



May 4, 2005

The TV season now ending had barely begun last fall when I composed a few choice comments for your consideration. Now, I am not exactly the most astute viewer, but because I do watch quite a bit, it gives me a certain sense of expertise. You be the judge.

For one thing, "Law and Order" is a big favorite at our house. We watch the new episodes of all four versions of this venerable show, and we also watch the reruns on cable channels. Mr. Jerry Orbach, the lead detective in the principal show, formally departed just before the announcement that he would be back with Bebe Neuwirth, formerly of "Cheers." That was good news. I first saw Mr. Orbach when he was the principal male dancing and singing lead in the Broadway production of "Chicago," and he was merely great. His one-liners on "Law and Order" also were great. We miss him. Some of the new shows, and those returning after just one season, are being touted for all kinds of major awards. I understand that performers and shows can nominate themselves, and not all of them choose to do that. Maybe that's why some of my favorites were overlooked in the Emmy awards.

TV has fallen on hard times for various reasons, all of them monetary. Some of the hit shows are struggling, and many of them lack the quality we used to see every night. Raunchy lines and bare skin seem to be the main ingredients offered to the audience who once enjoyed Mary Tyler Moore and various other artists. Our household was never very fond of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, but at least they have no comparable performers today. Subtlety and comic genius are in extremely short supply.

Johnny Carson's self-effacing humor was enjoyable, but now he's gone and his successor, Jay Leno, is about ready to hang them up. Here's hoping an inventive comic takes his place. Conan O'Brien is the presumptive heir, but he will need to clean up much of his act to suit me. He is funny, though.

So there you are, a few random thoughts about the kind of TV that is being offered to us today. My grandkids want to know what people did before they had television. Danged if I can remember.



May 7, 2005

A famous visitor

A reader who shares my interest in the history of this part of the Cherokee Outlet recently wrote with a couple of suggestions, and I am happy to pass them on to you. The reader writes that he watched a History TV channel show that brought to mind the fact that both Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of FDR, and Mickey Rooney, once the biggest draw at movie box offices in the U.S. visited Perry in the 1930s. Both visits were covered in my book, *The First Generation*, (see chapter 31) but he believes this should again be called to the public's attention. I am pleased to agree with that, and a portion of the chapter dealing with Eleanor's visit is provided herewith, as he suggested. The part about Mickey's brief stopover here will

follow in a few days. Here's the portion telling of Mrs. Roosevelt's stay in Perry. (The book, by the way, is available at the Cherokee Strip Museum on West Fir Avenue.)

"Perry is perhaps slightly off the beaten path, so not too many celebrities have visited this city through the years. A few have found their way here, however, and in most cases they were warmly, if sparsely, received. Two of the biggest names that come to mind are Eleanor Roosevelt and Mickey Rooney. They were here on separate occasions in the late 1930's and the total amount of time required for their stopovers was perhaps less than half an hour." (Remember, this is an abridged account and big chunks of the original chapter are not reprinted with this column due to lack of space.)

"...Mrs. Roosevelt came to Perry via Santa Fe Railroad (she was going to Alva) and this was as close as the rail line could take her. The remaining distance had to be traveled by automobile. The First Lady detrained at The Perry depot. There she was met by a small official caravan to whisk her away for the approximately four-hour highway journey.

"Although she was traveling on a tight schedule, Mrs. Roosevelt graciously consented to a brief public appearance here...From the moment her train's scheduled arrival approached, hundreds of people lined both sides of the streets around the square....The Perry High School band turned out in full uniform under the direction of Professor Leopold Radgowsky," (The President's wife said it was one of the best bands she had ever heard.) "Perry citizens, then as now, were extremely proud of their band, and that remark endeared Eleanor to local hearts. She was a good will ambassador of the first magnitude."

