

***April 2, 2004***

A lot of stories, most of them unfounded, are swirling about as the day and hours approach for a decision on building bonds for a new Perry elementary school. One of these has to do with the amount of taxes to be paid on a house that was assessed for \$300 this year. Some people have been informed that if the bonds pass, the taxation on that same house would be \$1,000. School officials are hearing most of these tales. Our superintendent, Jack Parker, is doing his best to set everyone straight on this matter. There's no denying a tax increase will be necessary, but it will be more like 15 percent. If a house is taxed for \$300 this year, the rate would be \$450 next year, not \$1,000. It's hard to straighten out all such stories, but that is one we all should know. Of course it costs money to provide suitable classrooms for our children and grandchildren. But, be sure you have all the facts before trekking to the polls next Tuesday.

Interest rates to be paid on the elementary school bonds are expected to be extremely favorable, lower than in the past several years. Chances are good that we will not see such rates again for a while. And that is just another reason we should be proceeding with the construction of a new elementary school.

Some of the buildings now in use at the present elementary school are literally falling apart. Mold is present in many areas. Walls are cracking and the splits are becoming worse each year. Facilities for music, art, media study and many other things are simply missing because there is no place to serve as a classroom. Rest rooms are an intolerable mess.

Traffic already is a problem. Many elementary students are delivered to the present school each morning by cars and many more arrive via school buses. The morning deliveries and the afternoon pickups are a major problem now. If the new elementary school is built, it will be beside the present Middle School on 15th street, where students in the fifth, sixth and seventh grades now are housed. What additional cares will have to be dealt with under the new school arrangement?

Again, school administrators have made plans for dealing with that problem. When the new school is built, it will provide separate delivery and pickup areas for automobiles and buses. The City of Perry already has set aside funds for an additional turning lane on 15th street to ease the problem for moms and dads who bring their youngsters to school or bring them home in the evening.

Maybe other questions are circulating in your mind. Mr. Parker and all the other Perry school officials urge you to make your concerns known because there probably is a ready answer to such matters. Don't rely on self-appointed experts. Go to the people who are trying to provide adequate space and facilities for the education of our boys and girls in the lowest grade levels, where building conditions are the worst. Most of all, be sure to vote next Tuesday. A 60 percent approval level is required for passage of the bond issue.



***April 6, 2004***

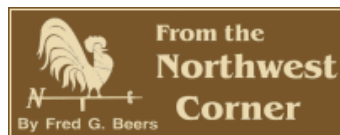
### **A few unconnected, idle thoughts...**

A few unconnected, idle thoughts while waiting for the next change in the weather. Haven't we had some truly beautiful days lately? There's just nothing quite like an Oklahoma spring. All the trees and early spring flowers are leafing or greening up like crazy. That's at least partly the result of the gorgeous spring that has blessed this area. Bradford pears, red buds and dogwood trees all are at the peak of their beauty. Shucks, even the old crab apple tree on the west side of our church is blooming and really looks pretty.

Perry made the front page of the latest issue of the monthly newsletter, Mistletoe Leaves, published by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The focus for that issue is our annual Rural Heritage Festival, which will be held on the weekend of Saturday, May 1. The entire front page of the newsletter is devoted to that event. Two photos are used to highlight some of the special events at last year's Festival. One of them features Elizabeth Willems in a costume typical of the 1893 Cherokee Strip land run era, and another shows Morrison students winding a May pole on the grounds of the Cherokee Strip Museum last year. Lots of fun and interesting things are planned for the Festival this year, so be sure to keep track of them for you information and pleasure.

J.D. Sadler recently asked for information about a peach orchard and canning factory that he understood was once located east of Perry. Several callers filled in some blanks for him. Among them was Mabel Eby. She described the location for him. One reason she remembers is so well: She once worked there.

Another reader wonders why Perry fails to commemorate the fact that movie star Buster Keaton once lived here. "Why doesn't Perry have a Buster Keaton Day?" he asks. He says the event could be held every now and then, not necessarily annually. Someone could dress up in an outfit like Buster used to wear in most of his movies, including a "pork pie" hat, with a parade as a principal feature. I think he has the right idea. The old Keaton home on Grove Street is slowly falling apart. What a shame it would be to lose it.



