



## ***July 2, 1999***

August is the birth month I share with several friends, and it will be here all too soon. Some of us Leos were born in the same year (I'll not say which one for fear it would embarrass them), but only one of them that I know of was born on "my" day of the month (and again I'll refrain from revealing which one because we would not want you to feel that you have to shower us with cards.) I have had so many of these natal celebrations that they no longer bother me, except when I stop and really think about it.

As a matter of fact, no birthday has disturbed my peace of mind since the 21st came along. That was really traumatic, however. It made me realize I was growing old! I could vote, for heaven's sake. By then, I had already served almost three years in the Army of the United State during wartime and I thought that gave me all the maturity I would ever need. But the idea of being 21 years old simply summoned visions of the Grim Reaper standing by, waiting to gather me in. I was a very callow lad.

Well, of course I survived that, and it apparently was a good catharsis. No birthdays since then, even those that truly marked milestones, have been hard to take. I guess it's good to get that purging taken care of as soon as possible. What brought up this line of thought is a welcome contribution received in the mail the other day from a longtime friend, who happens to be about my age. Here's what he clipped from something and sent along to me:

"Things do change when you hit 70 (years). For instance: I get winded playing bridge. My spouse asks why I'm not moving when the light has changed to green. My knees buckle but my belt won't. Sometimes I feel like the morning after when I didn't have a night before. The driver's test is more threat than nuisance. Someone asked why I would choose to become involved in so much at my age. I concluded that it's the earliest age I have left."

If you're from the right generation, you'll probably agree that those are valid points and you doubtless can add a few of your own. If August is your birth month, too, here's a Happy Birthday wish for you. Enjoy your cake and ice cream, after you blow out the candles, however many they may be.

No, matter what your new age is going to be, consider it a bonus. The cemetery is full of friends and family who, sadly enough, are no longer with us. Many of them departed this earth before they were through playing with the grandkids or taking care of important business matters on their "To Do" list. It's up to us to make the most of what we have left. Then we can ponder all that has been allotted to us. Laura's Mom, our houseguest now, has had a full life and she will be 103 come October. There are still things she'd like to do and some memories to cherish in quiet hours. Every now and then, when she momentarily forgets her age, we'll tell her she's 102. Her usual response is, "I can't believe I'm that old." Guess that sums it up pretty well for all of us.



## ***July 6, 1999***

Some of the changes in our local economy become more obvious when we read about major events that were going on in this community nearly 60 years ago. Until the post-World War II period, agriculture was the leading industry hereabouts. Noble county was fortunate to have a large number of progressive ranchers and farmers when wheat crops and cattle were the main focus of this area -- plus an occasional brief oil boomlet. Small family farms were numerous and some proved very profitable. Many operators of those tidy patches of Noble county land were leaders in associations that were dedicated to the promotion of their farm output. Among these were the Northern Oklahoma Hereford Association and the Perry Sales Day Association, both of which had the resounding support of most ranchers, farmers and the Perry Chamber of Commerce itself.

Today there are fewer small farms around here, but those that remain have been consolidated into larger operations and a number of our friends continue to till the soil, reap the harvest and feed cattle herds, even though that is not their primary occupation. They do it because they love the land. When their day jobs don't interfere, they find release from other cares by heading for the country and indulging in many of the myriad chores related to running a farm. Some of them are proud to be on homesteads that were staked by someone in their family when the Cherokee Strip was opened to settlement on September 16, 1893. But this piece is not intended to be a philosophical discussion of today and yesterday. It's just another glance back at the way things were while Perry and Noble county continued to mature in the decades that followed the run.

I'm indebted to Ken Box for passing along the printed programs used at the annual Chamber of Commerce membership dinner, the annual dinner meeting of the Perry Sales Day Association's Hereford Breeders Day, and the chamber's tenth anniversary dinner for the Perry Sales Day Association. They tell an interesting story about our community's self-prescribed remedies for the Great Depression.

