

Stalking My Elders and Their Hometown

By Jim Phillips

I carefully read every issue of two competing Midwestern farm-town weeklies published between 1924 and 1947. I came to know my hometown just before my birth, because the reporting of these weeklies was relentlessly local.

I started this project as a legacy to be left for my family and others, documenting the world of my parents' youth and their home Pulaski County, Indiana.

At retirement, inspired by the genealogical research of a maternal aunt and cousin, I keyboarded their notes into a computer dataset, which I posted on the website, *ancestry.com*. I then extended research on the family using their two hometown weekly newspapers. The result of that effort is more than 33,000 clippings from the two competing weeklies for almost 20 years.

Methodology: The newspapers were the *Pulaski County Democrat* and the *Winamac Republican*. The first years, 1924 and 1925, were the birth years of my parents, and the last year, 1947, was my birth year. These clippings chronicle the public lives of my family and other residents. They included the "greatest generation," which endured the Great Depression and World War II.

The microfilmed archives were obtained through interlibrary loan from the Indiana State Library and viewed at the University of Kentucky's W.T. Young Library. Each microfilm reel had about 18 months of the eight-page weekly issues and took about 20 hours to read. After reading the entire microfilm set of 20,000 pages, I repeated the process to ensure that I didn't miss any family items.

Hometowns: Winamac, the county seat of Pulaski County, was my mother's hometown. During this period, the population of Winamac was about 2,500 and the county population was about 11,000. Star City, another town in the county, was my father's hometown. About five miles south of Winamac, its population was probably about 500.

"Scope creep": When this project started, I was merely looking for items mentioning my family, but it soon expanded to other items that interested me. This occurred – as my journalism professor, Al Cross, aptly pointed out – because of the wide variety of information displayed on each newspaper page. Less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the text was related to my family; the rest included interesting ads and items about other residents.

Clipping categories: I clipped every item about family members, no matter how trivial, even Red Cross contributions and newspaper subscription renewals. I also clipped ads and news items which caught my attention. I clipped front-page items related to nearby Purdue University, as well as other related items deeper within the paper that caught my eye. I clipped every front-page. From the first issue of each January, I clipped the masthead, annual news summaries, bank statements, and sample county agent columns. For the month of each starting quarter, I clipped grocery ads and agricultural market reports. If a recurring column interested me, I clipped all instances of that column. From World War II papers, I clipped photos of anyone in the military, as well as notices of "killed in action," "missing in action", "prisoner of war" and major medals. And, of course, I clipped all items related to any of the ongoing stories or dramas that interested me.

Stalking My Elders and Their Hometown

1924-1947

A MetaStory

Read, clip, and repeat: Page by page, I read each weekly issue. After all issues of those two weeklies over 24 years were scanned, I scanned every page a second time to avoid missing family-related items, items of interest as well as background on stories already clipped.

Well, not every single word: In addition to the county seat, Winamac, there were seven or so other smaller communities for which some resident regularly reported social news. Although I thoroughly read most of each issue, I only read the community news columns for the towns of Winamac and Star City, my parents' hometowns. And I rarely scanned the editorials or the regular farm, home, and humor columns, although I did sample those items. I ignored sports, which was limited to local high school basketball and community-based baseball.

The Fourth Estate in Pulaski County

Relentlessly local: With very few exceptions, international, national, and state news was left to the dailies located in much larger nearby cities. These two hometown weeklies already knew the secret of successful community journalism: relentlessly local news about its residents.

Page	Count
First	208
Second	232
Third	528
Fourth	536
Fifth	335
Sixth	101
Seventh	383
Eighth	307
Total	2630

Community correspondents: Except for World War II and limited presidential election coverage, the news was focused on Pulaski and adjacent counties. Of course, births, marriages, deaths, and courthouse reports were front-page staples. In each issue, Sunday dinners, family visits, short trips and parties were routinely reported by correspondents for each of the county's five to eight communities and their adjacent farms. Hospitalizations and long trips were also announced, without concern for confidentiality and burglaries. For the smallest communities, these correspondent reports were intermittent. The number of people mentioned in an issue was about 2,500. Although it included visitors from outside the county, that number is significant in a county with a population of about 11,000. Very short human-interest and trivia items from beyond the region seemed to be used as filler.

