

3 Rivers Historian

Winter 2002

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 5, No. 1

1914 Model T Loaned to Museum

Larry Ross, a Muskogee Shriner, has loaned his 1914 Model T Ford to the Three Rivers Museum. The vintage automobile has been on display in the museum's large exhibit hall as part of its "Gone, But Not Forgotten" exhibit.

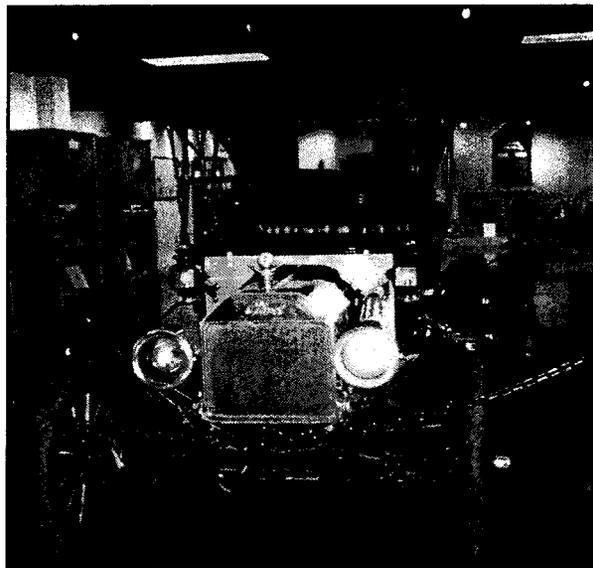
Ross bought the car in April of 2001 and found that the engine had never been rebuilt. He installed a 1924 engine in the car so that it does run. Ross plans to have the original engine rebuilt and then re-installed in the car.

The 1914 Model T was first restored in the 1960s and was displayed for many years in a museum in Missouri. Later, it was viewed in an old hotel lobby in Oklahoma City. Then it was on display at the Ford dealership in Eufaula until Ross bought it.

The headlights on the car were originally fired by carbide. Ross uses propane when he drives the car in night parades. The carriage lights on the sides and the tail lights are kerosene lanterns.

The car completed a four-day tour in Eureka Springs last October and will be a part of the Azalea Festival Model T Tour in Muskogee this April.

The license plate on the car is a 1914 California plate. It was given by a friend named Bruce Siebert before Ross had



Larry Ross's 1914 Model T Ford

even bought the Model T. Siebert told Ross, "One day you might find a 1914 Model T to put this plate on." Only three weeks later, Ross bought the car and put the plate on it.

Seibert's mother had passed the plate down to him. Her parents had bought a new 1914 Model T that year and drove to California in it. Since California required license plates (Oklahoma didn't at that time), they bought a California plate to put on the car.

Model T Fords were produced from 1908 to 1927. Over 15 million of these popular cars were built. Ford gained

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Rivers
Museum
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The 1914 California license plate

Model T *cont.*

national attention in 1914 when he began his assembly line production of automobiles.

The 1914 Model T Runabout sold for \$990 in that year. But Ford realized this price was out of reach for most Americans. He continued to modify the car and improve his assembly line to cut costs. By 1924, Model T's sold for just under \$300, making them affordable for nearly everyone.

Henry Ford went broke six times during his years of building the Model T, but investors kept funneling him money. No other car had the production numbers of this Ford until the popular, economical Volkswagen Beetle. ▼

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Museum News Briefs

School Groups Tour

Museum Director, Linda Moore, reports that several schools in the Muskogee area have visited the museum in recent weeks. The schools are utilizing the question and answer study guides sent to the schools by the museum.

The study guide covers facts from Three Rivers history that are presented in the current museum exhibits. Students get a first-hand look at the history they would otherwise only know from a textbook.

Volunteers Needed

As the museum enters into the busy tourist season, it is seeking volunteers to work at the ticket counter and gift shop and help visitors with tours of the exhibits.

The museum also seeks a part-time paid employee to work during museum hours. If you are interested in volunteering or in working part-time, please contact Linda Moore, the museum director.

Three Forks Video Made

The Oklahoma Historical Society has produced a video that documents the early history of the Three Forks area. The video is available at the Three Rivers Museum.

The video focuses on the earliest days Oklahoma history that made the Three Forks area a crossroads for trade between the Native Americans and the French, Spanish and English.

Trouble in Threes: The Morris Bank Robberies

by Ron Morgan

Clara Aggas, a pretty 22-year-old, bid her parents goodbye on the morning of September 8, 1931 as she left for her job at the Morris Bank. She felt blessed to have a job in these days of the Depression and falling cotton prices. Joblessness and the slumping economy had produced desperate people and Miss Aggas was about to fall victim to a few of them.

Graham Smith, a newly trained accountant, also worked at the Morris Bank. Mr. Mullins, the bank manager, arrived at work at 8:00 a.m. to let his two co-workers into the bank.

