



October 2, 1998

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, and so, when our fearless leader appeared to be struggling the other day with his understanding of "is," I turned to a long-time friend, Charles Kemnitz, who has been trained in that field. He is a semanticist, one of the few I actually know, and both of us take delight in the pursuit of purity and clarity in the English language. In an attempt to be helpful, I asked him for any information he could provide concerning the issue of "is." Here is what he had to offer:

"My memory of a course in the Oxford English Dictionary," he wrote, "was that 'is' has more meanings than any other in the English language, with more than 200 (including all forms of to be, which are included under is). And, yes, (President) Clinton did quibble over two of those possible meanings. Where he made a fool out of himself, though, is that even though 'is' has 200 dictionary meanings, its meaning is determined by its use, its context; and the context in which it was used in the question left no room for ambiguity. I would say this is an 'old lawyer's trick,' but it only works when there is true contextual ambiguity. Otherwise you just look like you're evading or stupid."

I hope that helps, if, a question about the meaning of "is" comes up again. My thanks to Charles, a former colleague in the Ditch Witch graphic arts department. He is now on the faculty of a university in Pennsylvania. Charles is the son of our neighbor, Mrs. George Kemnitz.

As I've noted previously, friends often bring me objects of interest with the notation that they need not be returned. That takes a load off but it also means that quite often I wind up examining something of special interest but with no idea of its source. Unless I devise a tagging system or some method of identifying who gave me what, I have this annoying habit of not remembering where things came from. Such a one is a small booklet titled *One Thousand and One Things Worth Knowing*, published in 1855 by Henry Stephens. The flyleaf adds this statement: "A book disclosing invaluable information, receipts and instruction, in the useful and domestic arts. Everything of which is of practical use to everybody." What more could we ask?

The sale price at the time of publication a century and a half ago was twenty-five cents, but I regard it today as a priceless treasure. It offers 144 pages of household health hints, including cures for such obscure ailments as run-arounds, quinsy, consumption and summer complaints. It also tells the etiquette of courtship and marriage, including how to write love letters. Cookery for the sick room is covered along with the care of furniture and housekeeping articles. In short, it touches on just about anything you would want to know about everything, just as the flyleaf suggests.

The problem is, I don't know where this little gem came from. I hope the donor is reading this and will let me know something of its origin.



October 6, 1998

Continuing along the theme of "Some Cars That I Have Known" leads ultimately to a personal favorite -- the little red Volkswagen Beetle that served me so faithfully and well for 17 memorable years. It was never intended to be anything but a work car, a means of getting from home to the Ditch Witch office each day, and it filled that need admirably. I drove it for 17 years before selling it to a friend in 1989, and for all I know it is still providing transportation for someone yet today.

It was pure VW, manufactured before Americans began demanding luxuries such as automatic transmissions, air-conditioning, revved-up engines, power assists and other amenities that in the end defeated the purpose of the Bug: inexpensive transportation for the masses. The German car-makers, anxious to satisfy their American customers, began hanging so much stuff on the Beetles, even adding a Super-Beetle model, that in the long run VW purists lost interest, and so did the mechanics who worked on them. And of course when the U.S. imposed strict pollution emission ground rules, plus safety requirements, the fabled Bug could no longer be imported to this country. The newly introduced and re-engineered version meets all those standards, but it is no longer in the price range originally intended.

My VW had been rebuilt after a front-end crash before I bought it. A shade tree mechanic did the work but that is not to imply that it was shoddy in any respect. He used genuine parts and his own knowledge to put it in first class shape. The only thing missing after his restoration was the round VW medallion on the front hood, but those things were constantly being swiped anyway by souvenir hunting vandals.

My Bug survived a fire in the rear-mounted engine. That happened one morning on the way to work just a few blocks from home. The fire department sent a big pumper truck to douse the flames and it took quite a bit of work to get the little rascal back in shape. The engine had to be replaced, of course, and the rear window was shattered by the heat. Fire ruined the paint on most of the rear end, but new parts were available for everything but the engine, and the body shop found a good used one so that was not an insurmountable problem. When it came out of the shop, it was almost as good as new and it certainly did shine, what with a complete new paint job, new chrome trim and sports stripes.