Al Cross pointed out that many small-town newspapers, once the most familiar form of mass media, filled their pages with reports from correspondents in nearby communities. Very few newspapers do so today, but he believes they still have a value to the paper and their readers. This work is a reminder of a basic function of the community newspaper to provide news about the individuals of that community and sometimes the world's impact on them.

Sports: The only sport routinely reported was high school basketball, specifically the regional competition. Occasionally there was also references to community

baseball. I didn't clip sports news.

The newspaper business itself was reflected in articles about the papers' new printing equipment, editor conferences and awards. Besides advertising and sales, income also came from sales of printing services, stationary, paper and typewriter supplies. Based on names listed in their annual front-page Christmas greetings, the staff of each weekly numbered four to six.

Stalking My Elders and Their Hometown
1924-1947
A MetaStory

Matched competitors: Outside of political news and editorials, the two weeklies showed the same perspective and talent. While an edition was never missed during those 24 years, frequently “holes” in the stories indicated that the staff was busy, but less skilled than our current expectations.

Slang terms: Over the years, slang terms diminished. In 1924 an individual was “pinched” and “headed for the calaboose.” In 1947, he was arrested and jailed.

Enterprise stories: There were no “enterprise” stories about individuals or situations. Except for editorials, there were no analytical pieces. Interestingly, weeks would pass with no editorials. Investigative reporting was not done. There was only one corruption story in those 24 years. It started with an item about a forthcoming audit of the welfare office. Within a few weeks, the director was replaced, she repaid the shortage, and the drama ended.

Photographs: Until the late 1930s, photographs appeared rarely and were obtained from wire services and larger newspapers. In the 1940s, more front-page photographs appeared. They were mostly “head shots” of anniversary couples, prominent deaths, and soldiers, along with a rare fire or accident scene.

Errors: Even with insinuations and gossip which would not be possible in today’s litigious society, in 24 years, I found no retractions in either weekly. During that period there were only a few corrections in the two weeklies. In the early 1940s, when one owner died, the weekly was sold. Typos and misspellings began to appear, but disappeared within a few months.

China: There was little international news, but by far the most-mentioned single country during this period was China. This was likely due to the visibility of Christian missionary efforts and to photographs throughout three decades of turmoil of China due to a Russian invasion, followed by a civil war, and finally a Japanese invasion and World War II.

Stalking My Elders

My paternal great grandfather was John Clark “J.C.” Phillips. He owned the grain elevator in Star City, selling local grain to remote mills and stocking seeds and livestock supplements. He and his wife, Bertha Faye Reed Phillips, raised seven children born as the 20th century was starting.

My maternal grandfather was John “Papa” Kruzick. He owned a concrete silo and bridge construction company and, after Prohibition, built and operated a local nightclub. An immigrant from Croatia, he and his wife, Rosa Eldridge Poole Kruzick, raised eight children born around 1920.

If you’re like me, you’ve heard many family stories, but I discovered that not all family stories might be shared.

While there were no horse thieves reported among my elders, there were stories in the weeklies which never were discussed within the family. No one in my mother’s family ever mentioned that my uncle shot his sister; I encountered a news item about my Uncle Clemmie, then a teenager. As he was cleaning his “empty” revolver, it discharged, and the bullet passed through a wall, striking my Aunt Helen in the shoulder. Fortunately, it wasn’t serious, but the event was never mentioned in the family.

I knew that my paternal Great Uncle George’s first wife, Rose, had died, but learned from the newspaper that her death was related to scarlet fever and came suddenly, after just four months of marriage. When I obtained her death certificate, I also learned that when Rose died, so did their three-month-old unborn child.

Stalking My Elders and Their Hometown
1924-1947
A MetaStory

Stalking My Hometown

Over three years of reading, I came to know many of my family's friends and acquaintances as well as other county residents. Initially, they were just names in the paper, but I began to learn their public stories. As I reviewed the clippings, long-term dramas and stories spanning decades became visible, as well as trends.

