

October 1, 2002

Congratulations to Nancy Stirman for the attractive new paint job on the two-story building housing her shop on the east side of the square. The project has been approved by the Perry Main Street organization. It's a good example of how much can be accomplished simply by painting, and this job helps to brighten the entire east side. And just next door, the historic Foucart Building, occupied by the Perry Chamber of Commerce, the Perry Main Street organization and the office and studio of Perry PIN, Inc., also help anchor that part of the downtown Perry business district. A little down the street from there is the Malzahn Heritage Center, still drawing acclaim after the unveiling slightly more than two years ago. Ace's High kind of started things moving on the east side with their neat and attractive business and we hear that more improvements are planned in that vicinity. Yes, our downtown is still alive. Thanks to everyone who took part in the effort to clean up and brighten things for the big Cherokee Strip celebration in mid-September.

Speaking of the Stirman building, how many of you remember when the downstairs portion once housed the Arcade Billiard Parlor, operated by Tom McLiman, and the Babcock Cafe, operated by Guy and Florence Babcock? Several other tenants also were housed there through the years. The upstairs offices usually were filled with doctors, attorneys, accountants and various other professionals.

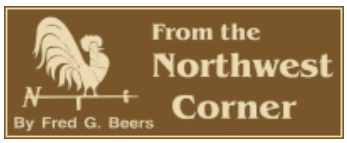
Across the square, on the west side, Nancy Nida has added some new twists to her enterprise. In the two-story building adjacent to her deli she is now operating a unique shop featuring merchandise formerly located in the deli. Wearing apparel, cups and mugs and note cards are just a few of the things you'll find there. Perhaps in the future an access door will be made in the wall separating the two businesses.

Here are two more anecdotes provided by a regular reader of this mishmash.

A man in the supermarket was pushing a cart that contained a screaming, bellowing baby. The gentleman kept repeating softly, "Don't scream, Albert; don't yell, Albert; keep calm, Albert." A woman standing next to him said, "You certainly are to be commended for trying to soothe your son, Albert." The man looked at her and said, "Lady, I am Albert."

A three-year-old boy went with his dad to see a new litter of kittens. Upon returning home, he breathlessly informed his mother, "There were two boy kittens and two girl kittens." "How did you know that?" his mother asked. "Daddy picked them up and looked underneath," he replied. "I think it's printed on the bottom."

Let's meet here again next time.



October 4, 2002

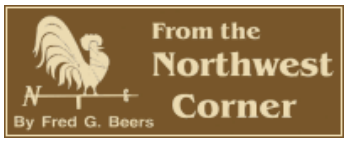
Stand by now for a few bits of foolishness offered by a faithful reader. These are not guaranteed knee-slappers, but perhaps they will make you smile.

Two robins were sitting in a tree. "I'm really hungry," said the first one. "Me too," said the second. "Let's fly down and find some lunch." They flew to the ground and found a nice plot of plowed soil full of worms. They ate and ate and ate and ate until they could eat no more. "I'm so full I don't think I can fly back up to the tree," said the first one. "Me too. Let's just lay here and bask in the warm sun," said the second. "OK," said the first. So, they plopped down to bask in the sun. No sooner had they fallen asleep than a big fat tomcat sneaked up and gobbled them up. As he sat washing his face after his meal, he thought.... (Are you ready? You're gonna love this.... Here's what the cat thought:)
"I just love baskin' robins."

While working for an organization that delivers lunches to elderly shut-ins, I used to take my four-year-old daughter on my afternoon rounds. She was unfailingly intrigued by the various appliances of old age, particularly the canes, walkers and wheelchairs. One day I found her staring at a pair of false teeth soaking in a glass. As I braced myself for the inevitable barrage of questions, she merely turned and whispered, "The tooth fairy will never believe this I"

A lady friend (Laura) told me the other day about a local residential area with numerous improvements that I really should see. Roughly, it's the 1000 block on Delaware street, plus some parts of adjacent neighborhoods. With that admonition, we made a little tour of the area one recent evening and checked it out. She's right (as usual). It took a lot of time and effort but those folks have created and restored a truly neat, attractive residential area. For one thing, a brand new two-story home has been built on a corner lot. It has a pleasant architectural style complete with a white picket fence. Some of the older houses in that same vicinity seem to be freshly painted, yards are free of clutter and it is just altogether very inviting and pleasant to behold. Makes you think those people are proud of their property, and rightly so. I'm sure there are other neighborhoods with visible signs of tender loving care. We just need to commend those responsible for that kind of attention and let them know that we appreciate it.

