



August 4, 1998

I have to admit that I had lost track of Ethel Shaw until reading about her death last week in this newspaper. She has been in poor health and living away from here for the past several years and her friends here just simply lost touch with her.

Bert and Ethel Shaw were integral parts of this community for three decades or longer after the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Show folded during the early days of the Great Depression. They were musicians and entertainers, proud to be show people and always glad to share their talents. Ethel played piano and Bert played the trombone. But when hard times forced the Millers to end the 101 Ranch Show era, they came to Perry to make their home. Ethel was a beautician and Bert helped out around the shop wherever needed. In time they added sheet music, records and other related items and the beauty shop also became a music store.

Their shop that I remember was on the east side of the square, approximately midway between the Roxy and the Annex Movie Theatres. I passed by there many times on my regular trips to catch the new movies. Bert was always friendly, even with barefoot boys who hung out downtown during the summer vacation from school. Ethel was usually busy in one of her shop's cubicles, doing hair for one of the town's ladies.

At that same time, my folks had the City Drug Store on the north side of the square and I remember lunch hours when Bert and Ethel would stop by. Our store was the local headquarters for RCA Victor records and for some reason we also had a piano. When the Shaws were there, Ethel would sit down at the piano and knock out any tune that came to mind, or she would take requests. A community sing usually ensued. Those were some of the lighter moments of the Great Depression Era.

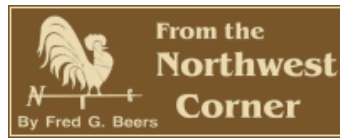
Bert also was interested in government. He served on the Perry City Council and later threw his hat in the ring for statewide offices. A race for lieutenant governor failed, but Bert was well aware of a sort of phenomena in state government: Three offices, state auditor, state treasurer and secretary of state, were on the ballot every four years. At that time the office holders could not succeed themselves, a constitutional provision, so they found a way to stay on the state payroll. One of the three gentlemen was A.S.J. Shaw. He had been in the rotation system through several elections, and, probably because of his name recognition, voters kept electing him to whichever office he sought.

Bert filed for state auditor one year, using his legal name of A.F. Shaw, and he won the job, possibly because some voters mistook him for A.S.J. Shaw. Bert was not an accountant, but he hired a friend, Marion Watson, as his principal deputy, and his term of office was successful. Marion was the retired assistant Perry postmaster and he understood accounting very well. Bert freely gave Marion credit for enabling him to have a good administration.

When the 101 Ranch Show folded, the Millers had a Russian bandmaster named Leopold Radgowsky, who spoke virtually no English. He was fearful of being deported to Russia, the land he had fled after the Bolshevik revolution. He was subject to execution there because he had been part of the Czar's household. Bert befriended him and introduced him to Perry families as a music instructor. They soon lined up enough clients to provide the "Professor," as Mr. Radgowsky was known ever after, to make a living. He soon became the Perry school's band and orchestra director and in the 1930s was named "Perry's Most Valuable Citizen."

Bert preceded Ethel in death some time ago. I suppose God must have needed another pianist for some angelic chorus, and so one day last week He called her home to handle that task. I'm sure she and Bert are deeply involved with music of

some kind, he on the trombone and she at the piano keyboard. They left us many happy memories.



August 7, 1998

Contributions for this column have been received from several sources lately, and today I'll acknowledge as many as space allows.

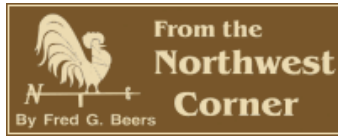
One of the most interesting is an article from a recent Sunday issue of The Edmond Sun, written by a free-lancer identified as P. Blake. An editor's note explains that Mr. Blake, his wife and daughter, live in Piedmont where he writes travel articles and has an art studio. I wish I could reprint all of his piece about Perry, but I'll try to do justice to it in summary. It was written after the family visited our little city recently while making their way home on U.S. 64. Several photos are included with the article.

As an artist, Mr. Baker is fascinated with murals so the map of Oklahoma on the Nicewander-Wolleson building on the north side of the square immediately caught his eye. He is concerned that the map needs restoration soon or it may become only a memory. He notes that the courthouse park is the centerpiece of our town square and that it is now surrounded by an historic business district of antique and gift shops and restaurants. He found it hard to believe that such a peaceful community could have been the home of "Hell's Half Acre" shortly after the 1893 run.

