

July 2, 2002

It's a good time to take care of some loose ends and pass along the thoughts of some readers, beginning with the following from a friend who wishes to remain anonymous. He writes:

I've been wondering why there aren't any "City Limits" signs on the highways that lead into Perry. There are signs that read "Welcome to Perry," but that doesn't spell out "City Limits." If they're short on poles, there are plenty of unneeded poles on our street intersections that could be pulled up and used. While on the subject of signs, wouldn't it be great if our street name signs had a "maroon" background with "white" letters instead of the color they are now? I know that if they were changed as I suggest, some of them would become wall decorations thanks to a few overly ambitious students, but hey, we were young once, also.

Roy Kendrick wants to bring us up to date on Sharron Miller, another Perryan making her way in big time show biz. Roy writes: Sharron Miller directed segments of the CBS Friday night series, "That's Life," last season. The first episode she directed aired on the network in October. Sharron is the daughter of former Perryan Emaline Miller, who used to be a mainstay of Stagecoach Community Theatre. (She is now an attorney in Oklahoma City.) Sharron's sister, Carolyn, is married to John McLemore, also from Perry. They both were associated with the first Stagecoach production of "Oklahoma!" several years ago. John is now a Christian church minister.

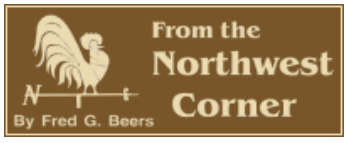
Roy continues: Sharron began her film career as a projectionist at the Perry Theater. When the manager there (Roy) was asked to return to a former job as film editor at KWTV, he suggested that Sharron be hired instead. He then persuaded her to take the job and quickly instructed her in the art of film editing. After about a year, she returned to college to major in film and then she went on to Hollywood. She was able to film segments for the series, "That's Incredible," worked on some "Grizzly Adams" chapters, and directed some religious programs. Her first big break came when Dick Clark wanted to use a story that Sharron owned for an after-school special. She agreed on the condition that she would be allowed to direct it. She won an award for outstanding directing for the show. Some of her credits as a director since then are for the series "Cagney and Lacey" and "The Trials of Rosie O'Neil." (My thanks to Roy for this good information.)

Now, to close this column, here are some pearls of wisdom from a retired friend in Florida;

Eventually you will reach a point when you stop lying about your age and start bragging about it.

Don't let anyone tell you you're getting old. Squash their toes with your rocker!

The older we get, the fewer things seem worth waiting in line for.
Thanks to all of you for your support in various ways, and especially today to the three who contributed the preceding.



July 5, 2002

The latest copy of the PHS Alumni Association newsletter arrived in the mail the other day and, besides being very attractively laid out, it contains a lot of information about the Centennial reunion being planned for the week of the Cherokee Strip celebration in September. Congratulations to Ethel Coe and others responsible for producing the newsletter and also to Marilee Macias and Karen Wilcox for their willingness to serve as co-chairmen of the reunion. They have taken on a big job and they are getting it organized very nicely. Thanks to everyone who has accepted some responsibility for carrying out the various function of this once-in-a-lifetime event.

I see an article in the newsletter about a PHS Centennial Alumni Band being organized to perform during the reunion. Bill Rotter and Sandy Hentges are working on this. I haven't been contacted yet about playing a Sousaphone, the instrument I had in the Perry High School band some 60 years ago, but let me say in advance that I will not be able to participate. For one thing, I do not own a Sousaphone. For another, I have completely forgotten what little I ever knew about reading music.

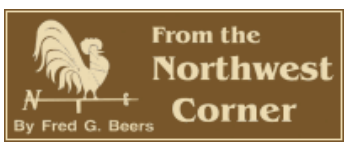
Singing in a choir or playing in a band where most of the others read music is not always an easy job. Generally, if you don't read music, it means you need to sit near someone in your voice or instrument range who *does* read music and then try to sing or play the same notes. It also means you don't know where to look when the director says at a rehearsal, "Start from the C sharp."

I have had some experience with this problem. It began when I took piano lessons as a youngster. I had several teachers because during the Great Depression our family drug store used to barter merchandise like aspirin and Ex-Lax for my piano lessons. I could read enough music to get by but that ability did not last very long.

