



September 4, 2001

On one of those recent steamy, triple-digit temperature afternoons, while running the usual house-husband errands in a comfortable, air-conditioned vehicle, I realized once again that our town has many wonderful assets that we take for granted. Among these are the stately elm trees that cast their welcome shade on so many streets.

We have had our share of the devastating blight that inflicts Dutch elm disease on defenseless trees and has led to the removal of some noble examples from lawns in various parts of Perry, but a lot of them remain and still give many neighborhoods a distinctive, friendly appearance. One notable example is on Cedar street, particularly the block between Twelfth and Thirteenth streets. Appropriately, Elm street also is a good example, and so are many others. A few years ago, when *The Perry Daily Journal* had a weekly Forum Page, Mr. L.J. Mooter won a prize for his essay boasting of the beautiful elm trees along Perry streets. The late Mr. Mooter would be pleased to know that so many of them still remain.

Many people see similarities between Perry and the Victorian homes described by Booth Tarkington in *Seventeen* and in his other novels. That's not at all a bad comparison. On these lazy summer days you can almost hear the clicking sound of push lawn mowers described by Mr. Tarkington, except that today's versions are not driven by a Willie Baxter, but by a small gasoline engine with a teen-age boy (or girl, or an adult) walking behind to steer the contraption.

In the courthouse park, more of those beautiful trees provide a shady, cool oasis for shoppers and others in the downtown area. Many travelers through our city have found that location to be a welcome, restful place for a brief time of relaxation. The park is one of Perry's most valuable and distinctive trademarks as it surrounds the stately courthouse building, the Carnegie Library and the post office with silent, leafy sentinels.

We are deeply indebted to Mr. Will Little and Perry's territorial-era county commissioners for their labors and foresight in creating the courthouse park way back there in the early days. And more thanks go to today's commissioners and all the others who have seen to it that the park continues to be a source of community pride. A Perry Garden Club unit has erected a granite marker with a metal plate that tells, in brief, the story of Mr. Little and the courthouse park trees.

But we also owe a deep bow to homeowners and others throughout this city who have provided us with those beautiful, shady trees, along with clean lawns and tastefully tended flower beds and shrubbery. Next time you're driving around town, notice some examples – there are many of them – and tell the folks who live there that you appreciate their concern for the beautification of Perry.



September 7, 2001

The September issue of *American Heritage*, one of my favorite magazines, is now being delivered to subscribers throughout the land, and it contains the editors' annual compilation of the Most Overrated and Most Underrated in a variety of subjects. This feature is always amusing, sometimes thought-provoking, and (of course) frequently debatable. I disagree with several of their choices.

For instance, guest writer Arthur Schlesinger Jr. is responsible for choosing the Most Overrated and Most Underrated movies of all time. I don't envy him. Everyone has his or her own choices in those categories and most of us are prepared to go to war in defense of the titles we like. But Mr. Schlesinger's choice of *Gone With the Wind* as the Most Overrated movie really angers me. In my own personal list of choices, *GWTW* stands alone as the greatest movie ever. I have seen it many times, and in each instance I have been moved by the drama, romance, adventure, baring of human foibles, and faithful retelling of America's shame in slavery. Lately there has been a tendency to ridicule the novel by Margaret Mitchell and the movie itself by self-appointed arbiters of good taste. I can only testify to my own reaction to the original book and the movie. I found both of them to be wonderful. Who can forget the performances of Clark Gable, Leslie Howard, Vivien Leigh, Olivia DeHavilland, Thomas Mitchell and Hattie McDaniel? All of them, plus the director, Victor Fleming, were super stars in their own right.

As for Mr. Schlesinger's choice of the Most Underrated movie, he nominates a worthy World War II comedy, *To Be or Not to Be*, starring Jack Benny and Carol Lombard, for this award. Part of his rationale is the fact that the film was directed by Ernst Lubitsch, who produced "a gallery of wonderful movies." I can't argue about this one because the film and the director happen to be among my own favorites. But there's another film classic that is my personal choice for Most Underrated. That would be *The Best Years of Our Lives*, a post-World War II story with a dynamic cast that included Fredric March, Myrna Loy, Dana Andrews, Teresa Wright, Virginia Mayo and Cathy O'Donnell. It also introduced us to Harold Russell, who lost both his hands in war-time action and went on to win an Oscar for his role. The director was William Wyler, another giant in his field.

