

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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A VISIT TO PRINCETON

Princeton, Arkansas is a very small town in Dallas County. I was recently contacted by a 90 year old lady who had some property in that area. She said there was an old cemetery on her property and she wanted me to check it out. She gave me directions on how to find it. I wondered how long it had been since she was there and if her directions would be precise enough for me to locate the old cemetery.

My wife and I picked a day when the temperature was warm and headed out to Princeton which is about 33 miles from my home. I followed the directions the lady had given me and had no trouble finding the cemetery. She said her grandsons had recently cleaned the cemetery off and by following the trail they had left, we had no trouble locating it. We found eight graves there with only two of them marked—Archer Hayes and Mary A. Hayes, both born in Mecklingburg Co., Virginia. These were the great grandparents of the lady who called me. She said she had promised her parents that she would see that this cemetery was preserved. She told me that she had ordered a nice fence to be installed around the graves.

Every county has small abandoned cemeteries and many are deep in the woods. Some are accidentally disturbed by logging equipment when timber is cut. It's hard to see two or three grave markers while riding on a big skidder when you don't even know a cemetery is on the property. This particular cemetery near Princeton was saved because the property has stayed in the same family since the early settlers lived there.

I did a little research on the computer about Archer Hayes and his family. I learned that he was a slave owner and that land was once a plantation where cotton was grown. I even found that one of his former slaves had been interviewed in the 1930s when he was an old man and that information was posted online. The former slave described Mr. Hayes as a good man. It was interesting to read about those days of long ago from the viewpoint of one who was actually a slave on that property. I passed along the information I had found to the lady who called me and she was very happy to learn more about her great grandparents and was amazed that I had found all that information on the computer.

Since I was not too familiar with Princeton, I did a little research into its history. I learned that Dallas County was named after George M. Dallas, who was vice-president when James K. Polk was president. Princeton was originally the county seat of Dallas County, but the county seat was later moved to Fordyce because that town grew fast when the railroad came through. The same thing happened in Nevada County. The county seat was moved from Rosston to Prescott when the railroad came through. Towns located on a railroad tend to grow a lot faster than others.

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While at Princeton, I visited the Ben Few Campground, a Methodist campground established in 1898. It was named after a Methodist preacher named Ben Few. Only a few of these campgrounds still exist. This one has about twenty cabins situated around a large open meeting shed. There is also a building used as the kitchen, a spring house, and other structures.

The Princeton Cemetery is listed on the register of historic places in Arkansas with some graves dating back to 1849. It is about three acres in size.

I learned from a 1905 newspaper that Princeton at that time had three churches, a steam mill and gin, two daily mails, and two tri-weekly newspapers.

There were some skirmishes at Princeton during the Civil War in 1863 and 1864. Some of the injured from the Battle of Jenkins Ferry were taken to the Presbyterian Church at Princeton which was used as a hospital.

I also learned that Princeton was the birthplace of a famous American—George Raymond Gray. He was born there in 1867 and was the son of school teachers who had moved there from the state of Maine. George Gray was educated at the Arkansas Industrial University at Fayetteville and went to work at age 16 as a telegraph operator and station agent for the Santa Fe Railroad. He worked his way up in the railroad business serving as general manager and president of several major railroads. He even served as a financial advisor to John D. Rockefeller. George Gray became president of the Union Pacific Railroad at age 46 and was the youngest person in the world to be head of a great transportation system. He also was an advisor to the president of the United States on transportation issues.

Mr. Gray was described as unusually intelligent, handsome, and impressive man over six feet tall. He died in his hotel room in 1939 at the age of 72 and is buried in a cemetery in Baltimore, MD. He was fascinated with Abraham Lincoln and after Lincoln was assassinated, he persuaded Union Pacific to buy Lincoln's funeral car and kept it until 1901 along with some of the contents. The funeral car was lost in a fire in 1911.

I learned all this about Princeton just by doing a little research online. I'm sure there are many more interesting stories about the little town if one had the time to do more research. If you are interested in Princeton, check out the Facebook page called The Glory Days of Princeton, Arkansas. You will find many pictures and discussions about the town.

100 YEARS AGO

APRIL, 1916

(from the files of The Nevada News)

The Theo local news column mentioned these folks: William and Pink Creech, John Creech, Mattie Creech, Charlie McAteer, Clair Mooty, and Elison Beaver

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An exhibition was held at the Gun Grounds in Prescott by an expert marksman, Adolph Topperwien, representing Winchester Arms Co. He was well known for his trick shooting and expert marksmanship. As part of the show, he shot at oranges, apples, walnuts, marbles, and empty cartridge shells thrown into the air with either a rifle or a revolver. In one exhibition in Texas lasting ten days, he shot at 72,500 blocks of wood two and one fourth inches in diameter thrown into the air and missed only nine times.

Note: I did a little research on this guy. He set the world record in San Antonio in 1907 when he used three 1903 model Winchester automatics and fired at a total of 72,500 small wood blocks thrown into the air and only missed nine in 68 and one half hours of shooting during the ten day exhibition. He used up all the ammunition that was for sale in San Antonio at that time.

In 1903, he married Elizabeth Servaty, a woman from Connecticut who had never fired a gun in her life. Within two years, she also had become an outstanding woman marksman. She was known as "Plinky Topperwein", the nickname because of the sound of bullets hitting tin cans. They traveled the world as a team known as "The Famous Topperweins" until her death in 1945. Adolph died in 1962. (Source: "The Handbook of Texas History")

One of his specialties was shooting patterns such as the outline of Texas and his initials, stars, and triangles with a .22 caliber rifle. He would set up a piece of paper at a distance of 25 feet and sketch nearly any picture he wanted with bullet holes. One day he sketched a picture of an Indian head. He shot three times a day and six days per week. (Source: The Fabulous Topperweins—Part 1 on the Internet)

50 YEARS AGO

APRIL, 1966

(from the files of The Nevada News)

The Prescott city council passed a resolution changing Prescott from a first class city to a second class.

