

October 1, 1996

The Newton name has been around this town about as long as there's been a Perry. Jack Newton was the last linear descendant of that pioneer family still residing here, so his passing on Sunday in the Stillwater Medical Center brings to an end a chapter in our history.

The Newtons were pioneers in the furniture business, and in the old days that meant they also were undertakers. For a time, George Newton, Jack's grandfather, had a store at 629 Delaware on the north side of the square with Fred L. Treeman as his partner. The business was known as Treeman & Newton. Mr. Treeman was a brother of Ralph W. Treeman and an uncle of John Treeman and Elizabeth Willems. George later became a partner with Charlie Christoph in a furniture store/undertaking parlor, Christoph & Newton, at 301 Seventh street, on the west side of the square.

Christoph & Newton Furniture and Undertaking endured for quite a few years, later evolving into the Newton Furniture Store and the Newton Funeral Home. Until the 1930s, Perry did not have a real "funeral home." Services were held in homes, churches, or other buildings. Embalming was done at the undertaking parlor. George and Ted Newton built an impressive-looking two-story funeral home on north Seventh street about 60 years ago, and it was operated by them as a separate business from the furniture store. It is now the Brown Funeral Home, operated by Lloyd and Dolly Brown. The furniture store was one of Perry's finest and most reliable firms.

Ted Newton joined his father, George, in the family business as a young man and later became proprietor when George retired. Ted's older son, Jack, also followed his father into the firm. A younger son, Bill, is now a prominent Tulsa attorney. A few years after World War II, during which he served in the Navy in the Pacific, Jack took over the family business and ran it with his wife, Velva.

While Ted was still active, the Newtons bought a funeral home in Billings about 40 years ago, and Jack and Velva moved up there to operate that business while Ted and his wife, Libby, concentrated on the Perry operation. The folks at Billings took an instant liking to Jack and Velva, and the young couple quickly became integral parts of that community. They later disposed of the Billings home and returned to Perry. Jack and Velva became sole owners after Ted's health forced him into retirement.

For most of that time, ambulance service in this city was furnished by our two funeral homes, Davis & Son, operated by Fred A. Davis and his son, Farris, and the Newton Funeral Home. It was a highly competitive, not to mention dangerous, business, and the two firms were happy when the city took over ambulance service. While the Newtons and the Davis' were still in it, their people became the equivalent of today's emergency responders and their skills were much appreciated by our hospital's emergency room when accident victims were rushed in.

In due time the Davis business was sold to Bill Parker, and he eventually merged it with the Newton Funeral Home when Jack and Velva stepped out of the firm. When Bill retired, Lloyd and Dolly became owner-operators of the city's only funeral home. Jack assisted Lloyd through the years, but he also kept the Newton name active among Perry volunteer services as much as his health permitted. For some time now he has been the American Legion service officer. One of his functions has been to present the U.S. flag to veterans' families at graveside services.

Jack and Velva were high school sweethearts in the 1940s, and after her untimely death in 1993 Jack became restless to join her. His health was precarious even before he lost Velva, and it seemed to deteriorate rapidly. This last episode was

more than his frail condition could tolerate, so now he has achieved his wish, which he stated at Velva's funeral: "Walk slowly down the passageway, for soon I'll follow you." So long, Jack. It's been good to know you.



October 3, 1996

Most of us know that when we get married, we also acquire a whole new family from the spouse's side. Very often, that's an unknown quantity at the outset, but, happily, in my case it turned out to be a bonus. New uncles, aunts, cousins, even a gentle couple that I still have trouble thinking of as in-laws. They quickly folded me into their household and made me feel welcome. To their grandkids and most of the rest of us, they were "Mimi and Pa-Pa," and those names stuck. Pa-Pa died a few years ago, but Mimi is about to celebrate a significant milestone, her one hundredth birthday, and I think she's embarrassed about all the fuss being made over her.

The matriarch of the new family that I acquired more than four decades ago has spent virtually her entire life taking care of other people, in sickness or any other kind of distress, and it's a bit of a role reversal for her to be on the receiving end now. She has been through a lot of good times and bad, but the years have been kind to her. I'd say she's pretty spry for a centenarian, though a little unsteady on her feet at times. She has a walker and a cane stuck off in a corner somewhere but she shuns their use because they are for "older folks."

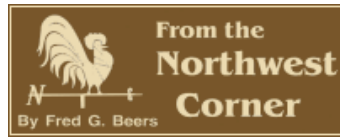
Until very recently, she lived alone in her neat brick home in Oklahoma City and fared very well. Her son, a brother and two granddaughters all live in the city, and along with several caring neighbors, they kept a watchful eye on her. For a while now, she's been a guest in our house here in Perry, and the main complaint she has is that we don't give her enough work to do. She's still planning for that day when she can go back to her own house on Lancaster Lane.

Mimi's given name is Atra, and she had that long before the Gillette Co. started making a razor with the same name. She comes from the family of Mose Allen Collins and his wife, Laura, a sturdy pair of Georgia folks who settled down along the Red River in Oklahoma earlier in this century. Mimi had three brothers and a sister, and all but one of them are enjoying long lives. Uncle Grady died back in the '50s, but Aunt Mont lived to be 90; Uncle John R. is in his mid-90s; and Uncle R.C., the baby of the family, is hale and hearty and past the age of 80. Good genes.

Clean living must have something to do with it, too, for they are all faithful, devout and hard-working members of churches in communities where they live. Since the loss of her beloved Charlie (Pa-Pa) a few years ago, Mimi has pretty well focused her entire life on serving her church and doting on her son, daughter, brothers, grandchildren and great-grandkids, along with the assortment of families acquired by her son and two daughters through their marriages. A vivacious daughter, Charlene, died a few years ago. That hurt, of course. Charlene was a young woman at the time.

So, next Saturday afternoon we'll be heading down I-35 for Oklahoma City to spend a couple of hours at the Baptist Temple church where a few friends and relatives will gather for cake and punch and well wishes for Mimi on her hundredth birthday. She'll read messages of congratulations from some pretty important people, some friends, family and a few contemporaries, chat a bit with guests who drop by, and then she will probably mosey out to the kitchen to help with the dishes.