So, those are my choices for consideration alongside those of Mr. Schlesinger. Sad to say, few if any of the movies I've seen during the past 30 years are notable enough to be possibilities for Most Underrated or Most Overrated. They are, mostly, just junk. I think the movies need to quit disgorging the trash they've been producing and return to some of the themes that audiences will remember decades from now. But, let's face it. As long as we buy tickets to see sewage on the screen, that's what they will be giving us.



September 11, 2001

New traffic lanes have been marked with fresh paint on streets around the downtown Perry square, and that's just one of the sure signs pointing to our annual celebration of the Cherokee Outlet land run on September 16, 1893. In Perry, everyone knows what it means when somebody speaks of "the 16th celebration." It's our town's birthday, partner. Unlike some of our neighbors here in the outlet, we have never failed to throw a party on this historic anniversary, and all indications point to another big one this year.

It's a time when everyday cares are laid aside and all of us join in the celebration. Most retail businesses are closed for the event each year because this day is not merely a gimmick to lure more customers. It's a holiday for everyone. The traditional date is the Saturday closest to September 16, and this year that falls on Sunday. The annual parade will help kick things off on Saturday morning, September 15th, followed by free entertainment the rest of the day in the courthouse park. Concession stands will be open for food, fun and games, the carnival will be in full swing just off the northeast corner of the square, the annual Noble county free fair will just be winding down out at the fairgrounds, and you'll find a holiday spirit everywhere.

The aforementioned newly painted traffic lanes even help to brighten things up, and that should remind us that the whole town can use a few refreshing touches. We can join in the spirit of this celebration by getting rid of the trash in our yards, mowing the lawns (don't blow the clippings onto the street), and perhaps touching up some painted areas on our property, or just plain cleaning the premises. You know you've been meaning to do that. Now is the time! We will entertain thousands of visitors, including a large number of former Perryans who enjoy returning for this occasion. Let's show them that we are still proud of this town. Remember to include the kids in the bands and the organizations that entered floats in the parade. Let them know we appreciate their efforts.

And when the party is over, don't forget to thank the people who made it all possible. There's no way to name each one of them, but we know that the staff, board members and officers of the Chamber of Commerce deserve a round of applause, as do the fair board members, extension workers and others who run the county fair, not to mention the exhibitors. The Cherokee Strip celebration in Perry just seems to get bigger and better every year but it doesn't just happen. It takes the combined labors of just about everyone in this town, so if you are among that group, give yourself a pat on the back.

Just a brief word about the death of Gordon Abel last week. He was only 67 years old, and that is pretty young as things are measured now. His daddy, the late Jim Abel, was mayor of Perry for a while in the 1930s and his mother, Viola, was a city officer for several years after that. The Abels lived just a block away from the house where I grew up, but I came to know Gordon better when he was a clerk at the M&W Food Store on the north side of the square, in the building where my Dad's drug store had been located. I can remember Gordon's dad, Jim, who was the local Railway Express agent, telling me when Gordon was born that the baby's middle name was Lillie, honoring the colorful friend of the Abels, Col. William F. (Pawnee Bill) Lillie, who used to ride his beautiful palomino each year in Perry's Cherokee Strip parade. Our condolences to Gordon's family.



September 14, 2001

Here's an addendum to the recent series of columns about some Perry eating places, mostly looking back to recall a few of the favorites. As I stated when this subject matter began, not all of them were to be included, but here are the names of some that may help you recall the fragrance of the culinary art as it existed in a few places.

Several readers have reminded me of the Nu-Way Café on the west side of the square, at 307 Seventh street. The Nu-Way was operated by Elvena Dillard and her mother, the late Pet Dillard. The ladies also had a restaurant for a while in a building that was attached to the old two-story Bank of Commerce building on the north side of the square. That building has had several occupants through the years. After the bank closed, some of the tenants have been Reynolds & Taylor, and (still later) the Oklahoma Tire & Supply Co. store operated by Wilson Clark and later by Gordon Clark, who were not related. The OTASCO store was destroyed by fire and Gordon moved his business to the old Safeway Store building, which now is home to the Dollar General Store. Meanwhile, Albright Title & Trust Co. erected a sparkling new single-story building on the corner. Nancy Groom's tag agency now shares the building with the Albright folks. Still with me?

