



May 5, 1999

Henry S. Johnston would have enjoyed the ceremony last week in the Oklahoma State Senate Chamber when his portrait was formally unveiled. He relished all his moments in the limelight, and a touch of irony always added zest. This occasion offered quantities of both.

As a gallery of young people and adults looked on from their seats in the balcony surrounding the Chamber, an oil painting of the former governor and one-time Senate president pro tempore was unveiled. A standing ovation by senators on the floor of the Chamber and spectators in the visitors' gallery gave some clue to the degree of respect the late Perry attorney now receives. Sad to say, though, probably few, if any, of the youngsters knew who Henry S. Johnston was, and I'm not even sure if all the adults were aware of the role he played in the founding and development of this great state.

Mr. Johnston was elected governor of Oklahoma in 1926 but was impeached and ousted from office by the State Senate midway through his four-year term. The Senators found him not guilty of any criminal intent, but lowered the boom on a general accusation of "incompetency." Then in 1932 he was elected to the State Senate from the district composed of Pawnee and Noble counties. How's that for irony? He rejoined state government as a part of the very body that had only recently removed him from the governor's office. He thus rubbed elbows with many of the gentlemen who had found him guilty of a vague charge of "incompetency." Mr. Johnston loved to tell that story.

Years later, in 1965, he died at his home in Perry about 24 hours after the State Legislature took formal steps to soften the stigma of his impeachment. He lived to the age of 97, just long enough to have a moment of atonement from his humiliation.

Long before his political battles began as governor, Mr. Johnston served this state as the first president pro tempore of the State Senate. That is the primary reason his portrait is now hanging in the Senate Lounge. He also had been the convening officer for the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention in Guthrie when Oklahoma's basic laws were established. He was a political figure throughout his life in this state, which he adopted as his own at the time of the Cherokee Outlet land opening on September 16, 1893. His name is entwined in the history of Oklahoma.

State Senator Robert Milacek, whose district includes a portion of Noble county, commissioned Mr. Johnson's portrait. The excellent painting was executed by the gifted young artist Mike Wimmer of Norman. The public may view the work in the Senate Lounge any time the Senate is in session. A committee headed by Charles Hall of the Exchange Bank & Trust Co. spearheaded the drive for funds in the Perry area, and more contributions are needed to bring the effort to conclusion. All gifts are tax deductible. Further information can be obtained from Mr. Hall at the bank. Your participation in this campaign will be appreciated and formally acknowledged.

There is much more to say about the life of Henry S. Johnston, but volumes would be required to report all of it. In the meantime, you're invited to share in this tribute by adding to the gifts already received.



May 7, 1999

The story of the fabulous 101 Ranch is familiar to most of us in Noble county, but a newly published book about the place should be required reading for everyone. I'm talking about *The Real Wild West*, an historical non-fiction work from the pen of Michael Wallis. Lots of folks hereabouts had close connections to the 101 spread in the old days when the working ranch and its traveling Wild West Show were internationally known.

Perry lies in the heart of one of the state's most historic and interesting settings. Just slightly more than 100 years ago -- a short span as such things are measured -- this area was alive with people and events that defy an equal in the chronicles of the United States. This was one of the last Western frontiers. Its settlers were largely ordinary people who found themselves in extraordinary circumstances and they reacted in memorable ways. Some seem to have been predestined for colorful, prominent roles in what came to be known as the Cherokee Strip. For example, I give you the Miller Brothers of the 101 Ranch with portions in Noble, Kay and two other counties, but with ranch headquarters in the Marland (Bliss) area.

The Miller family created a unique American enterprise that became known internationally through a traveling Wild West Show. Who were the Millers? Where did they come from and why were they in the Cherokee Strip? Answers to all those questions, and many others, are contained in this interesting new book by author Michael Wallis. His previous works have included *Oil Man*, a popular biography of Frank Phillips and the birth of Phillips Petroleum; and a national best-seller about the old route 66. Mr. Wallis, who now lives in Tulsa, spent considerable time in this part of Oklahoma the past ten years researching material for his latest book. With it, he gives a fascinating glimpse of that earlier period and the years that followed.

