

Jerry McKelvy's
SANDYLAND CHRONICLE

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MEMORIES (PART THREE)

By J. L. Franklin Jr.

In 1932 Dad bought a pea thrasher and Robert Sampson worked with him. They went all over the lower part of the county thrashing peas. I can remember him setting it up in the barn for thrashing the neighbor's peas. The motor that ran the thrasher was quite cantankerous and I can remember several times, either Robert or Dad would come home with a sore arm, where the crank had kicked them. At times they would come home covered with pea mites, that's when the old #3 bath tub and mother's homemade lye soap really saw a lot of action. One time after staying overnight in the lower part of the county, they got something other than pea mites. This time they got 'scabes mites'. They caused what was commonly called 'the itch'. I remember mother getting them also. I'm not sure if my sister did or not. I was lucky and didn't get them. I'll never forget that smell of sulphur and grease that was used to treat them. In the mid 80's, I found out what it was all about, as my grandson got them in Mt. Ida School and came to visit us for a few days. I got a good dosage of them and had to bathe with Lindane for a week before the healing occurred.

To show how things have a way of making this seem like a really small world, I was still working for Ark. Forestry Commission and one morning my phone rang and Rick Horton over at International Paper Nursery asked if I had bought a small gasoline engine from Sears Roebuck in 1932. I told him no, since I was only four years old at the time. He said, "I just bought one from J.T. Rhodes and the original receipt was with it, and sold to J.L. Franklin". I asked him if it was on a pea thrasher and he said it was, but J.T. wouldn't sell him the thrasher. I told him that my dad bought it and how hard it was to start. He said he knew why, as he had taken it apart and the piston rings were installed backwards or upside down. I went over to see it one day and he just gave the flywheel a turn and it kicked right off without even using the crank. The water reservoir had a

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small chunk broken out of the upper edge and he asked if I knew anything about how that came about. I surely did as I was there when it happened. Dad cranked it off while in the barn hall, that crank flew off, hit the wall and bounced back and broke that chunk out. I would have loved for Dad to see how easy he started that old engine. It would have saved several sore arms and a bunch of 'cuss' words if he'd known back then.

I remember the first experience I had with wringing a chicken's neck. You know, when someone was coming for supper, you went out and caught a fryer and wrung its neck and fried it. I had seen Dad do it lots of times and thought it was my time. I kept begging until he finally consented but said if I didn't kill it, he would spank me. My big chance at last. I swung that joker around several times not knowing I was supposed to hold the head and neck rigid. When I threw him down, he hit on both feet and took off like he had been scalded. I got my spanking and we did have fried chicken after he finally caught one, which wasn't easy as my fryer and me had spooked all of them.

I remember we had a black hound named 'Dot'. She would go to the hen house as soon as a hen quit cackling from laying an egg and suck it out of its shell. Dad tried every way he knew to stop her, but nothing worked. One day a hen laid and Dot went straight to it. When she rounded the corner of the hen house with that egg in her mouth, Dad dropped her with his old 12 gauge 'long-tom'. He killed my dog and I didn't like him for a long time. I didn't enjoy having an egg for breakfast afterwards either.

Most of the old houses had a fireplace with a clay chimney. These chimneys would go bad every so often from rain and weathering. I remember ours having to be rebuilt. All the men in the neighborhood came over and we had a chimney-raising. First they tore down the remains of the old one and put up a framework of poles. Some were digging and hauling in clay while others were cutting and bringing in sedgegrass. We had a lot of both products at hand. Next they would make a slurry of the clay and water and then roll the sedgegrass into bats or bricks and dip them in the slurry. These were referred to as 'mudcats'. These would then be stacked inside the frames and before the day

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ended, we had a new chimney. Some of the women visited and cooked for the workers. We kids that were too young to work, so we played and always managed to get in the way and also get plastered with the mud. After the sun dried the outside and a few fires cured the inside, these structures would last for several years. Mr. Lige Barlow was the local carpenter and was usually the head man on these projects. As hard as these people worked for a living they still had time to have some fun and enjoy being with their neighbors. Friday or Saturday night would be party time. I remember one time we had a 'tacky party' at our house. Everyone dressed as 'tacky' (outrageous) as they could and the couple that dressed the 'tackiest' won a prize. I remember Jack Beaver brought his guitar. Dad played his harmonica and mother corded or seconded as she called it on her mother's old organ. There was some dancing, some games played, and a whole lot of singing going on. Everyone seemed to have a good time, especially us kids.

