

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

Vol. 16 – No. 3

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March, 2015

THE OIL BOOM AT SMACKOVER

For those who don't know, Smackover is a small town in the southern part of Ouachita County, Arkansas. The population in 2010 was 1,865. The discovery of oil in the area around Smackover in 1922 caused quite a boom. According to an old newspaper, the population in 1922 went from 300 to 15,000 within six months. Imagine a town growing that fast and all the problems associated with such rapid growth. When the word spread about oil being discovered, men rushed to Smackover looking for work in the oil fields along with fortune seekers hoping to get rich. There were few places for these men to live, so some pitched tents in the woods and others tried to find places to stay in nearby El Dorado. Special trains ran from Smackover to El Dorado to take workers back and forth to the oil fields. Some passengers rode on the tops of rail cars or wherever they could find a place to hold on.

Included in this group of men were many who were considered "undesirables" by the local residents. The local people witnessed their small peaceful town change almost overnight into a large town filled with rowdy oil field workers. Gambling, drinking, fights, and partying were common.

A small battle erupted in November of 1922 when a group of about 200 hooded vigilantes from the surrounding area decided to rid the area of the undesirable element. Some were members of the Ku Klux Klan which was very active in many Arkansas towns at that time. The battle happened in an area known as Patagonia on the Ouachita county side of Smackover Creek. It all started when a man was tarred and feathered. Another man was flogged. Men wearing white robes and hoods rode through Smackover with signs warning gamblers and other undesirables to be out of the area within 24 hours. It was estimated that there were about 2000 of these "undesirables" in the oil fields. Several buildings were burned. The battle spread to the areas known as Ouachita City, Laneytown, and other places. There was a general exodus of Negroes from the oil fields.

Sheriff Ed Harper of Camden went to the area to try and stop the violence, but had little luck in catching anybody. Few lives were lost in the "battle", but many of the so-called undesirables did leave the oil fields as a result of this action by the vigilantes.

Another period of excitement a few days earlier made the news. A hundred thousand barrels of crude oil caught fire and escaped from the storage reservoirs into a creek which created a roaring furnace for miles.

Smackover may seem like a peaceful little town today, but in the fall of 1922, it was anything but peaceful.

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CIVIL WAR PRISONS

This article appeared in the Prescott Daily News in May of 1907.

The largest Confederate prison was in Andersonville, Georgia, where 45,913 Union soldiers were imprisoned. The prison had its maximum number on August 8, 1864, when the rolls showed the presence of 33,114. Death claimed 12,912, or 28 percent of the entire number. Every day the death roll averaged 30. The greatest number of deaths occurred on August 23, 1864, when 127 yielded up their lives.

The largest military prison in the North was at Elmira, New York where 11,916 prisoners were confined in the open pen or stockade. The death list reached 3,994, about 25 percent. In March, 1865, the greatest mortality occurred—495—or 16.5 percent of all the deaths. All except six of the dead were buried in a field which was afterward plowed up and planted with wheat, and now neither summer nor winter shows a sign of where 3,000 hapless Confederates were laid away.

DAYS GONE BY

100 YEARS AGO (FEBRUARY, 1916)

There were 1176 convicts in the Arkansas state pen in 1916. *(there were 18,079 in Arkansas prisons in 2015)*

The Gem Theater in Prescott was showing four shows nightly including one called *Cupid and the Scrub Lady*.

It was announced that the Prescott power plant was getting new equipment which would allow a continuous electric current in the daytime.

For Valentine's Day, the Prescott Ice and Milling Co. advertised ice cream shaped in Cupid and Heart molds.

A product called Penslar was advertised for chapped hands. It was a cream made from almonds and cucumbers.

Upton and Harvey's store in Bluff City was burglarized with \$200 in merchandise taken. A \$100 reward was offered.

A product called Rub-My-Tism was advertised for rheumatism, neuralgia, headache, cuts and burns, old sores, and insect bites. *(I like the name of that product)*

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Cale defeated Caney in a basketball game with a score of 49-13.

Former Nevada Co. sheriff Ed Hood died. He was a very popular sheriff who had served Nevada County for 12 years as sheriff or deputy.

Arkadelphia Milling Co. advertised White Dove flour—"the best flour on earth".

A poultry buyer was in Prescott for two days and offered these prices: Hens (11 cents per pound); spring chickens (11 cents per pound); turkeys (12 cents per pound); geese (7 cents per pound); ducks (9 cents per pound); old roosters (20 cents each); guineas (15 cents each). Farmers were instructed not to feed the poultry the day they brought them to town.

50 YEARS AGO (FEBRUARY, 1966)

The Liberty Valu-Mart grocery store in Prescott was being remodeled and expanded. Silver Dust detergent was advertised which included a free dessert bowl inside the box. Bananas were 9 cents per pound and a 10 pound sack of potatoes was 39 cents. *(Note: This store was where the police department is now across the street from the new library)*

The new Nevada County Hospital was dedicated with about 2500 people attending the dedication.

