



April 3, 2001

An enthusiastic group of Perryans representing virtually all age brackets met briefly one spring night in 1973 to look at the possibility of forming an organization to invite traveling artistic and cultural events to this city. The principal motivation for that came from the new auditorium nearing completion on the junior-senior high school campus. Talmadge Stands, a lady representing the Oklahoma Arts & Humanities Council, met with the group to explain some of the goals that could be set for the future of such an organization.

The group quickly voted to form a local Arts & Humanities Council, elected officers and board members, and began looking forward eagerly to future seasons of soul-satisfying musical programs, art displays and other forms of culturally fulfilling events. The newly elected president was A.J. Bontrager, a young Perry pharmacist. Other officers were Steve Daniels, first vice president; Steve Smallwood, second vice president; Doris Graham, third vice president; Emaline Miller, recording secretary; Gloria Bluethman, corresponding secretary; Kenneth Coldiron, treasurer; Leroy Rolling, historian; James McFarland, parliamentarian; and Mary Malzahn, John Coker and Harriet Hoot, board members at large. Look carefully at that list of 12 names. Seven have moved to other locations, two are deceased, and only three still live in Perry.

To ensure the broadest possible participation, these organizations named representatives to the Council. In that group were Mrs. Kenneth Reed, Marigold unit of the Perry Garden club; Mrs. Tom Kirby, Petunia unit; Mrs. Lowell Highfill, Columbine unit and Noble County Homemakers Council; Mrs. O.C. Lackey, Iris unit; Mrs. Fred G. Beers, Progress club; Mrs. Paul Edmundson, Perry Study club; Mrs. Frank Boothe, Ladies Tuesday Afternoon club; Mrs. A.J. Bontrager, Chapter BH, PEO; Mrs. Terry Leonard, Jaycee Jaynes; Mrs. Dennis Maine, Alpha Chi Child Study club; Mrs. Harold Smith, Business & Professional Women's club; Fred G. Beers, Rotary club; Jim Thompson, Lions club; H.B. Evans, Billings community; Mrs. Lawrence Mack, Lucien Community club; and Mrs. Betty Clark, Red Rock.

The newly formed Perry organization hit the ground running. Its first membership drive that year produced a total of 411 paid-up members. The future looked even brighter when it was announced that the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra would appear in concert at the new auditorium in October that year. Reserved seats were offered at \$4 each and all were quickly purchased. More on this unique but now non-existent organization will follow shortly.



April 6, 2001

In the last column, I wrote about the night in 1973 when the Perry Arts & Humanities Council was formed. At that time, there was no other organization in Perry attempting to coordinate the needs and satisfy the cultural appetites of Perry citizens. The Brush & Palette Club was in existence but the primary concern there was to provide instruction and encouragement to the growing number of artists in this community. More about that aspect will be forthcoming.

The driving force behind the formation of an Arts & Humanities Council came from several Perry citizens as they awaited completion of the new Perry high school auditorium on the junior-senior high school campus. The building was to have a seating capacity of 999. The contractor hired an audio engineer for advice on providing the best possible sound quality.

Also included were comfortable theatre seats, carpeted aisles, a waterfall front curtain on the stage, the latest controls for lighting, central cooling and heating and as many features as the school could afford, with local assistance, to give this community a marvelous new auditorium. The next question to be answered was, how best to utilize it? That was not to be the job of the Perry school district. The answer was to be provided by the Perry Arts & Humanities Council. Its new officers and members approached the task with great relish.

While the A&H Council was gearing up for its task, Perry district school board members took it upon themselves to book an attraction for a formal "opening night" performance when the auditorium was ready. They arranged for a concert in the new building by the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra on Tuesday night, October 16, 1973, and the news of that coming performance was greeted with cheers by the more than 400 members of the Arts & Humanities Council. Tickets went on sale with reserved seats priced at \$4, and the response from purchasers was almost overwhelming. An afternoon session was scheduled by the orchestra, with Ray Luke as conductor, to introduce classical music to all children of this area. Youngsters were admitted without charge. School buses from surrounding towns brought boys and girls to Perry for the treat, and most of them admitted they were delighted by what they learned. Mr. Luke and individual members of the orchestra lavishly complimented residents of the community for the beautiful new auditorium. Music by Mendelssohn, Mozart, Rossini, Wagner, Schuman and Fernandez enthralled the opening night audience.

