

July 2, 1998

Today's installment completes the series on the Shepherd family, Noble county pioneers. This portion tells more about Jack Shepherd, whose parents made the Cherokee Strip run in 1893, and his wife, Pearl.

In the previous column we learned about Jack and Pearl's difficult times early in their married life, including a close call when the nearby Black Bear Creek flooded in the late 1920s. Jack and Pearl purchased the Bowers homestead eight miles east of Perry on December 28, 1929. It was hot and dirty the following year, when U.S. highway 64 was paved, and the rattlesnakes in the concrete forms were abundant. But Mildred still traveled on muddy side roads with deep ruts at three miles per hour in the cold, windy school bus to the consolidated school in Sumner. Toilets there were two blocks away from the building.

Those dust bowl days of the 1930s during the Great Depression were lean times and thievery was rampant. Jack and Pearl persevered, however, farming, raising Hereford cattle, Rhode Island red chickens and a fine garden. There was always plenty to eat. Pearl preserved the vegetables and beef in the pressure cooker, and baked prize-winning light bread in an oven on a kerosene stove. What a day of celebration when the mortgage was paid off and Pearl got a Maytag washer!

Despite her laborious home tasks, Pearl made time to participate in worthwhile community activities. An excellent teacher, she taught a Sunday school class in the First Christian church at Sumner and at Morrison for 29 years. She also was an active member of the Sumner Ladies Aid.

Pearl's real leadership abilities shone forth in her work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Homemakers Association, once known as home demonstration clubs. She joined the Sumner Farm Women's Club in 1932, one year after its inception, and served as president for 17 years and secretary for nine. If you will excuse this aside, I well remember Pearl Shepherd on her periodic trips to *The Perry Daily Journal* office with information about the Sumner club. She was always smiling, upbeat and helpful. We liked to see her come in through the front door.

She also was a leader in the Noble County Home Demonstration Council, serving two years as president and four years as treasurer. Pearl was a parliamentarian, reporter and member of various committees of the council. She especially enjoyed the state meetings on the campus of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. During her 50 years of service, Pearl was recognized as an honorary member of Noble county 4-H clubs.

Jack and Pearl built a new house on the homestead in 1965. After Jack's death on December 14, 1969, Pearl continued to enjoy her home, friends, family and flowers, until she suffered a stroke in 1992. Patient and unassuming, Pearl had a genuine love and concern for others. She was never too busy to lend a helping hand.

Jack and Pearl's daughter, Mildred, graduated from Sumner high school in 1940. After graduating from OSU in August 1943, Mildred married a Californian, Sgt. Mario Rodriguez, in Champaign, Illinois, the following month. While he was in Europe and she was living with her parents, their daughter, Jacqueline, was born March 14, 1945, in Stillwater. Mario received his Ph.D. in Latin American history from the University of California - Berkeley in 1952. Later, Mildred continued her education at the University of Arizona in Tucson, receiving her Ph.D. in agricultural biochemistry and nutrition in 1969. After successful careers, they returned to Stillwater when Pearl had her stroke in 1992. Their daughter, Jacqueline, married Wayne Mattice in January 1965 and completed her bachelor's degree in biology at the University of North Carolina and her master's in education at Duke University. Wayne, a graduate of Grinnell College in Iowa and Duke, is now a professor and polymer chemist at the University of Akron (Ohio). Jacqueline teaches science at Our Lady of the Elms. Their daughter, Valerie, and

her husband, John Tesmer, are post doctorals in biochemistry at the University of Texas Southwest Medical Center in Dallas.

My thanks to Dr. Mildred Rodriguez for providing this information. It is among the many Noble county family biographies you will find in the forthcoming Volume II of History of Noble County to be published later this year by the Noble County Genealogy Society.



July 7, 1998

Gene Taylor spent a virtual lifetime on the staff of *The Perry Daily Journal* so it seemed a little surreal when he announced his retirement last year. After he had put in more than half-century on the job at this newspaper, folks had pretty well become accustomed to seeing him in and around the office. His distinctive, sometimes adversarial coverage of city council meetings helped to establish his image in the mind of the paper's readers. Dozens of friends and acquaintances joined together on Feb. 28 of last year to wish him well and celebrate his exit from the daily grind.