The dinners were separate events, all held about 1940 or 1941, although the exact years are not shown on the programs. At least we know they were in the neighborhood of 60 years ago, toward, the end of the 1930s and the start of the 1940s. The printed pieces were among the keepsakes saved through the years by Ken's dad, the late William A. Box, a tireless civic worker, school board member, gasoline wholesaler, car dealer and retail merchant before his death.

The story told by those three dinner programs will require another column to relate, so please watch for the concluding installment in a few days.



## ***July 9, 1999***

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, two organizations helped Noble county farmers with marketing their livestock and produce. One was the Perry Sales Day Association and the other was the Northern Oklahoma Hereford Association. As I recall, the Sales day Association was fostered by the Perry Chamber of Commerce as it recognized the need for a marketing tool to help support the farms of this area. The association, originally called the Perry Community Sale, purchased equipment and rented the fairgrounds arena and other facilities for weekly auctions that attracted hundreds of prospective buyers. Around 1940-41, C-C directors sold the operation to local auctioneers Sherm Trussel and Zeke Walker. The sale had been losing money and the C-C believed it would serve best in private hands.

Ken Box recently brought me printed programs used at the annual banquet of the Chamber of Commerce and the Perry Sales Day Association nearly 60 years ago, and the information on those programs is fascinating. Ken's dad, the late William A. Box, was president of the C-C in 1941 when the organization's dinner was held in the basement of the First Presbyterian church. Music was provided by Dr. W.C. Marshall and Bert Shaw. Rev. David Thomas, the Presbyterian pastor, gave the invocation. O.R. Hall gave the report on the annual membership drive. G.T. Webber, program chairman, turned the floor over to speakers on seven topics: Improvements, Billy Lynch; streets, Paul Cress; flowers, Mrs. Emil Voigt; music, Elmo Schultz; rural contacts, Mrs. Grace Hampton; main street, Ben Childers; and advertising, W.K. Leatherock. The program committee, in addition to Mr. Webber, included Frank Douglass, Joe Foster, J.O. Silverthorne, Herman Ladner, Dick Eby and Walter Kehres. The C-C treasurer's report showed total receipts for the past year amounted to \$3,452.76. Salaries, presumably, for the C-C manager and his secretary, totaled \$1,975.

The printed program for the tenth anniversary dinner of the Perry Sales Day Association does not bear a date, but it apparently was held in 1940. It, contains an annual report covering the period of March 1, 1939, to February 29, 1940. This affair was in the First Presbyterian church basement but was served by ladies of St. Rose of Lima Catholic church, and music was provided by Dr. W .C. Marshall, who also led group singing. Rev. W.H. Reid gave the invocation. New members and guests were introduced by William A. Box, who was president of the C-C at that time. Charles B. Forney was president of the Sales Day Association. For fun time during the evening, a Doctor I.Q. show, based on the popular radio quiz show of the day, was staged by Glenn Yahn and these assistants: Charles Monroe Jr., Ralph Treeman, Jack Smith, Dr. Marshall and Keith McQuiston. A photo story of the sale, fat stock show and Herefords was provided by R.T. Scott and Everett Nelson. The committee in charge of arrangements for the evening was composed of Keith McQuiston, chairman; Ralph Treeman, Charles Monroe Jr., Jack Smith, L.E. Plumer, Dr. W .C. Marshall, R.T. Scott and Glenn Yahn.

The annual report of the Sales Day Association showed total receipts during the past year of \$180,030.46. The manager and secretary received a combined total of \$1,310.93 in wages for the year. Animals sold totaled 14,758 and they included mules, horses, cattle, hogs, sheep and goats. In addition, the sale handled 33,440 bales of hay, 37,536 posts; and 191 pieces of farm machinery. Closing notes on the program concluded with this statement: "The office of the sale has been a clearing house in locating seed oats, purebred animals, hay and the like for farmers in the trade area." And that was just what this depression-weary rural area needed at that point. Thanks to Ken Box for showing me these interesting mementos.



