

**February 4, 1997**

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**First Movie Theater in Perry** was the Wonderland at the northeast corner of the square. Hazel and Ivan Kennedy were the musicians who played accompaniment for the images flickering on the screen there in the early years of this century. Mrs. Kennedy sketched this view of the theater as she remembered it in 1980.

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Warrenne Kennedy Harris, who wrote "Dear Old Perry High," the official PHS school song, began taking piano lessons from her mother at the age of five years, or about as soon as she was able to spread her fingers far enough to cover most of an octave on the keyboard. As an adult during the 1940s she was a professional pianist on the West Coast and frequently played accompaniment for some major stars of the entertainment world in and around Hollywood. Her talent came naturally. Both her parents, Hazel and Ivan Kennedy, had been professional musicians themselves.

Warrenne, now 82, was one of seven children in the Kennedy family. All of them took easily to music. After starting their family, the parents settled into a snug frame bungalow on Tenth street and there the radio or Victrola provided a background of music most hours of the day and night. Or, there would be a live performance with Father on the violin or tuba and Mother on the piano, or one of several other instruments lying around. The sound of music was always there.

Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy both were the offspring of early-day arrivals in the Cherokee Strip. Ivan's parents were Elias Marion Kennedy and Mattie Ellen Gowty Kennedy. Ivan was born in 1888 and later was joined by a sister, Sara, and three brothers, Glen, Laurraine and Walter. Glen and Laurraine both were nicknamed "Snake." The family came to Oklahoma from Kansas in a covered wagon and eventually settled in Rock township of Noble county. Mrs. Kennedy insisted on bringing the family's pump organ to the new land and frequently played for church services in the New Hope and Pike's Peak school houses. Her daughter, Sara, later was organist for many years at the First Presbyterian church in Perry.

Laurraine played drums with the acclaimed 101 Ranch Wild West Show band, and Glen and Walter both were trombonists. Ivan's specialties were the tuba and violin. During World War II, Laurraine married a Belgian girl while serving in the U.S. Army in Europe. After the war he died on a troop ship en route home to the U.S. His bride was transported separately and she arrived in Perry, alone, just a few days earlier. The young Mrs. Kennedy sorrowfully returned to Belgium after a short visit here with her new in-laws.

Hazel Kennedy was born on Valentine's Day in 1893 at Wellsville, Kansas, the daughter of George and Ermina Eby. The Ebys came to Perry in 1905. The family eventually included six sons and three daughters: Hazel, twins Faith (Johnson) and Hope (Wolf), and Bill, Pete, Hal, Cecil, Dick and the youngest, Frank, who is now the only survivor. Hazel attended Perry schools and the Kansas City Conservatory of Music. She and Ivan were married in 1912. They had six daughters: Carol, who died young; Warrenne (Harris), now of Canoga Park, California; June (Jerome), Shawnee; Marjorie (Talbot), San Antonio, Texas; Betty (Anderson), Prague, Oklahoma; and Donna (Golliver), Enid; and one son, Robert, Shawnee.

Both Hazel and Ivan were musicians in movie theaters in the early years of this century. In the era before movies had sound tracks, when dialogue was flashed on the screen between scenes, audiences were treated to "live" music that was alternately peppy, dramatic, sad or comical, depending on the action being portrayed on screen. Every theater had at

least a piano, and some also had drums or another instrument or two. At the Wonderland Theater in Perry, Hazel played the piano and Ivan played violin.

The Wonderland was the first picture show in Perry. It was opened in 1909 by Joe Appleman and Bush Bowman, who also were proprietors of Bush & Joe's Smoke House, in a building on the northeast corner of the square, where Roy Morris' accounting firm is now located. "(Ivan) was the best of all the musicians," Mrs. Kennedy said years later. At the time he also was playing tuba in Dr. W. C. Marshall's community band on Saturday nights and attending classes at Oklahoma A.&M. (OSU).

