

January 4, 2002

Here's more about the new "old stuff" recently acquired by Carol Steichen. It is made up largely of items offered by the estate of the late Fredonna Eisenhauer, a collector whose interests spanned a broad array of subjects.

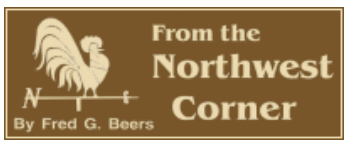
Included in the collection are several printed programs presented by high school and other community groups. One of the latter is a play described in the program as a "glittering, gorgeous, musical comedy," entitled "The Million Dollar Doll in Paris." This production was staged on two November evenings in the Masonic Temple auditorium, but the year is not stated. I am guessing it was in the early 1930s, give or take a little. Presenting it were the men of Perry's National Guard unit - Battery C, 158th Field Artillery, and their band. Battery C later was a component of the 45th Division, and it was called up for active duty at an early date during World War II.

Members of the cast were Farris Davis, Walter Kehres, Will Pricer, Aline Adams, Leo Marshall, Viola Hogszette, Kathryn Laird, A.C. Marshall, Robert Elliott and LeRoy Miller. Musical numbers were offered by Marjorie Laird and chorus, a sextette of boys and girls, and Rev. Charles Johnstone. "Vaudeville interpolations" were provided by Aline Adams, Viola Hogszette, Kathryn Laird, Virginia Elliott, Jeanice Beers, and Gertrude and Leo Marshall.

"Perry kiddies" were spotlighted in scene two, and they included Doris and Regina Gregory, Lucille Mitchell, Thelma Lewis, Genevieve Samuelson, June Kennedy, Ima Jean Peyton, Mary McClellan, Alice Mosena, Maxine Mitchell and Martha Morgan. Also appearing in that scene were Wanda Rasmussen, Mary Ellen Ritthaler, Dorothy Lee Freeman, Marjorie Kennedy, Jane and June Blake, Lois Magee, Theda Oden, Rosemary McEwen, Virginia Elliott and Jeanice Beers.

"The Doll Chorus" included Virginia Vandenberg, Josie Mae Douglass, Ethel Delores Huffman, Dorothy Woodruff, Josephince St.Clair, Peggy Shouldis, Betty Munger, Lorena Barker, Carol Kennedy, Georgianna Blake, Maurine Samuelson, Lucille Swisher, Helen Craig, Dorothy Craig, Lorraine Mugler, Katherine Barnes, Phyllis Nemec, Lavon Minor, Hazel Curtis, Lucile Johnson, Marie Jackson, Fay Havin, Geraldine Robertson, Marilyn Laird, Georgia Woods, Glenna Belle McCoy, Norma Dodge, Myrtle Barnes, Opal Fitzhugh, Frances Skalenda, Mabel Warner, PhyllisYeager, Eva Beryl Foster and Irene Jackson. "The 1950s Sextettes" included these men -- the Messrs John Worley, Walter Kehres, Mickey Johnson, Donald Rice, A.C. Marshall and Will Pricer; and these young ladies - Georgia Woods, Georgianna Blake, Frances Skalenda, Norma Dodge, Eva Beryl Foster and Opal Fitzhugh. The orchestra was directed by Dr. W.C. Marshall; pianists were Arthur Johnston and Mina Bartow, and the talent committee included Mrs. Joe Foster, Capt. Howard Cress and Frank Marshall

It was a benefit production to support the men of Battery C and the 158th Field Artillery band. Do you remember some of those names? More of this is coming later.



January 8, 2002

Here's an interesting explanation of a question that may not have occurred to you. File this under "Transportation Facts." (I'm obliged to an anonymous friend for this curious bit of information.)

The U.S. standard railroad gauge (width between the two rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number.

Q. Why was that gauge used?
A. Because that's the way they built them in England, and the U.S. railroads were built by English expatriates.

Q. Why did the English build them like that?
A. Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Q. Why did "they" use that gauge then?
A. Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons which used that wheel spacing.

Q. Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing?
A. Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

Q. So who built those old rutted roads?
A. The first long distance roads in Europe (and England) were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever since.

Q. And the ruts in the roads?
A. Roman war chariots first formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for (or by) Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches derives from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot.

Specifications and bureaucracies live forever. So the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's behind came up with it, you may be exactly right, because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses. Thus, we have the answer to the original question.

Now the extraterrestrial twist to the story.

