

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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GO WHERE THE TRAIL LEADS

About fifteen years ago, I got interested in genealogy. I don't claim to be an expert at it, but I know the basics of how to get started. It's sort of like putting a jig-saw puzzle together. You gradually add pieces of information until hopefully, you can get a complete picture. Even if you don't find all the pieces, you will learn a lot about your ancestors as you do the research. It takes a lot of time to gather the information from many different sources. The Internet makes it a lot easier, but you soon learn that not everything you find on the Internet is accurate. It still needs to be verified.

Once you start doing research on the Internet, you will soon discover many distant cousins scattered all over the country. These cousins usually have a piece of the puzzle you are looking for and by working together, everyone benefits.

I knew some things about my grandparents, but not much about the more distant members of my family. I found a distant cousin in California who was accumulating a database of all the related McKelvy lines. I contributed what I knew about my close relatives and he shared his information with me.

I learned that James and Margaret McKelvy first came to this country on the ship *Nancy* in 1767, landing at Charleston, South Carolina. Their son and my great-great-great grandfather, John McKelvy and his wife, Mary, settled in Laurens County, South Carolina. He left a will when he died in 1802, and from that will I learned that they had sixteen children because they were listed in the will. That's a very large family by any measure.

When the children left home they seemed to go in all directions from Laurens County, South Carolina. Some of them may have remained there. My great-great grandfather, Jabez McKelvy decided to settle in Coweta County, Georgia in 1846. He stayed there about ten years and then decided to move on to Arkansas. Using research done by others plus my own research, I have a pretty good idea of how my line of McKelvys ended up in Arkansas. I'll not bore you with all the details. It is rewarding to learn all this information and become acquainted with distant cousins I never knew existed.

While my great-great grandfather settled in Georgia, his brother William decided to seek his fortune in Tennessee, settling in Franklin County. Back in 1999, my wife and I decided to do some research on William's family. We packed our bags and took off driving to the county seat of Franklin County, a small town named Winchester. Not being familiar with the area, we weren't sure that Winchester had a motel so we stayed in the nearby town of Tullahoma.

The next day at Winchester, we went to the courthouse and the county library. We found quite a bit of information about William's family and made a lot of copies of various documents. We

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searched the cemetery records and found the burial places for some of William's family. We decided to visit a couple of these old cemeteries while we were in the area.



Using our map we located the spot where the first cemetery should be, but all we saw was a large cultivated field. I knew it should be close by somewhere. I saw a man standing out by his house and stopped and asked him if he knew of an old cemetery around there. He pointed across the field to a clump of trees and said that was it (photo at left). He gave us permission to check it out. We recorded all the names on the old tombstones that we could still read.

Another cemetery was nearby so we hurried to try and find it. Again, I stopped and talked to a man who happened to be outside. He pointed to a house which was on another road and said the cemetery was directly behind that house. He said the owners were not at home, but it would be okay for us to look at the cemetery. I was surprised that he would offer to let us do that since we were strangers. We drove to the house and walked behind it and found a small cemetery very close to the outbuildings. Several McKelvys were buried there. We quickly wrote the names from the markers and went on our way.

We had a good impression of Franklin County, Tennessee. The scenery was nice and the people we met were all very friendly. We left the county and headed toward Nashville and on to Missouri to visit my wife's folks. So far our genealogy trip/vacation had been quite productive.

From our research we had learned that two of William's sons, Aaron and Elijah, had left Franklin County, Tennessee and moved west into southeast Missouri and settled in the same county where my wife grew up. That got us more interested in these McKelvys because I had no idea that I had distant relatives who once lived within fifteen miles from where my wife grew up.

We checked out the genealogy sections of libraries in that area and found all kinds of information on these McKelvys. Some had been prominent citizens of that area. Some had served in various political offices. We discovered that there was a McKelvy School at one time. That county had a small building staffed by volunteers where various records were stored. One day I received a packet of materials regarding this McKelvy School which I didn't really need, but I appreciated the lady's thoughtfulness in sending the material to me.

