

March 4, 2003

Perry's fire department is embarking on a new voyage now that its members have voted to join a union, and that inspired this backward look. A unique relationship exists between the citizens of a community and its fire fighters. Likewise, the citizenry has a special bond with its police officers and other municipal workers, but for the purposes of this series we are only examining the fire department.

When Perry sprang to life on September 16, 1893, the threat of major fires was a genuine concern. On the day of the Cherokee Outlet opening, there were no telephones to summon assistance in the event of a fire. Newly established businesses in the downtown area were required to have two barrels of water in plain sight in case the wood and canvas structures caught fire. There were no phones to summon help, so the authorized way of sounding an alarm was two pistol shots aimed at the sky. The first firemen in Perry had no motorized or horse-drawn wagons. They hand-pulled their meager equipment to the scene; water was hand-pumped. All of this sounds very primitive today, but in that era it was about as good as it could be.

Judge E.W. Jones, editor of *The Perry Republican* newspaper, was one of the early settlers here. In 1931 he published a collection of his memories concerning the birth of this prairie town and it now provides a lucid glimpse of the way things were more than a century ago in Perry. Here's part of what he had to say about Perry's first fire department.

"No serious conflagrations occurred the first year (in Perry). Not until the spring of 1895 when with Lon Wharton's printing office on 6th (street), between 'B' and 'C' Streets, the Midland Saloon property across the street, and the Southeast corner of 6th and 'C' went up in flames. In those days the Bucket Brigade did noble service and to this day there is an ordinance of our city requiring two barrels of salt water be kept in front of each business house for use in case of fire.

"Henry Beard, later U.S. Marshal of the Eastern District, was the first appointed fire chief of Perry. Then came John Patterson. The Pabst Brewing Company presented a hose cart, hand drawn, to the City, and W. W. Keas became Fire Chief. Then came the water works and successive Chiefs of J.W. Snyder, with horse drawn truck, the team of white horses being loaned to the City by C.O. Burch, the liveryman. The Department then had moved to 7th Street, between 'B' and 'C' Streets. As Fire Chiefs there followed Ed Staggs, Art Shirley, Emmet DeLaney, E.G. Cooper, to the present Leonard Winters. The Department has developed from the salt water barrels, with no particular headquarters to a spacious and ostentatious concrete building on 'D' Street, between 7th and 8th Streets, equipped with a Studebaker truck and a high-powered pumper. The Chief is assisted with one paid assistant and a number of volunteers. The Department is now recognized as one of the most efficient in the State."

Thus endeth the history of the Perry Fire Department as handed down to us by Judge Ernie Jones. We have depended on the dedication of those men to protect our city, for more than a hundred years and they have responded to every call. We are fortunate, to have their expertise—and their equipment— available when needed.



March 7, 2003

Here's a little reminder, in case you need it: The Titanic steamship artifacts exhibit at the Kirkpatrick Center in Oklahoma City will soon be packing up and leaving for the next destination. You really should think seriously about seeing this display if you haven't yet done so. Or, go see it again if you have already been there. The sinking of the Titanic on her maiden voyage in the North Atlantic is a tragic story and much of the ambience of that sad night is vividly conjured up by this collection of miscellaneous articles that have been recovered from the British vessel. It now rests in ignominy at the bottom of the sea where it sank after striking an iceberg decades ago. The horrible drama of that night in the early 1900s is compounded by the owners' proud, but premature, proclamation that the Titanic was unsinkable. It is one of the saddest events in world history and the exhibit now in Oklahoma City probably will astound you. By all means, try to see it if you possibly can.

The latest issue of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, published quarterly by the Oklahoma Historical Society, is just being delivered and once again it contains stories of historic interest to all Oklahomans. The stories include several that are of special interest to those of us who live in the north-central area. One of these is an article with the title, *Joseph Pierre Foucart: Man of Art and Mystery*. This piece delves into the interesting life of the European architect who designed at least two buildings in Perry and many more in Guthrie. One of those, of course, is the old First National Bank building (which we now call the Foucart Building) on the east side of the square, where several local agencies, including the Perry Chamber of Commerce and Main Street of Perry, are headquartered. The other Foucart-designed local building is at 614 Cedar street on the south side of the square in the two-story brick building now owned by Etsell Emde. It is formally known as the Pancoast building.