When we see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRB's. The SRB's are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRB's might have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRB's had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory had to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRB's had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, the major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's behind.

And you wonder why it's so hard to get ahead in this world.

From the Northwest Corner

By Fred G. Beers

January 11, 2002

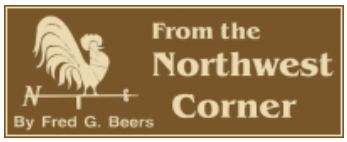
First of all, a correction and amplification. My friend Fredonna Wayland Dowell is now living in Eufaula to be near her brother, W.C. Wayland, who by the way once was a carrier-salesman for this newspaper. When Fredonna left Perry for Eufaula, many of her possessions were offered at an estate sale. Some of these things provided the basis for three Northwest Corner columns, including this one. My New Year's resolutions now include the following: "Don't jump to conclusions." My apologies to Fredonna's family and friends for the mixup.

On the night of February 20, 1923, Perry High School presented "A Pair of Sixes," but a printed program for that performance does not indicate that this was a class play. Members of the cast were James Maloch, Clair Williams, Earl Passow, Frances Willett, Max Boyer, Hubert Mossman, Lee Merry, Victor Coldiron, Otto Marshall, Zelma Elswick, Gertrude Ritter and Hazel Yahn. Directing the play were Miss Ortie Hebbe, Miss Ina Heaton and Miss Anna Boyce. Jim Maloch and Max Boyer were business managers and the stage crew consisted of Willis Athearn, Odie Moore and Ted Newton. Stage electricians were Arthur Campbell and Harry Kent. Miss Irene Maloch was in charge of costumes and makeup, assisted by Miss Vera Maloch and Mrs. W.M. Maloch. Property men were Jim Maloch, Max Boyer, Arthur Clark and Odie Moore. Press agent was Jay Gaskill.

The annual Perry High School baccalaureate service on May 13, 1928, was held in the First Baptist church. It was quite different from today's format. All of the speakers were Perry ministers. Miss Ethel Knox and Alba Mulkey played piano accompaniment for two groups that sang at the opening and closing. Now, here's the cast of a senior class play presented in the late 1920s: Dudley Tucker, Ted McCuiston, Margaret Sowers, Maxine Brier, Dorothy Warner, Dan Brengle, LeRoy Miller, Fern Goley, Sloan Jackson and Elmer Waltermire. Music was furnished by the high school orchestra, directed by Ivan Kennedy. A note at the bottom of the printed program stated that owing to the school activities, the Dubinsky Bros. Stock Co. had postponed their engagement until Monday, May 24, when they would begin a week-long show on "the regular show grounds - east of Corner Drug Store."

The annual concert of the Perry Civic Orchestra, under direction of Leopold Radgowsky, was presented on May 2, 1929. Professor Radgowsky had been head of the Perry High School instrumental music department only one year at the time, but he loved working with orchestras and organized one here featuring PHS students and several adults. Orchestra members were Arthur Johnston, piano; Mrs. Fred Moore, organ; Ivan Kennedy, Ed Bowles. Patsy Jane Sowers and Margaret Otto, violin; Josie Mae Douglas, cello; Andy Abbey, percussion; Lou Endres, trumpet; Bert Shaw, trombone; Bill Lynch, bass; A. Pittman and Carlyle Kerr, clarinet; and Dr. A.M. Crowder, saxophone. Traditional symphonic music made up the night's program, concluding with Sousa's stirring march, "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

The senior class of 1929 presented their annual class play, "A Lucky Break," on May 22 in the high school auditorium. The cast was made up of Laura Maxwell, Marjorie Laird, Gertrude Marshall, Harold Victory, Lawrence Edgar, Ruby Hinson, Irene Jackson, Bud Wolleson, Steward Smith, Earnest Brown, Mabel Warner, Kenneth Coldiron, Myrtle Barnes, Eva Beryl Foster, Ina Nelson, Bill Jones, Byron Kepley and Edwhite Mooter. Names of the director and others working backstage are not shown on the printed program. Again, my thanks to Carol Steichen for allowing this advance look at some very interesting new, but old, acquisitions.



January 15, 2002

Jesse Phillips brought a piece of Perry history to a recent Rotary meeting and it led me to thinking about that one-time local institution, the Perry Mill & Elevator, maker of "Pride of Perry" flour. It was a home-owned business and the largest employer in town before the state highway department established a division office here. The era was years before the Charles Machine Works, Inc. became a major factor locally and on the international scene as well. Few people still remember the Perry Mill, and fewer still know what "Pride of Perry" refers to.

