

***August 1, 2003***

Something of unusual significance occurred the other night at the Heritage Center when the Main Street of Perry organization handed out its awards at the annual announcement of prize winners for the past year. Strictly speaking, everything that night was significant in its own right, but I am choosing to focus on one subject—the effort to have our entire downtown placed on the national register of historic places.

We have earned that right. Perry is one of the few Cherokee Strip county seats that have always celebrated the opening of this land to settlement on September 16, 1893. In many ways, we have demonstrated a serious interest in the heritage we claim as descendants of those brave souls who "made the run," then endured countless hardships in the process of turning this beautiful land into productive acreages.

Right now Main Street people are in the midst of a renaissance effort to bring back some of the old excitement and energy to our downtown, which truly, is a large historic depository of infinite value. We were told at the Main Street meeting that formal presentation for the "historic" designation has been made at the state level, where it was enthusiastically received, and our bid now goes to a higher group for confirmation at the national level. Our local authorities have been given reason to believe that we should clear that hurdle successfully, perhaps in time for announcement at the Cherokee Strip celebration in September.

The local entry was prepared by many hands, but one who surely deserves a large measure of credit is Marsha Williams. She has been designated "volunteer of the year" in the local Main Street program. A lot of her time and energy were channeled into the project with equal vigor. Marsha will be the first to tell you that others had a hand in that project, but she's the one who rode herd on it and in the end drew all the fragments of it together.

It's always dangerous in assigning credit for things like this, and, yes, many others did provide help and input. Marilee Macias, for one, initiated a similar effort a few years back but the regulations imbedded in the process proved unpopular and the project was set aside for a while. In more recent years, Clyde Speer, son of long-time Noble county residents, revived the effort as president of Main Street but had to turn the job over to others after a harmonious launch. I know other names could be included here, but it is difficult to determine who all of them are and it is inevitable that some will be left out. Anyone who contributed to this effort in any way should get a pat on the back from the rest of us.

The historic designation will open many doors of opportunity. We can invite tour groups to make Perry a stop any time they are in this vicinity. That means we need to get to work now—cleaning up the eyesores, clearing away the unsightly abandoned buildings that plague us, and just generally sprucing things up all over the town, not just in the business district. Thanks to those who have brought us this close. Now, the rest of us can roll up our sleeves and take it to the next stage.



***August 5, 2003***

Today we continue the interesting story of telephone service in the era just after the opening of the Cherokee Outlet to settlers in 1893. The telephone was an important instrument then, as now, in the growth and development of this, part of Oklahoma. The syntax may seem a little rambling, but conversational styles were different then. What follows is from the Perry Daily Journal's coverage of a dinner in the local Presbyterian Church on December 9, 1926, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the existence of the Bell Telephone Company, parent of Southwestern Bell. This picks up the story of the dinner following that introductory portion in a previous Northwest Corner. Now, to continue that account, here are some of the things touched on by the newspaper's reporter:

"It (the dinner) was probably one of the few times, if not the only time, that these old settlers have gathered together in one group and discussed the early history of Perry and particularly the early history of the telephone. It was strictly an old settlers party in one sense of the word for the youngsters were not there. And as the various speakers, those who had been instrumental in first organizing the telephone company here, told the early experiences of their organization and the history of their trials and cares, it recalled to those familiar with these circumstances and brought forth much laughter."

"E.E. Westervelt, vice president of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, apparently had less to embarrass him or evidently told the truth in a larger measure than any of the speakers of the evening for he disclosed all the secrets that he possibly could and gave the most complete account of the formation of the early telephone company here. John M. Noble was really the founder of the Arkansas Valley Telephone Co. in Perry for it was his genius and his business forethought which caused the construction of the first telephone line in this section of the state, from Perry to Pawnee.

"This was crudely built, the line being fastened to trees along the way, but it was finally completed. On the day of its completion it had been agreed by Noble and his young assistant at the Howendobler Drug Store in Perry that if the phone did not work, then each would start walking, from Perry and the other to Morrison, and they would meet half-way and in this manner locate the trouble.