When I was old enough for the school band, Professor Radgowsky coached me on the trombone and I dreamed of being the next Tommy Dorsey, or at least being able to read the notes. By the time I was old enough for the high school band, they said they had too many trombones so I was switched to the Sousaphone. Those are the large and fearsome metallic bass horns that coil around the player's chest and rest primarily on the left shoulder, with a cavernous bell projecting above the player's head. If I wanted to be in the band, I had to play the Sousaphone. This was both good news and bad.

The bad news was, a whole different musical library had to be learned. The good news was, it seemed to me the Sousaphone only had two notes - "oom" and "pah." Anyone who has danced the polka knows this is so. Not do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti or do. Just "oom" and "pah." So it was not hard to get by when playing those stirring marches favored by band directors. Just blow "oom" or "pah" on the right beat and I could get by. It worked, most of the time. Some of my colleagues in the bass section were Wendell Wood, Frances Russell, Frances Harris, Mildred Malzahn and Paul Laird. All of them could read music. Judging by the excellent concert presented by the Perry High School band the other night, all of those musicians read music, too, and they certainly play it very well. Congratulations to all of them.

Once, in preparation for the band's annual spring concert in the early 1940s, I noticed that other members of the bass (Sousaphone) section were playing actual notes on the scale, and that made my "ooms" and "pahs" very obvious, because they were audible. To make a long story short, I got by with my version of "notes" but today I am musically challenged. The ability to read music has left me. I know when a note goes up or down, but the best I can do in choir is listen to the singer next to me and try to duplicate what he is doing. Most of the time, it works, but I no longer accept invitations to play the Sousaphone. Sorry, Bill and Sandy.



July 9, 2002

This column has devoted a lot of space in recent months to the movie theaters that once provided entertainment for patrons in this area. Now the most recent edition of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma,* published by the Oklahoma Historical Society, has come out with a detailed, interesting story about the movie theaters of our neighbor, Stillwater. That's of special interest locally because Perry no longer has a film palace of any kind while Stillwater has a multi-screen theater where many of us go to see the movies.

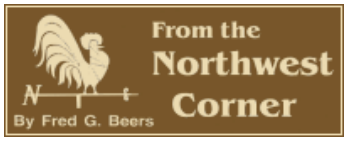
The article deals with all of the many theaters Stillwater has had through the years, including quite a few that I do not remember. The Payne county capital also had its own three-story Grand Opera House located on East Ninth Street between Main and Lewis. A photograph shows the old brick building as it looked in the early days, with space for retail businesses on the ground floor and a central door to the stairway leading to the theater area. It looked much like Perry's own Grand Opera House when it dominated the east side of the courthouse square.

The Stillwater Grand opened for business on July 1, 1901, while Perry's Grand opened on May 1 that year. The opening bill on the Stillwater stage was a presentation of the Noble Dramatic Company Band and Orchestra performing *The Strategists* at prices ranging from ten cents for gallery seats to fifty cents for balcony seating. Box seats flanked the stage.

At one time Perry citizens had a financial stake in the Stillwater Grand Opera House, the article indicates. The opera house owners, Louis Jardot and James Blouin, joined with the "Delaney Theater" in Perry and J.M. Brooks of the Brooks Theater in Guthrie for group-booking arrangements. This made it possible for the Perry, Stillwater and Guthrie theaters to operate as a circuit and thus pool their bookings to secure top-dollar acts for their small town arenas. Incidentally, the "Delaney Theater" mentioned in the Chronicles article probably refers to Mr. John Dulaney, former operator of the Perry Opera House. Mr. Dulaney joined Mr. J.B. Tate, owner of the Perry Grand, in a business deal in 1902, according to a chapter in my book, *The First Generation*.

Another striking similarity appears to be the resemblance between the old Aggie Theater in Stillwater and the Perry Theater, which was located in a 50-foot front building just off the northeast corner of the courthouse square. Both those buildings are now gone, but the Stillwater theater (opened in 1926) looks very much like the Perry Theater, which I believe opened in 1941. The marquees and other front-end features were very similar.

The Chronicles article was written by Deborah Carmichael, associate editor of *Film & History* and currently an assistant director of the Oklahoma State University composition program for all first-year students. She credits a lot of her information to Doris Dellinger, who wrote *Stillwater's Grand Opera House* for the Payne County Historical Review in 1984, and additional material came from Robert Cuinningham's book, *Stillwater Through the Years*. Both of those folks have many friends in this area. Mr. Cunningham wrote the book *Perry, Pride of the Prairie* in the 1970s. The book is now out of print. If you can find a copy of the spring edition of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, be sure to check out the article by Deborah Carmichael. Even if you are not a movie fan, you will find the piece interesting.



