

August 1, 1997

Plans already are being made for a bigger and better version of Perry's annual Rural Heritage Day on May 2, 1998, following on the heels of this year's celebration, which turned out to be the best yet. In addition to all the activities that were on the grounds of the Cherokee Strip Museum on West Fir avenue, the downtown area will host the first annual Courthouse Antiques Fair, bringing in many exhibitors with their wares from miles away to display alongside our local dealers. That will be combined with the Classic Car Show which is now well established each year in the courthouse park, and together the two events are sure to draw a large crowd to Perry.

Obviously it's a little too soon to be pinpointing details, but that early outline makes it sound inviting. Better mark it on your 1998 calendar (if you have one) for next spring. The museum's Rural Heritage Day has been improving in scope and attendance each year, and with the downtown events added to complement it next year we should be all set for an exciting weekend. Perry's Main Street organization is assisting with arrangements for the car show and antique show while the Noble County Cherokee Strip Historical Society and the Oklahoma Historical Society take care of events on the museum grounds. The downtown events will provide an excellent showcase for our new courthouse park sidewalks and street lights.

Rural Heritage Day is becoming firmly established as a major attraction here each year. It is a welcome addition to the Christmas open house and related events each December, our traditional Fourth of July program, and, of course, the Cherokee Strip celebration which has been held here since 1894 to mark the anniversary of America's greatest land rush on September 16th, 1893. Other events during the year help to make Perry an exciting and alluring place for visitors, but it's up to each one of us to help promote them and make the public aware of our city's attractions. In other words, let's all pitch in and sell Perry to the world at large. As a further step, volunteer your services to help when one of these events is coming up. Call the Main Street office and/or the Cherokee Strip Museum and tell them you're ready to help out.

I came across an item of interest in an old copy of *The Perry Daily Journal* the other day while looking for something else. It was a brief story stating that Glenn Yahn had been appointed chairman of the Poor Boy club's reunion committee to celebrate their 15th anniversary. The paper was dated April 23, 1947, a little over 50 years ago. I have checked with Glenn and he says he is still working on a reunion. Unfortunately, only two or three former Poor Boys still live here so he's having to do most of the work by himself, and consequently the gears are not turning very rapidly. The Poor Boys were never known to act too hastily on anything, even during their heyday in the 1930s.



August 5, 1997

Most of you know I write these columns in a quiet little corner of my home, a sanctuary where outside distractions are minimal. There, with big band music emanating softly from a radio in the background, I can focus on whatever the particular subject of the day might be, and, if all goes well, produce one of these lightweight tomes. The system has worked well enough for a few years, but recently it has been more like fruit basket upset rather than doing things in the

customary Presbyterian way -- decently and in order. Chalk up another willing but bewildered victim who has capitulated to the onward surge of technology. Friends, I am about to join the web and my life will never be the same.

The user-friendly little personal computer which has served so faithfully and well for most of a decade has become badly outdated in that it is incompatible with all the wonderful new bells and whistles now offered by manufacturers whose names I had never heard before embarking on this adventure. Yes, I had heard of IBM, Bill Gates and Apple, and even one or two others, but most of the players in this game do not have names that are household words to me. Suggestions and advice from friends and family members who already had taken the plunge, plus a little consumer research, ultimately led me to the choice of my new system. By then I no longer felt totally like an innocent lamb being nudged on to slaughter, but by no means was I confident about any of my choices.

Having a previous familiarity with the vendor also was helpful and reassuring as I listened to descriptions of the mysterious but marvelous capabilities of this new gadgetry, but there was still that gnawing suspicion that I was about to get into something 'way over my head. That sense has not yet departed, but things are getting a little better as I learn how to do what I need to do.

One ancillary benefit will be the use of e-mail to stay in touch with my niece, Sydney, who, with her husband, Vince, is now in China to teach at an American school after eight years in Pakistan. Routine mail service to such distant lands is too slow in this age of instant gratification. And of course there is an unbelievable amount of information in the various websites awaiting my visit, but I am not yet ready to tap into them. A period of adjustment is necessary, and in my case that will take a bit (byte?) more time.

