

September 2, 2003

As we continue these columns dealing with the use of telephones in the early days of this community, here are a couple of footnotes provided by readers:

Elizabeth Treeman Willems remembers hearing about the association of her grandfather, Mr. L.D. Treeman, with Mr. E.D. Nims, along with some other Perry men, who helped establish the first telephone exchange in Perry not long after this area was opened to settlement. The company eventually became known as the Pioneer Telephone and Telegraph Company, and still later it was the Arkansas Valley Telephone Company. Mr. Nims stayed with the phone company as it became part of Southwestern Bell. He eventually prospered, but Elizabeth says her grandfather apparently chose to go his own way and did not enjoy the financial success of his associates.

I have a copy of the 1909 directory of the Pioneer Telephone and Telegraph Company and it shows that Mr. Nims was then president of the company. John M. Noble was listed as vice president and general manager, E.E. Westervelt was a secretary-treasurer and Arthur Whorton was auditor. The manager was J. Higgins and the local exchange was in the Hainer building (telephone 305). Mr. Treeman had telephone number 4 at his residence, 1020 K Street. Elizabeth says that number stayed in the family many years. My maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Bucklin, had a phone at their variety store on the north side of the square (number 61), but no residential phone. My Dad's City Drug Store, also on the north side of the square, had number 110 in 1909. The store still had that number when it closed for business in 1940.

The directory had only a few pages, and several of them were taken up with "Rules for Good Service." The book admonished phone users to speak slowly and "be brief but courteous." It also called attention to its "information" service, advising users to ask for that "When you can't find the telephone number you want, or to get answers to any questions regarding subscriber's names, numbers or addresses." Years later Southwestern Bell operators also provided the correct time of day or night upon request. That was when we had actual operators at the switchboard, and not the automated systems that accompanied the use of dial phones.

Friend Don Stoddard has this recollection. Don writes: "While reading about the early day phone system in Perry in your column, it rang a bell that I had read somewhere else about Perry and its early day phone service. It finally dawned on me that it was in Roy P. Stewart's book, *Born Grown*. Quoting from page 156: The Arkansas Valley Telephone Company began operation around Perry in 1897. The Arkansas Valley firm brought out a number of smaller firms and in 1902 became the 'Pioneer Telephone Company.' Then Pioneer moved into Oklahoma City and was later absorbed by the Bell Telephone Company."

I appreciate these sidelights and I am pleased to pass them on to you. There's still more to be said about Perry's early telephone system, so please be watching for additional columns on this subject from time to time in the near future.



September 5, 2003

Along with some wonderful photos of Perry's early day telephone exchange, several newspaper clippings from the early 1900s are found in a collection once owned by the late Mrs. Ralph Foster. The clippings deal with the phone company, of course, but they also shed a little light on the social climate of that period. For many reasons, they are valuable and extremely interesting. As you would expect, the paper is faded and very brittle now, but if the clippings are handled with care they can offer a wealth of information. Mrs. Foster (Edna Brown) and my mother (Ivy Bucklin) were close personal friends when both of them were young unmarried women in this community, and I am happy to share portions of these clippings with you in this series of columns about the Pioneer Telephone Company.

First is this one from an unnamed Perry newspaper, headlined simply, "Mrs. Higgins Entertained." The complete story follows: "Perhaps no organization in Perry are recipients of more delightful parties than those participated in by the young ladies in the telephone company employ. This time Mrs. Higgins, of Lawton, wife of the former manager in Perry, was the honoree, last evening at the home of Miss Edna Brown.

"Mrs. Elmer Rice chaperoned the young ladies to the home of Miss Brown, where a most delightful evening was spent. Miss Tillie Ringler (later to become Mrs. O.R. Hall), furnishing such gay conversation that she was elected chief entertainer of the occasion. Flash light pictures, social chat and delicious refreshments furnished a most pleasant evening for the recipients

"Those present were: Misses Ethel and Francis McMeekin, Tillie Ringler, Dorothy Owens, Stella Schott, Helen Manson, Bretta Adams, Mildred Depew, Edna Brown, Mrs. Higgins and Mrs. Rice."

