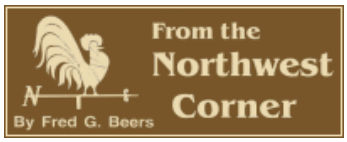


July 2, 2005

Here we have some "Redneck" lines for your amusement. Are they funny? Many of us think so. Before we leave this format, though, stay with this for a moment.

Fellow in our Adult Sunday School class at the Perry Presbyterian Church waved his hand after the teacher asked for examples of "modern-day miracles." My friend is a rancher. One recent morning he noticed some cattle belonging to a neighbor were on his wheat pasture. Fearing one of the animals might stumble into an old gopher hole and break a leg, or something like that, he decided to call the neighbor. Oops! The cell phone line was busy. So, he called the neighbor's Dad, who lived nearby. Bingo! He made an immediate connection and explained the problem. "Well," said the Dad, "I understand the problem and would be glad to help you out, but you see I am in Boston." That was the end of the conversation. Another way of clearing away the cattle was figured out, and the incident had a happy ending.

Now, back to the original beginning of this column. Read and enjoy.

Jesus fed the 5000, whether the two fish were bass or catfish, and what bait was used to catch' em.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... when the pastor says "I'd like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering," five guys and two women stand up.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... opening day of duck season is recognized as an official church holiday.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if...a member of the church requests to be buried in his 4-wheel-drive truck because "It ain't been in a hole it couldn't get out of."

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if...the choir is known as the "OK Chorale".

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if...in a congregation of 500 members, there are only seven last names in the church directory.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... Baptism is referred to as branding.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if...high notes on the organ set the dogs on the floor to howling.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if...people think "rap music" is what you get when you lift something too heavy.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... the baptismal pool is a #2 galvanized washtub.

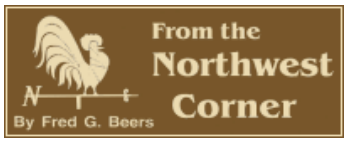
You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... the collection plates are really hub caps from a '56 Chevy.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... instead of a bell, patrons are called to service by a duck call.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... the minister and his wife are driving matching pickup trucks.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... the communion has Boone's Farm "Tickled Pink".

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if... the final words of benediction are, "Y'all come back now!! Ya Hear!



July 6, 2005

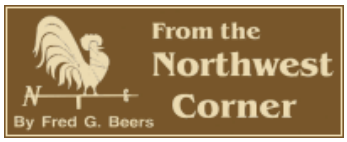
Millard Mayfield was a "porter" at our City Drug Store during a crucial time in my life. This was in the late 1930's and I was just growing up. Millard was only a few years older than I was but he taught me a lot about many things. He didn't know he was teaching me and neither did I, but now that we've all entered another era I can understand that.

Part of this is racial, but not all of it. At the earliest part, local blacks were still treated poorly. There were separate drinking fountains for them on the ground floor of the courthouse, and separate rest rooms there and at the two Perry train stations. Movie theaters (we had two of them) had hidden "balconies" where black men and women could see the films without being seen themselves. We had Blaine Separate School so black children could be a "separate but equal" education, and they played basketball on their own court which, incidentally, seemed better than the one in our PHS gym.

When young black men applied for jobs as janitors in local drug stores, the position was called a porterage. If hired, they were expected to sweep the floor once or twice a day, dust the merchandise, and run little errands when so instructed. That's what Millard did for the City Drug Store. He succeeded Sylvester Holly, who also taught me how to drive when Mother took pity on me. I had an *Oklahoma News* route in Perry. There were 10 subscribers around the square, and two others who lived on the east side and west side of town. When the weather was bad, Mother had Sylvester drive me to those remote houses. But Syl grew tired of chauffeuring me around in the family Buick, so he taught me how to drive even though I was still far too young (not yet 16) for a legal license. Mostly, Syl just sat back in the passenger seat and waved to friends as we passed them en route to those two customers.