Gene was born with an eye problem that plagued him throughout his life. Thick-lensed glasses provided some help but he never enjoyed anything like normal vision. I've been told that with today's surgical tools and techniques his problem could have been solved in early childhood, but that solution came too late for him. Gene's sister, Marie, was with him all through his years in the Perry school system, but he was determined to make it on his own as an adult. While still in high school he worked in the circulation department at *The Journal* and he continued as a full-time employee here after graduating from Perry High School in 1942. W K. Leatherock, publisher of the paper at that time, understood Gene's problem and admired his attitude. He did not hesitate to offer him a regular job.

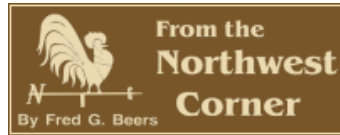
When World War II came along, most of Taylor's friends and contemporaries were called to military service. Since he was unable to go with them, Gene kept up a regular correspondence with many of the young men he had grown up with while they were in training or serving in combat zones. As a reporter for *The Journal* he stayed abreast of the news, including things that never broke into print, and he shared those in his voluminous correspondence.

I worked with Gene at the newspaper before and after the war. He seemed to enjoy covering various things in the community, although some of those drawn-out, long-winded council sessions were a real pain in the neck. Even when the city fathers met into the wee hours of the morning, debating issues of the day, Taylor faithfully returned to the office and wrote his story about the meeting, then showed up for work bright and early at the usual time the next day.

Despite his subjective view of some council members and other city officials, the mayor and council respected him enough to name a street for him several years ago. The bob-tailed thoroughfare that borders City Hall on the east was named "Gene Taylor Street" to show there were no hard feelings. Indeed, they usually enjoyed having him on the sidelines at every meeting.

Taylor was determined to live life on his own terms despite the serious disability that dogged him, and he spent his last few months in retirement doing pretty much what he pleased. He continued as a member of the Kumbback regulars and he maintained his interest in what was going on around town even though he didn't have to write about it. *The Journal* gave him his desk and his faithful, battered old typewriter upon his retirement, but Gene had no use for them and donated them to Stagecoach Community Theatre, where they are put to good use.

It still seems strange not to see Taylor going in and out of the newspaper office and it will be even more so now that he is gone from the community. It is sad to think that his death came while he was alone, but he spent most of his life that way, by his own choosing. As we write "30" to Gene Taylor's personal story, we recognize that he will be missed, but we acknowledge with a tip of the hat his contribution to this community.



July 10, 1998

Joyce Tell is another one of those who enjoy listening to Big Band music and the singers of that golden age of great music. Her interest is not surprising. The Tell family came from New Jersey and they are musically inclined. One of Mrs. Tell's sisters-in-law even made the grade as a vocalist with some of the best of the Swing Era's great musicians. Her story is told briefly in a story from a New Jersey newspaper with a dateline of Hammonton. Mrs. Tell shared it with me the other day and I want to pass it along.

The story relates that several well-known Hollywood and Broadway personalities came from the Hammonton area. "Then there were the Tell sisters," the story goes on, "all three born in Hammonton. They rose to fame back in the 1930's when girl trios such as the Andrews (sisters) and others were in vogue. They played the big-time circuits, including Keith's, but it was Gladys, who graduated from Hammonton High in 1934, who achieved the greatest measure of fame. She was the leading female vocalist with big name orchestras of the day, especially during World War II, including the Dorseys and others."

The Dorseys were brothers Tommy and Jimmy. At various times they had a top-flight organization known as the Dorsey Brothers Band, but they battled each other regularly. With their own individual bands and styles, each attained the top rung of success in a business that featured the likes of Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Harry James and dozens of others. Their records, concerts and dance dates were as popular as today's pop music icons. As a Dorsey singer, Gladys Tell was in the company of Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford, Dick Haymes, Bob Eberly and Helen O'Connell, among others. Some of those names may not be familiar to all of you, but they were mystical and magical in the Big Band era.

Hammonton, New Jersey, also takes pride in bragging on some other native sons and daughters who soared to or near the top in show business. One of the most prominent was Victor Moore, born there in 1876. He later became a popular musical theatre figure and he also appeared in some of Hollywood's biggest productions. On the New York stage he was in "Of Thee I Sing," "Louisiana Purchase," and others. One of his last appearances was with Marilyn Monroe.

