

3 Rivers Historian

Fall 2001

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 4, No. 4

Museum Decorated for Old Fashioned Christmas

THE MUSKOGEE High School History Buffs helped decorate the Three Rivers Museum to celebrate an Old-Fashioned Christmas. The History Buffs are a student club, led by Dianne Hill, a teacher and Three Rivers Museum Board member.

Club members Marquita Rowland, Shaina Greuel, Tiffany Hill, Dominique London, Whittanni Brewer, Ebony Briggins, Bobbi Frey, Katie Avance and Kristin Avance set up a tree in the lobby of the Midland Valley Depot which houses the Three Rivers Museum. The theme was "An Old-Fashioned Christmas" — appropriate for a museum which remembers and celebrates our rich past.

The Christmas tree features a miniature steam engine and train that circles the tree on a track, puffing steam from its stack and blowing its tiny whistle. It will be a delight to both children and adults who visit the museum during the holiday season. A photo of this train was featured in the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*.



The History Buffs decorate the museum's Christmas tree.

Garlands of greenery and ribbon add color throughout the museum's lobby. To honor America, many red, white and blue ribbons are a part of the decorations.

If you will have visitors during the holiday season, you'll want to bring them by the museum before you tour the Garden of Lights in Honor Heights Park. The museum is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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Christmas Eve in Council Hill

by Ellen "Cowboy" Collins Johnson

CANDLELIGHT flickered on the shining faces of children ages 5 to 12 dressed in their "Sunday best." They stood in a line across the wooden platform in the Council Hill Methodist Church. It was Christmas Eve of 1925.

The children fidgeted while waiting for the piano prelude to finish. The pulpit had been moved back and in the center of the stage two children represented Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus.

Sweet voices echoed in the rafters. "Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head."

Applause from smiling parents and grandparents in the mahogany pews exploded at the end as anxious children swarmed around the Christmas tree in one corner. They sat on the highly polished pine floor in a semi-circle to wait for Santa Claus.

The twelve-foot cedar tree had been cut on the nearby mountain and decorated with strings of cranberries, popcorn, and brightly-colored paper chains and a large star on top.

The arrival of Santa Claus caused a murmur to cross the 20 x 16 foot room.

His nose and cheeks were red from bitter cold outside; and he briefly warmed himself by the potbelly stove near the door. With a wide grin and many "ho, ho, ho's," he strode to the front and finally reached into a burlap bag to distribute small brown sacks filled with candy, a fat orange and one red apple.

The Council Hill Methodist Church has been the center of the town's social activities since it was built in 1907 as a community church. Louis Barnes, an old timer, said that during a tent revival on a vacant lot, someone started the collection to build the church.

Besides Sunday and Wednesday services, it has been used for meetings, Missionary Society Ice Cream Socials and lectures.

There are two bells in the steeple, but one cracked several years ago. The rich tone can be heard for miles. Shirley Hicks Paden, granddaughter of Hattie and Thomas R. Hicks, now rings the bell each Sunday.

"I grew up in Council Hill hearing the bell every Sunday morning," Paden said. "It's part of our life here."

Council Hill was founded in 1905 around the newly arrived Missouri Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad station. The town was named for a well-known landmark five miles west, site of the first Muscogee Creek Nation Capital in Indian Territory.

The Indians built a fire on the mountain and used smoke signals to announce General Council meetings to other Creek towns. Then in 1861, it became headquarters for Col. D.N. McIntosh of the Creek Regiment of the Confederacy.

Early farmers raised corn, oats and
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Fall 2001 V. 4, No. 4

P.O. Box 1813 ♦ Muskogee, OK 74402
918/686-6624 ♦ www.3riversmuseum.com

published quarterly by Three Rivers Museum
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Editor-in-Chief: Roger Bell Managing Editor: Jonita Mullins

Design and Production by JM Publishing
323 N. 13th St. ♦ Muskogee, OK 74401 ♦ 682-0312

Spaulding Park: A Bit of History

by Linda Moore

THE HISTORY of Spaulding Park, and its namesake, Homer B. Spaulding, involves looking at several different sources of information to get a clear picture. It is interesting to note some of the events in the very early days of the development of Muskogee.

In 1872, the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad built its lines through the section of Indian Territory near the confluence of three rivers, the Verdigris, the Grand (sometimes called the Neosho), and the Arkansas. The town sprang up and a number of merchants, ranchers and businessmen settled in to make their living. Among those was Homer B. Spaulding.