Millard was good-natured, always smiling, and trying to do a good job. One August day, when I was swimming at the Country Club, where Blacks were not allowed, Mother sent Millard down the street to the Exchange Bank in quest of more coins for the cash register. He took a bag full of currency for the conversion. He walked in the bank lobby, and quickly learned that a daylight robbery was in progress. Mr. Willett, the president, let Millard know that it was the real thing and advised him to sit at his desk until the process was finished. When he realized the peril he was in, Millard almost wet his pants, he later told me.

We'll continue this little profile of Millard Mayfield in just a few days. Please watch for the finale.



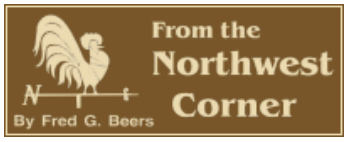
July 9, 2005

Millard Mayfield was part of a cadre of young black men who served as "porters" (a euphemism) at the four or five drug stores located around the Perry square. Millard was employed at our family's business, the City Drug Store, so I came to know him pretty well. This was in the late 1930s, when I was in the middle teens and learning about a lot of things. Millard was a few years older and much wiser than I was. We had many interesting discussions on a wide variety of topics.

Some of the other porters that I remember are Walter Baker at Brownie's Drug on the west side of the square, before he became a well-liked, full-time member of the "back shop" gang at the *Perry Daily Journal*, and a pleasant man named Leonard at Foster's Corner Drug. The South Side Pharmacy also had a man and I think Merrill Hamous and Jim Hopper had one at their store on the west side, but the names escape me now. As I recall, Leonard at Foster's also had a shoe shine stand at the Mossman Barber Shop. But Millard was exclusively a City Drug Store representative and we all thought a lot of him. He came from a big family and we enjoyed being around them.

The times were different then. We had Blaine Separate School for young black children, and the teachers and administrators there were pretty much the intellectual and social leaders of the black community here. When Blaine was merged with the Perry public schools (I believe that occurred in 1957) the leaders moved elsewhere. Mr. E.H. Hancox was principal of Blaine school but I have no further information about his subsequent location, when separate schools were kicked out by the Supreme Court. The Blaine football and basketball teams, both very competitive, disappeared as an entity. Their head coach became an assistant at PHS but many of the athletes concentrated on their studies. There were exceptions, of course, but the merger pretty well offset the benefits of the new prospects.

This is not the whole story about integration, nor is it so intended. It is, simply, a few personal memories of that critical time. Perry has not been quite the same since that profound change came along, but it's interesting to compare "then" with "now." No doubt you have your own personal recollections. Am right or wrong?



July 13, 2005

Jack Stone was one of the coolest characters I've ever dealt with, and I knew him when "cool" had a slightly different connotation than it does today. He was laid back, as the adjective implies now, and he was also seemingly unperturbed no matter what kind of hand the world dealt him day after day. He was, I believe, a notary public, perhaps a justice of the peace, and he answered the telephone in Dr. J.W. Francis' office when the lady hired for that purpose was assisting the Doctor in other ways. None of his jobs paid much money, but he was content. I've been told that he once owned and operated a large ready to wear clothing store, but that was before my time and I have no personal knowledge of that business.

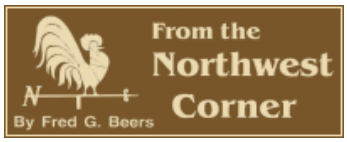
Dr. Francis' office was just across the hall from our apartment on the second floor of the building where my late Dad, Fred W. Beers, had operated the City Drug Store. Dr. Francis was a family friend, in addition to being our physician. His wife, Rachel, and their daughter, Katherine Khoury, were good friends of my Mother, Ivy Beers. Katherine, her husband Joe Khoury, and Rachel often brought us squirrel, frogs and other wild game from hunting expeditions. I personally never cared much for any of it, but it was the thought that counted.

