

Jerry McKeiv's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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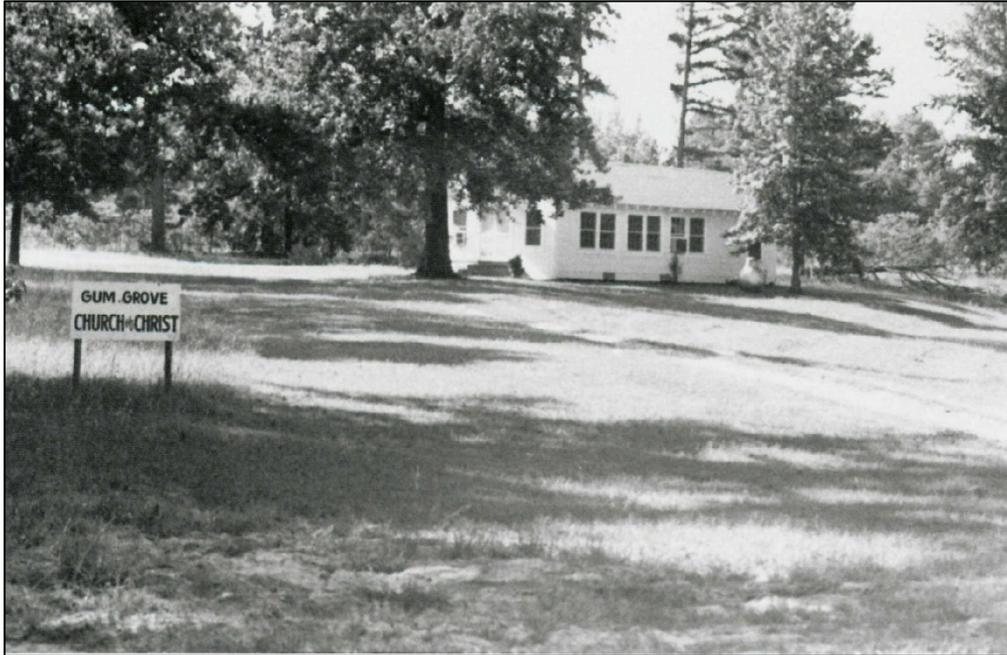
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## THE OLD COUNTRY CHURCH

When I was growing up in the late 1940s and 1950s, it was expected that we would be at church services on Sunday, at mid-week Bible study, and at any revivals (or gospel meetings as we called them) unless we were sick or something was going on at the farm that needed our immediate attention. Certain things were considered legitimate excuses such as being sick, the cows getting outside the fence, having to get the hay in the barn before a rain shower, the car wouldn't start, or some other unusual event that prevented us from going to church. I always wondered why the Wonderful World of Disney came on TV on Sunday nights at the same time we had church services. We didn't have video recorders back then to record a TV show.



We worshipped at the Gum Grove Church of Christ, a small country church with maybe 25 members. We didn't have a regular preacher living in the community, so usually a preacher came out from Prescott which was about fifteen miles away if he traveled the shortest distance on gravel roads. Usually, the preacher and his family would have lunch with one of the families after church and then visit with them in the afternoon before he preached another sermon at the evening service. We always had an extra good meal for Sunday dinner (as we called it) when the preacher came to our house. Of course, the children had been warned to be on their best behavior.

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The young folks of the congregation often visited each other on Sunday afternoons also. There was not much for young people to do out in the country, so we sometimes had to make our own entertainment.

Sunday in those days was still considered a day of rest. Stores were not open and there was no such thing as a Walmart. Some farm work had to go on as usual on Sundays like milking the cows and feeding the animals, but anything else could wait until another day. Even today, I try to use the Lord's Day mainly for worship and rest and avoid doing heavy work if at all possible. By the time I was grown, some stores began to be open on Sunday afternoons from 1 to 5. Now we can hardly tell Sunday from any other day of the week as far as shopping goes.



Gospel meetings were usually held in the summer in those days when the weather was hot and the small country churches had no air conditioning. There might be an electric fan or two and there was a good supply of hand-held fans usually furnished by the funeral homes or some store which kept the air moving as the preacher delivered his sermon. I think most of the sermons in those days were fairly long and after sitting on the wooden church benches for an hour or more, most folks were anxious to hear the last "Amen".

