

# 3 Rivers Historian

Fall 2002

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 5, No. 4

## Georgia Pacific Donates Switch Engine

**T**raffic briefly stood still on Tuesday, October 22 in downtown Muskogee as a 1940s-era diesel train engine was moved to the Three Rivers Museum. The 230,000 lb. engine was transported from its location at the Georgia Pacific's Muskogee paper mill by rail to Union Pacific's Mill Street crossing.

Then the switch engine was hoisted by crane onto a truck and hauled down Main Street to the Midland Valley Railroad Depot at 220 Elgin. American Transport of Tulsa handled the move for Georgia Pacific.

The Georgia Pacific Foundation contributed the funds to prepare the site for the engine on the museum grounds and have it moved to its new home. Cross Construction of Fort Gibson laid a portion of railroad track behind the Midland Valley Station where the engine has been permanently set up.

The vintage switch engine was used for years at the paper mill in Muskogee but has sat idle for some time. The Three Rivers Museum will have the engine painted in Midland Valley Railroad colors and visitors will be able to view the train up close as an outdoor exhibit.

A fence, paid for in part by A More Beautiful Muskogee, will enclose the



*Spectators watch two cranes hoist the switch engine into place*

engine. A More Beautiful Muskogee will also assist the museum in landscaping the grounds around the engine.

"Adding a train engine to the site has always been a museum goal," according to Roger Bell, chairman of the board of directors for Three Rivers Museum.

The museum staff and board wants to express our appreciation to Georgia Pacific and all the other organizations who have helped make this possible. We must say a special thanks to Tom Harrington of Georgia Pacific for coordinating the donation, the site preparation and the moving of this engine. We couldn't have done it without his expertise. ▼

### Inside:

- 2 Museum News
- 3 Frederick Severs
- 4 Thomas-Foreman Home
- 7 Welcome to New Members
- 8 Three Rivers People

## Three Rivers Museum Board & Staff

### Officers/Staff:

#### Chairman:

Roger Bell

#### Executive Director:

Linda Moore

#### Marketing:

Jonita Mullins

### Board of Directors:

Lynn Campbell  
Mildred Cousins  
Orville Eaton  
Dianne Hill  
Jerry Hoffman  
Shirley Rogers  
Bud Stewart  
Kit Stewart  
Ed Warren

#### Emeritus Member:

Delphia Warren

## Museum News Briefs

### Museum Honors Veterans

**O**n Saturday, November 9, the Three Rivers Museum saluted veterans with a special exhibit, "Honoring Our Heroes: Three Rivers Military History."

The Three Rivers region has a rich military history dating back to the establishment of Fort Gibson in 1824. Soldiers serving at Fort Gibson went into battle in the Mexican War. During the Civil War, Fort Gibson served as a Union stronghold while the Confederates built Fort Davis just across the Arkansas River.

Muskogee provided two troops to the famed Rough Riders during the Spanish American War. Lt. John R. Thomas, Jr. served with the Rough Riders and his saddle and uniform will be on display at the museum during Military History Day. Veterans from the Three Rivers area served heroically in both World War I and World War II. The museum featured an exhibit on Camp Gruber where the 42nd Rainbow Division received its training near Braggs.

Howard McKinnis of Checotah demonstrated "A Day in the Life of a Soldier," explaining the various weapons and equipment that an early-day soldier would have used.

Keith Myers of Tulsa displayed a portion of his extensive military memorabilia collection covering several conflicts that Three Rivers Veterans have been involved in.

### Museum Sponsors Cookson Hills Tour

**T**hree Rivers Museum led a caravan tour exploring the favorite hideouts and final resting places of the Cookson Hills Gang on Saturday, November 16. This followed a book signing by R. D. Morgan of his latest book, *The Bad Boys of the Cookson Hills*.

The Cookson Hills Caravan Tour is just the first of what the museum hopes will be many more caravan tours in the future. If you're interested in participating in exploring the Three Rivers' fascinating history by caravan, please let us know.

### Depot District Celebrates Christmas

**F**ollowing the Muskogee Christmas Parade on Saturday, December 7, the Downtown Depot District of Muskogee at 3rd & Elgin will create its own Christmas magic.