A few of us still remember that Forrest Severe preceded the Dillards in that location behind the Bank of Commerce. Forrest served a great bowl of chili, among other delicacies. He later moved to 420 Kaw street, the old U.S. 77 curve at what was then the northeast corner of town. There, before Mr. Severe arrived, Eve Stanislav had a tavern with a meeting

room that also was used by dancers who brought nickels for the jukebox. Still later it became a Jersey Queen franchise, operated by Mr. Severe. Forrest provided lots of malts and other treats for many of the youngsters who played in Perry's little league baseball program.

Ethel Koch has been a waitress at several Perry eateries, and she tells me there once was a Jones Café on the south side of the square at 608 Cedar, and she was employed there.

I've relied heavily on information found in several old city directories in my collection. Most of them have been previously named, but here are a few more from the 1952 directory: Coffee Cup Café, 600 Fifth street; Eddie's Drive-In on north Fifth street; Harvey's Café, 302 Sixth; The Oasis, 409 Sixth; Perry Coffee Shop, 600 Cedar; Roads Café, 510 Cedar; Thompson's Golden Barbecue, Highway 77 South; and Woods Café, 636 Cedar.

Several restaurants were named in the 1948 directory. Included then were these: Auto-Eat, 402 Sixth; The Period Drive-In, South U.S. 77; Corner Lunch, 123 Seventh; Elite Café, 609 Delaware; Harvey's Café, 302 Sixth; Kumback Lunch, 625 Delaware; Marcy Café, 806 Ninth; Nu-Way Café, 307 Seventh; Perry Coffee Shop, 500 Cedar; Severe's Barbecue, 420 Kaw; and the U.S. Café, 642 Cedar.

The 1940 directory listed these restaurants: Auto-Eat Café, 402 Sixth; Babcock Café, 302 Sixth; Corner Lunch, 123 Seventh; Elite Hotel & Café, 509 Delaware; Folan Café, 619 Delaware; Gem Café, 608 Cedar; Kumback Lunch, 625 Delaware; La Fonda Café, 538 Cedar; Palace Café, 318 Sixth; Seventy-Seven Café, 522 Sixth; Temple Lunch, 700 Delaware; U.S. Café, 638 Cedar; West Side Café, 307 Seventh; and the Whiteway Café, 407 Sixth.

The 1912 Perry city directory: does not have a separate listing of restaurants, but along about then my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Bucklin, had a chili parlor and notions store on the north side of the square at 621 Delaware. Next door east, at 619 Delaware, was the Chili House, operated by Mrs. R.C. Cartwright, who offered short orders, chili, a soda fountain and confectionery. I'm sure there were others. Several years later, Jim and Edith Brier had a lunch counter in our family business, the City Drug, at 643 Delaware. And let us not forget Forney's Ice Cream Store at 324 Seventh, the west side of the square, where good sandwiches were served along with Cokes, malts and popular tunes from the jukebox.

There almost certainly were other through the years, but that's a pretty complete list. Maybe some of those I've named in these columns bring back some special memories of days gone by.



September 18, 2001



These "ladies" probably brought a little laughter to depression-plagued Perrans in the late 1930s. Do you know them?

Rummaging idly through a stack of old, unrelated but interesting photographs the other day, I came across one that piqued my curiosity even more than the others. It appears with today's column and I'm hoping that perhaps a reader can shed some light on the story of this comical photo.

Here is what I know about it. The seven people shown sitting and standing are all well-known Perry business and professional men wearing women's attire. This originally was a picture postcard, and it probably was sold at different locations around town. An inscription in the upper left, corner reads: "To My Valentine - Enright Studio -1937." That means the photo was taken at a sitting in the studio of Mr. Barney Enright on a balcony located at the rear of Nelson's Pharmacy on the south side of the square, 609 Cedar street, where City Hall is now located. The year shown on the postal cancellation also is 1937. A three-cent postage stamp is affixed, and the addressee is "L.B. Swearingen, Perry, Okla." There is no return address and no message. Intriguing.