These gospel meetings brought in a lot of visitors from other congregations and the small building was usually full. A good gospel preacher could even bring in a few men who never came to church at other times. The sermons were designed to build up the regular church members and to teach any non-members who happened to be present. It was unusual in those days to have a gospel meeting and not have someone respond to the invitation at one of the services. The Gum Grove church didn't have a baptistry in the building, so if someone needed to be baptized, it was usually done at the nearby Bluff City church which had one inside the building after they moved into a new building in 1957. Before that time, baptisms took place in a nearby farm pond, a gravel pit, or down at the creek or river—anyplace where there was enough water to completely immerse the person. I can only remember attending one baptism like that and it was in a gravel pit near Caney Creek. That pit had a gravel bottom that gently sloped out to the deep water. Many people used it as place to wash their vehicles.

The visiting preacher at a gospel meeting usually lived so far away that he had to stay in the home of one of the members during the meeting which in those days usually lasted for a whole week. During the time of the meeting, he would visit other members for the noon meal. These days, most churches just book a hotel room for the visiting preacher.

The singing in that small country church was very beautiful in most cases. Sometimes there might be someone who sang a little off key, but we figured we were singing praises to God and thought He would be pleased with us for doing our best. The congregation sang the old time gospel hymns like "I'll Fly Away", "When the Roll is

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Called up Yonder”, “Standing on the Promises”, and many others. Everyone knew those old hymns because they had been singing them for years. Our singing was a cappella (without instruments).

One thing that really livened up a church service in those early days was when a wasp got inside the building. I’m sure the preacher hated to have competition from a wasp because it was very hard for a person to concentrate on what he was saying when a wasp was flying around. I don’t remember anybody getting stung during a church service and I don’t remember anything larger than a wasp in any of our church services. I did hear of an incident at a small Methodist church near Camden. My cousin had a pet chicken that somehow got in their vehicle as they drove the short distance to the church. During the church service, while his first cousin’s wife was playing the piano, the chicken entered the open front door, walked down the aisle, and hopped up on the piano bench where she was sitting. I’m sure she may have missed a note or two during that song and I expect there were a few chuckles in the congregation. I wonder if they counted the chicken in their attendance number for that day. This sort of thing reminds me of the Ray Stevens song about the Mississippi Squirrel Revival when the squirrel got loose in church.

There are still plenty of small churches in the rural areas and small towns and most of them these days are air conditioned and some even have cushions on the pews. If you have never visited a small country congregation, I think it would be worthwhile to do so if you have the opportunity. I think you will find a group of friendly people who would be delighted to have a visitor. I guarantee it will be different from worshipping in a large city church with hundreds of members. You may not find everyone dressed in fancy clothes. There may not even be a microphone for the preacher to use since they are not usually needed in a small church. You might even still find one of those hand-help funeral home fans lying on the pew. If you are very lucky, you might even visit on the day when they are having a pot luck lunch after services.

One of my favorite stories about country churches is the one written by Gordon Irvin about the night when a congregation in our area prayed for rain about 1920. I printed this several years ago, but it sort of fits in with a story about country churches. If you want to read more of Gordon’s writings, you can find them online beginning with the May, 2005 issue.

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## **Excerpt from Gordon Irvin’s autobiography**

Arkansas has a bad habit of being dry during July and August. Just when the corn needs it most, it will not rain a drop for weeks. One summer, right at prayer meeting time, the weather was being uncommonly stubborn so that the corn leaves were twisting up like firecracker fuses and turning about as yellow, and never a sign of rain in the sky. Someone, I think it was my father who was prone to lean to the practical side, suggested they pray for rain. Now this idea of his of praying for rain didn’t catch on right away. It lacked emotional quality. Also, it does not sit well in the eyes of God to tamper with Arkansas weather. No, it would be better to stay on familiar ground and stick to

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tangible, familiar emotional and personal subjects like John Stone and Tom Plyler, where you could call a spade a spade. Still, as I have said, my father was a persistent man and he had a point to his argument that if all the pleas and supplications could be funneled into one main stream and all the prayers focused on one single objective, their combined weight might bear fruit in the form of a good summer shower. There was much wagging of heads and rolling of eyes at this, but reluctantly and grudgingly, they finally set aside one evening to pray for rain.