***April 9, 2004***



Hundreds of young elm trees were beginning to grow in Perry's Courthouse Park in the mid-downtown area when this picture postcard was made. The photo probably was shot by Barney Enright, an early day photographer here, northwest from the top of the Foucart building, on the east side of the square. (Photo from the collection of Fred G. Beers)

### **Council minutes reveal interesting phraseology in early-day decision to beautify Perry**

With the pretty safe perspective of more than a century for reflection, it is interesting to review the syntax and phraseology used by our early-day City Council members in authorizing Mr. Will T. Little to make our Courthouse Park a thing of restful beauty. In the Council's official minutes of 1897-1904, he was lauded (and rightfully so) for converting the Park's five-acre tract from a dusty, barren eyesore into a virtual oasis, simply by planting elm tree seedlings and nursing them to maturity.

The Council's intentions were appropriate. It makes me realize that even today we really should be doing something to call to the attention of young people and new residents the fact of Mr. Little's one-man campaign. Those trees we see today in the Courthouse Park probably were not planted by Mr. Little, but his efforts 'way back then have inspired many generations to perpetuate and expand his dream- to have a lush park in the heart of downtown Perry. Of course, he also planted elm seedlings in schoolyards and other public places around the county and he deserves recognition for that, too.

Nor is it the intent of this column to ridicule what the City Council of that day did (in the late 1890s.) I'm glad they recognized him and I regret that we have not found some way of honoring his pioneering efforts in a new land- our part of the Cherokee Outlet.

Here's what the Council minutes of Sept. 19, 1898, had to say: "Will T. Little was present and addressed the Council on (the) matter of planting trees in the seven parks of the City. On motion, Mayor (Richard E.) Wade appointed Councilmen Fields, Larsh, Ellis and Bulaum (?) as committee to confer with Mr. Little in regard to the matter. On motion, a phone was ordered installed in the Mayor's office on north side of (illegible.)" The minutes were signed by E.E. Gibbens, city clerk. Thus was the tree-planting venture launched in Perry and Noble County. We'll have some more about early-day Council meetings in a future column.



***April 13, 2004***

It's going to take just a little while, getting used to having only one drug store around the square in downtown Perry. The announcement in this newspaper last week that Chris' Pharmacy and Foster's Corner Drug Store were merging was like a dash of cold water on a frosty morning. They were the last two pharmacies around the square. It's especially hard to believe because I grew up in a downtown apartment when our family business, the City Drug Store, was one of four such enterprises around the square.

Yes, there were four of us. Foster's Corner Drug was on the east side, where they are now; E.E. Nelson's Southside Pharmacy was on the south side, where City Hall is now established; Brownie Drug was on the west side, where Dr. Starling Miller's auction business is head-quartered; and the City Drug was on the north side in the middle of the building now occupied by Georgia's Fine Furniture. We fought our little battles in diverse ways, but it was always friendly competition, like families have. One year, a drug store from Enid opened a branch here on the west side of the square, but the locals found a way to prevent them from getting a foothold and they soon left. It was our store's misfortune that we could not survive the terrible Great Depression. The City Drug Store closed for the last time in 1940, and we didn't blame anyone but ourselves for that. The competition and the sense of being part of something rare and interesting kept my attention, and I still miss our drug store. In the 1950s, Mr. Nelson sold his store and it became A.J. Bontrager's business. Meanwhile, pharmacist Merrill Hamous left our store and went to work for Charlie Watson at Brownie's. Jim Hopper moved here, from Oklahoma City; I believe, and opened a radical new drug store where Chris' Pharmacy has been located. It was radical because it did not have a soda fountain, like most drug stores of that time. Eventually Mr. Hamous joined Mr. Hopper and the business was known as Hamous & Hopper's Service for the Sick. Still later Mr. Bontrager bought the Hamous & Hopper store, and in a few years he sold it to Chris Cockrum, who operated a fine store for more than two decades. When Chris met an untimely death a few years back, Earlene, his wife, ran the store until Calvin Anthony of Stillwater bought it and ran it without changing the name of the store.

But I will always remember those four stores, including my Dad's, and this will not seem like the same old town without them. Anyway, welcome to Perry, Troy Simons, who now assumes a major responsibility in this friendly little community.



***April 16, 2004***

**Perry could follow El Reno's lead in handling local problems**

Congratulations to the city of El Reno, a fine, upstanding community west of Oklahoma City. El Reno's ruling body has declared war on several local problems and an attack is being launched against them, effective immediately. According to TV accounts of the effort, the first problem to be dealt with is the appearance of the town.