Jesse's home on West Fir Avenue was built on the site of the Nida family farm and the house once occupied by those folks has been standing there like a lonely sentinel for several decades. When the Phillips house was built, the Nida home was moved to a new location a few yards south. Jesse has been using it for storage but the old house has been showing its age lately and it is being dismantled. In that process, an empty cotton cloth sack was found inside the wall of a room. Originally it held six pounds of the locally made flour. The sack may have been white at one time, but after years of collecting dust it is now a light beige color. It is imprinted with the product's name, "Pride of Perry Flour," the name of the Perry Mill & Elevator as manufacturer, and an attractively designed layout. The printing is in two colors, red and blue.

In his book, *Perry, Pride of the Prairie*, author Robert Cunningham wrote that Dave McKinstry founded the Perry Mill & Elevator in the early days. Mr. McKinstry had a background in milling and he built a Perry mill just off the square, partially on the area where the Malzahn family had a machine shop before moving in 1959 to the new location on West Fir Avenue to concentrate on building Ditch Witch equipment. Mr. McKinstry used the name "Pride of Perry" for his flour right from the start, and it was a fortuitous choice. His flour was in demand all over the Midwest. Millers from northern cities sent sacks bearing their own brand designs to Perry to be filled with the local product, anxious to claim it as their own.

The writer continued: "Even with the flour consumed, the empty sacks continued to praise Perry, say early newspapers. A Stillwater writer told of a farm woman bringing in an empty flour sack as a convenient receptacle for taking home a large quantity of apples. Sacks were not supplied by the grocers in those days. She held the sack while the grocer poured the apples into the opening, only to see them fall to the floor through two holes in the bottom. She left with a very red face when she became aware she had brought a pair of her own underwear, made from a Pride of Perry sack. Times were tough on the frontier in those days, and frugal wives made do with what they had. It was the era known as 'jack rabbit stew and kaffir corn cakes'."

The old Perry Mill, with its 100-foot tall brick smokestack, was an imposing feature on the local landscape for years. It was sold, probably in the late 1920s or early 1930s, to General Mills. In a few years they closed the mill and the negative economic impact was severe for a while. "Pride of Perry" disappeared and the episode is mostly forgotten now, but the mill was one of the mainstays that kept Perry healthy for several decades. Jesse's flour sack is an excellent reminder of that period. Not many of them are still around. This is the first one I've seen in many years.



January 18, 2002

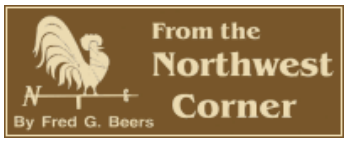
It's kinda rewarding to spend a few minutes at this point in time looking back through the Christmas cards and other holiday greetings received during the past month. Inevitably, there are some thoughts or comments on those messages from dear friends and relatives that didn't quite penetrate to our consciousness when originally scanned. A second look brings greater appreciation. It's a shame that this is the only contact we have with some people who mean so much to us, and all too often the only "message" contained is the printed or signed name of the sender. We would much prefer a few brief sentences telling how things are going but we also are often guilty of sending similar bobtailed greetings, so we can't protest too much about the ones we receive.

So, a second look may turn up some gems. My award this year for the best line in a Christmas greeting goes to Roc Mitchell, a friend in Farmers Branch, Texas. In writing about the family's woes of 2001, Roc described his own physical problems, including a suspected aneurysm at the base of his brain stem. That was chilling news at the time, but he went on to say: "In May the neurologist explained that they had reexamined all the tests and had decided that none of the earlier predictions were true and to the contrary, I was healthy, old and had arthritis. I knew two out of the three, but was relieved to know that I was healthy. They still had no idea what was causing the tingling in my left hand." Roc is a graphic designer and retired Scoutmaster. He, his wife, Clarice, and their children are continuing to live their normal (which is to say, peripatetic) lives. Laura and Clarice have been friends since the high school years in Oklahoma City. We both look forward to the Mitchells' annual Christmas greeting.

That column the other day about the old Perry Mill & Elevator provoked a lot of thoughts for those old enough to remember an era, perhaps seventy years ago, when the mill was the economic mainstay of this community. The mill was located on Birch street just south of the Perry square. In the 1930s it was sold to General Mills and in due time the new owners closed it and the building complex was cleared. The last to go was a 100-foot brick smokestack, an architectural feature that stood out in many early day "bird's eye view" photographs of the city's skyline. Among other things, the Perry Mill used a shrill whistle to announce the start of another workday, lunch hour and quitting time. It was a distinctive, audible sound, and Perry folks missed it when the business shut down. So, General Mills donated the whistle to Perry and it was installed at the old water and light plant that used to generate electric power for the city. It was located near the Santa Fe Railroad tracks in southeast Perry.