In subsequent years, the Arts & Humanities Council assumed responsibility for bringing more groups to Perry for concerts and performances in the auditorium. In December 1973 the A&H Council brought the Madrigal Singers of Oklahoma City University here for a Christmas concert. In 1974 the Oklahoma City Symphony returned with its new conductor, Ainslee Cox, and Perry's own piano virtuoso, Anne Sherwood, played a Beethoven concerto with the orchestra. In 1976 Mr. Cox again brought the Symphony here for an April concert. In 1978 the Metropolitan Ballet Company of Oklahoma City joined the Symphony here for a ballet with nine scenes. Mr. Cox provided program notes during the evening and added, concerning the auditorium: "For us, it is a very comfortable hall and we are able to hear ourselves very well." He said it was one of the most beautiful halls in which the Oklahoma City orchestra performed. In the previous fall that season, the Tulsa Philharmonic also was brought here for an evening's performance. So, the Perry audience was treated to two orchestral performances that year, but that was the last of them. The Arts & Humanities Council ceased to exist as leadership declined. No other agency stepped in to fill the void. More on this subject will follow soon.



April 10, 2001



Kindergarten church at the Perry Presbyterian church some 70 years ago was presided over by Mrs. A. H. Crawford, shown in the center of the back row in this photo, made in about 1932. Some of the youngsters can be identified. Front row, from left: First four not identified; Arlene Dotts, Jap Dotts, Velva Treadway and Marion Lobsitz. Second row: First two not identified; Judy Pratt, Dean Dotts, next one unidentified, Frances Treeman, Harcourt Thomas, Marie Taylor, and next one unidentified. Third row: First three not identified; Donald Laird, next two unidentified, Charles Lamb, David Thomas, Theodore Hartman, Fred Beers, Hugh Lobsitz, Gene Taylor and Archie Moore. Fourth row: First four unidentified; Mrs. Crawford, Billy Bruce Watson, Robin Johnston and next three unidentified. (Photo from Frances Treeman Hoch.)

The approach of Easter always brings back happy memories of earlier years in the Perry community. Yes, then as now, we had a host of special church services, family gatherings and many Easter egg hunts. In my neighborhood, another highlight was the Sunday afternoon get-together for youngsters and their parents on the spacious lawn at the home of Mr. W.N. (Bill) Stahl and his wife, Anna. They lived at 1002 Elm street where the Perry high school vocational agriculture building is now located. My sisters and I brought home several bunnies and even some baby chicks each year as prizes in the numerous Easter foot races Mr. Stahl had for us.

That also brings to mind the children's program held every Sunday morning at the Presbyterian church. On Palm Sunday the boys and girls would open the adult service by processing down the aisle waving greenery, but on other regular Sundays we had our own service. While the big folks worshipped upstairs in the sanctuary with Rev. David Thomas, toddlers went to the basement for an hour of what they called "kindergarten church." Presiding over it was Mrs. A.H. Crawford, a saintly, prototypal grandmother, who I suspect never spoke harshly to anyone during her lifetime. Usually there were about 25 boys and girls of pre-school age, and we all loved Mrs. Crawford.

She was a gentle, slightly plump lady with a sweet, smile. Looking back now, I think she resembled Opie's Aunt Bee on the Andy in Griffith TV show. Her gray hair was pulled back into a bun and she usually wore an apron over a long-skirted dress. She knew each child by his or her first name and we appreciated that. She would arrive at church each Sunday morning with a large, brown suitcase stuffed with a supply of Bible stories, cutout Bible characters, scissors and paste pots. Her

husband, Mr. Crawford, brought her to church in their black, four-door sedan and he carried the suitcase down the basement steps, then disappeared. We assumed he went upstairs to the sanctuary for the morning service.

Mrs. Crawford usually read us a story from the Bible, then we would cut out the pasteboard characters from the sheets she provided. It helped us understand the special message contained in that day's lesson, although at the time we didn't realize it was a lesson.

After all these years I still remember Mrs. Crawford and those Sunday morning kindergarten church days. She brought Bible stories to life for me and my friends who came to kindergarten church each Sunday morning in the old stucco building at Eighth and Elm, where the present Presbyterian church, now stands. I'm not sure, but I think we had as much fun with her as we did with Mr. and Mrs. Stahl on Easter Sunday afternoons on their front lawn, even though Mrs. Crawford didn't give us bunnies and baby chickens.



April 13, 2001

Here's more about the founding and ultimate demise of the Perry Arts & Humanities Council. It once was a lively organization with noble aims of improving the cultural climate of our city. After a few years of existence it disappeared.

