

***April 1, 2003***

Saw a story in this newspaper the other day about a project called "Legacies". It was sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and it is intended to encourage small towns (under 30,000 population) to create a legacy for future generations. Pawnee, our somewhat smaller neighbor to the east, was held up as a good example of what can be done. The town has put a major focus on Chester Gould, the creator of the comic strip cop, Dick Tracy. The story said: "A local (Pawnee) citizen, Darrel Gambill, realized that a native son, Chester Gould, was someone the city should feature... Honoring his legacy is an appropriate way for Pawnee to participate in this program."

Let me see. Who could Perry choose to salute if we got into this program? Hmm. Oh yeah. The name of Buster Keaton comes to mind. Is anyone interested in this? Several workshops are scheduled around Oklahoma in the near future to assist towns intending to enter. If you are so inclined, contact Patricia Klein at the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, 405-815-3587. One of these days, we are going to realize that Mr. Keaton's connection to Perry is worth bragging about. Seems like there's a golden opportunity for Perry to capitalize on something (legitimately) that would encourage vacationers and tourists from 1-35 to check out the things of interest in Perry.

We have to be careful in pronouncing unfamiliar names and places, if they are foreign to our native tongue. For instance... it's easy for a youngster of this generation to hear "food court" when some adult mispronounces "Foucart". You probably saw that example in a commercially printed document the other day. A food court is a concentration of eating places in a shopping mall. Foucart was the name of the Belgian architect who designed the Victorian building where the Chamber of Commerce, Perry Main Street and other local entities are located on the east side of the square.

It wasn't a local death, but a lot of folks in this neck of the woods were sorry to read about the passing of the big band director Al Good in Oklahoma City the other day. Al seemed like a real Okie, although he came here as a young musician after World War II. He once was a staff artist with WKY radio and TV, and he was a regular part of the National Finals Rodeo when the attraction was still an Oklahoma City affair. He had a "big band" that was scheduled to play for a dance in Stillwater the week he died. At his funeral in Oklahoma City, his band played for a half hour before the service began. It was a non-traditional service, just as he requested. You may also remember that he played for one of the numerous Christmas Balls that communities like Perry once sponsored in places like our armory. We'll miss Al Good's sly grin and his beautiful music. He was well named.



***April 4, 2003***

On a recent afternoon, left to own devices at the keyboard of my trusty personal computer, my mind wandered more than usual. CDs embedded with the music of Mr. Glenn Miller and his orchestra played in the background and I found myself pausing for long periods to hear again those marvelous doo-wahs and the lilting harmony of the reed sections. It was becoming more difficult to concentrate on the work at hand so I just pushed back and daydreamed of those halcyon days when the Moonlighters tilled. Life was peaceful then, although we stood on the brink, of a terrible struggle that came to be

known as World War II. We knew who we were in this blessed land and we were prepared to defend that role even if it meant the loss of countless young lives to convince the dictators of the world.

Ray Eberle crooned the soothing ballads on my CD player and I remembered thinking at the time these were originally recorded that he was not a Dick Haymes or Frank Sinatra, but somehow his style just seemed right for the Miller orchestra. And of course when Marion Hutton and the Modernaires belted a tune, there was no mistaking the style or the sound. They were supreme. Thanks to the advanced recording technology we now enjoy, those ballads and jump tunes from several decades ago sound as fresh and soothing as they did 'way back when.

I thought about the time when three or four of us from Perry traveled to Oklahoma City and the great dance hall in the Skirvin Tower when the Glenn Miller orchestra played one weekend. The place was full, and the dance floor was packed with couples trying to get as close as possible to the bandstand for a close-up look at the musicians. They were the idols of the day, as much as today's rock stars or the big-time performers in any field. Many of them were known to us in that pre-TV period only through vinyl records and remote, late-night radio shows. These could be heard almost nightly from Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook, the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle or any of many Venues around the country where young people listened and danced to the music of that age. Recordings of that day, now transferred by newer technology to small disks, remain as fresh and soulful as when they were first released.

Getting to Oklahoma City for the Glenn Miller appearance would be difficult for young teens, today, but we were resourceful back then. None of us had a car and only one or two were old enough to have a driver's license. So we chose our usual mode - hitchhiking on U.S. 77. It was not dangerous then and passersby were not, reluctant to pick up young people who used their thumb to ask for a ride. I cannot imagine allowing that to be done today.

Ali, but the reverie had to end as the last of the Miller recording, arrived. Nothing special to say here, but thank goodness for happy memories of the music and the mood of those innocent years not so long ago.



