



January 2, 2001

Our neighborhood said goodbye the other day to another good friend. Frances Anderson died on Christmas Eve after an extended period of failing health, during which she endured about every pain and problem known to modern medicine. It has not been a happy time for her. Although we will miss her, no one doubts that she is more secure, safe and comfortable than she has been in a long while. Frances did not have a large family but she had a host of friends through her work in the Methodist church and Sunday school and the Golden Circle homemakers. She was queen of the kitchen at the church. Her culinary skills were demonstrated many times, including some of the periodic Ditch Witch fly-ins and the annual Lenten luncheons. She was our next door neighbor until conditions made it necessary for her to move to the Green Valley nursing home several months ago. Her friendship and dedicated service will be missed.

Our neighborhood is like many others in this close-knit little prairie town. Good people live here. Any pain or loss experienced by one home affects all the others, so we all grieve at the loss of Frances. This spirit is undoubtedly best exemplified by the tender affection of Otis and Jeanette Shelley who have looked after Frances in her declining years with a real demonstration of compassion and caring. They are like that because it is their nature to do so, and knowing that gives the rest of us a sense of security that cannot be purchased. We sadly say farewell to Frances, but at the same time we are glad to be reminded of the special nature of this neighborhood. It typifies the Perry community, and you just don't find that everywhere.

Glenn Yahn, the retired lumberman, turned 90 this year. Because of that birthday, he has accumulated some interesting nonagenarian commentaries, including the following by an anonymous wit:

GOT IT MADE AT 90

We oldsters sure do get away with a lot just because we've managed to keep breathing longer than most folks. I have just celebrated my 90th birthday and I've got it made. If you forget someone's name or an appointment or what you said yesterday, just explain that you are 90 and you will be forgiven. If you spill soup on your tie or forget to shave half your face, or take another man's hat by mistake, or promise to mail a letter and carry it around in your pocket for two weeks, just say, "I'm 90, you know," and nobody will say a thing.

You have a perfect alibi for everything when you're 90. If you act silly, you're in your "second childhood." Being 90 is much better than being 70. At 70 people are mad at you for everything, but if you make it to 90, you can talk back, argue, disagree and insist on having your own way because everybody thinks you are getting a little soft in the head. They say that life begins at 40. Not true. If you ask me, life begins at 90.

Mr. Yahn may not be as steady on his feet as he once was, but he has lost none of that great sense of humor which made the now-defunct Broke and Bankrupt Order of Poor Boys such a great organization back there in the Great Depression.



January 5, 2001

A page one story in the great moral daily down at Oklahoma City said something the other day about a newly released report from the Tulsa Race Riot Commission. The article stated that the role of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1921 violence on Tulsa streets was not thoroughly explored by the commission, and even hinted that the actions of the National Guard were perhaps less than honorable. I don't know about how the National Guard performed – those troops are under control of the governor – but it should come as no surprise to anyone that the Klan may have been on the wrong side in that most regrettable incident./p>

Growing up in this small Oklahoma town in the 1930s, I heard the usual bad remarks about the Klan and its anti-Negro bias. Nationally, the KKK was fast fading from the scene as more rational tolerance emerged. By contrast, there were many stories about how noble the Klan was earlier in the 20th century. Politicians in this state and elsewhere around the U.S. began renouncing the hooded, pro-white organization about the time when Negroes were being courted and poll tax laws were under attacked. A powerful voting bloc emerged as a result, and politicians are very sensitive to things like that. They have been known to jump on the bandwagon whenever such opportunities present themselves.

But during the age of acceptance, perhaps best identified by the decades between 1900 and 1920, membership in the Klan was considered honorable. Many of the fabulous Cherokee Strip parades around the Perry square during that period featured stunningly decorated floats with several of the town's fairest young ladies on board, smiling and waving to cheering thousands in town for the day. No stigma was attached to such participation. It was an honor to be asked to ride on the float, and many well regarded and respected businessmen of the community were very open about their membership in the KKK.

In this age of enlightenment, it is hard for us to believe that such a radical organization could exist here. I understand that the Klan of that time stood for an all-white, all-Protestant United States of America. Cross burnings on the lawns of those they despised were fearful events. In some Southern cities homes were burned and men were lynched by white-hooded Klansmen, and all-white juries rarely convicted the few proponents who actually were brought to trial. Something like that must have occurred in Tulsa in 1921, and it is a shameful burden we should never try to hide.