A magazine recently did a piece about some of the most over-rated and most under-rated products of the recent past. It categorized the VW Beetle as vastly over-rated, describing it as unsafe because the fuel tank was virtually in the driver's lap and there was little protection in a front-end crash. I already knew that and that's why mine was only used for short trips here in town. Thanks to some expert tender loving care from David Payne on weekends in his home garage, it just kept on running like the pink bunny in the battery ads. My needs outgrew it, but I wouldn't mind having another just like it someday.



October 9, 1998

One of Perry's most distinguished citizens has been chosen to receive a unique honor from the Oklahoma State Senate, an assembly that he helped mold in the earliest years of this century. Henry S. Johnston came to Perry only a few hours after the great land run of September 16, 1893, and stayed to become a key figure in writing the state's constitution, presiding over the constitutional convention, becoming the first president pro tempore of the state Senate, and eventually governor of his adopted state. Now he is in line for special recognition from the legislative body he partially created. You and I can help make that possible.

Mr. Johnston has been chosen to become the subject of an oil painting that will be hung in the lounge of the State Senate at the capitol, or in an adjacent public area of the Senate. His selection was made by State Sen. Charles Ford of Bartlesville on the basis of Mr. Johnston's significant role in fashioning the history of the Senate and, indeed, the state of Oklahoma itself. The honor is part of a grand plan to prepare for the state's Centennial Celebration in 2007. Sen. Ford's efforts are being supported by State Sen. Robert Milacek of Waukomis.

The plan's objective is to present 18 paintings and two bronze statues for display in the Senate Lounge and other public areas of the Senate in time for the Centennial. Thus far, four paintings have been committed. Each of the paintings and bronze pieces will be privately financed and donated to the state. The artist's fee and associated expenses for Mr. Johnston's portrait will total approximately \$5,500, and contributions are now being requested to provide that amount. Sen. Ford has asked Charles Hall of the Perry Exchange Bank & Trust Co. to head up the effort in this area, and Hall is now receiving funds for that purpose. It is hoped that contributions can be received by November 1. All gifts will be acknowledged and a commemorative plate will be attached to the portrait to explain Mr. Johnston's role in the development of the state.

Mr. Johnston's career ended with his death at the age of ninety-seven on January 7, 1965. During his long lifetime he experienced enough highs and lows to provide the basis for a good novel. He was loved, honored and respected by thousands, but there also were detractors who saw him in a different light. When he was ousted from the governor's office by impeachment in 1929, it was a moment of dark despair. But a cheering reception from home folks followed a few hours later when he returned to Perry from the gloomy halls of the state capitol, and his spirit was instantly refreshed.

There's more to this story and I'll try to bring part of it to you in ensuing installments. Meantime, check with Charles Hall if you want to help with this project to pay tribute to Henry S. Johnston. Checks may be made out to the Oklahoma State Senate Historical Preservation Fund.



October 13, 1998

Recognition is coming, albeit posthumously, to Perry attorney Henry S. Johnston, thanks to an Oklahoma Centennial Celebration project under way in the State Senate. An oil painting of Mr. Johnston will be hung in the public area of the Senate at the capitol as a tribute to him as the first president pro tempore of the Senate. He will be one of several historic figures honored by the upper house of the Legislature in time for the Centennial of statehood in 2007. Contributions to help pay for the painting, which has a price tag of \$5,500, may be made payable to the Oklahoma State Senate Historical Preservation Fund. Take them to Charles Hall at Exchange Bank & Trust Co.

Most of us are familiar with Mr. Johnston's aborted term as governor of Oklahoma in 1927-29, but we tend to overlook his contributions to the earlier development of the state. He arrived in Perry by rail a few days after the great land run of September 16, 1893, and began a law practice that continued almost to the day of his death in January 1965, when he was ninety-seven years old.

In 1897, Mr. Johnston was chosen to serve in the upper house of the territorial council, now called the State Senate. Legislators then received \$4 per day while in session and \$4 per mile travel pay to reach the capitol. In 1906 he was

elected a delegate to the Oklahoma constitutional convention as a representative of district 17, composed of Noble and Pawnee counties.