July 12, 2002

From Kit Norman Froebel, 'way down yonder in the heart of Texas, here are some things to ponder, all under the general

heading of "What a Difference a Century Makes." These are some U.S. statistics from 1902:

The average life expectancy in the U.S. was 47.

Only 14 percent of the homes in the U.S. had a bathtub.

Only 9 percent of the homes had a telephone. A three-minute call from Denver to New York City cost $11.

There were only 8,000 cars in the U.S. and only 144 miles of paved roads.

The maximum speed limit in most cities was ten miles per hour.

Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa and Tennessee were each more heavily populated than California. With a mere 1.4 million residents, California was only the 21st most populated state in the nation.

The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.

The average wage in the U.S. was 22 cents an hour.

The average U.S. worker made between $200 and $400 per year.

A competent accountant could expect to earn $2,000 per year, a dentist $2,500 per year, a veterinarian between $1,500 and $4,000 per year, and a mechanical engineer about $5,000 per year.

More than 95 percent of all births in the U.S. took place at home.

Ninety percent of all U.S. physicians had no college education. Instead, they attended medical schools, many of which were condemned in the press and by the government as "substandard."

Sugar cost four cents a pound. Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen. Coffee cost fifteen cents a pound.

Most women only washed their hair once a month and they used borax or egg yolks for shampoo.

Canada passed a law prohibiting poor people from entering the country for any reason.

The five leading causes of death in the U.S. were: (1) pneumonia and influenza; (2) tuberculosis; (3) diarrhea; (4) heart disease; and (5) stroke.

The U.S. flag had 45 states. Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Hawaii and Alaska had not yet been admitted to the Union.

The population of Las Vegas, Nevada, was 60.

Crossword puzzles, canned beer and iced tea had not been invented.

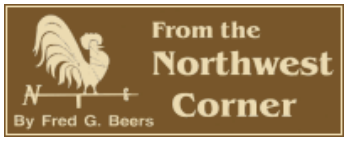
There were no Mother's Day or Father's Day.

One in ten U.S. adults could not read or write. Only 6 percent of all Americans had graduated from high school.

Marijuana, heroin and morphine were all available over the counter at corner drug stores. According to one pharmacist, "Heroin clears the complexion, gives buoyancy to the mind, regulates the stomach and the bowels and is, in fact, a perfect guardian of health."

Eighteen percent of households in the U.S. had at least one full-time servant or domestic.

There were only about 230 reported murders in the entire U.S.



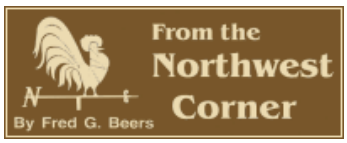
July 16, 2002

Oklahoma City has its MAPS projects to brag about, but Perry can point with pride to its multi-faceted 2000 Water Project, something that will serve the needs of this city for the foreseeable future. Water is a basic requirement for every living thing. Without the assurance of a supply of that precious commodity to meet this community's needs, there could be no possibility of growth. Congratulations to Mayor Rolling, the city council and everyone else who had a hand in drawing up this important project to make certain that Perry does have a future.

Years ago, one of the younger members of our family listened intently as we drove down one of Perry's main streets during a discussion of Perry's obvious assets, all of them critically needed to move the city forward. "But I don't want Perry to get bigger," our beloved youngster protested. "I like it better as a small town." We didn't do a very good job of reassuring her that we had no illusions that Perry would ever rival Oklahoma City in size, or even Stillwater, for that matter. Besides, I agree with that child's point. Perry doesn't need to be a big city, or even a large small city, if there is such a thing. Stillwater, for example, has crossed the line and is now experiencing some of the growing pains that afflicted Edmond for several years. Perry doen't need to be THAT big. Let's just be sure there's enough water to drink and sustain the life of our population, whatever level that figure reaches.

Many other good things going on around town. The KFC store at Seventh and Fir is being refurbished with a new exterior façade, and the Rose Petal store has moved from the north side of the square to the north half of the old J.C. Penney Co. location on the east side. Their new window display is very attractive. Jay Williams has transformed his Sport Shak storefront into an inviting new all-glass façade. Perry's Main Street is helping behind the scenes with many other projects around town in hopes that something of the Victorian architectural style in the downtown area is preserved as a reminder of our heritage. I also see that our city's brand-new Perry Information Network on cable channel 19 is now on the air with no advertising (and no background musical clatter) but straight facts about local happenings. The studio and offices are located in the upper story of the Foucart building, which also houses the Perry Chamber of Commerce, Perry Development Coalition and Perry Main Street headquarters.