Mrs. Kennedy later described the Wonderland Theater: "There was no paving near the building. Hitching posts around the courthouse square and the lots now occupied by the Exchange Bank and Foster Corner Drug Store were used for parking wagons and buggies by moviegoers. The Wonderland was a small frame building which seated about 100 people. The audience sat on wooden benches with backrests to watch the latest silent pictures." In those days, films ran only for a few minutes. Frank Johnson operated the handcranked projector at the Wonderland in an upstairs room above the cashier's cage. It probably had a very hot, very bright, very dangerous carbon arc lamp to illuminate the film. In addition to scores played during the movie, the pianist also was called on to entertain the audience whenever one of the frequent film breaks occurred.

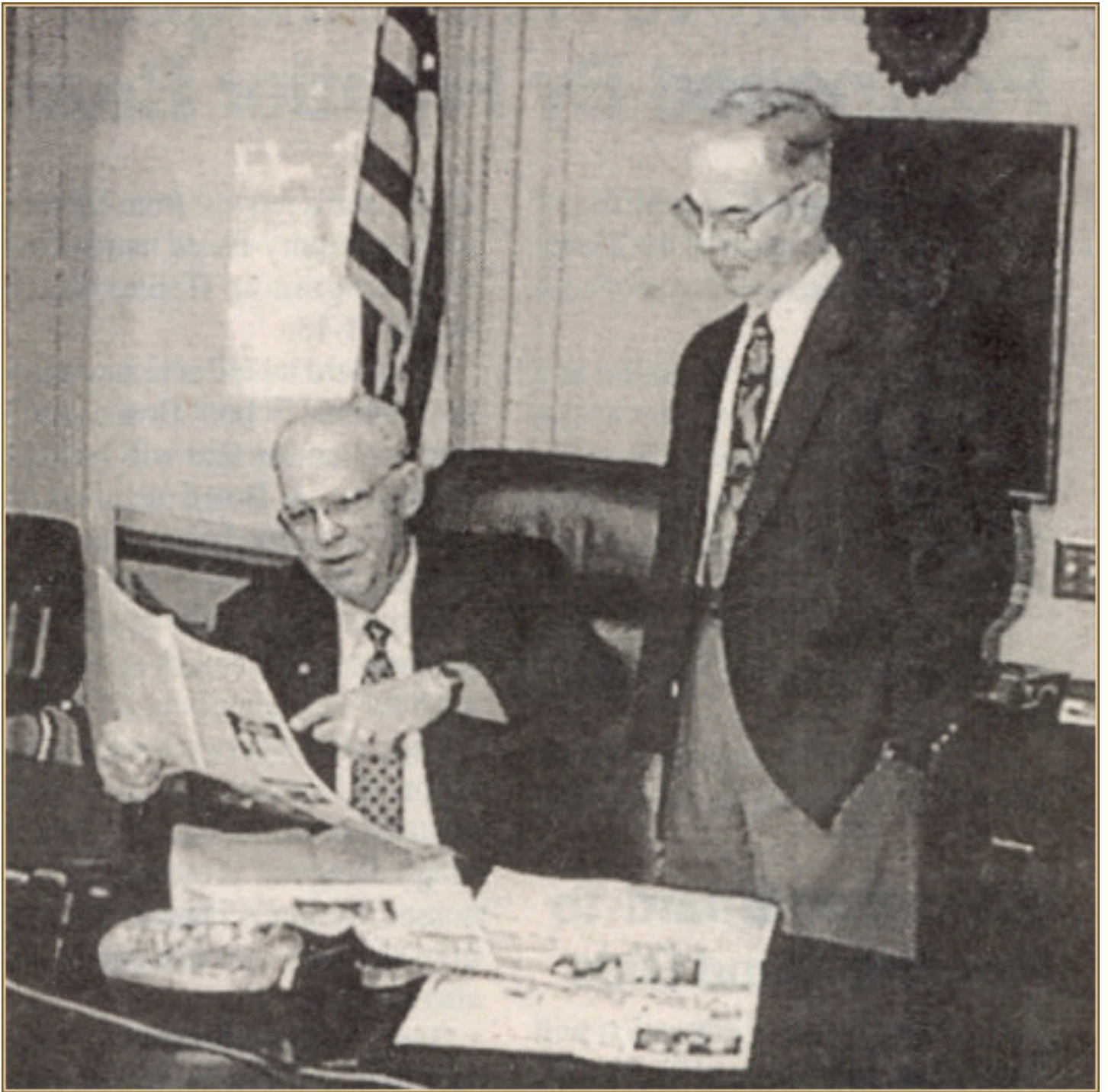
Ticket takers at the Wonderland included Otis Hamm, who later published a newspaper here; Kenneth Kirchner and Cecil W. Eby, Hazel's brother. Some theater employees also were performers who sang with illustrated songs that came with color slides projected by a "magic lantern." Among the singers were Nell Lucas, Frank Jones, Dr. Frank C. Hubbard, Sled Ellis and Harry A. DeLashmutt, who sang "The Holy City" for the Passion Play picture. Years later Mr. DeLashmutt was a bank officer and still later bookkeeper for *The Perry Daily Journal*.

