

Jerry McKelvy's  
**SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

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**STORIES FROM GOOSE ANKLE**

These are true stories about a group of young men growing up in the part of Nevada County, Arkansas called Rocky Hill or Goose Ankle during the days of the Great Depression. These stories are based on an audio recording made by Hartwell Irvin and his wife, Myrtie McKelvy Irvin at their home in 1989.

Cast of Characters

“Gee” McKelvy (father of Lee Roy, Ruel, and Myrtie)—my grandpa  
Katie May Kirk McKelvy (mother of Lee Roy, Ruel, and Myrtie)—my grandma  
Lee Roy McKelvy (Mud)—my uncle  
Ruel McKelvy (my father)  
Myrtie McKelvy (my aunt)  
Harland McKelvy (Trout)—son of Orland McKelvy (brother of Gee McKelvy)  
Harwell Irvin (Red)—son of Willie Irvin  
Alvin Dunn (Tar Heel)—a neighbor  
Haskel Norman (Hack)—a neighbor  
Other boys not mentioned by name

Time Period—1930s

The area around Rocky Hill (Goose Ankle), like every other place in the nation, was suffering from the Great Depression. Money and jobs were scarce. About the only kind of work to be done around Goose Ankle was farming or cutting logs. There were a few “ground-hog” sawmills scattered about. These small mills would be set up on a tract of land and stay there for six months to a year until the timber was cut and then the mill would be moved to another tract.

Just about everybody in the community farmed. They grew cotton, corn, potatoes, cane to make sorghum syrup, and watermelons. Everyone had a large garden to provide food for their family. Most families had several children.

James Columbus McKelvy (nicknamed “Gee”) and his family lived about a half mile from Rocky Hill church. His brother Orland and his family lived about one mile away. Other families who lived in the community included the Irvins, Parkers, Sarretts, Nelsons, Johnsons, Stones, and several others.

Mr. Gee McKelvy was one of the few around who was able to get a high school education. He went to the Union High School at Bodcaw, one of the few high schools around in those days. He made his living by farming, a little carpentry work, and some sawmill work. He

## SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

and Mr. Frank Nelson were in a partnership sawmill together at one time. He also made sorghum syrup. Neighbors would bring their cane to his home to have it made into syrup.

All the children of the community went to school at Gum Grove until 1929 when the school consolidated with Bluff City. There were no buses before the consolidation, so the children had to walk up to three miles one way to the school.

### FIRST AUTOMOBILES

The automobile had been around a while, but most folks put off buying one at first. They were expensive and some considered them a luxury item. Why buy a car when you had horses to ride or a person could always walk if the distance wasn't too far. The boys from Goose Ankle often walked several miles a day with no problem.

Mr. Gee McKelvy was one of the first in the community to buy a new automobile. He bought a new 1927 Ford T-Model for \$400. He was 45 years old at the time and had to learn to drive it. His two sons, Lee Roy and Ruel, learned quickly how to drive the car, but Mr. Gee never did quite get the hang of it. He always had to look down to make sure he had his feet in the right spot. There was the clutch, the brake, and the foot-feed (accelerator) to worry about.

He kept his new car in a shed not far from the house which he called the car house. It was made with wide boards placed vertically on the walls and the closed end. One day he came home in his car and as he entered the car house, he couldn't find the brake to stop in time. He drove right through the back wall of the shed, made a big circle out in the field and tried it once more. This time he got it right. Then he had to nail all the boards back on the shed.



His wife was never too fond of the new car. The roads back then were in terrible shape. Vehicles often got stuck going up a hill and had to roll back and make another attempt. She didn't like it one bit when the car started rolling backward. She would abandon the car as soon as that happened, sometimes opening the door and sometimes getting out over the door.

## **SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

Mr. Gee never made any long trips in his car. He sometimes went to Prescott to pay his taxes or stock up on needed items. He didn't have a license on his car because he couldn't afford one. He thought money could be better spent on other things. Usually, the kids went along on these trips to town because that was much more exciting than hanging around the farm. The shortest way to Prescott from his home was to take the Lackland Road across Caney Creek bottom and then go west to the Cale Road and on into Prescott. Since he didn't have a license on his car and didn't want to risk getting caught by the law, he would park the car near the edge of town and everyone would walk into town to do their business, then walk back to the car, and return home.