Over a period of time, Dr. Francis had several office girls. One of them was Belle Ruff, a rather matronly lady who was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dutch Ruff. Among other things, the Ruffs were jailers at the county courthouse before the

current crisis came along. Another helper was Dr. Francis' daughter-in-law, Mildred Green Francis, and another was one of the Terronez girls, who was very professional and a good worker. But through each of them, Jack Stone was in the background, ready to pick up the phone if it rang while they were busy and sharp enough to schedule visits by patients. We liked Dr. Francis as a friend and physician, and Rachel had an alterations business on the "balcony" at the rear of our drug store, which made visiting with my Mother and other friends a possibility each day.

But back to Jack. His regular office was in a small building on the north side of the square, not far from our drug store, and normally occupied by Mr. A.W. Tucker, who was in the oil and gas business. Jack had a desk in Mr. Tucker's office, but he preferred the reading matter in magazines and newspapers in Dr. Francis' office, so that is where he usually could be found during office hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After a bite to eat from a restaurant at 6 p.m. each weekday evening, he brought out a straight-back wooden chair from Mr. Tucker's office, planted it beneath the pole-mounted street light on the surface of Delaware Street in front of the office, then adjusted the volume on our drug store radio, perhaps 50 feet away so he could clearly hear the dialogue on "Amos and Andy," the wildly popular NBC radio show that he never missed. Young drug store clerks quickly learned not to fool with the radio while that show was on the air. Jack would sit on the chair, regally, arms folded, pipe and hat in place, and listen to each night's comic episode. He was the epitome of cool. You don't see folks doing this like that any more.

More on this profile of Jack Stone when we come back in a few days.



July 16, 2005

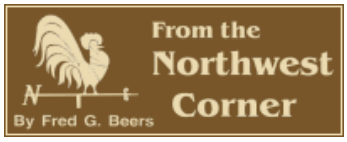
More recollections of Jack Stone are contained in the following. I'd say he was one of the more interesting adults I knew through our family's City Drug Store on the north side of the square, where a furniture store is now located.

Mr. Stone was a good man, quiet and unassuming, and he helped run Dr. J.W. Francis' office during the Great Depression years. One of the most memorable traits that I associate with Mr. Stone is his pipe. He and Dr. Francis both smoked pipes, packed full of fragrant tobacco. It's one reason I used to smoke a pipe, in addition to a pack of cigarettes each day, but the smoking tobacco never tasted as good as the fragrance of their pipes. Both Dr. Francis and his friend, Jack Stone, are long since gone from this earth, but they left me with many distinctive memories because I knew them when I was at an impressionable age.

Jack Stone was a sort of assistant office girl for Dr. Francis. He liked to hang out at the Doctor's office and he took care of the phone when the regular receptionist was assisting the Doctor with other patients. Our family had an apartment across the hall from Dr. Francis' office. My Mother and Mrs. Francis were close friends, along with Dr. and Mrs. Francis' daughter, Katherine Khoury. When no patients were scheduled, Dr. Francis and Jack might play a game of Chess, or Checkers, or perhaps just listen to the St. Louis Cardinals' baseball game on the radio. Both were big fans of the Cardinals.

Mr. Stone had no visible means of support. I was told that he once owned a clothing store catering to the entire family, but that was before my time and I only knew him because his office was next to our drug store building on the square and he spent a lot of time in Dr. Francis' upstairs office across from our apartment. As a notary, and perhaps a justice of the peace, he earned a few coins a day, but his bankroll was usually pretty slim. The story I heard stated that his department store had been on the northwest corner of the square, about where the First Bank & Trust building is now located.

I never knew Mr. Stone's age. He was a small man, about 5'10", weighing maybe 130 pounds, and silver-haired. Though physically small and slender, to me he was "an old man." Looking back now, I think he probably was only in his early 60s at the time I knew him, but that is just speculation. He was a good story-teller and a listener when that was required. He was even-tempered and quick to provide a kind of cackle or a laugh if someone else told a joke. I had no grandfathers and he took their place in my life. I'm sorry to say I do not remember when he passed away, but I know many people must miss him, as I do, just because he was a nice man.



