

June 3, 1997

Judge E. W. Jones was a newspaper editor, attorney, historian and a pretty fair country baseball player who had personal knowledge of Perry at the time of the September 16, 1893, Cherokee Strip land run. He had a fine sense of the significance of events during that time and he cared enough to record many items of interest for posterity in his weekly newspaper, The Perry Republican. Other stories by Judge Jones are contained in a short history of Perry which he authored. We started this account of Perry's early days by Judge Jones in the previous Northwest Corner, and now here's the rest of the story just as he wrote in for his newspaper on February 8, 1912:

"Northeast Perry was homesteaded by 'Billy' McCoy, one of the clerks in the local land office. His contest was short lived, however, the claimants getting rid of him in a few months. Billy was a Milwaukee product and after the boom days of the town subsided he went back to take his old place on the police force which he had resigned to come to Perry.

"John Malone, brother of the register of the land office, was the contestee of Northwest Perry. The settlers defeated him in his fight, which was shortly followed by his becoming insane. He was taken to Jacksonville, Illinois, and committed to the asylum, which then took care of our insane, where later he died.

"The contest over West Perry was a battle royal. Henry Bowie, one of the real characters of the early days, filed his homestead entry on the quarter section and against him were a thousand town lot claimants. Bowie had come here from Texas. He was a direct descendant from the illustrious defender of the Alamo. The contest for West Perry continued for several years but Bowie lost and like Henry Linn, down and out, wended his way back to his old home in Texas.

"South Perry was the battlefield where various and sundry characters made their mark in early day history. Chas. E. (Doc) Reed, a veterinarian and practical horseman; Chas. (Buffalo) Jones, pioneer and plainsman, later game warden of the Yellowstone park, a friend of President (Theodore) Roosevelt and breeder of the catalo, a cross of the domestic cow and the buffalo; John McClintic, now in business in Oklahoma City; 'Jack' Combs, soldier of fortune, who died a few years ago in Kiowa county; all were contestants for the homestead right while against them were arrayed hundreds of settlers seeking town lot titles.

"This was the last of the townsite additions to be adjudicated and resulted in Doc Reed winning against all claimants, the first time in the history of land openings of a homesteader winning against the settlers.

"Reed obtained a deed for the land and later transferred it to Thomas H. Doyle and it is now known as the 'Doyle Addition.' Reed, was a reckless fellow, of not too pleasant disposition when sober, which was with him periodically, and he had but few friends at the finish of his local career, realizing comparatively nothing after having his claim to the land recognized.

"The story of the 'run' made by himself and 'Buffalo' Jones as recited in the records of the land office, would make several chapters of the spectacular history of Perry. Their relays, change of horses and breakneck speed, demoniacal riding and driving coming from Orlando over the rough country makes a story of dime novel interest."

Thus ended this installment of Judge Jones' interesting account of the homesteader battles inside the city limits of Perry. We are all indebted to the old Judge for his careful chronicle of that exciting period in the life of our placid little community.



June 6, 1997

In these politically correct days when so many of our traditional attitudes and practices are being called into question and modified to adapt to a more "modern" view there is something very reassuring in the way the Boy Scouts of America are handling things. Boy Scouts have always stood for the characteristics that most Americans admire. Their unflinching adherence to qualities that emphasize honor, courage, character and devotion to duty is an attribute all of us should cultivate in our own lives. Certainly we should admire the Boy Scouts for the way they steadfastly perpetuate those values.

I was reminded of all this by the Court of Honor held the other day for the presentation of Eagle Scout awards to Jason Wornom and Jeff Steichen. two members of Perry's Troop 12, sponsored by the First United Methodist church. Richard Sharp is their Scoutmaster. This is the highest rank available to members of the Boy Scouts and only a relative few persevere to the conclusion in their pursuit of it. It was a solemn occasion, but it was also good fun, like most Scout events. For Jason and Jeff the Court of Honor was the culmination of years of working for higher ranks in Troop 12 and accumulating many, many merit badges along the way. The achievement of these two young men should instill a bit of pride in all of us, right along with their parents and their Scout leaders.