Sunday was rest and church day. There was very little if any work done on Sunday back then. My first memory of church was at Gum Grove. As it was just down the hill and we usually walked instead of hitching up a team and wagon. Those that lived a little farther would come in wagons or a buggy if they had one. Once in a while someone would visit that came in an automobile. Rich people, we thought. Brother J.A. Copeland is the first preacher I can recall. We didn't have a regular, so it was special when one did come to preach for us. I liked Brother Copeland, but he didn't always stop preaching soon enough to suit me. I'd be tired and thinking about that fried chicken that would be on the table after church. I think Brother Bill Barlow would get a little bored too, as I'd notice him doze off now and then. I watched him a lot as he had a long white beard that simply fascinated me. Grandpa always had a mustache but I can't recall him ever wearing a beard.

Gum Grove was Church of Christ, Gooseankle was Methodist and Ebenezer was Baptist (I think). But it made no difference what your beliefs were, when one church had a meeting in session or a singing going on, everyone went and joined in. I can remember even going as far as Caney which had two churches and was about ten

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miles away. Every once in a while someone would come in and hold a singing school at one of the churches and I especially like them. You might say I cut my teeth on gospel singing and I love it still. I could even do a fair job at it, when I was young, but lost it when my voice changed. Aubrey Barlow from Terrapin Neck was a good singer and teacher. All of our local Barlows were good singers (Lige, Albert, Everett and Jeff). I remember learning a lot from Ms. Ethel Barham who with her husband Brice lived where the Plumley place is now. I remember Mr. Barham just having one arm but not much else about him. Ms. Ethel died while they lived in this place. That really hurt me. I also recall there being a lot of controversy over the cause of her death. I think it was listed as a suicide or natural, but the grownups didn't think so. Their belief was that someone killed her. I don't know what happened to the house they lived in, but it was gone before James Plumley bought the Leroy "Mud" McKelvy house and moved it there.

Tom and Ms. Ibra Plyler lived in the house up the hill. Their oldest daughter Mae, married Shelby Hunter and they had several boys and a girl. I played with these boys in later years, Mattie, married ____ Helsell and they lived in Detroit, MI for years, Mattie still does. I didn't know their children as they were raised elsewhere. Dester married Henry Jones and I only knew their eldest son. Virta married "Green" McCain and had two daughters. The youngest, Mary, and I worked together for fifteen years at the Ark. Forestry Commission. After "Dent" Tomlin retired and I moved up to supervisor, she became my girl Friday, and Thursday and Wednesday and Tuesday and Monday. She was one fine secretary and will always be my dear friend. "RP", the only boy, was about my age and we played and hunted together as boys. He married my buddy, James 'Cabbagehead' Tomlin's sister, Hazel and they had a boy and a girl. I was never around their girl that much but their son Dennis and his wife Teresa are my closest neighbors, living on the Tom Plyler place.

Mr. Tom was a tall thin man with an Abraham Lincoln look to me. He loved to sit on his porch and talk. In fact, he liked this better than working. Ms. Ibra was the hardest working lady I ever saw. I'll never forget one time after I married, Martha and I came

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down to the farm for a visit. When we passed the Plyler place, Ms. Ibra was pulling a garden plow and Mr. Tom was holding the plow and yelling directions at her as if she were a mule. My wife said, "who is that old man? I'd kill him before lunch and promise God he just fell dead". She learned to like him some after she got to know him. But don't think she ever forgave him for that one act. He was a nice guy, but as my mother always said, he just wasn't to work brittle.