I am faithful, patient and believing disciple of the computer, within the narrow limits of my understanding and practice, and I am in awe of the incredible potential it has for all of us. I would just ask that the geniuses behind the growth and development of these technological wonders slow things down so that some of us can catch our breath and absorb the scope of what's already out there. It's like being trapped in a rock video dreamscape where wildly expanding and contracting concentric circles repeatedly overwhelm helpless and innocent victims, drawing them into a dark abyss or uncharted sea. Ever get that feeling?



August 8, 1997

For an exhilarating experience, try threading your way through traffic in the downtown area these days. It's a special thrill at peak periods but it can be a lot of fun whenever more than one driver reaches an intersection at approximately the same moment. Our traffic control system, as you may have noticed, has been haywire for quite a little while.

We're pretty accustomed to this in the downtown area because of the frequent breakdowns in the traffic lights controlling movement around the square. The problem there this summer has been understandable because of the construction of new sidewalks around the courthouse park. But the malady in recent weeks spread temporarily to the usually reliable lights at Seventh and Fir, which must be one of the busiest crossroads in the Perry traffic grid. It was a special problem there because travelers on U.S. 64 use that route to get across the city, and they are not accustomed to our quaint system. They must have been bewildered by the flashing red lights that confronted them there until those lights were fixed earlier this week.

The problem downtown is deciding which driver is going to make the first move. Sometimes it comes down to "I dare you!" glares from motorists on opposing sides, and a game of chicken seems imminent. I understand that on the West Coast this type of thing often results in the use of firearms.

Fortunately, cool heads have prevailed here so far. Most folks seem almost a bit amused by the "Stop Sign" barrels around the square, but even that refinement was lacking at Seventh and Fir. Crossing the intersection becomes more of a challenge when some poor soul wants to turn left and those coming from the opposite side do not choose to allow him/her do so. Pedestrians have their own problems while trying to dodge motorists in cross walks.

By my reckoning, we have seven traffic lights in this town -- four around the square and three on Fir avenue. Those on the square are currently out of commission. When all of our signals are working once again, I still think it would be a good idea to have left turn only lanes on Fir Avenue. That would solve one of the problems we have even when the system is up and running.

Of course, as a friend mentioned the other day, we don't have a traffic "rush hour" in Perry; it's more like a "rush minute." Even so, tempers get mighty frayed and there are a lot of potential fender benders on our streets this summer as we try to cope with this problem. Here's hoping someday we'll have a system that can be depended upon to do the job right.



August 12, 1997

As a graduate of what they now call "old Classen high school" in Oklahoma City, Laura regularly receives a copy of The New Classen Life. It's a quarterly magazine, quite possibly the best of its type put out by any high school alumni association anywhere. It usually has a four-color cover on slick paper, color and black and white photos inside, plus interesting articles about graduates of the revered old school, which now is devoted to students in advanced studies. The magazine staff consists of several retired print and electronic media people, and their professionalism is very apparent. I look forward to each issue. They're a joy to behold.

Here's a bit of anonymous doggerel borrowed, with permission, from a recent issue of the Classen magazine. Many of you personal computer users out there will appreciate this.

SPELLING CHECK SYNDROME

I have a spelling checker.

It came with my PC.

It plainly marks four my revue Mistakes I can knot sea.

I've run this poem threw it,

I'm sure your pleased to no,

It's letter perfect in its weigh;

My checker tolled me sew.

If you attended the lecture given here last year by Eddie Faye Gates at the Cherokee Strip Museum, you'll be interested in learning that her newest book, *They Came Searching*, is now at book stores around the state. In it she tells how blacks in

earlier generations sought the promised land in Tulsa. The price of the book is \$19.95. It's available from Eakin Press in Austin, Texas. Phone orders are accepted at 1-800-880-8642, and they take credit cards. Ms. Gates is the author of several books on African American Studies, and her lecture here was engrossing. Her home is in Tulsa.