Frank Eby, Hazel's youngest brother, remembers that Mr. Jones, Mr. Ellis and Mr. DeLashmutt were three members of a quartet in those days. They toured the Perry square on Saturday evenings, entertaining shoppers along the way with impromptu concerts. He also remembers that one of his older brothers or a parent would go to the theater each evening about 10 p.m. to escort Hazel to the family home on north Sixth street. Ivan Kennedy died October 23, 1973, and Hazel passed away March 19, 1986.

We'll have more about Warene Harris and the interesting Kennedy family in the next Northwest Corner in March. (The column is now appearing in this newspaper once a month.)



**February 14, 1997**



**George Hall of Exchange Bank and Trust Company** discusses placement of The Northwest Corner column with Fred Beers, author. The column will appear each week in the northwest corner of the back page of the Tuesday and Friday editions of *The Perry Daily Journal* beginning Feb. 18. (Staff photo).

### ***Northwest Corner Returns Tuesday***

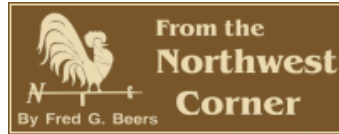
Beginning Tuesday, The Northwest Corner column by Fred Beers, will be published in *The Perry Daily Journal* twice a week.

The column originally appeared in *The Journal* three times weekly. Recently, publication was limited to once a month.

Because a number of subscribers reported they missed the column, *The Journal* management began looking for a sponsor.

An agreement has been reached with Exchange Bank and Trust Company of Perry to sponsor publication of the column. The agreement, involving *The Journal* management, Charles Hall and George Hall of Exchange Bank and Beers was reached Thursday.

Under the agreement, the column will appear in Tuesday and Friday issued of The Journal.



**February 18, 1997**



**158th Field Artillery National Guard Band** is shown in this photo from the 1930s while the citizen soldiers from Perry were at Fort Sill for annual summer camp. Ivan Kennedy, standing at right in khaki uniform with breeches and boots, was the band director. His young son, Robert, is seated on the front row beside the bass drum. Only a few of the guardsmen are identified. Among them are Mickey Johnson and Warren V. Ryan, seated on ground at left in front row. The drum major standing at left is Bill Elliott Jr. Seated next to him is clarinetist. Henry Clark. Perhaps a reader can furnish other names. Pyramidal tents in background housed bunks for the guardsmen.

Ivan Kennedy was a skilled artisan in several unrelated fields, but his real love was music and he excelled in that, also. His principal instrument was the violin, and the sensitive hands that coaxed beautiful music from that delicate medium also knew hard work. He was slender and not very tall, a sparse, frail-looking man whose frame belied a seemingly boundless reservoir of energy. As the father of seven young children during the Great Depression, he understood the necessity of applying one's self diligently to stay afloat in a whirlpool of economic distress. He made a living as a professional musician in his younger years, but later the very practical reality of paying the bills for a sizable family forced him to look elsewhere for a vocation. I always had the feeling he would rather be stroking his violin or leading an orchestra if he could afford it, but he was wise enough to know that a life like that was not to be for him. Instead, he found other ways of indulging his

love of music, like directing the local National Guard band and playing in a community band led by Dr. W. C. Marshall. On occasion, he also was invited to direct the Oklahoma City orchestra.