## ***July 13, 1999***

*Time* magazine had a brief item the other day about plans for celebrating the 100th birthday anniversary of the late Noel Coward, an icon of the British stage and screen. His birth month was December and, since he also was a popular actor, playwright and songsmith in this country, Broadway is planning to take special note of the occasion. His sophisticated, worldly demeanor was toasted in the 1920s and right on through the World War II era. *Time* also mentioned that Coward had a great friendship and collaboration with Gertrude Lawrence, the British stage star who introduced theater audiences to the role of Anna in *The King and I* years ago. The magazine's reference to Miss Lawrence brought back a flood of memories to me about a memorable interview I had with her in a Honolulu beachfront hotel during WWII.

For reasons you will soon understand, this is not exactly among the highlights of my career, except for the fact that she is without question the most internationally celebrated stage and film star I have ever had the privilege of meeting. She was a preeminent personality, a singer and actress who had achieved the lofty rank of stardom at home in England and abroad long before I had the good fortune to chat with her on a one-to-one basis. It was my misfortune that I barely knew who she was when we met that balmy day on Waikiki.

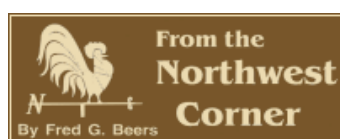
I was enjoying being alone in *The Stars & Stripes* Honolulu office one Sunday morning, typing letters to various correspondents and family members back home. No other staffers were present since we did not have to prepare a Sunday edition. The phone rang and, against my better judgment, I answered it. After a brief preamble the man on the other end of the line told me that Miss Gertrude Lawrence was resting in the Moana Hotel (one of the only two hotels then on Waikiki Beach) after returning from a USO-sponsored tour of GI locations in the Pacific. He stated that she would be ready to receive the press in her suite at 2 p.m. that day and our paper was welcome to send a representative to cover the event. I said fine, and we hung up. My mind wondered, "Who is Gertrude Lawrence?"

I phoned our editor and told him about the press conference, assuming no one would get the assignment because it was our day off. Instead, he told me I should attend and write a report for the next day's paper. Our editor outranked me by several stripes, so I said OK, with misgivings. I reasoned that the two civilian papers on the island, the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* and the *Honolulu Advertiser*, would send their reporters. I would listen as they asked questions and make my notes accordingly. At the appointed hour, I knocked at Miss Lawrence's suite and was ushered into a sort of parlor, completely unoccupied at the time. I was still wearing the rumpled khakis I had worn for typing letters. Time passed slowly, but eventually Miss Lawrence made a sweeping entry into the room. She overwhelmed me with her friendly manner, and for several minutes it was just the two of us making small talk. No other media representatives appeared, creating a situation I had not prepared for. I had to ask all the questions and I truly did not know what to say.

But, gracious lady that she was, Miss Lawrence sensed my uneasiness and quickly began describing interesting points about her tour of the South Pacific jungles. I did not even whip out a notebook, but listened intently and remembered everything she said. Finally, I realized the "interview" was over, and awkwardly began to leave. She was still charming and personable, and as I turned to leave I heard her chuckle softly.

Once safely in the hallway outside her suite, I became aware of a cool draft from the hotel air conditioning. In only a moment, I realized that the seat of my rumpled khakis had a rather lengthy split along a seam on the seat, and that is what prompted Miss Lawrence's discreet little chuckle when I turned my back to leave.

We had an exclusive story about the famed actress in the next day's edition of *The Stars & Stripes*. It made no mention about the end of my interview with one of the world's most celebrated stage and screen stars. That was one of those moments a body never forgets.



## July 16, 1999

Here's a note about a couple of entertainment events that you probably will want to jot down. First of all, Perry actress Myrna Niles Hamman, now a West Coast resident, will be appearing on an episode of ABC's afternoon soap opera, *General Hospital*, when it airs on channel 5 next Tuesday (July 20) at 2 p.m., our time. Myrna says, "I'm in the opening scene (about

four or five small lines), one scene closer to the end (one line), and another scene even closer to the end (three small lines). I will be playing the secretary to a guy named Nicholas. My name in the episode is Madeline. It was fun to shoot." Even though, as Myrna says, she has only small lines, it is still a thrill to see our former Perry resident on a network television production. We're all proud of what she's doing.