Enjoy the early fall weather. Tomorrow we may have a snow storm. It's Oklahoma, you know.



October 8, 2002

You may have noticed the story and photos of our Perry Junior High band in this newspaper the other day after the youngsters came home covered with glory following their appearance in the Tulsa State Fair. If you did not experience a surge of pride for that accomplishment, you must not have a granddaughter or grandson in that band. Mine's a stellar seventh grade trumpeter enjoying another year (her third) as a part of that tradition-laden organization. (All our grandkids are smart and good looking.) Perry's band honors are like those enjoyed by the PHS wrestling team. You just expect more from them because of the acclaim heaped on their predecessors and their directors.

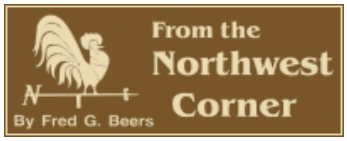
The Perry band program had its official beginning in the 1920s after the arrival here of the Russian-born maestro, Professor Leopold Radgowsky, and he's been a tough act to follow ever since. Before his untimely death in 1938, he exposed young people and adults of this area to the beauty of all kinds of music. It's a story familiar to most of us and it has been told and retold many times. It still bears repeating because it makes all of us burst with pride when we see the young musicians of this generation working hard not only to stay in step but also to experience the joy of music.

Now, on to another subject. Let's take a look back at the way it was in Perry as mirrored in the local newspaper on October 5, 1934. Radio broadcasts of the World Series were being heard on both the Columbia and NBC networks and the public

was invited to hear them at the Noble County Motor Co., corner of Sixth and Elm Streets. Ford was sponsoring the broadcasts. At the Roxy Theatre, "Now and Forever" was being shown Sunday through Wednesday. Starring were Gary Cooper, Carole Lombard and Shirley Temple. At the Annex, the feature for that same period was "The Cat's Paw," starring Harold Lloyd.

The PHS Maroon football team was preparing to meet the Lawton High School team at Lawton. Coach Hump Daniels was taking a squad of 20 for the game. The Maroons were undefeated at this point of the season. Meanwhile, city workmen were ready to start the installation of floodlights at the fairgrounds field where Perry played its home games. Twenty Perry businesses and individuals were paying for the lights to make possible night games for the first time in Perry.

Sid Wade and Bailey Render were advertising Marfak lubrication for customers' cars at their Texaco filling station, Seventh and Birch Streets. Candidates for the third district county commissioner office were Ed Bieberdorf, Republican, and Charles O. Johnson, Democrat. Many more county offices were at stake in the November general election.



October 11, 2002

I really enjoy those yellowing copies of this newspaper that were given to me recently by Virginia Gengler. They tell interesting stories about life in Perry many years ago and they conjure up images of a kinder, gentler time that we can only wish will return someday. Anyway, here are a few bits and pieces of information contained in *The Perry Daily Journal* on Thursday, July 7, 1938.

Lucille Ritthaler was honored with a miscellaneous shower by a group of friends at the Presbyterian church. Miss Ritthaler, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A.L. Ritthaler, was the bride-elect of William Clarence Graham. Virginia Malzahn gave a reading, and Lois Magee and Frances Russell sang two numbers with piano accompaniment by Mary McClellan. Camilla Francis and Billie Boyer assisted the honoree in opening her many lovely gifts. Elizabeth Treeman and Frances Marion Jones presided at the punch table.

Young people of the Christian church were planning an ice cream supper to raise funds for delegates to a summer conference. Planning to attend the conference were Dixie Carter, Irma Newman, Helen Marie Neal, Mary Ellen Ritthaler and Jack Lewellen.

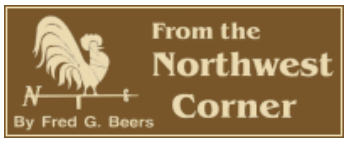
Hon. Henry S. Johnston and Judge W.M. Bowles were to speak in the Public Square in support of W.S. Key, Democratic candidate for governor. Brownie Drug Co. had a small ad offering a free 25-cent value bottle of Mennen Skin Bracer with each purchase of a big 75-cent value bottle, all for 49 cents, while supplies lasted.

It was Thursday, and that meant *The Journal* was full of large ads from Perry's many grocery stores. We'll include just a few highlights. Safeway invited grocery shoppers to compare their prices with anyone else's. Some examples: Safeway offered lard at 10 cents a pound ("you bring a pail"); veal shoulder steak at 15 cents a pound, corn-fed baby beef roast at 15 cents a pound, and sliced bacon ("no rind") at 23 cents a pound. Galaway's Market ("we deliver") advertised sardines packed in salad oil at six cans for 25 cents and Vienna sausages at two cans for 15 cents. Barge's Grocery & Market had boneless picnic hams at 31 cents a pound, potted meat at three for 10 cents and 10 gallons of Brimfull prunes at 28 cents.

