

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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THE OLD STAGECOACH INN AT SAYRE

There is something about old buildings that makes one want to explore them and imagine what might have happened there many years ago. The old Stagecoach Inn at Sayre no longer exists, but this old building was a prominent landmark for many years. Many stories have been passed down about this old structure by the families of those who once lived in the area around Sayre. There is no way to prove some of these old stories, but they do make for good story-telling.

For those who don't know, Sayre was an old community in Ouachita County on the railroad line that ran from Gurdon to Camden. That railroad was constructed in 1880-81. Most people think some railroad official named the place Sayre, but we don't know for sure if that is true. Another story is that it was named after a young girl named Sarah who was camping there and that Sayre is a fractured version of the name Sarah. I have not found any reference to Sayre until the railroad was constructed, so I tend to think it was named by a railroad official.

The story of Sayre and Reader are closely connected. An early saw mill was located at Sayre and the Sayre Lumber Co. had a railroad that extended several miles into Nevada County to bring logs to the mill. That was about 1890. A man named Oscar Rowley appears to have been the main person associated with the saw mill at Sayre in the late 1890s, but for some reason most of his equipment and real estate holdings were sold at public auction at Sayre in 1896. In

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the 1900 census, Oscar Rowley was living in Arkadelphia with his family and was 40 years old at that time. His occupation was listed as a lumberman.

Another man associated with the sawmill industry was Lee Reader. He had purchased 160 acres of land near Sayre in 1884 and some say he proposed to build a larger mill at Sayre on the condition that the town would be renamed "Reader" in his honor. Records show the post office at Sayre was changed to Reader, but was quickly changed back to Sayre for some reason. There must have been some kind of dispute because Lee Reader decided to build his mill a mile down the track from Sayre on the land he had purchased in 1884. The town that developed around the mill was named Reader. That mill was larger and the town of Reader grew, but the post office and railroad station remained at Sayre. The two communities, Sayre and Reader, were located only one mile apart. Some of the residents were very particular about saying they were from Sayre instead of Reader or vice versa.

A booklet called "Businesses, Manufacturers, Merchants, and Tradesmen for Ouachita County" was published in 1923. According to that booklet, Sayre had a population of 100. Businesses listed were Jay Benton (grist mill and saw mill) and W. R. DeWoody (gin). The population of Reader in 1923 was not given, but Valley Lumber Co. was listed as the principal business.

The old Stagecoach Inn was originally the home of Dr. Isaac Hawkins and his family. After his death in 1871, the house was occupied by the Wallace family. One of the Wallace descendants, Sandy Wallace Caulk, sent me information she has about the Hawkins and Wallace families which should help tell the story of this old building.

THE HAWKINS FAMILY

The Hawkins family history can be traced back to 1682, when Jeffrey Hawkins, his wife, and seven children came to America on the ship *Welcome* to the new colony of Pennsylvania. Isaac Hawkins was the third great grandchild of Jeffrey Hawkins. He was born 7 October 1819 in Union County, South Carolina, the son of Jonathan Hawkins and Leticia Howard. In 1847, Isaac Hawkins graduated from medical college in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1851, he married Martha Ann Gill, daughter of John Gaston Gill and Ann Rebecca King. Soon thereafter, the couple came to Ouachita County, Arkansas.

John Gill had begun acquiring land in south Arkansas as far back as 1839, and at one time had accumulated over 4000 acres of land. At least two of his sons eventually came to Arkansas, settling in what is now Nevada County.

Doctors were much in demand in those early days and Dr. Isaac Hawkins served as a physician to many of the early settlers in the area where he settled. He had a large home constructed which was a prominent landmark at that time. A page from a notebook kept by a family member says Dr. Hawkins lived at Bluff City while his home was being constructed. The construction date is believed to be about 1856-1857, but could have been earlier since Dr.

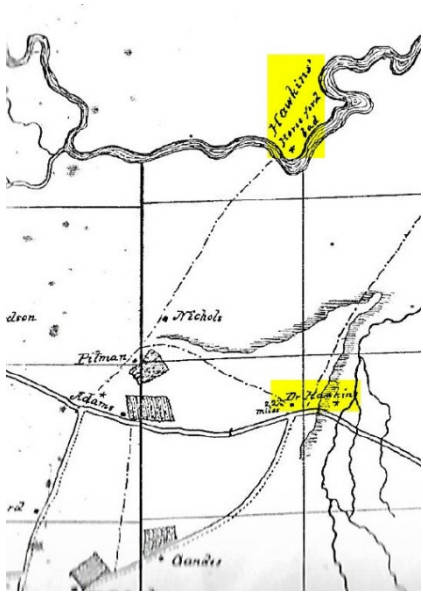
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Hawkins was in Arkansas by 1853 or 1854. It is believed the home was built by Thad Gill, the brother of Mrs. Hawkins.