The Blake family also spent some time at the Cherokee Strip Museum on West Fir Avenue and enjoyed the indoor and the outdoor environments. "Behind the museum building is a beautiful picnic ground and nature trail," he wrote. "The trail winds through trees identified as Osage Orange, Eastern Redbud, White Mulberry and Chittamwood." The historic Rose Hill School is described, and Mr. Blake concludes with this comment: "I find myself wishing I could come here more often to turn over in my mind how this state and its people have been tried... and endured. It makes you proud to live here and be a part of Oklahoma's future, as it unfolds." Mr. Blake's kind remarks are appreciated, and we hope he will find an excuse to venture up this way again soon.

The most recent edition of Mistletoe Leaves, the monthly newsletter of the Oklahoma Historical Society, also calls attention to our museum and the part it played in the recent Rural Heritage Festival here. "Record crowds attended the Rural Heritage Festival on the grounds of the OHS's Cherokee Strip Museum in Perry...," the writer states. "Beautiful weather, hard work and partnerships with the Perry Chamber of Commerce and in Perry Main Street's Spring Fest contributed to the success of this year's festival." The article includes pictures of craftsmen, musicians, ropers and fourth grade students from Morrison performing a May pole dance.

The most recent edition of OMPA Outlet, the official newsletter of the Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority, contains a history of Perry's municipal water, light and ice company, along with a photo of the original plant constructed in 1895. It is an interesting article but too long to be reprinted here. I'll try to share some excerpts in columns that follow this.



August 11, 1998

They say a man never forgets his first kiss or his first car. I am a little hazy about the former but I sure do remember the first real automobile I ever owned. It was a dark blue two-seater Chevrolet coupe formerly owned by Ralph (Honk) Mossman, a local barber and juke box entrepreneur. I bought it in 1946 from the local Chevrolet dealership shortly after returning to Perry following the end of World War II. Cars had not been made in the U.S. for several years because of the massive defense effort and the new post-war models had not yet started trickling down to the smaller markets, like Perry. Mr. Mossman's car was clean, lean and ready to roll. It was available. I loved it.

The most distinctive feature about the interior was the gasoline heater beneath the dashboard. Heaters were still not standard equipment in automobiles, so having one was something to brag about. Normal forced-air auto heaters draw their warmth from the engines so the car has to be operating for a few minutes before you realize any benefit from them, but that's not true of gasoline heaters. They operate on a different principle. They become very hot in very short order. I understand they are no longer made. Not surprising.

One chilly Saturday night I escorted a local young lady to a marvelous double feature at the Perry Theatre on Sixth street. We emerged from the cinema to find that snow was falling and the temperature was hovering around the freezing level. "Never fear," I advised. "This heater works swell!" I proudly flipped it on after starting the engine. It was the first time I had tried to use it. All the air deflectors were aimed at my lady friend, as a courtesy to make sure she had the benefit of the first warmth produced by the heater. A sudden feminine shriek made me aware that something was seriously wrong. Yes, it was instantly H-O-T in the car and my date's lower legs were being barbecued. I had purposely set the thermostat at the highest level to produce rapid heating. The heater was responding by enveloping the compact interior of the coupe with suffocating, super-hot air. That's what gasoline heaters do. Those scorching waves were being produced unbelievably fast. Lowering the thermostat did not help. The only solution was to switch the heater off, which made us quickly aware of the cold weather outside. The rest of the evening was none too pleasant.

When I described the problem the next day to the dealer who sold me the car, he was surprised to learn that I didn't know about gasoline heaters. I think that was the last model that came so equipped. My next car, a brand-new 1949 dark blue Chevy with white sidewall tires, removable fender skirts and a built-in radio, had a standard heater. That was the first thing I asked about when I started looking for something to replace Mr. Mossman's car. At that stage of life, everything was a learning experience. Come to think of it, that's still pretty much the case.



August 14, 1998

Ruminating the other day about that gasoline heater in my first post-war car has opened the gates to the recollection of other memorable automobiles along the landscape of my life. There was the faithful family sedan, a bulky, black Buick with that old-fashioned, on-the-floor stick shift, the car that I remember from my earliest childhood in the late 1920s and on into the 1930s.