In the same issue are articles about "the rise and fall of Governor Jack Walton," who preceded Perry attorney, Henry S. Johnston into office as Oklahoma's chief executive; a piece about "*Yakni Achukma, the School With a Soul*," a history of the Goodland Indian orphanage at Hugo; and a feature about Pepper Martin, "the wild horse of the Osage." Pepper, whose real name was John Leonard Roosevelt Martin, had a .500 batting average, in the 1931 World Series. The author of the piece says he was one of the best baseball players of his time.

The Walton article is of interest because it sheds light on the way things were in the 1920's, when both Mr. Walton and Mr. Johnston were impeached and driven from office. In both cases, the Ku Klux Klan played a major role. The piece about the Goodland home is of local interest because a number of Perry people contribute financially (and in other ways) to help the school. Pepper Martin was a colorful major league player years ago and many local fans remember him well.

If you are a member of the Historical Society, you should already have your copy of this interesting quarterly publication. If not, and you're interested, contact the Oklahoma Historical Society at 2100 N. Lincoln Boulevard Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4997, and they'll fix you up.



March 11, 2003

My nomination for the next Nobel Peace Prize goes to the guy who invented those printed labels on men's undershirts to replace the stitch-on variety that have been driving me nuts for many years. Same problem is found on other apparel – sport shirts, dress shirts, and so forth. When those stitched labels are worn, they create an itchy, irritated spot on the spine. The only remedy is to try to scratch, and that often creates bizarre scenes in unexpected places. Hurrah for the printed label on men's stuff!

That recent series of columns about Perry's firemen and their fire stations struck a responsive chord with several readers. Glenn Yahn describes a scene from about 1916, when Perry received its first motorized fire truck, a Studebaker. Until then all the local fire wagons were pulled by a sturdy team of horses. Glenn remembers that a race was scheduled between the new fire truck and another pulled by the horses.

Glenn says the fire station was still located in the 400 block of 7th Street, just off the west side of the courthouse square. The race route was east on Elm street to the old Long Bell Lumber Yard at 6th and Elm, then south to Delaware and then east to the Santa Fe Railroad Station. After some comic mishaps along the way, the horse-drawn team, driven by Chief E.G. Cooper, was the first to arrive at the finish line. The Studebaker was driven by L.O. Winters, who then served as assistant chief. Spectators enjoyed the spectacle very much, Glenn recalls.

Glenn further remembers that Chief Cooper was a heavyweight prizefighter and that he won some significant championships in this state. Perry had some other boxers of note through the years, but Chief Cooper was one of the best.

Others remember the temporary bedroom space provided from time to time at the fire station by Fire Chief L.O. Winters for some of the local high school's athletes and other young men. Chief Winters was in contact with legendary PHS football Coach Hump Daniels, and when it was determined that one of the squad members or some other PHS student needed a place to stay for a while, the fire station was available. The boys thus sheltered also helped out as volunteer-firemen when the need arose. The fire station "home" also meant that the young men would get a wholesome and healthful meal three times a day.

Elsewhere on this page are some photos of early day Perry fire stations. These were provided by David Payne from his excellent collection of historic pictures. I appreciate the help offered by David and everyone else who contributed to this series.

The Perry fire station has been in at least four locations since the Cherokee Strip opening on September 16, 1893, when the city was "born." Photos and information provided by David Payne show these building as they looked when they housed the fire department.