The convention met November 20, 1906, in the territorial capitol of Guthrie, with 90 Democrats, 12 Republicans and one independent comprising the body. Mr. Johnston was elected chairman of the Democratic caucus and called the session to order. "I uttered the first sentence in organizing this state," Mr. Johnston said proudly years later. He was elected to the first State Senate in 1907, again representing the district composed of Noble and Pawnee counties. That body elected him its first president, and that is the position for which he is being honored now. Mr. Johnston believed that his work in organizing the Senate led to his election as governor nearly 20 years later.

Following his removal from office, Mr. Johnston was elected to the State Senate from Noble and Pawnee counties in 1932. He won by a comfortable margin and enjoyed serving side by side with many of the lawmakers who had voted three years earlier to oust him from the governors post.

Through most of his public life, Mr. Johnston relied heavily on the support of his wife, the former Ethel L. Littleton. She was a bright-eyed, 20-year-old court reporter working for the State Senate when they were married in Guthrie in 1909. Mrs. Johnston had a distinguished career of her own, including tenure as grand secretary of the Oklahoma Order of the Eastern Star.

More on the Johnston era in Oklahoma when we meet here again. Meantime, check the Perry Carnegie Library for additional information on Mr. Johnston.



October 16, 1998

Oklahoma has one of the few state capitols with classic architectural lines but no dome. To those of us who grew up with that image imprinted in our minds, it seems OK, but many others think it looks incomplete. Through the years numerous efforts have been initiated to raise funds privately for an addition of the dome or to have the legislature make an appropriation for that purpose. Neither of those objectives has been reached, so we try not to think about the problem. It's still there, we just ignore it.

There are Perry connections to this story, and they include two former governors. One is well remembered here but the other is not. All of this is part of preparations now under way for the Oklahoma Centennial Celebration in 2007. But first some background is needed to understand what's going on today. Why was the dome left off in the first place?

When the capitol was built earlier this century on the extreme north side of Oklahoma City, funding was a major factor. The people had been told that the cost of construction would not exceed \$1.5 million but, as completion neared it looked like that amount would not be sufficient. In an effort to bring down the outlay, Gov. Robert Williams decided to scrap plans for the dome, even though the original plans called for it and the footings were poured to support it. Gov. Williams, who served 1915–19, thought that such an ornament would be an extravagance that Oklahoma did not need. The dome was dumped at his direction.

Other "excesses" also were tossed out. It was a time of major cost-cutting by our state's leaders. Five state-supported junior colleges were closed, taxes were raised and institutional appropriations were cut to reduce state indebtedness. The

capitol was completed with virtually no ornamentation anywhere. In more recent years, the stately old building at NE 23 and Lincoln has been the centerpiece of a handsome complex of structures and it remains the state's No. 1 tourist attraction. Renovation of the capitol is in progress and many major steps toward that end have been completed. Some of these projects correct oversights or omissions in the original construction.

State Sen. Charles R. Ford of Bartlesville has chosen to do something to enhance the integrity of the Senate Lounge and other public areas of the Senate as part of this effort. The capitol is a popular attraction for visitors and it is open to the public even when the Legislature is not in session. Sen. Ford is putting together a voluntary program to create a series of oil paintings depicting historical events and places throughout Oklahoma. This is where our Perry community comes in.

Sen. Ford hopes to place an oil portrait of Henry S. Johnston, a pioneer Perry attorney, in the lounge with a memorial plaque noting that Johnston was the president pro tempore of the Oklahoma State Senate when the first Legislature met after statehood in 1907. He also was a key figure in the state constitutional convention in Guthrie and he went on to become Oklahoma's seventh governor, but Sen. Ford, a Republican, is honoring Johnston, a Democrat, because of his significant contribution to the State Senate. Sen. Ford is supported in his effort by State Sen. Robert Milacek, of Waukomis, another Republican. As you see, it is by no means a partisan project.