You can be sure she won't be using a cane or a walker, even though she'll be somewhat tired. Our Mimi is one tough gal. Happy birthday, pretty lady. Charlene would say, "you're a honey!" The rest of us think so, too.



October 5, 1996

Three Noble county farms with direct ties to the opening of the Cherokee Strip in 1893 will receive Centennial Farm Awards or Centennial Ranch Awards tomorrow from the Oklahoma Historical Society. One of them also will receive the Historic Structures Award.

Selected for the honors this year are the Broken Bar L Ranch, operated by Terry and Judi Leonard; the Family Circle Farm, operated by Starling and Joan Miller; and the Fred W. Gang Homestead, owned by Pern L. and Faye Gang. All three are in the Perry vicinity. To qualify for one of these awards, the property must be a working farm or ranch with a minimum of 40 acres and gross annual sales of at least \$1,000, occupied by a family member for at least 100 years, and operated or lived on by a family member or leased out by a family member over 65 years of age.

Historic Structure Awards are presented for properties with four or more structures that are at least 50 years old and have not been altered significantly. That award will go to the Millers' Family Circle Farm.

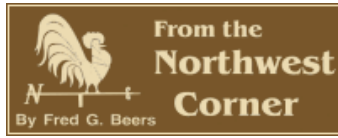
Another Noble county structure also has received official designation as an historic site. The old Sumner school building east of Perry is one of nine Oklahoma properties chosen for the National Register of Historic Places. The school is now owned by County Assessor David Dolezal, who is using it as a residence.

The school is comprised of four sections built in 1920-21, 1940-41, 1945 and 1954. "The school ... is an outstanding example of both the Commercial style as adapted to a school building and WPA (Works Progress Administration) architecture in Oklahoma," according to the Oklahoma Historical Society. "The school reflects changing architectural styles as well as the needs of the rural community during its seven decades of operation as an educational facility," the society said.

In all, more than 880 Oklahoma resources are now listed on the National Register. The newly listed properties consist of one residence, one hotel, one town hall and six schools. Six were listed under the Multiple Property nomination of WPA resources in Lincoln county. All six were constructed by the WPA between 1935 and 1943. Five of them were schools, including the Sumner property. One of the others is the Chandler high school building, the largest existing school constructed by the WPA in Lincoln county.

Also of interest locally is the selection of the Angie Debo house in Marshall, constructed in 1928. Angie Debo, renowned scholar of Oklahoma and Native American history, wrote nine books, edited three and collaborated on another. Debo's writing served as one of the earliest published records of the history of American Indians. Angie Debo was well acquainted in the Noble county area and was a frequent guest speaker for local organizations.

As time goes by, more Noble county resources will be identified as authentically historic and will be called out for some type of appropriate recognition. Thanks to the Oklahoma Historical Society for this year's selections.



October 8, 1996

You saw the item about Milo Watson in this paper the other day. He's now living in a retirement facility near his younger daughter, Mary Lee Streller, whose home is on a rural route out of Earlsboro. Milo was not doing well when he left Perry last summer and his condition is not improving. We all miss him like the dickens and certainly wish him well.

I first met Milo in 1942 when W. K. Leatherock brought him to Perry to become advertising manager of *The Perry Daily Journal*, hiring him away from The Harper County News in Buffalo, one of the best weekly papers in Oklahoma. A few years later, when Mr. Leatherock died after a period of ill health, Milo became publisher and part-owner of this paper. When Mrs. Leatherock left Perry later for a retirement center, Milo bought her interest in the business and, with his late wife, Anne, became sole owner. Milo and his two daughters still are the owners.

Milo made a unique imprint on this community during the more than half-century he spent at *The Journal*, and Perry will not be the same without him. Through that period, our business district has changed radically and we have moved from an economic base of oil and agriculture, thanks to the emergence of the Charles Machine Works, Inc., as a major international business. Population has stayed about the same but many new young families have moved here, bringing their fresh ideas and talents to stimulate our quality of life.

During Milo's stewardship, many things happened in Noble county and he was at the forefront of most of them. "When responsible people fully understand the need," he said, "they will find a way to make improvements." And he was proved correct time and again through the passage of bond issues, sales tax increases and/or public subscriptions. The key to the success of these projects was public understanding. That's where Milo came in. If he was convinced of the need for a public issue, he placed the full resources of his newspaper at the disposal of those backing the measure. It was not used as a club to blindly persuade people to act positively. But his personal column, editorials and clarifying news stories gave the public the knowledge needed to proceed intelligently, and that invariably meant success. Most of us can clearly recall examples of the type of civic effort Milo brought to bear to insure the approval of a given matter. "If Milo is for it, it must be all right." That statement was common when an issue was brought before the public.

He was more than a promoter of these things. He was the originator of many of them although he often stayed in the background to give others a chance to exercise leadership. He had an abiding faith in the wisdom of Perry and Noble county citizens to act responsibly when they knew all the facts.

Right now our community is faced with the need to finance a number of things in our school system, county and city governments, and Perry Memorial Hospital. You will be hearing much more about each of them, and a clear picture of options undoubtedly will be presented. Even without Milo at the helm, this paper will be providing you with information you need to make a decision. Each one of us owes it to ourselves, our families, our neighbors and the community at large to come to grips with the problems and face up to the fact that we must provide adequate financing for whatever services or facilities we deem necessary.

Milo isn't here to share with us his views of these things, but I think I know how he would feel about them. He would be right in the midst of the campaign to adequately inform those of us who must decide. Then when the votes are counted, he would again be able to say: "When responsible people fully understand the need, they will find a way to make improvements." That's the legacy he left with us. Milo is missed, but his influence will continue to be felt here because of the impact he made through a lifetime of a special type of service.



October 10, 1996

Several interesting construction projects are underway in the community. How many have you personally inspected? Maybe you can add some more to the list.