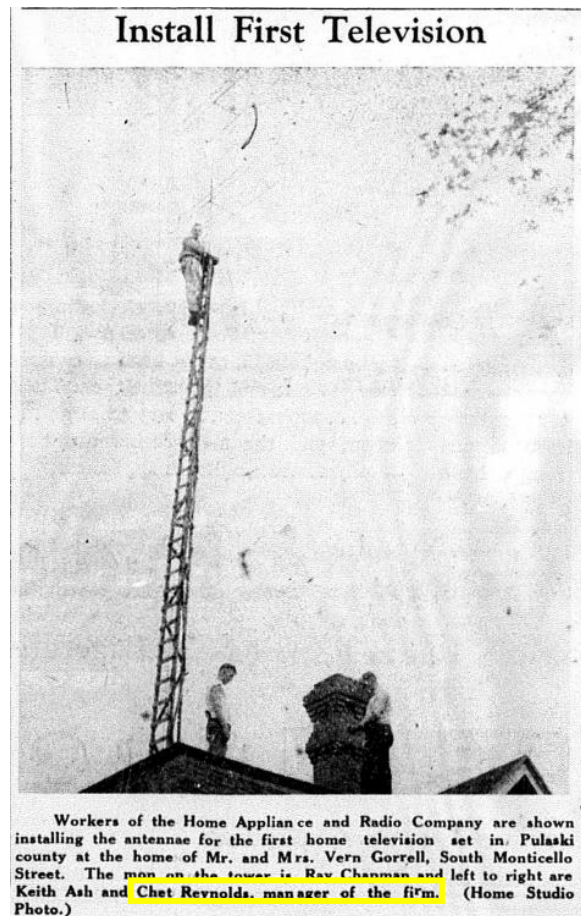
Chester's Wish: When mass entertainment was limited to silent, black-and-white films, one little boy knew what he really wanted. In letters to Santa published in 1924 and again in 1925, Chester asked for a "picture machine." In 1947, we found him selling and installing "television" sets.

Winamac.
Dear Santa Claus—I am six years old and I go to school. I want a picture machine and I want a airplane and a dog and give me a suit of clothes and a football and a fire gun, some candy, oranges and some nuts. Chester Reynolds.

Pulaski County (IN) Democrat Dec 18 1924 1

Dear Santa Claus:
I am 7 years old and I want an electric moving picture machine, a derrick, niggertoes and some English walnuts and some oranges and some candy.
Chester Reynolds.

Pulaski County (IN) Democrat Dec 24 1925 1



Winamac (IN) Republican May 20 1948: 1. 1

IT'S HERE

TELEVISION

Yes, that's right, TELEVISION is here... Experts said we couldn't receive television broadcasts in Winamac that we were too far from the nearest television station in Chicago. But we proved them wrong. We bought one of the best RCA TELEVISION receivers money could buy, erected a receiving antennae and now we receive broadcasts regularly... You are invited to see the first TELEVISION set in Winamac in operation. Consult your Chicago newspaper for program time... And remember when they are placed on the market, we'll have 'em.

Your Westinghouse and Norge Dealer
HOME APPLIANCES & RADIO STORE
Chet Reynolds, Mgr.

Winamac (IN) Republican Oct 9 1947: 7. 1

Stalking My Elders and Their Hometown

1924-1947

A MetaStory

Preston and his children: Over a 16 year period starting in 1924, one father and three of his grown children generated recurring drama. Two of his daughters alleged rape and incest. They and their brother, in turn, were charged with perjury and other state and federal felonies, for which they were incarcerated. Over the decades, the father endured an incest accusation, his suicide attempt, train and car collisions, lawsuit losses, broken bones, and finally insanity just before death in 1940.

Elba's one sin: Over 24 years, an artist went from art-school graduation, then to successful regional shows of her watercolors and oils and, on to final years as an art restorer and teacher. Her only misstep was in the summer of 1936, when the decomposed body of her newborn was found in the trunk of her repossessed car. Although the grand jury didn't indict, because a murder couldn't be proved, they recommended sterilization and institutionalization, which didn't happen. In the subsequent years, her exhibits and other positive community activity continued to be reported despite her 1936 drama.

Recurring themes related to family, church, and neighbors also appeared.

Golden rule: Annually, there were a few stories about neighbors helping the ill or widowed with a planting or harvest.

Ain't love grand? The foibles of love were frequently the basis of stories. After robbing a grocery store in 1925, the two men fled in a car containing their wives. When their car broke down while being pursued, the men abandoned the car and their wives. Their fate was not reported.