A neighbor, Willie Irvin, bought his family a car about the same time. The main reason for buying it was to make a trip to Galveston, Texas to visit some of the family. As soon as they got back home, he sold his car. He said he didn't want it cluttering up the yard.

During the Depression days when money was so scarce, those who had vehicles could barely afford to drive them. If the trip was five miles or less, they walked or rode a horse. Gasoline, tires, and parts were all expensive. It was better to walk than risk unnecessary expenses for the car.

### **PARTIES**

Life was not all work in those days. Saturday afternoons were a time to relax from all the hard work. The boys organized a baseball team and played during the summer months. They usually hunted in the winter. Saturday night parties were popular with the young people. Sometimes there would be 40 to 50 teenagers who gathered at someone's home for a party. They didn't usually have refreshments at parties in those days. They played games and enjoyed being with other kids about the same age. Some future romances were probably kindled by these parties.

### **SWIMMING**

It was only a mile or two to Caney Creek. The boys of Goose Ankle spent many hours fishing on this creek. Each hole of water had a name like the Fox Hole, the Gar Hole, etc. The favorite swimming hole was called the Round Hole. In the hot summer months, there might be 15 to 20 boys swimming in this hole of water. They came from as far away as Cale. No girls were allowed. The boys didn't have bathing suits, so swimming was done in their birthday suits.

### **DIRT POOR**

Nobody around Goose Ankle had any money during the depression. They had to make do with what they had. Their food was whatever they could raise in their gardens and some years the weather was so dry nothing much could be grown. Purple hull peas were grown by almost everyone because they were easy to grow. Corn was grown to fatten their hogs which they butchered for meat. They had fruit trees which provided some fresh fruit.

The McKelvys were determined to make sure all their children received at least a high school education if at all possible. Children were needed at home to help with the farm work, so the

## **SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

school terms were arranged so that school didn't interfere with the planting and harvesting seasons.

One day Mr. Gee's daughter, Myrtie, needed a new pencil to use to take a test the next day. She approached her father and asked if she could have some money for a pencil. Mr. Gee pulled a few coins out of his pocket and showed her 20 cents. He said, "This is all the money I have". Myrtie knew he was telling the truth. She said, "Just give me a penny. I can buy a penny pencil to take my test". He said, "No, I think you need a nickel pencil." Back then you buy three pencils for a nickel. She took the nickel he offered but felt bad about taking so much knowing that was all the money he had and needed it for other things.

### **A GOOD TRADE**

Children going to school in those days had to bring their lunches from home. They usually used a syrup bucket for a lunch pail. The type food they had was usually a biscuit sandwich and maybe an apple if they were in season. It took quite a bit of food to prepare lunches for several children in a family and food was scarce. Supper in those days might be nothing more than a piece of buttered cornbread covered with sorghum syrup or maybe cornbread and milk.

Arl Moody lived near Ebenezer, about two miles from the Gum Grove School. His family was better off than most of the families in that area. Arl rode a bicycle to school each day except for the sand beds where he had to push it. Most of the children at Gum Grove had never seen a bicycle.

Hartwell Irvin and Arl Moody worked out a deal one day. Arl had a bologna sandwich for his lunch and all Hartwell had was a biscuit with some cured country ham. Hartwell thought it would be a good trade to trade his biscuit and ham for the bologna sandwich. Bologna was considered a delicacy in those days. Anything store-bought was more in demand than the ordinary home-made foods. Children didn't get many snacks from the stores in those days. Popcorn and peanuts were popular, but these were both grown on the farm instead of purchased at the store. Nature provided a few delightful foods like blackberries, muscadines, and persimmons. The nearby Parker pecan orchard sometimes provided pecans to eat.

### **THE GOAT CART**

Lee Roy and Ruel decided one day to make a cart and hook it up to the Billy goat. They spent lot of time building it and finally got the goat hooked up to it. So far, so good. Then the Billy goat took off at a high rate of speed. The cart crashed into something and it tore all to pieces. That put an end to their plan to use a Billy goat to pull them in a cart.