Long before the Arts & Humanities Council was formed in 1973, several local artists were busily learning new techniques of expression under the tutelage of Jacques Hans Gallrein, a German-born, recognized professional instructor. His assistant was Lucille Ritthaler Graham of Stillwater, formerly of Perry. The artists met regularly in various studio facilities and honed their skills admirably. Indeed, Perry at one time was a veritable hotbed of artists, some just starting to bud and others in various stages of advanced development. Ethel L. Johnston, former first lady of Oklahoma, took the lead in bringing the group together in the early 1950s. Each of them had different, personal reasons for taking up the palette and brush, and their output for the most part was greatly admired. A lot of it was sold to local and out of town collectors. Some of their paintings still adorn walls in Perry homes and businesses.



Perry artists took lessons each week when the Brush & Palette Club was active here in the 1950s. The group pictured above was preparing for an art show in the Methodist Youth building when this picture was made. Shown in front row, from left: LeOla Donley, Avis Leatherock, Girtha Plumer, and Mr. and Mrs. C.B. Forney. Back row: Mary Swart, Pearl Berger, Allien Kruse, Minnie Sherrard, Jacques Hans Gallrein (instructor), Loren Snodgrass and Ethel L. Johnston.

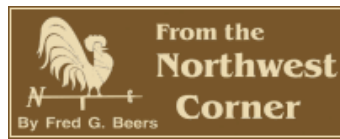
The group normally met with their instructor, Mr. Gallrein, each Thursday in their second story studio on Seventh street across from the post office. The studio was open each day of the week for use of the artists. In decent weather, they also took field trips to interesting sites around the county. Their common interest in art and the levels of talent demonstrated by each one helped to forge individual bonds that drew them close to each other.

Until his death at the age of 97, Mr. Gallrein maintained a residence at the Studio Art Gallery in Stillwater. Mrs. Graham continued his work as an artist assistant, teacher and custodian of the Gallrein Collection, according to Volume 1, "History of Noble County," published in 1987.

The group began as the Brush & Palette Club, then evolved into the Noble County Artists Association. Still later came an organization called the Cherokee Strip Arts Company. When the Perry Arts & Humanities Council emerged in 1973, the Arts Company became a component along with Stagecoach Community Theatre, which sprang to life in 1975. The Arts Company had regular meetings and officers. They imported visiting professional artists as instructors, operated a gift shop on a heavily traveled highway west of Perry, and contributed greatly in other ways to the culture of art in this community. Unfortunately, interest lagged in time and the group disbanded, to the disappointment of many Perry collectors.

The reasons that forced the group to throw in the towel are familiar to most of us. Death and attrition removed some of the more advanced and serious artists. The expense of maintaining a studio and a gift shop was mounting, and not enough young, new members were being added to the rolls. After the inevitable disappearance of the initial euphoria that

followed the launching of their organization, a gradual decline set in and in time the membership base simply eroded. Similar afflictions have dogged other laudable clubs and organizations. Sometimes you hear it said that Perry is already over-organized to the point that new additions to the layers already in place hardly have a chance to take root. This may have been an example of that sad analysis. More about the Perry Arts & Humanities Council will be forthcoming shortly.



April 17, 2001

Several columns lately have dealt with the origin and eventual extinction of the Perry Arts & Humanities Council, a lively organization that once was composed of hundreds of Perry area residents hungering for an occasional cultural event in our community. The impetus came primarily from the opening of the new Perry high school auditorium in 1973. For the first time in years, the auditorium provided a stage worthy of performances by major artists.

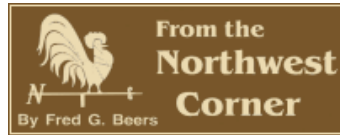
During its brief time of existence in the 1970s, the Council succeeded in bringing in some memorable concerts by Tulsa and Oklahoma City symphonic orchestras, a ballet, a solo by local piano virtuoso Anne Sherwood and OCU's Madrigal Singers. Eventually the Cherokee Strip Arts Company (which included many of the former members of the Perry Brush & Palette Club), and Stagecoach Community Theatre embraced the Council. All three groups joined in a united membership drive to raise a small portion of their operating funds.

Before the Arts & Humanities Council came into existence, a group of art enthusiasts had formed the Perry Brush & Palette Club. Its members found a great deal of pleasure in creating water colors, oil paintings, charcoal sketches, or tackling new media to expand their appreciation and love of art. Their instructor, Jacques Hans Gallrein, was a widely known artist and teacher in this area. He spurred his Perry students to reach their potentials, whatever they might be, and he encouraged them in many ways. Later came the Cherokee Strip Arts Company. Eventually the two organizations became one, and they joined the Arts & Humanities Council in a united membership campaign to bolster their finances.