Several of the oil paintings already have been committed. The objective is to complete 18 paintings and two bronze statues in time for the State's Centennial. The artist's fees and associated costs for Mr. Johnston's portrait will be approximately \$5,500, and that's where you and I come in. We can become active participants in this by sending checks payable to the Oklahoma State Senate Historical Preservation Fund to Charles Hall at Exchange Bank & Trust Co. in Perry. No legislative appropriation is being asked for the projects. All funds will be subscribed by private and corporate donors and each gift will be appropriately acknowledged.

The other Perry connection to the domeless capitol story is former Gov. Robert Williams, who made the decision to leave the topper off the building. Mr. Williams came to Perry at the opening of the Cherokee Strip on Sept. 16, 1893. We don't hear much about his time in Perry, but according to Judge Ernie Jones' *Early Day History of Perry, Oklahoma, R.L. (Bob) Williams* stayed here "long enough to take a course in the finer points of legal ethics, traded his standard library of one volume of Oklahoma statutes for a ticket to Muskogee from whence he returned as Governor of the state and now (early 1930s) Federal Judge from the east side."

What a fascinating history our little town has!



October 20, 1998

"Impeachment" is very much in the news these days because of the hullabaloo in Washington, but Noble county folks became well acquainted with the term some 70 years ago when one of our own, attorney Henry S. Johnston, was in trouble with the Oklahoma Legislature. The upshot of that turmoil came when Mr. Johnston was ousted from his office as governor of this state.

Most of us understand the implications of the word "impeachment." According to Webster's, when used as a verb it means to bring a charge, usually against a high public official. Sometimes we equate "impeachment" with "ouster." We forget that if someone is impeached, it simply means that an official accusation has been filed and a hearing, or a trial, may be held

to rule on the validity of the charge and, if a guilty verdict is rendered, the nature of punishment is determined. Impeachment alone does not mean that a person is guilty of anything.

In Mr. Johnston's ordeal, his trouble came to a head in 1929, midway through his four-year term as the state's chief executive. The episode is now widely viewed to have been a fight among warring factions within the Democratic party -- the party he represented -- to wrest control away from Mr. Johnston and his supporters. It was a political struggle. To achieve the goals of his foes, Mr. Johnston was impeached (charged) by the state House of Representatives, then tried and convicted by the State Senate. Both were heavily dominated by Democrats.

The House voted 11 specific charges of impeachment against the governor, claiming ten acts of wrongdoing and one of "general incompetency." After the hearing, the Senate agreed that there was no criminal intent on the part of Governor Johnston and threw out all but the one incompetency charge. He was convicted of that alone, and for years after that efforts were made to remove the stigma from his name.

It was a bitter time for this state. Mr. Johnston and his devoted wife, Ethel L., put up a brave front but it is doubtful that they ever completely shook off the trauma it foisted on them. A cheering crowd of some 4,000 neighbors, friends, townspeople and supporters from throughout the state surprised him with a spontaneous greeting in the courthouse park when Mr. Johnston and his family returned to Perry. They met him in a caravan at the edge of town and escorted him to the park, where he acknowledged their friendship and the reception. He later described this as one of the high points of his life. Through the years other steps were taken to atone for the humiliation of impeachment. A portion of U.S. highway 64 at the south edge of Perry was memorialized by the state in Mr. Johnston's name. A concrete pillar with a bronze plaque marks the location. On the day before his death on January 7, 1965, the Oklahoma legislature approved a measure to soften the stigma of his removal from office. As a former governor, his body lay in state at the Capitol before funeral services were held in Perry.

Today, a group of state senators, headed by Charles Ford of Bartlesville, is attempting to raise funds to hang an oil portrait of Mr. Johnston in the vicinity of the Senate Lounge at the capitol. That would be a fitting tribute inasmuch as Mr. Johnston presided over the first Oklahoma State Senate following statehood in 1907. The painting will be part of preparations for the state's Centennial Celebration in 2007.

If you would like to help make this a reality, contact Charles Hall at the Exchange Bank and Trust Co. He is working with Sen. Ford in this very worthwhile effort. State Sen. Robert Milacek of Waukomis also is backing the project. To assist, make checks payable to the Oklahoma State Senate Historical Preservation Fund and direct them to Charles Hall. November 1 is the target date for completing the effort.