Well, it started off like a bad dry evening. Papa was just a humble man, not much given to flowery words or demagoguery, and here he found the whole burden of this project on his shoulders alone. It was his baby, so to speak, and he was not a man who could fan a spark if indeed there ever was a spark. Of course, when it comes to praying, especially on the eve of a protracted meeting, one should not be refractory like a mule, nor have to be kicked in the side when it comes his turn to pray. But this is about what Papa had to do to keep things going and the people awake that evening. There was more muttering and maundering than praying as everyone fidgeted and waited for a decent time when they could pick up and go home. And it was just about that time, I guess, say 9:30 or 10:00, when someone noticed a faint lightning low in the east. Now everyone knows that this is another bad habit Arkansas has of lightning at night in the east during a drought. It just doesn't mean a thing except that you are in the middle of a long dry spell. Rain always comes from the west and northwest—never from the east in the summertime. Here it is hard to describe or understand what went through the minds of most of the farmers and their wives there that night. True, the lightning was not bright at first, still one associates lightning with thunder and later with rain. Well, that is what they had been praying for. This then was their dilemma—should they rely on all past experience, pretend not to see the lightning, quietly slip out of the church and go home? But no, God is the author of all inexplicable phenomena. Here the unbroken chain—prayer, God, lightning, thunder, rain—five links and already the first three in hand. Still, lightning in the east during a drought—to believe or not to believe—that was their crux. They hung momentarily on the horns of their dilemma, but not for long. It has been said that Mag Johnson was the world's most ignorant woman, but I believe, on this night, she was its most vociferous one. East or west didn't matter to her--she knew it was going to rain.

Now the tide turned and everyone followed her example, got down on their knees, and started to pray—and I mean to pray good and proper. And lo, the flashes became brighter and the praying became louder, and soon across the heavens rolled the distant sound of thunder. Ever nearer the thunder drummed as louder and louder old Mag shouted. It seemed for a spell they were jawing at each other back and forth. But as the night wore on, they became more belligerent. The bellicose thunder rumbled, roared, and came tumbling down out of the black sky hard in the wake of each vivid flash. And many there that night knew they had tampered with the lock of God's workhouse and were wrought with fear and sought to hide themselves from His vengeance. Yet, all alone in the midst of the storm, stood old Mag and gave no ground. Not an inch did she give. Small in stature, but stout and staunch, she stood with her hair streaming and arms outstretched in the blinding white lights. Aye, she hobnobbed

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with God that night and the strength of heaven was in her breast. She looked the storm full in the eye and gave as good as she took.

Now, it has taken God several hours to gather up the storm and bring it to Rocky Hill, so it was quite late or early morning before He was able to break it on top of old Mag's head. No matter, she had lost all track of time and was in no state of mind to go home. Everybody else had had enough of it. Many were leaving and some had already gone. Frank, her husband, had threatened to leave her there alone, but she either couldn't hear him above her shouting and the raging tumult, or else she didn't care. He could home if he wanted to. She held her ground and beat her bosom and arrogated unto herself the power of God while the tempest howled outside. My father was a cautious man, especially where the Lord dwelled, and he was also head deacon in the church. He realized something had to be done and was reluctant to stand by and hold his hands and accept the impasse. He was responsible for and accountable to the Lord in all church activities. So, he called Frank to one side and told him what had to be done. Frank agreed--he had to--and so, with the assistance of two or three more good men, they put a headlock on Mag, hauled her bodily out of the church, and threw her into the back of a wagon. The horses were unhitched, the lightning unchained, and the rain descended. In sweeping gray sheets, the rain came and beat upon Mag while the lightning flashed and the thunder clapped. And the last I saw of old Mag, she was writhing and screaming and wailing and flouncing there in the back of the wagon as it rolled down that rocky hill into the night.