At some point, some person took the time to write the names of the "ladies" on the reverse side of the card. Here they are, from left to right seated on the front row:

Charles Monroe Sr., Russell Dotts, Dr. O.W. Boyer, Ted Newton and Everett Nelson. Standing behind them are L.B. Swearingen and Paul Harding. All were familiar to folks who transacted business in Perry.

It is quite likely that these gentlemen are made up and dressed up for some kind of local benefit show, the kind we used to have regularly almost every year. Messrs. Monroe, Boyer and Harding were charter members of the Lions club and the

others also may have been Lions in 1937, but there is nothing to confirm that.

Mr. Monroe and Mr. Dotts were partners in the Dotts-Monroe Hardware Store on the south side of the square; Dr. Boyer was a dentist with offices on the second story of a building on the east side of the square; Ted Newton and his father, George, operated the Christoph & Newton Furniture Store on the west side of the square and also the Newton Funeral Home; Everett Nelson had a drug store (which also housed Mr. Enright's photo studio) on the south side; L. B. Swearingen was an engineer at the city water and light plant; and Paul Harding was in the insurance business.

As you can see from the photo, each of the seven gentlemen was wearing lipstick, rouge and eye makeup to enhance their appearance, not to mention skirts pulled well back of the knees and the popular cloche hats along with the other female finery. My guess is they probably had more laughs than anyone else out of this picture and whatever else they did in drag that year, when the Great Depression made the nation yearn for comic relief. Can anyone shed more light on this old photo?



September 21, 2001

Let's chat some more about the movies, or is the subject becoming a bore? I certainly hope such is not the case.

Something related to this topic seems to pop up unexpectedly all the time. An article, "They Refused to Allow Their Town to Die," recently appeared in the Sunday Parade magazine. As you would surmise from the title, it's about a small town (pop. 4,400) that fought back from the familiar decay process that seems to be afflicting America's small to medium-size communities, like Perry. The subject of the piece was Tunkhannock, Pa. A sub-head on the story states: "For many residents of rural Tunkhannock, Pa., the closing of their only movie theater in the mid-'80s marked the decline of the town and left little to offer their kids." Facing that challenge, a local lady named Hildy Morgan stepped forward. "I always loved the arts," she explained, "and I could see no real program for kids. I know what the arts can do for kids." She then spearheaded a drive to rescue and revive the town's only movie theater.

How they went about reaching that goal is told, and the main emphasis was on reopening the theater. It was a total success, thanks to local volunteers. You may have read the article. Space does not allow me to retell the details here, but they got the job done. Residents of Tunkhannock no longer must drive to neighboring Scranton, 35 miles away, to go to the movies. Their hometown theater gives them the opportunity to see first-run films. For details, dig out the *Parade* magazine dated August 12. It's an interesting piece and relates to Perry in many ways.

A little closer to home is this news article tucked away in a corner of an advertising broadsheet published in Oklahoma for "seniors" – those who have reached the age of at least 45 years. (I thought the line of demarcation was 55.) Paula Fuqua, a writer for the sheet, has glowing words to describe Chandler. Among her comments are these: "The movie theater (in Chandler) shows the latest box office hits, one at a time, for only \$3 a seat." That's right. Chandler, like Tunkhannock, is smaller than Perry and it is located near some larger cities where multiple screen theaters lure movie fans with a litany of new films each week. The sheet also brags, with justification, about the town's beautiful golf course, the quaint and clean shops offering everything from exclusive designer clothing and jewelry to the bargain hunters' paradise. Any of that remind you of Perry, except for the movie theater?

Who knows? One of these days Perry might have its own movie theater again, if enough people with the right objectives can put together a plan that would work here. One more observation: The other night (it was on a Tuesday) Laura and I attended a movie at the cinemaplex in Stillwater. There were two other couples – a total of six people – in the audience, and the feature film was one of the season's most heralded offerings. Obviously, it would take larger audiences than that to support a theater anywhere, and the buzz is that even some of the multiplexes are in trouble.



