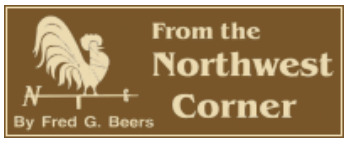


January 2, 2004

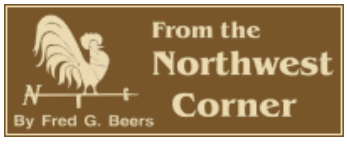
Today we continue with some of the recollections of Roy Kendrick, now a Perry antique store operator, who once was manager of the city's movie theaters. Here he is telling about how he happened to come to Perry in 1967 after leaving a job in Oklahoma City where he worked with Katherine Pierce, sister of B.J. McKenna, who for a time owned the Perry and Roxy Theaters in Perry. Roy writes:

Katherine had suggested that I should lease the theaters at Perry (I didn't even know where the town was at first), and the McKenna family kept after me to meet with B.J. to at least look the town over. B.J.'s brother, Harry, was co-owner of Screen Guild Pictures (an independent movie releasing company that was the Oklahoma representative for American-International Pictures, plus Reel-art and several small movie companies) and his office was just a couple of buildings away. He and his son came in to our office frequently to visit Katie (Katherine) and to sell me their latest hit movie for my small theater circuit. Also, Jim and Bernard McKenna (B.J.'s other sons) would come in from Tulsa frequently to buy product for their theaters and also to stop in for coffee and conversation with Katie.

They all seemed to think that I really ought to look at Perry as a possibility of expansion. Then a projectionist from Perry came in looking for a part to repair a machine and commented that there were problems with some of the equipment and could I maybe come up and look at it? (I had a pretty good reputation as a troubleshooter.) So the next time they had a fairly large concessions order, I volunteered to deliver it and to look the place over. As I drove down the hill to this little valley I was saying to myself that it looked like a nice little town to raise my kids (we had two small sons.) I found the theater, delivered the supplies and went up to the projectionist booth. The projectors were old and rather noisy and one had a bad case of "travel ghost" (shutters between the light source were out of time with the movement of the film so that there were streaks of light on the screen) and the carbons in the arc light wouldn't feed properly. I reversed the gears in the lamphouse to slow down the carbon feed (it was set for different carbon rods than the one they were using), and I showed the projectionist how to get the shutters back in time. When I left, there was a "decent picture" on the screen.

A few weeks later we met with B.J. McKenna and worked out a deal for my wife and I to lease the theaters (eventually we bought the equipment). The building properties were not for sale. We closed the drive-in after some kids broke in and smashed all the concessions equipment, and the Exchange Bank tore down the Perry Theater building to expand their property. I now operate an antique mall in the former Donaldson & Yahn Lumber Yard (which I purchased from Glenn Yahn and the Bob Donaldson family.) I didn't intend to bore you with all this detail but just couldn't find a stopping place.

Far as I'm concerned, Roy didn't need to leave out any of the details. This is a most interesting account by someone who deals daily with antiques and recollections. By the way, the original message was sent to Jo Claire Hamilton, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Al Singletary, who are fondly remembered here.



January 6, 2004

The trouble with playing all these bowl games over a period of about two weeks is simply this: It requires too many hours of TV viewing, even though the time is spread over several days. If my eyeballs look like test patterns, that's the reason.

The readers continue to write, and several of them are passing along things that should produce a few chuckles for the rest of us. Here, personally selected by me, are a few of them. Enjoy.

This man in a Volkswagen Beetle pulls up to a guy in a Rolls Royce at a stop sign. Their windows are open and he yells at the guy in the Rolls: "Hey you got a telephone in that Rolls?" The guy in the Rolls says, "Yes, of course I do."
"I got one too...See?"
"Uh-huh, yes, that's very nice."
"You got a fax machine?"
"Why, actually, yes, I do."
"I do, too! See? It's right here!"
"Uh-huh."
The light is just about to turn green and the guy in the VW says, "So, do you have a double bed in the back there?"
And the guy in the Rolls says, "NO! Do you?"
"Yep, I got my double bed right here. See?"
The light turns and the man in the Volkswagen takes off. Well, the guy in the Rolls is not about to be one-upped, so he goes immediately to a customizing shop and orders them to put a double bed in the back of his car. About two weeks later, the job is finally done. He picks up his car and drives all over town looking for the Volkswagen. He finally finds it parked alongside the road so he pulls his Rolls up next to it. The windows on the VW are all fogged up and he feels a little awkward about it, but he gets out of his newly modified Rolls and taps on the foggy window of the Volkswagen. The man in the Volkswagen finally opens the window a crack and peeks out. The guy in the Rolls says, "Hey, remember me?"
"Yeah, Yeah, I remember you. What's up?"
"Check this out...I got a double bed installed in my Rolls."
And the man in the VW says, "You got me out of the shower to tell me that?!!"
End of story.