Coming up: Mickey Rooney visits Perry



May 11, 2005

A famous visitor

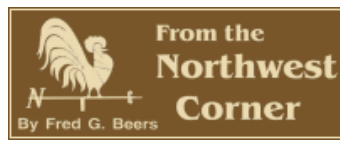
Here's the rest of the story about two distinguished visitors to Perry, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (Mrs. FDR) and the young screen star, Mickey Rooney, in the 1930s. These portions are taken from Chapter 31 of my book, *The First Generation*, which is available at the Cherokee Strip Museum on West Fir Avenue. The first installment dealt with Mrs. Roosevelt's trip here in 1937. Mickey also was here during that decade.

"While Mrs. Roosevelt's trip to Perry was well known in advance, the nation's No. 1. movie box office attraction arrived (on a southbound Santa Fe train) unannounced. Mickey Rooney was just beginning his reign at the top of the heap of Hollywood stars when he came to Perry on November 1, 1938."

"He was king of the hill, the most magnetic name and the brightest star of them all in the magical, glamorous home of movieland. Clark Gable, Jean Harlow and others were megastars, but their names on the marquee did not mean the automatic success that Mickey Rooney's did at the time." (And when he co-starred with Judy Garland, it was a heavenly thing for the big time movie investors.)

That's the gist of the story. My friend adds this personal note: "Eleanor is no longer with us, but Mickey is! I wish our city leaders would use some imagination. Why not invite Mickey back for a second stop along with his wife and let them lead the parade around the square during our Cherokee Strip celebration?"

Sounds like a reasonable suggestion to me. Does anyone else remember in the 1950s when we had Mr. and Mrs. Buster Keaton here for the world premiere of the movie about his life? At first, that sounded like an impossible suggestion, too, but it happened. Maybe we could have Mickey Rooney here again on just such a far-out idea.



May 14, 2005

'Swing and Sway' with Sammy Kaye

The other day, Laura and I made one of our routine visits to Nell's Diner, one of the noontime gastronomic showplaces now available to those who choose to eat out occasionally. I emphasize "occasionally," because we are not frequent diners away from our own little heavenly kitchen where good things always emerge. Perry has a lot of good places to eat, but personally I prefer our own household cafeteria.

Nell's Diner is a good place to eat. The food is tasty, a lot like home cooking, and the selection is not bad at all. The waitresses hustle around when the meal-time crowds appear. Service is very good. But now I'm getting far off the point.

While there the other day, my thoughts wandered back to another occasion when I was an invited guest on the same premises. At the time, the building that now houses Nell's Diner was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Moe Marcus. The house was part of the Marcus Motel, a hostelry Moe and his wife operated. He was a colorful character and a city councilman, very outspoken politically and on any occasion that demanded an opinion. At the same time, he was also a bit of a clown, one of the drum majors and instrumentalists in the local American Legion post's Dutch Band. Members of that august group usually wore female-type wigs and garments. I, meantime, was managing editor of this newspaper, always on the lookout for a good news story. One of my bosses, the late Milo Watson, agreed with that philosophy and encouraged his staff to sniff out good, juicy stories whenever possible. On this particular day, probably in the late 1940's, I was very much open to leads from someone for something of interest, even if it was only a feature story, not a hard news story. Then the phone rang at The Journal office and I answered the call. Moe Marcus was on the line. We were well acquainted.

After establishing my identity, Moe asked if I liked the Big Bands. I reassured him on that point, even though that kind of music was fast giving way to rock and roll. Then he said that Mr. Sammy Kaye was a guest that very moment in Moe's motel. Mr. Kaye's band was a good one. Its weekend radio broadcast (nation-wide) always opened with an invitation to listeners to "Swing and Sway" with Sammy Kaye. In other words, he was a household name and his music had a very distinctive style. I grew anxious.

"If you'd like to interview him, come on down," Moe said. "We're just sitting here talking." I grabbed the PDJ's new Polaroid camera and headed for the motel. Meantime, I decided Moe was pulling my leg. No one as big as Sammy Kaye would come to Perry "just to talk." But when I arrived at the motel on Fir Avenue, I walked in as Moe had instructed, and there was Sammy Kaye, sitting on a bed in Moe's house, carrying on a very normal conversation. Moe introduced us and explained that Sammy had some oil interests in Noble county, and that's why he was in Perry.