September 25, 2001

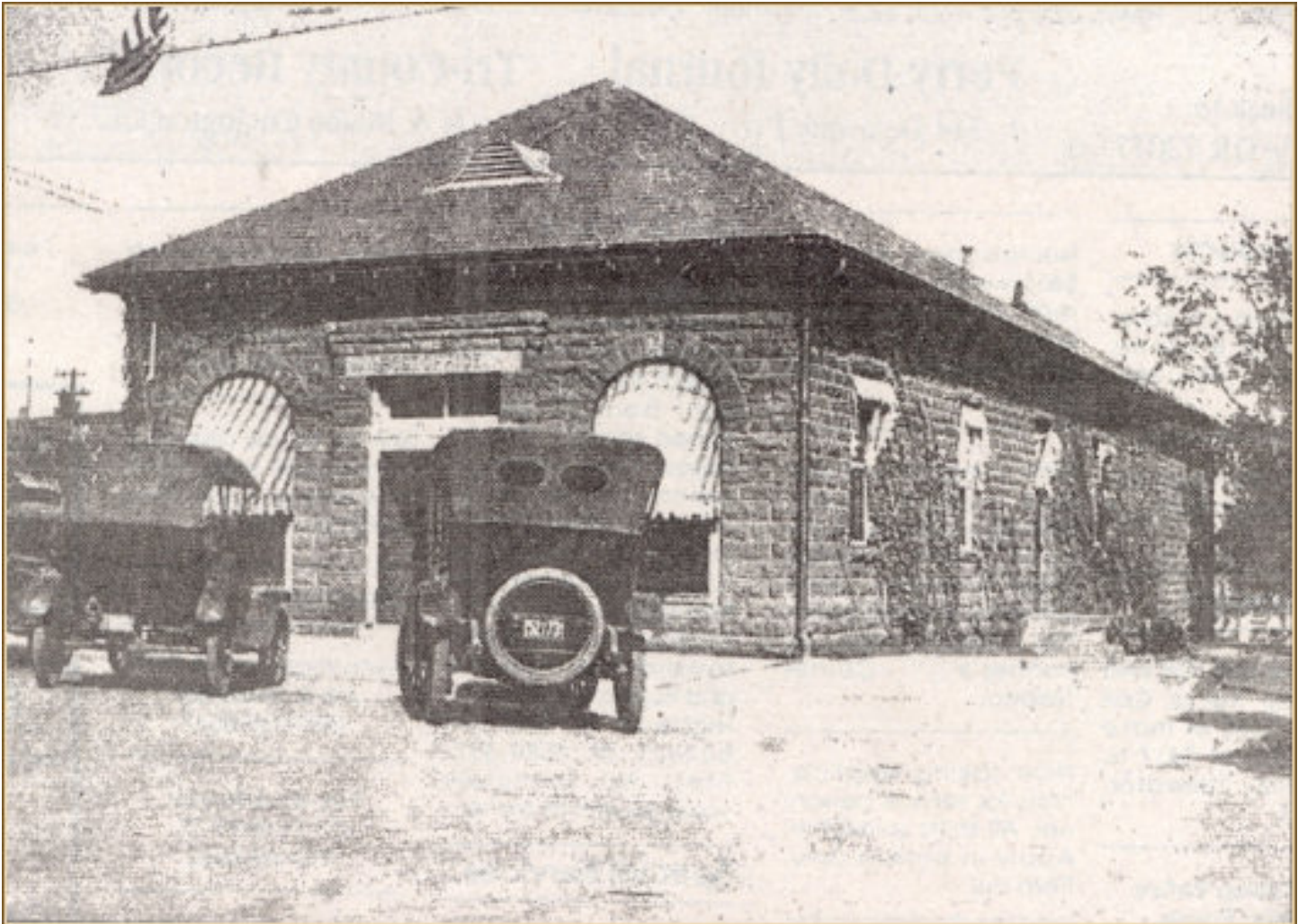
In case you haven't noticed, our Perry high school football team is playing very well these days. The Maroons opened the season with a disappointing loss at Chisholm despite a good team effort, especially in the first half. Following that came a decisive win at Bethany, then a morale-boosting victory over Blackwell, our ancient foe, on Daniels Field. Last week came the third consecutive win, a 47-0 triumph at Wellston, and on next Friday night the PHS Maroons will travel to Kellyville. A win there would run their record to 4-1 heading into the homecoming game with Mounds on October 5. That contest also will mark the halfway point for the season.

