



***December 1, 2000***

At a meeting I attended the other morning, a question came up: "Whatever happened to the brave men who signed the Declaration of Independence?" One of those men, John Hart, was an ancestor of Mrs. Dave Woods of. Perry. He was her great-great-great-great- great-great-great-great-grandfather. The question sent me to a pile of information on my desk where I remembered once seeing something that shed a bit of light on the subject. Here's a rundown on those early Americans who helped bring forth this nation.

Of the 56 men who signed the Declaration, five were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army, another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War. They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they? Thirty-four were ministers, jurists and attorneys. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well-educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags. Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hull, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge and Middleton. At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife and she died within a few months. John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken spiritual men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty and freedom more. Standing tall, straight and unwavering, they pledged: "For the support of this Declaration, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

A couple of morals can be seen in this: Freedom is never free, and patriotism is not a sin. Pass it on.



## December 5, 2000

A while back (it seems like only yesterday) I began revealing my own list of Noble county's "Top Ten" people, in terms of their celebrity status or accomplishments in some fields of endeavor. Of course, there are far too many to be confined to a list of ten, so my Top Ten selections run into multiples of that number, and, what's more, not all of the honorees actually lived in Noble county. It is, after all, my list. All of them are, or have been, closely connected to Noble county, however. The main objective right now is simply to make my choices known before we have another brand new millennium staring us in the face.

It's been a while since the last group was announced, so to refresh your memory here are the 23 named thus far: Mary Jane Barnes, Paul W. Cress, Jack VanBebber, Danny Hodge, Bill Pricer, Bill Krisher, Dr. R.R. Robinson, David Lilienthal, Dr. Joseph Brandt, Gen. William E. Jones, Clara Bowles Pellow, Patti Page, Buster Keaton, Lysbeth Seids Hughes, Henry S. Johnston, Ethel L. Johnston, Sen. Henry Bellmon, Shirley Bellmon, Dave Matthews, Gen. Lavern Weber, Edwin G. and E.L. (Bert) Corr and Sharron Miller. If you have to ask who any of them are, you haven't been following this spasmodic series of columns. But, onward and upward we go. Here comes the next batch of qualifiers.

**Ashley Alexander, Beverly Alexander and son Richie Alexander.** This talented family has touched many people for years with their wonderful music ministry. Before that the Alexanders took talented OSU students to faraway places around the world to perform for American servicemen and others. **Ed and Mary Malzahn.** No one deserves more than this couple to be included on Noble county's Top Ten List. Besides developing the unique Ditch Witch line of underground equipment, Ed and Mary have been the benefactors of everything good about this community. They are truly citizens of the world when their area of influence is considered and Noble county is truly blessed to have them as friends and neighbors.

**Ed Kelley** grew up in Perry and became managing editor of the state's largest newspaper. His skills and talent are well regarded in professional circles where they can be objectively evaluated. **Perry Carlile** rode herd on an annual Shetland pony sale that attracted thousands of visitors to his ranch southwest of Perry after World War II. The little animals sold for big bucks for several years, until the market sagged. **Wayne Mackey** was a product of the Billings community. He was a columnist and feature writer for the Daily Oklahoman for several years and later was a member of Henry Bellmon's team in the first campaign for governor. **Francis Thetford** was a West Point cadet before becoming managing editor of this paper just prior to WWII. I had the privilege of working under him when my journey in the Fourth Estate began in 1941. Francis became a columnist for the Oklahoma City newspaper before cancer claimed him too soon.

That makes 32 names on my Top Ten list and there are more to come. Stay tuned.



## December 8, 2000

What a glorious time of year we are now experiencing. The brisk autumn air puts a new zip in each step, foliage remains colorful and beautiful on Bradford pears, maples and other ornamentals, and the thrill of Advent permeates it all. Choirs sing, ministers proclaim anew the birth of Christ and our hearts fairly burst with joy and anticipation. Families prepare for holiday reunions and youngsters count the days, the hours, the minutes until Christmas Eve. Nothing quite equals the joy all this brings to a sometimes-troubled world.

