

March 2, 2004

Courthouse Park was always meant to be a source of community pride

For most of us, the Courthouse Park in downtown Perry has been there practically forever. So, we take it for granted, scarcely thinking of the people who made that green oasis a reality and nurtured it through the years.

We know that an editor and environmentalist name of W.T. Little planted the trees that first converted a dusty field into a garden spot not too long after the opening of the Cherokee Outlet on September 16, 1893, but that's about as far as it goes. We also need to remember that platoons of County Commissioners, other county officials and caretakers have helped in perpetuating the park that we know today. They did not have to do that, but they apparently understood that the park was a source of community pride. They also were aware that the people wanted that park to be cared for and improved as the years go by.

The park wasn't always pretty and it certainly was not always something that the citizens of this county could brag on. The courthouse was not always located there. The first Noble County Officials had offices scattered among the upper floors of two-story buildings around the square because the local government had no funds for constructing a building large enough to provide those officials with a building of their own.

Early day documents tell us that the "park" was a windswept and dusty tract for a full year after the opening. The only structures on the grounds during that period were a small frame post office building and the frame land office on the west side and the northwest corner of the grounds. On the Fourth of July in 1894 a baseball game was played on the square between the Perry team and the Ponca Indians. In the spring of 1895 ground was plowed and sowed to alfalfa to keep down the suffocating cloud of dust and sand.

The west acre of the park was reserved by the Federal government. Our post office is now located on the north half of the acre. The south half was deeded to the city and is now the location of Perry Carnegie Library. The courthouse park grounds were designed by a landscape architect. Among the specifications were these: "More than 3,000 feet of cement walks and driveways, all of ample width for the traffic they are designed to bear, winding in and among the shade trees. There is a bandstand for summer night concerts with permanent bleacher seats for listeners." In more recent years a map of the county in flat cement line has been installed flush with the grounds on the south lawn of the park.

The park is watered with the use of an artesian well that makes it unnecessary to tap into the city's reserves. So, even during the most severe summer droughts the park caretakers can keep grass, trees and flower beds well watered.

More details about the early history of the Noble County Courthouse Park will follow soon.



March 5, 2004

We lost some more good ones last week. Willard Andrews, a truly gifted craftsman, and Dayle Lynch, a retired educator,

both passed away after debilitating illnesses. Velma Moore also left us, and she was part of a passing era.

Willard was a Perry-born artisan who had few equals in decorating homes or serving as a general construction contractor. He took special pride in the new Country Club building and he was a devoted golfer on the links. Dayle has been away from here since he graduated from Perry High School in 1943. For the past several years he and his family have been living in Nowata, where he retired as a teacher and administrator. Before that he had taught classes in the Billings school system. He was well regarded there and he had been named Billings school superintendent just before Nowata lured him away. At different times Willard and Dayle were key members of Coach Hump Daniels' highly successful Maroon football machines. Both were team players, family men and civic-minded citizens. Each of them leaves a hole in their communities. Their kind is hard to find.

Velma Moore served local citizens in different ways. Many of us remember her as the local person in charge of the Annex Movie Theater on the east side of the square. She was a hard-working employee in a time of emerging female workplace leaders.

Several friends have been kind enough to mention that they enjoyed reading the recent *Stars & Stripes* comments on the status of Al-Arabya as providers of legitimate information. It is the belief of some that the Al Arabya are mere tools of the Iraqi resistance. According to some, if that were true, the U.S. challenge in Iraq would be easier than it is. In fact, the channel merely reflects as well as drives the common Arab and Iraqi opinion about the U.S. and the occupation- which is mistrustful, misinformed and often antagonistic. Censorship will only reinforce such biases while driving up Al Arabya's viewership. The only effective way to attack the problem is to offer an alternative - or many alternatives- that give Iraqis and other Arabs access in quality programming and credible information provided by professional journalists who are independent of the governing authority. This ought to be something that an American administration can get right. That it has not done so after months in power, is an inexcusable failing.

So there you have another aspect of an argument that is liable to swirl for several more months - at least until the November elections.



March 9, 2004

Habitat home prompts stories of 'how it used to be'

At the Habitat for Humanity dedication ceremony the other day, some of us were admiring the shiny new fixtures and the array of labor-saving devices now in use on projects like this house. It set some of us to reflecting on the ways our lives have changed in recent years. For instance, when I was a kid, you took a bath only after lighting the burner at the base of a cast iron water tank, usually located in the bathroom. Then, when the tank was warm enough, you filled the tub and climbed in.