Now here's another newspaper story from about the same time period.

"Manager Brown"

"Good morning, Manager Brown of the Pioneer (Telephone Company). Goodbye and Godspeed ex-manager Joe Higgins. With a hurry-up call Monday evening Manager Higgins packed his grip and left Tuesday morning for Lawton where he takes charge of the exchange at that place. A deserved recognition of services rendered the company by the promotion to a much more responsible and better paying position.

"With the transfer of Mr. Higgins, Miss Edna Brown, for the past two years a central operator and of late bookkeeper of the office, is promoted to the managerial chair.

"This is certainly a flattering compliment for Miss Edna. She is, so far as we know, the only lady manager in the state for a city the size of Perry and unquestionably the youngest of the lady superintendents. Her endorsements were such that with the transfer of Manager Higgins there was no hesitancy with the head officials of the great Pioneer in selecting her as the guardian of their interests at this place.

"The young lady is certainly to be congratulated upon her promotion which will be appreciated by the patrons of the local office."

So it went in those days, around 1910, in Perry, Oklahoma. We're happy to bring you this reconstruction of two news articles from the local newspaper of that period. Edna Brown went on to become the bride of Ralph Foster, Sr., owner-operator of the Foster Corner Drug, where Mr. and Mrs. Mike Shannon are now the pro-prietors.



Perry telephone operators in the early 1900s are shown in this picture from the collection of the late Mrs. Ralph Foster, Sr. This bank of switchboards apparently was on the second floor of the Hainer building at the northwest corner of the square, where the First Bank & Trust Co. is now located. Mrs. Foster, the former Edna Brown, was chief operator of the phone company when this photo was made, but no one is identified in this shot.



September 9, 2003

Back in 1953, this newspaper put out a Cherokee Strip celebration edition that was chock full of interesting stories and photographs about the historic land run that took place in this area on September 16, 1893. It was the 60th anniversary of that great event, and I remember working on it very diligently for several months beforehand.

Because our mechanical equipment at that time could handle nothing larger than an eight-page section, all of it was written, designed, and printed in six- and eight-page sections 'way ahead of the release date, which was September 13, 1953. The special edition was made up of 80 pages. It turned out to be the biggest edition of *The Journal* ever printed up to that time, according to the Northwest Corner column that day, and it even included a splash of bright red ink on the cover and in several ads placed by merchants. Printing an 80-page newspaper was not easy at that time since we were dealing with an ancient Goss flatbed press. The front page of the news section that day included a letter from President Eisenhower to Kenneth Coldiron, finance chairman of the anniversary, congratulating the citizens of this community for staging the celebration.

Despite the poor images in some of the photos, the text included many wonderful stories about the pioneers who settled this part of Oklahoma Territory, and I know it sparked an interest in me as I reflected on the fascinating history of this

chunk of real estate. That interest has endured and increased through the years, and it has motivated me to delve deeper into the historic fabric of this part of the Cherokee Strip.

One of the stories that was covered the best in that edition was the saga of early day telephone service in Perry. Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., which served this area, provided facts and photos on that subject. Those were added to the reflections of some of our first telephone operators, Edna Brown Foster and Tillie Ringler Hall. Many of those who contributed to that historic newspaper are no longer with us, but some of them left their recollections to help the rest of us understand what it was like back then.

All of this prelude is just to furnish a polite nod in the direction of all who have endowed others with their memories of the first few years of Perry's existence. None of those who staked claims after making the Cherokee Strip run in 1893 are with us any longer, but subsequent generations can pass along stories to the rest of us and thus make the historic event come to life. Right now we are in the midst of a multi-part story about the telephone people and how our present-day system began. On Saturday, September 13, our little prairie city will again mark "the run," as we have every year since the drama of 1893 unfolded.