On August 11, the TNT cable network will tell the story of Perry's first police chief (town marshal) when it highlights its evening programming with a feature-length film on the legendary Bill Tilghman. I have no advance word as to whether or not Perry will even be mentioned in the two-hour original movie, but it should be. Our first mayor, John N. Brogan appointed Bill Tilghman town marshal on October 28, 1893, barely a month after the opening of the Cherokee Outlet. Perry had more than its share of notorious outlaws at the time. A few facts about Marshal Tilghman can be found in *The First Generation*, and other books have tackled him as an interesting subject.

Bill Tilghman, who will be played by the character actor Sam Elliott in the TNT movie, came to this area as one of 1,000 deputy U.S. marshals appointed to help maintain order. Before coming to this territory he was teamed with another legend, Bat Masterson, to bring law and order to Dodge City, Kansas. Some 30 years later, a bullet fired by a drunken fellow officer in Cromwell, Oklahoma, dispatched Marshal Tilghman. Mr. Tilghman was an authentic, rough cut frontier peace officer. The TV movie should be worth a look. Check your schedule for details.

Speaking of TV, our local cable provider is part of the package recently acquired by AT&T in a mega-deal that has been in the headlines on all the business pages lately. The Perry office has no details, other than what the rest of us have seen in the newspaper, but there appears to be a possibility that still more changes may lie ahead before the current wave of restructuring is finished.

Interesting things are still going on in the downtown area. George Rice continues to spruce up his building on the south end of the west side of the square. Transom windows are being installed at the front of the building and residential quarters are being prepared upstairs. Antique cars will one day be on display in the building.

Just up the street from there, Allen Webb has created a fine new look for the Perry Paint & Body Shop. A distinctive shade of gray gives the front a neat and unified appearance, and a colorful new sign has been installed on the upper area of the exterior. On the north side of the square, Tony and Marilee Macias are continuing with the Kumback's exterior renovation. All these things enhance our attractive Perry square. (Now, if we could only do something about those stop sign barrels on the east side.)



## ***July 20, 1999***

Cleo Payne was asking the other day if anyone else still remembers the minstrel shows that used to set up in Perry on east Delaware street some 60 or so years ago. I do recall the tent shows that came here each summer in the early 1940s and 1930s, providing various types of entertainment, including minstrels, presented by nomadic performers. They usually pitched their tents in a vacant lot across the alley from Foster's Corner Drug, where Ruble-Vance Motor Co. is now located.

During the late 1940s, a gentleman named Dude Kimball came to Perry several times to produce, direct and star in minstrel shows at the old Perry high school auditorium. I think he was based in the area of Fort Worth or Dallas. At that

time, minstrel shows were still acceptable art forms, but the black-faced comedy later was recognized as an objectionable type of theater and now one is rarely, if ever, seen.

Mr. Kimball was an interesting character in his own right. He traveled from town to town, usually spending about two weeks in a community. He recruited local civic clubs like Rotary and Lions to sponsor the shows in the various towns he visited then shared the ticket sale revenue with them. He cajoled local folks to do the comedy routines that he had salvaged from a lifetime of vaudeville performances. In Perry, he had bankers, funeral directors, lumbermen, teachers, preachers, merchants, optometrists, physicians, and even an occasional newspaper person and assorted others cavorting on stage in all kinds of outlandish stunts and comedy routines, sometimes in drag but most often in the flashy costumes that he provided.

To climax each performance, he appeared in one of his own comedy acts with homemade musical instruments, something on the order of the bazooka that Bob Burns introduced to movie audiences a few years earlier. His patter was mostly impromptu and spiced with clean but biting barbs that were localized to the community that hosted him. He was a little like Don Rickles of this generation. Mr. Kimball was a born showman, comedian and storyteller, and no one enjoyed his foolishness more than he himself did. It was fun just to be around him.

Mr. Kimball, with his flowing white mane and show biz personality, probably retired about the time minstrel shows were generally frowned upon, and I presume he has passed on to that great stage show in the blue yonder. It's just as well. Though his stage specialty would not be tolerated today, he was a very funny man who never stopped trying to entertain where two or more were gathered about him.