July 20, 2005

'Way back there in time, what now seems like a pre-historic era, Perry had a virtual fleet of taxicabs. Yes, they were money-makers for the operators and there were other side benefits, like tips, reasonable working hours, being your own boss, and other bits of good news. The thing that inspired all of them, however, was the arrival and departure of passenger trains in Perry. At that time, we had riders on both the Frisco line and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe line. Many of the riders were old folks who could not or did not have access to a car of their own. They depended on the taxis of Perry to get them to and from the railroad depot.

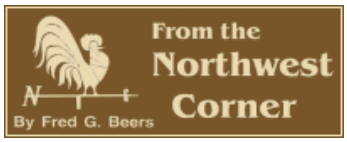
I'm probably forgetting some of them, but the cabbies I remember are Charlie Jirous, H.R. Bittman, Bud Francis, Pat Townsend and Paul Wood. As I say, that is probably not a complete list, but it's the best I can do, even with the help of the Moorhead Directory, which has not been published in recent years.

I knew Bud Francis better than most of them, because his taxi stand was on the north side of the square, where our family-owned City Drug Store once was located. We had a popcorn machine in the building with Bud, and I had charge of that operation. Bud and I solved a lot of the world's problems by discussing them. He also had a telephone, a table and a chair, and, of course, a four-door sedan for taxicab passengers. None of the cab drivers that I remember had a meter to determine charges for rides, but no one argued with the amount assessed by their driver.

As I recall now, all the taxicabs went out of business when passenger train service was discontinued here. Some of the drivers also aged, and they chose to retire when they felt the time for that was here. Mr. Bittman was a familiar sight around town for years. He probably wondered why pedestrians scattered when his route merged with theirs, but he knew how to get passengers delivered on time. All the drivers did.

He was not a cab driver, but Mr. Herb Peden should be mentioned here. He drove a model-T Ford truck, carrying mail and other objects from the Perry post office to the mail trains that came through town. Mr. Peden was a gentleman, friendly with kids, but he did not covet passenger trade. He's another friendly icon from out of the past in this little prairie town.

Those are just a few of the people from out of the past who made this a special little community. In the minds of those who remember them, they still have the power.



July 23, 2005

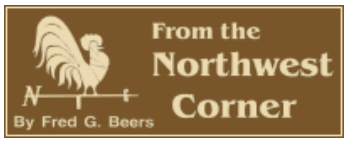
A lot of things have changed since I was a pre-teenage kid growing up on the downtown square in Perry. One thing that has adapted to new ways and new ideas but remains the same in many ways is the old barber shop. There used to be a lot of them around the square, but now you have to know the location, know something about the barber and be pretty certain how you want the outcome to look.

When I was a youngster, there was usually a copy of the scandalous *Police Gazette* lying on a seat where men young and old awaited their turn in the barber's chair. The magazine usually promised more than it delivered (or so I've been told), but reading the old paper was a kind of rite of passage for boys who were just growing up. If you quoted the magazine, it was assumed that you were hip, or with it, or whatever the term was at that moment.

There were many choices to be considered in picking a barber. Some that I remember were Leo Stieferman and Charlie Hise in the Elite Hotel building, Ralph and Hubert Mossman in their shop on the north side of the square, where Jack Dorl now presides, George McManness on the west side, Henry Loeffelholz on the east side, Ellsworth Choat on the north side, Charlie Longacre and his partner, Frank Taylor, on the south side, Jess Lee, who taught me to read a baseball scorebook, on the north side, and various others who seemed to come and go with the seasons. In truth, they were all good barbers and honorable men, and they gave a good haircut. So do today's practitioners. Mr. McManness was one of the few customers I had for the Oklahoma City paper, *The Oklahoma News*, and I recall that he always offered a 360-degree look at your head when he finished the job.