The two largest jobs are at the Charles Machine Works, Inc., on West Fir avenue, and the new Country Club house on North Ninth street. Steel frameworks have been erected at both sites and soon the structures will have an even more definite configuration when siding is added. The Country Club folks hope to have their new building ready in time for a Christmas celebration, but the CMW job probably won't be ready by then. It will be the new home of the SubSite factory, which is now located downtown in the old CMW building. The SubSite division has outgrown those quarters.

The Episcopalians have put up a fine looking new stockade fence around their yard at Seventh and Grove, and my Presbyterians are in the midst of erecting a large new multipurpose metal building at Eighth and Elm. It will provide storage for the church van, lawn equipment and other miscellaneous articles, and one large segment will be an activities room for various purposes as needed.

In the downtown area, the Perry Development Coalition has repaired that historic iron railing along the south side of the Foucart Building at Sixth and Cedar. It was heavily damaged in a freak motor vehicle accident several months ago. Two blocks down the street, on the west side of Sixth, the exterior of another business building has been repainted in preparations for a new occupant. And of course Clyde Speer has started a long process of renovating the Kehres Elite Hotel & Restaurant Building and will soon turn it into a hotel once again. Georgia Curtis held a three-day public auction at the historic old Elite building earlier this month to dispose of her antiques and collectibles there.

Out at the fairgrounds, the new roofline on the Women's Building is a practical and attractive change. It removed the valley between two adjacent buildings which were erected at different times through the years, so that now they are unified into a more eye-pleasing configuration.

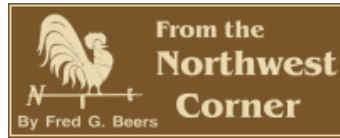
Lloyd Brown continues to enhance the building and grounds around the funeral home at Seventh and Jackson. The latest addition is an attractive new yard sign beneath a steeply, pitched roof on the south lawn, and large new letters on the north side of the building to identify the business. Extensive exterior and interior redecorating has been going on at Lloyd's place most of this year. The Exchange Bank has added a new outdoor ATM machine in one of its drive-through lanes, and Boatmen's Bank has put up new signage reflecting the company's new name (used to be Bank IV). All these things add up to greater convenience and more eye appeal for those who transact business in this community.

A recent column mentioned that a small business district once existed east of the Cow Creek Bridge on Cedar street. That reminded Don Stoddard of an old storefront that stood on the northwest corner of Third and Cedar in the early 1940s. His family lived for years around what we now know as Leo East Park, so Don asked his aunt, Hazel Hileman, 87, if she remembered anything about that old building. She not only remembered, but she also knew that a man named Pressler had a grocery store there.

Don adds: "Oddly enough, just across the alley due north of where that store once stood is an old cellar with a trailer home sitting close by. My dad, Leland, was born in 1903 in a house, now long gone, which stood about where that trailer

home is located. Aunt Hazel said that old cellar was where my Dad was born. The cellar may be as old as the town of Perry. Aunt Hazel says that an aunt and uncle of mine once lived in part of the old Pressler store."

Mrs. Hileman remembers many people and events from days gone by in Perry. She is shown in my book, *The First Generation*, in a 1941 photograph of Eddie Parker with his cadre of waitresses at the Kumback Lunch. Eight waitresses are pictured; Hazel is the one standing next to Eddie.



October 12, 1996

Dr. Edwin Fair, one of our community's most distinguished citizens is valiantly battling a debilitating disease at his home here but he knows he has the prayers and good wishes of many friends in far-flung places. That kind of support helps Dr. Fair and his entire family in this stressful time. Before his illness progressed this far, Dr. Fair had finished work on a project that has been on his mind for some time -- writing a dual biography about his life and that of his late father, Dr. Ellis Nathan Fair. The book is now at the printers and should be delivered in just a few weeks. The title is *The Doctors Fair*, and it will be available here in due time. Numerous photos are used to illustrate the text.

Dr. Ellis Fair spent his life in the early years of this century as a country doctor in Heavener, in east-central Oklahoma, and he served as a role model for his son, who truly idolized him. Dr. Edwin Fair has pretty much patterned his life according to the things he learned from his father. The story of their careers should be fascinating reading. Watch for this book when it becomes available. Meantime, Ed and the Fair family will appreciate your good thoughts.

There's more good news for our downtown area. Two new business locations have been established -- one on the north side of the square and one on the south.

Jim and Sondra Garvey will formally open their downtown shop, Wood 'n Stuff, on October 22 at 610 Cedar street. Jim says the emphasis will be on their woodcraft, but other works will be included in the gallery. Pottery is one example of the additional pieces we'll find there, and many of them will be created in the gallery.

The first month will be devoted to a Christmas store atmosphere. Regular business hours will be 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Clerks, including Jim and Sondra, will be on hand to assist shoppers, and you will generally find other artists at work on the premises, also. The Garveys will continue to maintain the shop at their home, 415 First street. They are finding a growing demand for the custom pieces of furniture emanating from their shop.

On the north side of the square, Michael Flynn has just opened an insurance agency at 603 Delaware, in the TRIB building. Michael is a recent graduate of Oklahoma State University and has just been appointed Farmers Insurance Group agent for Perry. Mike, a native of Sand Springs, spent some time as a member of the Perry national guard unit while at OSU so he's somewhat familiar with our community.

Mike is unmarried but engaged, so that status may change sometime soon. He is still receiving training to prepare for his new business venture and for that reason he may be out of the office temporarily from time to time. Also, he has not yet found a home here so commuting is a daily chore, also temporarily. Drop by the TRIB and get acquainted next time you're strolling down the north side of the square.

Improvements and acquisitions such as these are welcome and are helping to make the downtown area more inviting and convenient for those who shop and transact business in Perry. We're glad to join with others in welcoming them to this community.

Other things also draw a crowd, sometimes unexpectedly. The other day, when the state school land auction was held in Perry on the courthouse lawn, you could hardly find an empty parking space on either side of the street on all four sides of the square. The situation was pretty much the same for several days after that while a jury trial of great general interest was going on in the district court room on the third floor of the courthouse. Many veteran observers could not remember a bigger turnout for a trial here. Some though it was almost like another September 16th Cherokee Strip celebration.