In 1975 the Stagecoach Community Theatre was born with a debut production of the wonderful Rogers & Hammerstein musical, *Oklahoma!*, as their premier production. They also joined the artists and the A&H Council in conducting a membership drive in this community. Stagecoach is the sole survivor of that group today. Local artists have no organization to assist them with exhibitions or instruction.

To step back in time a bit more, our city also once had a Community Concert Association to help fill the need for an occasional refreshing splash of classical music on feverish Perry brows. This group flourished for a few years in the 1950s, and many other cities of varying sizes still enjoy the benefits of a Community Concert Association. When we were involved, we formed a Perry chapter by selling memberships to individuals and organizations. The dues gave us an operating fund. We received a catalog listing from a subsidiary of Columbia Records showing vocal and instrumental artists who were available, and the fees we would have to pay to bring them here. Because we had a small population base to work from, we could only afford two or three low-priced performers, but we did manage to bring in some legitimate professional talent. A young folk-singer named Susan Reed, who accompanied herself on the zither, was probably the best known artist to perform in the old Perry high school auditorium. In time, interest and memberships lagged, and our Perry Community Concert Association went out of business, as did the art associations and the Arts & Humanities Council several years later.

This has been a very capsulized summary of what happened to those worthy organizations. We owe a salute to those who breathed life into them years ago. They accounted for some memorable evenings of beautiful, soul-satisfying music and art shows. I think we still need that, and perhaps at some future date they will be revived in some format to rejoin our Stagecoach Community Theatre players as cultural icons in the Perry community.



April 20, 2001

A thoughtful, but anonymous, friend has supplied me with a fragile portion of the Daily Oklahoman dated September 12, 1929. The piece contains several things of interest, but the principal item from our point of view is a letter to the editor of the Oklahoman from the late Frank F. Ritthaler of Perry, who at the time was the Noble county assessor. Mr. Ritthaler probably was a bit perturbed and was taking exception to a news article about Noble county's property values that had been printed earlier by the Oklahoman. Mr. Ritthaler thought the article was unfair and he offered information to set the record straight. Like any good newspaper, the Oklahoman was pleased to print his rebuttal. Here's a portion of the story that disturbed Mr. Ritthaler, as he quoted it in his letter:

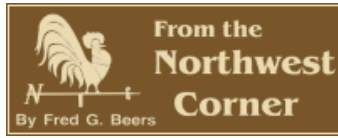
"PERRY, Sept. 4 - (Special) - With the setting of the valuation of Noble county by the state equalization board at \$14,128,517, a decrease of \$6,000,000 has been shown over a period of three years. Action of the state board in raising the land valuation of farms in Noble county was rescinded."

To which Mr. Ritthaler replied as follows:

"I wish to state that the above article is misleading and just as unfair to the individual and commercial interests of Noble county as can be. The author of the above article evidently grew weary too soon and failed to remember that we have a few pipe lines, railroads and telegraph companies, high lines, etc., which are assessed by the state board of equalization and pay taxes on an ad valorem basis. The evaluation of the aforesaid should have been added to the \$14,128,517 the same in 1929 as in the former three-year period referred to.

"Honestly believing that my farm lands were assessed higher than other counties, I did work hard to have the proposed 5 percent raise in valuation set aside and I personally went before the board of county commissioners of Noble county and asked them to adopt resolutions protesting said raise. They granted me the resolutions, and sent them to the state board of equalization. The state board set aside the proposed 5 percent raise. When the amount of \$4,600,700 is added to the amount quoted in the special article, the author can then make a comparison."

The assessor went on to show the comparison that he called correct. Longtime residents of Noble county who remember the years when Frank Ritthaler presided over the county assessor's office on the second floor of the courthouse probably will agree that he was a completely fair, reasonable and even-tempered county official until his retirement in the 1960s. Some may also remember that after his retirement he became rural circulation director for *The Perry Daily Journal*, and in that position he continued building friends throughout Noble county.



April 24, 2001

What kind of news and advertising did readers find in the *Daily Oklahoman* back there in 1929, when the impact of the Great Depression was just being recognized? The content was a little like what we find in today's metropolitan papers, but the display and format were quite different. As an old-time newspaperman holding part of a 1929 edition of the *Oklahoman* in my hands recently, I found that interesting, and perhaps you will, too. I didn't join the newspaper business until 1941, but I do remember how newspapers looked in 1929.