The Famous Department Store announced a July clearance sale of shoes. Some examples were $6.50 Paramount white shoes for women on sale for $3.69; and $3.95 Jolene shoes for $2.19. Boys' shoes were reduced from one-fourth to one-third. Freeman men's shoes, two-tone and white, were reduced from $5 to $3.29. Straw hats were half off making the sale prices as low as 74 cents, 90 cents and $1.23. Smith's Variety Store on the east side of the square had anklets at 15 cents a pair.

On the sports page, *The Journal* had a wrap-up story about the next game scheduled for the semi-pro Perry Merchants baseball team. The Perry nine was to meet the Stillwater Boomers at Stillwater. The Merchants were hoping to snap a long Boomer winning streak after defeating the Eason Oilers, 16-4, in their previous game. Perry Manager Harold Daniels was uncertain who would start on the pitcher's mound for the Merchants, but indications were that lefty Roy Winkler would get the nod.

And so it was in Perry America that July day in 1938. As you can see, there were some happy times to make up for the Great Depression. We'll tune in on that era again soon.



October 15, 2002

Let's lead things off with some anecdotes provided by two faithful readers.

Friend Roy Kendrick passes along the following under the general heading of "George Carlin Strikes Again," and here's a sample for your amusement.

Ever wonder about those people who spend $2.00 apiece on those little bottles of Evian water? Try spelling Evian backwards .... Isn't making a smoking section in a restaurant like making a speeding section in a swimming pool? ... If four out of five people SUFFER from diarrhea, does that mean one enjoys it?

You want more? OK, here we go.

A little girl was watching her parents dress for a party. When she saw her dad donning his tuxedo, she warned, "Daddy, you shouldn't wear that suit." "And why not,. darling?" "You know that it always gives you a headache the next morning."

While walking along the sidewalk in front of his church, a minister heard the intoning of a prayer that nearly made his collar wilt. Apparently, his five-year-old son and his playmates had found a dead robin. Feeling that proper burial should be performed, they had secured a small box and cotton batting, then dug a hole and made ready for the disposal of the deceased. The minister's son was chosen to say the appropriate prayers and with sonorous dignity intoned his version of what he thought his father always said: "Glory be unto the Faaaather. And unto the Sonnn.... And into the hole he goooes."

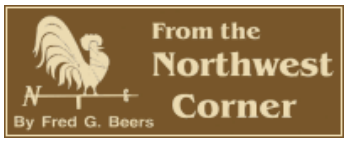
Let's see what was happening in Our Town on July 6, 1933, as recorded in a copy of *The Perry Daily Journal* provided by Virginia Gengler.

On the editorial page, managing editor Sam Schweiger wrote about the collapse of a world economic conference in London, just as he had predicted. He believed most of the delegates considered the conference nothing more than a

vacation. A two-column ad on the same page announced that the Hotel Black, "newest popular priced hotel in Oklahoma City," had 215 rooms starting at $2 per night. Dan James was manager of the hotel.

A popular feature of that era was a brief daily column entitled "Around the Perry Square." In that day's edition, these bits appeared: "Wayne Proctor not being able to figure out why people thought it was hot this morning - James Ledbetter not giving Glenn Yahn much encouragement in regard to a trip to Ponca - Leonard Winters pushing a cigar down the street - O.R. Hall rushing into the post office - George Butler ready to have it out with a semi-prizefighter...."

We'll have more of these when time and space allow.



October 18, 2002

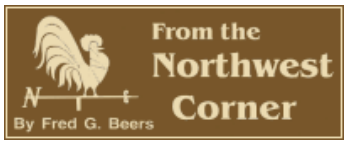
How about some more tidbits of news as found in a copy of the May 28, 1934, issue of *The Perry Daily Journal*, provided by Virginia Gengler. Here we go with some nuggets chosen at random.

Final services were held for Frank Rigg, pioneer Noble county resident and Frisco Railroad agent here who had died of a heart attack. Theodore Hartman, 9, was injured when a .22 caliber bullet exploded after it was hit by a hammer in his hand. Theodore had been playing with the bullet, which he thought was a dud. A neighbor boy had given it to him. John M. White, manager of Wacker's Variety Store, returned home after ten weeks on active duty with the CCC camp at Talihina. White was a first lieutenant in the Officer Reserve Corps and was second in command at the camp. The 200 CCC camp boys at Talihina were building truck trails through the mountains.