Yes, times do change, and the Ku Klux Klan still exists in several pockets of the country. There is no longer widespread, popular support for those night riders and virtually all politicians are quick to denounce the bigoted views spouted by those Klansmen of another era. The KKK of yesterday may have been a fearful, potent entity, but today the organization and its members are generally ridiculed and denounced. It has been consigned to a smelly trash heap of history, thank goodness, and that is good for all of us.



January 8, 2001

Normally I don't recommend specific TV shows for your viewing, except the ones in which Myrna Niles Hamann appears. However, a series is coming up on Public Television that certainly warrants the attention of anyone who has even the least bit of interest in the musical genre known as jazz. The name of the series is simply that, "Jazz," and some of the giants of that field will be dealt with on the show. That includes the likes of Louis Armstrong, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Artie

Shaw and many, many others. Personally, I'm all a-tingle in anticipation. Anxiety is building as if another national championship football contest were coming. The series is advertised as a 19-hour documentary, and while that may sound too long for some, I have a feeling it will not be nearly long enough for true believers and aficionados

The series is another from Ken Burns, whose previous works along the lines of popular history have included "The Civil War" and "Baseball." Of course I have not seen a preview of this one, but I saw the others and they were simply great. The advance stories I've read indicate that "Jazz" is a worthy addition to Mr. Burns' collection of cultural studies.

I mentioned earlier that Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller and Artie Shaw are among the industry's best-known showmen and that they will be spotlighted in the series. Those men contributed much to the birth, growth and continuing popularity of jazz, but many others whose names are not so well known also will receive recognition. Of the four gents mentioned above, only Artie Shaw survives and he gave up being a musician decade ago. He's now in his 90s but his wit and wisdom seem to be unimpaired. He was a masterful clarinetist and his orchestras were among the favorites of young people in the late 1930s and on into the 1940s. To me he comes across today as a great egotist and cynic, but that does not diminish his contributions to the world of popular music. Incidentally, he was once married to actress Lana Turner, among others. I remember an interview he granted to a reporter a few years ago. The name of Sammy Kaye came up. For you too young to remember, Mr. Kaye had an orchestra that invited listeners to "swing and sway with Sammy Kaye." In other words, they played music both sweet and hot, but mostly sweet. "Mr. Kaye and I were not in the same business," Artie told the reporter with a sneer, an obvious rejection of Sammy's style.

The series starts tonight, Monday, on OETA channel 13. Watch the TV listings for future installments of this eagerly awaited series on jazz, and I suspect you will be either as thrilled as I expect to be, or perhaps you will be converted to the ranks of those who already love it.



January 12, 2001

Here's a short story to warm your heart at this time of year:

An elderly woman and her little grandson, whose face was sprinkled with bright freckles, spent the day at the zoo. Lots of children were waiting in line to get their cheeks painted by a local artist, who was decorating them with tiger paws.

"You've got so many freckles, there's no place to paint!" a girl in the line said to the little fellow. Embarrassed, the youngster dropped his head. His grandmother knelt beside him. "I love your freckles. When I was a little girl I always wanted freckles," she said, while tracing her finger across the child's cheek. "Freckles are beautiful."

The boy looked up and said, "Really?"

"Of course," said the grandmother. "Why just name me one thing that's prettier than freckles."

The little boy thought for a moment, peered intensely into his grandma's face, and softly whispered, "Wrinkles."

Perry's own Myrna Niles Hamman will appear on an episode of the popular "Ally McBeal" TV show January 22 on the FOX network (channel 12 on our cable system). Myrna says it is a very small role. She appears as the jury foreperson in this

courtroom drama. "But hey, I get to work, and they pay me, so even getting to do the little roles is good," Myrna says. She can be sure many Perry viewers will be tuned to the proper channel that night. Check your listings for the time.

A friend passes along this group of nostalgic quotes from the 1950s:

"I'll tell you one thing, if things keep going the way they are, it's going to be impossible to buy a week's groceries for \$20."

"Have you seen the new cars coming out next year? It won't be long when \$5,000 will only buy a used one." (P.S. In 1950 I bought a new four-door Buick Special with automatic transmission and white sidewall tires for \$2,400.)

"If cigarettes keep going up in price, I'm going to quit. A quarter a pack is ridiculous." (P.S. A package of Wings cost ten cents in 1941. Whatever became of that brand?)

"Did you hear? The Post Office is thinking about charging a dime just to mail a letter!"