***April 8, 2003***

Yes, the local municipal election last week produced some interesting results and catapulted some of my friends and yours into positions of authority. Far as I know, all of them can handle their new jobs and they should compile good track records. Even better news is the realization that all the candidates in all the races were good citizens. It's hard to go wrong when that is true. We are fortunate to live in such a community.

As usual, the mayor's race held the spotlight, along with two contested council contests. However before we start examining the new municipal authorities too closely, let's hear some richly deserved applause for the outgoing officials. They have had the unenviable task of guiding this little city through some difficult times in the recent past, and they will have little to show for it except for a few pats on the back. Next time you see one of them, tell them you appreciate their service.

Mayor Leroy Rolling especially deserves a warm handshake for what he has accomplished. His honor took over the post when Mayor Bud Hollingsworth passed away. Mr. Rolling was president of the city council and moved up to succeed Bud, then won a full four-year term on his own merit. He completed much of his predecessor's program, including the important water line project that ensures a safe, adequate supply of that essential commodity for this community. Mayor

Rolling would be the last one to claim all the credit for everything that has been accomplished during his tenure, but we all know that major projects don't succeed unless someone has a firm grip on the steering wheel. Congratulations, and many thanks, Leroy.

The city's new chief executive will be Etsell Emde, a strong, hard-driving individual who manages to get things done. Etsell won the mayor's job by narrowly defeating Jill Zimmer, the first woman to seek that position, with Clifton Franklin also in the race. As you know, candidates in our municipal elections do not run as Democrats or Republicans, or any other political label. Thus, no runoff elections are held.

Our new council will have a different composition when the newly elected members are seated. Representing ward two (post 1) will be Trish Engel, a registered nurse, succeeding John Nemec, who failed in his bid for reelection. Also in that race was Jesse Phillips. The new council member from ward four (post 1) will be Bob Neely, a retired highway patrolman, who defeated the incumbent, Hank Nida, and Darlene R. Roads. Lois Malget, a Perry bank executive and a former councillor, was elected without opposition for the office formerly held by Mr. Franklin.

Two school bond propositions were heartily approved, and that continues Perry's unique and enviable record in passing school bond issues. The need for these two matters was clearly stated by administrators and other school officials. This city has never failed to provide its public school system with adequate financing when a legitimate need was shown.

Perry has been well served by the council, the mayor and all the workers who tend to the myriad details their jobs require. Now is a good time to tell all of them that their dedication is appreciated, and to welcome the newcomers who soon will take the reins. Working in harmony, our elected officials have, the capability of getting things done.



## ***April 11, 2003***

Let's spend a few moments, today on miscellaneous topics that have no connecting theme.

Those recent columns speculating on how the title of "soda jerk" came into being really didn't answer that question but they succeeded in identifying some former practitioners of the art and many more who remember the days when every drug store had a soda fountain. Jim Endicott, now 84 years young, offers a common-sense idea that seems perfectly logical. Jim remembers when soda jerks, those knights of the drug store soda fountains, were asked to concoct an actual soda, they drew carbonated water by jerking the handle downward, thus making the fizz that characterized those delicious drinks.

A reader offers this question for consideration: Have you noticed anything fishy about the inspection teams that were sent to Iraq? They're all men! How in the name of the United Nations does anyone expect men to find Saddam's stash? We all know that men have a blind spot when it comes to finding things.

For crying out loud. They can't find the dirty clothes hamper. They can't find the jar of jelly until it falls out of the cupboard and splatters on the floor. And these are the people we have sent into Iraq to search for hidden weapons of, mass destruction? They probably couldn't find them if the weapons were lying in the middle of a dusty street with a picture of Saddam aiming a rifle taped to the side.

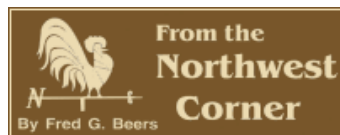
I keep wondering why groups of woman weren't sent in – preferably mothers. After all, mothers know that their boys can't find their socks or underwear when they're neatly folded in their dresser drawers, so how could they be expected to find hidden biological weapon? On the other hand, mothers can sniff out secrets quicker than a drug dog can find a gram of dope.

What we need over there are women like my mother. She could find the old olive bottles filled with dimes that Dad stashed in the attic beneath the rafters. She could sniff out a diary two rooms and one floor away. She always knew when the lid of the cookie jar had been disturbed, and I swear she must have dusted for prints on the roll of salami that was always in the refrigerator. She knew if a slice had been removed, and by whom.

I developed her ability to stalk out criminal activity when my kids were at home. They couldn't get away with much that I didn't know about. They still think they got away with a lot, but actually I always knew what they were doing, and if I decided that what they were doing was not too important or dangerous, I allowed them to think they were getting away with it. It was important for them to think they have an uncanny ability to pull the wool over mom's eyes occasionally.