Somewhere in a box in my bedroom, there's a fading photo of Sammy Kaye talking to Moe Marcus one summer day in Perry. For several days I did not really believe I had met one of my heroes, but Moe finally convinced me it was true. I didn't recognize him at first because he was not waving a baton. I miss the swing and sway music of Sammy Kaye.



May 18, 2005

I'm finding that hanging around book stores and associated businesses can sometimes be downright dangerous. That applies even when eyesight, like mine, is dimming along with other problems that seem to accompany the aging process. For example, the other day at our wonderful local Carnegie library, I found some pamphlets that had been there for quite some time, just waiting for some softie like me to pick them up and read at least portions of some of them. Yes, it happened to me, as it probably has to you, and bingo! I was hooked. The subject was Oklahoma's historic places and the fact that we are losing them through inattention. Our history in Noble county is still so new and so exciting that we are inclined to forget that it actually is history, and we are allowing substantial parts of it to slip through our fingers unnoticed.

The losses listed in the little pamphlet probably were insignificant to the folks who lived nearby, but still they should have been preserved and identified for what they are. For the record, here are the listings: A WPA-built school gymnasium in Moss, The Meadors Hotel in Wetumka, and the Moses Keokuk house near Stroud. Few outside those towns have any idea what those buildings mean to the history-minded, but they have a great historic value. The interest in them, however, goes far beyond the complaint of local folks.

Perry stands to lose the same way if we are not careful. It's an old joke that people hereabouts snort a bit when they think about the 30- and 40-year-old buildings that have been destroyed to make room for newer buildings. Some of our school structures are the result of WPA projects - the Perry Stadium is a good example - and there are others. Who do we consult when "a newer building" is under consideration? Who do the municipal and school authorities rely on when asking that question? Who took action when the "church on a perch" was moved from the Episcopal church property to CCC Park? There should have been some group with legally designated authority to render a verdict and approve or disapprove the project. The fire the other night at the flower and gift shop on the west side of the square is another good example. Do we pull it down or rebuild? Should the old Masonic building be razed? Those are questions that may require answers in a few weeks, and we had better be ready to provide answers. Let's not change the names of historic streets or demolish old but historic buildings on a whim. Think about it and see if you agree.



May 21, 2005

Not too many people is this rather tightly knit community really knew Russ Sadler of Oklahoma City, who died the other day, but he was married to a pretty local girl and he was an important Perry figure in many ways. For example, did you realize that he had a great deal to do with the success of those wonderful Ditch Witch machines? Probably not, unless you were part of the underground construction industry, but he took a shot at one of the first things the Perry-based company did when it introduced its own type of marketing. He was the proprietor, and therefore a trail blazer, of the single focus market that practically guaranteed the success of those orange-colored machines. He operated an Oklahoma City-

based business, the Sooner Equipment Company, but with the local company's urging, changed that name to "Ditch Witch of Oklahoma," and thus became the first dealership to rely on Ditch Witch products to earn a living for himself. The change was immediate, and successful.

His widow is the former Dorothea Doyle of Perry. She is the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Bud Doyle, who operated a produce company in Perry for many years. Dorothea was active with her husband in the Ditch Witch of Oklahoma dealership. Russ retired in 1976. John Bridwell, formerly a regional manager at Ditch Witch, and his son, Gary, now own the Oklahoma dealership. Russ has been a docent at the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center for many years. Russ and Dorothea were married in 1942. Later, while they were living in Tucson, AZ, my sister's daughter, Sydney Jean Wade, was a baby sitter for the Sadlers, who lived near the Wade home in Tucson. Sydney and her husband, Vince, now teach at an American school in China. You should also know that Russ was a brother of J.D. Sadler, a former marketing executive at the Charles Machine Works, where Ditch Witch equipment is made. These little bits of information are just to round out the story bit

I think you get the picture from all this. Russ was a good man, a leader in everything he undertook, and the folks at Ditch Witch are going to miss his frequent trips to the factory here in Perry. Russ was one of us. Condolences to his family and his many friends.



