

September 3, 2002

From the mailbag, here are a few thoughts to ponder, if you're in a lighthearted mood:

A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is two-tired.
What's the definition of a will? It's a dead giveaway.
Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
In a democracy it's your vote that counts. In feudalism it's your count that votes.
She had a boyfriend with a wooden leg, but broke it off.
A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.
If you don't pay your exorcist you get repossessed.
With her marriage she got a new name and a dress.
Show me a piano falling down a mine shaft and I'll show you A-flat minor.
When a clock is hungry, it goes back four seconds.
The man who fell into an upholstery machine is fully recovered.
A grenade thrown into a kitchen in France would result in Linoleum Blownapart.
You feel stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.
Local Area Network in Australia: The LAN down under.
He often broke into song because he couldn't find the key.
Every calendar's days are numbered.
A lot of money is tainted - taint yours and taint mine.
A boiled egg in the morning is hard to beat.
He had a photographic memory that was never developed.
A plateau is a high form of flattery.
The short fortune-teller who escaped from prison was a small medium at large.
Those who get too big for their britches will be exposed in the end.
Once you've seen one shopping center you've seen a mall.
Those who jump off a Paris bridge are in Seine.
When an actress saw her first strands of gray hair she thought she'd dye.
Bakers trade bread recipes on a knead to know basis.
Santa's helpers are subordinate clauses.
Acupuncture is a jab well done.
Marathon runners with bad footwear suffer the agony of defeat.

More of these good and bad puns will appear from time to time (as long as readers provide them).



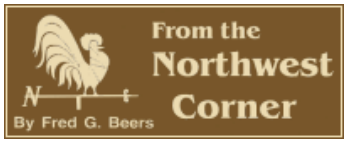
September 6, 2002

See where the Penn Square movie complex in Okie City is to be reopened soon under new management. It's been closed for several months, presumably a casualty of the intense competition among exhibitors in the Big Town. For one thing, the new folks are planning to install stadium seating as they try to catch up with the features now found in the newest film "palaces." Laura and I hope they also will have cup holders at each seat to hold those huge Cokes from the concession stand. It is hard to balance a cold drink in one hand and the essential box of popcorn in the other while watching the flickering images on the big screen. And you can't go to the movies without those items, can you?

Reminds me of a brief episode from childhood days when our family had a drug store on the north side of the square. This was during the Depression era of the 1930s, when the cash flow in every kind of business was a cause for concern. In other words, customers were hard to come by and we had to scramble to keep the store solvent. One of our responses was the purchase of an industrial strength popcorn machine. Not one of those lightweight counter-top models, but a massive, chrome and glass, self-contained, wheel-mounted device like the ones you see in movie theater concession stands today. They were made in Kansas City, Mo., by the Birch Co. We thought popcorn would be a reasonably good complement to the cold drinks and ice cream concoctions from our soda fountain. The machine cost around $600, a huge investment for that time of economic distress, but the Birch Co. put it on time payments and we hoped it would pay for itself. It was one of the few good decisions our family made during that time.

The machine was mobile but when we had nice weather it took two of us to wheel it out the front door onto the sidewalk during business hours (7:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., seven days a week). Pedestrians could hardly avoid seeing it and inhaling the tantalizing fragrance emitted when a fresh kettle of popcorn was being whipped up. The sight and sound almost guaranteed quick sales regardless of the time of day. By popular request, we began distribution of popped corn in gallon-size aluminum cans to many of the family grocery stores then located around the square. H.C. Galaway's Royal Food Market on the south side of the square and the Johnson family store on the east side were good customers. Shoppers had a choice of regular popcorn, cheese corn, caramel corn or strawberry-flavored corn. They sold for $1 per can and the grocer realized a small profit. As the head popper, I was given the responsibility of seeing to it that only fresh popcorn was on the grocers' shelf. (I guess I was also marketing director.) That responsibility necessitated periodic checkups and the disposition of anything more than one week old. Business was good, but the profit margin was not high, especially while we were making monthly payments to the Birch Co. in Kansas City, Mo.