The demand for quality housing continues in Perry. Some fine looking examples are underway on both the northwest and southwest corners of town where uncompleted structures show that they eventually will be comfortable abodes for some local families. Keep an eye on Fifteenth street. Business and residential developments should continue there in the near future.



## ***July 23, 1999***

Minnie Rozell passes along additional information about the forthcoming made-for-TV movie dealing with the life of frontier lawman Bill Tilghman. She provides a clipping from a column called Museum Notes in the Lincoln County News, Chandler's weekly newspaper, which pretty well tells the story.

As you know, Mr. Tilghman became Perry's first town marshal (police chief) when our first mayor, John N. Brogan, and the city council appointed him to that post on October 28, 1893. The TNT cable network has announced that its biographical movie, "You Know My Name," based on the interesting career of Marshal Tilghman, will be shown to a nationwide audience, but there is some confusion about the date of that showing. The TNT network has been promoting it as a feature of its August 11 program schedule. The Chandler clipping shows a July 26 premiere date. I am trying to confirm which date is correct. It's possible two showings will be offered.

Chandler Mayor Keith Duncan and the Lincoln County Historical Society are welcoming the public to Chandler, Marshall Tilghman's hometown, on Saturday (July 24), which has been proclaimed "Bill Tilghman Day" by the mayor. Chandler is using the day to acquaint the public with the marshal's life and service as an Oklahoma lawman, plus Chandler's own

heritage. Visitors to the town that day may see an early-day movie produced by the marshal and others entitled "Passing of the Oklahoma Outlaw," at Chandler's Museum of Pioneer History. According to the column, Tilghman featured himself in the 1915 silent film.

Walking tour guides for the historic district where Tilghman lived will be available to further acquaint visitors with the hometown hero who served as town marshal, county sheriff, state senator and deputy U.S. marshal. Thanks to Minnie Rozell for providing this information, and congratulations to the town of Chandler and the Lincoln County Historical Society for putting together this celebration.

Perry's claim as "the wrestling capital" was underscored once again by the announcement of "All-Century Wrestling Stars" by the Daily Oklahoman sports staff the other day. Certainly it was no surprise that Dan Hodge received this accolade: "Perhaps the most dominating college wrestler in state history, unbeaten at 177 pounds in three championship seasons, 1955-57." Hodge was named the outstanding wrestler of the 20th century at Oklahoma University. Gordon Roesler received honorable mention on the OU list. Jack VanBebber, who wrestled collegiately for Oklahoma A&M (OSU), was named No. 8 on the list of the state's international wrestlers, with this comment: "Beat the silver and bronze medalists to win gold at Los Angeles Olympics in 1932." Bill Pricer received honorable mention in the list of outstanding high school wrestlers during this century.

Predictably, wrestling fans already are complaining about oversights. Cecil Beisel comes to mind as one who could have been included. But you can't please everyone, especially wrestling fans.



## ***July 27, 1999***

In just a few days we'll be noting the 62 anniversary of a very historic Perry event -- the daylight robbery of the Exchange Bank. The daring deed occurred on a steamy August day in 1937 at a time when such things were more or less commonplace in the U.S. because of the Great Depression gripping the country. In peaceful little Perry, Oklahoma, however, it was momentous.

I devoted an entire chapter of *The First Generation* to the retelling of this story when that Perry history book was published in 1991, but now there is new information that merits a fresh look. A monthly magazine, entitled simply Good Old Days, which circulates nationally, has just published its August issue. It contains an article by Ruth Esther Willet T. Lanza, daughter of Y.V. Willett, the late president of the Exchange Bank. It is essentially her personal recollection of what happened that fateful day. The bank then was located at 635 Delaware, now the home of the Powers Abstract Co.

Ms. Lanza has published previous articles, both fiction and non-fiction, in a number of periodicals. She was just 16 years old, a summer employee at the bank and a student at Perry high school at the time of the holdup. But she was an eyewitness to all that happened, including a death threat for her father from a very nervous robber.