Thanks to Mrs. Tell for passing along this information about her connection with the kind of music so many of us enjoy.

A note from Marilyn (Norman) Wasemiller of Dearborn, Michigan, followed a recent column about the late Gertye Kobes Croka, a long-time first grade teacher in the Perry school system. Mrs. Croka taught the Norman twins, Marilyn and her sister, Carolyn Wilda, when they were in first grade in 1944. "We both loved her dearly," Marilyn says. Her note followed a recent photo and commentary about Mrs. Croka and a few other local teachers from years ago. Bessie Barker, home economics instructor, also was in the photo, and the twins had her as freshmen in 1953. Marilyn also sent along a copy of the cover sheet from one of her grade cards from 1944-45, bearing the name of Gertye Croka as a teacher, L.E. States as principal, and George Spraberry as superintendent. Marilyn is now with the labor relations department of Ford Motor Co. at Dearborn.



July 14, 1998

The basis for another good Perry anecdote appeared in a recent Tulsa World article that dealt with a new book and its author, Bob Burke, an Oklahoma City attorney. Mr. Burke has written or co-written 19 books about Oklahoma history. One of these is *From Oklahoma to Eternity: The Life of Wiley Post and the Winnie Mae*. The author was guest speaker for the Oklahoma Heritage Association at a reception recently at Tulsa's fashionable Southern Hills Country Club. The meeting was covered by the Tulsa newspaper, and that's where the Perry connection was brought out.

Mr. Burke is chairman of the Wiley Post Commission which is celebrating the centennial anniversary of Post's birth. For those who may not recognize the name, Wiley Post, an Oklahoman, is an authentic aviation pioneer. An Oklahoma City airport is named for him. Following Mr. Burke's remarks, several Heritage Association members had stories to tell about Wiley Post. One of those contributions was provided by King Kirchner, Tulsa oilman, who grew up in Perry.

King related that when he took his father, the late Kenneth Kirchner, up for a ride in a new plane back in the 1960s, his father said the last pilot he had ridden with was Wiley Post on a flight from Oklahoma City to Perry. No other details were provided by the newspaper. I've checked with some of the local folks who knew Kenneth Kirchner quite well but none of them had heard the story previously. Someday I'd like to know how Mr. Kirchner came to be aboard a plane piloted by Wiley Post.

You will remember, of course, that Wiley Post was the pilot of the plane that crashed near Point Barrow, Alaska, on August 15, 1935, killing Mr. Post and his internationally known passenger, Will Rogers. Both men were celebrities of heroic stature who gave their fellow Oklahomans a good name. Mr. Post is the subject of a fascinating article in the current issue of *Oklahoma Today* magazine. You really should find a copy and read more about him. He has been inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame at Dayton, Ohio, among other well-deserved honors.

Wiley Post contributed substantially to the early growth and development of aviation, including the design and experimental use of a pressurized flight suit with features that were studied in preparation for today's space travelers. For a time during his career, he was employed as the personal pilot of Oklahoma City oilman F.C. Hall and that may have been when he had Kenneth Kirchner of Perry aboard his plane, the *Winnie Mae*, as a passenger. Wouldn't it be interesting to know more about that? Next time King Kirchner is in town, maybe one of us can get the rest of the story.



July 16, 1998

Kurt Andrews made a fascinating presentation to the Rotary club the other day, describing how the Charles Machine Works, Inc., covers the world in marketing the product that made Perry famous, the Ditch Witch trencher. Perhaps we who live here are prone to take this company for granted because many of our lifelong friends work at CMW and we are

virtually next door neighbors of the sprawling installation out near the west end of Fir avenue. It is hard for us, being so close to the very core of this business, to realize just what we have here.

Kurt sounds very sincere and humble when he tells his own story as a Perry boy who grew up here and came back to his roots after earning a degree at the University of Oklahoma. He now serves as marketing director of CMW, and that is a very prestigious position. As such he oversees a small army of men and women who have dedicated themselves to the task of continuing the Ditch Witch tradition of setting the pace in the underground construction industry, not only in this country but on an international basis.

CMW is a giant in its field, the acknowledged leader in designing, developing, manufacturing and marketing its equipment. Roger Layne, the company's product development manager, introduced Kurt to the Rotary gathering and commented that in any business, "nothing happens until you sell something." That underscores the importance of marketing.