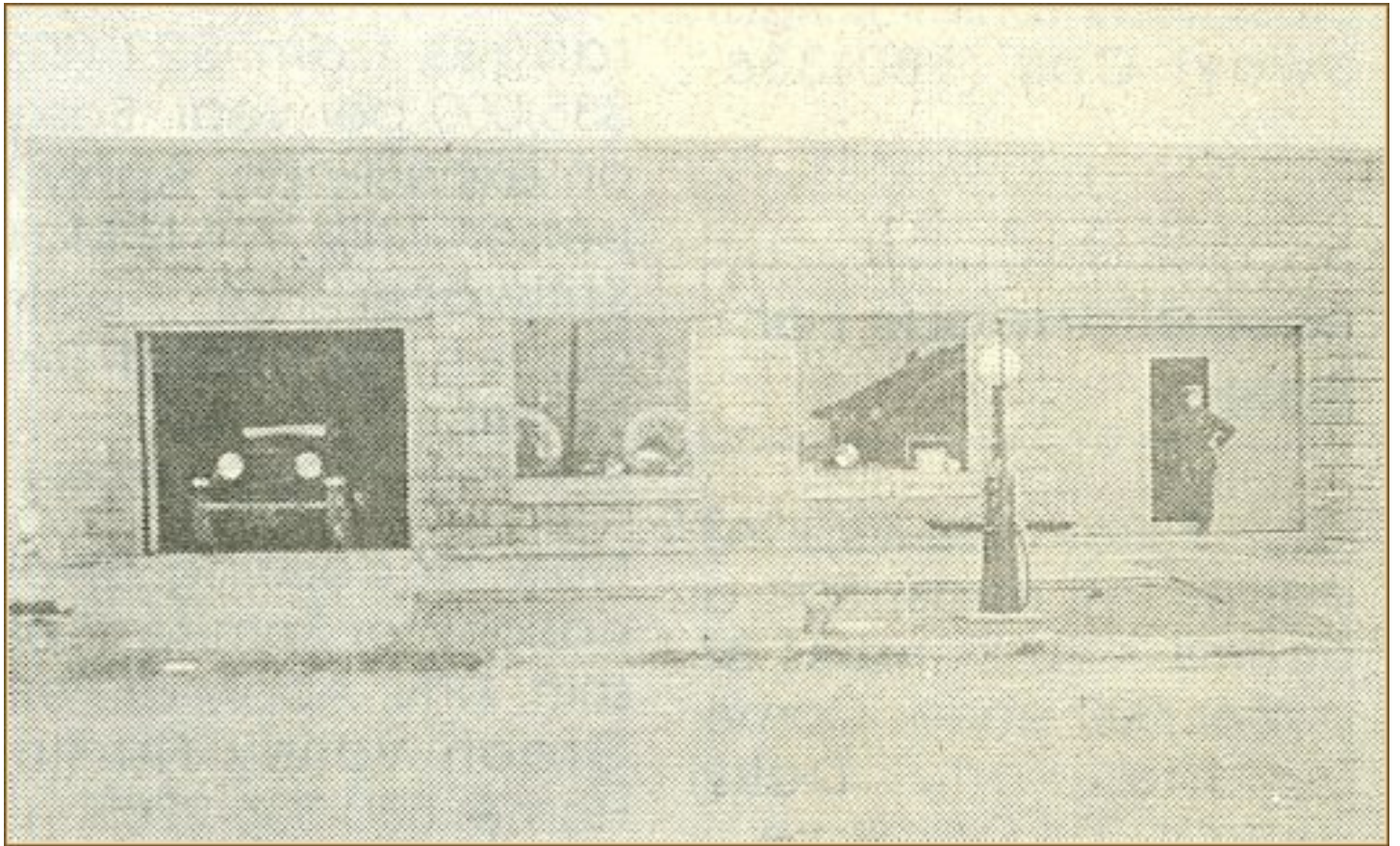
On east side of 7th, facing west, between Delaware and Elm Streets. This brick and masonry building was approximately where the Dollar General Store now stands. After the fire station moved, this became the home of Ivan Kennedy's tire repair shop.



Available information puts these two wooden front buildings at the southeast corner of 7th and Delaware. The buildings face the west. In the left background, the building in photo A is visible. Names of the two firemen on the fire truck in this photo are not known.



On south side of Delaware Street, facing north, between 7th and 8th Streets. The present fire station, including this building now occupies this space, plus a major addition on the right (west) side.



On the west side of 7th Street, between Delaware and Elm. This was the Perry fire station at one time. Later it became the home of the Red Front Garage. The year is not certain and the name of the man in the doorway on the right is not known. Many Perryans will remember when this building was the home of Ivan Kennedy's Roller Rink. Now located there are Dr. Stacy Wilda's optometry office in the north half and Marilyn Hamman's Cherokee Hair Company in the south half.