Each Christmas also recalls a charming little story told years ago by Uncle Irving, my father's brother, whose son (Frederick William Beers) lived at our house during the 1930s and thus became more big brother than cousin. Uncle Irving and his wife, Aunt Mollie, lived in Kansas City, Missouri, but they kept in touch with their son and his sister, Dorothy, who lived in Arizona, through letters. Uncle Irving was a stern looking but gentle man, very dignified and formal and his writing style reflected that. He looked something like Judge Hardy, Andy's dad in the old movie series. It saddens me that Uncle Irving and his family have all passed away, but I have saved a copy of one of the letters he sent to his son, describing life in the latter part of the 19th century when Irving and my Dad were young men living with their parents on a farm near East Gilead, Michigan. That's where this bit of Americana originated, and I share it with you now. Here is Uncle Irving's account:

"As a boy I attended the Island school, about one mile and a half from home, having to walk in the winter over roads often covered with snow and ice from a foot to four or more deep in places. During the spring and summer seasons there was not a great deal of time for entertainment – but most of the outdoor sports and parties were during the winter months.

"Of course, there was ice skating and coasting and there was a real delight in skating on the lake over glaring ice, and pushing the 'only' girl seated on a block of ice over which was spread a woolen blanket. Some nights there were the singing schools, spelling schools, debating societies, and church entertainments, all of which were held in the schoolhouses or in the big tavern.

"In the big tavern we had such games as miller boy, needle's eye, in and out the window, Ruth and Jacob, and sometimes even post office, but that was taboo in polite society.

"I am sure the young people of today get no more real enjoyment out of commercialized entertainment than the young of that day from the games and entertainment of their own production."

That was written by Uncle Irving some 60 years ago and that is how he summed up the Currier and Ives picture that he described. His letter went on with details that could also have inspired several Norman Rockwell covers for the Saturday Evening Post. Reading again his recollections of a kinder, gentler age in another century makes me yearn for just a bit of that for my family and for all of us today. Happy holidays to all!



## ***December 12, 2000***

The following contribution from a reader arrived too late for use prior to Thanksgiving, the holiday it relates to, but I thought you'd enjoy it just as much prior to Christmas. As a premise, this is supposed to be a letter from a Thanksgiving hostess to her guests. Here 'tis:

Martha Stewart will not be dining with us this Thanksgiving. I'm telling you in advance, so don't act surprised. Since Ms. Stewart won't be coming, I've made a few small changes: Our sidewalk will not be lined with homemade paper bag luminaries. After a trial run, it was decided that no matter how cleverly done, rows of flaming lunch sacks do not have the desired welcoming effect.

The dining table will not be covered with expensive linens, fancy china or crystal goblets. If possible, we will use dishes that match and everyone will get a fork. Since this IS Thanksgiving, we will refrain from using the plastic Peter Rabbit plate

and the Santa napkins from last Christmas.

Our centerpiece will not be the tower of fresh fruit and flowers that I promised. Instead we will be displaying a hedgehog-like decorations handcrafted from the finest construction paper. The artist assures me it is a turkey.

We will be dining fashionably late. The children will entertain you while you wait. I'm sure they will be happy to share every choice comment I have made regarding Thanksgiving, pilgrims and the turkey hotline. Please remember that most of these comments were made at 5:00 a.m. upon discovering that the turkey was still hard enough to cut diamonds. As accompaniment to the children's recital, I will play a recording of tribal drumming. If the children should mention that I don't own a recording of tribal drumming, or that tribal drumming sounds suspiciously like a frozen turkey in a clothes dryer, ignore them. They are lying.

We toyed with the idea of ringing a dainty silver bell to announce the start of our feast. In the end, we chose to keep our traditional method. We've also decided against a formal seating arrangement. When the smoke alarm sounds, please gather around the table and sit anywhere you like. In the spirit of harmony, we will ask the children to sit at a separate table. In a separate room. Next door.

Now I know you have all seen pictures of one person carving a turkey in front of a crowd of appreciative onlookers. This will not be happening at our dinner. For safety reasons, the turkey will be carved in a private ceremony. I stress "private" meaning: Do not, under any circumstances, enter the kitchen to laugh at me. Do not send small, unsuspecting children to check on my progress. I have an electric knife. The turkey is unarmed. It stands to reason that I will eventually win. When I do, we will eat.

Before I forget, there is one last change. Instead of offering a choice between 12 different scrumptious desserts, we will be serving the traditional pumpkin pie, garnished with whipped cream and small fingerprints. You will still have a choice: take it or leave it.

Martha Stewart will not be dining with us this Thanksgiving. She probably won't come next year either. I am thankful.

Happy holidays to all!