Seeking new outlets, I called on Mr. Charlie Wolleson at the Roxy Theater and Mr. Henry Tate at the Annex, both on the east side of the square, to see if we could work out some kind of deal to offer popcorn to their movie patrons. I thought it was a wonderful idea, since neither theater had a concession stand and, as a vendor, I would see some of the movies for free, but Mr. Wolleson and Mr. Tate could not envision it as a profitable service for them, so they declined to take part. They said they did not think movie theaters should allow patrons to eat or drink on their premises, so that ended my dreams of expansion. In time, local grocery store patrons also seemed to tire of popcorn in a can, and all that led to the inevitable decline of our drug store's venture into a new field. I was about to graduate from high school, anyway, so retirement from the popcorn business seemed like a logical thing to do. We sold the machine to Mr. Charlie Forney, who had just opened a soft drink parlor and sandwich shop on the west side of the square. We closed the drug store, and waited hopefully for new opportunities.



September 10, 2002

The Cherokee Strip celebration in September always has been the biggest entertainment event in Perry. That's appropriate for several reasons, including the fact that Our Town is the only one in the whole Strip that has never failed to salute our pioneer heritage every year since 1893. Perry area people are proud of those early settlers who made the run, or those who came soon after them, and it is fitting that we have a good time on this anniversary every year. We salute those hardy men, women and children who came here trusting in the Almighty to make it possible for them to carve a home for themselves on the barren prairie that made up the Strip - 57 miles wide from the Kansas border to a line that ran north of Orlando and 200 miles long from the Texas border to the Cherokee reserve in Northeastern Oklahoma. The Cherokee Strip! A colorful name for a land of drama, romance, hardship and adventure.

A fillip to this year's celebration is the gigantic salute being planned to mark a significant Centennial at Perry High School. One hundred years ago, in the spring of 1902, the first senior class was graduated from PHS. So, as our area's roots grow deeper, we take pride in achieving a century of progress in education. And, added to that, is another Centennial - the birthday of the humble blacksmith shop presided over by a stout German immigrant and his two strapping son, Gus and Charlie Malzahn. From that shaky beginning in a dusty little shop just off the southeast corner of the square emerged the giant now known as The Charles Machine Works, Inc., where Ditch Witch equipment is created, manufactured and marketed throughout the free world. We are so fortunate to have a business like this in our midst. There could not be a better industrial partner for a town of any size.

Being a native son myself, I have an inordinate sense of pride regarding all the good points of this community. And there are many of them in addition to the few I have a chance to mention here in these Northwest Corner columns. The truth is, Perry is blessed with an abundance of wonderful people, the kind you'd like to have as neighbors or to lend a hand when things go wrong. I could not begin to name them all because many of the good works they do are not public knowledge, and that's the way it should be.

Likewise, being a proud graduate of Perry High School (1941) I have an undisguised conceit when it comes to the local system. Our school has been home for many excellent teachers at every grade level and I was fortunate enough to sit at the feet of some of them. Actually, there were far too many to list here and inevitably I would leave out some of the best. So, if you understand that this is only scratching the surface, let me mention just a few. Thelma Brown was a playful young lady during recess at the old Elementary school and a good teacher during classroom time. Ditto for her sister, Ethel Knox. Hal Sherrod was a hard taskmaster but he made sure we caught on to everything he was trying to tell a rowdy bunch. Thelma Stewart, Fern Folger McCormick and Gertye Kobes Croka were some other favorites. Pearlie Mae Acheson used some unusual techniques to get her points across in Geography at Junior High. Floyd Pratt was an old-school professor who sneaked out to the teachers' lounge between classes to smoke a cigarette, then returned to the classroom reeking of tobacco. Perry Carmichael was a dignified superintendent, as was George Spraberry. Professor Radgowsky was everyone's dream come true on the podium when the band rehearsed. I barely knew Homer Hill but I understand he was another good superintendent. No one excelled like Elizabeth Green Rogers and Della Whisenhunt in my public speaking and Spanish classes.

Such lists could and should go on and on, but that will have to suffice in this limited space. If you knew those people, you have your own recollections to contemplate. Just let me say in parting that each of them, along with many others, made a real contribution to my life, and I thank them, one and all. As our PHS graduates gather this weekend, they will tell many tales of their years in the local system, and I wager that all of them are very grateful to our school, whatever year their graduating class represents.

From the Northwest Corner

By Fred G. Beers

September 13, 2002

Sometimes I wonder what compels me to spend so much time thinking about and studying and writing about the history, the origins, of this special area known as the Cherokee Outlet. Inevitably I come around to the conclusion that the need for all this was planted in my mind years ago by my family and friends who were a generation or so closer to the Great Run than most of us. I had the privilege of listening to first-person accounts of deeds of derring-do by ordinary people who did not know they would be folk-heroes. Those intrepid early settlers were part of or witnesses to one of the most dramatic stories in the settling of the Old West in this country.