The perpetrator in the crime was a young man named Ray Barker, an employee of the State Highway Department division office, located at the south edge of Perry on a sweeping curve of U.S. 77, a major north-south highway that ran through this city. Although Mr. Barker worked in Perry, few people here really knew him and no one recognized him when he walked

into the bank to rob it. He appeared to be nervously glancing around the lobby. It was during the noon hour on August 19, 1937.

Mr. Willett was seated at his desk near the rear of the lobby, talking to an office supply salesman from Oklahoma City. Mrs. Lillian Hunt, a pretty young teller, was at her station. Ruth Esther stood nearby engaged in casual conversation with her co-worker. Those four were the only ones in the bank when they saw Mr. Barker.

Limited space makes it impossible to tell much more than this about that fateful day. Mr. Barker, who clumsily spilled about half of his loot in an alley adjacent to the bank, eventually was captured and sentenced to prison. I am indebted to Willene Mornhinweg, Mary Ann Sherrard and Bill and Esther Smith of Perry; and to Margaret Clark of Tonkawa, my 1941 PHS classmate, for making me aware of this article and offering copies of *Good Old Days* magazine for reference. If you can find a copy, the Exchange Bank article ("The Noon Heist") alone makes it worthwhile reading, but it is filled with other stories about days gone by that should interest just about anyone. I recommend it.



## ***July 30, 1999***

Two deaths this week serve to bring up little mental scenes of another generation in Perry's ongoing history. Gertrude Mossman, 92, and Charlie Rau, 75, had little in common except for their years of residency in this city, but their stories offer us a glimpse of some of the interesting sidelights of a different, almost forgotten age. It should not be forgotten.

Charlie grew up in this community and graduated from Perry High School in 1942. By then he was already well over six feet tall. He usually wore a solemn expression and he had a tendency to let his shoulders droop. Most of the time he moved at a slow gait, but Charlie had a keen mind and a sharp sense of humor. When World War II was heating up and threatening to draw the U.S. into the maelstrom, Charlie enlisted in what was then known as the Army Air Corps. That was a year before Pearl Harbor. He became a bombardier and served faithfully until the end of the war, accumulating a number of air medals along the way.

When the Axis powers in Europe and the Far East capitulated to the Allies, he returned to homefolks in Perry. He joined his brother, Lawrence, in the petroleum business and soon joined the Army National Guard unit stationed in Perry. In time he became commanding officer of the unit, which was a component of the 179<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team. In that capacity he was again called into active duty during the Korean conflict and served until 1953. He retired from the military in 1982.

His sense of obligation to the community drew him to the post of city councilman from ward four, where he served in 1953–54. There he earned a reputation as a practical, sound-thinking servant of the people he represented. In time he moved on to the Oklahoma City area, and there he passed away last week after losing a fight with lung cancer.

Gertrude Mossman and her late husband, Ralph, made their living for years in the hair care business, Gertrude as a beautician and Ralph as a barber. With his brother, Hubert, Ralph had a shop for years on the north side of the square where Jack Dorl now has the only barber shop on the square. (In 1940, there were six shops on the square.) Ralph and Hubert shared their space with the La Grace Beauty Shoppe, operated by Grace La Bord. The Shoppe was located toward the rear of the building and was separated from the male-dominated barber shop by a sheer floral drapery. That is where Gertrude and Ms. La Bord provided ladies of the community with the latest in hair fashions.

Hubert eventually left the barber shop to become a clerk at the local post office, and in time Ralph quit barbering to operate a juke box business in this area. He placed the neon-adorned music machines in restaurants, lunch rooms, taverns, drug stores -- anywhere one was wanted -- and provided regular changes of the vinyl and wax records that played the hottest tunes of the day. Ralph and Gertrude had two sons, Jack and Charles, both now gone. Jack served in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II and later joined his dad in the juke box business, Ralph died several years ago but Gertrude lived long enough to celebrate her 92nd birthday. She had been in frail health for some time.

Charlie Rau and Gertrude Mossman were links to significant events in the recent history of Perry. Their passing brings those happenings, the good and the bad, to mind once again. Although it is a sad occasion, it makes us remember the strength and dedication possessed by folks from that earlier era who laid the foundation for today's Perry. We join their families in sharing their personal losses.