

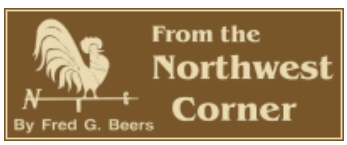
June 4, 2002

Buster Keaton continues to be an object of interest today even though he died in February 1966. He still is an icon to thousands of film fans who know him only through book biographies and classic movie theaters where his restored films have been shown, or through video tape versions of his comic genius. Here in Perry we like to think of him as a local boy who made good, big time, in the early days of the movie industry in Hollywood.

I've been writing about some of those books, many of them new releases since Keaton's centennial birth year in 1995, and more titles are still being brought to my attention. One of them, *Buster Keaton Remembered,* (Abrams was the publisher) was reviewed by *The Washington Post*, and it is of special interest because it was written by Buster's widow, the late Eleanor Keaton, who came to Perry with her husband in 1957 for the world premiere of the Paramount movie based on his life. Jeffrey Vance also is given credit as co-author. The reviewer says: "There are those.who consider Buster Keaton, not Charlie Chaplin, the king of silent-film comedy. Keaton can be considered one of the great American inventors," the reviewer wrote, because of his visual tricks and breathtaking ingenuity and verve. The writer cites as an example a film titled "The Playhouse," in which Buster the conductor directs an orchestra composed exclusively of Busters, while in a box yet more Busters listen to the concert.

A friend recently read another book, titled *Buster Keaton: Cut to the Chase*, by Marion Meade, published by Harper Collins Publishers, Inc. Several portions of this book are worthy of note here because they tell small bits and pieces about Buster's experiences in this part of Oklahoma. Citations include: Chapter one - the Cherokee Strip, the 1893 land run; Buster's father, Joe, applies to the Cutler Comedy Company, an Indian medicine show, for employment; the town of Perry; Cutler's daughter, Myra, impressed with Joe; Coulter, folding the show for winter, sends Myra to relatives in Lincoln, Neb.; background of the Keatons; Myra travels to catch up with Joe and marry him in 1894; summer of 1895, Joe and Myra bring Buster, their young son, on stage in Wilmington Del., in 1900; Gerry Society of New York polices theaters to keep young kids off the stage; Joe writes letter from "624 G Street, Perry, Oklahoma," to Gerry Society on December 27, 1900, and it is quoted in the book; much thereafter is about Buster's acting and career; "all his life Keaton had dreamed of owning a home in the country; his most vivid memory was of visiting his grandparents in Oklahoma;" later in the chapter, Keaton departs on a promotional tour coast-to-coast "that even included a stopover in Perry, Oklahoma." Thus the book becomes one of the few Keaton biographical pieces that tells much about his connection to Perry.

Perry is proud to have had a role in the nurturing and rearing of the young Buster Keaton and to have been chosen as a home for the family a century ago. Look for these books. They will help you understand why.



June 7, 2002

A pun-loving reader provides the following for our enjoyment. See if it gives you a chuckle, as it did when I read it.

Timmy was a little five-year-old boy who was loved very much by his Mom, and, being a worrier, she was concerned about his walking to school when he started Kindergarten. She walked him to school the first couple of days but when he came home one day, he told his mother that he did not want her walking him to school every day. He wanted to be like the "big boys." He protested loudly, so she had an idea of how to handle it.

She asked a neighbor, Mrs. Goodnest, if she would surreptitiously follow her son to school, at a distance behind him that he would not likely notice, but close enough to keep a watch on him. Mrs. Goodnest said that since she was up early with her toddler anyway, it would be a good way for them to get some exercise as well, so she agreed.

The next school day, Mrs. Goodnest and her little girl, Marcy, set out following behind Timmy as he walked to school with another neighbor boy he knew. She did this for the whole week. As the boys walked and chatted, kicking stones and twigs, the little friend of Timmy noticed that this same lady was following them as she seemed to do every day all week. Finally, he said to Timmy, "Have you noticed that lady following us all week? Do you know her?"

Timmy nonchalantly replied, "Yes, I know who she is."

The little friend said, "Well, who is she?"

"That's just Shirley Goodnest," Timmy said.

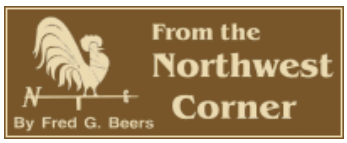
"Shirley Goodnest? Who the heck is she and why is she following us?"