Another contemporary said he remembered that in his house, the tub (usually a steel stock tank) was filled with warm water and then each family member, one by one, took their turn in the water, starting with the oldest and ending with the youngest. By the time the last one got in the tub, the water wasn't very warm and he never did actually feel really clean, he recalled.

You probably have your own version of stories like that, but there's just no denying that the Habitat projects are truly wonderful. The single mother with two young children who will occupy this house were obviously deeply touched, and we were told that the next such project is already in the planning stage. Local Habitat for Humanity people are praying for more helping hands to expedite the next big job. If you are so inclined, call Richard Dugger or one of the other Habitat folks and let them know you are available. The thanks you get from grateful Noble Countyans will be just a part of your reward.

The new paint job on the exterior walls of the Courthouse are giving the old building a spiffier look. Dean Courtright, county commissioner whose district includes the Courthouse park, says the paint also serves as a sealant to keep out moisture from the man-made stones of the building. The series of Northwest Corner columns about the park has been temporarily interrupted because of more timely topics, but more will follow soon when the series is resumed.

Through the years, we have been fortunate in having conscientious county commissioners who were truly concerned about the proper care of the Courthouse building and the park. Visitors in Perry never fail to make favorable comments about the Courthouse and the grounds that surround it.



March 12, 2004

One of my favorite magazines, *American Heritage*, came out recently with its annual selection of the most over and under rated things in many categories. I suspect some of the selections were made with tongue in cheek, others to stimulate discussion, and some a sort of payback for perceived liberties with things the magazine is interested in. No matter. All of them are worth a moment's notice, and that is all they'll get. For your information, here are a few of them.

Most Over Rated Inventor: Thomas A. Edison. The magazine pointed to a story that appeared a few years ago in the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper in which Mr. Edison was heralded as "the inventor of electricity." Most of us already know that electricity existed years before Mr. Edison found ways to use it. For instance, he gave us the light bulb and phonographs that led to talking machines. But he also battled vainly for the Direct Current (DC) distribution system although the ultimate winner, Alternating Current (AC) was clearly superior. In the end, he lost control of the company that bears his name and he probably wasted a great deal of intellect and effort in the unsuccessful attempt to establish DC systems as the standard in this country. (Yes, the LA Times corrected its gaffe in a later edition.)

Most Under Rated Inventor: The magazine nominates the people who created the computer, probably the most transforming technology since electricity and the automobile. According to the magazine, the fathers of the computer, J. Presper Eckert and John W. Mauchly, have achieved a modicum of post-mortem fame outside high-tech circles." But the article says they are not nearly as famous as they should be.

Most Over Rated Baseball Manager: Connie Mack (nee Cornelius McGillicuddy.) "(He) is to baseball what George Washington is to American patriotist." Mr. Mack practically invented the Philadelphia Athletics. The Most Under Rated Baseball Manager should be Walter Alston of the Brooklyn Dodgers, according to the magazine.

Most Over Rated Political Slogan: "A chicken in every pot a car in every garage" (1928). **Most Under Rated:** "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" (Ronald Reagan, 1980.)

Most Over Rated TV Sitcom: "I Love Lucy." (Let me here add my most hearty concurrence.) Most Under Rated. "Gilligan's Island," 1963. (I didn't care for this one, either, but what do I know?)

That's just a brief look at what the magazine had to say about a lot of things. Maybe you can find a copy somewhere to read the whole shebang. Or you could borrow mine.



March 16, 2004

Memories of Movies

Friend Don Stoddard remembers the Saturday afternoon movies that we used to call "B" westerns. They usually starred Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Bob Steele, Lash LaRue or any one of dozens of others who made those quick flicks for hero worshipers like us. You seldom see that kind any more. Anyway, it was generally believed that none of those heroes ever bestowed an actual kiss on the lips of their leading ladies, but Don says, "Just a dangd minute, partner."

"I don't know where the idea ever got started," Don says, "that those old movie stars didn't kiss the heroines. Maybe it was because as young boys we didn't care about seeing them smooching. All we cared about in those movies was seeing six-guns blazing and bare knuckle fights: I still watch those old movies on TV and I would venture to say that somewhere in the picture the cowboy smooched with the heroine!"