Now, to wind this up, here are a couple more offered by a reader:

A backslider suddenly began attending church faithfully on Sunday mornings, instead of going fishing. The pastor was highly gratified, and told him, "How wonderful it made me feel to see you at services with your good wife!"

"Well, Preacher," said the fisherman, "it's a matter of choice. I'd rather hear your sermon than hers."

After Sunday service a young couple talked to the pastor about joining the church. The pastor hadn't met the husband before, so he asked what church the young man was transferring from. A little sadly, he replied, "I am transferring from the Municipal Golf Course."

From the Northwest Corner
By Fred G. Beers

January 9, 2004

The summers of the 1930s are easy to remember. That was the time of the Great Depression. My own personal observation post was behind the soda fountain of our family's drug store on the north side of the square in the building

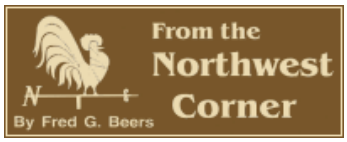
now occupied by Georgia's Fine Furniture. We didn't have any money, but neither did most of our friends. We found ways to be entertained without spending real money (i.e., more than a dollar or so).

Most of our customers at the City Drug Store were regulars, people who dropped in often for a cold drink concocted by one of us professional soda jerks. Or perhaps they needed a prescription refilled, or a new tin of Bayer aspirins, a pack of cigarettes, candy bar-and things more personal. If they came to our store, I listened to their conversations carefully without snooping, and I longed for the day I could be a grown-up person like they were.

Judge William Bowles was among that group. His law office was down the street above the barber shop that had always been there (now operated by Jack Dorl). Judge Bowles had a commanding presence, a leonine manner, and a person sensed without asking that he was a gentleman who knew what he was talking about, no matter where the conversation was headed. Most people instinctively respected him. Another was Mr. Fred Moore, a tall, slender banker from down the street when the Exchange Bank was located just a few feet east of the drug store. Mr. Moore enjoyed a five-cent glass of Dr Pepper. The concoction had an advertising slogan advising customers to have a Dr Pepper each day at 10, 2 and 4 o'clock. Mr. Moore took that literally and he came to the drug store for his cooling sip each day precisely at those hours. He usually occupied one of our booths by himself, relishing a few moments of peace and quiet. Mr. Moore was a kind, gentle man. He and his sweet wife Anna were treated harshly by the Depression, much worse than they deserved. She was the choir director at the Presbyterian church and both of them were warmly regarded by the rest of the community. Sadly, their story was repeated in many families at the time.

Mr. Gus Wollard, who also had an office down the street from our store, was another community leader who came to our drug store regularly. So did Mr. Harry Donaldson of Donaldson-Yahn Lumber Co. Each morning, en route to his office at the lumber yard on east Delaware, he came in for a Coke and a supply of cigars (Roi Tans, I think), and he always had a cheerful thought to express.

All of those fine gentlemen are gone now, and a new generation has taken over the roles of leadership the others once filled. We also have many women who have become hard-driving forces in the business community and elsewhere in our little city. Those fellows mentioned here were not the only ones who handled important jobs in addition to their vocational callings, but perhaps they are typical. I personally felt touched by them and honored to have known them in my minor capacity as a fountaineer at the City Drug Store during those dreary summer days of the 1930's.



January 13, 2004

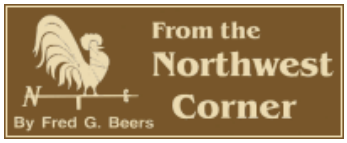
Some friends who are still in the news-gathering business are concerned over the way things are going in Iraq. This may surprise you, because it's not what you hear daily from the liberals on TV and elsewhere. My friends tell me that the occupation force in Iraq has been steadily losing one battle-that of the media. That is the opinion of some present and past staffers of *Stars and Stripes*, the military newspaper, and those people have been around long enough that we can assume they know whereof they speak. Here's a condensed version of their conclusions:

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein there has been an explosion of information sources in the country. More than 200 newspapers are being published, and Iraqis have rushed by the tens of thousands to acquire satellite equipment allowing them to watch Arab and other international news stations. Meanwhile, the coalition's own attempts to broadcast news and information have been woefully deficient. Although it controls Iraq's main broadcast channel, two domestic radio stations

and a major newspaper, the authority and its American contractors have failed to capture the Iraqi audience-news programs, in particular, smack of sanitation. The problem is made all the more serious by the fact that Arab satellite broadcasters are at once more skilled in production, more credible with many Iraqis and wildly biased against the U.S. mission. Last week, with the approval of the Bush administration, Iraq's Governing Council reacted by shutting down the Baghdad operation of one of the two leading broadcasters, al-Arabiya. In addition to setting a terrible precedent for press freedom in Iraq, this will only make the underlying problem worse.