The shriek of the whistle then again was heard each weekday. Employees at the water and light plant took turns pulling the cord that powered the whistle. It was sounded at 6 a.m., 8 a.m., 12 noon, 1 p.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. Local folks set their clocks by that whistle. It also was used to welcome in the New Year at midnight each New Year's Eve.

All this was brought to mind again the other day when Jesse Phillips found an old cloth sack that originally held six pounds of "Pride of Perry Flour," the product that emanated from the old Perry Mill & Elevator. The Perry Mill was the city's largest employer in its prime, but few remember it today.



January 22, 2002

When the Union Pacific locomotives came through Perry the other day with the Olympic flame on board, a handful of us assembled at the old depot on east Delaware street to await the arrival at the announced hour. We waited for a considerable length of time before two men in a pickup truck drove to our location and told us the train was behind time,

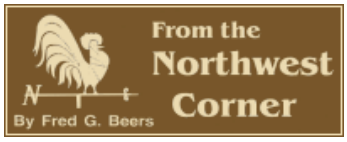
probably as much as an hour and a half off the schedule. "It's so late because it's a UP train," they snickered. It was nearly noon so, knowing that we had plenty of time, we opted to go home for lunch and then return. So did all the others.

Eventually the specially made-up train did arrive. It was not the usual freight hauler that we see here every day. The dual locomotives were brightly painted yellow and black with appropriate symbols, telling the world that the flame was en route to Salt Lake City, Utah, for the 2002 Winter Olympics. It was quite an interesting spectacle. The flame itself was on a gondola-type car with a large cauldron on top. The train made a slow, snaking transit through Perry on the tracks that are now owned by BNSF - the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad. Then it disappeared headed south to Oklahoma City before returning late in the afternoon to this general area for a westward trek, again on the BNSF. Despite the brevity of the moment, it was truly thrilling and I'm glad we had the chance to see the train and wave at the engineers. It gave everyone a little thrill, something this country can use right now. It also brought back a lot of memories, none of them having anything to do with the Olympics.

The old Santa Fe station is a dreary place these days. Now you cannot buy a ticket at the iron-grilled window. In the waiting room those hard wooden benches are nowhere in sight. It's not a place where you can leave Perry for Chicago or Dallas, or greet incoming friends and relatives from Kansas City or Fort Worth, or other points in either direction. Mail is not brought here by rail, and none is dispatched by that means. All of the excitement is long gone. Perry has no passenger railroad traffic now.

A brick sidewalk just north of the depot was once used by passengers boarding or leaving the Santa Fe passenger trains that passed through Perry on a regular schedule. Much of the brick walk now is gone. Adjacent to the walk was a hard-surfaced street where motorists could park while awaiting arrivals. Many parents brought their young children to the station just for the thrill of seeing a train. A standing joke locally was that Stillwater citizens and Oklahoma A.& M. athletic teams had to come to Perry to catch a train. Conductors always waved and engineers shrilled their whistles when they saw an audience on the platform.

There's still a question about the possibility of resuming passenger rail service in Oklahoma, and the location of tracks that the trains will use are also uncertain. In the meantime, we'll have to be satisfied with an occasional treat like the one when the 2002 Olympic flame train came through Perry the other day.



January 25, 2002

The Santa Fe Railroad station was a busy hub of activity years ago when coal-fired locomotives hauling passenger trains chugged through Perry each day of the week. This photo evidently made in the 1920s, shows the handsome brick depot as a train arrived from the north. New passengers waited to board and cards were lined up to haul away parcels after the train departed. The depot now belongs to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line and is now used for office space and storage.

One of these columns the other day told about the old Santa Fe depot on east Delaware street and the Olympic flame that passed through here on a Union Pacific train bound for its final destination, Salt Lake City, Utah. There it will serve during February as a beacon to Olympic athletes from all over the world. Laura and I were among those who gathered at

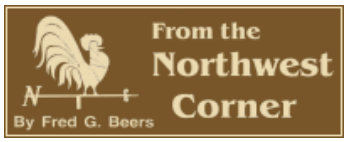
the station to watch the train make its way through here en route to Oklahoma City. That may be as close as we ever will be to an Olympic event.