It's time to start thinking about football at all its levels. I guess we'll have to agree that the Nebraska Cornhuskers had one of the country's best football teams last season, despite their two losses. Until the big game with Texas, they had beaten the best from the new Big 12 conference's north and south divisions. Their record eliminated them from the possibility of owning a third straight national championship. That's too bad. We all feel sorry for them.

I don't think there ever has been competition for "best fight song" in any collegiate conference, but the Cornhuskers would definitely NOT win that. Not my vote, anyway. Their song, There Is No Place Like Nebraska, is not exactly spine-tingling. It just doesn't stimulate much excitement, especially among non-graduates of the Lincoln school. I'd give the prize for the best song to OSU for Ride 'em Cowboys, especially when they play it with that extra zest and percussion that come after the 'Boys score a touchdown. They really need SOME kind of gridiron prize, anyway. OU's Boomer Sooner is not too bad, but it's also not very original. Yale of the Ivy League is just one of several others who use it as their song, singing Boola Boola in place of the OU lyrics.

I keep mentioning this but it's worth repeating. None of those schools has a fight song or a school song to compare with the Perry Maroons' Fight on for Perry and Dear Old Perry High. For one thing, they were written just for PHS. For another, they are soul-stirring when heard in the right environment. I'm sorry, OU and OSU, but that is just a fact of life. No matter. Bring on season of football, and hurry!



August 15, 1997

Ernie Stoops was a friend of mine and a co-worker for a good many years when both of us were employed at *The Perry Daily Journal*. More recently we have been across-the-street neighbors up here on the north side of town since about the time we retired, but the truth is we did not see much of each other except in the summertime when we happened to be in our yards at the same time. Still, I knew he was over there if I ever needed something he could provide, and I hope he sensed the same thing about me.

Ernie and I were about the same age. We both served in the Army during World War II, he in Europe and I in the Pacific. We both shared a love for newspapering; he partially grew up in the Hobart News and Democrat offices and I spent a lot of time as a mere youth trying to get the hang of things at *The Journal*. Ernie was mechanically inclined so he took naturally to intricacies of the newspaper's back shop, while I concentrated on what they used to call "the front end," or the news department.

Ernie came here a few years after World War II. He was hired by Milo Watson to work in *The Journal* print shop, primarily as the crap machine operator. That is a perfectly good term traditionally used to describe the person who runs the machine that produces the large type used in headlines and in advertising matter. Few shops have hot type machines any more so computers now spew out types of all sizes, and I doubt that there are many "crap machine operators" still active. It was never a term of derision. He was an artist when it came to selecting just the right size and type font to present the text in an appropriate way for ads that offered lingerie, or soap flakes, or headache remedies, or what have you.

His mechanical skill came in handy for coaxing type from one of those oversized and often balky Linotype machines. He became shop foreman at the PDJ and he was often the one Milo turned to for advice on getting another day's run from the ancient flatbed Goss press before the offset process was adopted in more recent years. Ernie learned that system too, and he was the Mr. Fixit for just about anything out of whack in *The Journal's* back shop.

Ernie was a master craftsman who always had to be busy, even in retirement, and his sense of humor was evident from the twinkle in his eye. That persisted even as serious health problems came along, limiting his favorite activities -- riding horseback, operating farm and yard equipment, tinkering with the vehicles, working on heating and cooling systems, and myriad other things. I'll remember him best, though, for the soft-spoken Christian witness he bore every day of his life, as long as I knew him. His faith was undiminished through adversity and times of deep depression, and I rejoice now in knowing that he is at rest and the bad times and the pain are all past for Ernie. We'll miss him in the neighborhood.



