



November 2, 2001

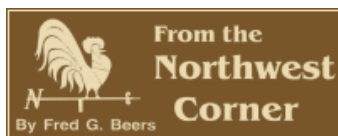
One of those columns the other day about Perry school programs presented on the stage of the old Grand Opera House some 90 years ago listed a piano duet played by Miss Ellen Bowles and Miss Ethel Knox as one of the features. Those with long memories will recall that Miss Knox went on to become a social science teacher at the old elementary school, a Perry historian and an accomplished organist, among other things. Miss Bowles also continued to serve this community as a pianist for years at the First Presbyterian church, where her family were devoted members. A sister, Claire Bowles, was a concert singer and their brother, Ed Bowles, became an attorney, Perry postmaster, violinist and a staunch baritone choir member at the local Presbyterian church. The father was William M. Bowles, a no-nonsense attorney who became district judge.

The Bowles family lived at 801 Holly street in a spacious, multi-level frame house most recently occupied by Mrs. Bill Hodge. The house, with its distinctive broad veranda, is still standing. It has a carriage house at the rear of the property, and together they provide a fine example of the architectural style favored by early-day residents of this city. For years, the next-door neighbors of the Bowles family were Mr. and Mrs. Jack Snyder and their daughters.

In a recent letter, one of the "Snyder girls," now Mrs. Maurine Peake of Nashville, TN, tells a story from her childhood when the two families were neighbors. I thought you might be interested in at least a portion. Here it is, in Maurine's words:

"My parents were Jack and Roberta Snyder, who moved to Perry before 1925 (when I was born) and are buried there now.. As you may remember, all of the Bowles' children grew up to be fairly accomplished musicians, and Ed played the violin. I have a remembrance of being introduced, when quite young, to Professor Leopold Radgowsky, the Perry school instrumental music instructor, in the presence of Ed and Claire, his sister. There may have been other musicians present also, but I don't know. I just know that what I said when told who the professor was, caused some smiles and titters. My remark to him was, 'Are you as good as Ed Bowles?' The incident has stayed in my mind probably because of the reaction it provoked. I think my parents were thoroughly embarrassed, and even at that age I realized I had committed a *gaffe*. But at the age of four or five, what did I know? I eventually majored in music education at Phillips. But I would not like to be remembered for my remarks to Professor Radgowsky."

Maurine's sister and brother-in-law, Herbert and Coralie Brown, have moved back to Perry after an absence of several years. Maurine writes an interesting letter and I'll share some more of her recollections in another column.



November 6, 2001

During a lull at choir practice the other night, someone brought up the subject of shoe repair shops that served Perry customers years ago. We used to have several of them, including four situated around the Perry square. Now, to the best of my knowledge, there are none. Maybe shoes last longer than they once did.

The shops that some of us remember are the ones that were doing business in the early 1940s. They were Davis Shoe Shop on the north side of the square, operated by Elmer Davis at 630 Delaware, where May Drilling Inc. is now located, although the address has changed to 639 Delaware; the East Side Boot and Shoe Shop, operated by William Stopp on the east side of the square at 306 Sixth street, now the home of Ace's High; the Perry Shoe Shop, operated by Ernest Gregory on the south side of the square at 640 Cedar street, where the Security Finance office is now located; and the City Shoe Shop, operated by A.W. Christansen in the north half of 309 Seventh street, in a building now occupied by the Perry Senior Citizens Center. Years ago, when the shoe shop was in the north half, Mr. Christiansen's son-in-law, George McManess, had a barber shop right next door in the south half at what was then called 309A Seventh street.

Think of it. Four repair shops were needed around the square in 1940 to keep Perry citizens well shod. And the operators of those shops supported families of various sizes with the income from those businesses. Now there are none on the square. Others have come and gone through the years, but most of us remember the four named above.

Maybe the repair shops flourished because of the Great Depression that was still raging as we entered the 1940s. It was less expensive to have a pair of shoes half-soled at the repair shop instead of paying \$5 or so for a new pair of shoes at Kraemer's, J.C. Penney's, the Famous or Zorba's Department Store. Still better, at McLellan's Dime Store or Jack Smith's Variety Store you could buy a do-it-yourself home repair kit with rubber cement, an applicator and scuffer, plus a rubber half-sole and instructions for use, all for about a quarter.

Today the repair shops, department stores and the five- and ten-cent stores are all gone from Perry. Still, I don't hear of any folks around here inserting cardboard in their shoes, as some used to do, to extend their usable life. When a pair of shoes springs a leak, we go out of town to buy new ones. Parents with growing kids know the routine all too well.