But as I have said, you could not expect the above type of show very often. In fact, it was the most spectacular prayer meeting production that I can remember seeing.

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## **A UNIQUE WAY TO PRESERVE HISTORY**

**(based on an article in the May 27, 1948 issue of *The Nevada County Picayune*)**

Here's an interesting idea. Randolph Hamby was mayor of Prescott for about 36 years and kept all kinds of records about the town. He was very interested in history and preserving historical facts for future generations. He took many photographs of schools, churches, and other important buildings in Prescott.

He said many of the photographs of the early schools and buildings in Prescott were either destroyed or misplaced, requiring months to locate an original photograph. He came up with an idea he hoped would prevent this from happening.

Starting about 1933 and continuing for 15 years, he presented a set of from six to twelve pictures he had personally taken of important buildings around town to selected girls in the senior class each year when they graduated. I guess he figured the girls would be more apt to keep them than the boys. He figured that from the law of averages, about half of the girls would keep the pictures and the other half would probably throw them away. He picked the girls at random by taking every second or third name on an alphabetical list of the girls who were graduating. He also gave each

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honor student a set of the pictures. Over the 15 years he gave out over 800 pictures of buildings in Prescott taken from 1933 to 1948. The pictures included photographs of the various school buildings, the gymnasium, the entrance to Cummins Field, the city hall, the amphitheater in the city park, and churches where the baccalaureate sermons were delivered.

Mr. Hamby's photographs showed many changes over the years. He documented the remodeling of the high school and the two primary schools. These were originally two-storied, but later cut down to one-story and later torn down. During the remodeling of the high school, classes were located in the city hall and the gymnasium.

Some of these pictures are probably still out there somewhere, maybe stored away in a box or up in someone's attic. If you know of anyone who might have a set of these pictures, give them a call or have them contact me. It would be interesting to locate some of these photographs after all these years. Mr. Hamby died in 1969 and now the Depot Museum has much of the material he collected. Chances are they have some of these photographs that he shared with the senior girls of Prescott High School.

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## RAINFALL RECORD

**RAINFALL RECORD** (at my house)—January—5.4 inches; February—3.6 inches plus 5 inches snow and ice; March—10.7 inches plus 2 inches sleet; April—7.7 inches; May—6.0 inches; June—5.7 inches; July—6.2 inches; August—5.1 inches

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## ***THE PRESCOTT HOUR DEDICATED TO BLUFF CITY*** **(reported in the 8-19-1948 issue of The Nevada County Picayune)**

A radio program called *The Prescott Hour* in August, 1948 was dedicated to Bluff City. It featured Paul Adams, the superintendent of the Bluff City pine tree nursery and the Bluff City Quartet composed of Wilma Knight, Miss Bernell Johnson, Glen Barham, and Leon Neal. Also featured was the Bluff City String Band composed of Elmer Meador and his young son, Billy along with Glen Barham.

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## ESKIMO'S VIEW OF DEATH

***Nevada County Picayune***  
**2-28-1926**

The Eskimo's theory of death is peculiar in Christian's eyes and has resulted in many tragedies. It was believed that a man had two souls, one good and one evil. When he died the good soul expected to spend eternity in bliss and comfort in a warm place

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underground. His bad soul was expected to remain in the spot where the body died, a lasting harmful influence over those who were luckless enough to encounter it. When a person became ill, the medicine man was sent for. Almost always he pronounced the case hopeless. The invalid was then taken out of the igloo and placed on the snow to perish. It was a logical proceeding, for if he died indoors, the igloo would have been abandoned and sealed up forever.