We visited several cemeteries in that area where some of the McKelvys were buried. One was in behind a man's goat pasture, but he was very nice and allowed us to walk in to the cemetery which was covered with high grass. The man who owned the land said he mowed the cemetery about once each year. Elijah McKelvy and some of his family were buried there. I had learned

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that Elijah was my third cousin, three times removed and a first cousin to James Wesley McKelvy who is buried at Ebenezer Cemetery in Nevada County, Arkansas. These two first cousins were only three years apart in age and had probably never met each other. They served on opposite sides in the Civil War.

Elijah had an older brother named Aaron McKelvy. We found a lot of information on him. He was a Baptist minister and a physician who came to Missouri on horseback in 1848. He served in various political offices of that county—tax assessor, presiding judge of the county court, and a justice of the peace. He died in 1881. We wanted to visit his grave, but it was in a cow pasture behind a locked gate. We got permission to visit it and intended to do so on another trip, but never got around to it. The man who owned the land gave us a tour of the old two-story house where he lived which was filled with all sorts of antiques and historical things from that area. We really enjoyed visiting with him and seeing his collection.

At some point during our research, I had discovered a letter written by Aaron McKelvy in 1861 to his brother back in Franklin County, Tennessee. It seems that his mother had been in Missouri visiting him, but while there she became ill and died. The letter gives the details of what happened and I'm sure it was a sad occasion for the family members in Missouri as well as those who were still in Tennessee. Here is a transcript of the letter taken from the original: (The spelling corrections in parentheses are mine)

Bollinger County, Mo. May the 7th, 1861

Dear Brother,

Imbrace (Embrace-?) an opportunity of writing you a few lines which may inform you that myself and family are all in moderate health. One of the objects or causes of my writing at present is to inform you that mother is dead. She died on the night of the 4th day of this month about eleven oclock at Henry McDaniel's. She had been getting weaker and more feble (feeble) all the time since she arrived here, but still entertained a hope that she would sometime get back home until 3 or 4 days before she died. She did not consent to have a doctor until Friday before she died on Saturday night. The doctor went to her and did what he could the first visit, but the next day when he came he saw the case was hopeless and did no more. Her cough and derangement of the bowels was as we suppose the cause of her death. I suppose she had the consumption. She died in great pece (peace) and did say with much assurance I know that my redeemer lives, and that I love God and his people and I love sinners, too, and I find the same God that has been precious and kind to me through all the scenes of life to be my supporter and friend in death. These words and many others similar were spoken to us (all that were present) after she was fully satisfied that she was dying. I was seting (sitting) by the bed where she was lying on Saturday about 11 o'clock and she apeared (appeared) to be dosing. Suddenly she said poor Noah. I arose and asked her what she wanted. She said nothing, but that she was thinking about what Noah said to her in the time of a revival meeting. She said Noah said to her that she had been wanting to go to see her children and that she might go, but he never expected to see her again. So it is Noah never can see her any more in this life. She is gone to the region from whose borne (?) no traveler returns. Narcissus requests that you appoint a day on which you will have her funeral preached and let us know the time and we will also have a funeral sermon

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preached on the same day. Her remains were deposited (or deported) in the Union Campground Cemetery near Bessville at the head of the graves of our children. After being told that she must and would shortly die, she told Henry and myself to pay her doctor's bill and all the burial expenses. She gave Narcissus \$20 and said Sis had been under the necessity of doing what no other one of her children had ever done and that it was due her. She gave me \$10 and said the same. I now proceed to give you the burial expenses, doctor's bill, etc. (?)