As you watch the big Cherokee Strip parade around the square and take part in other events, such as the county fair, remember the people who made it possible for the rest of us to thump our chests and proudly say, "We are part of a land of romance and industry, and we're proud to say so." Thanks to the hardy pioneers and their descendants who made it possible for us to be here today.



September 12, 2003

The story of telephone service in Noble County is fascinating partly because it helps tell how this area was settled after the Cherokee Outlet land run on September 16th, 1893. Telephones were still newfangled equipment in that era, but folks were getting used to them and soon wondered how they ever got along without them. It's the same today. We fuss about the service provided by the growing number of phone companies, and we weep and wail because robotics seem to be taking over the business office, but there is no denying that our commerce would be in a terrible state without the means of communication afforded by our telephones. So, here comes another chapter in the saga. This is from an old issue of *The Perry Daily Journal*.

The story of the first telephone installed in pioneer Perry is an interesting tale as it was told by E.E. Westervelt, Oklahoma manager of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, at a meeting in Perry in the early years of the 20th century. Earlier, Mr. Westervelt had been station agent for the Santa Fe Railroad in Perry. The newspaper story does not explain when this was first told. Mr. Westervelt began:

"The (first) line was put in by C.P. Walker. It was put in a month or two after the opening in 1893, September 16th. In 1897 John Noble and John Coulter built a line between Perry and Pawnee and Stillwater. The Perry office was at Howendobler's Drug Store (southeast corner of the square). In 1898 R.G. Van Cleef, E.E. Westervelt, E.D. Nims, E.E. Howendobler, L.D. Treeman and H.C. Wallerstedt agreed to put in a local exchange and had C.P. Drace, then postmaster, circulate a subscription list for telephone subscriptions and obtained quite a list. This was in the summer of 1898. About the same

time John Noble stated to me that he intended to build an exchange, also. The subscription was in the name of E.E. Westervelt and associates.

"Next Noble proposed that I join him and I talked to my associates and found they did not care much about the matter so I bought their interests by agreeing to pay the expenses up to that time and I then joined Noble and Coulter and arranged that E.D. Nims would also join them and in the fall of 1898 the exchange was built and service commenced.

"Byrd Walker was the first operator and the office was in a Wolleson building on the north side of the square. (Apparently that was the building now owned by the Oklahoma IOOF Lodge organization.) There were about 100 subscriptions when the exchange opened. Rates were \$2.00 for business and \$1.50 for residence per month with the rate of \$3.00, for both business and residence to the same person.

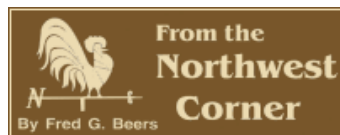
"In 1899 a line was built to Guthrie and in 1900 a line to Enid and a line was built from Arkansas City, Kansas, and Ponca City and Blackwell to Perry by Oklahoma Telephone Company which was connected with the exchange.

"(The) first directory was gotten out by E.D. Nims and E.D. Westervelt on a hectograph at E.D. Nims' office which was at Perry Mercantile Company. Later Arthur Whorton prepared the Directories and Whorton about 1900 or 1901 went to work for the company which was named Arkansas Valley Telephone Company at that time. Whorton worked one-half time at \$40.00 a month. Balance of time for Perry Sentinel. Later he left the Sentinel and worked full time for the telephone company. In 1902 the name of the company was changed to Pioneer Telephone Company.

"In 1904 the name was changed to Pioneer Telephone and Telegraph Company and headquarters were moved to this city. Whorton became auditor and now is auditor of receipts for the company at Sonnis. (No clue is given about that location.) The name of the company became the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in 1919.

"E.D. Nims became president and general manager of the Bell system in Oklahoma. I was secretary and treasurer, general commercial superintendent, and purchasing agent. Nims retired in 1932, Noble in 1921 and I retired in 1920. Noble and myself still have an office in the telephone building. Noble is vice president and I am secretary but we are not actively engaged in telephone business."

Mr. Westervelt also added this postscript: "In 1905 the Pioneer Telephone and Telegraph Company was combined with the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company under the management of Mr. Nims, Mr. Noble and Mr, Westervelt. The account did not say what became of that merger.