I had a paper route at the time, delivering the now-defunct *Oklahoma News* to 12 subscribers. Ten of them were on the square, but the other two were at residences far separated – one at the west end of Fir avenue, which then pretty much terminated at Fourteenth street as far as homes were concerned, and the other in the vicinity of Jay Dauman park, on the east side of town. Normally I could cover that route in short order on my trusty balloon-tired bicycle, but in cold weather Mother took pity on me. We had a young employee at the City Drug Store named Sylvester Holly, and Mother had him drive me to the east and west subscriber locations when weather conditions seemed appropriate.

Syl, as Mr. Holly preferred to be called, didn't mind the duty, but it was boring for him and he soon discovered that I was curious about the car's operation. He showed me the gear shift pattern, which incidentally was in the form of an H, just like today, but with the sequence of first, second, third and reverse gears in the opposite order of today's arrangement. He also showed me the gas pedal and let me try turning the steering wheel while the car was stopped. That was enough instruction, he decided. He told me to drive.

I, of course, was only too willing and eager to do so, though I had to sort of hunch up and peer over the dashboard to see where I was going. In fairly short order I learned about using the clutch without completely stripping the gears. I found a safe level for using the gasoline pedal, but also discovered how to use the two small levers on the steering column, near the horn button, to choke or accelerate the car. They constituted a sort of primitive cruise control.

Syl was an exceedingly handsome man. He had a muscular, athletic build, wore a dapper, pencil-thin mustache and when he flashed a dazzling smile that showed off his pearly white teeth, many female hearts went pitter-patter. Riding in the Buick was a prestige-builder for him, even with an almost invisible 10-year-old driver at the controls in the seat beside him. Syl waved at every available acquaintance and not a few strangers. He did not mind if I took the longest possible way to cover those last two stops on my paper route, so it was a mutually enjoyable experience for the two of us.

If Mother worried about the length of time it took us to deliver those last two papers, or questioned the frequency that I requested the car in lieu of my bicycle, she never let on about it. One day, however, someone remarked to her in a joking manner that it was a strange sight to see me driving the car around town, barely visible in the dark recesses of that monstrously big car. That pretty much brought the adventure to a close. Drivers licenses were unknown in Oklahoma at that time, but Mother thought I should at least be big enough to see over the steering wheel without a pillow to sit on if I was going to drive the family auto. That came a few years later, and then I had to relearn the gear shift pattern all over again.



August 18, 1998

Bud Hollingsworth came to Perry more than 30 years ago as a dapper young insurance salesman with the Donahue-Mugler Agency. His office was just a couple of doors up the street from *The Perry Daily Journal* where I toiled, and we soon became coffee-drinking friends. He joined Rotary and there again we made regular contact once a week. In a few years, he took a sales position with the Charles Machine Works, Inc., as a district representative, or "D-R" as they were usually known, and that required a great deal of traveling, so our association waned.

In the spring of 1969 I also became a happy member of the Ditch Witch staff, and by that time Bud had become advertising manager. My job involved working with Bud on a variety of projects so we were able to resume our friendship.

Early that fall he and I shared the front seat of a pickup truck loaded with equipment for a gigantic outdoor trade show in the Chicago area, and that really brought us close together. Driving all those miles to Illinois and back to Perry, I learned that he shared my passion for Big Band music. We spent many hours of travel time recalling the names of band leaders, vocalists, star sidemen, theme songs and other trivia related to the musical era we loved so much. Through the years he has given me dozens of classic LPs and cassette tapes which I have treasured and added to my own collection. Bass fishing was perhaps the only thing that meant so much to him as the Big Band sounds.

Bud taught me a lot of things, including the importance of being organized and being on time for appointments. That's not to say that either of us perfected the techniques, but I am familiar with some of the disasters that can be encountered by the failure to take care of certain details in an orderly way. We had a lot of discussions about that.

Bud retired from CMW a few years before I did and that made it possible for him to indulge in some of the fun things he enjoyed the most. Then no one was more surprised than I when he filed for the mayor's job. He often made remarks about what he wished the city government would do concerning certain projects, but I always thought that was just conversation. When he won the election the first time, I wished him well, never dreaming he would take to the post so readily. But he set about fixing some things and instilling pride and a family feeling into the people who serve the rest of us almost anonymously. I would venture to say he has been one of the best mayors this city has ever had.