"The government is wanting to get its hands on everything. Pretty soon it's going to be impossible to run a family business or a farm."/p>

"If they raise the minimum wage to \$1, nobody will be able to hire outside help at the store."

"When I started driving, who would have thought gas would someday cost 50 cents a gallon. Guess we'd be better off leaving the car in the garage." (P.S. And for 50 cents a gallon you also got clean windshields, plus a check of tire pressure, engine oil level and radiator coolant.)

On the other hand, average income levels have climbed to unbelievable heights. Is there a correlation there?



January 16, 2001

The Charles Machine Works, Inc., Perry's home-grown industrial giant, receives a measure of recognition in the latest issue of Oklahoma Today, the official and highly regarded bi-monthly magazine published by the state of Oklahoma. My copy arrived in the mail the other day and I discovered that this is "the Business Issue: A special focus on Oklahoma commerce, past and, present." CMW, manufacturer of the internationally marketed line of underground construction tools known as Ditch Witch, is spotlighted in a full-color, full-page photograph on slick paper that shows technician Keith Hayes working in the manufacturing assembly department of the company's product development center. An unidentified welder also is silhouetted in the background amid a shower of sparks. This excellent magazine is distributed and read throughout the U.S. Find a copy and check out the Ditch Witch article. Better still, order a subscription and receive it regularly.

In just a few succinct words under the heading, "Be Witched," the magazine tells the Ditch Witch story, something that is familiar to nearly everybody hereabouts – how a young engineer named Ed Malzahn designed the first practical small trencher in the business founded by his father, Charles Malzahn, for whom the company is named. Also sharing the magazine's spotlight in the Business Edition are the Sonic Corp., Kerr-McGee, Phillips Petroleum, Express Services, Glamour Shots photographs, Parks Place (owner of all the Six Flags parks), Harold's clothiers, Dollar Rent A Car, and Conoco Oil Co. I'd Say Ditch Witch is in pretty good company, and deservedly so.

Another state publication, The Chronicles of Oklahoma, a quarterly from the Oklahoma Historical Society, is just out with a new issue and it contains more about the decline of the Ku Klux Klan in this state. You may recall that the same subject came up in this column last week. The Chronicles article is entitled "Consorting With Blood and Violence: The Decline of the Ku Klux Klan." The author is Michael M. Jessup, associate professor of sociology at Taylor University, Upland, Indiana. The Chronicles format affords Professor Jessup ample space to discuss and analyze the topic, and it is well documented. The subject matter is interesting, particularly in light of the current debate being stimulated by a study of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot.

A former Perry resident who grew up here during the period when Klan membership and activities were politically and socially correct contacted me after the appearance of my earlier column on the KKK. "Our family employed several African-Americans in the 1920s and I always had a high regard for them," the caller said, "but I'm not sure how the rest of my family felt about them. To me they were more like friends and I still feel warmly toward them." Many others who grew up in that same time period still find it difficult to accept individuals who come from non-white cultures or racial backgrounds. It may take several more layers of generations before the old hostilities are altogether dead and buried. The Klan was not solely responsible for the racial hatred and degradation that still partially divides this country, but the KKK is an icon that symbolized the problem. Read the Chronicles article and reflect on what it says about all of us.



January 19, 2001

One of our Perry products, Max Edgar, who is now a health service psychologist with hospital staff affiliation at the Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City, recently dropped me a line after reading the newly published booklet about Perry high school wrestling. I was privileged to write the narrative for that little story. As Max says, there are "so many to pay tribute to, there are always those some feel should have been included." His letter tells about one such, and I want to share it with you. Max writes:

"From the 1950s through the 1980s, I can't think of any individual who supported Perry wrestling more than David C. Matthews. Having been an NCAA champion at the University of Oklahoma and then the wrestling coach at OU gave him a unique perspective to support kids in Perry wrestling. At least a couple of generations depended on Dave to give them references to colleges and sports scholarships. He was a World War II hero in the Navy and later with the Army National Guard, and a fine attorney.

"Indeed, it is my belief many Perry boys immortalized Dave by following in his footsteps. Some of the wrestling attorneys are Robert J. Mildfelt, R.N. Dunagan III, William Paul Parker (grandson of Paul W. Cress, Dave's original law partner) and Michael Emmons. Many of us did not become attorneys, but benefited immeasurably from his model.

"...It has always been my belief that one reason Perry wrestling was great was because behind every wrestler were several nearly as good who were waiting for their chance. Ranking matches in the wrestling room beat anything at the state tournaments. There would not uncommonly be paired two state champions vying for the same weight at the next match."