***December 15, 2000***

A few random thoughts on miscellaneous subjects are offered today for your consideration, or not.

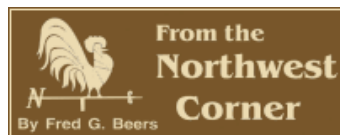
If you've been reading the sports page lately, you may have noticed considerable coverage is being given to the achievement of race car driver Bobby Labonte. The young man is the year 2000 winner of the Winston Cup championship, the ultimate prize offered to competitors in the National Association of Stock Car Racing (NASCAR). This is perhaps the fastest-growing professional sport in the U.S., and I wanted to mention it because Bobby has a Perry connection. He is part of the NASCAR team working for Joe Gibbs, who also happens to be the former coach of the NFL's Washington Redskins. Bobby drives a dark green stock car that is fairly awash with the official decals of the many corporations that sponsor Gibbs' team. Look closely the next time that green car appears on TV and you will see a medium-size Ditch Witch decal on the driver's side door. Yes, our fabulous Perry company is one of Gibbs' backers, and Coach Gibbs himself has

visited the local plant on East Fir Avenue. Back to Bobby Labonte: His older brother, Terry, also is a star driver in the NASCAR firmament.

Waymon May, the former Perry Maroon athlete who received a wrestling scholarship at the University of Oklahoma after winning the state 187-pound high school championship in 1996, elected to sit out last season at OU. This year he's a senior and a rising Sooner star as the starter at 197 pounds. Keep an eye on his matches throughout the season. He is one tough performer. In Sunday's Bedlam dual with Oklahoma State he was pitted against Mark Munoz, the nation's second ranked 197-pounder. Waymon lost the match, 3-2, because of a takedown just 16 seconds from the final whistle. OSU, of course, is the rated No. 1 in the U.S. at this point.

Switching subjects now.. Remember a few years ago when our late Mayor Hollingsworth was talking to Stillwater folks about the possibility of Perry acquiring Lake McMurtry as a water source? One of the major objections raised by our Payne county friends was the fact that Perry, because of its considerably smaller size, would be unable to properly maintain and keep up the lake grounds. For starters, that was a fatuous argument, and we may never know if it had any validity.

However, in our frequent business trips to Stillwater we have noticed several glaring examples of poor public and private maintenance. Some eyesores in the Stillwater vicinity are very close to major highway routes leading to the Payne county capital. Write it off as the price of growth because Stillwater is undeniably getting bigger (too big, some say), but it still offers evidence that our neighbors over there are not exactly candidates for Better Homes and Gardens awards. Personally, I think Perry is (and was) very capable of policing the grounds as well as Stillwater. That's my opinion. What's yours?



## ***December 19, 2000***

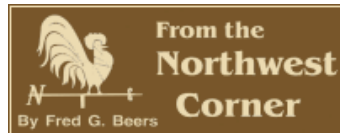
The chaotic and historic year 2000 is drawing to an end, thank goodness. That means different things to different folks, and to me it's time to dust off some morsels that have been saved for a time. You're invited to come along on this merry waltz through a mixed collection of various items and thoughts.

I had a nice visit the other day with Eddie Diebold, a former Perryan who now makes his home in Ponca City. In 1992, Eddie was honorably discharged from the U.S. Air Force after completing 41 years and ten months in military service. He achieved the grade of master sergeant, one of the highest non-commissioned ranks. Time has been kind to him. He still looks lean and trim. He's the son of the late John and Pauline Diebold, and his Dad was one of our town's best house painters. Many of you still remember the family, I'm sure. I've enjoyed thumbing through a magazine that Eddie brought me, "The 100 Greatest Military Photographs," published by Military Times magazine. The cover features Joe Rosenthal's memorable photo of the flag raising by U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima in World War II. Eddie reminisced about the American Legion baseball team of 1947-48 and some of the Perry residents he remembers from that period. Some who had special meaning to him were Paul Kehres, Joe Dolezal and Bob Donahue, all now deceased.