Doctor's bill - \$5.00

Shrouding and trimming for coffing (coffin) - \$6.60

For making coffing (coffin) - \$3.00

all paid, and there was \$8.35 of her money left. We wish to know whether you would be willing for us to use it in paying for the filling (?) in of her grave. You can all let us know when you write. You will please also let us know what will have to be done with the property and effects, whether you will have to administer or not. Old Kit (?) is here. I am keping (keeping) her. Sis has the saddle and says she is going to keep it, but she is willing to allow what it is worth. Mother gave her clothes to Sis and told her to keep them. I am willing to keep Kit (?) and allow what she is worth.

Aaron McKelvy

Note in margin: I wrote too much to have room to say farewell.

Since Aaron said in his letter they had buried his mother "at the head of our children's graves", we made a short side trip to Bessville, MO to the Old Union cemetery to try to locate the grave. We were able to find the children's grave marker, but no marker for Aaron's mother. Her burial place would probably have been completely unknown had it not been for this letter written by Aaron McKelvy.



Aaron and his wife, Drusilla, lost four children between 1856 and 1859. This is their marker at Old Union Cemetery in Bessville, MO. The names are hard to read--Minerva E. --died 11-3-1859 (age 3); Laura F.--died 2-10-1859 (age 6 days); Noah W.--died 1-30-1858 (age 1 day); Missouri A. --died 1-23-1856 (age 17 days).

It was common for many families to lose children in infancy in those days. The couple had five other children who survived. It is a shame that Aaron and Drusilla were not buried in this well kept cemetery with their children instead of their graves being far off the main roads in a cow pasture.

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Even though these were my distant kin, it was interesting to learn more about that branch of our family. I also found another family in the same county named McKelvey which was not related to me. These had migrated from Pennsylvania, through Ohio, and on to Missouri. Some of that family ended up in Prescott, Arkansas in the same county where I grew up. Having two unrelated families with the same name living close together can be very confusing. Even some in my family spell their names with the extra “e”, or at least many official documents have the name spelled that way because most people who are not family members tend to put the extra “e” in the name.

Remember, at the first of this article I mentioned that the older McKelvys back in South Carolina had sixteen children. I’ve only researched two of them. There were fourteen more children who probably married and had families and scattered in all directions. Some probably stayed in South Carolina. Just think of all the cousins yet to be discovered. Genealogy is fun but can be addictive.

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THE WILD MAN

Many of us have probably heard stories of someone who lived alone and didn’t associate with other people. They were considered a little strange or maybe even called a hermit. Most people just left them alone to do their own thing.

I remember hearing stories about a man who was living under one of the Caney Creek bridges on Highway 24. I never saw the man—just heard the stories. Just recently, I heard about a man living under a bridge in the city of Camden.

Our larger cities have many homeless people. It is hard to get an exact number of how many homeless people there are in America. I saw estimates ranging from 634,000 to 3.5 million. About 70% live in the large cities and only 9% in rural areas, according to one source. Some of these people choose to live on the streets and I’m sure some do it because they have no other place to go. Some take advantage of shelters in extremely cold weather, but return to the streets when the weather breaks.

Some ask why homeless people don’t sign up for the government benefit programs. Some do, but many refuse to take advantage of these programs for several reasons. Most programs require a permanent mailing address and they don’t have one. Some require a photo ID or proof of citizenship such as a paid utility bill and they don’t have one. Some have outstanding warrants in another state and don’t want to risk being arrested. Some shelters don’t allow alcohol and some of these people don’t want to give that up. Some had rather depend on charities, and food banks. Some hold up signs and beg for money from strangers. Homelessness is a major problem in many cities in this country.

Being homeless in a rural area would be quite a bit different from being homeless in a large city. It would be a challenge to live off the land for any length of time. It’s good to know some basic

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survival skills just in case of an emergency like an airplane crash in a remote area. A person who survived a crash might be forced to live off the land for several days until they are rescued. Sometimes people get lost while hiking and run out of food. Some are forced to eat strange foods not normally eaten just to survive. It would be good for all of us to know which plants are poisonous.