But male inspectors? Going after Saddam?

There's some food for thought until we meet again.



## ***April 15, 2003***

A few days ago, we had occasion to be in Atchison, Kansas, nestled in the northeast corner of the Sunflower State. The name of the town is very familiar to us, of course. For one thing, it was the railhead of the old Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad. Along with Frisco, the two lines came right through Perry in the early days when Our Town was being established. Passenger service continued here on the old AT & SF and Frisco lines until it was eliminated throughout Oklahoma. Today the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe railways send lots of freight trains through here on the old Santa Fe and Frisco lines, and the joy of riding in those clean railroad Pullman cars and having a tasty meal in the dining car is in danger of becoming merely an insolvable political issue, and our children are growing up unaware of what we once took for granted. But I don't want to get started on that.

The point I started to make was an observation of what has happened to the town of Atchison in the last few years of turbulence on America's railroads. During that time, most of the nation's passenger railroads became part of Amtrak and the colorful old rail line names slipped into the past. That might have dealt a fatal blow to Atchison, Kansas, but believe me, it is still very much alive because the folks who live there refused to roll over and play dead. The town's population is about twice the size of Perry's, but they could show us some things about survival and growth.

Atchison surveyed its assets and found several possibilities for attracting visitors. For one thing, the town was aging and showing signs of wear. The downtown area was not user-friendly, so civic leaders closed a large portion of that area, sealed it off to vehicular traffic and made it an attractive pedestrian mall. The old street was ripped up to be replaced by a well-designed walkway, using buff bricks and a darker contrasting style along with leafy planters and benches in strategic places. Building facades were renovated to harmonize with the brickwork while still retaining the original look. A

few vacant buildings remain, but the mall is indeed a big attraction. Several tenants are antique dealers. Their wares fit in very well with the town's underlying theme.

Atchison also was the birthplace of Amelia Earhart, perhaps America's premier aviatrix and the first woman to make a solo flight across the Atlantic. The house where she was born is a tourist attraction and apparently it has been thoroughly renovated. Her life story is told through photographs, newspaper clippings and memorabilia in a downtown museum, and that building in itself is a piece of history. It was a railroad depot for the AT & SF line in the early years of the 20th century. That gives the town three major points to lure visitors - the birth-place of Amelia Earhart, the railroad passenger line and the downtown pedestrian mall. It appears to me that the town has succeeded in resuscitating its business community in a logical, practical way. What has happened there could well be emulated by many other small and mid-size towns.

Oh, by the way. Many of the old AT & SF tracks are on the south side of Atchison. Even though most of the rail traffic through there is freight, motor vehicles do not have long, tiresome waits to cross the tracks. Elevated streets make it possible for motor traffic to move smoothly in regular patterns. We need to learn how they managed to do that.



***April 18, 2003***

**Let's have a few chuckles**, thanks to a thoughtful reader who passes along the following for our amusement. I'm not sure where these originated, but maybe you have had similar thoughts.

Have you ever noticed that they put advertisements in with your bills now? Like bills aren't distasteful enough, they have to stuff junk mail in there with them. I get back at them. I put garbage in with my check when I mail it in. Coffee grinds, banana peels...I write: "Could you throw this away for me? Thank you."

My wife uses fabric softener. I never knew what that stuff was for. Then I noticed women coming up to me, sniff, mutter "married," then walk off. That's how they mark their territory. You can take off the ring, but it's hard to get rid of that April fresh scent that no self-respecting bachelor would use.

Did you know that it costs 40,000 a year to house each prisoner? Jeez, for \$40 thousand bucks apiece I'll take a few prisoners into my house. I live in Los Angeles. I already have bars on the windows. I don't think we should give free room and board to criminals. I think they should have to run 12 hours a day on a treadmill and generate electricity. And if they don't, they can rest in the chair that's hooked up to the generator.

You know those shows where people call in and vote on different issues? Did you ever notice there's always like 18% that say, "I don't know?" It cost 90 cents to call up and they're voting "I don't know." "Honey, I feel very strongly about this. Give me the phone." (Says into phone) "I DON'T KNOW!" (Hangs up, looking proud.) "Sometimes you have to stand up for what you believe you're not sure about." This guy probably calls phone sex girls @ \$2.95 to say "I'm not in the mood."

Did you ever hear one of these corny, positive messages on someone's answering machine? "Hi! It's a great day and I'm out enjoying it right now. I hope you are too. The thought for the day is 'share the love.' Beep." "Uh, this is the VD clinic calling....Speaking of being positive, your test results are back. Stop sharing the love."