In the past few days, some friends who know how much I enjoy old Perry newspapers have brought me generous loads of some issues dating back to the 1920s. I am still in the process of scanning them but you can expect to hear more about them as time goes by. Those old newspaper stories give us a unique glimpse of life in Perry decades ago.



July 19, 2002

Newspapers from out of the past fascinate me, especially those fragile, yellowing copies of *The Perry Daily Journal* that were originally distributed decades ago by carriers in this Booth Tarkington setting. In a unique way, they recorded the

history of their time in this special little part of the U.S. along with accurate reflections of the mood, temperament, attitude and philosophy of some memorable times here on the prairie.

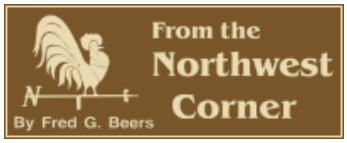
Nothing else comes close to matching the story-telling of those news articles and the advertisements that accompanied them. They related on a daily basis what people did, what they thought, and how they carried out their responsibilities to those who were to come after them. I believe that people of the Cherokee Strip area have always had a sense of history and knew, if only sub-consciously, that they were part of it. So, I truly appreciate the many thoughtful friends who have shared with me some of the newspapers from out of the past that had special meaning to them. Reading those old papers, merely touching them, takes me back to an era of growth and pride in this community that we can hardly imagine today.

Eighty years ago, in the 1920s, the residents of this part of north-central Oklahoma were just beginning to realize some of the bountiful benefits pouring from the horn of plenty envisioned by those pioneers who came here in 1893. The Great Depression had not yet materialized. Our hardy pioneers arrived here determined to tame the wilderness and to carve out farms, ranches and all types of enterprises for the families they knew would populate this area.

The same struggle goes on today, but Perry residents of that period were learning how to deal with it and the newspaper tells us how they survived. That is part of the reason I find so much pleasure in reading newspaper accounts of the life those gritty folks led. I'll share some of those accounts with you in future columns.

Suddenly Shifting Subjects - will there be another major league baseball strike this season? My best answer is, I don't know. There is so much unrest and discontent hovering over what used to be America's favorite game that you'd have to say a strike is probable but at the same time it is also improbable. Disputes between the zillionaire team owners and their millionaire players are, for the most part, looking sillier all the time to John Q. Fan, who shells out those big bucks in the first place. Television money also plays a big part, but it is the same schlemiel, the poor wage earner, who sits at home in front of a TV set and ultimately provides the cash in the first place.

The recent mid-season All-Star classic did little to ease the tension. Ending a so-called "dream game" like that with a tie score satisfies no one. Commissioner Bud Selig's office already was rocked with controversy by the "constriction" theory that would reduce the number of major league teams and now more woes have been dumped on the same doorstep. Will the big leagues survive? It's questionable, but as long as boys and girls of all ages play the game and love it and as long as their families do too, the diamonds will continue to flourish in some form. Personally, I can't wait for the start of football season.



July 23, 2002

Add these to your collection of words of wisdom, or whatever you wish to call them. Some may bring a chuckle.

Yes, being young is beautiful, but being old is comfortable.

Old age is when former classmates are so gray and wrinkled and bald they don't recognize you.

If you don't learn to laugh at trouble, you won't have anything to laugh at when you are old.

First you forget names, then you forget faces. Then you forget to pull up your zipper, then . oh my goodness, you forgot to pull your zipper down!
Here now are some thoughts on **Children's Logic**.

"Give me a sentence about a public servant," said a teacher. The small boy wrote: "The fireman came down the ladder pregnant." The teacher took the lad aside to correct him. "Don't you know what pregnant means?" she asked. "Sure," said the young boy confidently. "Means carrying a child."

An exasperated mother whose son was always getting into mischief, finally asked him, "How do you expect to get into Heaven?" The boy thought it over and said: "Well, I'll just run in and out and in and out and keep slamming the door until St. Peter says, "For Heaven's sake, Jimmy, come in or stay out."

A nursery school teacher was delivering a station wagon full of kids home one day when a fire truck zoomed past. Sitting in the front seat of the fire truck was a Dalmatian dog. The children started discussing the dog's duties. "They use him to keep crowds back," said one youngster. "No," said another, he's just for good luck." A third child brought the argument to a close. "They use the dogs," she said firmly, "to find the fire hydrant."