H.B. Spaulding was born in February, 1862 in Tennessee. He moved to Sulphur Springs, Texas in 1880, where he lived for four years. Here he met and married the daughter of the Hon. S.B. Callahan, of the Creek Nation.

Coming to Muskogee in 1884, he began working as a carpenter but soon entered the mercantile business with J.A. Patterson & Co. He remained in this position for four years, then went into the ranching business for himself, buying the cattle and improvements on Patterson's leased ranch on Cloud Creek, sixteen miles west of Checotah.

He also built ranches on the Creek allotment lands his wife was entitled to, and by 1899, owned some forty thousand acres and sixteen to twenty thousand head of cattle. In partnership with W.S. Harsha, there was a large mercantile as well as a thriving cotton gin, named for the pair — Harsha and Spaulding — both in Muskogee and Checotah.



Spaulding Institute rose above the prairie of Muskogee

Spaulding and his wife were staunch Methodists and were always supportive of the functions of their church.¹ In March 1878, a few Methodist residents of Muskogee had asked the Creek chief for permission to build a church. In November 1879, permission was given and the building, known afterwards as the "Rock Church," was built on the southeast corner of Cherokee Street (then called the Texas Road) and Okmulgee Avenue.

Rev. Theodore F. Brewer, pastor, and his sister, Mrs. M.E. Locke, offered to provide school facilities for the children, and in 1879, classes began in the church building and another building a short distance east of the church. By 1881, a high school building was needed and Harrell Institute was established in 1882, and named for Rev. John Harrell, a famous missionary who had died in 1867 and who had served at Asbury Mission near what later became Eufaula.

By 1884, two two-story buildings, one frame and one of brick, were constructed east of Rock Church. These buildings

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Our Mission

The Three Rivers Museum has been established to tell the complete story of the founding, settlement and development of the Three Rivers area of Oklahoma. The museum will actively seek to collect, preserve, research, exhibit and interpret a collection of historic artifacts. We will serve the visitors and residents of the area through these efforts as well as through educational programs and special events. The Three Rivers Museum hopes its work will establish a respect for the region's past and will contribute quality and value to its future.

Council Hill *cont.*

grain but the main cash crop was cotton. A stockyard built near the train station enabled ranchers to ship cattle to Kansas City instead of driving them north.

Unfortunately a fire in 1915 swept through the town and a tornado in 1917 destroyed most of the remaining buildings. Many were never rebuilt. Then a larger railhead at Checotah took most of the business away. The last passenger train was around 1957.

The Hicks family settled in Council Hill before 1900. T.R. died young from a rupture that hemorrhaged. Dr. F.B. Fite came from Muskogee and immediately operated on T.R. on the family's dining room table, but was unable to save him. His oldest son, Mack, attended Henry Kendall College in 1901.

Mack rode the train to Muskogee each Monday morning and returned on Friday Night. He later owned a garage in Council Hill and then worked for the OG&E Oklahoma Pipeline Co. The relay (pump) station was two miles from town and transported oil from the Glenn Pool Oilfield to the Gulf Coast.

Mack and his wife Maud Clemons Hicks had nine children: Lena Parks, Gibson (who died from measles at age 15), Dessie Jackson, T.R. "Tom," Perry, Inez Holland, Hazel Franklin, Grace Lemon and Shirley Paden. Only four of



Mack Hicks of Council Hill, circa 1910

the children are still living — Inez, Hazel, Grace and Shirley.

Hazel, a lively lady of 86 with silver hair and a quick smile, told about the time when her daddy was bit by a water moccasin while working in the hay meadow. "Old Man Sellers immediately put gunpowder on the bite," she said, "and set it on fire in a few seconds. It never even swelled!"

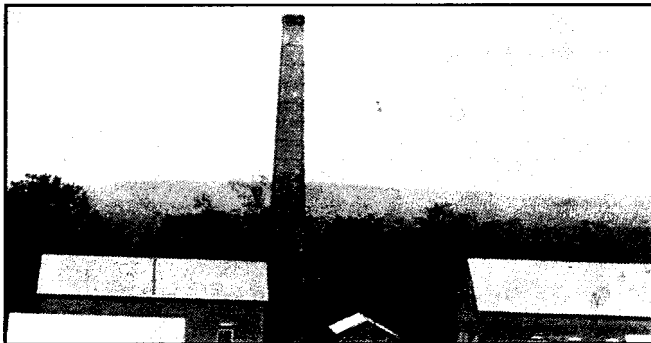
Another memory concerns helping their mother with spring cleaning. She would build a fire, warm a #10 washtub of cistern water and add the family quilts one at a time. After it cooled, the kids would stomp on them in the tub.