Those who differed with Bud on specific issues nipped at him through the years, but Bud managed to keep his sense of humor and shrug them off while keeping his focus on finding solutions. He avoided getting into a shouting match with the opposition. The recent corn plant failure was a major disappointment and the water situation continues to baffle all of us, but Bud has been slugging away at those problems along with others you and I don't even know about. The stress was obvious, if unspoken.

His recent bout with major health problems just seemed to mushroom overnight. He had successfully battled some of them before and it appeared that he was fit for more jousting with the problems of Perry's city government. Somehow I feel Bud was long overdue for a respite from the cares that he once seemed to thrive on.

Bud's family was precious to him. He lost Marcy a few years ago and with her went much of life's sweetness. In due time he met Gwen and the two of them were able to fashion a refreshing new start, and the quest for fulfillment returned. Bud was proud of his son, the tough-as-nails Jay, a two time state wrestling champion, and his comely daughter, Becky, a former PHS wrestling queen. Grandchildren, of course, were an extra special bonus. He was a Bible scholar and faithful in church attendance.

Bud never did find the time to do as much bass fishing as he would have liked, there were still some Big Band CDs on his wish list, and the city has some pressing problems that he'd like to deal with, but he needed a change. Time has a way of slowing us down to a reasonable pace when necessary. We'll miss Bud Hollingsworth in this community, and our sympathy goes out to all of his family.



August 21, 1998

If you're an amateur photographer and even mildly interested in history, come downtown next Monday and Tuesday while Main Street program managers from all over the state of Oklahoma begin transforming some of our older business

buildings to something like their original architectural beauty. You'll find "before and after" photo opportunities galore as the teams peel off old veneers of plastic, aluminum and multiple layers of paint. In due time the fronts of those old buildings will be refurbished and, as much as possible, they will look the way they were intended when built in the early years of this century.

Barry Williamson, architect with the Oklahoma Main Street program, is almost ecstatic in his appraisal of the potential he finds in Perry buildings that surround the courthouse park. Many of them remain virtually untouched, or at least not disfigured, by well-intentioned "updates" through the years, but most of them do require some attention. We who live here are perhaps less aware that we are in the midst of such stylish, Victorian-era structures because we see them every day and we hardly realize they are there. Mr. Williamson, with his professional training and years of experience, sees them differently, and to him they are absolute gems. Other visitors, who are not equipped with his critical view, share his delight. Perry has a great untapped beauty ready to be stripped clean and offered up as a visual treat.

Perry has been a member of the Main Street program only a few years so we are fortunate to have been chosen as the site for this workshop. Main Street managers are required to attend these quarterly affairs. They will be arriving Sunday evening but on Monday morning they will receive instruction in various techniques of such things as removing "slip cover" facades, restoring brick and masonry fronts to their original look without chemicals or sandblasting, and patching where necessary. After that they will be divided into three teams for the beginning of "hands on" training. The visitors will don hard hats and work gloves and scramble up metal scaffolding to be erected at each of the three buildings.

On the north side of the square, the challenge will be the building owned by Butch and Sandy Ellis at 629 Delaware, with the Second Time Around consignment shop on the ground floor; on the west side, it's the C.O.D. building owned by Victor Green at 313 Seventh, home of C.O.D. Heating and Air Conditioning; and on the south side the location is the venerable old Shepard Building, owned by J.W. and Phyllis Shepard. L.J.R. Enterprises is on the ground floor. (Many of us still tend to think of this building as the former location of the Gottlieb brothers' Famous Department Store, with Henry S. Johnston's law office upstairs. If we do, it's just because part of our brains are stuck in time.) All three are two-story buildings.

Even if you're not a photographer, this workshop will be great fun to watch, so come on down and observe the restoration in progress. It won't cost you a nickel, but our town will be rich indeed because of the effort this will inspire to bring our Main Street buildings back to their original splendor.



August 25, 1998

Next time you're watching a CNN news show from Washington, keep an eye peeled for Perry's own Sarah Ruth, who has been promoted to the level of producer with that cable network organization. She's frequently at White House news briefings and other events of great significance, and on occasion you may spot her in the midst of newshounds such as Sam Donaldson, Helen Thomas, Wolf Blitzer and other familiar bylines. Her name appears on the credits of shows she produces for CNN. This is a heady time for a young news professional to be in the nation's capitol, where daily excitement is the norm. As you know, CNN is not part of the Time-Warner empire. Sarah is the daughter of Tom and Susan Ruth.