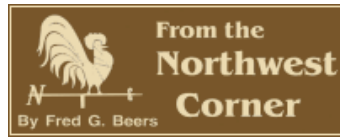
The troop sponsored by the Methodist church is now the only one in Perry, but at one time at least three troops existed here and all of them were active. My own experience was with Troop 15, sponsored by the First Presbyterian church. Troop 12 was going strong 'way back then, and the First Baptist church also sponsored a lively troop. Harry DeLashmutt Jr., who later became a fulltime professional Scout executive in Colorado, was the Troop 15 Scoutmaster when I earned my Tenderfoot badge. The fact that I never advanced beyond that rank was not his fault. Other interests (girls, money, grades -- the usual things) precluded further activity in Scouting for me, and I fell by the wayside without ever learning to tie a decent knot, much less start a camp fire with a piece of flint.

But I never lost my respect and admiration for those who stayed with the program and continued to advance. From today's perspective of adulthood I am even more in awe of those who climb all the way to the Eagle rank. As Jason and Jeff were advised at their Court of Honor, they will continue to be Eagle Scouts the rest of their lives. They will not say, "I was an Eagle Scout." From now on they can say Proudly, "I am an Eagle Scout." That will tell future employers and the world at large that they have truly accomplished something worthwhile and it will be an indication of the strength of their character.

Retired District Judge Don Powers of Chandler presented the Eagle awards at the local Court of Honor, and that was a special moment for Jason's dad, John Wornom. Judge Powers was Scoutmaster of Troop 11 in Chandler when John received his own Eagle award 27 years ago. Honorary miniature Eagle pins were presented to Jason's mother, Beverly, and to Jeff's mother, Carol Steichen, while her husband, Dennis (also a former Scout) looked on. Grandparents of both the young men also were on hand and were recognized as part of the presentation. A large number of family members and friends attended.

All in all, the Court of Honor was handled as a class act, which is most appropriate because that's just what it is. I'm thankful the Boy Scout program continues to prepare young men for the future by stressing the old morality and the value

system that most of our previous generations grew up with. Congratulations to Jason and Jeff, and thanks to their family, friends and all those associated with the Scout program for nurturing them as they begin taking their place among tomorrow's leaders.



June 10, 1997

Since our local schools were dismissed the other day, I have made a conscious effort to be more alert while driving along city streets. Many youngsters are riding bikes on them now. Even more are blithely running, walking, skating and what have you, hither and yon, and they don't always remember to watch out for vehicle traffic, so it's left to us grownups to protect them by driving carefully.

I thought about this the other day while heading north on Seventh street, just a block or so off the square. I had just come from the square where construction of our new courthouse park sidewalks is causing some temporary inconveniences, like blinking traffic lights at all four intersections. Workmen and vehicles were busily engaged in taking out the old sidewalks and portions of the curb, and I could not help but notice that neither flagmen nor warning pylons were in use as vehicles gingerly made their way from one side of the square to another, being careful not to hit a front end loader, a workman or some kind of heavy equipment along the way. But that's a whole 'nother issue.

Two very young bikers were ahead of me, going single-file in the correct lane of traffic as we neared the traffic light at Seventh and Fir. The signal was red and as I prepared to stop I saw in my rear view mirror a pickup making a U-turn in the middle of the street behind me, despite traffic approaching from both directions. That is very illegal, not to mention unwise. At precisely the same moment, a late model car in front of me executed the exact same maneuver -- making an illegal U-turn to reach a parking place on the other side of the street. The driver made a friendly hand wave as he went by.

Meanwhile, the bikers had stopped, properly, looking behind them as they did, and they waited for the light to change to green before proceeding on their way. Somebody had taught them the basics of road safety for bicycle riders. Let's hope they retain that good sense as adults and that they don't join the ranks of drivers who feel they can get away with illegal U-turns despite the potential for an accident they thereby create. In Perry, it's not too far from any one point to another, so we surely don't have to take such short cuts in the name of saving time.

New business activity around the square and on the other adjacent streets certainly is welcome and looks good. Many property owners are sprucing up their shops or other places of business. You can easily tell which ones keep their windows clean enough to see through and those who sweep the sidewalks each day. Unfortunately, though, we're seeing more grass being allowed to grow in the cracks of concrete walks and that does create an unsightly appearance.