My feelings were mixed as we left the train station. Seeing the train and its flame-bearing cauldron was undeniably a thrill, but it also was a reminder that now there is no regular passenger train service through Perry. Several years ago we had daily north-south trains on the Santa Fe line and east-west trains on the Frisco Railroad. You could buy a ticket to almost anywhere at a window in one of the two Perry train depots.

Amtrak has made Oklahoma one of the very few states without a passenger train, excluding rare occasions and those on the Oklahoma City-Fort Worth line. Our situation is now under review. Some legislators and civic workers are applying pressure wherever they can in an effort to bring back passenger trains. For now all we can do is watch the Burlington Northern Santa Fe freighters pass through our town, sometimes with shrieking whistles blowing for what seems like an eternity while slow-moving, unbelievably long freight cars tie up vehicle traffic for long spells at crossings. This often makes motorists unhappy. In some cases I've overheard a few colorful obscenities and vulgarities that first came to my attention when our platoon was called out to clean the latrines in basic training. But that's another story.

The passenger trains we used to see here each day seemed friendlier for some reason. Perhaps that was because the engineers always responded to waving children and adults with quick toots on the diesel locomotives, or because the conductors and passengers usually smiled and nodded to onlookers who watched from their cars or stood on the station platform. Each arrival was a cause for celebration.

The old days are not likely to return, and I don't believe they should. But wouldn't it be nice to ride a train for business or pleasure once again? Our children are growing up without ever having that experience. C'mon, Amtrak. Give us passenger service.



January 29, 2002

Sam Ebersole, who knows how I enjoy looking through old newspapers, brought me a rare one the other day. If you're interested, I'll share some tidbits with you. It was a tabloid called *The Perry Tribune*, and it appeared locally for a brief period in the mid-1930s. The Great Depression had a death grip then on just about everything in the U.S and it was not a particularly opportune time for any kind of new business to be launched.

This issue, now brown with the accumulation of years of dust and almost too fragile to touch, is dated August 16, 1934. It was offered to subscribers at fifty cents per year. If it were published each week, that means it cost less than a penny per copy. No wonder it did not find a permanent place. The page one masthead tells us that the paper was published every Thursday, and that this was No. 30 in Volume I. That means it had existed for at least 30 weeks, but there's no clue as to how much longer it continued.

I vaguely remember the paper and I don't believe it continued for any great length of time. For one thing, The Perry Daily Journal was too much competition. The editor of *The Tribune* was Mr. E.B. Pastorius and the publisher was the Perry Printing Co., Inc., located at 719 Cedar street, apparently the former location of Mr. O.H. Hovey's job printing business. Mr. Hovey, a colorful Perry citizen for many years, died in April 1940 but retired earlier because of the infirmities of old age.

This issue was found among miscellaneous objects laid aside by Sam's mother, Dorothy Ebersole, who is now a resident of the Perry Nursing Home.

News items on the front page were mostly brief homespun articles about local folks, like this one: "W.W. Turner and J.L. Coffman of near Billings transacted business in Perry Monday." Or they were borrowed like this one, reprinted here in its entirety: "John S. Labatt, wealthy Canadian brewer, was kidnaped Wednesday and held for $150,000 ransom." Another local story on page one was headlined: "**City Is Now Getting Water from Laird's Lake**." The story reported: "The water department has completed the pipe line to Laird's Lake and the city is now getting water from that source. Water will not be shipped in unless in emergency. No contracts have been let yet for the drilling of water wells, but may be soon." Laird's Lake, of course, was a popular recreation center at the north end of Seventh street, where several fine homes are now located.

Some of the advertisers were Wilson's Cash Grocery, Thompson's Grocery & Market, Mooter's Little Store ("At the foot of the hill, 205 South Seventh Street"), Huffman's Grocery, Good Eats, home of the People's Cab, Marcy's Furniture Exchange, Brant's Garage on West Cedar (Louis V. Swearingen, manager), Stanley's Garage, DeBord Tourist Camp and Robert Wilson's Service Station at Sixth and Kaw. There were a few others, but not many.

The Perry Printing Co. is now owned and operated by Larry and Toni Miller and it is on the west side of the square, and *The Perry Tribune* no longer exists. It's interesting to see what people were reading and talking about nearly 70 years ago in our community, and my thanks to Sam Ebersole for letting me see this old newspaper from another era.