March 14, 2003

It used to be that when a new public building (like a school) was being constructed, a corner stone was provided. The hollow stone usually contained documents of interest relating to the era of that event, like a time capsule. It was intended that someday in the future, when the building was being dismantled the corner stone would be opened and folks could read about matters pertaining to the original construction period. When an old building was demolished, one of the essential ceremonial steps was the removal of artifacts from the corner stone, assuming there was one.

We don't have too many occasions like that in Perry. For one thing, our city and state are new enough that only a few of the "early day" buildings are ready for replacement. Cornerstones just aren't too fashionable here right now. The treasures stored in those corner stone's are permitted to ripen until another time when they can be retrieved from their dark, quiet

resting places and spread before our eager eyes. But when it happens, people interested in history are often rewarded by what they find in the corner stones. Those, items normally are mementos left to us by earlier generations of the area. Ah, what treasures they often yield to bring about a clearer understanding of what our friends and families of other eras read about, talked about and used in their daily living.

In 1911 a multi-level high school building was built in northwest Perry near the site of the present Elementary School. It included a corner stone containing historic memorabilia of that time. The corner stone was set in place by the Perry Masonic lodge. As you will see, an impressive ceremony was held at the school construction site on that day. Historic records show that this building apparently was constructed with financing from a \$30,000 bond issue. It was known as Central High School. That building was demolished in 1924 when a new brick three-story Perry High School was built facing Elm Street, between Eighth and Ninth Streets. That structure was replaced in the 1960s when the present high school was built on the south side of Fir Avenue, spanning an area that once was part of Ninth Street. The street was closed to make room for the school. If all these dates seem confusing, don't fret. An authentic, chronological listing of Perry school construction work, dating back to the earliest days of this community, would be most welcome. Richard Postelwait, secretary of the local Masonic lodge, and I have been trying to clarify some of those dates but I cannot guarantee that they are correct. Different written accounts do not always agree with one another.

The corner stone referred to in this column apparently came from the old Central High School building when it was demolished. Since the Masons placed the original corner stone in that building, they were given possession of the tin box. For years it was stored in the lodge's archives. It came to light again when the Masons moved to their new home on the west side of town. Contents of the old structure's corner stone were carefully retrieved and spread out for examination. The corner stone was a compact, vault-like space in a corner of the ground floor level of the old building. The corner stone had been placed there in a formal ceremony conducted by the Perry Masonic lodge when the old high school building was nearing completion in the summer of 1911. Clifton Franklin, the current Worshipful Master of the local order, made it available to me, and I thank him for doing so. More about all this will follow in a subsequent column.



March 18, 2003

Let me interrupt for just a moment the series of columns about corner stones in public buildings.

The death of Charles Monroe Jr. last week removed one of Perry's last links to an era of great significance. Charlie was the son of Charles Monroe Sr. and Icie Monroe. The family business they operated was known at one time as the Dotts-Monroe Hardware, but it later became Monroe-Lang Appliances, Furniture and Hardware. The peak period for the store probably was a decade or two after World War II, when young families were building new homes all over the U.S. Perry had its share of that kind of development. It came after a four-year fallow period in which the Allies defeated the Axis Powers (Germany, Japan and Italy) in a four-year struggle.

Until that peacetime surge began, Monroe-Lang had been principally just a small town hardware store on the south side of the square. It occupied the two-story building (Kirchner Hall) now owned by Glenn and Jill Zimmer. When the new post-war homes began sprouting here, local merchants had to provide furnishings, appliances and other services, and Monroe-Lang quickly responded. It was a period of great economic growth throughout the land. There were no Lowe's, Home Depots, Wal-Marts, or similar stores available to prospective customers. Perry did have three good lumber yards and

skilled workmen were available, but you had to look hard for major appliances and the right kind of furniture. Charlie's Dad had died so when peace broke out, Charlie and his brother-in-law, J.E. (Tiny) Lang became the operators of Monroe-Lang. They did a good job of filling customers' needs, and the store prospered. After a few years of business and community leadership, Charlie left the firm to become manager of Oklahoma's state-owned, lodges and resorts. In time he became a successful restaurant operator in New Mexico, and at some point he retired and turned that business over to his son, Chuck. Charlie and his wife, Trudy, moved back to Oklahoma City.