Al-Arabiya, like its competitor al-Jazeera, covers Iraq and the Middle East with a slant that is disturbing to Westerners, but typical of the prevailing outlook among the Arab intelligentsia. It heaps attention on violence in the Israeli-occupied territories, and on the resistance to the U.S. invasion, and al-Arabiya recently broadcast a statement it received at its Dubai headquarters that was attributed to the former dictator. This last act was the pretext for its shutdown. Yet the channel was doing no more or less than American networks that report smuggled statements from Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden, not because they support them but because they are news. After this fact was pointed out, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld charged at a press conference that al-Arabiya works in league with the Iraqi resistance, which, he claimed, summons it to cover attacks. But he offered no evidence to back the sensational charge. The channel, like other media outlets, covers the aftermath of attacks, but those who monitor it say it has not broadcast them as they occur.

So our American men and women in uniform and in civilian clothes attempt to reform Iraq without punishing it, and it is proving to be a daunting task. The price of freedom is never small, and rarely is it easy to achieve.



January 16, 2004

Let's hark back once again to the unpleasant times of the 1930s when, in the summer, red dust filled the air most days to compound the misery of the abnormal Oklahoma heat and the Great Depression, too. Thank goodness, those are consigned to history now and we have many new worries to occupy our time and our minds.

Fun was not hard to find, and we amused ourselves in countless ingenious ways. Some years during that wretched decade the usual summer heat arrived ahead of time bringing temperatures hovering in the upper 90s or higher. Air conditioning? There wasn't any, until the Roxy Theater installed a large evaporative cooler that lowered the interior readings by at least 20 degrees. My sister, Gloria, and I saw every movie that appeared on the screens at the Roxy and the Annex Theaters, because admission was only a dime or so. We thought that was marvelous, but on days of high humidity those dripping coolers were just more oppressive.

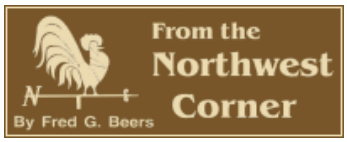
In some homes, including our apartment above the City Drug Store, folks used 12-inch electric fans in every room in a desperate but futile effort to make life a little more pleasant. Our drug store had several ceiling fans, which served pretty well most of the time. The final solution was the forerunner of today's refrigerated air systems. You find them everywhere today, but the first ones were expensive to buy and operate. They were generally used in the homes of wealthy people and in retail businesses where customers spent a lot of money. That did not include the City Drug Store.

My cousin, Fred W. Beers, moved here from Kansas City, Mo., to become general manager of the drug store after my Dad died in 1931. He was 15 years older that I was but he was like my big brother. On the warmer summer nights during that period, he and I would roll up some sheets, pillows and even a blanket and walk across the street to the Courthouse Park

and sleep there. We were not the only ones. Several others knew that was a cool place to sleep and they joined us with their own pallets. The only problem encountered was when the sun came up. Then you needed to roll up your bedding and head for home, because at first light the initial wave of starlings and other unpleasant birds began arriving in the park's shady elm trees. They deposited little bird messes on whoever or whatever chanced to be below.

Other folks who lived in the downtown area found different ways of reducing the heat problem. For instance, the family of Dr. George Driver lived above the Davis & Son Furniture Store, where the First Bank building now stands. The Drivers had an apartment on the second floor, along with his professional office and the local Southwestern Bell Telephone operators. When it was bedtime in the Drivers' household, they climbed out windows on the east front of the building and spread their pallets on the metal awning that hung there. I don't think the starlings ever bothered them.

Trying times usually lead to unique solutions, and so it was in the sultry summers of the 1930s when Perry citizens looked for ways to beat the heat.