October 15, 1996

Mary Witter recently let me look at some mementos that came from her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Enright, and her uncle, Barney Enright, the pioneer Perry photographer. Among the collection was a story written in longhand, titled "Radio Mixup." The writer's name is not given, but a note at the bottom indicates the little piece was provided "compliments of radio station KCRC, Enid." This probably originated in the early 1930s when radio was still a newfangled gadget and KCRC, with studios in the Youngblood Hotel, was very popular in this area. Here's the story:

"It was a radio mixup that caused the following experience for a man who had just installed a radio. He tuned in, getting three stations on the same wave length. One was a minister, one was a man giving the conditions of the road, and the third was a lecturer on poultry. This is what he heard:

"The Old Testament tells us that baby chicks should detour one mile south to Salina and listen to the words of the prophets. Be careful in the selections of your eggs, and you will find hard surfaced roads on to Garden City. We find in Genesis that roads are muddy just west of the hen house and clean straw is essential if you would save your soul.

"After passing through Leavenworth, turn north to Jericho. Three wise men bought a large sized incubator on account of a bad detour. The baby chicks were troubled with pip and a bond issue is being talked of in the Holy Land. Keep the feet dry and clean, live a life of righteousness, and turn south one mile west of the schoolhouse. Much care should be exercised in commanding the sun to stand still, as there is a washout just south of Paola, and the road to salvation is under repair, making it necessary for 70 degrees in the brooder house at all times.

"After you leave Winfield, unless you do these things, the wrath of the Lord will cause the pin feathers to fall out and detour one mile south. Many are called but few have any luck unless the road between Topeka and Lawrence is mixed with the feed. Out of 500 eggs, one should get good roads from Coffeyville to Tulsa and he commanded Noah to build the ark just one mile west of Wichita. It rained 40 days and 40 nights and caused an eight-mile detour, just west of the brooder house. Many tourists from the House of David are trying the Plymouth Rocks mixed with concrete and a desire to do right!"

I think that's still a good story after all these years, and worth a few chuckles. Thanks to Mary Witter for passing it along.

From the same bag of goodies came several old Perry newspapers, some dating back 65 years. One of these was from December 13, 1933, containing a front page story about the oil boom then underway in Noble county. The article,

headlined "County Field Is Leading In State Secondary Areas," went on to say: "The Lucien field in the southwestern part of Noble county was rated this week as the leading secondary field in the state by the state corporation commission, which set the potential of 12 producers in the field at 43,517 barrels per day.... Wells included in the potential rating making the county field the leading secondary field in the state are the No. 1 Whitten, No. 1 Jerome, No. 1 Wolff, No. 1 Ed Farr, No. 1 Miller, No. 1 J. Bolay A, No. 1 Magey, No. 1 Schonwald, No. 1 Webber, No. 2 Webber, all Shell Petroleum company tests; and the Stanolind No. 1 Belay and the Minnehoma No. 2 Schonwald."

The article also noted that the Lucien field had seen a rapid growth since the first well, the No. 1 Wolff discovery, was brought in for a producer by oilman L.W. Wentz of Ponca City, and others, in the fall of 1932. Of those completed, all but five had been producers, ranging in production from 100 barrels per day to 10,000 barrels per day.

Such stories help us remember one of the major oil booms experienced by Noble county at a time when wells were being drilled feverishly in this area and fabulous riches reportedly were being reaped by some. Such boom times, of course, were invariably followed by busts, with concurrent emotional and financial letdowns. Those were the days, weren't they?



October 17, 1996

By the year 1919, some thought Perry's growth had reached a plateau. Gone were the exhilarating times that followed the city's overnight birth on September 16, 1893, the day the Cherokee Outlet was opened to settlement. The spirit of those days, when every stage of development was an exciting new experience, had been tempered with time and the momentum of forward thrust had been greatly decelerated. The business community was restless and seeking some way to regain the old zeal.

As time drew near for biennial municipal elections in the spring of 1919, that feeling of ennui was driving some of the town's leaders to look for officials who could return a sense of momentum to the city of Perry. Urged on by the weekly *Perry Republican* and its doggedly determined editor, Judge E.W. Jones, a group of non-partisan leaders put together a coalition and offered a slate of businessmen who filed for every city office up for election. Their intention was to do away with "a period of inactivity" and provide a city ticket from top to bottom made up of representative businessmen, according to a front page news story in *The Republican* on March 13, 1919.

The newspaper story continued: "Whatever may be the merits or shortcomings of the present administration, it is a fact that the business interests have never been behind it with support or advice. The result has been nothing done for the real advancement of the city's interests and ... the regular grind of routine work that has been necessary each night and day just to keep the municipal machine going." Such marathon subjective sentences were commonplace in front page news stories of the day, and the editorial page kept up the drumbeat.

No charges were made of fraud, deception or corruption by the existing administration; it was merely an expression of the business community's desire to get things moving here once again. The coalition felt progress was at a standstill and new ideas were needed.

The non-partisan ticket included these men, none of them identified by political affiliation:

For mayor -- W.E. Johnston, a produce dealer.

For ward one council members -- John Marshall, freight agent for the Santa Fe Railroad, and John Ruth, retired farmer who

had lived southeast of town for 20 years.

For ward two council members -- C.D. Jensen, cashier of the First National Bank; and W.R. Fry, proprietor of the Palace Market and a former city mayor.

For ward three council members -- John Hansen, cashier of the Bank of Commerce; and Jim Lobsitz of the Lobsitz Hardware Store.

For ward four council members -- George Newton of Christoph & Newton Furniture & Undertakers; and J.S. McCormick, described by the paper as "an old-time educated councilman."

"The citizens and taxpayers, and as well the farmers of the county and other county interests at large, are to be congratulated on having such a group of men in charge of our city," Judge Jones wrote. "No salary would tempt them to run and every man is making a sacrifice of his personal affairs in accepting these offices. The many projects for the city's good that have been long discussed will now be put into action." Again, these quotes are from front page news stories, not the editorial page.