The Fairview Motel and Trailer Park was for sale. It included 4 double cabins, one single cabin, and space for 25 trailers to park. It was located one mile north of Prescott on Hwy. 67.

Delamar Chevrolet Co. advertised the new Chevelle SS 396 which was equipped with seat belts front and rear.

The Dynamo, the Prescott High School newspaper, published its 50th edition.

25 YEARS AGO (FEBRUARY-MARCH, 1991)

The price of postage stamps went up to 29 cents.

The Buick dealership in Camden (Hunnicut Buick) closed. The Chevrolet dealer picked up the Buick lines.

Kuwait was liberated in the Persian Gulf War which Saddam Hussein said would be "the mother of all battles".

Dan Quayle was vice-president and the population of the U. S. was about 252 million.

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SOME OLD DISEASE NAMES

Quinsy – complications of tonsillitis
Mortification—gangrene
Grocer's Itch—skin disease caused by mites in sugar and flour
Milk Leg—inflammation of femoral vein in the leg
Falling Sickness—epilepsy
The King's Evil –skin disease called scrofula believed to be cured by the touch of royalty
St. Vitus Dance – neurological disease characterized by jerking movements
Mad Hatter's Disease – chronic mercury poisoning
Scrivener's Palsy – writer's cramps
Consumption – tuberculosis
Painter's Colic – lead poisoning
Lockjaw – tetanus
French Pox – syphilis
Summer Complaint – eating food left out of refrigeration too long
Potato Nose – rosacea (red bumps on nose)
Stranger's Fever – yellow fever
La Grippe – influenza
Bright's Disease – nephritis (a kidney disease)
Ague – intermittent fever and chills; malaria
Apoplexy – stroke
Biliousness – jaundice associated with liver disease
Brain Fever – meningitis or typhus
Catarrh – inflammation of mucous membrane causing nasal discharge
Dropsy – abnormal swelling due to fluid buildup
Erysipelas – acute skin inflammation which is contagious
Lumbago – back pain

WHAT TO DO ABOUT GRAY HAIR

I suppose ever since Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth, people have tried to come up with a way to stop the aging process. Since that is impossible, the only other alternative is to come up with something that will help mask the normal aging so that a person will look younger than their actual age. Products such as wrinkle creams, lotions, and now even plastic surgery have been used.

There were many early home remedies that promised to prevent or reduce the natural graying of hair. Besides the home remedies, there were some bottled potions available that claimed to solve the problem.

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Here are some of the home remedies for gray hair I found on the Internet. Try these at your own risk.

1. A tonic made from coconut oil and curry leaves
2. Use Indian gooseberries in your diet.
3. A tonic made from ridge gourds and coconut oil
4. A mixture of sesame oil, carrot juice, and fenugreek seeds
5. A mixture of buttermilk and curry leaves
6. Ginger and honey
7. Massage hair with clarified butter twice per week
8. One cup strong black tea and one tablespoon of salt; massage into hair and leave it for one hour.
9. Onion juice
10. Mixture made from outer hulls of black walnuts and water; leave on hair 30 minutes.
11. Drink one glass of carrot juice each day.

Measures to prevent gray hair

1. Never comb hair when wet
2. Never wash hair in hot water
3. Cover hair with scarf or hat when going outside
4. Avoid smoking
5. Reduce stress

I came across advertisements in the 1917 newspapers for something called Wyeth's Sage and Sulphur Compound which was guaranteed to do away with gray hair, cure dandruff, and keep hair from falling out. It was sold in a bottle at the drug stores for fifty cents. The old bottles are now collector's items especially if they still have a label.

The advertisement said grandmothers once made sage tea and mixed it with sulphur in the old days, but it was very messy. This new product was easy to use. Instructions said to apply the compound to your hair and comb it gently through your hair and by the next morning, your gray hair would be gone. A second treatment a few days later would complete the restoration process.

This product was analyzed by the government and it was found to contain sulphur, lead acetate, glycerin, and cayenne pepper. The company was fined \$50 for having a misleading label.

ASPHIDITY BAGS

I don't think that's the proper spelling. According to the dictionary, it should be spelled asafetida, but I spelled it like most people pronounced it. I don't remember anyone in our

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family ever using these bags, but they once were common in certain areas. The purpose of them was to ward off diseases like colds and flu. The little bag was filled with certain ingredients which gave off a strong odor. Many children were sent to school wearing an asphidity bag around their necks. Many of the old folks strongly believed that these bags actually worked to keep a person healthy. They probably did help because people didn't want to get too close to someone wearing one of these smelly bags and therefore, germs were not as likely to be passed from one person to another.