Congratulations to all those in the offices and shops on the south side, however. A perfunctory survey leads me to believe that those folks currently can claim to have the best tended side of the square.

I hope that someday we can revive those monthly awards for the most attractive business place and the prettiest residential yard. I thought that was a good way of calling attention to some of our good features, and it probably stimulated some of us to keep our weeds mowed a little better. Maybe one of our city beautification groups can pick up on the torch in this particular crusade. It will pay dividends for all of us.



June 13, 1997

A new life lies ahead for one of Perry's landmarks on the south side of the square. Leroy Rolling has completed the purchase of the 25-foot front building at 608 Cedar street which was last occupied by a used clothing store operated by the late Beatrice Marchbanks. But for years before Bea Marchbanks opened that shop, the building was the home of the fabled Gem Cafe, operated by Wesley O. Marcy with Homer Thompson as his nonpareil chef. It was one of Perry's choice eating places in the 1930s, 1940s and on into the early 1950s.

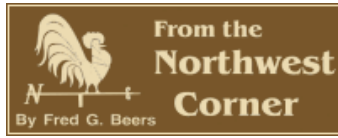
In the near future, the building is expected to become the new home of the Perry High School Alumni Association, which has been more or less located in a corner of the Foucart building but with no room to display its growing collection of historic memorabilia relating to Perry public schools through the years. Kathy Lewis is the current president of the association. Plans for converting the building to meet the association's needs are still being worked on.

But in the meantime, all this has taken me back in time to those decades when Wes Marcy was one of Perry's kings of the culinary arts at the Gem Cafe. Along with Eddie Parker's northside Kumback Cafe, Billy and Lucile Reckert's eastside Palace Cafe, Walt Kehres' Elite Restaurant, also on the north side, Speck and Stella Roads' Auto-Eat Cafe just off the northeast corner, and assorted other diners which came and went around the square during that period, the Gem Cafe was a wonderful place for eating out. Each was a veritable oasis of dining pleasure during the era of the Great Depression, and each had its own personality, largely a reflection of the owners themselves.

Wes Marcy was a dandy little entrepreneur, standing perhaps 5' 4", cheerfully chubby and invariably nattily dressed with a white shirt, necktie, and sharply creased slacks. On rare occasions, a jacket completed the ensemble, but that was usually only during cold weather when north winds chilled the entryway each time the front door swung open. Wes greeted customers with a smile, a handshake and individualized salutations as they arrived at the front door. His customary station was behind the cash register which stood on a glass display counter housing the cache of toothpicks, chewing gum, candy bars, cigars and cigarets intended to tempt departing customers as they paid their bills.

Wes rarely waited on tables, leaving that chore to his well trained and neatly dressed cadre of waitresses, but during peak business periods he mingled among the tables and booths to make certain each guest was pleased with his or her order. At the front of the cafe, a long dining counter with vinyl-topped flat stools was usually chosen by customers dining alone, or those who were just enjoying a cup of Gem Cafe coffee, perhaps with a slice of pie. The counter is now in the possession of Jim and Sondra Garvey, who operate their Wood 'n Stuff store just a few doors west of the old Gem Cafe location. Jim is looking for a photo of the Gem Cafe's exterior as it appeared in the 1930s or 1940s. Leroy Rolling also would like a photo of the cafe from that period. Perhaps a reader can help them with this.

More about the Gem Cafe, Wes Marcy and Homer Thompson when the Northwest Corner next appears.



June 17, 1997

In the last column, we began a remembrance of the Gem Cafe, its owner, Wes Marcy, and the longtime chef there, Homer Thompson. The cafe was one of Perry's most popular eating places in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. We misidentified the owner of the used clothing store that formerly was housed in the old Gem Cafe building. The lady who operated that business was Ermine Marchbanks, now a resident of the Perry Nursing Home. Here's the rest of our recollection.