Those vanished shoe repair shops, along with the Mom and Pop grocery stores and some other businesses, are just another sign of the changing times in Perry and throughout the land.



November 9, 2001

The newly reorganized Perry American Legion post is trying to stimulate interest in Veterans Day, which used to be called Armistice Day, and at the same time earn a little money for their service projects. Veterans Day falls on Sunday (November 11), but it will be celebrated tomorrow (Saturday) with a breakfast served in the Legion hall. Buy your tickets at the door. Later that day, a Veterans Day program will be held in the courthouse park. The entire community is encouraged to attend both these events.

The size of the silent crowd that assembled the other day for a final tribute to Bill Gengler spoke volumes. The Catholic church was filled to capacity and many of the group stood along the walls throughout the service when all of the pews were filled. Bill was a relatively young man and his sudden death last week came as a shock to his family and his many friends. Bill was an active participant in affairs of the community, the cattle business, his church, fraternal organizations, and other aspects of his wide-ranging interests. His parents, the late Harry and Gertrude Gengler, helped set his course by their example as hands-on people in many worthwhile activities, including the preservation of our town's pioneer heritage. Bill could be a leader when the occasion required, but he was a faithful foot soldier, too. He and Virginia raised an outstanding family consisting of three daughters and one son, and also including a grandchild born in Florida just six days

before Bill's untimely passing. The Genglers have been wonderful, contributing members of this community for many years, and Bill will be greatly missed. Our condolences to his family in this time of sorrow.

"Jesu and Mother Earth," a new novel by Sharon Ervin of McAlester, was favorably reviewed in the most recent edition of the *Sunday Oklahoman*. That's of special interest in Perry because Sharon lived here as a little girl. She's the daughter of the late Francis Thetford and his first wife, Florine, who now lives in the Dallas area. In the early 1940s, Francis was managing editor of this newspaper and as such he was my mentor when I was hired as a cub reporter back in 1941. We remained good friends for many years, until his death in 1969. At the time, he was the "Dateline: Oklahoma" columnist for the *Daily Oklahoman*, where he had worked since 1946. Sharon's second novel, *Bodacious*, will be published soon. She has written magazine articles and short stories and worked at several newspapers, including the *Oklahoman*. She has a journalism degree from Oklahoma University and was named the first woman sports editor of the campus newspaper. She later served as editor. Her husband, William J. Ervin, is a McAlester attorney. He and Sharon have four grown children. Her dad's second wife, Lolly Thetford, still lives in Oklahoma City.

The Perry football Maroons have had a good regular season and tonight they play at Salina, which has a 9-1 record. (Perry has had three losses.) Because of the district realignment mandated on alternate years by the Oklahoma High School Activities Association, Perry will be moved up to the 3A level next season. We'll be in district 3A-3, along with Berryhill, Bristow, Claremore-Sequoyah, Cleveland, Dewey, Meeker and Victory Christian. Here's hoping Coach Dombek's young men can do as well in 3A as they have done in 2A the past two seasons. No matter what, they will deserve our all-out support.



November 13, 2001

More much-appreciated information has been received concerning a couple of recent Northwest Corner topics -- the series about restaurants and cafes that have come and gone in this community through the years, and the source of some native sandstone used for building projects by the WPA in the 1930s. This comes from Margaret (Kit Norman) Froebel, now of New Braunfels, Texas. Margaret retains her affection for Perry although she left here some years ago. Her mother, the former Gertrude Hartung Norman, also grew up here and she, also, lives in the Lone Star state. She is now Mrs. Gertrude Lockett of Richmond, Texas. Here's Margaret's account:

"In 1945-46, mother and Bill Toone co-leased the Nu Way Café (on the west side of the square) from Elvina Dillard for about six months, because Ms. Dillard needed a rest. It was quite an experience, running a restaurant during the rationing of World War II. Mother recalls that they were not allowed to give anyone a second cup of coffee, for instance. I did my own tour there as a part-time dishwasher at the age of about nine."

And on the other topic, she adds: "The question from John Nida regarding the source of the sandstone blocks which the WPA used for construction also sparked some memories. Mother recalls that every stone used in the construction of the Farmers Union Co-op building in Morrison came from her parents' farm. Her parents were John A. and Pearl (Harlow) Hartung. Their farm was located a half-mile east, two miles south and another one and a half miles east of Morrison. The Cimarron Turnpike crosses that farm now, and you can still see their farm pond from the highway. Grandpa gave the stone to the government, and they excavated the stones. After the removal of the sandstone, grandpa had a lot more usable pasture land.