(More from the 1934 issue of the PDJ.) Major Gordon W. Lillie, better known as Pawnee Bill, pulled out of the annual spring rodeo and Indian pow-wow at Pawnee in a disagreement with the show planners. Discord between the white-haired cowman and the city of Pawnee was the only reason given. Pawnee Bill usually was master of ceremonies for the show. Perry stores were planning to close for Decoration Day but no extensive programs to honor the dead were planned here. The Perry Merchants baseball team defeated the Ponca City team, 6-5, in an exciting game played here the previous day. Mr. and Mrs. Al Singletary announced the birth of a son in an Oklahoma City hospital. Sixteen students were enrolled for summer school classes being offered at Perry High School.

Perry Middle School Journalism class students, taught by Joan Hubble, have produced their first issue (for this school year) of the *Maroon Messenger*. Again it is an attractive and well-written newspaper. One feature this month is a brief explanation and favorable commentary by Ian Woods concerning the new "minute of silence" law. Congratulations to Mrs. Hubble and her students for their dedication to excellence.

Many of you were kind enough to say you enjoyed the "Idiot Sightings" in a previous column, so, with that in mind, here's some more for today's closer. **Idiot Sighting #4**. I work with an individual who plugged her power strip back into itself and for the life of her couldn't understand why her system would not turn on. **Idiot Sighting #5**. When my husband and I arrived at an automobile dealership to pick up our car, we were told the keys had been locked in it. We went to the service department and found a mechanic working feverishly to unlock the driver's side door. As I watched from the passenger side, I instinctively tried the door handle and discovered that it was unlocked. "Hey," I announced to the mechanic, "it's open." To which he replied, "I know - I already got that side."



October 22, 2002

If you're ready to take a break, pour a cup of coffee or whatever you wish, kick back and enjoy the following, provided by a thoughtful reader.

When a close relative was in the hospital with a fractured leg, she was on morphine to ease the pain. She was going in and out of consciousness, so to keep her entertained while she was awake I was reading her clues for an EASY crossword puzzle and she was supplying the answers. Most of the answers were three- and four-letter words. After we had done this for a while, she asked me, "Don't you know ANY of those?"

The math teacher saw that little Johnny wasn't paying attention in class. She called on him and said, "Johnny! What are 4, 9, 2 and 38?" Little Johnny quickly replied, 'NBC, CBS, HBO and the Cartoon Network!"

When I stopped the bus to pick up Chris for pre-school, I noticed an older woman hugging him as he left the house. "Is that your grandmother?" I asked. "Yes," Chris said. "She's come to visit us for a while." "How nice," I said. "Where does she live?" "At the airport," Chris replied. "Whenever we want her, we just go out there and get her."

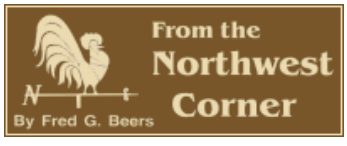
I didn't know if my granddaughter had learned her colors yet, so I decided to test her. I would point out something and ask what color it was. She would tell me and always she was correct. But, it was fun for me, so I continued. At last, she headed for the door, saying sagely, "Grandma, I think you should try to figure out some of these yourself!"

When the mother returned from the grocery store, her small son pulled out the box of animal crackers he had begged for, then he spread the animal-shaped crackers all over the kitchen counter. "What are you doing?" his Mom asked. "The box says you can't eat them if the seal is broken," the boy explained. "I'm looking for the seal."

And, finally, this one to grow on:

This little grandmother was surprised by her seven-year-old grandson one morning. He had made her coffee. She drank what was the worst cup of coffee in her life. When she got to the bottom, there were three of those little green Army men in the cup. She said, "Honey, what are these Army men doing in my coffee?" Her grandson said, "Grandma, it says on TV, The best part of waking up is soldiers in your cup!"

Thanks to all the many contributors who help by putting a little spark in this twice-weekly effort. Keep those cards and letters coming. Please.



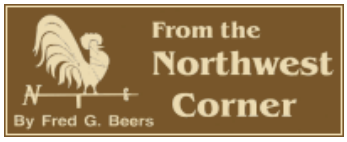
October 25, 2002

By the time you read this, Laura and I will have returned from the annual reunion of the *Stars & Stripes* Association, made up of former staff members of the various European and Pacific editions of that venerable Army newspaper, The Stars & Stripes. This year's reunion was held in Honolulu, which is where our edition was published during World War II. It was distributed to American military personnel throughout the Pacific Ocean area. I had the great good fortune to be assigned to that edition, and it was a memorable experience. It also was one of the most interesting periods of my life, partly because of the talented and gifted men I served with in that unique endeavor.