October 23, 1998



South Side of the Perry Square as it appeared in the early days is shown in this rarely seen picture postcard that now belongs to Marcia Moore of Severy, Kan.

Interesting things related to Perry's historic past have had a special fascination for Marcia Moore of Severy, Kan., for several years. In 1994 she began a collection of souvenir china pieces, starting with hand-painted plates bearing images of the Noble county courthouse and the Perry Carnegie library. These were made in the early 1900s in Germany for sale by the Barton Book Store of Perry. Marcia has made similar acquisitions from time to time, along with other articles that help recall the age just after the opening of the Cherokee Strip in 1893. She has a special warm feeling for Perry.

One of her most recent finds is a postcard bearing an August 6, 1908, cancellation stamp on one side and a rarely seen photo of the south side of the square on the reverse side. The card, now laminated in a protective plastic cover, is addressed to Mrs. H. Kroening of Covington and was mailed from Oklahoma City for the usual postcard fee of one-cent postage. A brief hand-written message states that the sender, whose name is not entirely legible, "arrived in Oklahoma City and (is) staying with Rev. (name illegible). Feel fine. How are you & the girls? Write a letter if you have a chance." The signature is simply "Henry." He presumably was Mrs. H. Kroening's husband.

The photo of the south side of the square makes this card particularly interesting. The photographer was K.P. Wetzel, according to an imprint on the lower left corner. The photo obviously was enhanced before printing, but not materially changed, by an artist's pen and brush. The scene is not one that you see frequently. The camera was pointed to the west looking up Cedar street from the intersection with Sixth street. Clearly visible in the foreground is the E.E. Howendobler Drug Store, where my father was a pharmacist until he opened his own store. A large sign on the wooden front advises that the store also handled paints and oils.

Mr. Howendobler came here around the time of the land run on September 16, 1893, and he brought my dad, a young druggist from Wichita, to Perry in 1895. By 1903, my father had opened his own business here, the City Drug Store, originally on the west side of the square. But Mr. Howendobler, whose home still stands on north Sixth street, had a very

successful pharmacy and was a civic leader here for several years before moving on to Tulsa. But let's get back to the details of the photo.

Next door west of the Howendobler Drug Store was the Chesapeak (sic) Cafe, a single-story frame building with an arched roof line on the front facade. I can find no mention of this cafe in the 1904 city directory. Eleven businesses are shown in the east half of the block (from Sixth street to Gene Taylor street). Six of them are in two-story structures and the others are in one-story frame buildings. Most of the two-story buildings are of sand stone construction. The old Monroe-Lang Hardware Store (now the Zimmer building) is clearly shown. A lone horse-drawn buggy, the only conveyance of any visible, is pulled up in front of the building.

In the west half of the block, from Gene Taylor street to Seventh street, names on the buildings are hard to make out, but "the Famous" is painted in large block letters on the side of the upper portion of the two-story building where that wonderful department store was located. It is now home of LJR Enterprises and the building is owned by J.W. and Phyllis Shepard.

It's a bit hard to tell for sure; but the street appears to be hard packed dirt but otherwise not surfaced. Neat concrete sidewalks with curbs the length of the block and electric lines and phone lines are strung on tall wooden poles.

How interesting to see this graphic representation of the south side of the Perry square as it must have been 90 years ago. Thanks to Marcia Moore for sharing it with us.



October 27, 1998

One of the fixtures of downtown Perry soon will be missing from the scene, but not from our community. Dick Lindsey is preparing to retire after a half-century of keeping local motorists on the road as an expert mechanic at the local Ruble-Vance car dealership. Although the business he represents has been through several owners in the 50 years that Dick has labored there, he has been on the job in the shop all this time and it is not excessive to say that he has become a landmark – "a conspicuous object that marks a locality," as Webster's says.

Dick, whose real first name is Daniel, has looked over the shoulders of, and supervised, several other technicians through the years. His co-workers estimate he has made enough Oklahoma state inspections of vehicles to wallpaper the town square 100 times or more. He has helped several generations of the same families with their auto service and repair needs since 1948, when he first reported for work at Moore Chevrolet Co. here. He has done it all, from lube technician to shop foreman. In each case his No.1 aim was to make sure the vehicles he worked on were in tip-top shape when their owners drove them home.