The Cale PTA had a mulligan featuring local talent from the surrounding area and stunts performed by volunteers from the audience.

Liberty Valu-Mart advertised canned vegetables for 10 cents per can, ten pounds of potatoes for 99 cents, Miracle Whip for 69 cents, and picnic ham for 45 cents per pound.

Teeter Bros. advertised men's dress shirts for \$3.95 to \$5.95.

Prescott Motor Co. advertised the 1966 Mercury Comet Cyclone GT

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OLD SETTLERS PICNIC AND BAR-B-QUE

The Old Settlers Picnic and Bar-B-Cue was held in Prescott in 1915. The stores closed from 10:30 to 1:30 and schools were dismissed so that the children could participate in a parade composed of the Prescott brass band, students, carriages, and autos.

Prizes were given in several categories. Winners were:

Oldest woman—Mrs. Bassett Bright—81 years old; chair from McDaniel Hardware

Oldest man—Capt. W. B. White—86—chair from McDaniel Hardware

Oldest married couple—Mr. and Mrs. T. D. Buchanan—52 years; \$5.00 in gold from Hesterly Drug Store

First married in county—Mr. and Mrs. William Carruthers--\$5.00 in gold from Hesterly

Tallest Man—J. L. McDaniel-6 foot 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches; hat from J. K. Hamilton Co.

Largest Family—E. A. Garrett family—13 children

Heaviest Man—Col. S. C. Thornton

ROADS NOT SAFE IN 1906

The story is as old as human history—travelers encountering thieves and other criminals while on a journey. Even in the Bible we read of the traveler who fell among thieves and was beaten and robbed of his money. The Good Samaritan found him and cared for him. Here is a little story about a similar incident in Nevada County in 1906 as reported by *The Nevada News*. Thankfully, this did not result in any injuries.

Last Saturday afternoon Ab Cobb and Mr. Tribble, who live several miles west of town, started for home, the former in a wagon and the latter on horseback, when they were overtaken by a stranger who begged the privilege of riding a piece in the wagon. The request was granted and the stranger proved to be a jovial companion, when suddenly, at a point six miles from town, drew a revolver and requested the boy to hand over. Being unarmed, Messrs. Cobb and Tribble promptly complied, and Mr. Stranger received a donation of \$18. He then requested Mr. Tribble to take a seat in the wagon with Mr. Cobb, as he wished to use the horse. Riding into the woods a piece, the stranger dismounted and turned the horse loose, which promptly returned home. So far, there is no clue about the mysterious stranger.

IT'S A GIRL

The Nevada News reported in September of 1915 about the arrival of a baby girl in the Cunningham family. What made this unusual was that this was the first girl born into that family in four generations (120 years). The child was named Mary Elizabeth. This Cunningham family was an old Tennessee family living in San Antonio.

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My article about gray hair in the last issue prompted Mr. Mathis to send in this poem.

Shades of Grey – by Don Mathis

I like how the light misted your hair
in the moonlight through the blinds.
It shines as radiant as the future.
I know you think misty hair is a sign of age,
but age is just a number. Although I'm 64,
I've always been immature for my age.
Your hair does not reflect your stage in life.
There may be five stages of grief,
but there are seven stages for misty hair.
Stage I: Stop pulling out gray hairs.
This path leads to baldness.
Stage II: Call it silver, not gray.
Stage III: You may want to change shampoo or gel.
Some conditioners may be good for auburn hair,
but may make misty hair look drab.
Stage IV: Don't expect sympathy from your elders.
Stage V: Don't expect sympathy from your peers.
Those young fools will only ridicule you.
Stage VI: Know that even though there is snow in the roof,
there is a fire down below.
Stage VII: There are worse aspects to aging.
Many. Worse.
Aching joints, failing eyesight, extruding teeth,
forgetfulness, diminished hearing, forgetfulness.
Stage Fright: All are indicators of pending death.
But all are indicators that you are alive.
Here. Now.
Enjoy it while it lasts.
Enjoy it while you last.

TIDBITS

The Nevada News in 1917 reported that an old-timer recalled the terrible winter of 1876 when 26 inches of snow fell over most of Arkansas. The snow fell on January 27 and was on the ground until March. The Arkansas River froze over for most of its length. There was much suffering and many livestock froze to death.

In 1917, the city council of Prescott reduced the pay for the city marshal from \$65 per month to \$5 per month. No reason was given except to save the city money.

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This is one of my favorite old pictures. The scene looks so peaceful.

RAINFALL RECORD

January – 4.7 inches February – 6.5 inches

“ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED COXEY’S ARMY”

I’ve heard this saying all my life especially when there is an abundance of food on the table. I often wondered about the origin of this saying and who Coxey was. Jacob Coxey was an Ohio businessman who led a protest march on Washington by unemployed workers in 1894. This was during the worst economic depression in the United States up until that time. They demanded that the government create jobs such as public works projects and road construction and print up \$500 million dollars in paper money to pay the workers.

Coxey started out leading about 100 men, but about 20,000 from all parts of the country headed to Washington as part of the movement and they were called Coxey’s Army. Only about 500 actually made it to Washington and they were met by 1500 federal troops. Coxey and some of the other leaders of the protest march were arrested for walking on the grass at the U. S. Capitol and interest in the march soon dwindled. By the way, Jacob Coxey had a son named Legal Tender Coxey.