In 1925, two "poor farm" male residents in their 70s, rivals for the same lady resident, had been bickering for some time. Near Christmas, as one was serenading the lady with his accordion, it was too much for the other suitor. He stabbed his accordion-playing rival to death. He was placed on probation in the care of his daughter in a distant state.

The wedding tradition of "belling" (AKA "charivari") was frequently mentioned, particularly in the early years of this collection. Typically, after the newlyweds retired for their first night together, they were drunkenly serenaded with yelling, songs, fireworks, and gunfire. It was not uncommon for some of the outside revelers to be injured during the rite. By the 1930s, the rite was tamed down to a sedate wagon ride for the couple through the town.

Church: Religion was central to the community, but coverage was usually limited to announcements of worship times, guest missionary speakers, and social events.

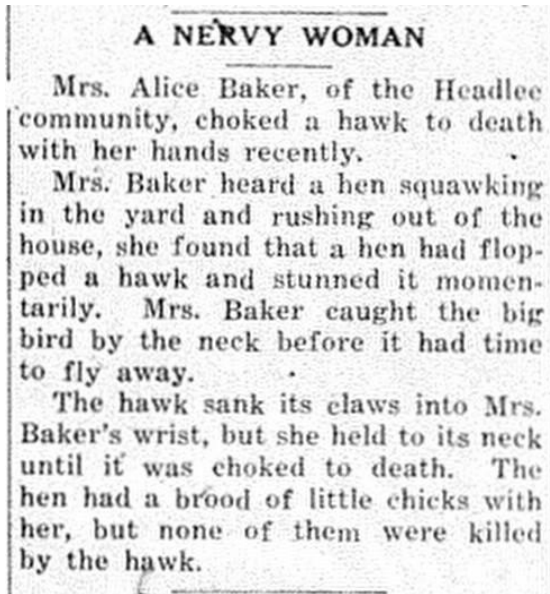
In one report, during the Christian Church fair in 1932, a turkey was tossed from the steeple. As it flew down, it struck a street lamp, shattering the glass globe, a fragment of which injured the eye of a boy. The boy recovered. The fate of the turkey was not reported.

Clubs: There are dozens of clubs, mostly for women. In addition to church related clubs, women could socialize over books, bridge, and home making. For men, the Kiwanis club was the primary place to hear speakers offer first hand perspectives on news.

Stalking My Elders and Their Hometown

1924-1947

A MetaStory



Winamac (IN) Republican May 14 1931: 4. Microfilm.

Critters: As Al Cross pointed out, animals have always been interesting objects of coverage, particularly when they interfere with human activity. Over the years, wild critters didn't fare very well. Each year bounties were offered for wolves and foxes, and wolves were effectively eradicated by the late 1940s. Eagles and hawks didn't fare much better, and in three cases lost battles by being stomped (1925) and choked (1931 and 1937)

KKK Disappears: Aspects of state and national activity by the Klu Klux Klan were visible locally. In 1924, the KKK sponsored the fireworks for the July Fourth celebration. After being a part of Indiana culture and politics in the first decades of the 20th century, the KKK essentially disappeared by 1925. Although never mentioned in the weeklies, this likely resulted from a March 1925 event. The Indiana Grand Dragon drugged, kidnapped, and raped a 29-year-old woman. She then took poison, but before she died prepared a statement about her ordeal, which was publicized in the daily newspapers of the Midwest. Later that year, the Grand Dragon assailant was tried and sentenced.

"Coloreds": Although there was a reference to dynamiting a camp meeting in 1915, there were no published reports of racial violence between 1924 and 1947. There were stereotypical references, such as a photo of black toddlers eating watermelon, and some news items included racial components not germane to the story. Typically, these were of the form: "X, colored, was ...". There were never references such as "Y, white, was ...".

Purdue University: The farmers of Pulaski County drew huge benefits from the large land-grant Purdue University, 60 miles to the southwest. Benefits included farm and home management columns from extension office administered by Purdue, as well as lectures and visits to farms.