Charlie turned 87 not too long ago, and his health declined. Last Tuesday, March 11, he passed away, and a private memorial service was held four days later in Oklahoma City, where he and Trudy resided for several years. I remember him especially as a dedicated member and president of the Perry Rotary Club in 1947-48. He was president of the club the year before I was elected to that office, and he taught me many things about Rotary, civic responsibility and life in general. He was the definition of a good guy. Although he's been gone from our community several years, we still regard him as "a Perry boy," and one that we will miss for many reasons. Our condolences go out to Trudy and her son and daughter, Charles Monroe III and Cathy Peck.



March 21, 2003

Here's more about the contents of that metal box retrieved years ago from the corner stone of an early day Perry High School building. The container, about the size and shape of a cigar box, apparently was stored originally in the corner stone of Central High School, built in 1911 near the site of the present Elementary school. Since the original corner stone ceremony was conducted by members of Perry Masonic lodge No. 78, A.F. & A.M., the local school turned the small metal box to officers' of today's lodge. The Masons found it when they moved a few years ago to their new lodge hall on the west side of town. They are planning to offer the box to the Oklahoma Masonic Grand Lodge with offices in Guthrie, and that is where, the articles would be displayed. The exhibit will show the Masonic influence on early day Oklahoma.

All of the artifacts are on paper and they are very fragile now. Here's a quick summary of what's included:

Three newspapers printed in Perry—the August 3, 1911, issue of the *Enterprise-Times*; August 5, 1911, issue of the same paper; August 3, 1911, issue of the daily *Perry Republican*; and the April 13, 1911, issue of the German-language newspaper, *Oklahoma Neurkerten*.

A lengthy, essay entitled, "Historical Contribution of the City of Perry— Masonic Archives at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the City High School Building," dated August 7, 1911, and certified by the signatures of attorney Henry S. Johnston and Judge E. W. Jones, editor of the *Perry Republican*. (Mr. Johnston, of course, became governor of Oklahoma in the 1920s.)

A typewritten carbon copy of a single-spaced document, containing what appears to be minutes of several Perry board of education meetings, starting with October 17, 1910, when the need for a new High School building was discussed, continuing through the May 18, 1911, meeting. The minutes, on legal-size sheets, were signed by W.N. Stahl and Miss Nellie Hostetler

A printed program with information about Decoration Day activities held on May 29, 1907, starting at 9:30 a.m. with a march for "flower children, members of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) and auxiliary, the W.R.C. (Women's Relief

Corps), citizens, the mayor of Perry, city council members, board of education, fire department, and so forth, with a line to be formed by directions of the city marshal and J. F. Cordell, officer of the day."

More details on some of these activities in the next column.



March 25, 2003

More about contents of the old Perry High School cornerstone, which soon will be offered by the Perry Masonic Lodge to the Grand Lodge in Guthrie.

A small metal box in the cornerstone contained memorabilia from the early years in Perry. Included are newspapers and other paper documents, and as you would expect, most of the material is so old, it falls apart in your hand. Nevertheless, with careful handling, a reader is rewarded with a great deal of interesting information. For instance:

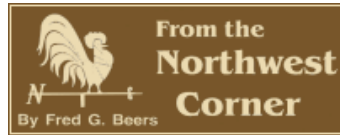
A copy of the printed program for a "Decoration Program" on May 29, 1909, apparently sponsored by the local G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic), the W.R.C. (Women's Relief Corps) and local citizens and dignitaries. The schedule called for a march from the G.A.R. Hall (now the American Legion Hall) at 1:30 p.m. ending at the Grand Opera House on the east side of the square where a program would be presented. William McNeely would be master of ceremonies, invocation would be given by Rev. Parvin of the Presbyterian church, followed by a recitation by Miss Edna Brown (later to become Mrs. Ralph Foster, Sr.). An oration was scheduled by Rev. George H., Bradford, chancellor of Epworth University (now Oklahoma City University). Ina McCarthy was to offer a solo, Rev. Miller (probably A.M. Miller of the Methodist Episcopal Church) was to recite Lincoln's Gettysburg address, then a song by Miss McNeely, remarks by Father Willibord of the Catholic church, a closing song by the audience and a benediction pronounced by Rev. Wolf.