During the 1930s, Mr. Kennedy operated the Kennedy Tire Shop, a car, truck and bicycle tire repair business on the east side of Seventh street a half block north of the northwest corner of the square, about where the Dollar General Store now stands. It was a small wooden building with broad folding doors in front, providing an opening big enough for a car to be driven in for service. The interior was expectedly cluttered and disorderly with racks of tires in various stages of repair, empty rims, tire tools scattered everywhere, a tub of murky water where inner tubes could be submerged to disclose tiny leaks, Vulcanizing patches to seal punctures, and the pungent aroma of rubber, hot glue and red Oklahoma dust permeating every cranny. Right next door, where Boatmen's Bank is now located, was the OK Filling Station operated by Cleo Stout and his uncle, Ira Stout. The Kennedy shop was straight out of Gasoline Alley. Years later, tubeless and steel-belted nylon tires changed that entire aspect of automobile service.

Hazel Eby Kennedy, Ivan's wife, provided a comfortable home for her husband and children in a neat frame bungalow at 815 Tenth street. Like Ivan, she was a musician at heart and found time to give piano lessons to youngsters of the community as a means of supplementing the family income. I for one remember the parlor where their upright piano stood, and the patient instructions Mrs. Kennedy gave to some of her less than gifted pupils. In my case the lessons were exchanged as barter for items purchased by the Kennedys at the Beers family's City Drug Store. Bartering was the accepted medium of trade in those days when cash was scarce.

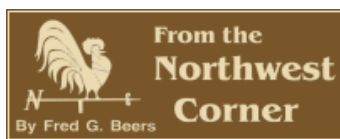
Private lessons of any kind were generally regarded as luxuries reserved for the well to do at that time, but the barter arrangement helped both parties to proudly avoid acknowledging just how tough the times were. Our drug store also had the same trade-out plan with the nuns who taught piano at St. Joseph's Academy and with Mrs. Florence Crowder, who also taught. My sister Gloria became quite proficient on the keyboard, although I never did.

In addition to fixing flat tires, Mr. Kennedy operated a locksmith shop and mattress factory at the Seventh street location. In 1938 he opened a roller rink on Elm street in a building which the Cooper Motor Co. Oldsmobile dealership later occupied. Safeway bought Mr. Kennedy's property on Seventh street in the early 1940s and built a spacious new supermarket there after closing the old store on the west side of the square at 317 Seventh street. (The "new" Safeway building has since been utilized by several businesses; it is now the home of Dollar General Store.) When the tire shop closed, Mr. Kennedy concentrated on the Elm street roller rink.

Skating was immensely popular with youngsters and young adults and the roller rink did a thriving business during the week. Rollerblades and inline skates were introduced many years later. On Saturday nights the building was converted into a dance hall with music provided by country and Western bands led by such as Merl (Salathiel) Lindsay, Johnny Lee Wills or some other popular musician. There in the subdued lighting and happy atmosphere, liquor was not tolerated. City police maintained a presence in the vicinity to make sure folks did not become too zestful. The Saturday night dances brought couples here from a broad area for a wholesome good time.

Still later, Mr. Kennedy moved the roller rink, dance hall and locksmith shop to a larger building almost directly across from his old tire shop location on Seventh street. The building had been the home of the Cramer Body Works, operated by Gerald Cramer, at 415 Seventh street, and in more recent years it has been used by the Ragsdale Hardware Store, which recently closed with the retirement of Mr. and Mrs. Larry Ragsdale. The Kennedy Roller Rink continued to be a popular recreational spot for skaters until it was closed. With its demise, Mr. Kennedy focused his attention on a picture framing business and locksmith shop in the middle of the north side of the square for the last few years of his active life. His son, Robert, grew up in the Perry roller rink and began operating his own business in Shawnee. It also was enormously successful. Robert, a 1942 graduate of PHS, played drums in the high school band and for a time joined a local dance band which played in this area. He and his wife were professional-caliber exhibition skaters.