Don Stoddard, who comes from the same era as Eddie, enjoys music and poetry. Don lives in the Villa Apartments on Fifth street. He likes to call himself Perry's Cow Creek Poet, and many of his verses deal with cowboy legends. Don has been working on lyrics for a collection of songs that deal with Perry's early history. One set that I've seen tells the legend of Marshal Bill Tilghman and another is the ballad of Cattle Annie and Little Britches. These and others may be included in a

CD album Don is working on with his brother, Allan, who is in the recording business in Shawnee. Allan goes by the professional name of Alan Lee. A previous album is titled "Oklahoma Country: Outlaws of the Cherokee Strip." Cherokee Heart Publishing Co. released it last year, and it showcases songs by Allan and Don. The recordings were made at Backroad Recording Studios in Shawnee. Don says, regarding the next effort, "If Allan and I can come up with tunes for them, I will be on my way to having a CD recording made of my historical songs. Keep your fingers crossed."

More along this line shortly.



## ***December 22, 2000***

General Motors has announced plans for phasing out its Oldsmobile division, and we have to look upon that decision with mixed feelings. Currently, we do not own an Oldsmobile but through the years several of them have graced our driveway and they have been exceedingly good automobiles. Comfortable, roomy, reasonably economical, and always with classy design features. Now it appears the Oldsmobile is going to vanish, just like Pierce-Arrows, DeSotos, Packards, Studebakers, the Tucker, and the Edsel. If you have one, you might be well advised to hang on to it. They will become collectors' items someday. We will miss the Oldsmobile, but, like the Volkswagen Beetle, perhaps it will have a renaissance one day.

Owning one of those cars from time to time helped me learn that they were originally created by Mr. R.E. Olds. His initials also were used on another defunct car, the REO, and that acronym is often useful when you're doing a crossword puzzle. Another sudden thought: What will now become of that popular singing commercial from years ago, the one that goes – "Come along with me Lucille, in my merry Oldsmobile.."

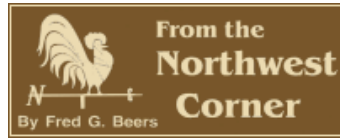
My family's association with the Oldsmobile goes back quite a way, not that we have always owned one. The earliest connection I can find has to do with a daring automobile race around the Perry square as a feature of the September 16th celebration in 1907. The participants were Mr. O.H. Hovey, a printer, and my Dad, who ran the City Drug Store on the north side of the square. Evidently, Dad was a rather dashing figure around town at that time. In 1906 Mr. Hovey brought to Perry the first automobile seen here, and it was an Oldsmobile. It had one cylinder and bicycle tires that were inflated with a hand pump. Dad then had the town's second car when he bought a new Ford from a shop in Red Rock. (Perry did not have a Ford dealership at the time.)

The race took place around the Perry square on the day of the 1907 celebration. Several versions of what happened have been offered from time to time, but the one that seems to have been closest to the truth was recorded by Judge E.W. Jones, publisher of a Perry newspaper, who witnessed the contest. He published the account in his paper and later in a booklet, "Early Day History of Perry, Oklahoma," containing 30 pages of his recollections. Here's how Judge Jones described it:

"Mr. Hovey's car could make about 18 miles an hour at top speed. He put on some wonderful exhibitions around the square and was stopped often by (Police) Chief Boright for engaging in dangerous and reckless driving. Hovey went to work in the printing business and later acquired a job shop of his own.. In the first automobile race staged during the (September) 16th celebration in 1907, no one having a car to compete with Beers' (Hovey's being out of commission), a dare-devil driver from Oklahoma City was imported. Fred and the visitor started around the square at the crack of the gun. A speed of possibly eight miles an hour was attained, but neither finished the lap. Fred skidded around a corner against the hitch

rack after negotiating half the distance, and the dare-devil quit, exhausted, coming west up the hill on the North side. For the effort, however, the purse of \$20 was divided and the race called a draw."

It must have been quite a sight to behold, back there some 93 years ago on the streets of Perry. You can see, however, that the Oldsmobile was not quite perfected or it would not have been in the shop that day. Maybe that's why GM is taking it off the market now. Anyway, we surely will miss those cars, and that jingle.



## ***December 26, 2000***

In 1896, a tall, slender gentleman named Fred G. Moore was the founding president of what is now the Exchange Bank and Trust Co. He headed the bank at its origin when it was on the west side of the square and later when it moved to the north side in the building now occupied by Powers Abstract Co., Inc., 635 Delaware street. Mr. and Mrs. Moore built one of the finest homes then existing in this little city. It is now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Sparks, at 903 North Eighth street. Time has taken its toll on the house but it is easy to visualize the affluence and dignity it once represented. All houses on that particular block seemed to radiate a story of success and achievement by the occupants. For a time, all of them were bankers while Perry was becoming a booming, bustling new city.