"Well," Timmy explained, "every night my Mom makes me say the 23rd Psalm with my prayers 'cuz she worries about me so much. And in it, the prayer psalm says, 'Shirley Goodnest and Marcy shall follow me all the days of my life,' so I guess I'll just have to get used to it."
Just for good measure, her are a few more quickies from the same source:

If you use a computer, you are familiar with the virus woes that occur from time to time. Here's how an "Amish virus" might we phrased:

AMISH VIRUS

You have just received the Amish Virus. Since we do not have electricity nor computers, you are on the honor system. Please delete all of your files. Thank thee.
That should be enough for today. Please tune in again next time.



June 11, 2002

From what I hear, things are going reasonably well with the forthcoming production of "The Wizard of Oz" by our own Stagecoach Community Theatre and the Perry school drama department. The play sounded like an ambitious undertaking when it was first announced, and I guess it really is just that. However, the venerable old musical was completely cast during the audition period and rehearsals are now well underway for a mid-summer presentation. I've been told that some

great local talent will be showcased. Laura and I have two granddaughters, Amy and Jill, who will be making their debuts as Munchkins, and we hope they will be as smitten by the theater as we are.

Matter of fact, we have just returned from a few days in New York on a theater tour with a group organized by the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha, where the school originally was known as Oklahoma College for Women. Now it's USAO, not OCW, and it's co-ed. When we joined those folks for a similar New York theater tour last year, we had visions of looking like chaperons and standing out among a bunch of extremely cool undergraduates. Instead, folks like us made up most of the group, along with a handful of drama students and we got along with them just fine.

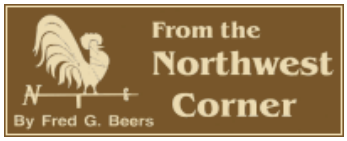
We saw a lot of good Broadway theater in only a few days and they were all great. This was the week preceding the Tony awards and that made those selections all the more interesting to us. We were returning home the night of the awards show so we didn't see any of it on TV, but we read about it in the newspaper the next day. Many of the performers we saw were singled out for honors. We thought each one of the principals and technicians that we saw deserved the little statuettes.

New York is an expensive city and nothing exemplifies that more than Broadway theaters. Even with the occasional discounts available to those who seek them, ticket prices are scandalously high. But if you love the theater, you are well compensated by the quality of the shows that are having successful runs.

One of the musicals we saw was "Into the Woods," a revival with new touches added. It was a delightful mixture of the familiar fairy tales about Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella, plus one you've probably not heard before, with a lot of new and entertaining twists tossed in. It was witty, exciting, well-staged and wholesome - a rarity these days. Vanessa Williams, the young lady who won the Miss America title a few years ago but had to surrender it in a matter of weeks, was the biggest "name" in that show, and she, along with some other cast members, joined our group after the play for an informal question and answer session.

I thought it was interesting when one of the young people in the group asked Miss Williams what she would say to a young performer hoping to break into the business. After a moment of reflection, Miss Williams said something like this: "Learn how to do everything. Don't just concentrate on being an actor. Take dancing lessons, piano lessons, singing lessons and learn all you can about making costumes and building or painting sets. You never know when one of those skills will help you land a job." That was it, in essence, and I thought it sounded pretty good. Hearing that from someone who is still making a name for herself in the theater is probably the most practical advice a young person could hope for.

Next year the USAO people will be putting together a theater tour to London in addition to the New York tour. Eventually we will have to decide which one best suits us, but you can be sure we'll be on one or the other. Meantime, get the family together and plan to see Perry's "Wizard of Oz" on stage at the Perry high school auditorium this summer. You'll see a lot of talent and youthful energy working hard to please you.



June 14, 2002



Carrier-salesmen for *The Perry Daily Journal* gathered for a Thanksgiving dinner in the basement of the First Presbyterian church when this photo was made, probably around November 1939. Merl Edwards, the newspaper's circulation manager, is at the far end of the table. Others, reading clockwise, starting at lower left: Jimmy Ramsey, Sammy Laird, Hugh Lobsitz, Johnny Marshall, Joe Kopecky, Riley Smith, Bill Rigg, Bobby Murphy (in far left corner), Edwards, Carroll Davis, Marshall Davis, next one unidentified, David Thomas, W.C. Wayland, Irl Henry, Theodore Hartman and Paul C. Laird.