Hazel laughed and said, "You know it's the cleanest our feet got all year!"

Grace Lemon, a warm-hearted lady with strong convictions, talked about frustrated efforts to have the church declared an historical building. She also discussed the Hicks reunion in 1979 when over 100 family members attended.

Many descendants of its founders still live around Council Hill: Barnes, Haggard, Hicks, Neumeyer, Sappington, Sellers, Stone, Sullivan, Swadley and Weaver families.

Council Hill's history is lovingly passed on in these families and will not be forgotten. ▼



OG&E Relay Station near Council Hill, circa 1920

Spaulding Park *cont.*

were subsequently destroyed by fire on September 25, 1899.²

H.B. Spaulding had contributed \$5,000 to fund several substantial improvements to the school, including a steam-heating system and electric lighting, and the name of the institution had been changed to Spaulding Institute.

The morning after the fire, H.B. Spaulding was again ready to help finance the rebuilding of the school on an eleven acre site near the fairgrounds (not the same location as the current fairgrounds).³

The school operated until Christmas of 1905, and due to financial difficulties ceased to exist as a school.⁴ Around 1908, after it had been used as a boarding and rooming house for a short time, it became Muskogee General Hospital at 518 Baltimore.

After the fire that devastated much of downtown Muskogee in February 1899, a Townsite Commission was formed to plat and design the town in an orderly fashion, so property deeds could be conveyed.

According to the plat map that the Commission presented in 1900, the eleven-acre tract where Spaulding Institute stood was bordered by Okmulgee Avenue, G Street, Park Drive (a widened extension of Cincinnati Street) and Spaulding Boulevard.

The area directly southeast of this tract, designated on the map only as "Park," was bounded by Okmulgee Avenue, K Street, Dorchester, Spaulding Boulevard, Park Drive and G Street. It was an irregular tract with a curved street through it named Park Drive, numbered Lots 376 and 378.⁵

Across part of Lot 378, there is a

dotted line marked "South fence of the Old Fairgrounds." This refers to the location of a fairgrounds used many years before. The Indian International Fair Association was organized in Muskogee, Indian Territory in 1875. The first fair was held that year under a large tent as the corner of what is now Cherokee and Cincinnati Streets.

Over the next few years, the fair grew to the extent that the location had to be moved farther east to where the Muskogee General Hospital (Spaulding Institute) stood. A long barn-like plank building was erected and the entire grounds, including the race track, was enclosed with a high board fence.⁶

As horse racing had always been a popular amusement among all Indians, that was one of the chief attractions for the fair. The mile race track, located where Spaulding Park is now, was always put in perfect condition for the occasion.

Many tribes came from all over the

1 "End of the Century Edition of the Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 1899," p. 24, 80.

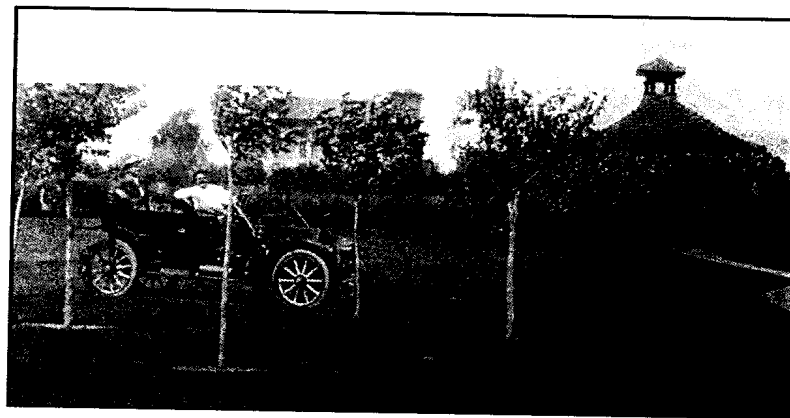
2 Grant Foreman, Muskogee: The Biography of an Oklahoma Town (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), p. 55.

3 *Ibid*, p. 55.