August 19, 1997

At some point, birthdays become a time for contemplative, sober reflection, as well as celebration. While munching on another slice of cake, we come to the realization that our time frame is changing, that we are not going to accomplish all the things we set out to do 'way back when. The bright golden hue on the horizon that beckoned us in childhood is no longer quite so far away. Seasons, entire years, pass so swiftly you hardly notice.

Little tasks that once seemed to require minimal effort become difficult, leaving us short of breath, red-faced and looking for a place to sit down and rest for a minute. The thermostat setting in both winter and summer becomes a matter of serious concern ("turn it up! ... turn it down! ") to a degree you never thought possible. Clothes hanging in the closet suddenly no longer fit and that may just be the first awareness that pounds are inexplicably adding up faster than they once did.

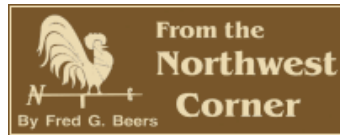
Listening to the dialogue on some of the popular TV sitcoms, where Generation X buddyships are predominant, is a clue to how unfamiliar we are with today's vernacular, and how much we miss the wit, style and taste of the old Mary Tyler Moore and Dr. Bob Newhart shows. Current popular music and the artists who assault us with it are mostly weird and incomprehensible, but that's been true since the advent of rock and roll. Big bands like the Dorseys, Glenn Miller, Harry James and Sammy Kaye, and composers like the Gershwins, Hoagy Carmichael, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and Jerome Kern (to name only a few of each) are fondly remembered and sorely missed.

Studying restaurant menus brings another gentle reminder that time is marching on, and that the old, carefree selection of things to eat has been drastically curtailed to avoid upsets in the upper and/or lower digestive tracts.

As the assemblage of family and friends harmonize on a happy rendition of the birthday song and the honored one prepares to blow out all those candles with a single breath, we are pleasantly reminded of just how much we need and treasure the love and friendship of these folks. Our connection with each of them becomes more valuable with each passing year because their strength supports us in a way that nothing else can.

Then, too, there is the spiritual vitality that most of us acquired in another time. That nourishes and refreshes us with the most meaningful of assurances, and that in and of itself more than tips the scales against all those dreadful negatives.

With that foundation to bear us up, the sun shines brightly once again. It is always a Happy Birthday!



August 22, 1997

Before there was radio, long before there was television, entertainment and cultural events were delivered to small towns like Perry by way of summer tent shows produced by Chautauqua, a system that flourished throughout the U.S. in the early decades of this century.

Perry was a regular stop for the touring groups. For one week in August, a large canvas tent would be erected to house an elevated stage for the performers and folding chairs for a receptive audience. Side flaps of the tent would be rolled up for cross-ventilation, and usually it was an agreeable evening for a large number of Perry area residents. Most often, the tent was located on a vacant lot at the rear of Foster's Corner Drug, where the Ruble-Vance automobile dealership now stands.

Traveling from town to town, Chautauqua brought live theater and an assortment of other platform performances to the crossroads of the country. It was like vaudeville, but without the taint of vulgarity associated with that particular type of stage show. Perhaps there would be an occasional bit of dialogue with double meaning, but for the most part it was all family oriented and as pure as the prevailing national morality allowed. A three-act play was generally the premier event of each Chautauqua, but typically there also was a lecturer providing a point of view regarding topics of current interest, plus an array of musical talent, both vocal and instrumental. It was a variety show mixture aimed at satisfying the presumed artistic hunger of rural America in a time when it was not easy to travel to urban centers where cultural matters could be routinely pursued.

The system began to fade when movies learned to talk and national radio networks began forming in the late 1920s. Improved highways and automobiles contributed to the mobility of rural Americans, and thus hastened the demise of Chautauqua. It virtually disappeared from view in the 1930s but strangely, in this final decade of the 20th century, Chautauqua lives again. Productions are booked around the country, including Oklahoma, as the system once again finds a niche.