I heard someone say people didn't have as much flu in the old days as they do today. They had their share of colds and some were considered "bad" colds. Some developed into pneumonia and that was very serious in the days before antibiotics. A case of the flu in the old days was called "la grippe". The most serious flu outbreak was the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918 which resulted in many deaths all over the world.

It may be that we spend too much time indoors these days in our well insulated homes. Many of the old homes our ancestors lived in had little or no insulation and were heated by wood stoves or fireplaces. Most of the rural people in those days had plenty of outside work to do and got plenty of fresh air. There were many home remedies for all kinds of medical problems and doctors were only called when absolutely necessary.

Many of the old folks thought fresh air was very important even inside the home. My father always liked to leave the window open an inch or so to get some fresh air even in the coldest weather and I tend to agree that spending too much time in a stuffy room heated by our modern heating methods may contribute to the sinus problems and allergies so many people have these days.

I have a copy of an 1874 almanac called the Virginia Bitters Almanac. Here is what this almanac said in an article entitled "How to Keep Well":

"Pure air by day and night should be as carefully provided as good food and pure water. MANY DIE OF FOUL AIR. Unless there is a full supply of fresh air, all who occupy the room will be subject to its injurious influences. Children especially suffer from bad air. The disturbed sleep, restless tossing, and mutterings give evidence of the effect of bad air, further confirmed by the dull eye, stupid expression, languid movements, and unrefreshed feeling which remain in the morning. *Let the house be well ventilated*, cover the body sufficiently with loose, warm, appropriate clothing, and the sleep will be sound and refreshing, the eyes will brighten, and life will receive a new impulse".

Remember, this advice was from 1874. Our modern medical professionals would probably disagree and I'm sure they would not recommend an asphidity bag. If people didn't get sick, they wouldn't need a doctor and that's how doctors make their living. You would have to do some research to find out what ingredients to put into an asphidity bag if you wanted to try one or find someone whose ancestors thought to pass the recipe down to their descendants.

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These steps are all that's left for the old Harvey & Sons general store in Bluff City. They are located at the intersection of Hwys. 24 and 299. I don't remember the store building, but some of you may. If you have some memories of this old store, or a picture of it, send them to me.



THE STEPS

By Jerry McKelvy

These steps are all that's left
Of the old general store
Where our ancestors bought
Coffee, feed, shoes, and more

The store had most anything
A person would ever need
From a spool of thread
To a package of turnip seed

On a bench in front of the store
The old men sat and discussed
Farming, the weather, politics,
And which candidate they could trust.

A local farmer went inside
To buy some ten penny nails
His young son sat on the steps
And listened to the old men's tales.

Men and women, boys and girls
The young and the old
Climbed these steps
In the heat and cold

The store is gone now
There is nothing left to sell
If these steps could talk
Oh, the stories they could tell.

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THEY COULDN'T WAIT

I found this little news item in the March 7, 1917 issue of *The Nevada News*:

Livingston County, Missouri is in the northern part of that state. A young couple had planned to get married but Squire Jordan, the one who was to perform the ceremony, lived on the other side of Medicine Creek. The wedding party gathered on one side of the creek which was swollen from recent rains. The young man swam across to bring Squire Jordan from his home to perform the wedding ceremony. Squire Jackson couldn't swim and wanted to postpone the ceremony a few days until the creek went down. The young couple did not want to wait. The young man swam back across the creek and the couple joined hands and told the squire to go ahead. The questions and answers were shouted across the creek and the knot was tied. Medicine Creek got its name, according to tradition, because a country doctor lost his "pill bag" as he was trying to cross the stream.

TRAFFIC LAWS FROM 1917

There was a lot of confusion in the days when some people had automobiles and many others still were using wagons pulled by a team of horses or mules. I found this list of traffic laws in the Nov. 8, 1917 issue of *The Nevada News*.

1. Don't leave your team unhitched or your motor running.
2. Don't stop your team or car at a street crossing.
3. Don't park team or car except within two feet of the curb.
4. Don't permit minors to run your car.
5. Don't get in a hurry, but keep your car under control.
6. Don't use glaring headlights.
7. Don't try to dodge a child in the street. Stop your car.
8. Don't pass a car to the right when overtaking it. Pass to the left.
9. Don't turn to the left when meeting a car. Turn to the right.
10. Don't travel to the left. Always travel to the right.
11. Don't try to outrun a train at a crossing. It can't be done.
12. Don't fail to keep your lights burning after sundown.
13. Don't turn around between traffic posts.
14. Don't fail to have license numbers on your car.
15. Don't disobey traffic laws. They are for your safety.
16. Don't forget those traveling east and west have the right-of-way.
17. Don't stop in the middle of the street for a conversation. Drive to the curb. The other fellow may want to pass you.

RAINFALL FOR JANUARY – 4.7 inches plus 3.5 inches of snow