

December 2013

A large portion of the City of Bella Vista now covers an area that formerly was made up of five historic communities, each with a community center that served as both their church and their school.

Three of those five buildings are still standing...Dug Hill, Miller, and New Home. A foundation is all that remains of a fourth one, called Summit, off Portsbury Lane in the Metfield area. A fifth one, Rocky Comfort, was on the site now occupied by the Judson American Baptist Church on Forest Hills Blvd.

Christmas was celebrated in each of the five communities with a program called The Christmas Tree. According to Virginia Squires, who grew up in the Dug Hill Community, the Dug Hill Christmas Tree was always held on Christmas Eve. She said, "Each fall, Dug Hill would hold a pie supper to raise money for the school and for Christmas. Money not needed for the school was to be spent on the treats handed out at The Christmas Tree. Everyone, adults and children, received a bag of treats, which held an apple, an orange, hard candy, and chocolate candy."

During the fall, while getting in their winter wood supply, the farmers would look for a pretty tree. Some people preferred cedar trees, others preferred pine, so each year they alternated which kind of tree they would have. Once the tree was selected, Virginia's father, Lee Jackson, and a couple of other men would go cut it down and deliver it to Dug Hill.

On Christmas Eve, the families would gather for the entertainment, which included a school program when school was still being held there. All the rural schools were consolidated into the Bentonville District in 1945, so after that the Christmas program varied in content but the Bible Christmas Story would always be read, and everyone sang Christmas carols. As Song Leader, Lee Jackson made sure that the last song was Jingle Bells, after which Santa would arrive. If a family missed the get-together, Mr. Jackson would get up early Christmas morning and go to their home to deliver their bags of treats.

For the farmers back then, Christmas Day itself was usually a quiet day. The farmers had chores to do morning and evening, and with the short winter days, there was not much time left for traveling very far. Family members who lived further away were more likely to visit at Thanksgiving than Christmas, preferring to be in their own homes on Christmas.

The last Christmas Tree was held at Dug Hill in the late 1950's, and none of the five communities continued the programs much longer. By then, the schools had been consolidated for over ten years and the communities were losing their separate identities. Many farmers had begun to leave, after selling their farms to buyers from outside the area. The rumor was that someone was buying up all the property for a large cattle operation. What else could anyone possibly do with all these hills and valleys?

Picture 1: Tommye Jackson took this picture of her husband Lee Jackson and their daughter Virginia in the 1930's on the front porch of their farmhouse not far from Dug Hill in Pinyon (later changed to Pinion) Valley, now under Lake Ann.

Picture 2: Dug Hill Church is on the hill overlooking Highway 71 on the southeast side of Town Center.

Picture 3: New Home Church stands on Peach Orchard Road just west of Lowe's.

Picture 4: Miller Church can be reached by taking either Prescot or Arthur off Chelsea to the intersection of Miller Church Road and Punkin Hollow Road.