4 Henry Sidney Babcock and John Y. Bruce, The History of Methodism in Oklahoma, I (n. p., 1935), p. 312. Reprinted in Volume 46 of Chronicles of Oklahoma, p. 313.

5 Original map in archives of Three Rivers Museum, Muskogee, OK.

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A vintage auto tours the grounds of Spaulding Park

Spaulding Park *cont.*

Sources for Spaulding Park

6 Ella Robinson,
"Indian International
Fair," *Chronicles of
Oklahoma*
(Oklahoma City),
Volume 17, p. 413.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 414-416.

8 C.W. "Dub" West,
"Turning Back the
Clock" (Muskogee:
Muskogee Publishing
Co., 1985) p. 21.

9 C.W. "Dub" West,
Muskogee: From
Statehood to Pearl
Harbor (Muskogee:
Muskogee Publishing
Co., 1976) pp. 211,
322.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 335.

11 *Muskogee Daily
Phoenix*, December
5, 1982, Section C, p.
5; also March 3,
1983, Section A, p.
3.

Territory, as well as the western tribes. The Indians brought their own tents and tepees and set them up inside the enclosure. They were a picturesque group with their different blankets and headdress.

The fair exhibits included all varieties of farm produce and livestock. In the women's department could be found exhibits of preserves, jellies, pickles, cakes and bread. Needlework of all kinds and a special department for children was included.

After a year or so, a more convenient building was erected at the same location. It was a round two-story structure with four entrances and was called the Dinner Bucket. Large posts supported the upper floor throughout the building.

A stomp dance was held each night by the Indians, on the second floor of the main building. A United States flag floated from atop the building and could be seen across the prairie for miles.

The exhibits were tastefully arranged, the women's department occupying one quarter of the space. Salesmen from adjoining states came and displayed their wares.

It was in the early 1880's that the first merry-go-round made its appearance at the Fair. It was a funny thing, operated by little mules that went round in a circle. At first the children were afraid, but soon took to it.

There were bands that played music all day and into the evening from a bandstand near the race track. Everyone in town participated, and as the distance of what is now called five blocks from town to the fairgrounds was too great to walk, the livery barn operated regular taxi lines to the fair,

charging 25 cents a trip.

The fair was held in the latter part of September and people's relatives always planned a visit during that time.⁷

Just after statehood in 1907, the Oklahoma Free State Fair was organized and the grounds moved to the present site. In 1909, the famous racehorse, Dan Patch, was featured there. Charles Lindberg landed there in 1927, and Vice President Charles Curtis attended in 1932.⁸

When the fairgrounds moved further south, Spaulding Park was more fully developed. The "lake" (pond) was dragged and dug, beginning April 1, 1909. Plantings and structures were also designed and built.

The gazebo, in the middle of the pond, which was connected to land by a walkway, was completed by 1910. There were fish to be caught from the pond and picnics were a popular pastime. Another popular pastime was sending picture postcards and Spaulding Park was the subject of a number of different scenes, mostly in the period between 1910 and 1920.

June 21, 1928, the Girl Scouts dedicated their "Little House" in the Park, which had formerly been the Kiwanis tourist house. On October 13, 1938, the Band Shell was dedicated. It provided a place for open-air band concerts, often conducted by Tony Goetz, that were enjoyed for many years. It also was the platform used in 1948 when Harry S. Truman came to Muskogee. It survived until 1975 when it was finally torn down.⁹

A June 18, 1939 issue of the *Muskogee Phoenix* tells of the popularity of the new swimming pool at Spaulding Park. In the late 1940's the local Boy Scouts raised money and purchased

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Welcome to These Museum Members

MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP continues to grow. We would like to welcome all our (♦) new members and those who have renewed their membership in the past three months. Thank you for being a part of the Three Rivers Museum.