Just before lunchtime they were going about their duties when a black Model A sedan parked in front of the bank. Two men, one short and stout and the other tall and gangly, entered the bank.

Mr. Mullins — standing on a chair, rewinding the lobby clock — felt a jab in his ribs. Thinking someone was joking, he said, “Knock it off,” without looking around. He received another poke in the ribs that felt like something metal followed by a gruff, “Get off there.”

Mullins turned around and saw a man holding a pistol. The three bank employees were told to stand against the wall.

The shorter man, armed with a 45 caliber pistol, leaped over the counter and started cleaning out the cash till. The taller man, positioned in the lobby, was also armed with a handgun.

Banker Smith remembered the robbery at age 92. He commented that the shorter bandit, a handsome fellow dressed in khaki clothes and a broad-brimmed hat, was rather a sport about



Photo from the Bixby Historical Society

Charles A. "Pretty Boy" Floyd

the whole thing. The man never threatened to harm anyone, but he clearly meant business.

It was also clear that he was no novice to the business of bank robbery. The two thieves gathered \$800 from the cash tills and another \$1,000 from the open vault. The bank officials were then herded into the vault and the robbers fled the bank, leaving a bag of gold coins on the counter in their hurry.

The bankers stayed a few minutes in the vault then let themselves out. They raced into the street, but saw no sign of the robbers. The town constable was informed of the robbery and he in turn called Sheriff Don Storemont in Okmulgee, the county seat.

The sheriff and a quickly formed posse raced to Morris. He interviewed the few people who were in the street — they hadn't seen a thing. But the owner of the "Y" gas station south of town stated two men matching the robbers' descriptions had stopped in his establishment that morning to purchase cigars. And a traveling sales-

continued on page 4

Morris Bank

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.

man came forward to say he had seen the bandits' car leave town after the bank robbery, heading south at a leisurely pace.

A break in the case came two days later when Sheriff Storemont took the Morris bank officials to the courthouse to look at mug shots. Mullins, Smith, and Miss Aggas all positively identified Charles A. Floyd, the noted bank robber, as the shorter man and his sidekick George Birdwell as the taller man involved in the robbery.

Smith later commented on the fact that as nervous as he was during the robbery, he was twice as shook up upon identifying Floyd as the perpetrator. "One look at his record frightened me badly," he said.

Smith also remembered that Miss Aggas, who had acted very professional during the holdup, had a terrible attack

of nerves after finding out the identity of the pair.

The little town of Morris hadn't had so much excitement in decades. Now people had something to talk about on trade days besides the price of cotton. Little did they know they hadn't seen anything yet.

The excitement in Morris died down from the bank robbery in September and it was back to business as usual. December 23 was a busy day in town — everyone was getting ready for Christmas. The weather had turned cold and people had donned their winter coats.

As the bank clerks Mullins and Smith returned from lunch, several customers were at the bank. Miss Aggas had taken the day off.

A black Ford Coup, bearing the license plate number 334-373 pulled to the side of the bank. Two men made their

"Pretty Boy" Floyd

One of the suspects in the Morris bank robbery — Charles Floyd — was wanted for the murder of a policeman in Ohio and a prohibition agent in Kansas City. He was also the prime suspect in the armed robbery of several banks in three states. He was listed in police mug books as an escapee from the Ohio State Prison, where he had been sentenced for bank robbery. Actually he had escaped from a train while being escorted to the prison.

His crime partner, George Birdwell, was an out of work roughneck who had at one time worked the rodeo circuit. He was born and spent his youth in northeast Texas. He met Floyd in the oilfield country near Earlsboro, Oklahoma in the early 1930s. The two were in the bootleg business together, but profits were nothing to write home about. Birdwell had a wife and passel of kids to feed. With the slump in oilfield work and slow "shine" sales, the two devised an alternative finance plan — bank robbery.

Floyd often stayed at the home of Jess Ring, his uncle-in-law. Ring lived in a little green shotgun house south of Haskell and operated the gas pumping station nearby. A story is still repeated around Haskell that Floyd filled up the gas tank of a junked car, parked behind Ring's house, with coins from his robberies.

Robberies *cont.*

way to the front door of the bank.

Mr. Smith looked up from his desk to see the two men enter the bank. He thought that one of the pair looked familiar. Charley Floyd and his pal Birdwell had come calling again. Floyd entered the bank and surveyed the room while Birdwell whipped out a machine gun from under his coat.

According to Smith and other witnesses, Birdwell announced that they were "back for a return engagement." Floyd, armed with a .45, jumped over the counter, quickly scooping up the money while telling everyone to stand still and be quiet. Birdwell commented to the crowd that they were following orders a whole lot better this time and that he appreciated it.