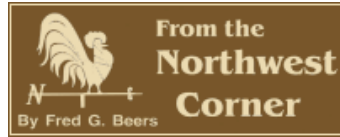
Presiding over the kitchen at the rear of the Gem Cafe was Homer Thompson, whose skill with the skillet was celebrated for years throughout Northern Oklahoma. Homer, a rather large and happy man with a broad grin, had a special way with those thick, succulent grilled steaks. Many of them came from choice herds right here in Noble county. In later years, and with Wes Marcy's good wishes, he branched out on his own and opened a barbecue cafe on the curve of old U.S. 64, about where C. J. Taber's gleaming octagonal office building now stands. Homer's place was an instant success. It attracted barbecue lovers from distant points until his untimely death at the front door of his cafe on a Christmas eve in the 1960s. Homer was one of the leaders of Perry's small black community, and he was a well regarded citizen.

During the depth of the depression, when our family operated the City Drug Store on the north side of the square, we set aside each Sunday noon after church for a dining treat at the Gem Cafe. We would stroll across the courthouse park on agreeable summer days to enjoy what to me was the supreme repast -- Homer Thompson's fried chicken on a platter with mashed potatoes topped by a dollop of cream gravy, plus green beans and a fresh hot roll. This was usually preceded by a steaming bowl of homemade (never canned) chicken and noodle soup. After the evening diners had been served at the Gem, and at Wes Marcy's invitation, I would ride my bike from the drug store to his cafe and he would fill a quart-size ice cream container from our soda fountain with some of the leftover soup That would serve as our supper, and it was a grand climax to those wonderful Gem Cafe Sunday dinners. We usually ate while listening to Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen on the Sunday night radio lineup. The drug store remained open until 11:30 each night, including Sundays.

Wes had an older brother, Gay D. Marcy, who operated Marcy's Furniture Exchange at 614 Cedar, just up the street from the Gem Cafe. Among other appliances, Gay sold Crosley refrigerators. They were rather small by today's standards but they were economically priced and designed to appeal to apartment dwellers. We had two of them, one in our living quarters above the store and the other in the pharmacy itself. Gay also dealt in used furniture. In later years, after Gay had passed on, his wife, Lilah Marcy, was the attractive hostess at the newly opened Cherokee Strip Restaurant on I-35 at the west edge of town. Lilah had been a professional musician in her younger years. She was an accomplished pianist. Jack Marcy, son of Gay and Lilah, was a standout Perry Maroon football player in the 1930s, and I believe he now lives in Midwest City. None of the Marcy family live here today.

The Gem Cafe played host to some minor celebrities and sports figures through the years. I remember one time, not too long after the end of World War II, Perry was visited by Lyle C. Wilson, the chief White House correspondent for UP, the United Press. He was touring "grass roots America" and had chosen Perry for one of his first stops. W. K. Leatherock, then publisher of *The Perry Daily Journal*, took Mr. Wilson and a select group of our civic leaders to lunch at Wes Marcy's Cafe and treated him to a superb steak. W. K. insisted that Wes furnish Mr. Wilson with a "steak fork" to cut the steak, assuring the visitor that the prime slabs of beef in this part of Oklahoma did not require a knife of any kind. Mr. Wilson very kindly mentioned that in his story about Perry when it moved on the nationwide UP wire a few days later, and it earned a measure of fame, momentarily, for Wes, the Gem Cafe and this little city.

The cafe's ownership eventually passed on to Eddie Watts Jr., who was listed as proprietor in the 1952 city directory, a time when Wes Marcy's health was failing. Although the Gem Cafe of those earlier times had been gone for several decades, just thinking about it produces a yen for some of that fried chicken, followed by the realization that it's no longer on my diet, even if Wes Marcy and Homer Thompson were here to serve it up in person. But it's nice to remember all that, even with those limitations.



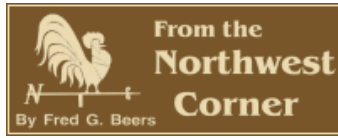
June 20, 1997

There's something magic about the sound of band music in the park, and that's the special treat awaiting us tonight when the Stillwater Community Band visits our spacious courthouse park for a free concert starting at 7:30 p.m. Remember when Dr. W. C. Marshall led the Perry Community Band each summer, or perhaps in slightly more recent times when first Orlan Lemler, then Bill Rotter, directed a Perry summer band in the courthouse park? Those were wonderful times, and some of that will be recreated at tonight's performance by the Stillwater band, directed by William L. Ballenger of the OSU music department. Jim and Julie Luthye of Perry are part of the Stillwater hand. The program is designed to please all ages, so bring your lawn chairs or use the park's bleachers, but be sure to attend. In case of had weather, the concert will be moved to the Perry high school auditorium.