Many who live here today are barely aware of the story of that early era in Oklahoma. It is of special interest to us because so many individuals and families in Perry and elsewhere in Noble county were part of the 101 Ranch story. To underscore that statement, here are some of the people acknowledged in Mr. Wallis' book for their help: Karen Bigbee of the Perry Carnegie Library; former Noble county Sheriff Steve Bunch; the late Kenneth Coldiron; Sharon Courtright, formerly with *The Perry Daily Journal*; Clyde Speer, site attendant at the Cherokee Strip Museum here; former Perryan Eddie Trumbler; several folks with Marland connections, including Rex and Marie Spangler, Jean Webb Evans, Linda Rennie Evans, Jack and Loy Keathly and David Keathly; and the Frontier school media department at Red Rock. Roger Glenn Taylor, a former Perry artist, is pictured in the book, and Richard V. (Cap) Swift of Perry is identified as leader of the Wild West Show's Zouave drill team. I had the pleasure of contributing a few pieces of information about the 101 Ranch and Mr. Wallis kindly mentions me, too.

I haven't finished reading my copy of this new book but let me tell you that it is easy reading, divided into short chapters that will be enjoyed by anyone who has an interest in this historic part of Oklahoma. All of us need to be reminded of our heritage.

Mr. Wallis discovered in his research around Ponca City that some people who deal daily with the public have virtually no knowledge of the 101 Ranch. A young woman who serves many tourists asked him: "Is that place (the 101) still in operation?" She had no real knowledge of the historic landmark once located virtually in her backyard. Hopefully, she will read this book and find an answer to that question.



May 11, 1999

Adversity has a way of bringing out the very best in Oklahomans. How paradoxical -- times of immense tragedy catalyze the greatest show of compassion. Last week's historic night of tornadoes on the plains and in metropolitan areas literally rocked this durable state, where disastrous bombings and cataclysmic weather are no strangers. Extremes at both ends of the scale are found in the retelling of what happened that night and in the aftermath.

There's little to add here to the reports still flowing from the media. Our friends and neighbors, especially those in Mulhall and other areas south and east of Perry, have suffered enormous losses and many barely escaped with their lives in this demonstration of the wrath of nature. Many of us were fortunate and escaped with nothing worse than the loss of a few hours of sleep. Our hearts ache for those who became victims. We applaud all those who are going the extra mile to assist in so many ways. May there be no more "mother of storms" in the next century to match the intensity of that terrible night.

The Perry city council is wrestling with the problem of finding an alternative water supply. It seems like this debate has been going on forever, and maybe it has. I have just been handed a copy of the March 21, 1957, edition of *The Perry Daily Journal* which also points in that direction. That day's newspaper reported on a meeting of the city council in which the very same problem was addressed -- with the same inconclusive results. Councilman Foy Branscom, who also was acting mayor, proposed that the dam and spillway at the municipal reservoir southwest of town be raised to impound more water. A shortage of water was in prospect that summer. The newspaper reported that councilmen were reluctant to approve that proposal, so action was delayed. Does any of this sound familiar today? Will there be a resolution to the problem this year? Stay tuned.

The shortage of water is not the only current problem that has plagued the city council for a few decades. Anyone else remember the time in the late 1940s when the council called for bids on garbage hauling but postponed action when the rates requested by prospective contractors seemed too high? After that information was printed in this newspaper, a young male teacher at Perry High School put together a bid of his own. It was lower than the others, the council accepted it, and the teacher resigned from the school to concentrate on hauling trash, which paid more than the school job. This made the front page of the *Oklahoma City Times* and was carried on the Associated Press and United Press news wires. It was a curious story -- trash hauling paying more than teaching -- but after about a month on the job, the young man resigned as garbage collector, left Perry, and presumably went back to teaching school. Today we again have a trash hauling dilemma and a water problem. Nothing new under the sun, really.

Congratulations to Perry's Ed Kelley for the fine job he's done as managing editor of *The Daily Oklahoman* the past nine years. He won awards for his paper's coverage of the Murrah building bombing and he has maintained the *Oklahoman's* record of excellence. He will do equally well at the paper's Washington bureau, where he served with distinction before becoming managing editor. He's a good newspaperman.