After he had collected about \$1,100, Floyd stated that they were "taking a collection up for needy widows and orphans at Christmas." The customers laughed nervously.

The collection of bankers and customers were made to walk in front of the bandits as they made their escape to the getaway car. Mullins and Smith were told to stand on the car's running boards and "hang on tight."

The bandits drove slowly out of town, waving and exchanging pleasantries with a crowd of about 50 people who had gathered in front of the bank. The two hostages were left at the edge of town.

The town marshal followed the bandit's car out of town, but at a respectful distance. He said he soon "lost them."

Okmulgee County Sheriff Storemont was quickly notified and roadblocks were set up on roads and bridges. Floyd's known hideouts and the

houses of relatives throughout the state were put under surveillance.

Sheriff Cannon of Muskogee County and a posse raided Floyd's suspected hideout in the Haskell area. Several days later, Floyd was seen getting a haircut in Haskell by numerous residents.

A gaggle of children (some of whom are still living) recalled seeing the town constable stick his head out the door of his office and get into a staring contest with Birdwell who was standing in front of the barber shop. Birdwell looked at the constable and shook his head as to say no. The constable blinked and there was no trouble that day.

A former sheriff, Erv Kelley, then working for the Bankers Association, thought he had sighted the bandits car the next day, but soon lost sight of it. Floyd killed Kelley in a gunfight near Bixby a few months later.

The town of Morris and the bank had once again survived a robbery. However, the events humiliated and angered the town marshal, city fathers, and the bankers. The bank's insurance company was upset to the point of apoplexy.

At a town gathering following the robbery, plans were formulated to defend the bank in case this happened again. An alarm was installed in the building.

Local businessmen were asked to bring guns to work and were assigned shooting positions in the event of another robbery attempt. The people of Morris vowed the next time it would not be so easy.

Read about Robbery # Three in the next issue of the Historian.



Sources for Morris Bank Robberies

Books:

Mike Wallis, *Pretty Boy: The Life and Times of Charles A. Floyd*

Morris Historical Society, *Morris History*

Okmulgee Historical Society, *Okmulgee County History*

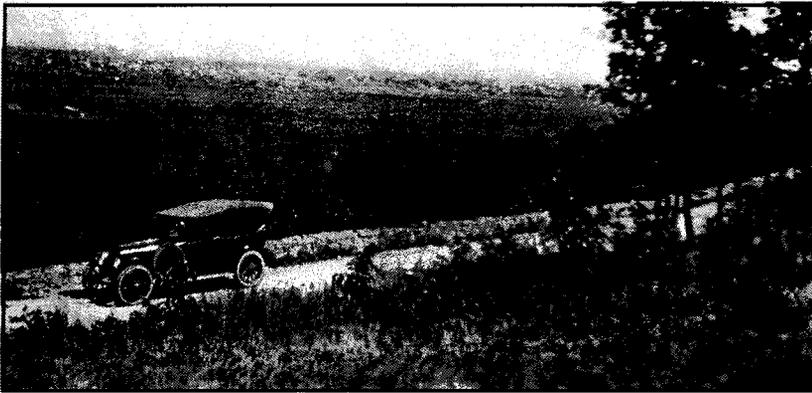
Newspapers:

Okmulgee Daily Times
Haskell News
Muskogee Phoenix
Morris News

Individuals:

Graham Smith, Okmulgee
Ben Reynolds, Morris
Tom Duncan, Morris
Stephen Guy, Haskell
R.D. Harrison, Haskell
Toni Brashera, Haskell
John Mackey, Haskell
Jess Hargraves, Bixby
Harper Edwards, Sallisaw
Claudia Chilcoat, Haskell

Honor Heights Park Won More Beautiful America Contest



Early view from
Agency Hill leading
to Honor Heights
Park

Editor's Note: *The following is an excerpt from the Muskogee Garden Club's entry into the Better Homes and Gardens "More Beautiful America" Contest in 1934. Its author is unknown.*

Muskogee is located in the gateway of the Ozarks, with a population of 32,500. It has five railroads, nine bus lines, a Government Hospital, State School for the Blind, Bacone College for Indians and a \$750,000 Federal Building. Muskogee is also the Indian Capital of the United States, being headquarters for the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians.

In 1927, the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee which was termed "The City Beautiful Committee." Out of that little group grew "The Muskogee Garden Club" in 1930.

When the *Better Homes and Gardens* announced the 2nd More Beautiful America contest, we voted to enter the City of Muskogee in the contest.

In the Fall of 1932, it became necessary for the community to seek aid from the State because budgets were reduced to low figures. Men were discharged from regular jobs, adding hundreds to the unemployed. The aid received enabled thousands of men to be called on CWA projects.