Speaking of Stillwater, that city's radio stations KSPI AM/FM have been sold by the Stillwater Publishing Co. to Stillwater Broadcasting, L.L.C., based in Springfield, Mo. This is the golden anniversary year for KSPI, which went on the air in 1947. L. F. (Chub) Bellatti and James R. Bellatti are owners of Stillwater Publishing Co. John and Robert Mahaffey, the new principal owners of KSPI, own and operate eight additional radio stations in Coffeyville, Kan., and Rolla and Osage Beach, Mo. No immediate programming changes are planned for KSPI-AM/FM.

Our friends over there in the Payne county capital also are debating a proposed new local tax increase. The city commission has been presented with a petition requesting a vote of the people on a use tax to benefit athletic improvements at Oklahoma State University. In May the commission approved an ordinance creating the use tax to provide up to \$600,000 per year for the next 15 years to support the OSU project. OSU asked Stillwater to contribute \$9 million toward its goal of a \$45 million improvement program. If approved, Stillwater residents will pay the city's sales tax on catalog purchases from companies that collect it. Use taxes are equal to the sales tax. Stillwater's sales tax is 3 percent and the state sales tax is 4.5 percent. The issue will be settled at a referendum scheduled for September 9.

Also in Payne county, the folks in Yale are getting fed up with loud music emanating from vehicles driving along State Highway 51, which goes through town. Several residents addressed the Yale city commission recently to voice their objections to the noise, claiming it is depriving them of a good night's sleep. The Yale commissioners are considering a city code amendment to define a noise level deemed a nuisance, as well as directing enforcement of the present ordinance. A \$73 fine is now imposed for such violations, but some Yale residents say their police are not giving the matter adequate attention. A petition signed by 54 persons are presented to the Yale city commission when the problem was brought up for discussion. They said a lot of the noise was the heavy bass type that sometimes makes walls vibrate and can be heard for blocks. It will be interesting to see how all this turns out.



June 24, 1997

Those recent columns about Wes Marcy, Homer Thompson and the old Gem Cafe have stimulated even more recollections concerning the east end of the south side of the square as it looked in the 1930s and 1940s. The Gem Cafe occupied the east half of a 25-foot front building at 608 Cedar street. The west half for many years was the home of the White House Barber Shop, operated by the late Charlie Longacre. Eventually the cafe took over the entire building.

Perry had several barber shops around the square in those days. Each side had at least one, and some of them also had a beauty salon where ladies endured hours of sitting under ominous-looking machines to receive a permanent wave. For a time the White House Barber Shop shared its half of the Gem Cafe building with a beauty parlor operated by a lady named Mikie Johnson.

Charlie Longacre was a tall, slender and friendly man. For years he served as secretary of the Noble county election board, and I will guarantee that no county in the state of Oklahoma had a more efficient, better organized election board and precinct officials than ours. On any election night, and for weeks ahead of time, he was there to oversee operations in the board's courthouse office, and he was never too busy to politely and fully answer any question. He did this without having to pick up a reference book. He had a thorough knowledge of the law governing elections and he invariably interpreted it correctly. Reporters from the local press who were stationed at the office on election night appreciated his courtesy and understanding very much. But the election board was just a kind of avocation for Longacre. He also was an ace barber.

The White House Barber Shop had three chairs, sometimes four, and they were usually occupied by customers. In addition to Mr. Longacre, who had the shop's second chair, Frank Taylor was the first chair barber and Ira Stanly had the third chair. Other barbers worked in the shop from time to time, but those three must have had the longest tenures. An enterprising young man named Bill Irvin also operated a shoe shine stand in the shop. He left Perry as a youth but returned years later for Mr. Longacre's funeral.