Dr. Hawkins and his wife, Martha Ann had four children. The oldest child, Elvira Letitia, born in 1854 in Arkansas, married John Thomas Wallace in 1871. They are the great grandparents of Sandy Wallace Caulk, the person who sent me this information. Another child, Martha Rebecca, born in 1855, married Rev. James Oakley. They later moved to Texas. Willie (or William) was born about 1858. John Gaston was born in 1859 and died in 1954. He married Sally Turner and they are buried at the nearby Turner Cemetery.

Martha Ann Hawkins died in childbirth on the day John Gaston was born. She is probably the first person buried in the Hawkins-Wallace Cemetery at Sayre. Her mother died the same year while visiting her son in Clark County and some think she might be buried there also.

Martha Ann's death notice appeared in the *Yorkville Enquirer* newspaper in Yorkville, South Carolina in the December 15, 1959 issue: "Died at the residence of her husband in Ouachita County, Arkansas on the 10th of November, MRS. MARTHA ANN, wife of Dr. Isaac Hawkins, and daughter of Mr. John G. Gill, in the 32nd year of her age".



Dr. Hawkins served as physician for a large area. There was a place on the Little Missouri River called Hawkins' Ford. He used this river crossing to get to his patients in Clark County. This map is a portion of the 1865 map of Ouachita County which shows Dr. Hawkins' home and the location of Hawkins' Ford on the Little Missouri River highlighted in yellow. A note at Hawkins' Ford says "Horse ford—bad". The ford was about one and a half miles north of Dr. Hawkins' home. You can also see the road that passed by on the south side of Dr. Hawkins' home which was one of the main roads at that time.

The house was used as a hospital in the Civil War. Dr. Hawkins' daughter, Martha Rebecca, said that she tore sheets into bandages so that her father could treat wounded soldiers in their house during the war.

Dr. Hawkins lived in the house until he died 15 October 1871. He is buried next to Martha Ann in the cemetery not far from his old home. That same year, his daughter, Letitia Hawkins, married John Thomas Wallace. It is thought that John Wallace had purchased some land from Dr. Hawkins before his death and acquired more of the Hawkins' land later.

Mr. Jesse Hesterly, a longtime resident of Sayre, was interviewed by one of the Wallace descendants in 1966. He told that the Hawkins land went delinquent after Dr. Hawkins' death, and that Tom Wallace bought back 160 acres of the Hawkins land which included the Hawkins

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house and the land that eventually became Sayre. Mr. Hesterly said that the land where he lived was originally Gill land and pointed to a field across from his home where Gill slaves had been buried.

So, the Hawkins-Wallace house, also called the Old Stagecoach Inn, was home for the Hawkins family and later for Tom and Letitia Hawkins Wallace. The road in front of their house became busier through the years and the house became a stagecoach stop. The actual years the stagecoach traveled that route is not known, but most likely it began during the time Dr. Hawkins lived there and continued after Tom and Letitia Wallace occupied the house. That road was called the Upper Washington Road and it is said that it took a stagecoach most of a day to get from Camden to the Hawkins house and that was a convenient stopping point for the night. I came across an advertisement for the Chidester Stage Lines which delivered mail from Camden to Prescott in 1878.

THE WALLACE FAMILY

Tom Wallace was born in Alabama 21 October 1849. His parents were William James Wallace and Margaret Ann Giles. William James came to America in 1820, arriving with his parents in Charleston, South Carolina when he was five years old. In 1856, William James moved his family to Arkansas and in the 1880 census was living in Union Township, Nevada County. William James is buried in the Bluff City Cemetery with an old CSA marker with no dates.

Tom and Letitia Hawkins Wallace had four children—Naomi Roberta Wallace (born 1872), Guy Leander (born 1875), Thomas Victor (born 1880), and Lillie Cleopatra (born 1882). Guy died in 1909 and Lillie in 1910, neither one married. Both are buried in the Hawkins-Wallace Cemetery. Letitia died in 1883 or 1884, and is also buried in the cemetery. Tom Wallace never remarried.