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## MEN IN MILITARY FROM BLUFF CITY

### THE NEVADA NEWS

6-7-1942

Gave mailing addresses and where stationed at this particular time

Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Glen Gillespie--Camp Bowie, Brownwood, TX  
Sgt. Millard McBride--Seattle, WA  
Pvt. Hillery H. Moore--Victorville, CA  
Cpl. Selma Nichols--Trenton, NJ  
Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Robert Purifoy--Camp Bowie, Brownwood, TX  
Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Willie Ray Beaver--Fort Cook, NB  
Pvt. W. Franklin Beaver--Fort McDauril, CA  
Pvt. Loyce Hays Gillespie--Umnak Island, Alaska  
Ave. Stell Meador--Ellington Field, TX  
Cadet Herman Lee--Shepherd Field, TX  
Pvt. Percy Bradley--Fort Sill, OK  
Pvt. Troy Byrd--Fort Sill, OK  
Tech. Sgt. G. P. Walker--Goodfellow Field, TX  
Cpl. Joe Griffith--Annette Island, Alaska  
Pvt. W. R. Gillespie--Umnak Island, Alaska  
Pvt. Dawson Barlow--member of the band-Camp Robinson  
Harland McKelvy--Tallahassee, FL  
Duncan Kirk--Fort Bliss, TX  
Pvt. G. Foy Gillespie--Seattle, WA  
Pvt. Herbert Knight--San Francisco, CA

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I forgot to include this article on grandparents in the last issue. I apologize for the oversight.

### Judith Crawford Creamer--My ancestors in Arkansas

[judithcreamergmail.com](mailto:judithcreamergmail.com)

Robert Warnock, born in 1794, fought in the War of 1812 while living in South Carolina. He married Lucretia McGraw in 1816, produced ten children; some being born in South Carolina and the rest born in Alabama. Robert and Lucretia settled in Ouachita County Arkansas in 1840 where several of their children had already settled. He died in 1845 and she in 1863.

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Robert and Lucretia are the three great grandparents of Judith Crawford Creamer. These were the first of her relatives to arrive in Arkansas and the ancestors of her maternal grandfather, Dr. Luther D. Reagan. Her other grandparents came to Arkansas as children with their respective birth families. The wife of Luther came to Little Rock in 1909 and both paternal grandparents moved from Alabama to Clark County at the turn of the century.

Robert and Lucretia's son, Robert Love Warnock, born 1833, married Delia Jane Adkins in 1860 in Ouachita County Arkansas while he was acting as the Deputy Sheriff; later he was a school teacher. Delia was born in 1841 in Alabama.

Robert and Delia's daughter, Cora Belle Warnock was born 1860 in Ouachita County. In 1880 Cora Belle married James Thomas Reagan who was born 1858 in Alabama to John T. Reagan and Mary Runyan; born in North Carolina 1829 and Tennessee 1832 respectively. John and Mary married in Alabama in 1855.

Cora and James T. Reagan had a farm in College Hill/McNeil, Columbia County. One day in 1905 James died a tragic death when the cotton loaded wagon he was driving went out of control when his team "took fright" and he was thrown from the wagon when the wagon wheel hit a pot hole. Cora died in 1928, both are buried at Shiloh Cemetery.

Cora and James T's son, Luther D. Reagan was born in 1881 in McNeil, Columbia County. Luther taught school in Columbia County in 1901, earning \$50.00 a month; he attended Ouachita Baptist College in Arkadelphia in the fall of 1902. He probably taught school again until he enrolled in the University of Arkansas Medical School in Little Rock in 1904. This school was renamed College of Physicians and Surgeons before he graduated in 1908. He practiced in Little Rock all his life until about three months before he died in 1964 in Little Rock. Luther married Helen May Stearns in 1914. Helen was born in Kansas in 1891 and moved to Little Rock from Missouri with her birth family just before enrolling in Ouachita Baptist College where she graduated in 1912. Her parents were Stephen and May Hannah Shaw Stearns. Stephen was a Superintendent with the Little Rock Water Works. Stephen was born in Indiana in 1861 and May was born in Ohio in 1862. Helen died in Arkadelphia in 1974.

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## WORD OF THE MONTH

SHILLELAGH (pronounced shill-lay-lee). I got acquainted with this word when I was a child. My dad would sometimes use it like this: "If you kids don't stop that, I'm going to get a shillelagh after you". It is an Irish word meaning stick or club. It could be used as a weapon or a walking stick. It was once used as a way to settle disputes in a gentlemanly manner, like pistols were once used in duels in the colonial days in this country. The shillelagh my dad was thinking of was a small branch off the peach tree. We knew we were in trouble when our parents told us to go break a limb off the peach tree.