Most of these remembrances were up to the age of five as we moved to Prescott when I was five years old. There will be others I'll recall and will add in later, as I think of them. I never had the opportunity to go to school at Bluff City but think I would have liked it.

The first place we lived in Prescott was the old Hatly place. It was a huge old house with three stories. Johnnie and Henry Meadows lived on one side of the first floor and we lived in the other. No one lived on the second floor and it was used for storage only. The third floor or attic was full of old items that had belonged to Miss Annie Hatly who had formerly lived there. It was like going to the museum up there. Old clothing, shoes, trunks, books, magazines, papers and miscellaneous other things from the 1800's. Of course we weren't allowed to open the trunks or pry around much. I spent many rainy days reading and looking at pictures and trying to imagine what a great lady Miss Annie must have been. This house was just up Hatly Avenue from where it intersects with Wildcat Road. The Sharpe place where Elizabeth (Hays) and Virginia (Duke) lived was first off of Wildcat Road and the Hatly place was next. I walked to the old elementary school (over by the gym) from here. While in third grade, my buddy Roy Duke Jr. and I both had pneumonia and missed quite a bit of school. Dr. E.E. Shell, Roy's granddad, was taking care of both of us and keeping us in touch with his visits. He finally broke mine by wrapping me in a mustard plaster from my armpits down to my hips. I thought he was trying to kill me rather than cure me. Roy wasn't as lucky as I and was left deformed and died at an early age. Dr. Shell was killed by a car when taking Roy over to Memphis for treatments, some years later. Shell Blakely was also a grandson of Dr. Shell. Dr. Shell was well known and liked in the Bluff City area. I think his first practice was at Theo, named for Theo Gulley, one of my ancestors. Theo was a son of John

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Gulley, the Alabama planter that migrated to this area. He was my great, great, great grandfather as my great, great grandfather Leroy Purifoy married his daughter, Elizabeth. John Gulley and Leroy Purifoy are both buried in Gulley Cemetery. I think Elizabeth is, but we don't have a marker for her. Roy Jr. was unable to play in the organized sports, but was always there either as a trainer or a time-keeper, etc.

We weren't at the Hatly place too long until we moved to what was known as the Langston place. It was a 40 acre plot I believe, and had a big house, a smaller house and a big barn. We lived in the big house and rented out the smaller one. There was a small pond down in the corner of the field in front of the houses. I caught lots of perch in it, and some of the biggest crawdads I've ever seen in the marshy ground around it. The Prescott Middle School is on this land today. Some of the neighbors I can remember on what I would guess to be north and east side is Dr. Townsend the vet., Willis Baker family, Robbie Wilson and daughters Imogene (Mrs. "Potsy" Davis) and Dorothy Mae, Dorothy Jamison (Ernest's sister) lived with an uncle I believe, but don't remember the name. Just across the street in front lived a black couple, Jim and "Crecia" Craven. Jim was in his 80's and could tell the most interesting stories I had ever heard. One I remember well; his son had been bitten by a rabid dog. There was no madstone closer than some place in Missouri. He put his son on a mule behind him and went to find this madstone. On the way, the boy developed rabies and steadier got worse. Jim said after a day's ride, his back would be soaking wet from the boy's frothing and slobbering on him. It got to the point where the sight of water made his son go crazy and he couldn't eat or drink any longer. He was so bad at this point that he would lunge at Jim and try to bite him so he chained him to a tree and watched him die. And we think we have troubles. Jim had been a slave in his earlier years but held no animosity toward anyone. He said he had a good massa and that white folks had always been good to him. He told me to always be good to people and they would be good to me. Many times in my life when I'd think bad thoughts about someone or want to do harm to them, I'd think of what this very wise old black man had told me.