The outstanding improvements which

constitute the project entered in the More Beautiful America Contest are located on old Agency Hill, two and a half miles West of the City, transforming the Hill, now known as Honor Heights Memorial Park, into a beautiful garden, and building a gravel road around the hill, with footpaths curving in and out among the flower beds of the entire acreage. The woods were cleared of underbrush and the trees trimmed of dead and low branches.

The woods border almost the entire tract at the edge of the road and are left in groves of such trees as Pin Oak, Dogwood, Redbud, Maple, Ash, Hackberry and Wild Cherry. The entire plan has been worked out to blend with the natural surroundings.

The road and walks all converge in the end toward the lake which is surrounded by Willows, Poplars, Mimosa and many others. The rocks are rugged gray with green and brown moss and look as if they carried with them the secret of prehistoric times.

In the Southeast corner is a lily pond with a small Island near the center. Around the pool visitors find their way over a winding pathway.

The water weaves its way on through the park, forming a brook, its banks flanked by Cypress and Dogwood trees with Hare Bells and Mountain Azaleas, Japanese Quince and Forsythia. The foot bridge at the lower edge was built by the Garden Club at a cost of \$22.50 for labor.

For the nature lover Honor Heights Park holds rare opportunities. Miles of picturesque driveways and miles of footpaths traversing the park are bordered by exquisite natural scenery.

Here on the 90 acres of land which
continued on page 8

▶ 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

Alice Hendrickson
 Norma Kilgore
 ♦ Barbara Lang
 Jonita Mullins
 Amy Gene Pepperkorn
 ♦ Christine Boulware Russell
 Nadeane Taylor
 Marie Wadley
 Erma Whittet

Family

♦ W.L. & Ruth Ballard
 Roy & Lin Barmore
 Hershel & Patsy Beaver
 Chip Bevilaqua Family
 Bethany Bowline
 Valarie Rogers Carter
 R.D. Cox
 Phyllis Durland
 Hubert & Louise Ellison
 Geraldine Bates Hannah
 Clay & Joy Harrell
 ♦ Timothy Hopkins

Julia Hurst & Jacob Gonzales
 Jayson Jarrard Family
 John & Barbara Lomax
 Arnold & Nita Moore
 Carl & Janet Moore
 Kai Moore Family
 Duane & Virginia Pickle
 Cliff & Suzanne Rogers
 Dudley & Paula Rogers
 Joe & Cindy Rogers
 ♦ Rex & Martha Slack
 Troy Thornton Family
 ♦ Tom & June Tucker
 Warren Weakland

Builder

Bill & Ann Boies
 ♦ Ruthie Bass Patterson

Sponsor

Richard & Leigh Bradley

Benefactor

Kirshner Foundation

▶ 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



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.

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

Full Slate of Special Events Planned

First Anniversary Celebrated

The Three Rivers Museum will celebrate its first anniversary of operation in the Midland Valley Depot with a reception on March 21 at 5:00 p. m. at the Depot. Volunteers who have worked at the museum throughout its inaugural year will be recognized at the reception. All members of the museum are invited to attend and help celebrate this first anniversary.

Antique Cars Will Gather at Museum

The Antique Car Club of Green Country will display their vintage automobiles outside the Midland Valley Depot at 3rd and Elgin in Muskogee on

April 6, prior to the Azalea Festival Parade.

The cars will be available for viewing by the public from 9:00 a.m. until they line up to participate in the parade through downtown Muskogee.

The Ross 1914 Model T, highlighted in the cover story, will be among the cars on display and then driving in the parade. Visitors to see the cars are urged to tour the museum as well.

Railroad Day Set for May 18

The Three Rivers Museum will host a Railroad Day on May 18 with special events throughout the day at the Midland Valley Depot. This will be the anniversary of Muskogee's first Railroad Day held on May 18, 1904 at the Midland Valley Depot.

Honor Heights Park cont.

first echoed only to the tread of moccasined feet, when the Indians long years ago, sought out this region for its beauty and refuge; where the shade of many trees cooled the heat of the summer day, and the surrounding hills admitted not the biting winds of winter, lies one of the most picturesque sections of Oklahoma.

The editor of Better Homes and Gardens, Elmer Peterson, wrote this editorial in the magazine.

"I'm writing this on a return trip from Muskogee, Oklahoma, where presentation was made of a \$1000 check to the Muskogee Garden Club, a

sweepstakes prize in the second More Beautiful America contest. I'm not merely enthusiastic but completely dumbfounded at the things this city has done.

"A tract of nearly 100 acres, comprising what, in some localities, would be called a mountain, was transformed from a towering jungle-wilderness of rock-strewn, weedy, unkept terrain into a fairyland, adorned by acres of tree and shrub plantings, rock gardens, pools, flowers and shady walks and drives.

"The best thing about it is its naturalness. If the park is maintained and reasonably developed, it will be a year-after-year mecca for American rock and water gardeners." ▼