The newspapers offered several items of interest on the front page, but unfortunately there is no translation of the German language paper that was printed in the basement of what we now know as the Foucart Building on the east side of the square. Here are some examples obtained by careful handling of the frayed old papers and by not trying to unfold them.

From the August 3, 1911, *Perry Republican*, edited by E.W. Jones - Three interesting page one stories, including the editor's urging of local officials to push for a proposed state highway leg in this area; a report on the monthly meeting of the "borough council," presided over by Mayor Fry. Council members present were Kite, Knox, McCormick, Miller, Shortman and Woodruff. None of their first names were given. Also, a roundup of activity by a Perry neighbor, headlined PONCA CITY DOING THINGS. The article recited how Poncans were planning and preparing for growth, with the implied threat that Perry had better be doing some of the same things.

From the August 5, 1911, *Perry Enterprise-Times* (editor's name not shown) - Page one articles about flood damage in Oklahoma and Kansas after recent rains, with damage estimated at more than \$1 million; a weekly church announcement from the Presbyterian church, with the pastor, S.H. Parvin, to preach at both morning and evening Sunday services; an announcement by A. Kraemer that he had moved his stock of shoes and gents' furnishings to the Doggett building on the east side of the square; an annual sale at the Lobsitz Hardware Store, operated by James Lobsitz and Sons; and an offer by the City Drug Store to repay in cash all of their cash register coupons for merchandise bought in that store on some certain day in August. The proprietor was Fred W. Beers, my Dad.

Much more is contained in that tin box from the school cornerstone, but space does not permit more in this column. Thanks again to Clifton Franklin and other members of the Perry Masonic Lodge for sharing this with the rest of us. It was fascinating to read and handle it.



March 28, 2003

Time alone will tell if this country's response to Saddam Hussein in Iraq was appropriate or excessive. Only history will show how wrong or right we were. We cannot possibly judge the situation from our up-close perspective today. Those who cry for diplomacy as opposed to a shooting war have merit on their side, but so do those who have grown weary of Saddam's intransigence over the past 12 years. They are weary of telling the Iranian leader that he must comply with terms of the Desert Storm peace accord that both sides accepted in 1991, even though he has largely ignored the stipulations laid out by the United Nations.

The coalition put together by those who choose to draw a line in the sand are understandably unmoved by Saddam's avowal that he has disposed of all weapons of mass destruction and that he is puzzled by the coalition's disbelief. They have seen the UN inspectors denied freedom of examination and of hearing the Iranian strongman proclaim that he is in full -compliance with the UN's demands.

Those in this country who choose to join the peace parade are demonstrating just how free we are. In Iraq, they would be summarily executed for opposing their national leader as TV newsmen and their cameras dutifully show the rest of the country what we are talking about in the way of freedom. The torture and other extreme measures inflicted by Saddam on those who oppose him are in stark contrast with the peculiar situation we are witnessing in this country.

Our President, of course, has become the target of the anti-war crowd in this country. They call him a "cowboy" and accuse him of unnecessary bloodshed, while this nation's leaders carefully point out the reasons that made this armed intervention necessary. We did not provoke this condition. Saddam was given ample time and many deadlines to meet, but he chose to thumb his nose at the United Nations. That left the rest of the world with virtually no choice. The gauntlet was laid down. Saddam sneered at it and now he is paying the price.

Mr. Bush has demonstrated bravery in the path he has chosen. We need to pray for him and for the courageous men and women who have been given the responsibility of bringing this situation to a close

Mr. Bush may indeed be a "cowboy", but it seems to me we could use a few more John Waynes to show Saddam and his cohorts just how serious we are about bringing this crisis to a close. Sometimes, someone somewhere must step forward with a plan to end the madness and conclude the nightmare of oppression. In the meantime, massive peace protests in this country and elsewhere should be laid on the shelf as a sign to our fighting forces that we, support them in every way possible.

Then, let's allow history to decide who is right.