May 14, 1999

I stopped paying attention to rock and rap artists a long time ago and I rarely listen to any of today's pop music. Let me clarify, lest some of my young friends stop reading right here. It is just too pop for me, too loud and mostly not understandable. I need something that sounds nice but also with words that make sense. When I was young, we used to

hear that all the time on jukeboxes, radios at the soda fountain or 78 rpm record players at the teen hop. It could be dreamy or hyper-energized by the big swing bands, but almost always with understandable lyrics that conveyed a sentimental or perky thought. The vocalists were always well dressed and well scrubbed. Men wore their hair short and clean, with perhaps a little dab of hair oil to make it glisten.

I guess I'm just suspicious of today's popular music because I don't understand it. I regret that young people of recent decades have missed out on what we who are now seniors recognize as more or less immortal tunes. We used to eagerly await each week's Hit Parade on the radio to see if our personal favorites made the Top Ten. (I remember that our elders back then did not care for swing, either. Thought it was decadent. Now I hear it's coming back.)

The other day my favorite radio station was playing a recording of "The Music Goes Round and Round," a classic from the 1940s, and it brought on this wave of nostalgia. That tune was a landmark on the cutting edge of modern swing in its day. And ah yes, the words. Here's a sample, best as I remember: "Oh you blow through here / the music goes down and around / wo-o-o-o-o-o / and it comes out here." Are those memorable lines? And easy to understand? Louis Armstrong at the peak of his career helped make that a certifiable classic with his distinctive singing voice and scat trumpet style. Numerous other artists of the era recorded that song and all of them did well with it.

Another standard with most swing bands was a number called "Cement Mixer." It also had noteworthy lyrics. One phrase that comes quickly to mind is this: "Cement mixer, put-tee, put-tee / cement mixer, put-tee put-tee." Nothing suggestive or vulgar there. Perhaps it's not in the same league with "Three Little Fishies" ("three iddy fishies in the iddy-biddy poo") and certainly not with "Mairzy Doats," ("oh, mairzy doats and dozy doats and liddle lamsy divy") or "Hey bob-a ree-bop," but it stays with you. Another hit was "Hold Tight." Those two words, plus "poodly-acky-shacky / I want some seafood, mama," comprised virtually all of the lyrics. It was one of the Andrews Sisters' biggest successes. Songsmiths don't write them like that any more.

In the interest of objectivity, and to keep this essay in the right perspective, I tried to think of some comparable selections or albums from today's charts but that didn't work because I have no clue to what the younger generation likes. When I accidentally tune in a top 40s show on the radio, it is mostly just noise to my ear -- no melody to speak of. How do you hum stuff like that? Give me the real thing -- perhaps another Spike Jones rendition of "Glow Worm." But, they're not writing that kind today. Pity



May 18, 1999

Some folks were sitting around the other day talking about Perry's pluses and minuses, tossing out ideas as they occurred to them. It was a good mixture -- teen-agers, seniors, in-between, male, female; a cross-section of local demographics. The conversation kept drifting back to the lack of two important ingredients in Perry -- movies and a teen hangout. We haven't had either one for some time now.

You've heard both topics discussed many times. What surprised me in this dialogue was the general consensus that a movie theater in Perry would have a reasonable chance of succeeding. It was pointed out that another town not too far from here, with a thousand less population than Perry, has a film house open seven nights a week and it draws consistently good crowds. The features are primarily current releases. Nearest competition is in a town more than twice that size, about 25 miles away. In other words, the situation is much like ours. Would it pay off here? The adult ticket price

is \$3. That's a better bargain than you'll find in some of our neighboring towns. Add to that the cost of filling the gas tank for an out of town trip and perhaps a meal or a snack, plus admission or a baby sitter for the children, and you have a pretty hefty tab for the evening.

The old Perry Theater on Sixth street, now the location of the Exchange Bank & Trust Co. drive-through facility, was torn down years ago. That was our last film palace. The last recreation center, a commercial enterprise aimed specifically at teen-agers, closed a few months ago.

In years past Perry has had a Teen Town or something of the sort, operated by young people with the help of a handful of parents and other adults. They offered a small dance floor, a jukebox, soft drinks, candy bars and sometimes homemade cookies. The emphasis was on a retreat where teen-agers could enjoy themselves in a safe, clean and wholesome atmosphere. Centers like that are in the distant past here. That's one of the reasons many of our young men and women say they can hardly wait to complete their high school education and leave Perry. If they do, they will be passing up an opportunity to find gainful, lifetime employment right here in a small town. There are many advantages to that but they may not be apparent to those who are just beginning a career.