The city election, on March 20, 1919, promised to be historic in more ways than one. Women's suffrage had been instituted and a heavy registration of women voters was recorded in Perry that spring. That fact plus the heralded non-partisan slate of candidates made it seem that there would be a heavy turnout at the polls. However, the only contest was in the ward one council race. None of the other candidates had any opposition. Still, precinct officials were dismayed when very few voters of either sex or party affiliation took the time or trouble to cast their ballot. It was but another demonstration of the lethargy affecting the city.

When the handful of ballots had been counted, these were declared the winners:

Mayor -- W.E. Johnston.

City clerk -- F.F. Busch.

City treasurer -- G.A. Ley.

Ward one councilmen - John Marshall and Ed Marshall.

Ward two councilmen -- W.R. Fry and C.D. Jensen.

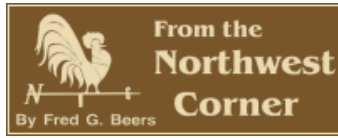
Ward three councilmen -- J.A. Hansen and Jim Lobsitz.

Ward four councilmen - George Newton and J.S. McCormick.

School board elections were held the same day. Everett Nelson and T.C. Goley were elected board members and C.D. Benight was named school district treasurer. In ward one, where the only city council contest existed, John and Ed Marshall defeated Stoddard and Rather. The newspaper reported "only a few more than 100 votes" were cast, as the non-partisan coalition got an early sample of how deep the community's apathy ran. Nevertheless, the coalition happily proclaimed victory and told citizens to look forward to renewed municipal vigor.

"The new city officials are recognized as about the best set of men that ever controlled (Perry's) municipal affairs," Judge Jones wrote for his front page report, "combining ability with enterprise and we can look forward to many improvements within the next year for the benefit of the city and taxpayers."

Editor Jones correctly predicted that Perry would again be on the move. We were, along with the rest of the U.S.A. Indeed, the roaring '20s brought an unprecedented era of prosperity to the entire country and Perry shared in that mushrooming economy. Our non-partisan coalition may not have been responsible for all the boom in the nation's business, but they undoubtedly contributed to our well being in this Cherokee Strip community. It was an interesting time.



October 19, 1996

Perry voters should be placing a bright red ring around the calendar on next Thursday, October 24. That's the date of a town meeting at the Perry high school auditorium to discuss the very important Perry improvement program to be voted on as part of the November 5 general election. This could well be one of the most crucial municipal issues to be laid before Perry residents in what's left of the 20th century, and that makes the town forum an event of the greatest magnitude. Don't dismiss this package until you've heard the facts about it, and that's what the October 24 meeting is all about. It will start at 7 p.m. and conclude by 9 p.m.

There should be a huge turnout for this meeting. Many people are in a quandary, frankly, about the multi-purpose program included in this package. They have heard conflicting reports about the objectives from well-meaning individuals, but I fear some of those reports have been based on a lack of understanding. At the town meeting, you will be hearing straight talk from the local officials to whom you and I have delegated the responsibility of making sure that this town has adequate facilities to meet the needs of its citizens.

These people are not out to make a name for themselves or line their own pockets. They are merely fulfilling their obligation by telling us what it takes to provide the kind of municipal services we expect and demand. Time will be provided for thorough discussion by those who represent both sides of the proposal. That means you will hear the whole story stated as clearly as possible by people who can give us the facts. You can be an active or passive part of the evening. Bring your questions, or just listen. Get reliable answers. Then decide how you'll vote on November 5.

If approved, the proposal would add 2.75 cents to our municipal sales tax, and that would only bring us to the approximate level of every city of any size in this part of Oklahoma. For some time we have had a much smaller tax bite than Ponca City, Stillwater, Enid, and, of course, Oklahoma City. That is not necessarily something to brag about, especially when there are so many things that need upgrading or fixing in our town.

Specifically, our current most pressing needs are an alternative water supply, repairs to 44 miles of city streets, and a way to continue making Perry Memorial Hospital the kind of healthcare facility we require. These are not frills. They are bare, basic necessities.

Cities, states and indeed the federal government have been faced with growing funding problems for years, and our little town on the prairie is no different. Do we want well-surfaced streets without potholes? How about a guaranteed fresh water supply without rationing every summer? And adequate medical care is so basic it would seem that discussion of it is hardly needed. These things don't occur by magic, or by wishing the problem would go away. It takes cash to get the job done.

Our city officials have analyzed the problems at hand and have come up with reasonable solutions. Every thoughtful citizen in this community should feel compelled to attend the town meeting on October 24 to arm himself/herself with accurate information. Then we can make up our minds as we perceive the need, and finally go vote on November 5.

We'll also be balloting on some other mighty important matters that day. Listen to the debate and read everything you can about all of them, and be prepared to declare yourself at the poll. In case it needs to be stated again your vote is important. Be sure to cast it.



October 22, 1996

If it accomplishes nothing else, the November 5 general election in Perry may get more people out to vote than President Clinton and Senator Dole together could have attracted. It seems we don't care who we send to the White House and Congress, but just watch it when a local sales tax question is on the ballot.

The Perry Improvement Program obviously has stirred a lot of heated debate in our normally serene little community. The tone of some of the letters to the editor in this newspaper has been downright caustic. Passionate statements have been made, some of them implying dark dealings by local officials. Others have stepped up to defend the proposal as well as those who laid it before us.

What's a person supposed to believe?

First of all, I would ask that everybody calm down. I would also say that personalities on either side should have nothing to do with the argument. I will personally guarantee you that those who conceived the Perry Improvement Program and those who are supporting it are not crooks and they do not stand to gain a red cent if voters approve the package. Some of the questions being raised about the program are not based on good information. Check out the facts before making up your mind.

Likewise, those who oppose the program also are honest citizens who have serious doubts about some aspects of the three improvement areas affected by the proposed sales tax increase.