Irl Henry and I were chatting about several topics related to our years at Perry high school in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and both of us remembered some of the after-school jobs we held down in that era to help put food on the table for our families. We were by no means the primary wage-earners for the Henry and the Beers clans, but our pittance was very welcome in those Great Depression years when just about everybody was broke most of the time. It also helped us buy an occasional ticket at the Roxy or Annex movie theater, or perhaps a ten-cent malt at Sherman's ice cream store just off the northwest corner of the square. Irl was a year ahead of me at PHS, but we had many things in common.

The subject eventually got around to the newly instituted major change in the way this newspaper is delivered to local subscribers. When Irl and I were mere boys, and until very recently, that chore traditionally was handled by newspaper carriers, or "paper boys" as they were usually called. In an effort to dignify the job, many publishers used the term "carrier-salesmen" because that actually described their jobs pretty well. Boys in that line of work went to the newspaper back shop and counted out the number of papers each one needed to make deliveries to their subscribers. Then once a week, or sometimes once a month, they would call at those same homes to collect the subscription price. The newspaper's circulation manager would be waiting for them at his office to collect the amount owed for the papers. The carrier-salesmen kept the remainder as their profit.

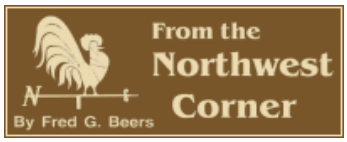
Two or three times each year the circulation manager would assemble his cadre of carriers and send them out to canvass the homes of non-subscribers along their routes and invite them to join "the family." That chore, euphemistically called

"crew work," usually netted several highly prized new subscribers, but it was a tiresome routine. However, being a *Perry Daily Journal* carrier was about the best job a young man could have at that time. It was tough to be hired as a carrier. That's right. Boys of high school age stood in line hoping to be called as full-time or temporary carriers. As in any occupation, not all were called. Many of the carriers kept at it until they graduated from high school and by then the earnings they had accumulated helped a lot with college expenses.

Journal carrier jobs were greatly in demand because of the earnings derived therefrom. Irl was among the lucky ones - he landed a paper route with the newspaper and stayed with it until graduation. I was on the waiting list but I was never called, even as a substitute. Out of desperation, I took a route with the now-nonexistent *Oklahoma News*, and although I was the sole source of that Oklahoma City Scripps-Howard newspaper in this town, I had only 12 customers. Ten of them were around the square and the other two were residences split between the west end of Fir Avenue and the eastern edge of the city on Kaw Street. Sunday issues were delivered to Perry by bus at 4 a.m. to the Elite Hotel & Restaurant and I was under orders to pick up my 12 copies for delivery the moment they arrived in Perry. One of my downtown customers was George McManess, a barber, who gave me a free haircut each month in exchange for the paper.

By contrast, *Journal* carriers received valuable bonus prizes for commendable performances and the publisher, W.K. Leatherock, treated them to Thanksgiving dinners or similar amenities. Merl Edwards was the circulation manager best remembered by Irl and me, and he knew how to get along with the spunky teen-age boys who made up his team of "carrier-salesmen." Now, as you know, your local paper is delivered daily by the U.S. Postal Service and there are no more *Perry Daily Journal* carriers. No crew work, either.

Times change, and it has been impossible to maintain a full crew of carriers for some time, even though the work has been co-ed for quite a while. But, we will always have the memories of the way we were 'way back then.



June 18, 2002

Here's a little political humor we hope everyone can enjoy, regardless of party affiliation. The author is anonymous.

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a Presidential election that was too close to call. Neither the Republican Presidential candidate nor the Democratic Presidential candidate had enough votes to win the election.

There was much talk about ballot recounting, court challenges and so forth. But a week-long ice fishing competition seemed the (manly) way to settle things. The candidate that catches the most fish at the end of the week wins.

After a lot of back and forth discussion, it was decided that the contest would take place on a remote and cold lake in Wisconsin. There were to be no observers present, and both men were to be sent out separately on this remote lake and return daily with their catch for counting and verification.

At the end of the first day, George W. returns to the starting line and he has ten fish. Soon Al Gore returns and has zero fish. Well, everyone assumes he is just having another bad hair, day or something and hopefully, he will catch up the next day.