Although we griped about Army life in general, we were well aware that we were living in that paradise known as Hawaii and not dodging Japanese Samurai warrior bullets in a cold and wet jungle foxhole. But each and every one of us believed we were rendering an authentic service to lighten the load for those brave GIs who faced the enemy daily. We had stacks of letters from those men to prove they read and appreciated the paper. It was written, edited and distributed by enlisted men, and its daily "Letters to the Editor" column was a relief valve for many GI complaints.

The S&S originated during the Civil War but achieved much of its fame during World War I with superb deskmen and writers like managing editor Alexander Woollcott; Harold Ross, founder of *The New Yorker* magazine after the war; Steve Early, who became FDR's press secretary; and others. In the World War II editions, some of the paper's stars were cartoonist Bill Mauldin; and the CBS-TV curmudgeon, Andy Rooney. Our paper had Jerry Siegel, creator of the Superman comic strip character; David Stern, the originator of Francis, the talking mule, which became a movie series with Donald O'Connor in a starring role; and a stable of capable newsmen from all parts of the U.S. including all the metropolitan areas- New York, Chicago, St. Louis and Los Angeles, and all the points in between. That included one novice from Perry, Oklahoma. All of us took great pride in our work. The seasoned writers and editors were willing to share their knowledge and expertise with anyone who cared to ask for it. I was transferred from the 98th Infantry Division to S&S and served first as a general assignment reporter and later as a copy desk editor. You can bet I soaked up a lot of great tips on newspapering from those guys.

Sadly, the ranks of my contemporaries have been drastically thinned by the aging process and not many of my Mid-Pacific colleagues are able to attend. These reunions are not nearly as much fun as they used to be when more of my wartime pals were still frisky and ambulatory. Perhaps I'll have more to say about this bittersweet reunion later on, but I just wanted to let you know that *The Stars & Stripes* torch is still being passed on, even in this time of a very uneasy peace.



October 29, 2002

The approach of another Halloween always makes me think of that beloved little self-styled "witch," Perry's own Biber, who loved kids as much as she loved poetry, and that is saying something more than somewhat. Biber, whose formal name was Mrs. Russell (Belva) VanBiber, passed away a few years ago after a prolonged period of illness in one of our local nursing homes. Her legacy of laughing at the inevitable array of daily frustrations endeared her to many friends and associates, young and old. Her blood relative family was not especially large, but if you count the kiddos (and grownups) who appreciated her sly sense of humor, the head count goes up considerably.

Before the infirmities of advancing age and declining health rendered her chairfast, Biber was the one Perry people called on for impromptu programs. These could be of any length and in any venue, frequently on short notice as a fill-in for

someone else who had to renege on a commitment at the last minute. Her material usually had a comedic twist but she also was capable of inducing a few tears with her "readings" about little ordinary things. I heard her many times but I cannot remember a time when she used exactly the same material repetitively.

In more recent years Biber became Perry's designated Halloween witch. Seated in the garage attached to her home, she would stir a bubbling pot containing mysterious elements and with steam swirling. Dressed in the garb of a witch and speaking in a squeaky, high-pitched voice, Biber doled out sweet treats to children from every neighborhood in Perry. Along with that and a few cackles, she would engage the young people in friendly conversation to be sure they understood the whole thing was just an act. You had to feel at ease if you spent more than a few seconds in Biber 's presence.

Along with the Halloween shenanigans, Biber and her very patient husband developed a kind of Christmas bit of business as "Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus." Russ was very supportive. He usually did not have lines to say, but he dressed in a Santa suit and Belva wore a matching outfit, what she supposed Mrs. Claus would wear. Together they received youngsters in the courthouse park on several nights before Christmas, handing out candy and receiving letters addressed to Santa. If you were a kid here in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, you remember all this.

Biber wrote many verses of homespun poetry. She loved all kinds of poems and collections of her works were published. Much of her material was inspirational, and some of her output may have given her the resolve to stay happy through years of bad health after Russ preceded her in death. So did the baby dolls she clutched in her arms as she guided her wheelchair around the nursing home. Biber was a unique Perry person and she is remembered fondly by many of those whose lives were touched by her in happier times. As Perry's designated "witch," she was truly a local institution.