

Memories through the U.S. Mail

It was such a noble offer from our neighbors that we could not turn their proposal down. Our mailbox was about to tumble to the ground, so they offered to fix it. When we agreed, they went home and returned later with some tools and a hewed pole. They would remove the old pole, redig the hole to make it straight, insert the new pole into it, and put a new box on top. They would have to go to Butler for the new box, but all their efforts would take only an hour.

The box was much, much too large by present standards, but it was suitable for our parents when it was issued to them in 1892, just a few days after their marriage. The box was the type that was approved by the Postmaster General to serve farm families. It was designed to hold bulky packages that contained shoes, clothing and other items that were shipped from mail order houses. It was not possible in those days to go to a convenience store or department store because there were none in the area.

Not much effort was required to remove the old pole, for termites had done a very thorough job of destroying most of it in recent months. As the workers placed the box on the ground, we realized that a long and very eventful era was coming to an end, for some of our earliest memories were built around the bulky and bent piece of metal that seemed so lonely and abandoned on the ground.

When we were a young child, the box was higher than the moon, and much more magical, for the moon only gave out a dim light, but the box was constantly throwing out goodies.

Our address was Route I, West Butler, and the carrier



Submitted photo

throughout our childhood was Mrs. Nora Rackley, a widow who lived in West Butler with her mother and young daughter. Mrs. Nora, as we called her, would keep the route longer than any other driver.

She understood that we were a family of readers, and that having something to read was more important to us than having food. When our subscription to the Mobile Register expired because of lack of funds, she renewed it for us. We responded in the only way possible, and that was by pushing her car when it became stuck in the mud. That happened rather frequently because there were no paved roads in Bogueloosa Valley. When the economy turned and World War II started, she deliver certain messages six times over the next

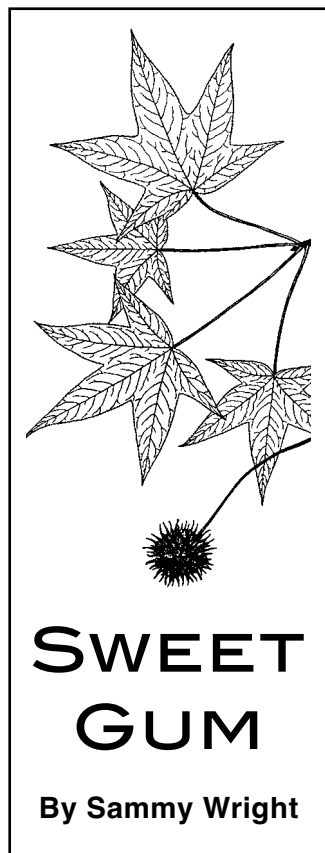
decade. Those messages were from the Draft Board and ordered us to report for induction.

After delivering one of those messages, Mrs. Nora never drove away from the box until someone came out and picked up the mail. She understood, especially during wartime, that getting drafted was a very traumatic affair that had a depressing effect upon a boy's mother. The thought of trying to dodge the draft never occurred to us because we felt that it was our duty to serve.

Candy and chewing gum companies tried to build up their consumers by providing free samples through the mail, and Mrs. Nora would see to it that each of us received something. The box survived two moves, dozens of storms, and the snows of winter, which were normal and expected in earlier times. The box held up well through all the turmoil.

It did not fare quite as well when the boys in the family reached their teens and began their experiments. One boy noticed one Christmas while shooting firecrackers that the box was actually a closed cylinder. He wondered, as did his brothers, just how many firecrackers could explode within the box without blowing the lid open, and if the explosion would sound as loud as a blast in one of the deep hollows between the hills.

It is not necessary for you to try this experiment, but only seven firecrackers sent the lid into



orbit, and the noise was like an exploding bomb. We found the lid and hammered it back into place and beat out most of the dents. Our experiments often left the box dirty and smelly, so we always gave it a good cleaning and a paint job.

While the experiments were fun, they not nearly as interesting as the missiles of love (and unlove) that came to the box when the girls in the family started dating. We remember the message in one of those letters from a frustrated boy: "I would brave any type of storm for you; would cross the highest snow-covered

mountain for you, and I'll see you Saturday night if it doesn't rain."