Tom Wallace had an agreement, probably a lease agreement, with the lumber company that located in Sayre. The company built a large two-story building that housed the company offices and commissary, and also built houses for the mill workers. This was all done on land owned by Tom Wallace. When the company left, the buildings belonged to him.

Workers boarded with the Wallace family in the Hawkins house for a period of time. These could have been railroad or mill company construction crews. Roberta Wallace told her niece that their nearest neighbor was two or three miles away when she was young. At about 13-14 years of age, she met her future husband when he boarded in the house. She married Dr. Charles B. McGlaughlin who served as the doctor for the lumber company until it left Sayre. They then lived in Camden for a while before moving to Fordyce to live there permanently.

Tom Wallace built a small house behind the big building and lived there the rest of his life. The Hawkins house remained vacant as long as he lived, but was kept clean and the yard was not allowed to grow up with brush.

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After the mill left Sayre his son, Victor Wallace, opened a store in the commissary area of the building that had been constructed by the lumber company. The post office was located next to the store and the Masons rented the upstairs and met there. It was a long building with a wooden walkway running the length of it.

Thomas Victor Wallace, known as Victor, married Lillie Cathey Rushing in 1902. They lived at Sayre until about 1922. They had six children—Sybil Rushing (born 1904), Meta Roberta (born 1907), Billie Tom (born 1910), George Merle (born 1913), Victor J. (called June, born 1917), and Frances Josephine (born 1923).

Much of this information comes from the children of Victor and Lillie Wallace, especially Meta who wrote about living in the village, and Victor who still had a vivid memory at age 91. He provided much information, as did Frances. After the family left Sayre, Victor spent most summers at Sayre visiting his grandfather until Tom Wallace died in 1928.

STORIES ABOUT THE OLD HAWKINS HOUSE

Many stories have been told about this old house, and most have been confirmed. The fact that it was a stagecoach stop appears to be factual. It was said to be a hospital during the Civil War and the notebook page belonging to the Wallace family confirms that. It is also true that it was a boarding house.

There are many stories about gold being hidden at various places during the Civil War days and the Hawkins house has its own “gold story”. Tom Wallace told his grandchildren that Dr. Hawkins did indeed bury gold and other valuables before or during the Civil War, although the story has been greatly exaggerated. One of the stories said gold from South Carolina was shipped to Camden and then loaded on a wagon that traveled by night to Dr. Hawkins’ home. The wagon was so heavily loaded that the wagon ruts could be seen for a long time. This part was almost certainly exaggerated, and would account for the treasure seekers of later years.

According to the story, Dr. Hawkins and an elderly black servant (or a slave) were the only two who knew the location of the gold. The elderly servant died during the war, and Dr Hawkins did not think it was safe to have valuables around following the war due to the number of homeless and hungry people roaming the countryside. As far as it is known, he also died without digging up the valuables.

Many a night when Victor Wallace and his family would sit on the porch of their house nearby, lantern lights could be seen around the old house when people would be digging in the yard for the treasure.

A prank by Victor Wallace may be the source of the “haunted house” reputation. Because he ran a store, Victor was able to buy the first flashlight in that area. One night he strung a rope from the upper story of the Hawkins house to a tree, borrowed white sheets from Miss Lillie, and fashioned a ghost likeness from them. A pulley was used to move them about.

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Finally, some treasure hunters came along and started to work. He knew some of the men, and determined which one was most nervous from their conversation. Soon he moved the sheet and used the flashlight on it when the man was looking in that direction. When the man told the others there was a ghost about, they laughed at him. Victor did this several times until the man was totally spooked and decided to leave. About that time he added ghost noises and they all looked up to see the “ghost” coming their way. Shovels were dropped as they all ran as fast as they could.

Sandy says her aunt described the old house as it looked when she was young and living at Sayre. It had double front doors, a covered porch with two windows on each side of the porch. The drive was circular, or curved, and lined with crepe myrtle trees, said to have been brought from South Carolina by the Gill family. It was L shaped, with the one story “L” extending to the back having three rooms. A rather narrow porch ran in front of each room and led to the rest of the house. The original kitchen was detached and set back a distance, but it had burned many years before.