When strangers drive through El Reno's residential areas now, they find the view blocked by broken down fences, junk cars, uncut lawns and old houses literally failing apart. El Reno is too proud to let that condition continue. A newly appointed city official has the daunting job of driving different areas to spot eyesores and then follow up with a word of warning to the property owner. After a reasonable time, if the junky area remains untended, a fine of more than \$200 per day can be imposed until the problem is eliminated.

Perry's annual cleanup week will soon be here and that serves a real need, getting rid of some of the accumulation of trash and so forth since last year's cleanup. But how do we stop the frequent offenders who spoil the looks of our little city by not tending to their property? Maybe El Reno's pioneering effort would work here, too. We have a lot of problems in that area and someday a solution will be found that works for us.

If something isn't done, and soon, we will all be knee deep in discarded trash and junked-up property. Those things spoil Perry's appearance for visitors and the rest of us, who have chosen to make this our hometown. A beginning has been made, but unless some pressure comes soon from some authority, we're going to lose this battle.



***April 20, 2004***

The following are passed along to me and are credited to "The Hillbilly Journal of Medicine." I'm not familiar with that dictionary, but some of these may tickle your funny bone. Enjoy. (These came to me from a friend who knows I enjoy a good pun.)

Secretion - Hiding something.

Tablet - A small table to change babies on.

Seizure - A Roman emperor.

Terminal Illness - Getting sick at the train station.

Tumor - More than one.

Varicose - Nearby.

Fester - Quicker than someone else.

Fibula - A small lie.

Hangnail - What you hang your coat on.

Labor Pain - Getting hurt at work.

Morbid - A higher offer than I bid.

Nitrates - Cheaper than day rates.

Benign - What you be after you be eight.

Bacteria - Back door to cafeteria.

Barium - What you do with dead folks.

Catscan - Searching for the cat.

Coma - A punctuation mark.

If that's not enough, try these on for size. They come from the editor at Stars & Stripes ewslatter, Ron Hatcher. We'll just look at a few of them.

Those who jump off a bridge in Paris are in Seine. A backward poet writes in verse. A man's home is his castle, in a manor or speaking.

Dijon Vu – The same Mustard as before.

Practice safe eating – Always use condiments.

Shotgun Wedding – A case of wife or death.

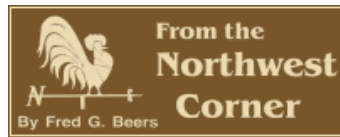
A hangover is the wrath of grapes.

Dancing cheek-to-cheek is really a form of floor play.

Reading while sunbathing makes you well red.

When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.

More of these some other time, if you can stand it.



## ***April 23, 2004***

Hang onto your hats and we will take a whirlwind ride, double-spaced and turbo jet propelled, through a field of land mines where some good clear humor lies. Here's a bit of geography along with some Bible facts. Thanks to a loyal reader, here we go:

The Garden of Eden reportedly was in present-day Iraq. It sure doesn't look much like Paradise today, thanks to Saddam.

Mesopotamia, which is now Iraq, was the cradle of civilization.

Noah built the Ark in Iraq.

The Tower of Babel was in Iraq.

Abraham was from Ur, which was in Southern Iraq. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was from Nahor, which is in Iraq.

Jacob met Rachel in Iraq.

Jonah preached in Ninevah – which is in Iraq.

Assyria, which is in Iraq, conquered the ten tribes of Israel.

Amos cried out in Iraq.

Babylon, which is in Iraq, destroyed Jerusalem. Daniel was in the lion's den in Iraq.

The three Hebrew children were in the fire in Iraq (that's good news to know that Jesus Christ also has been in Iraq, as the fourth person in the fiery furnace.)

Bell/shazzar, the King of Babylon, saw the "handwriting on the wall" in Iraq, which hopefully Saddam will, too!

Nebuchadnezzar, "the King of Babylon," carried the Jews captive into Iraq.

Ezekiel preached in Iraq.

The wise men were from Iraq. (Where are the "wise men" today?)

Peter preached in Iraq.

The "empire of man" described in the Revelations is called Babylon, which was in Iraq.

Maybe you've heard all of these before. They are offered gratis, with no guarantees of authenticity.