Maybe another Teen Town would not be acceptable in this day and age, but a variation of some kind might fill a need for our young people. Movies are wildly successful in this age of multiple screen theaters. We don't need that, but perhaps a small, single-screen theater with reasonably current attractions would earn a profit. I'm a movie buff and I would much prefer driving downtown to see a film instead of going to Stillwater, Enid, Ponca City or Oklahoma City.

This is not intended to inspire some enterprising entrepreneur with a little risk capital to start drawing up plans, but both a teen center and a small movie theater seem to be ideas worth looking into again. A movie theater and a teen center. Has the time come again for both of them in Perry America? What do you think?



May 21, 1999

Chris Cockrum left us at what seems like a very youthful age. He was only 57, the same as my Dad was when he was taken in 1931. I've known Chris all his life. His Mom and Dad, Alvin and Dorothy, lived less than half a block down the street from our house. He was just a babe in arms when I went into the Army during World War II, but I've watched him every step of the way since then.

He and his younger brother Randy grew up on the driveway of their dad's popular Conoco service station at the southwest corner of the square. Alvin and Dorothy have been hard workers all their lives and they instilled that discipline into the boys and their sister, Candy. I still have this image of Randy and Chris hopping up on the running board when I pulled in for gasoline. It was a full-service stop in every respect. The boys briskly went about the tasks of cleaning the glass all around, checking the tire pressure, the oil level and the radiator. If they saw anything awry, they fixed it or called their dad out to the driveway to ask what they should do. Then they filled the tank with regular or ethyl, and in those days the cost was what we would now call laughably small. Chris continued that work ethic when he became owner of his own pharmacy here. Customers knew he was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, if needed, to answer questions, fill orders, or provide assistance in any way possible.

Most of us have heard the story of Chris' pride and joy, that gleaming 1958 Chevrolet Impala. It doesn't come out in the sunlight very often these days, but it shines like a rare and exotic jewel when it does. Alvin, his dad, bought his own first new car in 1939 and he kept it in mint condition for many years. Chris was 11 when he began working at the family gas station and he faithfully saved his earnings until placing an order for that black Impala in January 1958. Chris took possession of the car in March that year and he has kept it immaculate ever since. (A recent renovation cost more than the original purchase price.) He passed that anecdote on to his own son, Paul, who was inspired to emulate his Dad by purchasing his own TransAm in 1985. The personalized tag on Chris' 41-year-old car is "1-Owner."

Chris' penchant for hard work fit right in with his operation of a drug store the past three decades. I grew up in my Dad's drug store in the 1930s and I enjoyed kidding Chris about how easy he had it these days. We used to open the City Drug Store at 7:30 a.m. and close it at 11:30 p.m. every day, seven days a week, with only Christmas and Thanksgiving as holidays. Chris observed shorter hours, in keeping with the shopping habits of most Perryans, and he has been open on Saturday afternoons until one week ago. He and Earline decided to close at noon on Saturday in view of the diminished trade now occurring on that day. It was something they had talked about for some time, and last Saturday they decided to do it.

As sometimes happen, the timing was not good. Chris had only that one Saturday afternoon to enjoy as a day off before his untimely passing last Tuesday morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Cockrum family as they cope with this sudden and tragic loss.



May 25, 1999

A sign in the front yard tells the story: One of Perry's finest historic homes will go on the auction block on Saturday, June 19, at the corner of Eighth and Jackson. If walls could talk, what a fascinating story the old house could tell.

Many of us still think of it as "the McCandless home," although in truth the Hoot family has been the owner and occupant for nearly 50 years. It's a treasure that has been preserved, a visible link to the early days in this community when gracious living meant gentility and culture in a frontier community that was just taking shape.

The house was built in 1900, seven years after the opening of the Cherokee Outlet and seven years before Oklahoma gained statehood. The owners and original occupants were Harry A. McCandless and his wife, Florence. Mr. McCandless and his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Fred G. Moore, came here from Kansas on February 26, 1896, to establish the Exchange Bank. At the time, Mr. McCandless was still a bachelor but he and Florence were already engaged to be married.