"Noble walked the entire distance back to Morrison, rang the phone very vigorously and sure enough the phone worked. The young man answered the phone and could hear Mr. Noble's voice very clearly but Mr. Noble could not hear his. Following their agreement, Noble started walking the half-way distance but was surprised to learn that his companion did not meet him so he walked the remainder of the distance into Perry.

"But the line did work and in this manner took a step forward for before this time it had required two days to make the trip from Perry to Pawnee, later by the use of the two Broncho teams, the trip could be made in one day. But the phone line made it possible to carry on a conversation between Perry and Pawnee and did away with many long trips. Well, so the story goes, the community was so well impressed with the idea of the line between Perry and Pawnee that the first talk of an exchange for Perry started and two factions started after a franchise but both were refused by the city council, which took little stock in their talking apparatuses."

More of this story will follow in a day or two.



## ***August 8, 2003***

What was the principal news of the day on August 8, 1945, in our little town of Perry, Oklahoma? The chief topic was the same all over the world: Soviet Russia declared war on Japan, belatedly joining the U.S., Britain and other Western Allies in

a mighty effort to topple the Axis powers, Japan, Germany and their satellites, as World War II neared a final climax. Everyone knew, among those old enough to care, that Russia's declaration meant the war in the Pacific, already shortened by the atomic bomb, would be ended even sooner.

The news overshadowed other developments in the war effort. Allied troops and civilians kept their eyes on the final goal—unconditional surrender of Japan. Germany and Italy had already hoisted the white flag of surrender. Most folks hereabouts were weary but leery of the news. Could it be? Was the war really winding down? Indeed it was. The Perry Daily Journal on that date devoted almost all of page one to the Russian declaration, and there were other tidbits of neighborhood news in that day's paper. Let's spend, a few minutes thinking about that day and reminiscing through some of the articles in that day's Perry newspaper. Here are some of them.

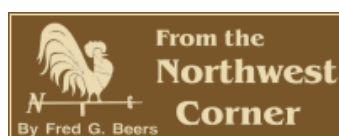
*The Journal* used a front page box item to state that it had no connection with the terrapin derby being promoted by the Chamber of Commerce. The brief story stated: "Parents are requested to advise children selling terrapins to the Chamber of Commerce not to call at The Journal office for the money." Elsewhere on page one was a United Press story about the U.S. Army still planning to land on the shores of Japan—either with occupational troops or with full-scale invasion forces, depending on what the atomic bomb did to the Japanese will to go on fighting. Japan threw in the towel after a few more days, so the war ended and there was no need for a potentially costly invasion.

Monroe-Lang Hardware, Furniture & Appliances had a large ad on the back page featuring "a big shipment of tools!" It was another indication that wartime shortages were ending. A 10-inch rigid wrench was on sale for \$1.75, metal tool boxes were \$2.65, and gasoline camp stoves were \$9.95.

Art Milliron, wholesale dealer for Phillips 66 products, promoted the sale of U.S. War Bonds and Stamps along with Phillips products. Conoco also had a large ad signed by Dale B. Ream, wholesale agent; and these Conoco service stations—Beckham & Cockrum, Bush-Terry Implement and LaFon's Garage in Orlando. Harold Scovill of C&S Tire & Supply announced the store had "all makes of tires—some retreads—for tractors." New tires were very scarce because of the war effort. Brownie Drug Co. had Dr. Hess Poultry Pan-A-Min to induce hens to lay 23 more eggs per bird.

Bob Cutsinger, husky Perry Maroon gridman of last season, was to leave for Wichita Falls, Texas, to take part in the Oil Bowl football classic between all-star teams representing Texas and Oklahoma. Cutsinger also was to play with the North team in the state prep school grid classic in Oklahoma City. North coaches said Cutsinger probably would do most of the passing in the North's aerial attack. Elsewhere, Ralph Foster Jr., former PHS athlete and a lineman for the Oklahoma A&M Cowboy eleven, was one of two Aggies among a group of players who would join the College All-Stars for their pre-season game with the Green Bay Packers.