Little Johnny watched, fascinated, as his mother smoothed cold cream on her face. "Why do you do that, Mommy?" he asked. "To make myself beautiful," said his mother, who then began removing the cream with a tissue. "What's the matter?" asked little Johnny. "Giving up?"
That's enough froth for this visit. More in another column.

From the Northwest Corner
By Fred G. Beers

July 26, 2002

Here's another contribution from a reader with a good sense of humor. It begins with the question, "Who Reads American Newspapers?" For answers, read on:

The Wall Street Journal is read by the people who run the country.

The New York Times is read by the people who think they run the country.

The Washington Post is read by people who think they ought to run the country.

USA Today is read by people who think they ought to run the country but don't understand *The Washington Post.*

The Los Angeles Times is read by people who wouldn't mind running the country, if they could spare the time.

The Boston Globe is read by people whose parents used to run the country.

The New York Daily News is read by people who aren't too sure who's running the country.

The New York Post is read by people who don't care who's running the country, as long as they do something scandalous.
Any dissenting voices?

If you enjoyed that bit of nonsense, try some of these:

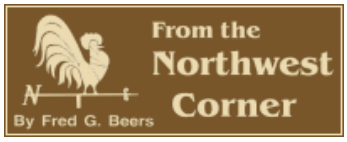
Some people try to turn back their odometers. Not me. I want people to know why I look this way.

When you are dissatisfied and would like to go back to your youth, think of algebra.

You don't know how I got over the hill without getting to the top.

The golden years are really metallic years - gold in the tooth, silver in your hair and most of all, lead in the pants.

One of the many things no one tells you about aging is that it is such a nice change from being young. One must wait until evening to see how splendid the day has been.
Ponder those thoughts for a while. Maybe they will tickle your funny bone.



July 30, 2002

My computer has been ailing recently with a case of multiple viruses. I am happy to report that the patient was saved and has almost fully recovered, thanks to the technical skill and know-how of my trusted caregiver in the field of electronics, but it was hard for me to do much while the recovery program was in progress and I was deprived of its services. In other words, I was again reminded of a bit of irony -- how much I rely on this equipment despite earlier avowals that I would never use it. This must be how those cynical skeptics felt after the first gasoline buggies appeared on the streets. I have succumbed to this way of writing and storing files and it is hard to imagine doing the same things any other way.

So my faithful old portable typewriters, both manual and electric versions, lie idle in their carrying cases. On those rare occasions when I need one, they seem clunky and ancient with nothing to remind me how well they served in years gone by, and how proud I was when they were first acquired. Why do I still have them? Because I don't know what to do with them.

The Oklahoma City newspaper had an interesting article the other day about a business that specializes in selling and reconditioning typewriters. The people who run the business are surprised that so many people still use typewriters in this electronic age, but their customers say they would not have it any other way. For one thing, you can't run a form through a computer to fill in the blanks.

A reader notes that there are no street name signs at the southeast and northwest corners of the square. "The one on the southwest corner sits back so far from the corner, you have trouble seeing it from Seventh Street," he adds. Missing street name signs are a major and chronic problem for our city officials, who probably have weightier issues to deal with. You can check the situation for yourself. Take a few minutes to drive around town someday and notice how many intersections have no street signs. Vandals are at least partly to blame. Those pesky vandals - don't they ever rest? Don't they realize how much their senseless, childish pranks are costing the poor taxpayers of this community?

A lot of people are working hard to make certain that the Centennial Celebration of Perry High School in September will be a memorable experience for the old grads as well as the younger ones who attend. Karen Wilcox and Marilee Macias are co-chairmen of the gala and they are supported by a small army of volunteers. A newsletter recently was mailed to all PHS grads with information about details of the event as they are now taking shape. Jim Edgar's band and the fabled

Magnificent Seven rockers are just two of the musical acts lined up for entertainment, and more bits of nostalgia will be added as time goes by. Right now, Ethel Coe and the PHS Alumni Association, which she heads as president, could use volunteers to help with the many details that make possible an event such as this. If you can help in any way, drop by the Alumni office on the south side of the square between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Monday through Friday, and they'll find something for you to do. But don't delay much longer; they need help right now. This is a once-in-a-lifetime event. Anyone who ever attended Perry High School is invited to join in the fun, and to help with the preparations.