But hard times landed several body blows on the people and the economy of Perry and all of the U.S. as the 1920s unfolded. The Great Depression quickly reduced many, once-prosperous merchants and entrepreneurs to new status levels. It had no respect for the specific situation of any individual. Times were tough, friends, and a lot of folks were seriously stressed by the adjustments thrust upon them.

Mr and Mrs. Moore were among the victims of that financial crisis. They sold their handsome two-story home and moved to a modest but comfortable bungalow on Elm street, just two blocks from the Perry square and even closer to, the First Presbyterian church where they were faithful worshipers. Mrs. Moore was a sweet lady who served as pianist and organist for the church and also directed the choir. Her husband was one of the pillars of the church. Both were widely respected and loved, and the reduction in their personal fortune hurt many others outside their family.

When the Moores sold their home and moved closer to the downtown area, they lived across the street from the Beers home at 501 Eighth street. We already knew them well since we also were Presbyterians and my Mother sang in the church choir, but I was too young to understand how they had been battered by the depression. Mr. Moore was a regular customer of my Dad's City Drug Store. When I was just a novice soda jerk, he came to our fountain every day for a glass of Dr Pepper at 10, 2 and 4 o'clock, just as the drink's maker recommended. I served him many times and thought I knew the Moores pretty well.

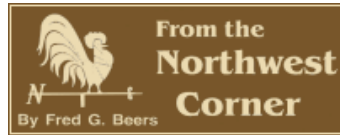
But, as Paul Harvey says, here's the rest of the story as relayed to me by another long-time friend, Mrs. Jo Wollard Garten of Ponca City, who grew up in this community and the Presbyterian church. Jo adds the following information:

"As a child I was frequently in the Fred Moore home. Their niece grew up in their home and was my friend. Her name was Carol Lee. Working in their home was a compassionate, lovely African-American woman whose name I think was Anna. Uncle Fred (as we called him) was not well. To earn some money, Mrs. Moore would walk all over Perry trying to sell vanilla and spices. I believe they were Watkins products. She would return home with her feet swollen and in pain. Anna loved her



and would come to her house, massage her feet and croon over them as she worked. I am sure this was a great comfort for she was not a young woman at the time."

I did not know of this touching relationship back then, but I would bet that Anna probably accepted no compensation for her act of loving-kindness, something we don't always hear about at the time it is rendered.



***December 29, 2000***

One of the news stories in this newspaper the other day contained a name that was spelled the same way backward and forward, and that made me stop for a moment to recall what such words are called. The answer, in case you also have forgotten, is "palindrome," and when I finally brought that to mind it sent me searching for a classic example that is often cited. You have no doubt come across this: "Able was I ere I saw Elba." The quote, often wrongfully attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, is pure palindrome. Read it front to back or back to front. The spelling is the same. There are some other good examples. If you like word games, here are a few that may amuse you.

"Eva, can I pose as Aesop in a cave?" Now there's one where you have to divide up some of the words to make it read correctly from back to front. Maybe you remember the pop singing group ABBA. How about this slogan: "All for one and one for all?" Maybe you know someone named Hannah.

Now, here's something you should know about. It is "I Love Me, Vol. 1: S. Wordrow's Palindrome Encyclopedia," revealed and interpreted by Michael Donner. According to Robert Armstrong of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune, the book collects palindromes of all kinds and lists them alphabetically. Reading about this, I immediately became interested because of the fascination English words hold for me. Two of the author's example are "Onno," a city in Italy on Lake Como, and "IUPUI," which stands for Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, where the 1992 U.S. Olympic swimming trials were held.

How about this one: "A man, a plan, a canal: Panama!" which is credited to Leigh Mercer, a British collector of palindromes. Donner also lists Guy Jacobson's longer version: "A man, a plan, a cat, a ham, a yak, a yam, a hat, a canal: Panama." (This version does not come out as a real palindrome to me, although it is very humorous.)

Donner notes that the Internet carries a palindrome of 49 words "attributed to Guy Steele and a computer-generated one of 540 words claimed by Dan Hoey." If you're wondering how all this got started, Donner says the father of the palindrome, "who appears at least to have been the inventor or an early practitioner of the palindromic sentence and verse, is Sotades of Maroneia (or third-century B.C. Thrace)."

My thanks to Mr. Armstrong for his report on the research being undertaken in this field of semantics.