September 16, 2003

Last Saturday was kind of a typical Cherokee Strip Celebration Day. Off to an uncertain start because of a heavy rainfall, it appeared the annual parade was in danger of being called off. It's the single biggest feature of our biggest municipal celebration, and hundreds of people were lined up around the square long before the official starting time, 10 a.m. Rain was still falling at that point, so the start of the parade was postponed for 30 minutes, until 10:30 a.m. Our local PIN station on channel 19 telecast that information, but it still caught a lot of us by surprise.

When the designated time did arrive and the color guard started a trek on the north side of the square, the usual crowd was on hand -- your estimate of the size is as good as anybody's, but there certainly were several thousand children and

adults lining the parade route. Unfortunately, some of the vendors and concessionaires who had purchased operating rights on the Courthouse Park may have been rained out. Still, there were many who functioned without missing a beat. The County Fair and the carnival at the fairgrounds stuck to their schedule, although the weather did have some effect on all the events. Rain? Who cares! We've had these celebrations in spite of snow, other rain storms, and even the occasional good weather.

I agree with the Celebration planners that it's a good idea to have this event on the Saturday closest to the actual anniversary of the run. There are many valid reasons for that, but it does seem that we still should have some recognition of the official date of the run on September 16, whatever day of the week that may occur. We can still fly our flags and pause for a moment, say at noon on that day, as a tribute to those strong-willed men and women who made the run and made it possible for the rest of us to enjoy the benefits of this blessed land. We must never forget what they endured here on the prairie frontier and what their strength and character mean to us.

Here's another idea that bears repeating: Let's outlaw the practice of throwing candy and other souvenirs from the parade entries. Children dart out into the street to pick up that stuff, and one of these days we are likely to have a major accident when a car, truck or other vehicle fails to see some of those youngsters scrambling on the street as they scoop up goodies off the asphalt. Watching that performance last Saturday was downright scary.

All in all, though, we've got to hand a major bouquet to everyone who had any part in putting this celebration together. Despite the rain delay, hundreds of Noble countyans and visitors were treated to a good time. Celebration week is becoming very popular for Perry High School class reunions. Traditions are being born every year. Perry can take pride in rightfully boasting that we are the only town in the old Cherokee Strip that has never failed to have a celebration of the great run since the official opening on September 16, 1893. Our ancestors would be proud.



September 19, 2003

A reader agrees with my recent comment about the hazards kids incur when they dash out on the streets during our Cherokee Strip celebration parade. My suggestion was to just totally outlaw the practice of having candy and other souvenirs flung from the floats toward the crowds on either side of the parade route. My friend suggests that adults or kids from the floats could hand out the goodies as they walk along close to the sidewalks and curbs around the square. That would eliminate the skirmishes now' taking place as float riders, with every good intention, pitch their stuff onto the street and watch kids of all ages trying to scoop them up.

It seems obvious that something needs to be done. As it now stands, our parade is just an accident waiting to happen. The parade is the single biggest feature of Perry's annual Cherokee Strip Parade, and we need to protect the tots, teens and adults who now scramble for the stuff being flung toward them from the floats and other entries.

Another bit of our local history is about to be sold in just a few days. The elegant former home of the W.M. Bowles family at 801 Holly Street has been put up for sale at auction next Saturday (September 27), and it will seem like a sad day for many of us. Judge Bowles was a distinguished jurist and a stern family leader after the opening of the Cherokee Outlet to settlement on September 16, 1893. He served by appointment of Mayor John Brogan as a member of our first city school board. The Bowles home, at the northwest corner of Eighth and Elm Streets, is a classic example of the type of

architecture favored here in the early 1900s. The two-story frame dwelling was built in 1903 by David McKinstry, owner of the Perry Milling Co., where "Pride of Perry" flour was milled and packaged for shipment all over the U.S. A detached one-time carriage house at the rear of the property later served as a spacious garage for the Bowles family, but a second-level space was still floored for use as a hay loft.