Stalking My Hometown
1924-1947
A Project MetaProfile (Sample Clippings)

Technology-driven transformations

The period from 1924 through 1947 saw transformations due to technology, including:

- from winter ice harvests for business use to ice cubes at home
- from horses to tractors and automobiles
- from accidental death from fast-moving trains to accidental death from automobiles without seatbelts
- from furniture-store undertakers and home funerals to funeral homes
- from wolf bounties to no wolves
- from black-and-white silent film to technicolor musicals
- from dirt roads to asphalt
- from bank failures and robberies to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)
- from “poor farms” to income supplements for the elderly
- from aircraft hobbyists to wealthier citizens traveling by air
- from farm sales due to poverty to farm sales due to enlistment

The greatest transformations were associated with Prohibition (AKA “The Great Experiment”), the Great Depression, and World War II.

The Great Experiment

Although Pulaski County was dry as far back as 1908, the production of drinkable alcohol, except by prescription, was made illegal throughout the nation by the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920.

In 1924 at the Community Hall the Women’s Christian Temperance Union hosted a screening of film, *Lest We Forget*, touted as the sequel to the “great film” *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*.

In 1925, Neil and Jesse brought a repair job to the local tinsmith. When they returned, the sheriff was waiting. Neil, already on parole, went directly to jail. Jesse had to get bail money to give him freedom until his trial for possessing a still. Over the next few years, Jesse became a regular in court and jail.

Two years later, over 300 gallons of booze taken off an abandoned, broken-down truck was secured in the local jail cell occupied by a prisoner with smallpox.

Before the Great Experiment ended, a courthouse janitor was pinched for selling booze from his broom closet, an elderly brother and sister were sentenced for running a speakeasy, and a large distillery was discovered in a barn in a nearby county and destroyed. It was a busy time for law enforcement and the courts.

By spring 1933, the Great Depression had hurt federal, state, and local tax revenues, so President Roosevelt allowed the sale of “near beer” and “light wines,” and late that year, the 21st Amendment repealed the 18th Amendment.

Even after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, there were intermittent reports of moonshine and untaxed sales. Starting in 1938, there was an advertising campaign which touted beer, the “beverage of moderation,” as a great tax-revenue source. And the WCTU and the Anti-Saloon League hadn’t given up, showing *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* in 1940 and 1941.

Stalking My Hometown
1924-1947
A Project MetaProfile (Sample Clippings)

The Great Depression

In the last half of the 1920s, the number of bank failures accelerated, with some bank presidents and cashiers going to prison. It took about a year for the 1929 stock market crash to affect Pulaski County. In December 1930, the "Work Wanted" classified ads were made available to all for free.

Foreclosures increases, but the New Deal programs of Franklin D. Roosevelt began to bolster wages, provide jobs for youth, and manage farm production. But it was too late for a 70-year-old widow of 30 years without family who had fallen behind in her farm payments; the story played out as expected.

In Pulaski County, there were no reports of bread and soup lines of men in suits, ties, and hats. Folks didn't prosper, but got by. On the farm, there was livestock, grain, and a garden. In the town, many kept a few chickens and a garden.

The New Deal was evident but discussed only in the local county context. The primary programs were related to the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Farmers got help managing their grain and livestock production through advice and income supplements from the AAA agency. In towns, unemployed young men could live in military-style CCC camps near home and work on outdoor, public projects, with most of their wages automatically sent back home to their folks.

Over the next years, as New Deal programs expanded, bad economic news diminished, but didn't disappear until the country went to war in late 1941.

World War II

Although the publication of international news was extremely limited, by 1933, articles started to appear indicating that another war might erupt in Europe. That expectation came from Kiwanis Club lunch-hour talks and letters printed from residents traveling in Europe. In 1935, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia.

By the late 1930s, local personal dramas were slowly, but surely, crowded out by war news in the eight-page weeklies. Recruiting ramped up by 1939, and in September, when Poland was invaded by Hitler, *The Democrat* started a "War in Europe" column. By the summer of 1940, the draft was announced, and an artillery/bomb ordnance plant began production nearby.

An air crash in early 1941 ended the promising career of a pilot. Starting in 1924, a boy from a prominent family graduated from West Point, and the weeklies followed his expanding responsibilities as an Army pilot until his death. He never got to see action in World War II.

In the months after the December 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, there was a rush of volunteers.

One of the first steps taken in early 1942 was to require aliens of Axis heritage to forfeit all cameras, short-wave radio receivers, and radio transmitters. Starting with sugar, rationing also began. In each weekly, a recurring column listed promotions, transfers, hospitalizations, and furloughs home. Locations outside the country were not mentioned.