Most of the officials submitting this Improvement Program were elected or chosen by us to oversee the operation of this municipality. They do that to the best of their ability, considering the limited resources at their disposal in this small town. They, like us, know we have major problems and insufficient money to solve them. They are looking for answers because that's what they are supposed to do. And they take seriously the responsibility we placed upon them to keep this city functioning and serving our needs. They know our streets are bad and getting worse because they have to drive them every day just like you and I. They know our water supply is precarious at best, and it behooves all of us to find an answer to that riddle. Medical care is basic for every man, woman and child, but sometimes we don't appreciate what we have, or do not have, until an emergency pops up in our own family. They are asking us to bring our local sales tax level up to 8.5 percent, which is where it is in virtually every town of any size around us.

The ultimate solution to this dilemma, whatever that proves to be, is going to cost money. If we put off action now, it will cost more down the line. Inflation guarantees that. And, the problems are not going to just disappear. They will get worse.

For some time now we have been united in a progressive effort to make this a better community. Perry Main Street, the Perry Development Coalition, the Perry Chamber of Commerce, the city council and many others have been cooperating as never before to improve our business district, to clean up the alleys and sidewalks downtown as well as in the residential areas. The Perry Improvement Program is a natural extension of that effort. Let's keep it moving forward.

Responsible home owners are faced with similar problems all the time. You know what happens when you postpone putting on a new roof or painting the trim. It does no good to get mad at your house just because it needs attention.

How do you choose a priority among three problems like those staring us in the face? The answer is, you can't. They're equally important. That's why all three are included in the Perry Improvement Program being submitted to voters on November 5. Every taxpaying voter in this city should attend the city council's special forum Thursday night starting at 7 p.m. in the Perry high school auditorium. There we can ask questions and get straight answers.

If we are satisfied with the situation as it exists, we'll reject the package. If we want it fixed, we'll approve it. I believe the best thing we can do is vote yes for progress and get on with the program.



October 24, 1996

Let's talk prep football! After last week's 42-14 victory over Tulsa Union, it seems' apparent that the Jenks high school Trojans are the cream of the crop in Oklahoma's class 6A this season. But did you realize the Trojans have a Perry connection? Two of their stalwart linemen are J.D. and Will Elliott, grandsons of Mr. and Mrs. Bob Elliott of Oklahoma City, who formerly lived here. Bob, a native of Perry, met his wife, Mary Louise, in Perry high school back in the early 1940s.

J.D. Elliott, a senior, is a tackle; younger brother Will, a sophomore, plays guard. Both are about 63" and sturdily built. Their dad, David Elliott of Jenks, is a son of the Bob Elliotts. David is with a Tulsa van line but lives in the Jenks school district. Other Perry relatives are Karen Grim, Bob's niece, and her twin brothers, Gene and Glen Elliott. Grandpa Bob says some area college teams are watching J.D.'s senior exploits with interest and he is hoping to land a full scholarship.

'To complete this story, we'd better tell you also that David's older brother, Bob, is associated with their dad in Elliott Engineering Inc., based in Oklahoma City, and their sister, Janet, is manager of Congressman J.C. Watts' office in Norman.

Still on the subject of prep football, the Perry Maroons have been unable to win as many games as they'd like this season (along with some big-time teams I could name), but a few individuals are earning laurels, statistically. According to the latest compilation by Daily Oklahoman sports writers, our Marcus Long is the leading punter in class 3A with 14 kicks for 548 yards (an average of 39.1). Long also is 3A's second leading rusher with 760 yards on 120 carries, an average of 6 yards per carry. Perry's James Boone is 3A's fourth leading pass receiver with 27 catches for 297 yards and one touchdown; the Maroons' Justin Stevens (14 catches, 262 yards, two touchdowns) is seventh. PHS quarterback Doug Morris is fourth in 3A passing with 62 completions in 130 attempts and one interception for 759 yards and six touchdowns.

Terry and Judi Leonard's Cattle Baron Steakhouse Restaurant on East Fir is favored by many local diners and visitors for its unique decor and cuisine. Aside from their buffalo burgers and an 80-ounce "free" steak challenge, the Leonards have some other things to intrigue their guests. One of these is the restaurant's king-size menu printed on a heavy 17" x 22" sheet, with loads of information besides the bill of fare, as interesting as that is all by itself.

The front and rear covers of the menu are formatted like an old-time newspaper with interesting stories about this area to occupy diners while they're waiting to be served. The source of the Cattle Baron name is explained; another piece tells about the post-Civil War cattle drives through this area; the 101 Ranch north of Perry is described, along with other major points of interest of tourists; and a recipe for Mexican chili con carne is offered. The Cattle Baron's dining room walls are decorated with memorabilia such as Western art, photos of the old 101 Ranch, a few branding irons, and similar paraphernalia. If they wish, diners can send copies of the menu back home to their friends. They make good souvenirs.

Along the same line, but on a much smaller scale, are the little handouts provided by Mike and Janet Shannon at Foster's Corner Drug Store on the east side of the square. These are 3 1/2" x 8 1/2" sheets printed vertically on brightly colored paper with an invitation to "return to the '50s" with a visit to the old-fashioned fountain at Foster's. It's the only place in Perry, and one of the few places anywhere, still offering ice cream sodas, sundaes, malts and milk shakes concocted by a fountain attendant (we used to call them soda jerks).

Former long-time Perry residents who return here for a visit usually, make a beeline for Foster's to enjoy a bit of nostalgia as they relax on one of the stools around the fountain. Many of these folks are often accompanied by children or grandchildren who have only heard about drug store fountains. It's another place of interest to show off in our little town.

Perry has other uniquely interesting places for dining and light refreshment and I'll try to touch on more of them from time to time. Stay tuned.

How appropriate! The next blood donor drive at the Charles Machine Works, Inc. is scheduled on October 31 -- Halloween. The Oklahoma Blood Institute will visit CMW that day from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to receive pints of blood from the company's hundreds of employees, retirees and their families in the basement auditorium of the main office building.