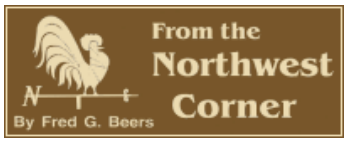
January 20, 2004

Bob McCubbins was a tough, hard driving man. Anyone who has known him during the past few years knows that to be true, even though Bob himself would probably laugh at the description. Life was not kind to him. He died last week after many years of pain and difficulty in doing things that the rest of us take for granted. He was crippled by an unfortunate accident when he was just becoming an adult. No one that I know remembers hearing him complain. He went on to win a law degree and to serve this county, where he was nurtured and grew up, in several ways.

Back in the days before the Americans with disabilities were given official help, Bob was serving this county in elected positions. This was his jurisdiction and he took his responsibilities seriously. I particularly remember standing transfixed as he negotiated those steep staircases in the courthouse. Each step was a struggle, and for years there was no elevator in the building to whisk him from the ground floor to his offices on a higher level. Bob never asked for assistance.

Bob was an honor student at Billings high school when he graduated there. His condition must have been a particular problem to him because he had been an outstanding athlete, a highly regarded prospect for honors at Oklahoma A. & M. College (Oklahoma State University) when he was recruited to join the other young Cowboys of that era. A broken neck while working out with the Aggie team in the fall of his first year there ended his athletic career but it did not deter him from striving for success. He completed undergraduate work at A.&.M., then earned a law degree from the University of Oklahoma Law School. He also was a CPA, held a degree in education and farmed 2,000 acres. While in law school he became the youngest person ever to serve in the state legislature. A busy life? You bet! He would not have been happy with anything less. Later he became our county attorney and for 26 years presided over county court as judge. Then he "retired" to devote full time to his farming interests.

Bob died the other day at the age of 84. An interesting man, without doubt, but a person we all would do well to emulate. Despite serious limitations, he achieved and succeeded where others might have shrugged their shoulders and walked away. Bob McCubbins was an icon for all of us.



January 23, 2004

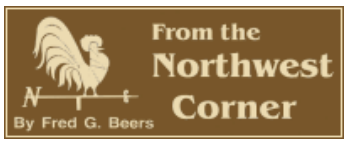
On a steamy September day in the 1930s, when the midsummer heat was barely tolerable, I buddied quite a bit with Richard Lane, a young man of about my age. Actually, he was a few years older than I was and he taught me some of the ways of the world, as he knew it. We enjoyed each other's company because it was cheap and neither of us had any spending money.

My family had an apartment on the second floor of the building where our store, the City Drug, was located. Richard's family had an apartment over the Sheets Plumbing Co. on 6th Street, where the Exchange Bank drive-through facility is now located. His father was Mr. Bill Lane, circulation manager of The Journal. Mr. Lane was in charge of local and rural deliveries of the paper and he spent most of his days roaming the countryside, collecting for subscriptions and signing up new readers. Mr. Lane also had charge of hiring and dismissing the newspaper's carriers, and those jobs were greatly coveted by those of us in the early teen-age stage. I had my application in for a carrier route when one became available, but there were too many ahead of me so I did not get a route. But that's off the subject for today.

Richard and I were both "downtown brats," so we hung out together a lot. We spent a lot of time sitting on those iron benches in the Courthouse Park, just talking about topics that teen-age boys of that era had on their minds. One day while we were so engaged, the attorney Al Singletary came strolling down a sidewalk in the park and he stopped to speak to us. We felt honored. He was a noted trial lawyer in this part of the state and it was flattering just to be recognized as a human being by someone of his stature. He and I were, after all, both Presbyterians, but he was a grownup and I was a mere kid.

Mr. Singletary asked us if we were pretty familiar with the park and the Cherokee Strip celebration that was coming up in just a few weeks. Of course we were- every Perry youngster knows about that event. "Would you like to earn a little money?," he asked. That was the clincher. Almost in unison, we both said, "yes." Well, Mr. Singletary explained that he was the Noble county campaign manager for Josh Lee, who was running as a Democrat for the U.S. Senate and he was going to be in Perry for the celebration. Our job, should we accept it, would be to maintain a barrel of ice water and hand out cupfuls, along with campaign literature, to anyone who came by. Our table would have a large "Josh Lee for Senate" banner to identify the one who provided that welcome refreshment. Richard and I would each receive fifty cents a day for our work, with a minimum of one day guaranteed.

We accepted the offer, and it turned out to be a one-day job. But each of us received a half-dollar for about eight hours of work, plus (on our own) we stayed up all night on election day in November listening to the radio just to see how things turned out. So, when we heard Mr. Lee declared the winner, we told ourselves that we had played an active role in getting him elected. We basked in the knowledge that we had helped even in a small way.