Those were just a few of the conversational topics in Perry on August 8, 1945, as World War II began its final hours. Thanks to Doris Warren and her family for providing me with that day's copy of this newspaper.



## ***August 12, 2003***

Continuing with the story of the telephone in early day Perry, as reflected by *The Perry Daily Journal's* coverage of a Bell Telephone Company dinner in Perry on December 9, 1926. Here's some more of that story:

(John M. Noble, founder of Arkansas Valley Telephone Co. was the speaker at this point. Here's what The Journal had to say.) "Finally, Noble, who headed one group that applied for a charter here, took Westervelt, who headed a (competitive) group, into his business after Westervelt had bought out his friends for \$25 to \$35. Into this group came two other men, Bird McGuire and Ed Nimms, and the company was formed and Harry Shortman, who was in attendance (at the dinner), helped grant this franchise (to Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.)

"The first exchange was constructed in the Howendobler Drug Store (on the south side of the square) and there were something like 100 subscribers in the city who had signed contracts for service at \$200 a month for business phones and \$150 for residence phones. It took something over \$500 apiece for each of the men interested to finance the company but it continued to grow from this time forward, later occupying the upper floor of what is now (in 1926) the Kirchner building (south side of square, now owned by Glen and Jill Zimmer). Some time afterwards the office occupied space over the building now (1926) occupied by the Townsend store, and in 1904 it was moved to its present location (presumably to the old Davis Furniture store, where the First Bank & Trust Co. is presently located).

"The first directory of the telephone company here was a mimeographed copy of names and Westervelt owns one of these lists and read the subscribers' names Thursday night. Arthur Wharton, the son of Lon Wharton, publisher of the first newspaper in Perry and the real founder of the present Perry Journal, became interested in the business after its organization and although he was only the bookkeeper he stated he spent much time over the books in the back office at night while the executive board was fighting over some serious matters relative to the phone business in their front office.

"Judge Sam Harris, present head of the legal department (in 1926) of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, became interested in the early phone company here by supplying the very badly needed \$5 at a critical moment when the company's success depended on it. He marveled in his talk Thursday night (December 9, 1926) at the progress of Perry and of many changes here but declared that Perry would always be home to him."

More details on the establishment of the first phone company in Perry will follow.



## ***August 15, 2003***

The story of the beginning of telephone service in the city of Perry was pretty well covered in a *Perry Daily Journal* news article following a dinner here the night of December 9, 1926, which celebrated the 50th anniversary of Alexander Graham Bell's new invention—the telephone. We have already quoted portions of that story, but there's more to tell, and some of it follows. The following is from *The Journal's* news story after that dinner. This is in addition to the account that has already appeared in this column:

"Judge Harris, who claims considerable credit for the training of Henry S. Johnston, governor-elect, in his legal profession, also made it clear Thursday night in his humorous way that he started Johnston on his road to fame when he helped carry a dry goods box' from which Johnston made his first political speech many years ago. Gov.-elect Johnston, although a comparatively young man when the phone made its appearance, recalled many facts regarding the founder of this system and disclosed these facts very freely at the banquet.

"Gov.-elect Johnston also gave a review of the progress of the phone since it had started with the signals used by savage tribes ages ago. Mrs. Henry S. Johnston, in her address, spoke of the Alexander Graham Bell home known as the Bell home

in West Moreland county, W. Va. This home was built, by the inventor of the phone as a summer home for the children of Washington and here frequently Bell sought rest from the worries and cares. It was also Mrs. Johnston's great privilege to know the wife of Alexander Graham Bell.