In later years the home was occupied by Judge Bowles, his wife and their family. Most of them were gifted musically and in other ways. I particularly remember Judge Bowles' son, Ed, who became postmaster of Perry. He was a violinist and a faithful member of the Presbyterian Church Choir. One of Ed's sisters, Ellen, was an accomplished pianist and another daughter, Clara, was a talented singer. Most recently the home has been occupied by Mrs. Bill Hodge, who no longer needs all that space.

Speaking of Perry history, I'll have more to say in a few days about the newly announced acceptance of the Perry business district by the national register of historic places. This is an exciting and promising designation, something that should make us proud.



September 23, 2003

Here's a batch of "Christian one-liners" sent to me by a friend in Texas. Maybe you'll get a chuckle from some of these. That's the main idea, so read and (I hope) enjoy.

Some people are kind, polite and sweet-spirited, until you try to sit in their pews.

Many folks want to serve God, but only in advisory positions.

The good Lord didn't create anything without a purpose, but mosquitoes come close.

When you get to your wit's end, you'll find God lives there.

People are funny, they want the front end of the bus, the middle of the road, and the back of the church.

Opportunity may knock once, but temptation bangs on your front door forever.

Quit griping about your church; if it were perfect, you couldn't belong.

God Himself does not propose to judge a man until he is dead. So why should you?

To make a long story short, don't tell it.

Some minds are like concrete, thoroughly mixed up and permanently set.

Peace starts with a smile.

We were called to be witnesses, not lawyers or judges.

Be ye fishers of men. You catch them, He'll clean them.

Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous.

Don't put a question mark where God put a period

Don't wait for six strong men to take you to church.

Forbidden fruits create many jams.

God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called.

God grades on the cross, not the curve.

God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage.

He who angers you, controls you.

If God is your co-pilot, swap seats!

The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.

The Will of God will never take you to where the Grace of God will not protect you.

We don't change the message, the message changes us.

You can tell how big a person is by what it takes to discourage him

The best mathematical equation I have ever seen: 1 cross + 3 nails = 4 given.

That's all for today.



September 26, 2003

Another cherished vernacular gaffe is about to be legitimized, if I am correctly reading all the usual signs. This is painful to me because I have virtually given my life to the correction and eradication of misspelled words, or at least those that are accidentally misused. It may be all right with some folks, but somehow it is not acceptable to me. By no means do I claim to be an authority. My bookcase is full of reference works to rely on in this cause, and it is humbling sometimes, in perusing those volumes, to find that some of my own misconceptions have taken root in what I can only describe as fertile soil.

The case in point today is this simple, everyday word – judgment. We all are familiar with it from frequent uses, in both writing and oral discourses. It has a special meaning to me because I learned, early in my career, from a reliable authority that "judgment" did not have a middle "e" (i.e., judgement). Let me tell you how this happened to come up in the first place.

Think 1941. I had just gone to work for *The Perry Daily Journal* as a raw cub reporter. Others in the news department at that time were older folks, all college-trained and self-assured as they went about their daily tasks of writing and editing. I felt challenged to learn everything they could teach. My immediate superior in this endeavor was the Managing Editor, Francis

Thetford, whose instructions were always given in good humor. I considered him to be like the Superman of the News Room.

One day a local minister brought in his weekly church notice for use on the church page the next day. He placed it on Francis' desk, exchanged a few pleasantries with others in the office, and went on his way. When Mr. Thetford picked up the church page article, he noticed that the preacher had typed the word "judgment" with the forbidden "e" in the middle. So, he struck it out with an editor's pencil and sent the copy to the composing room to be converted into type for the next day's paper.

When that edition was delivered, the preacher looked up his notice and found the change in spelling. Later that day he was in The Journal office and remarked to Francis that the word had been misspelled when it appeared in the paper. Francis picked up a copy and said, "No, the spelling was incorrect as you had it, but I deleted the extra letter 'e,' and that's why it was changed. Judgment does not have a middle "e." The preacher, feigning offense, continued his good-natured complaining and Francis finally told him they would settle the matter in accordance with our office dictionary. That was a heavyweight Webster's industrial strength reference work, and it had been used for several decades to settle just such arguments.