Starting at 7:00 p.m., the Three Rivers Museum will serve hot wassail and cookies to cold parade watchers at the Midland Valley Depot. Across the street at the Frisco Freight Depot, the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame will feature Victorian Carolers and a fireworks sendoff for Santa.

The Depot District will turn on its Christmas lights that evening and the winning entrants of the Christmas Parade will be announced. Drive through the Depot District when you're out looking at Christmas lights.

#### Three Rivers Historian

Fall 2002 V. 5 No. 4

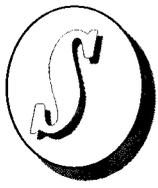
220 Elgin ♦ Muskogee, OK 74401

918/686-6624 ♦ [www.3riversmuseum.com](http://www.3riversmuseum.com)

published quarterly by Three Rivers Museum  
copyright 2002

Editor-in-Chief: Roger Bell

Managing Editor: Jonita Mullins



# Frederick Severs: Empire Builder

by Roger L. Bell

## The Three Rivers Area

**F**rederick B. Severs was one of the most important early pioneers of Muskogee and Indian Territory. Severs was continually working to promote Muskogee's early growth and development.

He once said of Muskogee that "he would help with all his might to build a great city here."

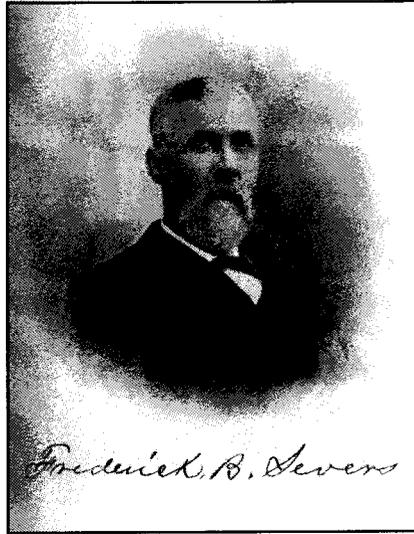
Captain Severs served on the first Muskogee City Council, built the first brick structure in the town, helped establish the first bank, and even up to his death was working toward creating "the finest hotel in the southwest," the Severs Hotel.

Severs was born in Washington County, Arkansas, in 1835, where he spent his boyhood days. His family was of southern heritage, with his father's family originating from Tennessee and his mother's from South Carolina. The family homestead was near the Cherokee Nation boundary and the Arkansas border.

Severs attended the neighborhood schools of the area up to the age of 15. At that time he enrolled in Cane Hill Collegiate Institute, one of the first collegiate schools chartered in Arkansas.

After graduation at age 17, he came to Indian Territory where he worked as a clerk in a general store in Fort Gibson owned by W.D. Dickson, an old friend of Severs' father. During this time, he received training in the mercantile business which would be valuable to him the rest of his life.

In 1855, Severs was asked to take charge of a school at Conchartry Town. There he met his future wife, Susie Anderson, daughter of George Anderson,



Frederick B. Severs

second chief of the Creeks. She taught school at Conchartry until she married Severs in 1870.

In 1860, Severs ventured into the mercantile business at Shieldsville, near Okmulgee. He hoped to establish a successful store and settle in the area, but the Civil War disrupted his plans.

In 1861, Sam Checotah, a prominent Creek, organized a company of men for the Confederate Army. (The Creek Nation was divided during the war with both Union and Confederate sympathizers.) Severs was recruited and made a second lieutenant in the company. He was one of the only soldiers in the regiment who was not of Creek descent.

During the war, Severs was promoted to the rank of captain and thereafter was always referred to as Captain Severs by most people in the territory.

His company was involved in battles at Round Mountain, Pea Ridge (Arkansas), Honey Springs, and Cabin Creek. Severs was known as a brave and efficient officer who was well

*continued on page 5*

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.

## 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.*

# Repairs Begin on Historic Home

**R**epairs have begun on the Thomas-Foreman Home. Linda Moore, director of the Three Rivers Museum, has overseen an extensive clean-up and repair of the historic fence that surrounds the property at 1419 W. Okmulgee.