What brings all this to mind today is the recently discovered copy of a printed program detailing the acts that highlighted a touring Chautauqua group that visited Perry one week in August 1922. The program is provided by Carol Steichen, whose shop, Antiques on the Square, is a treasure house of memorabilia.

Carol's Chautauqua program shows two performances were given each day, the first at 3 p.m. and the evening show at 8 p.m. Single admission prices were 75 cents for adults and 35 cents for children. A season ticket for all Chautauqua shows that season sold for \$2.50 per adult or \$1.25 per child. Here's a rundown on the performers who pleased Perry audiences that summer 75 years ago, as they were described in the program:

Leading off in the evening was the Lieurance Philharmonic Orchestra, composed of three violins, a viola, a cello and piano, with Thurlow Lieurance as conductor. Following in order were the six Royal Holland bell ringers, endorsed by the king and queen of The Netherlands; lecture by Yutaki Minakuchi of Japan, who had attended the Washington disarmament conference; then came the feature event, a play, "Polly of the Circus," which reportedly had run for a solid year at the Liberty Theatre in New York; the Artist Trio, composed of a violinist, pianist and Altinus Tullis, a soprano; lecturer Dr. Frank Church speaking on "How to Land on Both Feet;" and closing with the White and Black Minstrels, featuring a double male

quartet, the orchestra and minstrel finale. The afternoon show was tailored more for children but included virtually the same entertainers.

A program footnote shows the Chautauqua contract for 1922 was signed by Fred H. Merritt, J. H. Vandenberg, W. R. Fry, Sam Gottlieb, H. C. Jackson, Kaufman Creamery Co., Fred C. Seids, Burt E. Brown, A. J. Ringler, F. G. Moore, C. A. Worley, Fred Mugler, A. R. Johnson, E. E. Nelson and Ben Wacker. That group probably guaranteed the successful sale of tickets for the season and thus made it possible for Chautauqua to visit Perry.

A few days ago, Enid produced a "Chautauqua in the Park" event featuring workshops and theatrical performances that highlighted five historical characters who were influential in shaping today's society. I don't know if Enid's Chautauqua has any connection to the old system that saturated the country years ago, but it was obviously an attempt to recapture some of that time period. A few years ago, after World War II, Perry folks formed community-wide organizations to bring in a series of speakers on foreign affairs, and still later a local Community Concert group was created to import classical singers and small instrumental ensembles. The Perry Arts & Humanities Council used to bring in the Oklahoma City Symphony or the Tulsa Philharmonic for an evening of delightful classical music, plus assorted other class acts. All these fared well for a time, but eventually interest waned and they went the way of Chautauqua. Who knows -- perhaps at some point our interests again will lead the way to a revival of summertime Chautauqua in this little city.



August 26, 1997

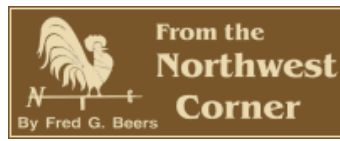
Work seems to be at a temporary standstill on the courthouse park sidewalk project on the west side of the square and that is causing some temporary inconvenience for folks who use that side to transact business or to gain access to the post office and Perry Carnegie Library. The library is closed until further notice and entry to the post office is limited.

The old, narrow sidewalks on the west side of the park were ripped out some time ago and new electric lines must be buried there before the new, wider ones can be installed. The library lawn is in total disarray, but the greater problem is the loss of the library with all its fine reference material, particularly with local schools just starting a new term. Public access computers at the library and the free video tape shelves are all denied users while we await the resumption of work by city crews and contractors.

Through all this, library staffers and board members can do nothing more than apologize to their patrons for the indefinite status of things. One major accomplishment during the hiatus has been completion of the bar coding of all books at the library, which means check outs and check ins will be handled much faster in the future, when the library reopens. In the meantime, just remember how nice the entire square will look after the work is finished. Like any construction project, this one is not going to be completed when we had hoped. Will it be ready by the mid-September Cherokee Strip celebration? Food vendors and others consigned to the west side of the square for that event certainly hope so.