Ed Malzahn and his father, Charlie, produced the first Ditch Witch trenchers some 50 years ago at the old CMW location in downtown Perry. Engineering at that time often consisted of chalk drawings on a cement floor in a building where custom welding and machining were still the principal business elements. "Research" meant taking prototype machines to local job sites for test runs in digging ditches for sewer lines. "Marketing" then was loading a Ditch Witch unit on a trailer and hauling it behind a pickup to plumbers or other prospects and hoping they would order one. My, how times have changed.

Today Ditch Witch products are seen throughout the free world and they are beginning to appear in some former Iron Curtain countries. They are considered to be among the best-made American products. The company's employees, all 1,300-plus of them, are part-owners of the business and they are among the productive men and women in all of the U.S. Cutting-edge technology is in use every day in the manufacturing, engineering and marketing areas, and the company's integrity is legendary. It is No. 1, Numero Uno, the very best there is, whatever phrase you choose to describe it.

And the people who put it there and keep it there, from Ed Malzahn and right on down the line, are our neighbors, the people who mow their lawns regularly, take part in civic activities, and load up their cars for soccer games, pee-wee baseball and any number of things. They are our friends, and we should never take them or their importance to this community for granted.



July 21, 1998



Newspaper Photo shown above originally appeared in a 1904 edition of *The Perry Republican* and it disclosed how these two buildings on the north side of the square appeared at that time. Today's Northwest Corner tells more about them. The building on the right belongs to Butch and Sandy Ellis.

On August 24–25, Oklahoma Main Street program managers from throughout the state will assemble in Perry for a hands-on workshop to learn the right way to restore old business buildings to something like their pristine glory. Perry is fortunate to have been chosen as the site for this workshop, and plans are being made to roll out the welcome mat in a grand way for the 70 or so visitors who will be here for the occasion.

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Main Street organization, the Rehabilitation Workshop is expected to become a model of its kind for other cities and states all over the U.S. The Perry training session will be the first ever held anywhere, so it will be a learning experience in more ways than one. Betty Warner, our local Main Street program manager, is excited about the impact the local workshop will have and she is hoping the community will join heartily in welcoming our visitors. Working with Perry Main Street board and president, Bonneta Hansing, she has rounded up a large committee of volunteers to look after myriad details to prepare for the event.

One of the buildings expected to be tackled is the one-time home of Shedrick Jewelers at 631 Delaware on the north side of the square. Several years ago the upper portion of this two-story structure was covered with a sort of corrugated aluminum scrim with vertical lines and the lower part of the front was also modernized. It now houses the Second Time

Around consignment sales store operated by Clara Williams. Sandy and Butch Ellis, who own the building, want to expose the classic back work behind the aluminum "slip cover." They also intend to convert the second story space into a downtown living area. Mrs. Ellis is Mrs. Williams' daughter.

At one time the upper floor was occupied by law offices of the late attorney Henry Dolezal. In addition to his law practice, Mr. Dolezal at various times served as county judge, mayor of Perry and a member of the State House of Representatives in the Legislature. His office furnishings were plain and almost Spartan in design, but the front windows looked out onto the bustling north side of the Perry square and the lush green courthouse park just across the street. Those windows have been covered by the aluminum for so many years that most of us who remember the original look have nearly forgotten what it was like.

While considering this renovation project, along with others to be undertaken here by the Rehabilitation Workshop next month, I experienced another one of those serendipitous gifts that could not have been more timely. Some anonymous friend placed a copy of the March 11, 1904, edition of *The Perry Republican* inside my front door the other day. It is in remarkably good shape considering that it is more than 94 years old, and there, in the lower left corner of the front page, is a photograph of the Ellis building and the building next door west of it.

The clarity of detail in the photo is remarkable. It is reproduced here today in an adjacent column, and I will have more about it in a subsequent Northwest Corner. Perhaps in the meantime I can learn the name of the friend who brought me that copy of Judge E.W. Jones' *Perry Republican*. I am grateful to him, or her.



July 24, 1998

In 1904, when *The Perry Republican* ran a front-page photo of two adjacent business buildings on the north side of the square, no one realized that nearly one century later the picture would offer the best clues to the original appearance of those structures. They were handsome buildings, attractively designed and very up to date for this little prairie city which had been established only 11 years earlier. Judge E.W. Jones, editor of the paper, provided some additional information in the cutlines beneath the photo.