And speaking of CMW, how about a little applause for them for bringing the Deutz German men's chorus to Perry earlier this month. The stirring concert at the high school auditorium was a trilling experience, one that will be long remembered by those attending. We also are indebted to the Ditch Witch company for the use of their men and equipment in cleaning up trash and weeds from the median and curbs along a long stretch of Fir avenue fronting the company's complex on West Fir. Those folks are good corporate citizens of this community in every way, and often we don't acknowledge all they do.



October 26, 1996



The Perry Merchants Baseball Team was preparing for the state sandlot tournament when this photo was made in August 1934 at Texas League Park in Oklahoma City. All team members were not shown, but those identified are: Front row, from left: shortstop Jack Henry; utility/catcher Frank Ley; outfielder Dick Brocaw; pitcher Leo (Dog) Dolezal; first baseman Harlan (Lefty) Cleeton; outfielder Willie Pricer; third baseman Ernest Bradley; and pitcher Sam Stubbs. Back row: A. E. Runnels, Perry Chamber of Commerce manager; pitcher Verlin Voth; Harold (Hump) Daniels, catcher and team manager; pitcher/outfielder Glen Peters; second baseman Tony Wapp; catcher J. E. (Tiny) Lang; outfield Babe Martin; and businessman Walt Bittman, a team supporter.

You've read yarns about the old Perry Merchants semi-pro and sandlot baseball teams in this column before, but there seems to be a never-ending supply of lore from the days back in the 1930s and beyond when our local heroes were winning state championships almost routinely. Here's another.

Two of the fabled players from that era were Pat Townsend, the old Boston Red Sox pitcher, and Leo (Dog) Dolezal, a good-natured Noble county farm boy with baseball savvy. They were strong-armed hurlers who won more than their share of games season after season. They also were local crowd favorites and good buddies with each other off the field.

In 1961, when they were past their playing days but still pals, Pat had moved to sunny southern California to enjoy the warm climate of a town called Desert Center in his retirement years. Pat was primarily a baseball player all his life, but he had to hustle other jobs to make a living. Among other things, he was a cab driver and a floor man racking cue balls for billiards and pool players at Joe's Smoke House at the northeast corner of the square. The building is now occupied by Roy Morris and his accounting firm, but for many years it was the favorite hangout for most of the town's adult male population. Baseball was just one of the topics of conversation at the Smoke House.

"Dog" Dolezal's nickname was unusual and there are two versions of how it came about. According to his grandson, county assessor David Dolezal, the name was adopted after Leo caught a live rabbit one day in a farm field. That was the story preferred by Leo himself, but some other family members had a different version, David says. They claimed Leo was as mean as a bad dog, and the handle just seemed to fit. Looking at the smiling photos of Leo today, it's hard to believe he was really a mean person. Whatever the reason, the nickname stayed with him all his life and that's what everybody, including his teammates, called him.

Pat Townsend was never one to waste time on formalities and he liked practical jokes. On a May day in 1961, he decided to write his old friend in Perry a letter. After scratching out a few lines in longhand, he folded the sheet inside an envelope, affixed a four-cent postage stamp and took it to the post office. Knowing Perry was a small town, he addressed it by simply attaching the photo of a dog's head, slightly larger than the postage stamp, wrote "Perry, Oklahoma" beneath the picture, and dropped it in the mail slot. Three days later it was delivered to Leo Dolezal at his home here. There was no name on the front, just the dog's photo and Pat's name in the return address slot. Our local mailmen knew exactly who had mailed it and who was intended to receive it. Neither rain nor snow nor lack of addressee's name interfered with the courier's prompt delivery of that missive.

Eddie Dolezal, Leo's son and David's dad, still has the letter and it makes interesting reading. Here's what Pat had to say:

"Hi Dog. I will stay here in Desert Center for a while. It is really hot here -- it is sweating weather. This is a small town or village. I had an awful time finding a 'Dog' to put on the envelope. I looked through a lot of magazines, no luck. So this morning I was walking around and found this 'Dog' picture on a dog food can. Then I could not find no good glue. They have a little grocery store here and this is wood work glue, but it may serve the purpose. Do you remember Frank Taylor, who used to barber with Honk Mossman? Well, he and his wife passed through here last Saturday and we met. I was glad to see them. We had quite a chat. He told me Ralph Foster Sr. had passed away. He had been to Perry (recently). Well, no news. Hope all of you are well. Has Evalena hit any home runs lately? Best wishes, Pat." (That last inquiry was about Leo's wife, Evalena Dolezal, who still makes her home here on Route One. She was not a baseball player; Pat was just kidding.)

Both Pat and Dog have passed on -- Leo died in 1989 -- but their deeds and derring-do both on and off the diamond will continue to keep their memories burning brightly for many longtime Perry baseball fans. Thanks to Eddie and David Dolezal for this particular piece.



October 29, 1996

Many of the questions now being asked concerning the Perry Improvement Program were answered at the town forum held last Thursday night in the high school auditorium. A panel composed of city officials, Perry Memorial Hospital officials, and others involved in preparation of this package received questions from the floor and answered virtually each one. The only questions left unanswered were a few which did not relate to the bond issue, and Mayor Hollingsworth promised even those questions would be answered one-on-one, though not at the forum.

Anyone with a question about the proposal had an opportunity to get straightforward answers at the town forum. It was well publicized in advance, but only a handful of people showed up. Some wondered if the World Series game on television helped hold down the crowd. Others say various other things were going on in the community that night, but the turnout must have been perplexing to our city officials. They tried to add to our understanding. The affair was set up to clarify points of contention, so why weren't more people on hand?

It may be that some folks with reservations about the package felt they would be intimidated by such an atmosphere, but even so some members of the "loyal opposition" did attend and they did place their questions on the table for officials to deal with. They are to be commended for being there and speaking up. They received honest answers. It was a cordial environment and that should not have been a deterrent to anyone who wanted to know the truth.