Today my contemporaries and I are the beneficiaries of what those pioneers made possible, and we should know how they lived and worked in those days of daily drama and development.

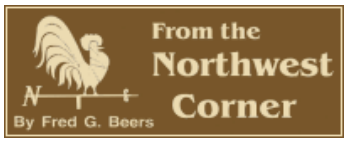
Often the same question is answered in a different way. On a sultry summer afternoon the other day I ran into three others, quite by chance, who, like me, find the story of the settling of this land to be a classic romance sprinkled with high drama and the gritty determination of men, women and children who had no way of knowing in advance what they were opening themselves to when they lined up for the Cherokee Strip run on September 16, 1893. What they did and what they achieved should be told and retold forever so that every succeeding generation might know and understand. We are so close to history in this state that we sometimes fail to recognize it.

The first of those recent encounters was at the local newspaper office where I saw Carolyn Chopp, whose family credentials easily qualify her as a source of information. She has never stopped adding to her storehouse of knowledge about the early days in Perry. As a retired teacher and a graduate of Perry High School, her special interests naturally lead in that direction. She is assisting in compiling information for a project of the Perry Alumni Association related to the high school's centennial celebration this year. At this point one of her principal objectives is a photo of the Blaine school as it appeared years ago when it was a separate school for this community. Perhaps someone can help Carolyn with this.

Next was a visit at Perry Carnegie Library with Don Brengle, the retired Airman whose family holds a special place in the early days of this area. Don's dad, the late Quine Brengle, invariably marched around the square in the annual Homecoming parade with Dr. A.M. Crowder and other members of the PHS class of 1914. Remember Dr. Crowder's bright maroon pullover sweater with the giant letter "P" stitched onto the front? Quine would have graduated two years earlier but he had been licensed as a pharmacist while still in high school so he worked in various oil patch drug stores around the state before returning home to finish his education. And, of course, he later became a fixture behind the counter at the post office. Quine's father and uncle both were physicians in this area during the early years of the Cherokee Strip. They were interesting parts of our history and now Don is an excellent source of information about that period.

The third encounter, also at the library, was with David Goss, son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Claire Goss. David is working on a book of history with hopes of securing a publisher in the near future. Visiting with him also was a joy, if only for a brief interlude. Many others share in the joy of retelling stories about the "early days" and the people who came here to claim the land.

Such conversations and the mental images they evoke reassure me in a positive way that my own interest in this subject is worthwhile and warranted. I never really doubted it, but it's nice to have some validation.



September 17, 2002

Ready for a good chuckle or two? Then I heartily recommend the following witty pieces sent to me by a loyal reader who found these observations somewhere.

To idiots everywhere: **Idiots in Service**. This week, all our office phones went dead and I had to contact the telephone repair people. They promised to be out between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. When I asked if they could give me a smaller time window, the pleasant gentleman asked, "Would you like us to call you before we come?" I replied that I didn't see how he would be able to do that, since our phones weren't working. He also requested that we report future outages by e-mail. (Does YOUR e-mail work without a telephone line?)

Idiots at Work. I was signing the receipt for my credit card purchase when the clerk noticed I had never signed my name on the back of the credit card. She informed me that she couldn't complete the transaction unless the card was signed. When I asked why, she explained that it was necessary to compare the signature I had just signed on the receipt. So I signed the credit card in front of her. She carefully compared the signature to the one I had just signed on the receipt. As luck would have it, they matched.

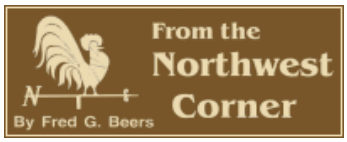
Idiots in the Neighborhood. I live in a semi-rural area. We recently had a new neighbor call the local township administrative office to request the removal of the Deer Crossing sign on our road. The reason: Too many deer were being hit by cars and he didn't want them to cross there any more.

Idiots in Food Service. My daughter went to a local Mexican eatery and ordered a taco. She asked the person behind the counter for "minimal lettuce." He said he was sorry but they only had iceberg.