"John A. Rowley, district manager of Ponca City, was in charge of the banquet Thursday night and introduced the various speakers. Mrs. M.M. Thomas, wife of one of the attorneys in Oklahoma City, opened the evening's entertainment with two vocal solos. She was accompanied by Arthur Johnston on the piano. Mrs. Orville Savage, former manager of the local station (exchange), also sang vocal solos. She was accompanied by Miss Irene Drake of Ponca City. Arthur Johnston of Perry played a piano solo.

"Telephone employees and out of town guests present for the banquet were John M. Noble, vice president, Oklahoma City; E.E. Westervelt, vice president, Oklahoma City; Arthur Wharton, assistant general manager, St. Louis; and R.J. Benza (title and home city not shown in my copy)."

One more bit of information gleaned from *The Journal*. This is from an article in a 1912 issue: "The great Pioneer Telephone and Telegraph Co. was born in Perry 18 years ago (that would make the year 1894), beginning with a single line to Pawnee. While headquarters have since been moved to Oklahoma City, Perry has a modern Central Energy system with 400 local and 300 rural subscribers. Connections with independent lines furnish free service for rural subscribers all over Noble and adjoining counties."

More bits and pieces of early day Perry telephone information will continue in a few days.



## ***August 19, 2003***

When I hear or read about pioneer country doctors, I always mentally picture the one that most of us here in Noble County knew and adored. That would be Dr. Daniel Frederick Coldiron, whose practice encompassed this area long before the advent of modern hospitals like Perry Memorial. He was unique, one of a kind, and his method of serving is rarely found today. If you remember the saintly "Dr. Christian" of radio and movie fame a few decades ago, you can summon up the countenance of Dr. Coldiron. Dr. Christian was portrayed by actor Jean Hersholt, who faintly resembled Dr. Coldiron. Their ethics were pretty much alike.

It seems everyone has a Dr. Coldiron story. Here's mine: My mother was expecting me to be born on a steamy August night several years ago, and Dr. Coldiron was our family physician. The night I arrived, earlier than the official forecast, Mother told Dad she was going into labor and asked him to call Dr. Coldiron. Most attended births were in the mothers' homes in those days. According to Mom's tale, I beat the doctor's arrival by several minutes and it seems I wound, up in something they called a "slop jar." When Dr. Coldiron walked in he quickly took charge of the situation, got me cleaned up and everything else squared away, then returned to his home on Fir Avenue to catch a few winks before beginning his daily routine of house calls. Despite the tumult of excitement at our house, he was his normal unperturbed self. Infant births were nothing new to him.

Throughout his career, he delivered an estimated 4,000 babies, mostly in the homes of mothers. In 1956 he was honored by Noble County farm women with a county-wide celebration at the Perry fairgrounds on the occasion of his 80th birthday. They gave him a new television set, a novelty at the time, and the livestock building at the fairgrounds was

packed with hundreds of well-wishers. He also was a guest on an Oklahoma City TV station, hosted by Danny Williams, as a further tribute to his health care through the years.

As noted, he was one of the last family physicians who made regular house calls. With the assistance of the Perry Rotary Club, which was proud to have him as a charter member, he organized annual pre-school immunization clinics for youngsters just entering the first grade. In the 1930's the state took over a similar service. He cared for patients in the Billings, Marland and Red Rock areas before moving his practice to Perry in 1918.

Dr. Coldiron died in 1961 at the age of 85. His office that I remember was a suite of rooms on the second floor of the Masonic building (now owned by Victor Green). Also in that building were several attorneys, another physician, a dentist, the Chamber of Commerce office and assorted others. I can still hear Dr. Coldiron shuffling around his office, whistling or humming a tune known only to him, just taking care of business. He is remembered with great affection by many men and women in this county who were ushered into the world by Dr. Coldiron, although some of us arrived at our homes before he did.