By 1943, while most of the local young men were still in training stateside, reports started to appear of boys missing in action, prisoners of war, and a few killed in action.

In May 1944, churches were making plans for the invasion of Europe, which ultimately started June 6.

Stalking My Hometown
1924-1947
A Project MetaProfile (Sample Clippings)



In April 1945, FDR died, and the war ended in Europe in May and in the Pacific in August. Each discharged serviceman got a “ruptured duck” label pin and “GI benefits.”

Over 1,000 men, and boys, and a few women and girls, had left for military service, to ultimately survive the war as men and women or die trying.

Change in news of violence

The level of reported local violence declined substantially over the period from 1924 to 1947, based on my research on the two competing rural weeklies.

In the last half of the 1920s, you couldn’t swing a ferret across the front pages without hitting a sensational murder. Granny was murdered and buried in a newly-laid concrete foundation of a granary. A husband was poisoned with arsenic-laced cornbread. A woman stomped eagle to death for threatening her chickens. During that time, there was an absence of war and alcohol.

In the 1930s, there was only a local murder every few years. During that time, there was an absence of assured employment.

In the first half of the 1940s, there was only one report of a local murder. During that time, there was an absence of assured national security.

Perhaps reported barfights and other violence diminished as the population, in general, and downtown businessmen, specifically, may have grown tired of negative images. Or, perhaps, some folks need whiskey, work, and war to control their personal rage.

How I was changed by this project

I began this project with a slightly snarky attitude toward the community and residents who were not members of my family. Most ads seemed quaint, and the hapless folk in many of the news articles were laughable. But my cartoonish stereotypes slowly transformed into real people.

One example concerned muck soil, a pretty girl and a “grease monkey.” Muck soil is composed of ultra-fine particulates. Muck farmland was limited to only a few crops, including onions and peppermint. To promote the crops, a young bookkeeper was crowned “Muck Queen.” In the community news over the next year or so, I noticed items about her attendance at nearby University parties. To me, she was the “Muck Queen Party Girl.” But over subsequent years of additional news items, I came to appreciate her as a person with physical frailties, strong family ties, and a love of a local boy, working at a service station, that blossomed into marriage with children. Most of folks in recurring stories I ultimately found endearing, even if they were flawed, including my family elders.

Most importantly, this project made me miss my elders more. They couldn’t tell me about their feelings during those years or afterwards, when I was too self-involved or shy to ask. The news items provided only public snapshots of events in their lives. And I couldn’t tell them how much I cherished them, and their contribution to my life.

Stalking My Hometown
1924-1947
A Project MetaProfile (Sample Clippings)

And it's helped me think about my own death. I've drawn some comfort in eventually following all those folks who made the last trip to the cemetery. It's the natural order of things. I just hope it's quick, painless, and I don't leave too many loose ends for my wife.

So my legacy is left in works like this meta-story and the collection of clippings at the Pulaski County Public Library.

Next . . .

After documenting the public youth of my parents and their siblings (1924-1947), I plan to complete the same task for the public youth of my grandparents and their siblings (1900-1923).

Stalking My Hometown
1924-1947
A Project MetaProfile (Sample Clippings)

URLs with stories and their clippings:

I have five primary publication sites, all on *facebook.com*:

- Facebook: **Jim Phillips**
<https://www.facebook.com/jim.phillips.982>
- Facebook group: **Stalking My Elders**
Family-related clippings are posted year-by-year. As I complete the second pass through the microfilms, I'm revising each year. The revision includes newly-discovered clippings as well as a "Community Climate" cover page with major historical events for that year as well as the top contemporary music for that year. (As I visually-scanned microfilm and edited the clippings, I listened to the music popular for that year.)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/179853322547131/>
- Facebook group: **Stalking My Hometown**
Non-family-related clippings are posted.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1853188958339628/>
- Facebook group: **Greatest Generation of Pulaski County**
Photos and items about each World War II veteran.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/268832590408949/>
- Facebook group: Pulaski County Critters in the News
News items about animals.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/247598606107245/>
 - Facebook group: Pulaski County Horses in the News
News Items about horses.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/255366072079108/>