Idiot Sighting #1. I was at the airport, checking in at the gate when an airport employee asked, "Has anyone put anything in your baggage without your knowledge?" To which I replied, "If it was without my knowledge, how would I know?" He smiled knowingly and nodded, "That's why we ask!"

Idiot Sighting #2. The stop light on the corner buzzes when it's safe to cross the street. I was crossing with an intellectually challenged coworker when she asked if I knew what the buzzer was for. I explained that it signals blind people when the light is red. Appalled, she responded, "What on earth are blind people doing driving?"

Idiot Sighting #3. At a goodbye luncheon for an old and dear coworker who was leaving the company due to downsizing, our manager commented cheerfully, "This is fun. We should do this more often." Not a word was spoken. We all just looked at each other with that deer-in-the-headlights stare.
That's enough froth for this time. There may be more later.



September 20, 2002

In the beginning, the combination last week of five major events into one gigantic celebration sounded like a good idea, and danged if it didn't turn out just that way. We can't control the weather, but everything else happened just about the way it was planned. Everyone appeared to be having a great time at the Cherokee Strip celebration, Perry High School's Centennial, the Charles Machine Works, Inc. Centennial, the Noble county free fair and the registration tea at the Cherokee Strip Museum.. It was a memorable week.

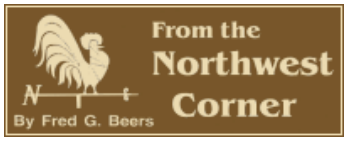
Don't assume for a minute that all of it just "happened." Hundreds of local folks - and many from other places - labored long and hard to be sure that it came off like clockwork. You've read the names of those who were responsible for various aspects of this undertaking, but there were many others who put in hours of hard labor to bring it all together. Thanks to all of them, including those who served in anonymity.

Laura and I tried to take in everything, but we couldn't possibly have done all of them. My personal favorite was the All-School Revue. I hope it was preserved on video tape. We missed the Perry Maroons' stirring victory over Cushing in the football game Friday night because we assumed it would be called off on account of the rain and lightning. Congratulations to the PHS gridmen - and to the faithful fans who persevered and were rewarded with a great victory.

Miscellaneous thoughts: A caller pointed out something that had also occurred to me - the number of people who failed to stand when the U.S. flag came by at the head of the parade. Maybe it's because of the diminishing number of Boy Scouts in this era, but it seems that some of us don't know (or don't bother) to remove our hats and place the right hand over the heart when Old Glory passes by. The Scouts used to instill a patriotic fervor in their program, something that lasted a lifetime. The military also does that, but not many young men are exposed to that kind of training nowadays. Too bad.

Another parade comment by some folks near us indicated that candy should not be tossed by politicians and others in the parade to youngsters lining the streets. Kiddos that age can't vote, for one thing, and they are risking life and limb by running onto the street to pick up another piece of bubble gum or candy. Let's outlaw the practice before someone gets hurt. That's enough preaching for today. Let's just say that it was another wonderful celebration and the thousands who came to Perry to be entertained were not short changed in any way.

Here's a frequent suggestion heard at the school's Centennial events. "This was so much fun - why can't we have an all-school reunion every five years or so?" Right now you would probably hear a negative response from those people who put on this year's big party, but maybe they would reconsider the possibility in a few months. It's worth thinking about.



September 24, 2002

Herewith a few points to ponder. Some of them may evoke a smile or two.

For those of us getting along in years, here is a little secret for building your arm and shoulder muscles. You might want to adopt this regimen. Three days a week works well. Begin by standing outside behind the house, and with a five-pound potato sack in each hand, extend your arms straight out from your sides and hold them there as long as you can. After a few weeks, move up to ten-pound potato sacks and then fifty-pound sacks. Finally, get to where you can lift a one hundred-pound sack in each hand and hold your arms straight for more than a full minute. Next, try putting a few potatoes in the sacks, but be careful not to over do it at this level.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto walked into a bar and sat down to drink a beer. After a few minutes, a big, tall cowboy walked in and said, "Who owns the big white horse outside?" The Lone Ranger stood up, hitched his gun belt, and said, "I do. Why?" The cowboy looked at the Lone Ranger and said, "I just thought you'd want to know that your horse is about dead outside."