From what I've seen, Coach Jerry Dombek and his staff have produced a very tough defense and a versatile offense. The Maroons blend a passing attack with a running game that keeps opponents guessing. I can't remember when we have had so much speed, size and physical toughness on a PHS team. On the ground and through the air, the Maroons always seem to be on the march when they have the football. The defense has completely blanked the last two opponents, and that is something that should make the PHS warriors feel proud. Congratulations to all the players, coaches and everyone else who has contributed to the continuing resurgence in Perry high school football. That includes local fans who follow the team faithfully each week.

You may have missed this, also. The Maroons are being bumped up from class 2A to 3A next season as a result of the realignment required on alternate years by the Oklahoma Secondary Schools Activities Association. For the 2002 and 2003 seasons, Perry will be in District 3A-3. Others in that district will be Berryhill, Bristow, Claremore-Sequoyah, Cleveland, Dewey, Meeker and Victory Christian. That means we'll be seeing several teams for the very first time the next two years. Remember when we used to play Enid, Ponca City, Stillwater, Guthrie, Cushing and Guthrie year in and year out? Those were traditional games, but all of those schools are now several classes larger than Perry and we should not be playing them now.

I greatly appreciate those marquee signs on businesses and public buildings around town, but here's a gentle suggestion: Please keep the information current. The temperature variances from one marquee to another are understandable in this strange Oklahoma climate, and even the differences in the current time can be forgiven. But when coming events are announced it would be very helpful if the folks who feed data to the signboards make sure it's correct and erased when necessary. Otherwise, please continue to keep us posted.

September 28, 2001



This photo of the old Perry post office was found in a collection accumulated by Henry and Fern Freese. A note on the back of the photo states that the original was taken on September 16, 1917

In a brief conversation the other day with John Nida, he brought up an interesting question – where did all the sandstone blocks come from that were used by the WPA in the 1930s? They were used in building the Perry Stadium, the National Guard Armory, Perry Elementary school and some other projects. For some time I have had the impression that they were quarried right here in Noble county but I do not know the location of the property where they came from. John also wonders how those large blocks were loaded onto wagons and other conveyances that were used to haul them to construction sites. Maybe a reader can shed some light on this topic.

Speaking of sandstone, the photo accompanying this column was received the other day from Nevalyn Freese Stotts of Stillwater, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Henry Freese. Her husband, Gerald Stotts, also is a former Perryan. The picture shows the old sandstone Perry post office, the one that preceded our present post office. It was located at the corner of Seventh and Delaware, on the northwest corner of the courthouse park. Our "new" post office was built in 1939 as a WPA project right next door to the old building. When moving day came, postal employees and others picked up the bags of mail and office equipment and carried them one door to the south. The old building eventually was torn down. This photo

shows it as it looked in 1917, when most local folks thought it was pretty spiffy. Several vintage automobiles are clearly shown, with spare tires attached.

The driveway on the right in this photo was used, among other things, to load up vehicles for rural carriers to deliver their routes. Also, for years Mr. Herb Peden, a contract carrier, drove a flatbed Model-T Ford truck to pick up incoming mail and dispatch outgoing material at the Frisco and Santa Fe Railroad depots. The driveway shown in this photo extended to the far end of the post office, then to Delaware street where the vehicle entry was located. What you see here is the driveway exit onto Seventh street, the west side of the square. The façade visible on the left is the upper part of the two-story building where my Dad's store, the City Drug, was located. From the front door of our store, we could look across the street and see the ivy-covered side of the post office.

Nevalyn found this photo in a collection accumulated by her parents, Henry and Fern Freese. A note on the back of the photo states that the original was taken on September 16, 1917. The developed film was presented by Ernest Kukuk. I thank Nevalyn for providing this photo.