"Mother recalls that the large deposit of sandstone on the farm included one very large cave which would have been big enough to have been used as a home. Her mother, fearing a cave-in, would not let the children play there. Mother didn't watch the stone being removed, but believes they used a block and tackle and mules to load the blocks onto wagons for transporting to the building site. She doubts that the stones in Perry came from this same farm, but it might shed a bit of light on the subject and spur contributions of information from others."

There's no question that sandstone was a primary building block for many large WPA projects toward the end of the Great Depression, and I'm thankful that so many of them have survived this long because they testify to the determination of that generation in their war with a wretched economy. The Perry Armory and Perry Stadium are two fine examples. They may not be beautiful and the sandstone doesn't glisten in the sunlight like marble or granite, but the buildings they made possible are mute examples of the Cherokee Strip pioneers' determination to claim this land. Thanks to Kit Froebel and her Mother for contributing this information about the subject.



November 16, 2001

The death of Esther Clark the other day at the age of 101 robbed this community of another figure from the early days of this part of the Cherokee Outlet. Esther was a colorful, upbeat lady who spoke with clarity as she related interesting vignettes from the era after the opening of the Outlet on September 16, 1893. Esther was the daughter of the late Henry H. and Etta Isham. Her father was sheriff of Noble county in the 1920s. He moved from his farm into Perry and built a comfortable home for his family at Ninth and Locust. (The home is now owned by Jim and Linda Franklin.) Laura and I lived across the street from Mrs. Isham for several years and we learned a new appreciation of that family.

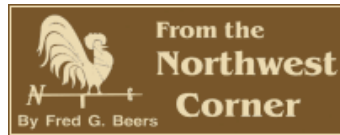
By coincidence, Mabel Eby shared with me just last week a scrapbook and historical narrative dealing with her brother, Edgar Albuquerque Warner, who died in 1997 at the age of 90. The narrative was written by Mabel. One of the many fascinating tales from that manuscript tells about a day when Edgar was a student at a rural Noble county school, Pioneer District 40. "A young lady just out of high school, Esther Isham, was the teacher at Pioneer school for the 1918-19 term," Mabel tells us. Here's the rest of that story, in her own words:

"In her card to Edgar on his 90th birthday, Esther wrote, 'Edgar, it was a pleasure to have you as one of my many pupils. Now, of course, you remember this, when some of you older boys went up into the belfry and pulled up the rope so I couldn't ring the bell to call the children in from their noon hour. I'd never taken psychology so didn't know what to do. The Lord was with me. How was I going to punish boys as big or bigger than I?

"I conceived of the idea to call the children in, call classes to order and leave you up there. Directly you began to come down one at a time. I ignored you all the entire afternoon. Even in class I let on you weren't there and praise the Lord it never happened again.'" Her discipline evidently worked pretty well. Edgar became a nationally recognized figure in his chosen field, and we'll have more to say on that subject later.

Esther spent a great portion of her long life teaching youngsters their ABC's and other important basics. In addition to that, her sweet smile, graciousness and friendly manner were characteristics that all of us could emulate in our own lives. In Esther's case, she endeared herself to the many hundreds of young people and adults with whom she came in contact. I respected her and felt blessed to have an opportunity to know her.

Congratulations to the Chamber of Commerce board of directors for their choices in staffing the organization. There was a great sense of loss when Wally Schieffer completed his second one-year term as president of the chamber. At the same time, the executive director, Penny Murrow, resigned to take a position in Wally's real estate business and Sheila Habben, administrative assistant, moved to the YMCA as a fitness director. Since then, Kaylen Martens has been hired to replace Sheila and Carolyn Briegge has been named to replace Penny as executive director. Board members also chose Rick Tearney to succeed Wally as president; Cindy Rice, vice president; Glenda Mittasch, secretary; and Connelly Wade, treasurer. Things seem to be in good hands again at the Perry Chamber of Commerce, and we wish all the best to the new folks.



November 20, 2001

Sandstone was the principal building material for WPA and CCC projects in this part of the U.S. during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The WPA (Works Progress Administration) and the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) were created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s to give able-bodied young men a chance to work for a living despite the aggressively rampant and oppressive Great Depression. Perry won several public works projects during that time and some of the buildings erected then are still very much in use today. For example – the Perry Stadium, home of Daniels Field; the Perry armory, where national guard troops have trained for more than 60 years; and the CCC Park, still bearing the name of the depression – spawned workmen who created the layout. A number of public school buildings also were built by those young workmen, and virtually all of them were sandstone structures.