### **HAIR CUTS**

Usually, there was one man in each community who was the barber. Folks couldn't afford to go all the way to Prescott just to get a haircut. The barber for the Goose Ankle/Rocky Hill community was Lee Roy McKelvy. On Saturday afternoons, dozens of men and boys would

## **SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

gather on the front porch to have their hair cut. He charged ten cents for a haircut for those who could afford it. Some couldn't even afford to pay the ten cents.

### **THE FISHING TRIP**

Teenage boys in those days spent much time in the woods. They hunted possums and coons at night and squirrels in the daytime. They also fished in Caney Creek. Any game animals or fish were a welcome addition to the menu in those hard days of the Depression.

Several of the boys decided to go fishing one night. They set out their bank hooks and sat around a campfire waiting for the fish to bite. They usually carried some food with them because they might be out all night on these fishing trips.

One of the boys, Alvin Dunn, brought along some home brew he had worked off by putting a jug in a sawdust pile where the heat would help the brew to ferment. He and Hack Norman were the main ones to drink the stuff.

On this particular night, Hack had begun to feel a little tipsy from the home-made concoction. One of the other boys decided to play a trick on Hack. They caught a toad frog and put it in one of the biscuits they had brought with them. They brought out their food and handed the loaded biscuit to Hack and said, "Hack, here's you a biscuit". According to the story, Hack bit into the frog before he realized the trick that had been played on him. According to the story tellers, this sort of thing was common during those days. There had to be some sort of diversion from the despair of those hard times.

### **BIRD THRASHING**

Another diversion was bird thrashing. When new land was cleared for farming, the brush was piled up and left to rot or burned when the weather was right. On cold winter nights, birds would use these brush heaps for cover from the wind.

The boys enjoyed going out on these cold nights to the brush heaps and run the birds out. They had no flashlights in those days. For light, they took several splinters of rich pine and tied them together into a bundle, making a torch that would burn for quite a while. It made a good light, but the resin from the rich pine would sometimes run down the arms of the person carrying the torch or sometimes burn the clothing they wore.

On one of these bird thrashing trips, Alvin Dunn was carrying his torch. Some of the resin happened to fall into his shoe, earning him the nick-name Tar Heel Dunn. He was known by this nick-name from then on by all those who knew him well.

### **ELECTRICITY**

Nobody at Goose Ankle knew much about electricity in the 1930s. Homes were lighted by kerosene lamps and those were only burned when the kids needed them for school work. Most

## **SANDYLAND CHRONICLE**

of the time, people sat in the dark by the light from the fireplace in the winter months. Kerosene was expensive. In the Depression days, saving things was the norm. Nothing was wasted.

Tar Heel Dunn was sort of a wizard with electricity. He developed some sort of a generator by using two wheels (one large and one small) connected by a belt. The large wheel was a wheel from an old car. He hooked up a magneto from an old car to the contraption and used a crank to turn the wheels which generated a small current.

He experimented with this by electrocuting his mother's chickens when she needed a hen for a meal. Most people just wrung their necks or used a chopping ax to cut off the chicken's head. Tar Heel's generator worked just fine for killing chickens. He tried once to electrocute a chicken snake, but for some reason it wouldn't work on snakes like it did on chickens. It's a good thing he couldn't generate too much power of someone might have been electrocuted.

### **THE FIRE**

Mr. Gee McKelvy always raised a good crop of sweet potatoes. He had a potato house where he cured the potatoes after digging them. One day, Ruel and Myrtie were outside near the well and happened to notice the potato house was on fire. Ruel grabbed a bucket of water from the horse trough and ran to put water on the flames. He told Myrtie to keep bringing water. The well was not too far from the potato house, but it took time to draw water. They managed to get the fire put out by dumping buckets of water on it.

If they had not been outside, the potato house would have been destroyed. After the fire was out, Myrtie asked Ruel why he was working so hard to put the fire out. He told her that his pocketbook was hidden in the potato house and he had \$3.00 in it.