The barbers had what they called a "county association," and they met regularly to discuss their price structure. When they went up from 50 cents to 75 cents, it was quite a blow. I believe that is when mothers decided their sons did not need a haircut every 14 days.

As I said earlier, many things have changed. I miss the old barber shops and the literature they provided. I also miss the male conversations, laced with gossip, that filled the air. But most of all, I guess, I miss the price structure that used to prevail. But, then, what else has not changed in that regard?



July 27, 2005

In another recent column the other day about taxicabs years ago in Perry, I commented that one of the taxi drivers in this little city made people scatter when they saw him coming. To be perfectly fair, he was not the only one who had that effect on people, and he seemed to understand that there was nothing personal in all that foolishness. Here's something to keep our perspective clear.

I was a newly hired reporter for this newspaper one day about 60 years ago. The editor and publisher, or "the boss" as we usually called him, was Mr. W.K. Leatherock. He was a hard-headed, businesslike person in most conversations, but he had

his limits. One day, a group of us from the news department were listening to his pronouncements when the phone rang and someone told Mr. Leatherock that call was for him. It was his Mother, Rilla Leatherock, who had his respect, something a lot of us aspired for. Mrs. Leatherock was, indeed, on the line, and he listened to the phone as she spoke. When she was finished, he had done an Ernest Gilbert-like slow burn and he put the phone down in its cradle gingerly. "Damn," said Mr. Leatherock, bitterly. (Usually his remarks to us were brief and to the point, so we understood.)

"Everything all right?," someone asked, not really expecting an answer.

"Yeah," WKL replied. "Mom parked her car sideways in the middle of her garage and she can't get it straightened out. I'll be back in about ten minutes."

With that, he stalked out of the office and none of us dared ask him about the situation when he returned. Mrs. Leatherock lived in an attractive one-story house on West Delaware street, with a detached double garage for her one automobile. We thought a lot of her but understood such difficulties, and as far as I know this is the first time it's been mentioned in what used to be her son's newspaper. WKL and Rilla both are now deceased. They were nice to me and I thought a great deal of them, but this little incident has tickled me for many years.

From the Northwest Corner
By Fred G. Beers

July 30, 2005

I can't let go of Dr. Francis as the subject of this column without retelling one more time the story of his "arrival" in this country many years ago. Of course, Dr. Francis, an MD with all the verification that position of eminence requires, has been gone from here for several years, but good stories like this are worthy of retelling forever. Just in case you missed the most recent version, Dr. Francis was a principal subject in the story about Jack Stone that appeared in this column a few days ago. Many of us still remember Dr. Francis as the sly, sharp-witted son of the Ozarks, which is what he was.

Dr. Francis was a member of the Perry Rotary Club. His wife, Rachel, and their oldest daughter, Katherine, were good friends of my Mother and many Monday nights (at the time when Rotary then met) Rachel and Katherine would gather at our house to fill the time, just talking. On the particular night I'm writing about, perhaps more than 50 years ago, that was the case. At Rotary, the club president announced that in lieu of a visiting speaker, he was going to ask five members to tell about the first dollar they earned. Dr. Francis was one of those chosen to speak extemporaneously. He relished the chance.

When his turn came, Dr. Francis spoke in a solemn voice. He related how he hitched a ride in the galley of an ocean liner that was heading to the U.S. from his native England, then how he saved his pennies in the U.S. until he had enough to enter a medical school and emerged with a cherished diploma. Eventually he earned his medical license, and he chose to come to Perry because it sounded like a good place, and that he had been here ever since. His embellishments made it a winner, and finally Dr. Francis sat down hearing tumultuous applause for the story he had just told. I went home, Rachel and Katherine were still there, and I repeated the story. Rachel sniffed and said: "None of that happened. He was born and raised in the Ozarks, and that's the only home he's ever known."

I was crushed to hear the true story, but although I saw Dr. Francis daily after that, he never let on that I knew what he told us was one big fabrication. His story was better.