The two-story frame home has many distinctive features in construction. Cypress lumber was used by the builder and brick and mortar foundation walls in the basement are a solid three feet thick. Interior trim also is cypress. George G. Byers, the general contractor, was paid \$3,600, a substantial amount in those days. Before the late Dr. Delmar C. Hoot, an optometrist, and his wife, Harriet, purchased it in 1951, it had been owned for several years by Dr. C.H. Cooke, a physician who operated Perry General Hospital; and his wife, Virginia, and their raven-haired daughter, Jesse Kathryn. Every owner has kept the house in excellent shape. Its gleaming white exterior and a large old shade tree in the front yard are symbols

of the respectability, the genteel style of those who dwelt within. In recent years an enclosed porch has been added on the north side of the lower floor, largely shielded from view by a fence and a tall green wall of shrubbery.

When it was built in 1900, only one other house was on the east half of the block facing Eighth street between Ivanhoe and Jackson. That was the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Moore, who came here with Mr. McCandless in 1896. In recent years, Robert McCandless of California, son of Harry and Florence, described some details of the building site in a letter to a Perry student who was doing research on the house. The Moore and McCandless homes were on opposite ends of the block and a semi-circle carriage drive linked them. Beautiful cannas bloomed in season all around the driveway and an assortment of fruit trees added a pleasant aroma to the ambience, on spring evenings. The old Moore home is now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. B.J. Sparks.

One can picture the merry parties, hear the happy laughter and inhale the fragrance at the informal gatherings and the holiday dinners that have been served in this fine old home. We're grateful to Mr. and Mrs. McCandless for their thoughtful choices in its original design and construction, and to the owners in intervening years who have maintained it so perfectly. Our best wishes also to Mrs. Hoot, who now is a resident of Smith Manor. Elegant residences such as this stand regally, though silently, as reminders of another age in this little Cherokee Outlet city.



May 28, 1999

Books with a combined value of \$1,058.32 have been written off this year at Perry Carnegie Library because borrowers failed to return them despite a series of pleas and warnings from the library. Similar problems, occurring regularly each year, have forced the library board to consider an electronic security system to help reduce the annual losses.

The city's library is the envy of many other towns our size around the state, but it has this frustrating dilemma each year – what to do about borrowers, adults and children, who simply refuse to return books or videotapes they have checked out, at no cost to themselves. Over the years, it has cost the city-owned library tens of thousands of dollars to replace or write off the "overdue books."

The list this year is composed of 57 books with a combined value of \$886.93 borrowed by adults, plus 15 books with a combined value of \$171.39 borrowed by children. All but one of the missing books were checked out in 1998. The lone exception was taken in December 1997. Individual names are not made public but their records are flagged so that they no longer have borrowing privileges at the library.

Other losses are sustained by the library when patrons walk out with books or videotapes stashed in coat pockets, purses or otherwise hidden. These articles cannot be traced but the loss they cause is considerable. An alternative under consideration is an electronic "gate" at each of the two building entrances, similar to those commonly seen in department stores and at airports. Stillwater's new library has several of them. The devices would cause a highly audible alarm to sound if articles were being carried away without proper authorization from the checkout desk. These systems could cost as much as \$5,000 or more, but the savings they make possible might be greater than that in a few years. It just seems so unlikely that a town like Perry would have need of such things, but the truth is, we do.

The library board is deeply concerned about the problem, along with other matters they have to deal with. As one of the board members, I know it's difficult to understand how some users can fail to abide by the rules of lending, especially when that passes a needless burden onto the backs of the taxpayers who make it possible for us to have such a remarkable library. Mr. Andrew Carnegie, the Pittsburgh steel magnate/philanthropist who provided the \$10,000 construction cost for this library in 1909, also would doubtless find the situation puzzling.

Mailed reminders are sent to borrowers with long-overdue books, followed eventually by a warning letter from the city attorney. Very often, those do the trick, but when these steps fail to recover the missing material, there is little that can be done. That's when the rest of us get stuck for the tab. It's embarrassing to learn that such things are happening in this part of Happy Valley.