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Crecia was a fat jolly woman that I didn't know but what I belonged to her. Mother was sickly at this time and Crecia helped her do the housework and look after me. If I got sick, she'd whip up a batch of "Jimpsonweed" tea, or whatever and soon have me on the mend. She knew all the old home remedies. She brewed up a batch of dried cow-chip tea and wanted me to drink it. Thank goodness mother didn't back her up on that one and I didn't have to take it. I spent a lot of time at their house when mother needed her rest. Crecia had white rats running all around her house and that didn't set well at first but after she told me as long as you had them, you'd never have an old dirty mouse in your house, I made it pretty good. Her house was old, but always spotlessly clean. I think I could have eaten off her floors about as well as the table. And she was some kind of good cook.

On the other side lived Mr. and Mrs. Ed "one-armed" Gordon. I remember Mr. Ed as being quite 'feisty' and always on the go doing something. Mrs. Gordon was real sweet. They had a grandson, Jimmy that lived in another state, Missouri I think. When he came to spend time in the summer, we'd play and became pretty good buddies.

A little farther down this road, at our back corner, the Vandivers lived. I think his name was Clio, anyway he was "Bub" and Margaret's dad. I don't remember the other kid's names, except I think one of the girls was called "Pete". They were real nice and Margaret and I went to school together for several years.

Just back towards town from the Gordon place was a scope of woods that ran all the way to the back of Mrs. Hardy's place on east Main Street. Sonny Carrington, Bobby Denman and I killed many an Indian and lots of aliens with our Buck Rogers Ray Pistols in this deep forest.

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That concludes J. L.'s writings about memories from his early life in the Gum Grove community and in Prescott. I'm glad he took the time to write this down and I thank his family for sharing it. J. L. was a great writer and story-teller.

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RAINFALL RECORD

January – 4.7 inches February – 6.5 inches March – 12.7 inches April – 6.4 inches
May – 1.3 inches June – 2.3 inches July – 4.8 inches August – 10.7 inches
September -- .6 inches October -- .3 inches November-- 4.8 inches



This object from the last issue is called a singletree. Other names for it are swingletree, whiffletree, and whippetree, although I have never heard those names used in our part of the country. If two horses were used to pull something, a singletree would be attached to each end of a larger cross piece called a doubletree. These people contacted me with the correct answer: Bill Sellers, Bill Carman, James

Nelson, Jeanie McKelvy, Charles Farr, Brenda Barham, Peggy Greer Seiler, Gerald Thomas, Yvonne Munn, Don Rubarts, Mary Ann Sanford, Annette Leamons, Adrian Hunter, and James Daniels.



Mrs. Zettie Griffith Link, 97, of Bearden died December 15, 2016. She was born in Bluff City in 1919. She was a very talented artist and enjoyed painting old home places and historic structures. She most recently had started painting on gourds. She recently completed a painting for me of the old home place where I grew up and this painting hangs in my home today. One of her paintings was featured in the Jan., 2015 issue of The Sandyland Chronicle. I did an article about her being chosen the first Nevada County fair queen in 1937 (Oct., 2011 issue) and an article about letters she had received from Harl Nelson while he was serving on the *USS Arizona* just before he was killed when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor (Dec., 2013 issue). She recently told me that she had saved every issue of this paper and looked forward each month for the next issue. She will be missed by all who knew her.

COMMENTS FROM READERS

I enjoyed the article in Sandyland about White Oak Lake. Just wanted to mention that my cousin Nelson Cox grew up at Reader, and he also fought to get the State Park established at White Oak Lake. Nelson was Director of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission from 1956-1965, and earlier he was in the House of Representatives from Ouachita County. He had political savvy, and he loved the beautiful great outdoors in our section of the state. -- *Cathy Cox Straley*

Have been reading the Sandyland papers for the last 4 hours and I'm really enjoying it. Thanks for publishing. -- *Brenda Wallace*