The question before the house is: Where did all that sandstone come from? It's a topic that has been often discussed, and a short while ago John Nida posed the question again in this column. As a result, we have heard from several readers. You may recall the recent recollections of Gertrude Norman Lockett in this column about one source of the stone. Mrs. Lockett, who now lives in New Richmond, Texas, remembers that some commercial construction people excavated sandstone from the farm of her father, John A. Hartung, southeast of Morrison, for construction of the Farmers Union Co-op in Morrison.

Bert Bezdicek, who moved back to Perry a few years ago after retiring, remembers another source of sandstone – the farm of his father, Frank Bezdicek; and neighbors, Joe Dolezal Sr. and Earl Bechtold. All lived southeast of Perry. Bert says there are still large sandstone outcroppings on that land. "I remember when those men (CCC and WPA workers) came to our farm. They had tools like hammers and wedges to shape the stone into blocks, but they dug it from outcroppings with spades, shovels and other hand tools. I think they must have loaded it onto trucks by hand, also." He doesn't remember seeing block and tackle devices for loading the stone. Bert says the CCC men also planted a tree in an excavation area. One of that agency's principal objectives was the reduction of soil erosion. The stone they quarried southeast of Perry was used in building the Perry armory, CCC Park and Perry Stadium.

Roy Kendrick passes along some information about Sharron Miller, a Perry girl who is well regarded by TV network people for her work on a number of highly rated shows. Right now she is directing episodes of a CBS Friday night series, "That's Life." Her most recent effort was on the tube last Friday. Roy says episodes directed by Sharron are scheduled every other week until some time in January. She formerly was a film editor at Oklahoma City's channel 9, where Roy had served as senior film editor. Roy now operates an antique mall at the former location of Donaldson & Yahn Lumber Co.



November 23, 2001

I trust your Thanksgiving feast was great in every way. No matter where we go to celebrate this holiday, we are almost assured of being thoroughly stuffed. But that temporary discomfort is usually offset by the pleasant glow of a surrounding of family and good friends. Laura and I are in Kansas City this weekend to spend a few hours with our daughter, Kathy, and her family. Daughter Susan and family are enjoying this time to be with other relatives and good friends. For Christmas, we will all be together in Perry at least briefly. Thanksgiving is a wonderful day and it helps us to focus on some really wonderful blessings instead of the day-to-day routine worries that seem to occupy 'way too much time.

Thanksgiving weekend used to be the launching pad for Christmas shopping, but in recent years the Yuletide surge has been moved up little by little. By this time, we are thoroughly aware of several special gift items and the holiday pricing lures that go with them. Even *Time* magazine had an entire section of "new inventions" last week. We were told that some of those alluring and exotic new gadgets can actually be purchased now, in case you have not yet been inspired to buy a special something for that hard-to-shop-for name on your list.

But, while still on that subject, it might be well to remember that we ought to buy at home even more than usual this year. Perry's economy has not flattened as much as some of our neighboring towns, despite the downturn of sales at the Ditch Witch plant here. Local merchants are going all-out to provide gift ideas for all ages and they merit our support. Check out the possibilities before making a decision that requires a trip to Oklahoma City or any of our neighboring cities.

Thanksgiving does more than direct our attention to Christmas shopping. It should also be a time for reflecting on the many things that truly bless all of us in the Perry community. We acknowledge that Our Town is a small one and it is lacking in some of the qualities of life afforded in bigger cities. But isn't it nice that in Perry we can be acquainted on a first-name basis with the people who serve us and really care about us? You won't find that in those big department stores where you have to hunt for a clerk to ring up a sale. That's not just a holiday attitude. It's another reason for us to give thanks all year 'round because we are so fortunate to live in a unique community like Perry.

So, go on with the celebration but keep in mind all the reasons we have to rejoice in this little corner of the world.



November 27, 2001

My generation grew up in the late 1930s and early 1940s with the Andy Hardy movies when Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland were pubescent teen-agers suffering the normal pangs of that dreadful age. We dated the opposite sex and sometimes a relationship developed into what we called "going steady." That was almost like a marriage vow in its single-track solemnity but in practice it really meant basically that we were locked in to the one and only girl friend/boy friend du jour and therefore not free to date anyone else. It was a pledge of exclusivity and our chums understood that.

Consequently, we were "spoken for" and not free to accept invitations from anyone else, at least until the inevitable breakup occurred.

For my young comrades and me, the outstanding social highlights of that era were the school dances held occasionally in the old Perry High School gymnasium, a cracker-box room in the school basement. Those affairs were sanctioned by the school but they ended abruptly when some parents expressed concern at possible consequences. At other times, our two local movie houses offered a dimly lighted environment where some of the more aggressive boys could reach across with a sweaty palm and grasp the hand of their shy dates for a moment or two. The evening climaxed with a stroll to the young lady's front door – almost no Perry teen of that time drove a car, except perhaps Newman Wolleson, whose father was a Plymouth dealer. Couples who had advanced to the stage of going steady sometimes exchanged a hasty good night kiss to wind things up. That was about it.