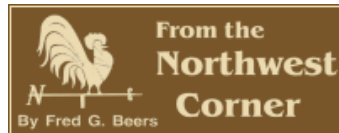
FINE. This is the word we use at the end of any argument that we feel we are right about but need to shut you up. NEVER use "fine" to describe how a woman looks. This will cause you to have one of those arguments.

FIVE MINUTES. This is half an hour. It is equivalent to the five minutes that your football game is going to last before you take out the trash, so I feel that it's an even trade.

NOTHING. This means something and you should be on your toes. "Nothing" is usually used to describe the feeling a woman has of wanting to turn you inside out, upside down, and backwards. "Nothing" usually signifies an argument that will last "five minutes" and end with the word "fine."

"GO AHEAD (with raised eyebrows)." This is a dare. One that will result in a woman getting upset over "nothing" and will end with the word "fine." GO AHEAD (normal eyebrows). This means "I give up" or "do what you want because I don't care." You will get a raised eyebrow "GO AHEAD" in just a few minutes, followed by "nothing" and "fine." And she will talk to you in about "five minutes" when she cools off.

That's enough vinegar and vitriol for one session. Have a good one!



***April 22, 2003***

Much has been written and spoken by the parties interested in a proposed state lottery. Those favoring the proposition say that it would make up the woeful lack of funds missing from our state's public education institutions. Those on the opposing side say the same claim was made years ago when the repeal of prohibition was OK'd, but that did not happen. Likewise, the horse racing legislation was supposed to solve our fiscal woes, but that also did not happen. No one denies that money for schools must be found somewhere, but there's a difference of opinion about the propriety of legalized gambling (the lottery) as a means, of accomplishing that. I'm not choosing a side to write about, but all this debate on the pros and cons of gambling brings back memories of a similar controversy that once raged in Oklahoma.

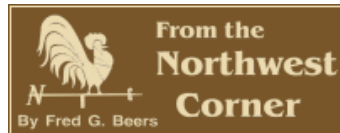
Remember those ubiquitous cardboard punch cards? They really seemed to be everywhere. And the "marble machines" that once took up floor space in so many unexpected places. All of them seemed to vanish, at least temporarily, as new legislation was devised and their respectability was yanked away. They fit the definition of gambling, and that is forbidden in state statutes. No more punch cards. Marble machines seem to have made a comeback, even though a player can earn merchandise or other gifts if their score reaches high enough.

The reason I remember them so well is because our family business, the City Drug Store on the north side of the square, had punch cards and marble boards when such things were at the height of their popularity. That would have been in the late 1930s or early 1940s when the Great Depression had all of us in a choke hold. They offered a quick, cheap trip to the land of instant riches. Actually most of the marble machine prizes were aluminum tokens good for free games, and the punch card prizes were like five-cent candy bar or a package of Wrigley's chewing gum. Those were not depression-busters, but what the heck, they were "prizes."

In our store, the punch cards were kept on top of the cigar counter, right beside the cash register, where men could see them and pay for a punch with the loose change that followed the purchase of a good ten-cent cigar or a ten-cent package of Wings cigarettes. Men were the usual punch card or marble machine users. Most women considered the

devices evil and eschewed them even though for a while they were perfectly legal or else they would not have been found at the City Drug Store.

Eventually, those who opposed their use of punch cards and marble machines prevailed and the devices disappeared except for a few in private clubs. Today you can still find marble machines in arcades that appeal to youngsters, but somehow they have been rendered legal and are considered OK. I don't know about punch cards, but they are not greatly in evidence. Maybe they have just gone to that great cigar counter in the tax-free casinos.



**April 25, 2003**

Our Perry boys certainly do go around and their performances are earning well-deserved prestigious recognition. You no doubt noticed a headlined story on page one of *The Daily Oklahoman* the other day when the top story was the promotion of Ed Kelley to the position of job editor of that newspaper. That is just as important a job as it sounds.

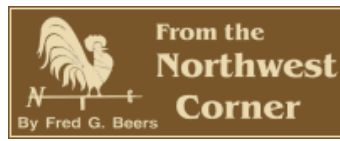
Ed is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Kelley of Perry. He has climbed the ladder of success at *The Oklahoman* since winning his degree at the University of Oklahoma school of journalism where he was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate. He began his career with the paper as a summer intern in 1974 while a student at OU. He joined the paper full-time after graduating one year later. In the recent past he has been serving as editor of *The Oklahoman's* editorial page. Ed chose his career path in journalism as a reporter and sports writer for this newspaper while still in high school. He is a 1971 graduate of PHS. He just recently was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. His promotion to the post of editor at *The Oklahoman* came about because Edward L. Gaylord, 84, son of the late E. K. Gaylord, is retiring soon from the position of editor and publisher.