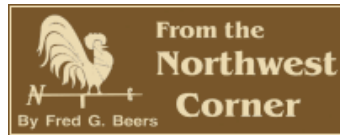
Remnants of the barber shop are still visible in the building, but most traces have been gone for quite some time. Dixie Nicewander was Mr. Longacre's niece, and she also helped Ermine Marchbanks when a used clothing store occupied the entire Gem Cafe and White House Barber Shop building. She tells me that a metal grate was located in the floor at the front entrance to the barber shop, and the grate is still there. The doorway was recessed slightly. A solid wall with a single door separated the rear of the barber shop from Mikie Johnson's beauty shop, and beyond it was a long, narrow corridor for access to the back door.

After the barber shop, other tenants occupied the west half of the building. During the 1950s, Virginia Hamann had her car tag agency in that location for about five years before moving to the east side of the square. Down on the east end of the south side was the Corner Fruit Market operated in the late 1930s and on into the 1940s by Leo and Hortense Johnson. It started as a flimsy-looking 25-foot front store with an open area at the sidewalk where fruit and produce were displayed in favorable weather. Later, the Johnsons built the structure you see there today. It was a modern new bus station along with a lunch stand that featured an S-shaped serving counter. The juke box was loaded with popular tunes of the day and the place was a favorite hangout for teenagers. The Old South Doughnut Shop now occupies the building.

Next to the Johnson' fruit stand was the Noble County Abstract Co. operated by the Dolezals -- J. E., Joe Jr. and George Dolezal Sr., then came Pearl Schiewe's Chic Shoppe, then Bill Ringler had Ringler's Leather Goods Store on the east side of the Gem Cafe. Mr. Ringler handcrafted all types of leather goods, from belts to saddles and everything in between.

One other tidbit before closing. In the 1910-11 Perry city directory issued by the Hoffine company, a listing is found for the "Little Gem Restaurant" at 318 Sixth street, which would place it on the east side of the square. I don't know if there is any connection with Wes Marcy's Gem Cafe of later years.

As I've noted before, each side of our square has had its own distinguishing characteristics through the years, and this brief reminiscence has made me aware once again that our central business district has been the location of some unique and fascinating folks who are well worth remembering. I miss every one of them.



June 27, 1997

One of the guests I met the other day at Willard and Betty Andrews' golden wedding anniversary was Lou Schaefer, a cousin of Betty. He holds a most interesting job as the mayor of Branson, Mo., where many of the country's big-time musical stars now perform.

Mr. Schaefer was born in Perry and was baptized at Christ Lutheran church, but his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lou Schaefer Sr., moved the family from this city to Missouri when the youngster was a mere three months old. Consequently he doesn't remember much about his early days here. He grew up in St. Louis and moved to Branson after the tremendous entertainment boom started there. As mayor, his constituency includes names like Glenn Campbell, Andy Williams, the Lennon sisters and brothers, and others who achieved national prominence as part of the long-running Lawrence Welk TV show.

Branson used to be a relatively small, sleepy Ozark town, but within the past two decades many of the best known names in musical entertainment -- pop, country-western, and virtually everything in between -- have staked claims there. Theaters like those in Las Vegas are in abundance, but there's no casino gambling and no risqué and naughty stuff onstage like you'll find in those desert oases. Branson has been popular with honeymooners and family groups from this area for years, even before the stars began to shine there, but now it's one of the hottest spots in the country for tourist travel. Mayor Schaefer says the city is still growing. Laura and I may be the only Perry people who have not yet visited Branson, but we plan to rectify that oversight one of these days.

Charles Kemnitz and his Laura are connoisseurs of good barbecue and they have kindly pointed out that Homer Thompson started his cafe with that specialty in a two-room house next to his own in the 700 block on Ash street. Homer had been chef at Wes Marcy's Gem Cafe on the south side of the square until the 1950s when he branched out on his own and started "Thompson's Golden Barbecue" at the tiny location next door to his house. Sometime later he moved the cafe to a one-story cinder block building on the old U. S. 77 curve at the south edge of Perry. Charlie says the new building had been constructed by the late Harry Hartman. Homer's widow, Edna, continued the business there after Homer's death, and Amos Haynes also was involved in the operation then. Many of us fondly remember the succulent ribs dished up night after night at Thompson's Golden Barbecue.