Individual

Wilma Allen
James Boyer
Carolyn Bresser
Mary Ann Burrows
Geraldine Farris
Pat Ferry
Helen Fite
C.G. Fullenwider
Al Cheeseman
Sue Gaston
Martha Griffin
Lillian Jayne
F. Merton Jeanes
Theodore Johnson
Barbara LaFerry
Muskogee Public Library
Frank Patterson
Lillian Ragsdale
Rosemary Rice
Vickie Sheffler
Nancy Steveson
Wren Stratton

Family

Rodney & Tish Callahan
H.C. & Suzanne Chancellor
Andy & Audrey Ewing
John & Linda Fike
John W. Griffin
Terry & Jeanie Grubbs
Richard Haugland
Jack & Bette Hodge
Elmer Hoffman
Grace Lemon
Lin & Linda Moore
Greg & Barbara Newell
Harold & Marjorie Patterson
Jim & Fran Risch
Ben & Marcia Robinson
Robert & Ann Roe
John & Lynn Rowsey
Jack & Eva White

Builder

Eloise & John H. Cable, Jr.
Joel Cousins
Stephen & Charlotte Crank
Jim A Egan Trust
Larry Hoffman Insurance
Kathryn Lathim
Joe Teaff

Sponsor

Karen & Carter Bradley
Moffitt, Parker & Co.
OG&E

The Three Rivers Area

What makes up the Three Rivers Area? It is defined to include Muskogee County, all the counties that border Muskogee County — Cherokee, Haskell, McIntosh, Okmulgee, Wagoner — as well as Southern Mayes and Western Sequoyah Counties.

The Three Rivers Museum hopes to collect and preserve historical artifacts from this entire region. Contact the museum if you have something to donate at 686-6624.



THREE RIVERS MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP

You can be a part of history! Join the Three Rivers Museum today. Your annual membership fee entitles you to a membership card, subscription to the quarterly journal, free admission to the museum and a 10% discount on purchases in the museum gift shop.

Please complete this form and mail with your check made payable to the Three Rivers Museum.

Individual Membership \$25 Family Membership \$35 Builder Membership \$100
 Sponsor Membership \$250 Sustainer Membership \$500

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

Clip or copy and mail to: Three Rivers Museum
P.O. Box 1813, Muskogee, OK 74402



Contact Us

The Three Rivers Museum is always looking for historical artifacts pertinent to the Three Rivers area of Oklahoma.

A representative from the Museum would be happy to meet with anyone who would like to make a donation of such artifacts.

Please call us at 686-6624 about making a donation to the Three Rivers Museum. Together we can preserve the past for future generations.

Editor's Note:

The "Three Rivers Historian" needs your historical articles. Please submit them to: Three Rivers Historian,

Attn: Managing Editor,
P.O. Box 1813,
Muskogee, OK
74402.

Or you can send us an e-mail at www.3riversmuseum.com

Museum Hours:

Wed. thru Sat.
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Call about group reservations and rates

Three Rivers People

Dianne Hill: A Steadfast Supporter

Dianne Hill has been a long-time member of the Three Rivers Museum Board of Directors and has faithfully supported it for many years. As a high school history teacher in the Muskogee Public School System, Dianne is determined to see that Three Rivers area history is preserved.

For a time, Dianne prepared the museum's first newsletter, the precursor to this publication, *The 3 Rivers Historian*. She has sought to educate others about the rich history of the region.

Dianne sponsors the Muskogee High School History Buffs Club. This organization raised the money and donated it to the museum to purchase a lectern for the museum's Dorothy Ball Conference Room. The club also helped with the purchase of the museum's old-

Spaulding Park *cont.*

a scaled down version of the Statue of Liberty, made of bronze. The Statue was placed on an island pedestal in the middle of the pond.¹⁰

During the years, renovations have taken place several times. In 1982, then Park and Recreation director, Henry Bresser, and a crew, took the Statue of Liberty, which had been vandalized in 1978, and welded her right arm back in position. The pond was emptied, cleaned, restocked with fish, and the Statue was reinstated in her rightful place in the center.¹¹

In 1995, new playground equipment in the shape of a dinosaur, and basketball courts were added. In 1996,



Dianne Hill coordinates her history club's decorating efforts

fashioned Christmas decorations. They joined Dianne and museum director Linda Moore in decorating the museum for the holiday.

Linda says of Dianne, "I admire her steadfastness in working for the museum. She has stayed with the museum board for many years and has made a difference." ▼

a new shelter, to be used for picnics and gatherings, was dedicated.

On that occasion, Mayor Jim Bushnell and Park Superintendent Mark Wilkerson presented a plaque with the following message: "This structure funded in part by friends and employees of Robert N. Yaffe in appreciation of his many years of leadership and service to our community."

As recently as 2001, the swimming pool was completely refurbished and remodeled, with new bath houses and fencing.

These are just a few of the memories of Spaulding Park, part of Muskogee for over a hundred years. ▼