Max, of course, comes from a wrestling family and he makes a good point here. Many, many volunteers have a hand in making possible Perry high school's unique accomplishments in wrestling. Each of those helpers is a story in his or her own right, and we probably never will know all their names. Typical of Perry, though, they labor in anonymity for the good

of the program. If the Perry wrestling booklet is updated in the future, the story of Dave Matthews certainly should be included. Thanks to Max Edgar for calling this piece to my attention.

Looking through some microfilm files of old Perry newspapers at our fine Perry Carnegie Library the other day, I came across a few advertisements that take us back to another era. These were in a September 1901 issue of The Perry Enterprise Times, a daily publication of that time. Among the over-the-counter remedies promoted that day were "Cascarets," a candy cathartic; "Wine of Cardui" for women; and "Kodak cameras and supplies of all kinds" at Howendobler's Drug Store on the south side of the square. (My Dad was a pharmacist there before he opened his own store, the City Drug, in 1905.) Other advertisers in that day's issue of the paper were the White Swan Cafe, with Tom Dorsey as proprietor, listing "regular meals for 20 cents," and Kodol Dyspeptic Cure, one of several small national accounts. If you, remember any of those articles, you must have grown up in a drug store, as I did, several years after that 1901 edition appeared.



January 23, 2001

The recent Northwest Corner column about Mr. and Mrs. Fred G. Moore and their travail in the Great Depression era of the 1930s brought back memories of those gloomy days for several readers. I thought you might be interested in hearing some of them. What follows comes from our dear friend, Esther Clark, a Perry centenarian. Her mother, Mrs. Etta Isham, lived across the street from us years ago and we have known Esther for a long, long time. Here is her recollection:

"Several weeks ago you wrote about the Exchange Bank and the Moores, and I got some answers to questions that I had wondered about often. When I was in high school, I spent about three months in Perry during the school term when it was too cold to ride horses to school from our farm eight miles north of town. The Moores made a practice of keeping a high school student each year. They once had a girl from Sumner who had spent three years with them, so then I came along.

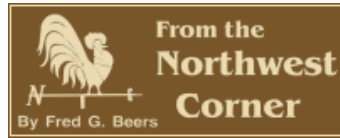
"Mother and Dad sold butter and eggs to customers in Perry every Friday. Mother became acquainted with Mrs. Moore, and then Mother asked Mrs. Moore if she knew where I could stay about three months for my room and board. Mrs. Moore was pleased to have me. She kept two teachers whom they boarded and roomed, and she could use some help. I would get up when Mrs. Moore did and help her prepare breakfast and if possible I liked to get the dishes done before I went to school.

"Mr. and Mrs. Moore were wonderful to me. They treated me like one of the family. Mrs. Moore was really a lovely lady and I felt I learned a great deal from her. I did not know that Mr. Moore and his brother-in-law, Mr. Harry McCandless, started the Exchange Bank in the late 1800s. Neither did I know that the Moores had built the large house they lived in (at Eighth and Ivanhoe) but I know Mrs. Moore had to manage her money carefully. One winter she was invited to the 'Bankers Ball' in Oklahoma City. She was feeling so sad, but said, 'I just can't go this year. I've worn the same red dress to three previous banquets and I don't feel I can fool them in this one. She cried, and I felt so sad for her.

"I went to church with Mr. and Mrs. Moore and as I said before, they treated me like one of the family. I spent the winter months of 1916, 1917 and 1918 with them. I graduated in the spring of 1918. Then there were the years I was gone (with her husband and children), but when I came back to care for Mom, I went back to them.

"I felt so sad when they had to sell the Big House and when I learned that Mrs. Moore had been going door to door with 'Avon supplies,' I again felt so sorry for them. I had lost track of her and I wish I could have made life easier for her"

Thanks to Esther Clark for letting me share this with you. I trust she has fully recovered from the congestive heart failure problem that she recently experienced.