Thinking about those old Westerns, Don says, brought back the memory of Perry and the old Roxy Theatre in the 1940s. (In case you don't remember, the Roxy was next door to Foster's Corner Drug Store.) He continues: "Though it was hard to do, I usually managed somehow to scrape up a dime so I could go to those old movies. Usually I had to resort to such things as hunting for certain brands of discarded pop bottles that could be redeemed for a penny or two at the friendly Mr. Bobbit's grocery store on 6th Street. I also thought about a man named Sim Hilley. He was an old cowboy if ever there was one. I remember the cowboy hat, the boots and cowboy clothing Sim wore. He always seemed to be at the Roxy Theatre on Saturday afternoons to watch those old Class B Westerns."

Don continues: "Sim would really get caught up in the heated action of some of those old movies, especially if the Three Mesquiteers were playing. You could hear him shouting encouragement to them when they were chasing the bad guys. Sim had a problem with pronouncing the Mesquiteers' name and it always came out like the name of the insect that delights in biting you on the arm or elsewhere in the good old summertime. I can still hear Sim, whooping and hollering."

Thanks to Don for sharing those good memories. I also recall that Mr. Hilley was a frequent participant in the Sept. 16th celebration parade, and he really did look like an authentic, if aging, cowboy.



March 19, 2004

For what seemed like an eternity, the traffic lights at Seventh and Fir had been on "blink: for too long. It advised all motorists who approached that location to wait his or her turn before proceeding. It probably is one of the busiest intersections in town. No telling how many accidents those traffic lights have prevented. But, after the blinking lights were no longer needed and the regular traffic light pattern returned, it took me a while to re-adjust. That's why I sat there one day in my little blue beetle through at least two cycles while other cars coming from all directions moved safely through the crossing. That must be how Pavlov's dog felt when his experiment was terminated.

Our Stagecoach Community Theatre is gearing up for another production, "Too Soon For Daisies." It's one that we did a while back, but some of us realized we are at an age when memorizing lines is tougher than it used to be so you'll see an entirely different cast in this effort. Watch for the dates and schedule them on your calendar. Stagecoach almost always comes up with a good one.

If you noticed the obituaries the last few days you may have read about the death of Sylvia M. Hooper, 95, identified as "a retired photographer." Indeed she was. She also was the widow of Barney P. Enright, who shot many of the historic photos of this little prairie city in the decades that followed the Cherokee Outlet opening on September 16, 1983. Barney imprinted his name on many of those old, now fading photos. His wife helped in the darkroom process and also used a camera to capture the images of many people and places who played an important part in the early development of Perry. It's sobering, but sad, to realize those connections are rapidly diminishing.

The Perry area can be justified for showing a lot of pride because of the achievements of their high school athletes. The Perry High School Maroons won their 31st state championship in wrestling and the Frontier Mustang basketball boys also went to the throne room again. Frontier girls missed the state title in their class but they made an impression on every team they played. And hey, don't forget about those young swimmers, the Piranhas, from the Noble County Family YMCA. They've acquitted themselves honorably every time they've dived into the pool again this season. Just for the record, their coach is a volunteer, Jill Zimmer, whose daughter, Raven, is one of the team's stars. Laura and I are proud that we have two granddaughters who work so hard, purely for pride. Their hard work and dedication pay off in the tournament period.



March 23, 2004

More movie memories from one of Perry's interesting individuals

Elizabeth Willems grew up in Perry, the daughter and granddaughter of pioneers. She graduated from Perry High School in the 1930s and went on to become a World War II officer in the WAVES, a branch of the U.S. Navy. She has always been something of an iconoclast, thirsting for intellectual pursuits at institutions of higher learning here and abroad. She lived in The Netherlands for several years after the war, acquiring and expanding her love of the European masters in classic art, literature and science. She was bilingual in the Dutch language and, of course, in English. Eventually she returned to her home town, still in search of knowledge. A visitor in her home, just down the street from us, might think Elizabeth engulfed by stacks of books, magazines and other publications. To some it would appear to be disorder, but she could go directly to the plethora of information and find specific reference to every imaginable subject. She is one of the most interesting individuals I have met.

So I was pleased to hear her comments the other day about the recent recollections of another reader about stoic cowboy heroes who seemed to spurn a lover's kiss in the Saturday Westerns at Perry picture shows. She believes those handsome cowpokes were as romantic as the other leading men in movies of that era, when Westerns were at their height of popularity.