The other day I wrote about a letter to the editor of the *Oklahoman* that was submitted in 1929 by Frank F. Ritthaler who at the time was the Noble county assessor. His letter attempted to set the record straight about property valuations in this county after a brief news story in the paper contained flawed information. The edition with Mr. Ritthaler's letter was dated September 12, 1929. Someone provided me with a portion of that paper and I have enjoyed looking through it.

Judging by that day's copy of the "The State Newspaper," it offered a mixture of hard news from the local, state, national and international fronts, plus current gossip about emerging Hollywood goddesses and their 'handsome swains, and other trivia. The ads were loaded with products and brand names that have since disappeared from view. All of that in just a bit more than 70 years. My copy of that day's *Daily Oklahoman* was brought to me by a thoughtful, but anonymous, friend. If you're still interested, read on.

I don't have a complete copy of that edition, just a four page section, but that's enough to warrant at least a brief look. For one thing, it contains Mr. Ritthaler's letter to the editor. That was covered in a previous column. On the same page with the letter is a one-column photo of the movie star Janet Gaynor with her new husband, attorney Lydell Peck. Among other things, Miss Gaynor starred in the original (1937) version of "A Star Is Born," with Fredric March. She was a diminutive all-American girl type, but as I remember this was not her first or last wedding. The dress designer Adrian was one of her hubbies.

Some of the major advertisers in that edition of the *Oklahoman* were Johnston-Randle Furniture Co., 214 W. First St. (living room suites, \$98.50); Sparton radios from Chesnut Bros., 404 W. Main; men's lightweight felt hats (\$10) at Rothschild's B&M, Main at Harvey; women's reptile leather shoes (\$10) at Hockaday's, 305 W. Main; and women's new fall felt hats (\$1.95) in Harry Katz' basement (no address given). How many of us remember when all of those stores and many others made downtown Oklahoma City a bustling marketplace?

Six-point typeface was used by the *Oklahoman* (and many other newspapers of that era) for news stories, and it was mighty hard to read without a magnifying glass. (Today, 12-point type is widely used.) Still, it's an interesting trip down memory lane when you find a legible copy of a newspaper from seven decades ago. I for one enjoyed that brief stroll.



April 27, 2001

My cable TV service was cut off the other day and life quickly became very weird. Apparently only our neighborhood was affected because some friends from other parts of town told me they had no interruption. I don't know what happened, but apparently something cut the line and we had no reception at all for several hours. We were left with painful withdrawal symptoms like those you see in movies about smokers, alcoholics and other addicts who try to break their habit cold turkey. Don't kid yourself. It's hard to do, friends.

The break occurred shortly before 3:30 p.m., just as the movie I was watching neared its denouement. It's an old one and I've seen it in snatches over a period of several years, but that particular time I was looking forward to seeing it all the way through, from start to finish. A couple of favorite game shows also were lost in the dark period. I tried to catch up on some reading while the screen was blank, but I kept checking periodically to see if service had been restored. Futile effort. Supper time, usually signaled by one of the evening news shows, arrived, without notice, to our surprise. Conversation at the table was forced and irrelevant, except when we debated what to do when the time for our favorite evening shows arrived without benefit of television.

Time came for our weekly trip to the church for choir practice (without the usual warning signal of Bonusland on the Wheel of Fortune), and we left the house, discussing how many of our favorite night-time shows we apparently were destined to miss. Home again, early because our practice was abbreviated. I was still expecting, and ready, for a Wednesday night without "Law and Order" and "West Wing." But then, what to my wondering eyes did appear but a TV screen all lit up with the usual midweek nighttime offerings, and life seemed normal again.

Our house is one of those where the television set is usually turned on even when no one is watching. It's like a comforting friend, standing by to provide companionship when called upon but otherwise to just be there. Don't think that we watch it every hour of the day and night just because I give that impression. I find that time goes by slower when there's no TV to divide it into 30-minute segments, and that is good. I feel guilty about the amount of time I have wasted on the worthless trash usually provided by the electronic media, but I do value the occasional gems, some of them actually educational and worthwhile for a variety of reasons.

But I am dismayed by the empty feeling that was created by just the temporary loss of that small screen, because I realize that it threatens to dominate our life. Maybe we should create a period of no television each day and just abstain from it altogether for more than a few hours.

Life already is much too short to have it divided into 30-minute segments filled with junk food from the networks and syndicates. But just don't take away the Mary Tyler Moore show and other classics. I deserve them.