But those school dances were exciting. The shiny maple wood floor where Maroon basketball players and wrestlers normally displayed their skills was coated with a veneer of corn starch to provide a slick surface for dancing couples. A nickelodeon (juke box) often furnished the music but on occasion a "live" band, composed of high school musicians, played the swing tunes and ballads that were on the Hit Parade of that age. Once in a while a "ladies' choice" dance would be announced and from the selections made by the girls you could pretty well tell who was getting serious about whom. You could also tell who the good dancers were because the clumsy ones weren't chosen. Usually I was content to watch from the sidelines, just enjoying the music. If worst came to worst, boys danced with boys and girls with girls. We were just learning, remember.

I had the great misfortune to reach teen-agehood at the precise time when the new dance craze, jitterbugging, came into vogue. That was in the mid-1930s, soon after the Lindy Hop and the Charleston began losing popularity. Big bands, saddle oxfords and zoot suits were all the rage. But that fast musical beat intimidated me. Benny Goodman had been crowned "king of swing" by adoring teen-agers, succeeding the previous idol, Paul Whiteman, the "king of jazz." In some ways, jazz in various forms is still heard, but it reigned supreme in the 1920s when new freedoms were being explored by America's younger set. I missed that period because I was too young, but I was (and still am) a big fan of swing. Dancing, however, was a serious stumbling block.

Jitterbugging was done with a kind of wild musical accompaniment, having a definite beat and a rapid meter. The music was rendered with abandon by gifted young musicians. Many uneasy parents felt the tunes and lyrics were profane or obscene and their sons and daughters were forbidden to listen to it. Many teens were solemnly told not to make a spectacle of themselves on the dance floor by attempting the new "jitterbug" steps when that craze came along. Today, looking back on all that, it seems obvious that the world was more innocent than we knew. More reflections on that period are coming in a future column.



November 30, 2001



This Perry High School dance band provided musical entertainment for young people in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The music makers, all students at PHS from left to right: Theodore Hartman, Johnny Marshall, Donald Fraizer, Homer Moore, next one unidentified and only partly visible, Clovis Sever, Bob Kennedy (director), Phil Galaway, Hugh Lobsitz, Charles Lamb, Bill Haynes and H. C. (Cab) Galaway Jr.

As a bewildered teen in the 1930s, when a style of dancing known as "jitterbugging" came along, my problem was a lack of physical coordination. Normally that is part of the traditional progression of arriving at young adulthood, something that goes away unassisted as more mature years are accumulated. I somehow missed that transition. The condition persists. In technical terms, it has something to do with a non-correlation between the hip bones and the knee bones, as well as the ankle bones and the toe bones. I do not fully understand the problem, but I have learned to live with it. The fact is, I am terpsichoreally challenged.

But that does not affect my appreciation of swing music, the form that brought about a whole new way of ballroom dancing among young folks, the social level I was approaching at the time. Then, as now, I enjoyed swing and its derivatives, including ballads. I do not pretend to be a dancer. For confirmation, direct inquiries to Laura or any of the ladies I have partnered with on the dance floor through the years. I have not yet heard the final comment on my failure to even *try* waltzing to a genuine Viennese orchestra while on a tour of Austria a few years back.

Working nights in the family drug store during the teen years, I always tuned the radio to a remote broadcast featuring one of the dozens of popular big bands when they played at the Trianon or Aragon ballroom, the Glen Island Casino at New Rochelle, N.Y., the Hollywood Palladium (big enough for 6,500 dancers), Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook or any of the other stylish dance venues around the country. Those broadcasts made huge celebrities of the band leaders, like Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, and dozens of others. They also made their kind of music a part of our country's society, and the beat goes on.

Young people were enraptured by the music. They listened to it on the radio, attended big band dances when possible, and (most importantly) they bought the 78 rpm records cranked out by the music industry. Those who did not live close to the big urban areas where the ballrooms were located listened to the regional bands or the university musicians who sprang up around the country. In Perry, as in other small towns, we had a few local bands composed of high schoolers who did their best to sound like the big guys.

I loved the music and still do, but I can only listen to it. My feet still do not move in time with the music. I gave Dancing in the Dark a whole new meaning. Fortunately, listening to those grand old orchestras on CDs, tapes or LP records still satisfies my need for that kind of music, but I do not venture onto the dance floor for anything faster than a slow fox trot.