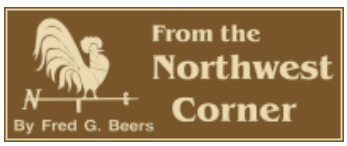


January 27, 2004

Growing up in downtown Perry during the 1930s was an unforgettable experience. Our family was not the only one sharing apartment space during that period. Several others occupied rooms in second story locations around the square. We lived downtown because the family business, which was the City Drug Store on the north side of the square, had living space on the second floor and we could then rent our house at 8th and Elm ($35 per month, partially furnished) for additional income. The apartment gave us four bedrooms, a compact kitchen, large dining room, larger living room and a bathroom that we shared with Dr. J.W. Francis, his office staff; and at least three tenants in the other apartments. The rooms we occupied were on the north side of the building and, yes, those Depression-era summers were miserable. Our family at the time consisted of Mother, my sisters Gloria and Jeanice, my cousin Fred W. Beers, and me.

Jeanice graduated from Perry High School in the middle of that decade and was married in the fall. The rest of us worked in the drug store. Then Gloria became a waitress at the Palace Café and that left cousin Fred, Mother and me to run the business. That was OK. I was not yet a teen-ager but I already knew everything. We lived downtown until the drug store yield-ed to the Great Depression and was closed in 1940. We moved back to our house, just across the alley from Perry High School where the school now has a large concrete parking lot. But while we lived on the square folks of my age had to test their resourcefulness to find amusement. We had two movie houses to choose from and each of them changed features three times a week. That occupied a lot of time, as did the drug store, but other leisure activity also was necessary. One of my friends was Tommy Robinson, a classmate at PHS, who lived with his parents in an apartment over Bush & Joe's Smoke House, a gentleman's recreation parlor on the northeast corner of the square. Tommy and I walked to school from the square each weekday morning and we generally finished the day with a teen-age conversation in the courthouse park.

On one such occasion we discovered that neither of us had ever seen the county jail atop the courthouse. We made an inquiry about a tour the following day and Sheriff Merl Harman arranged for us to be walked through those forbidding corridors. In one grimy cell block we noticed that several inmates had left their autographs on the walls, usually adding some other piece of information. One that caught our eye was the signature of a respected Perry professional man, accused of being a public drunk. Beneath his name he wrote the name of the Ivy League school where he had graduated with honors, plus a line or so about his family's home in a fashionable Eastern community. Other names scratched on that wall were those of habitual drunks and addicts, and a few others of assorted backgrounds. But only one Ivy Leaguer, and a very highly regarded one at that. It was only one of the facts of life we discovered that summer.



January 30, 2004

Recent temperatures in our part of the Southwest have been seasonably chilly, but each year the arrival of winter also makes us recall some of the unpleasant summers many of us have endured here. Oklahomans generally like to think that we have climatic extremes - 'way too hot in the summer, and unnecessarily cold in the winter. Actually, with my limited knowledge of weather conditions here and elsewhere, I'm guessing that we are no worse than average in those categories. That may be worse than we'd like but in reality it is not too bad. Does that make sense?

Folks hereabouts have come up with some ingeniously clever ideas for dealing with the weather when things become really nasty. Maybe a few of those ideas were impractical, but somehow they took weather as a serious conversational

topic off the table. That made us feel better, and that is pretty important. Growing up in Perry, I learned to respect the people and the improvisations some of them used when the July and August thermometer readings just seemed unreal, they were so high

I remember one year, probably in the late 1930s, *The Journal* carried a page one weather story each day to report the 100-plus readings and the ways Perry people suffered but endured. During that period people frequently said, with pride, "you could fry an egg on the sidewalk," it was so hot. The Journal printed that and it got some people to wondering. At the time, our family operated the City Drug Store on the north side of the square. My cousin, Fred W. Beers, who worked there, decided to test the theory. He himself believed it was true. One July afternoon, when we all felt at least half-baked, Cousin Fred broke an egg on the sidewalk in front of the store and poured its contents onto the concrete sidewalk. He wore the unlined green jacket of a pharmacist, so he looked very clinical. A small assembly of passersby gathered to watch the experiment. Twenty minutes or so later, neither the yolk nor the white of the egg showed any signs of being cooked, so Fred scraped up the remains and tossed them in the trash. The little crowd of observers silently dispersed, and the old saying just lost its meaning for me.

Recollections of those lazy summer days seem to help temper the times such as we have been experiencing lately. Makes me wonder- which is better, summer or winter? All things considered, I'll take anything in preference to the extremes of January and July in Oklahoma. Here's hoping we all survive many more of them.