At the end of the second day George W. comes in with twenty fish and Al Gore comes in again with none. That evening Bill Clinton gets together secretly with Al and says: "Al, I think George W. is a lowlife cheatin' son of a gun. I want you to go out tomorrow and don't even bother with fishing. Just spy on him and see if he is cheating in any way."

The next day, after George W. comes back with fifty fish, Bill Clinton says to Al:

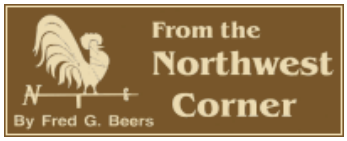
"Well, what about it, is George W. cheatin'?" Al replies: "He sure is, Bill. He's cuttin' holes in the ice!"

Now for something a little different. It's cowboy humor and it may have come from the same author.

A tall, weather-worn cowboy walked into the general store. The regulars quietly observed the drifter through half-closed eyelids. No one spoke, but they all noticed that the stranger's hat was made of brown wrapping paper.

Less obvious was the fact that his shirt and vest also were made of paper. As were his chaps, pants and even his boots, including the paper spurs. Truth be told, even the saddle, blanket and bridle on his horse were made entirely of paper.

Of course, he was arrested for rustling.



June 21, 2002

How about some more light reading for a summer's day? The following will not tie you in mental or physical knots. My thanks to a contributor who chooses to remain anonymous. The opinions expressed are someone else's and not necessarily mine. Enjoy.

Consider the sign that says, NO SHIRT, NO SHOES, NO SERVICE. Does that mean that as long as I have on a shirt and shoes I can take off my pants and get a bacon cheeseburger?

As we have proved with many of our popular American sports, it is better to have the violence on the field rather than in the bleachers.

If the deer had guns too, then, and only then, would hunting be a real sport.

I am to golf what Muammar Gaddafi is to world peace.

Educate your athletes and most of them will quit playing ball and start hanging around playing video games with the other students.

Doing PR for the Atlanta Falcons was a little like doing PR for the Italian army during World War II.

Ted Turner has put his foot in his mouth so many times over the years, his front teeth are starting to protrude.

Remember how cowboys in Western movies could get into fifteen-minute gun fights and never have to reload their pistols?

I want to point out that I'm a dog lover who brushes his teeth regularly, still has his hair, loves egg sandwiches, and often entertains friends doing a simply marvelous impression of FDR declaring war on Japan in 1941. Now, how are you going to get all that in a classified ad?

As long as most men can still outrun most women, there's always hope for me.

Never order barbecue in a place that also serves quiche.

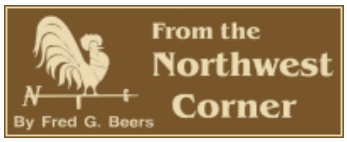
Today we are urged to eat cereals with names like Nutra-Grain. Isn't that something they feed to cows in Nebraska?

It is true I had some relatives who fought for the South in the Civil War, but they weren't fighting to save slavery. They were fighting to make Yankee men dress better when they visited Southern beaches.

Newspapers are the only romance in my life that hasn't eventually picked up and left me.

Some authors, I am told, write out their books in longhand. That's because they never learned to type. That's why Edgar Allen Poe wrote all that weird stuff. His hands and fingers were always hurting him. The pain became so intense he began to see talking ravens.

Now you have to guess if I'm making this up. Being a columnist is great fun. A newspaper is a living, breathing thing, and to pick up yours as it comes off a press when it is still warm is to hold your newborn.



June 25, 2002

The other day, I wrote a bit about an article in the current edition of *The Oklahoma Chronicles*, the official quarterly magazine published by the Oklahoma Historical Society. That article concerned a soon-to-be-published book written by Denzel D. Garrison of Bartlesville, father of Mrs. Marty Collins of Perry. The book tells about Oklahoma's 45th (National Guard) Division and its derivatives, and their participation in the Korean conflict a few decades ago. In that same edition of *The Chronicles* is another story of local interest because it concerns our Carnegie Library.