On to another subject: My friend Shirley Morton believes there should be some sort of memorial to recognize Noble countyans who have given their lives in defense of this country. That would include any war or military engagement since Perry was founded back there on September 16th, 1893. An engraved plaque bearing their names would be a bare minimum, but perhaps there is sufficient sentiment in favor of this idea to make possible an even more ambitious marker.

The first floor rotunda of the courthouse could be used to display the memorial, or perhaps a shady spot on the courthouse lawn. What do you think?



August 29, 1997

The subject of cats came up in casual conversation the other day, and so, as a long-time lover of those regal, enigmatic feline creatures, I immediately found the dialogue more interesting. That's how it is if you are a captivated fancier of these paradoxical, enigmatic animals. The mere mention of their name sends a shiver of excitement along the spine and you lean forward in anticipation of sharing your experiences with them.

Our new pastor at the Presbyterian church, the Rev. Tim Boggess, has been on the job here only since Easter Sunday, but in that brief interval he has acquired a lovely Georgia girl, Heather, as his bride and they are settling into married life as young newlyweds in the church manse on Lakeview. The household also includes Tim's dog and cat. I hesitate to call them "pets," because that implies a degree of docile servitude which I have never observed, and which his animals apparently also do not possess.

Tim moved the pair here from his former home in rural Georgia. Such adjustments usually are traumatic for humans as well as the animals they care for, and so it has been in this case. Tim himself has not suffered unduly, if you don't count the long-haul trip in a rented van, and Heather is becoming more comfortable with her new surroundings day by day, but the experience is causing serious emotional problems for the animals. The dog was accustomed to the freedom of open fields at his former abode, and the fenced yard at the Perry manse seemed to be puzzling and downright inhibiting at first. He appears to be accepting it now. The four-year-old male cat simply has not adjusted well at all, however. It is losing weight and exhibiting a listless mien to the point where Tim is considering consultation with a veterinarian -- perhaps one trained in counseling or dealing with the psyche.

We have never made a long-distance move involving any of the dogs or cats who have lived with us through the years, but we made the short switch from North Ninth street to Park Lane several years ago, and it was a serious blow for Checkers, our cat of many years. She was used to having a protective fence around the back yard at the home we left, whereas the new location was open to every stray dog, not to mention armadillos, squirrels, rabbits and other unfamiliar creatures. Checkers was so stressed that for the rest of her life she rarely set paw off the patio attached to the back side of this house. She had been accustomed to ruling the Ninth street neighborhood undaunted by humans or other animals, knowing that her fence provided a safe haven against all of them.

After delivering her first litter of four kittens one Fourth of July morning, Checkers was spayed, and I think the transition was a relief to her. She nursed the little ones faithfully until they were weaned and we eventually found homes for most of them. She did not seem to regret their departure at all; they were becoming a threat to her domain. However, one, a female, stayed with us, and she soon presented a litter of grandkittens to Checkers, but the new Grandma absolutely refused to accept them. On her own, she moved to a neighbor's home until her daughter and those kittens were placed in the care of others, who incidentally were glad to receive them. Checkers then came home.

A popular magazine (*Reader's Digest*) carries an article this month which discusses the question, "Do Animals Fall In Love?" It is an interesting piece about signs of family life in the wild kingdom, but I would add this comment to the opinions and conclusions described in it. I think animals develop a tolerant attitude toward those humans who feed, house and groom

them, based on dependency. But for cats, at least, I think they only love themselves. Centuries of domesticity have failed to extinguish their haughty air of condescension and this leads them to view themselves as the masters, not the obedient pets we want, in whatever household accommodates them.

Still, in our case at least, it is impossible to ignore the soft cudliness of these unsmiling stoics. Even though most of ours have been unwilling to spend more than an occasional few moments on our laps, we still covet their silent company. They are adorable and irresistible in spite of themselves.