The Lone Ranger and Tonto rushed outdoors, and sure enough Silver was ready to die from heat exhaustion. The Lone Ranger got the horse some water and soon Silver was starting to feel a little better. The Lone Ranger turned to Tonto and said, "Tonto, I want you to run around Silver and see if you can create enough of a breeze to make him start to feel better." Tonto replied, "Sure, Kemosabe," and proceeded to run circles around Tonto.

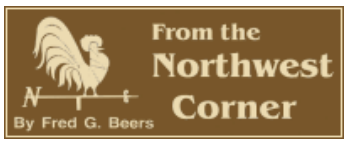
Not able to do anything but wait, the Lone Ranger returned to the bar to finish his drink. A few minutes later another cowboy strutted into the bar and asked, "Who owns that big white horse outside?" The Lone Ranger stood again and exclaimed, "I do. What's wrong with him this time?" The cowboy looked him straight in the eye and said, "Nothing, but you left your Injun runnin'."
The one which follows came to me from A.J. Dolezal by way of Kit Norman Froebel. My thanks to both of them. I love it.

When the driver of a huge trailer lost control of his rig, he plowed into an empty tollbooth and smashed it to pieces. He climbed down from the wreckage and within a matter of minutes, a truck pulled up and discharged a crew of workers.

The men picked up each broken piece of the former tollbooth and spread some kind of creamy substance on it. Then they began fitting the pieces together. In less than a half hour, they had the entire tollbooth reconstructed and looking good as new.

"Astonishing!", the truck driver said to the crew chief. "What was the white stuff you used to get all the pieces together?"

The crew chief said: "Oh, that was tollgate booth paste."



September 27, 2002

My favorite columnist in the Oklahoma City newspaper is not one of the numerous syndicated writers whose bylined material appears on the editorial page. My personal choice is Bob Haught, who has helped the paper with coverage of Oklahoma angles in Washington, D.C., for several years. Many moons ago, when I was on the staff of this newspaper, Bob was manager of the Oklahoma City bureau of United Press International (UPI), the wire service which fed state, national and international news to numerous small-town dailies throughout the U.S. *The Journal* now is served by the Associated Press and UPI is not what it used to be when Bob was in charge of the Oklahoma City bureau, but Bob is still the same capable craftsman with an ear for the occurrences in Washington that interest Oklahomans. Some of you will remember

that Bob also spent some time on Henry Bellmon's staff during the years our Billings neighbor served in the U.S. Senate and Oklahoma governor's office.

All of this is a long-winded prelude to the heart of today's Northwest Corner. What I want to say concerns another former Oklahoman, cartoonist Bill Mauldin, who is now in frail health in an Orange County, Calif., nursing home. I first learned of that through Bob's column the other day and I felt sure some people in this area would want to know about the situation. So, I'm passing the news on to you.

Bill Mauldin was the World War II cartoonist for European editions of *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper. I was a copy editor on the Mid-Pacific edition of the paper during that time but I only saw Mauldin, who is now 80, when he was en route to the forward area of the Pacific after the Allies had achieved victory in Europe. He passed through Honolulu, where our detachment was based, and that is where I met him. Best as I remember, he was traveling with another WWII luminary, Sgt. George Baker, the Yank magazine cartoonist who conceived the character known only as "the Sad Sack," a caricature of every GI's wartime travail. Mauldin, of course, used the unshaved and weary infantrymen, Willie and Joe, in his hugely popular cartoons. Mauldin won a Pulitzer Prize for one of his comedic panels during the war and later claimed another of the awards for one of his peacetime political cartoons, when he was working for one of the Chicago dailies.

I think Oklahomans lay special claim to Bill Mauldin because he began his newspaper career as a contributor to the *45th Division News*, the publication that served the men from this area who were in the National Guard when that proud unit was called to active service even before the U.S. became a belligerent in World War II. He won his first acclaim with the Thunderbirds and went on to much greater heights after his work became immensely popular with the mud-slogging GI's who helped defeat the Nazis in Europe. Today they say Bill Mauldin rarely speaks for days at a time. He suffered terrible burns in a household accident a while back. His health has deteriorated grievously. If you want to send a message to Bill Mauldin, address it to: Bill Mauldin, c/o The Orange County Register, 625 N. Grand Ave., Santa Ana, CA 92701. As a former colleague of Bill Mauldin recently wrote, "He (Mauldin) brought hope and smiles in terrible hours to millions of his fellow soldiers. If you were one of them, and you'd like to repay the favor, this would be the time."