Many of the younger people who grew up in the area around Chidester, Sayre, Reader, and Bluff City in the 1950s and 1960s remember visiting the Old Stagecoach Inn. The building had been vacant for many years, and looked much like the picture on page one. A large empty building like that can be very spooky especially with all the ghost stories that had been told about it. Another story I have heard is about a man killing his wife and baby in one of the upstairs rooms and that blood stains could still be seen on the stairs. The old house made a good “haunted house” for Halloween nights.

THE END OF THE OLD STAGECOACH INN

I don't know exactly when the house was last occupied. Tom Wallace died in 1928, and it was said the house was vacant for some time before his death. An unoccupied house soon falls into ruin if not maintained. The population of Sayre dwindled after the mills closed and people began to move away. Allen Green, president of the Bank of Chidester, was from Sayre and had accumulated much land in that area, including the land where Dr. Hawkins' house stood. He sold all his land to Deltic Farm and Timber Co. about 1975. The timber company decided the old house was too much of a liability because of the possibility of an accident with young kids exploring inside, so they made plans to have it torn down. I was told that Bobby Hildebrand bought the old house for \$100 and had it torn down. The lumber was stacked behind Harvey's Store near Camden until it rotted. The railroad through Sayre was no longer needed, so it was dismantled in 1999. Sayre is not shown on modern maps of Ouachita County, but still exists in the memories of some of the older generation. The road from Reader toward old Sayre was once marked as Sayre Drive, but the street sign is no longer there. The place where the old house once stood has now gone back to forest.

THE HAWKINS-WALLACE CEMETERY

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The family cemetery is located a short distance from where the old house once stood in Sayre. The only original headstones remaining are for Dr. Isaac and Martha Ann Hawkins. There were several other markers at one time, but all have disappeared. About 1960, Meta Wallace Knoefel counted nine apparent burial sites near Dr. Isaac and Martha Ann.

Known to be buried there in addition to the Hawkins, are their daughter, Letitia Wallace, Guy Wallace, Lillie Wallace, a McGlaughin infant, and Ralph Oakly, a young child of Martha Hawkins Oakley.

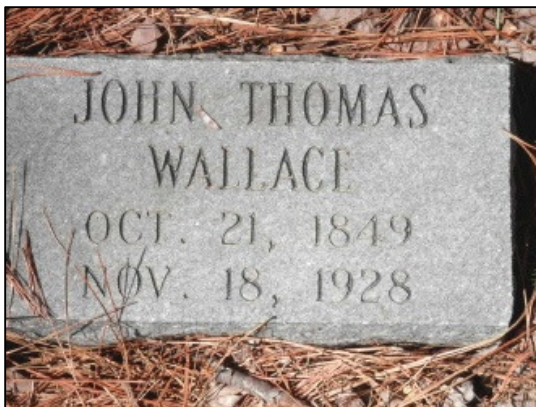
On the west side of the road, John Thomas Wallace and his son, Thomas Victor Wallace, are buried. Sometime after 2008, a nice metal fence was installed around the two Wallace graves. The Hawkins graves on the east side of the road have not been fenced. These graves are about 100 feet east of the road down a dim trail. The graves are on the right about 25 feet off the trail. Mrs. Hawkin's marker is lying flat on the ground four feet north of Dr. Hawkins' marker.



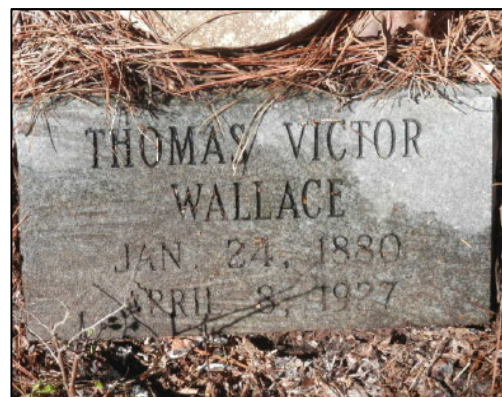
Dr. Isaac Hawkins' grave marker



Martha Ann Hawkins' marker



John Thomas Wallace marker

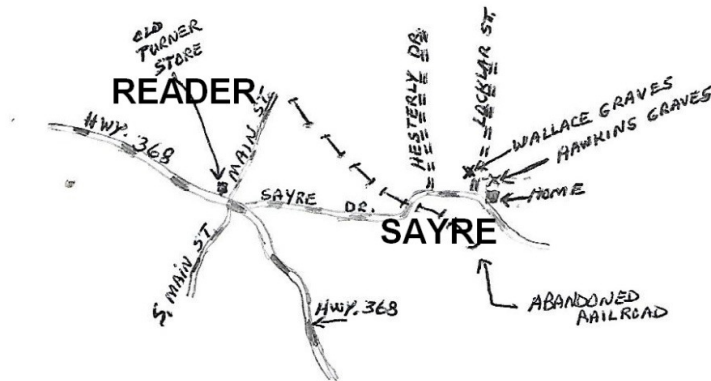


Thomas Victor Wallace marker

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New fence installed around the Wallace graves