### **CONCLUSION**

These are just a few of the stories from that neck of the woods during the days of the Great Depression. It was a terrible time for the country, but even with all the despair there were some happy times also. Children and teenagers had to make their own entertainment. Work was hard and the whole family had to pitch in to keep things going.

The McKelvys managed to keep their promise to see that all three of their children graduated from high school. The community of Goose Ankle/Rocky Hill survived the depression. The people learned some valuable lessons from the hard times. They learned not to waste money foolishly, to save for a rainy day, and to trust in God to see them through the hard times. Neighbors were good to help each other. Everybody was in the same boat, so to speak. The Depression touched everyone.

There were other boys from Goose Ankle not mentioned in these particular stories. These were Carl Greer, Herman McKelvy, Roy McKelvy, Gordon Irvin, Sam Sarrett, Harl Nelson, Ellis Johnson, Earl Johnson, Jay Sarrett, Foy Nelson, Claudis Nelson, Archie Stone, and others. Most of these boys were the right age in 1941 to be eligible for military service when the Japanese

## SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

attacked Pearl Harbor. In fact, Harl Nelson had already joined the Navy and lost his life on the *USS Arizona* when it was attacked at Pearl Harbor.

World War II changed things considerably. Most of the younger men in the community were called to military service or volunteered. I know that Harland McKelvy, Ruel McKelvy, Herman McKelvy, Ellis Johnson, Earl Johnson, Jay Sarrett, Alvin Dunn, Foy Nelson, and Claudis Nelson served in World War II and there could be others. Most of them had married girls from the community about that time also. The older men and women had to take up the slack while the men were gone to war. The Depression had ended but there were shortages of certain things during the war years.

The war ended in 1945, and the young men came back home. Some remained in the area around Bluff City. Others decided to settle in nearby towns where they could find work. Some decided there must be a better way of making a living than farming. Some took advantage of the GI Bill to further their education. Times were changing. Hartwell Irvin married Myrtie McKelvy and they moved to Camden. Lee Roy McKelvy married Marie Martin and worked in the sawmill business at Caney Creek Lumber Co. before moving to the Redland community near Prescott where he had his own sawmill. Ruel McKelvy stayed in the Bluff City area and worked at farming and in the timber business most of his life. Herman McKelvy, Ellis Johnson, Earl Johnson, Foy Nelson, and Claudis Nelson also stayed in the vicinity of Bluff City. Harland McKelvy married and spent most of his life in the states of Washington and Arizona. I found on the Find-a-Grave website that Alvin Dunn died in 1997 and is buried at Leavenworth National Cemetery in Leavenworth, Kansas.

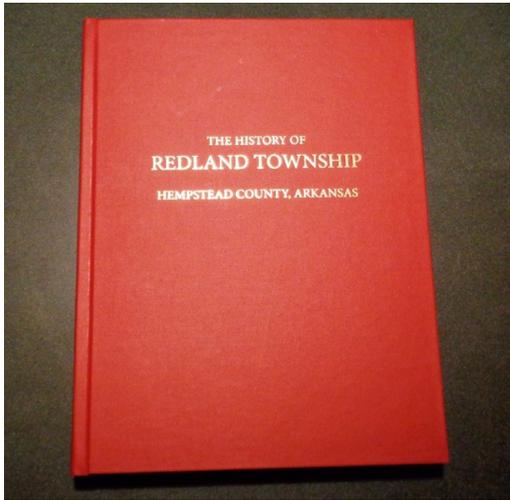
Mr. Gee McKelvy and Katie May McKelvy continued to live in their home at Goose Ankle until their health forced them to move in with their children. Mr. Gee died in 1959 and his wife in 1963.

The community of Goose Ankle has pretty much disappeared. The church at Rocky Hill is gone and the school at Gum Grove was consolidated with Bluff City in 1929. Most of the young folks left the area to find work in the cities after World War II. The farm fields were allowed to grow up in timber.

My brothers and I still own a large part of the old farm which has been in our family since about 1871. Every time I go there, I think of those times of long ago when the area was filled with farm families and all the hard work they did to make a living for their families. They did what they could in the best way they knew how. They didn't get rich, but I would say there is no doubt they were successful. They survived the worst period of economic collapse in our country's history.