More recognition of the quality care provided by Perry Memorial Hospital was contained in a recent Sunday Oklahoman article that was headlined "Rural Hospitals Fighting to Stay Healthy." Val Schott, director of the state Office of Rural Health, was asked by the reporter if rural hospitals have a difficult time keeping up with technology. His answer: "Sure they do.

Technology is one of those added costs, also the cost of the people that operate the technology. It's my feeling that probably 85 to 90 percent of the health care we receive, we can certainly receive locally. But understand that we may choose not to do some things in rural communities. A good example is the Perry hospital. They don't do (major) surgeries, but they are a good rural hospital. They have concentrated on outpatient, primary care and diagnostic services." It's nice to be held up as a good example of something so desirable as quality medical care. That's why we have one of the nation's top 100 hospitals right here in this community.

One of my favorite magazines, *Oklahoma Today*, arrived in the mail the other day and as usual it is full of interesting reading material. One of the lead articles is about Perry native Marvin (Bud) Jirous and his role in making the Sonic Corp. one of the greatest fast-food success stories of recent decades. Bud was not the founder of Sonic but, in 1961, at the age of 20, he was involved with it almost at the beginning and in time he became president of the company. He also operates more than 50 Sonic franchises throughout the southeast, and he maintains a beautiful home in the rolling countryside east of Perry. I can't reprint the entire article from *Oklahoma Today*, but it will be worth your while to find a copy of the magazine and read all of it.



August 28, 1998

Our city made some new friends earlier this week during the hands-on workshop held here by the Oklahoma Main Street organization. Some 70 visitors representing various Main Street programs from throughout the state were here to learn how to strip away phony "modernistic" facades or paint jobs from the fronts of business buildings and to restore them to their originally intended beauty. It's like going back to the future, or *deja vu* all over again. What's old is hot right now, and our business district is taking the first steps to catch the wave.

Thanks to the congenial hospitality provided by dozens of Perry citizens, the visitors went away with a good impression of this community. Many of them also are in awe of what's going on here, with signs of vigor and excitement in evidence throughout the city. I heard many exclamations of good-natured envy as the visitors toured the courthouse park and surrounding business area Sunday evening. The wide new sidewalks and the period street lights quickly caught the eye of the visiting Main Street managers and board members, and they wanted to know how we managed to get it done.

The workshop was not a fun thing. Temperatures, ranging up to 108 degrees made working conditions almost unbearable and a few folks were treated for heat problems, but a professionally manned first aid station was provided for that purpose. Frequent breaks were ordered and all visitors were cautioned to drink as much water as possible and to avoid overdoing their work projects. The workshop attendees normally don't get down and dirty in their hometowns – they are, after all, managers – but they seemed not to mind the extreme temperatures and the manual labor they performed here because they realized they were learning the techniques of doing things that will improve their own business districts.

Dramatic changes already are evident in our community as a result of this workshop, and there will be more to follow. The upstairs portions of several buildings around the square are destined to be converted to residential space, and this will add more vitality and focus to the downtown area. More Perry property owners are looking at the Main Street program and making their plans to join in. The potential for development is limited only by our hesitancy to take the plunge. Main Street offers the means and the plans, plus substantial assistance, in getting such things done.

Those with questions should contact Betty Warner, Perry Main Street program manager, or Mark Dement, president of the local group's board of directors. They have the information on how to proceed and they will be glad to work with anyone. They also can direct inquirers to the capable staff of the Oklahoma Main Street program in Oklahoma City. Many of the state level people played a big part in the workshop.

In the meantime, Perry Main Street workers can reflect back on the workshop that just concluded here and feel proud of the job they performed. Their hard work and cordial reception of visitors will pay off in many ways for this community. If you haven't been downtown lately, you now have a great excuse to come see what's going on around the Perry square.

Remember, all the work thus far is merely a prelude. There is much more to be done. Volunteers, like all those generous Perryans who pitched in with their time and labor this week, are still very much needed. You're welcome to join the fun!