Hazel and Ivan Kennedy were soft spoken and gentle in dealings with their children, the rest of their family, and their friends. None of the family lives in Perry any longer, but it is safe to say they left an enduring imprint. Because of that and because they were interesting folks to know, we have more to relate about the Kennedys of Perry when the next Northwest Corner appears.



## ***February 21, 1997***

One of the truly unique virtues about Perry high school is the fact that it has its own fight song as well as an official school song, and both of them were written especially for PHS. I don't know of another high school anywhere that can make such a boast. This fact has been mentioned here before but it's still worth bragging about.

Warrene Kennedy Harris, a 1930 graduate of PHS who now lives in Canoga Park, California, wrote "Dear Old Perry High," the official school song, in 1932 when she was a student at Oklahoma State University. The Maroon fight song, "Fight On For Perry," was written by Jim Hayes while he was PHS band director in 1967-68.

Warrene, now 82, was the oldest child of Ivan and Hazel Kennedy, who eventually had four more daughters and a son. They comprised an interesting family of gentle, talented, musically inclined people, and they provided this area of north-central Oklahoma with a great deal of entertainment for several decades. "Dear Old Perry High," for one thing, promises to live on for years to come as ensuing generations of PHS students memorize its stirring musical notes and the lyrics that render veneration to a noble institution, our local high school.

The story of how the school song came into existence has been told in various morsels through the years, but a recent authentic contribution to the lore has been made by Warrene herself. It fills the gaps existing previously in other accounts. Just how this narrative arrived at the Northwest Corner's address is rather involved, but I'll try to keep it brief.

Last September, Elizabeth Willems was directing arrangements for a 60th anniversary reunion of her 1936 Perry high school graduating class. Along about the same time, Leon Nelson, an active participant in the PHS Alumni Association who now lives in Oklahoma City, had written to Warrene in California with an inquiry into the genesis of our distinctive school song. He wanted to have the real story for the benefit of Alumni Association members, so he went directly to the source. What he received in reply from Warrene tells the tale from a first-person perspective that deserves to be heard and preserved.

Warrene's letter to Leon includes an amusing anecdote concerning Ashley Alexander, another Perry musical virtuoso who happens to be Leon's cousin. Because of that, Leon passed a copy of the letter on to Ashley and his wife, Beverly, and they in turn shared it with Elizabeth because they knew she was working on the reunion for the class of '36. Elizabeth showed it to me, and that is how we came to this point. Warrene's details are woven into the story that follows:

In 1932, the newly formed Perry Poor Boys Club decided PHS should have a more suitable school song than the parody of "Sweet Adeline," renamed "Dear Perry-O," which they then were using. The Poor Boys had voluntarily taken over the responsibility of sponsoring a homecoming football queen contest and a parade around the square on the afternoon of that special game. It was one of their efforts to relieve the depression-era tedium.

Glenn Yahn, a member of the fledgling civic club, took it upon himself to contact Warene at Oklahoma A.&M. College (now OSU), where she was a student. Glenn says he made a trip to Stillwater to present the request on a Tuesday night, and asked that the job be completed by the following Friday in time for the annual homecoming football game. It was a daunting challenge. "I was sort of taken aback by Glenn's suggestion," Warene writes, "but I said to myself: 'I can do this.' So I went up to my room and sat at my desk and wrote it that night."

Professor Leopold Radgowsky, the Russian immigrant who was then director of the Perry high school band, took Warene's handwritten manuscript and wrote an arrangement for the entire band. "Dear Old Perry High" was performed in public for the first time at a pep rally that Friday, right on schedule. Its bombastic tune and majestic lyrics were an instant hit with the student body, and the public in general also embraced the song from the time of its first introduction. Warene, too, was pleased with her effort. "I was very proud to hear the band play it," she remembers. "I am always thrilled when the band plays it in the parade at the Cherokee Strip celebration." She still makes it back to Perry periodically on such occasions.