Descendants still live in this community and all of them are well regarded. Their work ethic and cheerful nature remind us each day that we should share ourselves freely with one another. One of Dr. Coldiron's biggest helpers was his wife, Daisy Lemon Coldiron. She also has passed away, but her lifetime of achievements as a published poet, philosopher, doctor's wife and devoted mother earned her recognition and they also merit praise. One of these days we'll discuss those in a little more detail.



## ***August 22, 2003***

My friends down at *The Journal* office experienced some real discomfort earlier this month when the air conditioners in their building failed to work during the most intense heat of the summer. I felt sorry for them, and I understood how they must have suffered. To help remedy the situation, the present employer permitted them to leave the work place earlier than usual. But, just like in show biz, the paper had to be written and printed each day, and the usual *Journal* was produced without missing an issue.

That little problem took me back in time several years ago when I still labored at the *PDJ*. That period began in 1941 when only a few businesses made any pretense at air conditioning. The Roxy and the Annex Theatres were perhaps the first locally to install evaporative coolers, guaranteeing customers that it was "20 degrees cooler" inside. We thought that was marvelous. Eventually, other merchants took the plunge. I believe the Famous Department Store, operated by the Gottlieb families on the south side of the square, where LJR Enterprises is now located, was about the first to install an air conditioning system in a non-theatre setting. Kraemer's Store on the east side, operated by Ott and Marguerite Edson, also was among the first to install an air conditioning cooling system.

Most of us enjoyed those evaporative coolers except when the humidity was high. Then they just added to our misery. Refrigerated room air conditioners came along at a reasonable price, and they were much better at cooling shoppers. In just a few years most homes and businesses had them in operation. At the *PDJ*, we were divided into two elements—the "back shop" where the printers labored and the "front end" where the rest of us were toasted in the Oklahoma heat. The

building was quite large, and the Linotype typesetting machines in the print shop used heat-generating pots of molten lead, so it was assumed that we would just tough it out and pray for an early, cooler autumn.

Trying to make things better, in the meanwhile, management installed ceiling fans in the front end and pedestal-mounted fans in the print shop. Theoretically, that should have helped, but in reality all those fans did was stir up the hot air. My desk in the front end was a good example of another problem. I had scraps of paper and note pads spread all over the surface. Without fail, someone would pull the cord on a ceiling fan and the breeze thus created quickly cleaned off the desk. Folks in the ad room and the business office had the same problem. By the way, I believe those ceiling fans were purchased from the defunct City Drug Store, which our family operated on the north side of the square for many years with no air conditioning of any type.

About that time, the late Olin Randall disposed of some big evaporative coolers at his Ford dealership one block north of the square, where the O'Reilly Auto Parts store is now located. The PDJ snapped them up and eventually installed them on the south end of the newspaper building. It was hard to appreciate the difference they made because so many places already had refrigerated air types, and we were spoiled. I do believe, however, that we probably appreciated whatever temporary relief they provided. We soon noticed that the moisture from those evaporative coolers was causing rust on some of the newspaper's machinery, including the big Goss flatbed press which printed the daily paper, and they were soon turned off. Eventually we also had refrigerated air systems and began feeling human again. So, to the present-day work crews at the *PDJ*, I would say, hang tough! Things will get better. They always have.



## ***August 26, 2003***

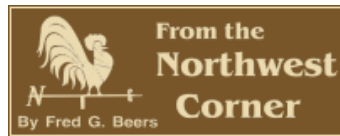
In just a few days, we'll be hearing sounds of football at Perry Stadium's Daniels Field. Shoulder pads will be popping as the wearers block or tackle the foe, the Maroon band will be playing and marching on and off the field, cheerleaders will urge the crowd to make more noise, coaches will shout instructions and other comments to their players, and once again the Fighting Maroons will be attempting to cover themselves with gridiron glory. Can you bear the wait? We're not talking NFL or Big 12 football here. This is all about the real game as it is played by youngsters still learning rudiments of the sport. Bring on the opposition! Our guys are tough enough to win 'em all!