May 25, 2005

Folks seem to like these little attempts at humor, so here are some more to enjoy, I hope. A friend sends these to me and I also get a chuckle by reading them.

I took a look at the tires on my car the other day. I've seen more rubber on the end of a pencil.

Those aren't dents in the fenders of my car. They are old-age wrinkles.

I just bought a little Italian car. It's called Mafia. There's a hood under the hood.

Some men desert their families but most missing fathers are merely looking for a parking space.

Monologue is a conversation between a traffic cop and an auto driver.

"I understand that car of yours is the oldest car in the county."

"I guess it is. The last time I got plates for it, they gave me uppers and lowers."

Texas resident: "Back in Texas I can be up and in my car and drive all morning before I come to the end of my property."

Redneck: "I know your feeling. I've got a car just like that."

There are many desirable automobile accessories. A full wallet is the main one.

Nothing depreciates your car faster than a new model in your neighbor's driveway.

The guy was such a bad driver the police gave him a season ticket.

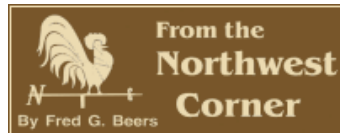
Robin Williams – Why do they call it the rush hour when nothing moves?

An inebriated Texas Aggie was arrested for driving down a one-way street the wrong way. The policeman asked, "Didn't you see the arrows?"

Inebriated Aggie: "I didn't even see the Indians."

A boy asked a lady if she had any work for him. She says, "Yes. You can paint my porch." She rustles up a can of paint and a brush and hands them to the boy."

An hour later he goes to the door and tells the lady: "I've got it painted. By the way that's a Corvette, not a Porsche."



May 28, 2005

The U.S. Postal Service has faithfully delivered another grab-bag of quick and easy bits of humor from an anonymous friend, and I am doing my part by passing them on to you. Hope you enjoy each of these.

Jackie Clark: Television sets are becoming very popular in automobiles these days. My uncle has a television set in his automobile, but it led to a little trouble. You see, he was sitting in the car catching television while his wife was driving on the highway at sixty miles per hour. Then the commercial came on and he stepped out to go to the bathroom.

Then there was the fellow who sat three hours in the car wash. He thought it was raining too hard to drive.

Gloria's father was aware of her wild ways and steadfastly refused to get her a car for her days at college. Gloria continued to badger her father until, finally, he gave in and bought her a new Mercedes. He told her if she had as much as one traffic ticket he would take the car away from her.

Gloria promptly had the chassis widened and the body lowered. She was tooling along the highway at 110 miles per hour when she spotted a motorcycle cop, in her rear-view mirror. She hit the gas but still the cop came on. Finally in desperation she headed into a filling station, managing to slow down just enough to avoid tipping over. She dashed into the ladies' room. When she returned to her car the cop had his boot on the bumper ready to write a ticket. She smiled sweetly, got back into the car as if nothing was amiss and said, "Bet you thought I wouldn't make it."

How many Christians does it take to change a light bulb?

Charismatic: Only 1- Hands are already in the air.

Pentecostal: 10 – One to change the bulb, and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.

Presbyterians: None – Lights will go on and off at predestined times.

Roman Catholic: None – Candles only. (Of guaranteed origin of course.)

Baptist: At least 15 – One to change the light bulb, and three committees to approve the change and decide who brings the potato salad and fried chicken.

Episcopalians: 3 – One to call the electrician, one to mix the drinks, and one to talk about how much better the old one was.

Mormons: One man to change the bulb, and four wives to tell him how to do it.

Unitarians: We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey you have found that light bulbs work for you, you are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your light bulb for the next Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including

incandescent, fluorescent, 3-way, long life and tinted, all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.

Methodist: Undetermined – Whether your light is bright, dull, or completely out, you are loved. You can be a light bulb, turnip bulb, or tulip bulb. Bring a bulb of your choice to the Sunday lighting service and a covered dish to pass.

Nazarene: 6 – One woman to replace the bulb while five men review church lighting policy.

Lutherans: None – Lutherans don't believe in change.

Amish: What's a light bulb?

And that's all for today folks.