***April 27, 2004***

**50 Years: Time passes too fast when you're having fun**

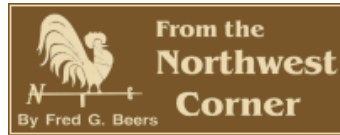
In the month of May 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower was serving his first term as President of the United States; Sen. Joe McCarthy was involved in hearings about alleged Communists in the U.S. government; the Supreme Court banned segregation in public schools; Perry had a pretty good semi-professional baseball team with Joe Ripley as manager; Laura Thomas was settling into her new position as medical technologist at Perry Memorial Hospital; Fred G. Beers was writing a column called the Northwest Corner at The Perry Daily Journal, where he was managing editor; and Dr. Bill Simon, M.D., may have been considering a second career as matchmaker because Fred and Laura, both young singles, prepared to get married after becoming acquainted at the prompting of Dr. Simon and Frankie Stoltenberg, a receptionist at the Perry hospital. And, on May 2, Fred and Laura became husband and wife. Some said it wouldn't last. Ha!

Fifty years later, here we are, getting ready for a golden anniversary celebration. It's trite but true: Time passes too fast when you're having fun. In some ways, it seems that wedding ceremony was just the other day, but the calendar doesn't lie. We have experienced both highs and lows over the route to this destination, but some things do not change; they only get better. That's what this slice of life has been for us. Overall, we have been richly blessed in many ways. For instance, two extraordinarily gifted and beautiful daughters, plus their handsome and noble husbands and the four grandchildren those wonderful couples have produced. We have had the privilege of doing a bit of traveling to see some of the things we used to dream about. Laura was something of a trailblazer in her profession after graduating from Baylor University with a degree in an unrelated field, and I had the great pleasure of serving with some able craftsmen and women in rewarding jobs while with the Army in World War II, then at The Perry Daily Journal and finally at the Ditch Witch factory (the Charles Machine Works, Inc. in formal terms). Life has been good for us, all in all, and to think - this is really only the beginning.

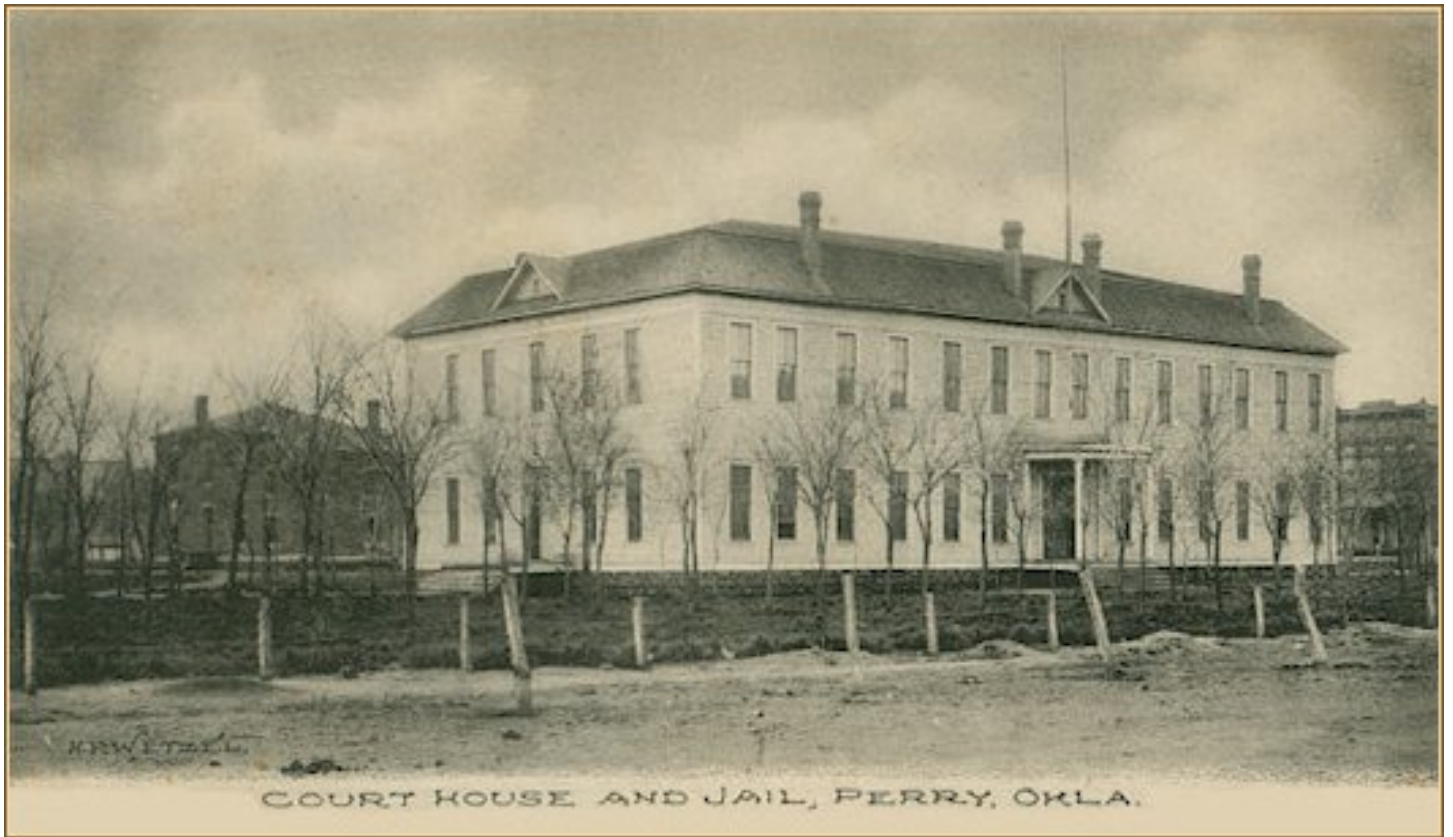
I want to say publicly that I freely give the credit for all this to Laura. We firmly believe that our meeting was part of a divine plan rather than a coincidence, and many of the joys we have experienced since then also were predestined. You understand, we attend the Presbyterian Church and some of our philosophy probably has been influenced by lessons we have learned there. But again, Laura has been the mainstay through our life together. She reared our children while I