The reason for the small crowd may just be apathy, the thing that plagues this nation at every election, from the smallest municipality to the nation-wide election for President every four years. Some say we have been taken over by professional politicians so there's no use going to the precinct booths to vote. In truth, the politicians haven't taken over. We have handed the reins to them by default. We don't take the time or the trouble to vote, much less inform ourselves adequately, so the politicians pretty much have their way. Then we sit back and complain and write unhappy letters to the editor about how we're being abused.

On November 5, next Tuesday, voters in the city of Perry will have an opportunity to express themselves on a three-pronged Perry Improvement Program. A "yes" vote will authorize the addition of a 2.75 sales tax with proceeds to be used to provide the city with an alternative water supply, repair our worn out streets, and update Perry Memorial hospital to bring it into line with today's usage.

Some wonder why all three propositions are included in a single package. Is "the hospital" trying to slip something over on us by tying their proposition to the other two? Actually, the hospital is owned entirely by the city of Perry (that's you and me), not some outside megacorporation. It is ours, just like the swimming pool and other municipal properties. Officer Tim Davidson was one of those with this legitimate question in mind until he attended the town forum last week. In a letter to the editor of this paper last Friday, Officer Davidson explained how he learned at the forum that the city council (not "the hospital") combined the three based on sound economic reasons. By placing all of them under one bond project, significant amounts of bond fees and interest will be saved.

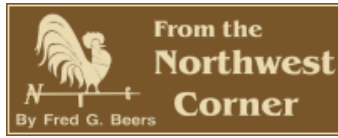
Another question at the forum seemed to suggest that physicians in the hospital clinic building are being furnished office suites at no cost to them. In truth, they pay a substantial monthly rental fee based on the current local market. They know that if the new clinic building is approved, their rent will nearly double, and they still are supporting the proposition. They are not being subsidized with free rent.

The amount of the proposed sales tax increase will only bring our local rate up to the level of virtually all of our neighbors. Some of them also are laying plans for additional increases to help pay for maintenance or upgrades in their own communities. Towns and cities have to do that in order to operate. Enid, for example, also will vote next month on a sales tax proposal. Most of it will go for economic development but some may be allocated for so-called "quality of life" projects, such as a proposed new downtown baseball park. In Perry, we built an excellent new baseball park primarily with contributions and volunteer labor. Taxpayers were not asked to fund that project. That's the Perry way of doing it.

Our local officials are asking us to provide funding for a water supply, street repairs and adequate medical care. No one likes to pay more taxes, but what could be more basic than those?

There's still time to arm yourself with information if you have questions. *The Journal* has been running a series of articles to explain details of the Perry Improvement Program, and even more information is available by inquiring at City Hall. Our officials know that an informed electorate will support this program because they have pride in Perry. They are not trying to slip something past us or asking us to buy a pig in a poke. An honest effort is being made to lay out all the information in a clearly stated way.

Don't fail to vote next Tuesday. And don't be misled by someone telling you that officials are trying to trick you into something. They're not. The Perry Improvement Program is just one of the many important issues to be settled. The honest facts have been laid out. Learn all you can about each of them, and then go vote. Let's have a record turnout in Perry and all of Noble county. Let's get the Perry Improvement Program in high gear.



October 31, 1996

How often have you heard a former Perry resident comment that our little town has made great strides forward in the year since he or she left? It's not exactly a divine revelation, but the statement is so recurrent, it must be true. Perhaps it's the change of perspective. Perhaps we're doing something right now and then. Whatever. Here's what a friend, who has been away from here for some time, wrote to me recently:

"The city of Perry has so much more going for it than when I moved there (about 50 years ago), or even when I went away to college ...I especially regret not having the swimming pool sooner, and would have loved to have the YMCA and the theatre group operational while I was there. I never did take for granted the wonderful library, because I recalled that (the school my friend previously attended elsewhere) had borrowed books from my home for the teacher to read to my first grade class."

The YMCA, city swimming pool and Stagecoach Community Theatre were only dreamed about 50 years ago, and at one time we had no Perry Carnegie Library, but today they all are realities for us to participate in and enjoy. People like my friend in the letter above would have reveled in them years ago. Some folks of energy and ambition eventually felt the need and tackled the job of bringing them to reality. The generations that follow us undoubtedly will add much more onto the building blocks we leave them if we lay a groundwork for growth. Will you and I contribute to that or will we fail to continue making Perry a better place?

Words are such strange things. As our primary means of communication, they can be a source of comfort or pain, a suggestion of tender caring or bitter rejection. The same words have different meaning to different folks. It depends on how they are used and who is using them. The way we see them or hear them affects our understanding: oral inflections, facial expressions, background distractions, or, if printed, the use of italics or bold letters adds to the effect. They can conjure up the vision of an imminent bright horizon or an unstoppable plunge into darkness and fear. Politicians and their hired schlockmeisters have mastered the skill. This may be the subject of an extended essay someday.

What brought this to mind today is the discovery of a piece quoting Kit van Cleave, who is known as one of the most important writers on the arts in the Houston area. She has regular monthly columns in Houston Home and Garden, Scene, H. Magazine and Dallas Home and Garden. She recently came up with her list of the top ten most beautiful words in the English language. Here are her choices:

1. FREEDOM – the touchstone of reality through which the human existence is defined.
2. LOVE – a much-abused word which symbolizes an emotion practically non-existent. Not a political, manipulative, power or controlling tool.
3. PEACE – a state which civilized people have a right to expect, but which is still in danger from those who believe individuals are not very important.
4. COURAGE – the step forward into human character development.
5. HONOR – the step forward into a one-to-one relationship with oneself.
6. INTEGRITY – the step forward into a one-to-one relationship with reality.
7. LOYALTY– the, step forward into the ability to be true to relationships with one's fellows.
8. ABILITY – the particularly human quality which strengthens self-esteem.
9. INTELLIGENCE – not a rating on a test, but a use of self-sufficient thinking.

10. TALENT – the result of proper assimilation with all the above words, plus the vulnerability of allowing creative thoughts to surface.

See anything about the list you'd care to change by adding or subtracting? Looks pretty good to me.