That pretty well sums up the story of when and how "Dear Old Perry High," was written. The song still brings chills of pride to the home crowd when it's played by the Maroon band during a football game at Daniels Field or by a pep band in Divine Hall when the PHS wrestlers or basketball team are playing at home: But this account tells only one aspect of the Kennedy family story. Thanks to Warene's letter and a few personal reflections, there's more to come on the subject. Watch for it in the next Northwest Corner.



## ***February 25, 1997***

Members of the local Methodist Ladies Aid Society were having a meeting in the church basement one afternoon several years ago when they were surprised to hear the lilting melody of "St. Louis Blues" being played on the brand new pipe organ in the sanctuary upstairs. A couple of aspiring young musicians were at the keyboard but were unaware that they were doing anything wrong.

One of them was Warene Kennedy, a daughter of Ivan and Hazel Kennedy, and the other was Ashley Alexander, who also was born with music in his soul. Warene, now eighty-two, still delights in telling the story. "I was young then, at sixteen, and didn't realize it was the wrong thing to do." As it turns out, both Warene and Ashley have made music their life and have brought entertainment to thousands as a result.

"I was in the Perry schools from about the fourth grade until graduation in 1930," Warene says. "Before that (our family) had lived in many places. Our Dad, Ivan Kennedy, was a violinist and orchestra leader in theaters. They played for silent movies and vaudeville acts. Our Mother, Hazel Kennedy, played piano and organ in the theaters. When I was born, their first child, she said she took me in a basket and set me on top of the pipe organ while she played. We lived in Oklahoma City a number of times, (and in) Shawnee, Tulsa, Okmulgee, Manhattan, Kansas, and Grand Island, Nebraska. Our folks decided that it was harder to move around as the family got larger, so they came back to Perry, where both of their parents lived.

"My mother taught me piano from the age of five. Music was always my interest. When I graduated from high school in 1930, my folks weren't able to send me to college. Luckily, the Methodist church purchased a pipe organ that year. I had been the pianist and played the pump organ in the basement of the church for Sunday school and junior church since I

was about nine years old. The church organist, Ethel Knox, a teacher in the school, was on a trip to Mexico that summer. So, I went to Kansas City to take the lessons and learned to play the organ. This was the first pipe organ in Perry. It was a Wurlitzer and my lessons were in a studio where station WHB broadcast. I was privileged to play on those programs. My first song was 'When It's Springtime in the Rockies.' I played for church the next year and took a post-graduate course at school." That's when her impromptu concert with Ashley caught the ear of the Ladies Aid Society, but that little misstep did nothing to deter the musical careers of either one of them.

"The next summer mother took me to Stillwater to try and find a job as I wanted to start to school (at A.&M.). The Physical Education Department hired a pianist for classes, paying 35 cents an hour. They had a pianist, but took my application. After a few days (the other pianist) cut her finger and I got the job, which lasted through college. I also got in a dance band, Bob Amend's Collegians, which I played with all through college. I studied piano, organ and voice, and graduated in 1935 with a degree so I could teach school.

"I taught in Ames and Mannford, then in Perry for three years. I taught grade school music and penmanship. With Thelma Brown, I taught auditorium, which was a period of giving plays, operettas and May festivals. Thelma was handling the dancing and physical activities. I enjoyed giving the operettas. I also had a boys' choir of fifth grade boys, of which I was very proud. They wore white robes made by their mothers. Their voices were so good, and we did some special appearances.

"I married Charles Harris in 1940 and left the teaching field. During World War II, while he was overseas, I was in California. I worked for Southern Pacific Railroad a year, then started playing in restaurants and clubs. I had many interesting experiences and met many interesting people. I played the organ for Doris Day and Errol Flynn when they got married in a Warner Brothers movie. I once worked with Johnny Carson for a show. During the intermission he told me, 'I'm just batting around, doing a little radio work, hoping to get some kind of a break.' As you know, he did get a break -- the Tonight Show.'

"I played for (the comedian) George Gobel once when he sang and for Phil Harris and Alice Faye when they sang. On one of my jobs, a young man named Clint Eastwood used to bring his drums and sit in with me. He was working in a (TV) series called 'Rawhide.' I had the privilege of giving piano lessons to Stephanie Zimbalist when she was around six to eight years old. It was an experience to teach her on their twelve-foot Steinway grand and to know her dad, Efram Zimbalist Jr.