But first, here's something to think about even before the season officially starts. I'm talking about the parking lot situation at our football field. Lions club members are performing a badly needed service by directing traffic on the west side of the stadium, and don't we need it? All of us, including the Rotarians, appreciate what the Lions are doing on game nights. The lot appears to be large enough to handle even a capacity crowd but if you've ever been trapped in a traffic jam out there after a game, you'll understand this message. Here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

Don't be in a hurry. Give the other driver the benefit of the doubt if you don't know who can make the first move. Don't honk your horn at those poor pedestrians. (They have enough to worry about, just dodging the cowboys and the kamikaze drivers.) Avoid the temptation to crash your old pickup truck into the side of someone's slick new SUV. Wait for your turn to move. Don't make your vehicle jump forward when a few inches of space appear to be available. Relax. Turn on the radio and listen to the color commentary and statistics from our game or someone else's. There's plenty of time to get home. Also, be considerate of our visitors, who may not be familiar with the way we do things. Before you head downtown for a

ceremonial trip around the square, help the out of towners if you see anyone who seems puzzled by our traffic grids. Be as nice to them as you would like to be treated in, say, Cushing.

But, you've heard all this before. This is intended to be a gentle reminder before actual warfare takes place at our good old WPA stadium, including the parking lot. Be a real fan and be courteous to those uncouth roughnecks who have the audacity to demand your help and cooperation. Remember, on most Friday nights when you see them driving lost and aimlessly in search of a highway exit, they will have been badly beaten by our guys on the football field. You can afford to be nice to them. Even if by some weird twist of fate they actually win a game, hold your head up and smile. We can all afford to be neighborly. What time is the kickoff?



## **August 29, 2003**

Thanks to a couple of newspaper clippings furnished by friends, I have some things of interest to share with you. First, there's an obituary in a Colorado Springs newspaper concerning the death last month of Peggy Pratt Wheeler, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Pratt. She passed away recently at the age of 89. Perhaps the name doesn't ring a bell at first, but I'm sure that many of you remember her dad quite well. He was on the faculty at Perry high school for many years before his retirement in the 1960s. Among other things, he had been a sponsor of *The Perryscope*, the PHS school newspaper that was printed periodically as part of *The Perry Daily Journal*. The paper was edited, written and designed by students at the high school, but Mr. Pratt furnished adult guidance and encouragement. Perhaps that is why Peggy became interested in journalism as a career. She earned a degree at Oklahoma State University in 1924. Among other things, she was a reporter for the *PDJ* at one time. One of the highlights of that period was a feature story that followed her interview with a man who claimed to be Jesse James. The newspaper obituary shows none of Peggy's brothers or sisters as survivors. She was the eldest of the children. Her parents preceded her in death. The Pratts were interesting people and they made an impression on all who were fortunate enough to know them. This clipping came from Perry's new first lady, Jean Emde.

Another bit of information comes from a recent edition of the Stillwater newspaper, signed by Mike Cronin, who is not further identified except to state that he is a Stillwater resident. The headline reads: "OSU headed to The Big Easy." Mr. Cronin goes on to explain that he has figured out that the Cowboys are going undefeated this season, and that they will win the Big 12 championship, then the Sugar Bowl game at New Orleans (that's The Big Easy, of course) and will wind up winning the collegiate national championship. Oh yes, the Sugar Bowl opponent for that title will be Miami University, coached by the former OSU assistant, Larry Coker (no relation to our onetime school superintendent, John Coker).

Mr. Cronin makes the piece even more interesting by predicting the outcome and the score of each game during the season. The OU game? He sees the Cowboys winning that one for the third straight year by posting a score of 21-17. Can you guess who showed me this clipping? None other than Mr. OSU, Glenn Yahn, and my thanks to him.

Some of you have been interested in the recent series of columns dealing with the early days of the Perry telephone system. Yes, there is more to come, but there will continue to be a few interruptions in the series as other topics come along. Keep watching, and thanks for asking.