His smiling countenance will be missed down there on the block just east of the town square, but it's nice to know that Dick and his wife, Velma continue to make Perry their home. If you'd like to wish him well, drop by Ruble-Vance on Friday Oct. 30 between 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and shake his hand.

One way or another, Perry is losing some other stalwart folks. George Albright, one of the upper management team at the Charles Machine Works, Inc., and his wife, Luana, are moving on to a new challenge in Florida. Jeff and Judy Feuquay have

relocated to nearby Guthrie, although Jeff is continuing his law practice here while Judy becomes administrator of the Guthrie hospital. All these people have been good citizens, serving this community and their churches in a variety of ways sharing with us their energy, creative ideas and leadership, and we're going to miss them.

In the same way the other day, our family lost a dear member when Laura's Uncle R.C. Collins died in Oklahoma City after a stroke. He would have been 83 years old last week, but you would never have known that from his list of daily activities. First and foremost among those was his church, where he was a "full-time" volunteer providing years of business expertise in the areas of finance and insurance. I was truly concerned about the impact of his death on the administration of his church's affairs, but his pastor's column in this week's newsletter was reassuring. He said: "We will miss R.C. Collins. He will leave a void in many areas of Baptist Temple church life. However, we are fully assured that not only will we see R.C. again, but the Lord will provide others to take over his areas of service!" Laura's Mom, who is 102, will miss her little brother and the rest of us will, too. He was the quintessential avuncular figure in our family.



October 30, 1998

Muses and mutterings from mental notes assembled during a mostly sleepless night....

Generally, folks who drive down the middle of the road are willing to pull over when traffic approaches from front or rear, but some seem reluctant to do so. A surprising number of us (yes, that includes your humble servant on occasion) like to take our half of the road out of the middle. Sometimes it's not a conscious act, we just drift out there. In defense, we say that most Perry streets don't have center stripes to warn us as we amble toward the middle. I guess mid-road driving allows a sense of freedom, of power or dominion, over the whole thoroughfare, long as no other vehicles are coming.

A variation on this is the pair of drivers, usually coming from opposite directions, who flat out stop side by side in the middle of the block to chat back and forth between their cars, or pickups, or whatever. They generally ignore and thereby effectively stop traffic from both directions, paying no attention to others pulled up behind them, waiting impatiently for them to move on so all can proceed. That's just plain rude.

Interesting, though, this is not unique to Perry. You see middle of the roaders and mid-street talkfests occurring almost everywhere in cities big and small. Just like the people who persist in making a U-turn on a busy street to park a few steps closer to their destination. Police Chief Fred LeValley warns that this is against the law in Perry but it still goes on.

Seems strange to see that "MOVED" sign on the gate at Donaldson-Yahn Lumber Yard, now that all the materials there have been moved to the Coast-to-Coast store on Fir Avenue. Donaldson-Yahn was one of the true business pioneers in this community and it served Noble county well for many generations. With the retirement of the affable Glenn Yahn a while back and the sale of the lumber yard to the Kennedy family, another page of progress was turned in Perry's ongoing history book.

Belatedly we have learned of the recent death of Eleanor Keaton, widow of the great comic genius Buster Keaton, who did some of his growing up in Perry in the early years of this century. Eleanor passed away on October 19 in California after a battle with both cancer and emphysema. She came to Perry with Buster in 1957 for the world premiere of the Paramount Pictures movie, "The Buster Keaton Story," starring Donald O'Connor in the title role. Perry folks were delighted to have

Buster and Eleanor in our midst that day when the film was first shown, and despite a very busy schedule both of them seemed to enjoy the occasion.

News of Mrs. Keaton's death was relayed to me by Frank Scheide, an associate professor in the University of Arkansas department of communications. Mr. Scheide was in Perry today doing some video taping at the old Keaton house on Grove street. He recently completed a half-hour documentary on Buster's early years in Perry and elsewhere. The Perry connection is given proper emphasis and Millie Highfill, one of our local historians, is shown in an interview segment about the Keatons. The documentary will be shown on BBC in London next December.