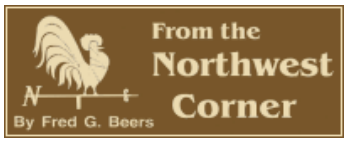
The article was written by Tanya D. Finchum and G. Allen Finchum, both faculty members at Oklahoma State University. The magazine relates that in the early 20th century, Andrew Carnegie funded the construction of 24 libraries in Oklahoma (including Perry), providing places for residents to learn, to read, and to be entertained. The Finchums invite readers to celebrate 100 years of Carnegie's presence in Oklahoma and to honor the communities' commitment to the library spirit.

The first Carnegie library in Oklahoma was the one built in Oklahoma City in 1900, seven years before Oklahoma became a state. In 1907 Mr. Carnegie was persuaded to award $10,000 for construction of a library in the courthouse park to serve the city of Perry, and that building stands proudly today after a major renovation that substantially increased its usefulness. The story of our library, and the other Carnegie libraries in this state, is a dramatic and fascinating tale in *The Chronicles*. To Perry's credit, we have preserved and improved our Carnegie library unlike Enid and Ponca City, our sister cities in the Cherokee Strip, who have razed their original Carnegie libraries, which seems like a colossal blunder and a loss

to me. I'm glad our Carnegie library building still sits majestically in the courthouse park. Read the *Chronicles'* complete article for more information about Oklahoma libraries.

While on this subject, I want to add something about the recent retirement of Dr. Charles Martin from the Perry Library Board, the group that oversees functions of the library through monthly meetings and oversight in several areas. Records at City Hall indicate that Dr. Martin has served ten years on the board, plus an additional stint as a sort of "watchdog" when the renovation project was underway a few years ago. Toni Miller, current president of the library board, pointed to Dr. Martin's tenure and his dedication to service as exemplified by his service on the board, and Danielle Shreve, librarian, also spoke highly of Dr. Martin's contributions.

I have had the good fortune to be associated with Dr. Martin in several areas of interest and I know how dedicated he is to such non-paying jobs. He is the most serious-minded person I know, yet he has a sense of humor that lightens - and sometimes enlightens - the panels on which he serves. The library board will miss him, but we can hope that he will return to serve in that capacity at an early date.



June 28, 2002

A couple of unrelated news items caught my attention this week because they both have serious implications for Perry. One of these stories appeared in this newspaper, just last Tuesday. It told about the certification received by the new industrial park on the west side of town and suggested that a new potential for income-producing businesses may be realized there.

The other story that caught my eye was in the *Oklahoma Commerce Folio*, a publication of the state Department of Commerce. It reported on the selection of Marietta, a small city in south-central Oklahoma, just off I-35 in Love county. We have relatives in Marietta and I know the residents there have been struggling for some time in hopes of landing a new industry for the town. They do have a cookie factory but that is not nearly enough. Now, however, the town has been chosen to become the southwest regional distribution center for Dollar Tree Stores. It will create 125 jobs for Marietta.

That's good news for the town's residents. The company is described as "the modern day equivalent of the traditional variety store." Marietta was selected for the regional center "because of its central location with respect to major population centers in both Oklahoma and Texas and the easy access to I-35." Dollar Tree is preparing for growth in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas and Colorado.

If those attributes sound familiar, it's because Perry has been trying to sell itself on the strength of those same virtues for several years. Here we sit, smack dab on I-35, U.S. 64 and U.S. 77, with major rail freight lines on both north-south and east-west routes, with a modern airport on the north side of town, and we do not seem able to lure something like a regional distribution center to our community. Not that one of those would solve all our economic problems, but something along that line surely would be nice to have.

By sheer coincidence, the same day those two stories came to my attention I also found myself reading a clipping from a copy of this newspaper dated almost exactly eight years ago. The subject was a meeting of the newly revitalized City Planning Commission, with then-Mayor Bud Hollingsworth on hand to help the new group talk about "what-ifs" for this community.

Among the possibilities placed on the table by the group were dreams of a plastics manufacturing plant which could also provide things used by the Charles Machine Works, Inc. in manufacturing Ditch Witch equipment; a wheel manufacturer, also serving CMW and other users; a marshaling yard for cross-country highway freight lines; and even a regional distribution center for Wal-Mart or Sam's Club stores.

In years past, some local tub-thumpers have suggested other things, none of which really materialized although they provided an opportunity for us to itemize our assets and talk about the great location we occupy for new businesses. We have what some people, like Dollar Tree store executives, are looking for, but thus far we have not been able to attract them to Perry. What's our problem?