David Thompson, a former executive of the Oklahoma City newspaper, is returning to this state from North Carolina to assume the role of publisher, another assignment being relinquished by Mr. Gaylord, who will continue to be chairman and chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Publishing Co. The change, to become effective next month on the eve of Mr. Gaylord's 84th birthday, will mark the first time since early in the 20th century that someone outside the Gaylord family will hold either of the top two jobs at the paper. Congratulations to Ed, his wife Carole, their three children, and to his parents. By the way, his mother, the former Marian Bobbitt, once worked in the advertising department of this newspaper.

This next one may have been missed by some folks here. On the Channel 4 news the other night they featured a segment about an NBC newsman, Phil Rogers, who has been doing the Iraqi war inserts on the news directly from the field of battle. That name may not ring a bell; but the feature went on to say that he is a graduate of Stillwater high school and his parents were Mrs. Elizabeth Rogers of Stillwater and her late husband, Murl Rogers, who was the full-time director of the Oklahoma State University Former Students Association. Elizabeth Rogers is a former speech and English teacher at Perry high school, and that is where she met her future husband, who was the vocational agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at PHS before being chosen for the post at OSU.

Phil also is a brother of Paul Rogers, former sales manager of the Charles Machine Works, Inc., who now lives in southern California. When not on foreign assignment for NBC, Phil is a newsman with the major TV station in Chicago. I can't let this go without mentioning that his Mom, Elizabeth Rogers, has never failed to attend a class reunion of the class of 1941 (that's

my class) at PHS. She directed our senior class play and did an excellent job with most of her students in the field of speech and English.



## ***April 29, 2003***

A short while ago, we were reviewing the interesting history of the Perry fire department. A lot of loose ends were tied up in the process, but I just ran out of time before scanning all the available material. For instance, the Cherokee Strip edition of *The Perry Daily Journal*, issued on September 14, 1953, contained a wealth of information about the early days of this city, including the fire department. It is interesting reading and it's important enough that it bears repeating, so here's the gift of what I've found. Most of what follows is gleaned from that edition, published half a century ago. The original author of this information is not known. Parenthetical information has been inserted where it seems to be needed.

Shortly after the opening of the Cherokee Strip on September 16, 1893, the matter of fire prevention was taken up by the Perry City Council. A committee advertised for bids for a chemical engine, hook and ladder wagon, and fire department fixtures. Mayor (John) Brogan called an election to vote on \$60,000 for water works bonds. In the early days the water supply was a domestic problem as well as a fire prevention concern. The government had one well dug on the town site in the center of Brogan and Flynn streets. (NOTE: Because the well was there the city reserved portions of all four corners of that intersection to accommodate horse-drawn wagons while water was pumped into barrels or other receptacles. Those corner positions are still reserved on abstracts held by property owners today, I am told. Also note this: Brogan Street originally was named to honor the first mayor of Perry. In recent years the name was changed to Gene Taylor Street to honor a *Perry Daily Journal* reporter now deceased, who covered city council meetings.)

A spring on east "A" Street furnished drinking water and supplied a laundry resort (?) where one could retire and do the family washing. Wells were dug for residential properties as well as for business houses. Bill Cates, the water man, supplied the business houses from his wagon making the rounds continually all day long.

One of the most destructive fires of the early days burned down four frame buildings on the northeast corner of the square. In an upstairs room of one of the buildings a group of men were having their nightly poker games, and by accidentally upsetting the coal oil lamp, the men set fire to the old frame building. In those days, the bucket brigade did noble service and to this day there is an ordinance of the city requiring two barrels of salt water to be kept in front of each business house for use in case of fire. (NOTE: That ordinance existed in 1953, but surely has been repealed by the codified ordinances now (1996) in existence.) With no fire siren, the warning alarm was given by six-shooters. A .44 gun being, one of the accessories of every business house, saloon and gambling house.

The Perry water and light plant was established by private individuals and operated thus until the city purchased the concern through a bond loan. The fire department soon came to be recognized as one of the most efficient in the State. Henry Beard, later U. S. marshal of the eastern district, was the first fire chief of Perry. The Pabst Brewing Co. presented the city a lone cart, hand-drawn. Then came the water works with a horse-drawn truck; the team of white horses was loaned to the city by C. O. Burch, a livery man.

More about the early days of the Perry fire department will follow this brief sketch.