Some of the people living near Prescott in 1944 had heard stories about a wild man living in the Little Missouri River bottom about eight miles north of town. Some had seen the man or had reported food missing from their gardens for about two years. Every time someone tried to approach him, he would run off into the woods.

Finally, in November of 1944, Duncie McClelland captured the wild man and turned him over to the sheriff. The man was described as being about 30 years old, 160 pounds, dressed in rags, with long hair and beard, and his pants held up by a belt made from two rattlesnake hides. He had in his possession an Army overcoat, a pocket knife, a bottle of matches, a skillet, and a box of baking soda.

The man didn't speak but just nodded his head when asked a question. Finally, after he was cleaned up and taken to a barber shop for a haircut, the sheriff asked him if he would like a cup of coffee and the man said, "Yes, I would".

The man told the sheriff that his name was Lonnie Ellwood from Summerfield, Oklahoma. He claimed he had left there "four or five years ago". The man had lost all sense of time and didn't even know what year it was. His reason for leaving home was that "he had signed the wrong government check", whatever that meant. The sheriff had him fingerprinted and contacted the FBI as they investigated him.

The man said he lived by eating berries, nuts, persimmons, turtles, squirrels, and what he could find in people's gardens. In bad weather he took refuge in old sheds and barns. When asked how he survived when the river was flooded, he told of one time when he spent three or four days in a tree with water up to his shoulders and ate only raw corn. He said he was afraid of everybody and some people had shot at him.

It was determined that the man was harmless and after he was cleaned up he looked normal. The December 1, 1944 issue of *The Arkansas Gazette* published the story about the wild man of the Little Missouri Bottoms along with his picture.

The Nevada County newspapers reported that about 1,000 people came to the jail to see the wild man when he was first captured. Betty Meeks wrote a good article about the man in the July 15, 1976 issue of *The Nevada County Picayune* which included this drawing by Scott Pollock, an artist, which is said to be a good likeness of what he looked like when captured.

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The man was held in the county jail while authorities conducted an investigation. The sheriff said he would be turned over to the federal authorities. The Nevada County part of the story ended with his capture. It was reported that his brother in Oklahoma came to Prescott and took him back home to Oklahoma. What happened to Lonnie Ellwood after he was returned to Oklahoma is unknown.

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RAINFALL RECORD (AT CAMDEN)

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; September— .7 inch; October— 10.5 in.

We had a prolonged period with very little rainfall which lasted about nine weeks from late August to late October. Forecasters are predicting a wetter than normal winter for much of the nation due to the El Nino effect. That could mean a low of snow and ice this winter depending on the temperatures.

TOTAL RAINFALL FROM JANUARY THROUGH OCTOBER 61.6 INCHES

HERE IS THE AVERAGE ANNUAL RAINFALL FOR SELECTED CITIES IN ARKANSAS:
CALE—53.21; BLUFF CITY—53.21; ROSSTON—53.21; CAMDEN—52.92

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A DOG NAMED SLIM

By Jerry McKelvy



He just showed up at the door
Obviously a stray.
I gave him some food
And hoped he would be on his way.

But he seemed so friendly
I couldn't turn him away.
I fed him more food
And decided he could stay.

Those big bright eyes
Would melt your heart.
He seemed so happy here
Right from the start.

I named him Slim
Because he was long and lean.
He was the friendliest dog
I think I had ever seen.

He became my buddy
And followed me everywhere.
No matter how long I worked
He was always there.

Unlike most other dogs
Slim had an unusual trait.
He was very particular
About the food he ate.

He loved to roam the woods
And sometimes even after dark,
I would wonder where he was
Until I heard his familiar bark.

I don't know why he didn't look
When he crossed the road that day.
It was all over so quick
What more can I say?

I buried him in a special place
Where he liked to roam.
I know Slim enjoyed the years
He spent at his adopted home.

He was just a stray dog
Maybe he got lost and was never found
I'll never forget the years we had together
Me and that old hound.