Of course, if the love turned sour it was not uncommon to find a brick in the box some morning. However, the messages were usually interesting and fun to read, and the bricks never hurt anyone. The boy who drafted knew that Mrs. Nora did not run the route on Sunday or holidays, so they calculated the time that was required for a letter to reach land. If delivery, but it had something much greater! A postmaster, Mr. Willie Land, who hated to have time off. He met the AT&N twice each day, every day of the year, took the mail to the Post Office and sorted and distributed it. That was a blessing for those families that had fighting sons away in the war.

News came through the mail about the consolidation of the school in the early 1940s, and the letter designated which school the students would attend. New schools were built throughout most of the county, and new buses were purchased. In spite of all the fear that was associated with the war, it was still a good time to be alive.

But there was something that seemed more dreadful to youngsters than the thought of war, and that was the fear of polio. Messages came through the mail each year to every household from the State Health Dept. that warned about the hazards of polio, and the method of its spreading. Of course, the methods changed every year and they included the theory that polio was spread by blowing dust. Remember, the roads are all dirt, and every vehicle that passed in dry weather left a cloud of dust behind. That year, every child in this valley could outrun any professional track star, because every cloud of dust set us on the move.

The next year, the Health Dept. did not mention dust, for it was swimming in the creeks that spread polio. When the youngster stayed out of the creeks during the blazing days of July and August, the disease did not decrease at all. In fact, the number of cases increased. The next year, the Health Dept. decided that the virus was spread by bubble gum, and that beautiful popping sound was not heard in the valley at all that summer, nor did we hear that the disease had decreased. It would be full decade before Dr. Jones Salk would perfect a vaccine

against the disease.

We do not mention the polio epidemics to chastise the health depts. The personnel in the clinics did what they could to lessen the great fear that gripped the county each summer. The most effective messages were conveyed by the newspapers that showed pictures of patients in iron lungs. If you ever feel depressed, you can shake it off by thanking God for the intelligences of Dr. Salk.

News about the electrification of the valley came through the mail, and the most noticeable effect of that change came in the appearance in the hands of housewives who had spent decades laboring over a washtub with washboard. Their hands were rough and calloused until they started using washing machines to do the laundry. The clothing was cleaner after a few weeks and the callouses disappeared.

We usually had our yearly revival at the Sand Methodist Protestant Church in August, after the farm work was over. During one especially hot August, the attendance was very slim because of the weather. It was the last year that the church would be without electricity. The preacher tried to increase the attendance by saying that he would go somewhere the next day and get some new fans to replace the cardboard, sheets of paper, and turkey wings that those in attendance were using.

We wondered all the next day if the fans would be General Electric or Westinghouse. All the youngsters in Land had seen pictures of those fans, so we got to church early that night and stood around arguing about the merits of each brand. It never occurred to us that there was still no electricity in the church. We just wanted to feel the fans, and wondered how the preacher could perform such a miracle. When he arrived, we found out how he did it. He had a little help, for on the back of each fan were these jolting words: "Compliments of Causey Funeral Home, York, Ala."

We thought of all these things as our neighbors were placing the new post in the hole. When they mentioned going for the new box, we remembered the words of Job: "Some remove the Landmarks." We would save our neighbors a trip to Butler, so we whispered softly

"Put the old box back."

Moms, Dads, Grandparents and proud Aunts, Uncles and other "kinfolks" ...

Salute your special Graduate (kindergarten to college!) in the *Sun's* big Graduation Issue to be published on May 16th.

Tell them how special they are in the paper with the largest circulation of any newspaper in Choctaw County ...
The Choctaw Sun.

But hurry! Friday, May 4th at 5 p.m. is the deadline for getting your ad in this special keepsake edition.

Restaurant Review

Good food, good times at Old Buddies

"Old Buddies" ... the same friendly faces – same good food. Open daily Monday – Saturday 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sundays 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Tuesday is also grill day and Friday night is grilled steak night, grilled to perfection!

On Sundays, there are lunch specials and hot dogs or chicken strips for the kids. Build your own pasta or order a great sandwich. Get some fries or a green salad for your side order.

If you enjoy steaks, get your choice -- an 8oz. or 16oz. -- cooked the way you like it, well, medium, or rare, or anywhere in between.

Bring a friend or the whole family for a good meal. "Old Buddies" is a great place to have a group meeting and plan an event while you eat some good food with great service.

So go to "Old Buddies" and meet Margaret, the manager, and her great staff and sit down for great meal.

Just remember "Good Times – Good Food" at Old Buddies, and tell them that you read about them in *The Choctaw Sun!*