"I am now eighty-two years of age. I had to stop working with a girls' trio about seven years ago. I fell and broke a knee while working. It was on a hardwood floor, and I tripped on a throw rug. Later I had a knee replacement and this year I had a hip replacement because of severe arthritis. It's been three months and I am recovering nicely."

Warrenne, the composer of "Dear Old Perry High," added that she hopes to be in Perry next September for the annual Cherokee Strip celebration to relive the thrill she always feels at hearing her song played by the PHS band. This recent series of columns has dealt with the family of Hazel and Ivan Kennedy by highlighting some of the ways they have entertained audiences here and elsewhere for the greater part of a century. Their story also helps tell a special part of the earlier days in the growth of this community. Thanks to all of them for the wonderful memories their lives and their music have inspired.



**February 28, 1997**

Work has just started on remodeling the former Ragsdale Hardware Store at 415 7th street to convert it into two 25-foot front business locations, and the south half soon will be occupied by Marilyn Hamann's Cherokee Hair Company. Her shop is now in the Executive Suites building on the north side of the square at 621 Delaware. Marilyn and her husband, Dwight, recently purchased one half interest in the former Ragsdale store location from the owner, Jerry Carpenter, of Stillwater. Mr. Carpenter plans to offer the north half for tenancy after remodeling is completed in a few weeks.

Another change in the downtown business district is scheduled before long. Carol Steichen soon will be moving her Antiques on the Square Mall from the historic Wolleson-Nicewander building on the north side to a building on the south side of the square which most recently has been occupied by Bob Voigt's Shoe Hut. Carol has purchased the building from Mr. Voigt. Dave Woods, owner of the Wolleson-Nicewander building, is hoping to negotiate a sale of that two-story structure.

Several interesting building projects are nearing completion in the community, judging by the exterior views, leaving me anxious to see the interiors when workmen have applied the final decorating touches. Some that come readily to mind are the classy new club house at the Perry Golf & Country Club, the new building added to the First Presbyterian church property at 8th and Elm, and the spacious new Subsite plant and offices on the grounds of the Charles Machine Works, Inc. complex on West Fir.

Improvements continue to be made at the Charles Wise Buick-Pontiac-GMC dealership on Cedar street. Exterior painting, a new General Motors sign and other changes are very visible, and more is still to come. In due time you'll also be seeing large vintage logos of the vehicles offered by this dealership in faithful reproductions on the front of the business. The logo designs were sketched by Larry Anderson, a Ditch Witch graphics specialist who assists the Main Street program. They will be painted on the Wise building by local artist Darren Maine. Charles is undertaking this work in cooperation with Perry Main Street, which assisted in the design phase.

Down the street from there, in the historic Christoph building on the west side of the square, George Rice is, continuing to prepare for his antique and classic car display. A new drive-in doorway has been installed on the south exterior wall and several handsome old cars now can be seen through the front windows. This promises to be an interesting addition to our town.

Likewise, the new Subway Sandwich & Salad shop in the Sunmart Station, at the Fir intersection on I-35, will give local diners yet another choice of menus to ponder. Considerable driveway work also has been underway for some time at the Sunmart Station.

It's good to hear that Kenda Williams is preparing to re-open the child care facility formerly operated for 17 years by Betty Tetik at 5th and Noble. Betty will be a teacher assistant at the center, which has been closed for two years. Working mothers and single-parent families will be happy to have this business back in operation. That new addition and others help make up for the loss of Fat Tuesday's Restaurant on the west side of the square and the Shoe Hut on the south side. Vacancies are scarce around the square right now, despite those two losses.

Help wanted ads are plentiful in *The Journal* these days. This may not mean literal full employment, but there should be no complaints that anyone cannot find a job here.

Jay Branson's new sub-division on the south side of town will provide some relief for the housing shortage here, as will the fine new homes dotting the landscape on the north side, at the Fairway addition adjacent to the Country Club. Yes, good homes are in demand in Perry.