Lo and behold, when they found the page containing the word in question Francis could hardly believe his eyes. There, starkly printed, was "judgement" with that middle "e" just as the preacher had written it. To Mr. Thetford's consternation, he realized that it was the right way to spell the word years ago, but the modern (and correct) use that he had chosen did not even appear in that dictionary. He pointed this out to the preacher, who, while chortling at his victory, felt thoroughly vindicated. That was more than sixty years ago, friend, but I must tell you that the incident remains fresh in my mind, and I still find two spellings of the word "judgment" in virtually all dictionaries. My personal Webster's does show "judgement" as an alternative, but not the preferred version.

But in several articles lately I have noticed the alternative, old-fashioned spelling of "judgment" is being used more and more. That's how "preferred usages" are determined and I cannot help feeling that Francis Thetford, who is now deceased, would be chagrined, to say the least.



September 30, 2003

Midnight musings sometimes are the best, but not always. Here's a small sample of the disconnected thoughts that parade through a sleepless night. How do you rate them?

Dr John Chaffin, a native Perryan, is one of the most respected cardiovascular surgeons in this great state. He currently is appearing in a brief but meaningful TV plug for the Oklahoma City hospital where he serves. Somehow it's a temptation to call him "Johnny," but I guess he's earned the right to shed that familiar name. His late Mom, Betty, and Dad, Everett, certainly would be justifiably proud of him today. So are the, rest of us who watched him grow up

Our Perry Maroons may be having trouble winning football games this season, but we may be leading the league in great singers. Brett Payne did a superb job of setting the stage for the PHS homecoming game the other night at Daniels Field.

He's distinguished himself on other occasions. Also, the PHS band continues to dazzle us with their precision marching and playing. Mr. Jim Parham is the director this year after the retirement of Sandy Hentges.

We Perry Presbyterians may have a hard time finding a replacement the equal of the Rev. Tim Boggess, who preached his final sermon here on Sunday morning before leaving for a new ministry in Georgia. Tim has fit into this community wonderfully well in his six and a half years among us, and his Sunday sermons have been finely crafted. Although he is still a young man, I think he must be the senior pastor in point of service among Perry churches today. We'll miss him for many reasons, but we wish him well. He was saluted by church members and friends at a church dinner after services last Sunday morning. It's also been a joy to have his wife, Heather, and their very young daughter, Claire, dwelling among us. His Mom, Rachel Boggess, a resident of Edmond, has been here faithfully almost every Sunday. She is a highly regarded member of our choir and a member of this church.

Driving south on State Highway 86 the other day, we were surprised, yet somehow pleased, to see a pile of rubble where once stood the "Chateau Ghetto." It has been looking a bit down at the heels for some time, and I don't know why it has been leveled now, but I think we're going to miss that old landmark. For one thing, it made us aware that the juncture with SH 51 was just ahead. On football Saturdays, especially, it was important to know that.

Someone has furnished me with what appears to be a Xerox copy of an envelope bearing the cancellation date of December 18, 1908. It was addressed simply to "Geo. Wetlerfeld, Wichita, Kansas," and it bore the legal (for then) two-cent postage stamp. The left end of the envelope had the type imprint of "Chas. Christoph," along with an etching of the two-story building at the south end of the west side of the square. That's where Mr. Christoph operated his furniture and undertaking business. In later years the businesses were named "Christoph & Newton Furniture" and the "Newton Funeral Home" (now, the Brown-Dugger Funeral Home). George Rice, who now owns the building, is still in the process of converting it into a display space for his collection of classic and antique cars, with living space on the upper floor. You may have seen George driving a new acquisition, a bright red fire truck, in the Cherokee Strip Celebration parade earlier this month. I'm not sure where this interesting envelope came from, but I thank whoever brought or sent it to me.