LOCATION OF HAWKINS-WALLACE GRAVES

RAINFALL RECORD

January – 4.7 inches February – 6.5 inches March – 12.7 inches April – 6.4 inches

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Don Mathis, a frequent contributor for The Sandyland Chronicle, sent this obituary for his aunt, Mildred Mathis who many of you may remember.

Mildred Mathis (August 3, 1921 - March 21, 2016)



Mildred Mathis, 94, of Camden and Hot Springs, died March 21, 2016 of melanoma. She was preceded in death by her husband George Benjamin Mathis, her son John Sidney Mathis, her parents and her siblings, Earnest Johnston, Walker Lee Johnston, Sally England, Jimmie (Doodlebug) England, and Elsie Guest. Mildred is survived by her 2 daughters, Victoria Harden of Camden and Nancy Mathis of Winslow, AR, and their husbands Shelton Harden and Peter Hine; Sid's widow Pam Shortness of Naperville, IL, grandchildren, Jonathan Mathis and Angela Caroline Mathis, Jonathan's wife Katy, her great-grandchildren Clay and Posey Jane, all of Illinois, special friends at Country Club Village in Hot Springs, and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

A graduate of Arkansas A&M (now UAM), Mildred attended summer school at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music where she learned about the big city and studied voice. Upon graduation, she began her teaching career in Emerson, Arkansas and upon her marriage to George, began teaching in the Fairview school system. When George opened his funeral home, Mildred joined him in operating that business and her own flower shop, Mathis Flower Shop. Together they owned and operated Mathis Trailer Park for many years.

Mildred was involved in politics for Ouachita County and the City of Camden. She served as a Justice of the Peace and as a city council member. She was the first female vice mayor of Camden. She was well known as a musician especially in the gospel singing circuit and continued to play the piano and sing throughout her long life. In her final years, she hosted a 'gospel sing-a-long' for the residents of her retirement home. During the 1960s, Mildred was a leader in the civil rights movement. She was a strong, radical woman who set an example of equality and fairness while making everyone sing and laugh. Mildred chose to donate her body to medical science.

A memorial service celebrating the life of this remarkable woman will be held May 21, 2016, at 11:00 A.M. at St. John's Episcopal Church in Camden. Donations to St. John's Episcopal Church, 117 Harrison, Camden, AR 71701, may be made in her memory. An electronic guest book may be found at <http://www.legacy.com/guestbook/Batesville/guestbook.aspx?n=mildred-mathis&pid=178362429>

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(In Acrostic poems, the first letters of each line are aligned vertically to form a word. This poem goes out to my son, Thomas Charlie Mathis, who is expecting his first child in the fall.)

Fathers Day Acrostic – by Don Mathis

Fathers are fun - and serious too!
And you learn more from them than you do at school.
Think of all the good times you've had.
How would it be without your dad?
Everything would be harder with no mentor for growth.
Reflect on the man who loves you the most.
Soon will come the day for you to fill his shoes.

Do you think your dad would accept an excuse?
Always try your best, that's what he would say.
Yes, think of your dad on this Fathers Day!

THE COLOR OF HORSES

I found this little tidbit in the October 21, 1915 issue of *The Nevada News*. I always thought a solid white horse was something special. That's what The Lone Ranger rode on TV when I was a kid. "Hi-Yo, Silver"!

According to the article, the color of a horse affects the value of the animal. Except for funerals, circuses, and special occasions, a white horse was not wanted. Light colors were not as popular as dark colors in 1915. The Army did not want light colored horses because they made good targets.

I don't remember what year it was, but it was reported that the Prescott Hardware was purchasing a pair of solid black horses to put their hearse in funerals. I guess preferences change over the years on things like this. I wonder if this holds true today. Are white horses more or less valuable than dark colored horses?

If any of you raise horses or know the answer to that question, send me an email.