January 26, 2001

Here's another personal recollection provided by a reader who recently was moved by the Northwest Corner column concerning Mr. and Mrs. Fred G. Moore. The Moores, you may recall, were prominent residents of this community from the time he first came here in 1896 to establish what is now the Exchange Bank & Trust Co. But when the Great Depression of the late 1920s arrived, the Moores, like many others, were reduced to a new level of living. What follows is from the memory of Elfreda Wells, now of Stillwater, who did most of her growing up in this community. Here's a portion of her letter:

"My Daddy (known to most of us as Happy Kerr) owned a hardware store located in one of the buildings near Eddie Parker's Kumback Lunch on the north side of the square. The one thing I recall about the hardware store is a balcony at the front inside the building on which Dad kept bicycles for sale. Dad was known as 'Happy Kerr.' (His full name was James Charles Kerr, or J.C. Kerr.) He was a Lions club member and a city councilman. We lacked for nothing. Dad had built a very nice home on Ninth street near the Tate two-story gray home on the corner. We had an 'Overland' car. The rear part of the roof would fold down. Dad would let us 'Red Hots' (Perry high school cheerleaders) ride with the roof down when he drove us to out of town football games.

"All at once one day the banks closed and my Dad lost everything – the store, home and car. We moved to a rental house on Sixth street where the road curves on to the old highway to Ponca City and into Kansas. There was a service station on the curve and I believe it is still standing. We lived in the house directly across from the station. Dad could not find work and we ate potatoes, cabbage and greasy slices of salt pork.

"Dad finally was hired as a foreman building the CCC Park outside of town. Mom did the same as Mrs. Moore, walking all over town selling 'Merle Norman' makeup. Bless her heart, she would be so tired, wearing worn-out old shoes so my brother, Buddy, and I could have decent clothes.

"On Sunday evening, if Dad had the money, the four of us would walk to town to see a movie. It was a very sad time for everyone. My Dad began drinking and could always be found hanging out at Joe's Smoke House. That's when Mom, Buddy and I left via a bus for Tulsa. I only returned to Perry once back then for my Dad's funeral. He was a good man. His pride was gone. The Depression killed him and I loved him."

This is a sad story, but true. Perhaps for some of you who are too young to remember the Depression this will provide a clue to the depths of misery that sorry era brought to families throughout the U.S. Thanks to Elfreda for granting me permission to tell this story.



January 30, 2001

This will be a story about a thousand dollar ham, but first, some background.

In the early 1940s, just before America became an active participant in World War II, Perry had grocery stores galore. Nineteen were listed in the Perry city directory at the start of the decade, and all of them were downtown, around the square. The east side and its adjoining blocks had a large share -- five of them -- and all but the Safeway store on the west side of the square were home-owned and operated. They were "Ma and Pa" stores in the true sense of the word, and each of them had a substantial coterie of followers. Most offered free delivery service twice a day for phone-in orders of any size.

One of the east side stores was the Stanislav Grocery at 308 Sixth street, operated by the late Louis Stanislav and his wife, Iva. Their store was well patronized and they enjoyed a steady flow of customers. Some neighbors of the Stanislavs were H.L. Johnson's Grocery at 314 Sixth street, C.T. Talliaferro's at 404 Sixth, Walkling's Market at 409 Sixth, and H.L. Winger's store at 322 Sixth.

Although he was married and had two young children, Louie was called to Army service in 1944. He was assigned to the Infantry Replacement Training Center at Camp Joseph Robinson, Arkansas, and that's where he was serving on a day in mid-June, 1944, when he received this friendly note from H.C. Donahue, back home in Perry. Here's what the message contained:

"Dear Louie: Just thought you would be interested in knowing that your grocery store really has good hams. Your wife recently sold one for \$1,000. This was at the War Bond auction sale in the Perry Theatre. We happened to bid it in and, by the way, I want to tell you it sure is fine; in fact I think it was one of the best prizes offered. I told your wife the same thing.. Things are not changed much around here. Nearly everyone is buying War Bonds. Harvest will soon be on; in fact, combining already has started. George Dufek delivered the first wheat here in Perry yesterday.. It tested 64."

Mr. Donahue was a partner with John Mugler in the Donahue and Mugler agency, dealing in abstracts, insurance, loans and oil and gas leases. World War II was in a critical stage in Europe and the Pacific, and the U.S. was promoting War Bond sales to help finance the enormous cost. Promotional events like the "auction" at the Perry Theatre, referred to in Mr. Donahue's letter, were held all over the country to help finance the enormous cost of warfare.

This strikes me as a charming little slice of life from the 1940s, and it might stir a bit of nostalgia for some of you. Today the Stanislavs and Mr. Donahue are gone, as are all of those downtown grocery stores, but Louie's son, Jerry, found this letter recently in some of his Dad's things. Jerry has a welding supply business in Oklahoma City and his sister, Frieda DeChant, is a school teacher in Moore. Jerry's wife is the former Binnie Eppler, sister of Anna Lou Randall of Perry.