My Aunt Myrtie McKelvy Irvin described it this way: "We had very little material things, but we had each other. We had family, we had friends, and we had neighbors. And everybody was just down-to-earth good people, I think. We went through a lot of good times, a lot of fun times, and a lot of serious times, but we came through all of it."

# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE



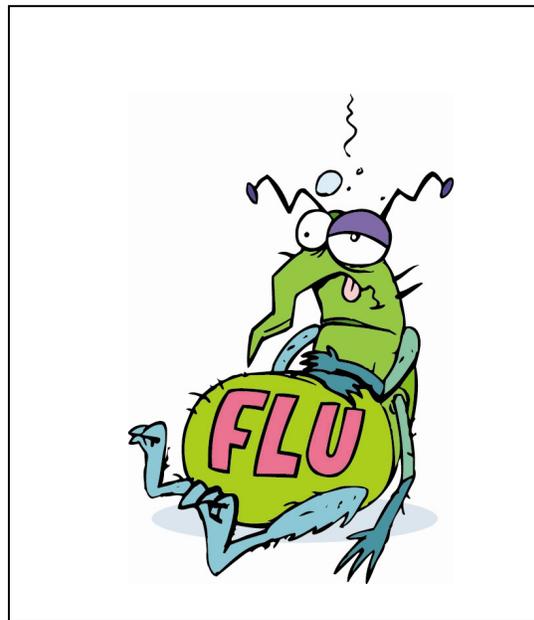
A few copies of this history book on Redland Township (Hempstead Co.) are still available for purchase. This includes the communities of McCaskill, Belton, Friendship, Dodson, and Avery's Chapel. The cost is \$35 available from The Town of McCaskill, P. O. Box 8, McCaskill, AR 71847

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## THE FLU

By Jerry McKelvy

What should I do?  
I think I have the flu.  
I'm sitting here in my favorite chair  
I ache all over--even my hair.  
I take all kinds of pills  
I alternate between fever and chills.  
My nose continues to run  
This flu is absolutely no fun.  
Maybe it's just a bad cold  
Or maybe it's because I'm getting old  
I think I'll just cover my head  
And pretend that I'm still in bed  
If anyone has something for me to do  
Just tell them I have the flu.  
Don't bother me; just leave me alone  
I may cough or you may hear me moan  
I need some advice; what should I do?  
What's a good remedy for the flu?  
Drink lots of juice; get plenty of rest  
Put those home remedies to the test.  
Nothing really helps no matter what I do  
It just takes time to get over the flu.



## RAINFALL RECORD

December --- 8.1 inches

Total for 2015 -- 80.5 inches

Normal -- 52.92 inches

# SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

## Blues of the 2015 News – by Don Mathis

How will we remember 2015  
considering everything we have seen?

Police brutality caused such a clatter.  
It brings home the point that [Black Lives Matter](#).

[Je suis Charlie](#) was the French cry against terrorist violence.  
But the [November](#) Paris attacks stunned us into silence.

[San Bernardino](#), too, had its own terrorist cell  
while other US cities had their own hell.

The [Charleston church](#) massacre brings us grief.  
And an [anti-abortion activist](#) kills for his belief.

A [Syrian boy](#) drowns on the Mediterranean Seas.  
But it's not enough for America to allow refugees.

The presidential candidates got off with a jump  
with [Bernie & Hillary](#), [Cruz](#), [Bush](#), & [Trump](#).

Woman of the Year, [Caitlyn Jenner](#), causes a scream.  
But we're more concerned with [Blue Bell](#) ice cream.

And [Pope Francis](#) comes to visit the U.S.  
Was that a [gold and white or blue and black](#) dress?

The NFL scandal was called [Deflategate](#).  
And we continue our [open carry debate](#).

[Gay marriage](#) is legal, some states [decriminalize pot](#).  
But we get high with the latest [Star Wars](#) plot.

The coming New Year will likely offer more  
of fear and pain and probably more war.

Yes, 2016 will bring more blues to sing,  
especially since the death of [B.B. King](#).

Mr. Mathis wishes to thank those readers who suggested news stories from 2015 for him to use in this poem.