A reproduction of that picture appeared with this column the other day in connection with plans for the Renovation Workshop scheduled here next month by the Oklahoma Main Street organization. I promised then to provide more facts about the picture and Judge Jones' paper, and that will be the subject of today's column. The 1904 newspaper, you might recall, came to me from an anonymous benefactor, and it is in very good condition considering its age. I now know that Iris Rosser thoughtfully brought that paper to our house, and I thank her for it.

The line above the photo stated simply: "A Perry Structure," and the buildings are called "The Evans' Block." That name (Evans) comes from the owner of the property at that time, Judge J.E. Evans. The caption implies that the two buildings are one, but they clearly are not. Two 25-foot front businesses are shown. Let me quote the rest of *The Republican's* caption. It is rich in the newspaper syntax and language of the day.

Here is the text, with my notes italicized in parentheses: "The cut (*photo*) which accompanies this article is a view of the two blocks owned by Judge J.E. Evans, of Perry. They are beautiful buildings. The first building (*not further identified*) was erected during the winter of 1895-96, and the second building was completed during the first part of the winter of 1903.

The Woodruff department stores occupy the first floors, and the second story floors are nicely and neatly finished and every room is occupied by attorneys, real estate agents, and banking and loan institutions."

Continuing with the newspaper's text: "Judge Evans came to Perry from Douglass, Wyoming, where he was register of the land office during the Harrison and part of the Cleveland administrations. But the Judge is a native of the Badger State and a pretty good Yankee. He has been a good member of the city council of the city of Perry, and has been and is at present territorial committeeman. He is a bright politician and a good republican, and is one of our good citizens. If we had twenty more men like Judge Evans, the whole square would be a solid mass of fire-proof buildings."

I love every word, every nuance in Judge Jones' newspaper. Again we are indebted to him for a sense of the way things were in Perry within the first decade or so of this city's existence. And it's nice to know that he thought Judge Evans was "a pretty good Yankee." In 1904, a majority of the population still remembered the War Between the States and had strong feelings about it. In Oklahoma, not all Northerners were considered "pretty good Yankees."

The name "B.J. Woodruff" belonged to the owner of one of the city's pioneer general mercantile stores, and it is visible on one of the store fronts. Ladies' dresses, with their long, sweeping lines, are easy to see in the window display. One of the large windows on the second floor of that building bears an arched sign reading: "Real Estate & Loans." Beneath that line appears "Office Of B.E. Lau & Co.," followed by two more lines which are not legible to me, even with magnification. The bottom line reads "Landagent" The ground floor of that building is now occupied by Three Sands Oil Co.

The second building, now owned by Butch and Sandy Ellis and slated for restoration in the Renovation Workshop next month, was part of Mr. Woodruffs store, but no identifying marks of ownership or occupants are visible on the lower floor. It has two tall, narrow display windows separated by a double door for customers' entry and a doorway leading to the stairwell for access to the second story. A large sign above the four arched windows identifies the upper level as offices of "Diggs & Cress, Attorneys at Law." Mr. Cress was P.W Cress, another true pioneer of the Cherokee Strip, and his first partner in the Perry law practice was Jim Diggs.

Mr. Woodruff, the merchant, was the father of Dorothy Ebersole and Maxine Mugler and grandfather of Sam Ebersole. Mr. Woodruff also owned a third adjacent building in that area. It later became the home of the Zorba Department Store and now houses Bob Kasper's law office. Much of that 1904 edition of The Perry Republican deals with early day businesses in Morrison. Somewhere down the line, I'll pass along some of that information and I think you will find it interesting, as I did.



July 28, 1998

Two of the hottest new summer movies link us backward in time to a period when my generation was just lurching into young adulthood. That would be in the late 1930s and early 1940s. "Gone With the Wind," the romantic novel as well as the historic 1939 movie, is an icon of that era and it still has a compelling presence in the newly released, digitally restored film version now on display in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. I don't know how many times I've seen it on the big screen and on TV, but I can't wait to see it again.