worked during the day and spent most nights of the week covering various meetings of a civic nature for this newspaper, and I thank her proudly now for the way she has performed, sometimes under adverse conditions.

So, for the record, our wedding on May 2, 1954, in the Baptist Temple at Oklahoma City, is being celebrated again for the 50th time, and it is a milestone that makes us very proud. Our daughters and our sons-in-law are arranging a reception on Saturday afternoon, May 1, in the Presbyterian Church Parlor and Fellowship Hall. You are invited to attend. If you are so inclined, good wishes are always welcome, but that will be more than enough. Please, no gifts, just come to the reception and give us a hug.



*April 30, 2004*



This wooden, two-story courthouse provided office space for Noble county officers until the present three-story stone courthouse was built in 1915-16. The wooden courthouse was just east of the present stone building. Visible in the background at left is the wooden jail where county prisoners were held. (Photo from the collection of Fred G. Beers.)

**Let's return to** the series of columns that makes up the unofficial "History of Noble County Courthouse." Together those columns constitute a series of articles that began a few weeks ago but went on hiatus while the Perry school bond issue was being discussed. The bond issue failed but we will have another go at it later this year. The need for a new elementary school will not just go away. Neither will our problems with the need for a new jail and maintenance of the courthouse. The history of that proud structure is worthy of our attention.

A few years ago, Dean Courtright, chairman of the three-member board of commissioners, scanned historic records and came up with a brief but, precise history of the courthouse. His summary is contained in a neatly done four-page brochure that probably is available to the public. I have used it many times as a point of reference. According to Dean's history, the present-day courthouse was built in 1915-16. It replaced an old two-story frame building that served our county officials for several years in the early days of this little city. Before the wooden structure was built, most county offices were in rented rooms on the second floor of buildings around the square. The new (present-day) building was built in the courthouse park just west of the wooden courthouse. Mr. Courtright's brochure goes on to say: "Funds for construction of the new courthouse were derived from a bond issue of \$100,000 worth of negotiable coupon bonds to be used for construction and furnishing the building." (Side Note: How far would that amount of money go today?)

The brochure continues: "The bonds were paid for by special taxes beginning with 1915 through 1935, inclusive, at an annual percentage, rate of 5 percent interest."

The brochure contains a lot of vital information for anyone interested in the background of our courthouse. We'll continue this story shortly.