Elizabeth says: "About 1925 or 1926, when I was not yet ten years old, Leonard Tate was a classmate in the Perry elementary school. His folks (Mr. And Mrs. Henry Tate) operated the Annex Theater on the east side of tie square. They had a Saturday morning matinee (usually a Western) and let kids in for a nickel. The movies were all silent then, no dialogue, and they even gave us a snack. They tried popcorn for a while but that was too messy so they gave us suckers, or some kind of candy, instead. My brother, John, and I used to go to all of those movies. Besides Westerns, they also showed some good mysteries. One title I remember is 'The Cat and The Canary.' Floyd Carley and his sister, Edna, were usually part of our gang.

"Two of my favorites were Tom Mix and Hoot Gibson," Elizabeth continued. "I remember when Tom Mix dies. He made personal appearances at some of the rodeos and that kind of thing and usually drove to those engagements in his big touring car, with the top down. In the back seat was a large metal trunk where he kept his costumes and other props. One time when he was returning home to Hollywood from a show in that area, he had to stop suddenly and the metal suitcase struck his head, killing him. My friends and I used to watch those Saturday morning shows, then return home and enact them with the same words they showed on the screen. Since I was small, they usually cast me as the preacher."

More of her memories are still bright and shiny and also very interesting. Elizabeth is a great resource of information on almost any subject we might bring up. Thanks to her for this, for her interest in so many subjects and her love of the English language.



March 26, 2004

When there's a need, Perryans give support

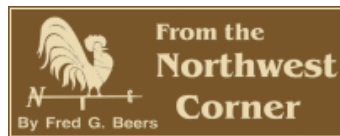
Residents of the Perry school district can be proud of many things. Not the least among them is the concern shown for facilities that make possible a more than adequate scholastic program for our young people. The same concern is evident in the growth and development of our children. We go to great lengths to see that school-age youngsters receive worthwhile educations as they prepare to meet the struggles that all of us must contend with as adults.

All of this is summed up in the record that should fill us with pride: When a need for facilities is demonstrated, this community will provide the financing. This has been demonstrated many times since the earliest days of public schools in the old Cherokee Outlet.

Superintendent Jack Parker, the Perry board of education, school personnel and an ad hoc citizens advisory committee believe that we can no longer send our boys and girls to crumbling, mold-infested elementary classrooms in the buildings that have served so long. Repairs and upgraded equipment are sorely needed in all of our district's schools, but the cost of starting over from scratch is prohibitive. So, the building replacement program is starting, logically, with new classrooms and facilities for children in the kindergarten and elementary grades level.

Many patrons of this district have taken advantage of the school's invitation to tour the buildings and see for themselves just how bad our situation is. Some of the buildings are not that old in terms of years, but remember – most buildings like these were built at the lowest cost possible. That means legal shortcuts were taken where possible, and the result of that cost-cutting now stares bleakly back at us.

Local school officials hope you will talk about this before the school bond proposal is submitted to citizens on April 6. Discuss it with your family and friends. Refer your questions to the proper school official, not to some sidewalk expert. Then go to the polls on April 6 and vote "yes." We have been shown there is a need. Now it's time for all of us to provide the funds that make possible growth and improvement in the education program that has been crafted for our children. Bear in mind, measures like this must receive a 60 percent majority to pass.



March 30, 2004

The readers write, thank goodness, and very often provide an ample supply of good material to fill these columns. What follows immediately is some humorous "stuff" from Jeanne Faris, a Billings-Perry girl who now lives in El Paso, Texas, with her daughter, Billie Jean. There's no particular theme, just some things in a Q and A format designed to tickle your funny bone. Thanks to Jeanne for passing these along.

Q. How do you catch a unique rabbit?

A. Unique up on it.

Q. How do you catch a tame rabbit?

A. Tame way. Unique up on it.

Q. How do crazy people go through the forest?

A. They take the Psycho Path.

Q. How do you get Holy Water?

A. You boil the Hell out of it.

Q. What do fish say when they hit a concrete wall?

A. Darn!

Q. What do eskimos get from sitting on the ice too long?

A. Polaroids.

Q. What do you call a boomerang that doesn't work?

A. Stick.

Q. What do you call cheese that isn't yours?

A. Nacho cheese.

Q. What do you call Santa's helpers?

A. Subordinate Clauses.

Q. What do you call bullfighters in quicksand?

A. Quatro Sinko.

Q. What do you get from a pampered cow?

A. Spoiled milk.

Q. What do you get when you cross a Snowman with a Vampire?

A. Frostbite.

Q. What lies at the bottom of the ocean and twitches?

A. Nervous wreck.

Q. What's the difference between roast beef and pea soup?

A. Anyone can roast beef.

Depending upon the demand, there may be more of these later.