The other new movie,, "Saving Private Ryan," is creating an unusual amount of discussion because of its grippingly accurate portrayal of combat during the Allied invasion of Europe following the 1944 D-Day landings in France. Director Steven

Spielberg has achieved a level of intensity perhaps greater than anything heretofore offered. Mr. Spielberg himself recommends that young teen-agers should not see it. The gritty, bloody reality of young men blasted to pieces by shrapnel and other means is more than some of us can handle. Those protracted scenes are offered not for their shock value but to impress on us that war is a chaotic, surrealistic nightmare layered with unbearable terror in which heroism and cowardice are sometimes blended without forethought.

The story of "Private Ryan" is a gripping drama played against the backdrop of a battleground from hell. You may forget the names of the actors, even those who are very familiar although seen here in mere cameo roles, but the characters they portray will become very real. The three-hour film will tug at your emotions, especially if you are old enough to remember the time it portrays.

"Saving Private Ryan" is not a happy film by any stretch of the imagination, but it will make you think about the lunacy and utter waste of warfare. The families and the fighting men who have suffered because of war throughout all of history deserve our compassion and pity. What about those who allow the insanity of global politics or the seeking of personal aggrandizement to create maelstroms such as this movie brings to our vision? We should despise what they inflicted on the world and pray for them.

By all means, see the movie. Leaders at every level in every nation of the world should see it and then be asked if war is worth the cost. Free men have always been willing to place their lives on the altar to protect liberty when challenged by despots or lunatics. They were brave men. We must never forget that their heroism was a high price to pay so that we can talk about it today and reflect on the madness of the time that produced the horror.

Try to see both of these epic movies. They are worth the price of admission.



July 31, 1998

The other day I finally found our rain gauge, right where I left it last fall (in a safe place to be sure it didn't freeze and burst during the frigid winter weather). Now it's back in its proper mounting on the fence, and so far, including that last little shower, it has measured a quarter inch of mud.

One of our favorite OSU boosters loaned me, his copy of the July 6 issue of Sports Illustrated magazine, the one containing that excellent article about Coach Bob Simmons of the Oklahoma State Cowboys. It is a touching, moving tribute to this man, his family and their faith. Find a copy and read it, even if you're not a football fan. It's not about football, basically, but there's a great story to be told about Coach Simmons, and you'll feel good just for having read it. Thanks to Otto Zilch for sharing the magazine with me.

Work seems to be finished on the rebuilding of Wakefield Drive, which goes down the north side of our property. It has been a long, hot, dusty summer for those of us who live on this side of town, but we now have a beautiful, smooth street for all to contemplate and admire, and we appreciate it. Hopefully, there will be many more restorations like this throughout the community. I still think it would be nice if these rebuilt streets could be center-striped perhaps with a reflective paint for the benefit of night travelers.

I must say commendations are in order for city street crews and Evans Associates folks for engaging in this kind of work during the recent almost unbearable 100-plus degree heat. Watching the job progress while we sat in air-conditioned comfort in our homes was an interesting summer diversion, but one step outside the front door was enough to convince anyone that mankind was never intended to engage in such strenuous physical activity as the application of hot asphalt to the streets of Perry in July and August.

I don't know the priority list for rebuilding or repairing other streets, but I will nominate the wretched little stretch of Park Lane Drive between Wakefield and South Brookwood as a likely candidate for early attention. Yes, that's where we live, and I realize the competition for attention is intense -- everyone thinks his or her street should be next -- but Park Lane will match its pot holes against anyone's.

Stillwater has ambitious and laudable plans for establishing a \$3 million high-tech industrial park on a 160-acre parcel of land owned by Oklahoma State University at the corner of Sangre Road and State Highway 51, with an option on an additional 17 acres owned by the Meridian Technology Center. Help will come in the form of a \$1.5 million grant sought from the Oklahoma Economic Development Association to fund infrastructure development of the area. Promoting the project is a partnership consisting of the Stillwater Industrial Foundation, the city of Stillwater, Meridian Technology Center and OSU. The first tenant already has been identified as a Stillwater employer who plans to add 50 jobs to its existing workforce. This project will be of interest to all of us in north-central Oklahoma. We'll be hearing more about it as time goes on.

In the meantime, preliminary work continues on the site of a new shopping center at the north Guthrie exit on I-35. Supposedly a motel franchise has taken a lease on part of the land and tenants, like Dillard's Department Store, are being sought for a large number of shops.