A year of unmanaged growth of vines on the old fence had damaged it and made the home practically invisible from the street. Linda and her husband, Dr. Lin Moore, worked to clear out the overgrown vines. The house is now visible and is again drawing interest from tourists.

Wiedel Bros. Construction has repaired the fence and rebuilt the front

gate. They have also made repairs in the home's foundation and patched holes in the ceiling. Gil Miller Roofing donated an emergency patch on the wood shingle roof to get it through winter. The entire wood roof will need to be replaced soon, however.

Due to serious budget cuts to state agencies, the Oklahoma Historical Society has been unable to contribute any funds to the repair of the Thomas-Foreman Home. The Three Rivers Museum hopes civic-minded Muskogee businesses and individuals will step up and help save this tourist attraction. Their investment in Muskogee will pay dividends in increased tourism dollars.

## Here's How You Can Help!

Your tax-deductible donation to Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home will help us save this Muskogee treasure and help us with maintenance and utilities. Please complete the form at right and mail to:

Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home\*  
1419 W. Okmulgee Ave.  
Muskogee, OK 74401

*Thank you!*

\*Friends is a 501c3 corporation.

Yes, I want to help save the Thomas-Foreman Home!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please mark your donation level below. Donors will receive the Home's quarterly newsletter **The Trellis** and free admission to the Thomas-Foreman Home.

\_\_\_ \$20 Individual      \_\_\_ \$30 Family  
\_\_\_ \$100 Builder      \_\_\_ \$250 Friend  
                         \_\_\_ \$500 Sustainer

Make checks payable to Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home.

respected by the men who served under him.

The Post-War South was bleak and desolate, including Indian Territory. Severs moved to Bonham, Texas to live with an uncle. There he taught at a local school. He received pay for his teaching in both money and provisions. These he hauled back to his ravaged family home in Arkansas.

While taking the first load of provisions back, he found little left of his family's homestead except a generous crop of apples, a large wagon and four mules. He then decided to head for Texas with as large a load of fruit as he could haul.

He sold the fruit in Texas from \$5 to \$6 a bushel. This soon began a profitable trading business, which he later expanded.

He decided to return to the site of his store in Shieldsville and with the aid of some friends, he started back up his business venture. Severs soon began to accumulate wealth and political prestige within the Creek Nation.

In 1868, Severs was officially made a member of the Creek Tribe by a resolution of the Creek council. It was later said that for many years there was never a law passed by the Creek Nation that Severs was not consulted on and in many instances he drafted the law.

His business grew steadily and eventually he moved it to Okmulgee. During this time he married Susie Anderson in 1870. He expanded his business interests in the area by building a cotton gin and a sawmill in Okmulgee. He built business buildings from which he received rental income. Some still stand today.

Severs was known as a great friend of the Creek Nation. He extended credit in his stores to all tribal members. At one time, it was said that he had up to \$164,000 in credit accounts to Creek tribal members.

He was also known as a generous man with his wealth. When a famine occurred in Indian Territory, he bought one train carload of potatoes and one of cabbage and shipped them at his own expense to Muskogee and Okmulgee where they were disbursed to the needy.

In 1884 Captain Severs moved to the growing city of Muskogee which was fast becoming the center of commerce in Indian Territory. He bought out a local general merchandise business and almost overnight became a prominent citizen.

In 1888 he built a fine two-story home in the center of a four-block property where the Severs Building now stands in Muskogee.

The home was built of select lumber and had beautiful stained glass windows. A large orchard was planted to the north of the home. A barn was also located on the property where the present U.S. Courthouse is located.

His success in the mercantile business in Muskogee prompted him to be one of the organizers of the first bank in Muskogee, for which he built the first brick building.

He also became active in all civic affairs of the town. He served on the first town council and gave money to many churches in the area on a regular basis.

Severs also had an extensive cattle  
*continued on page 6*



## Where Is the Three Rivers Museum?

The museum is located in downtown Muskogee at 220 Elgin.

Take Hwy 69 to Okmulgee Ave. Then east on Okmulgee Ave. to 3rd St. Then go south on 3rd St. to Elgin.

► **Severs  
Hotel  
Milestones**

**S Frederick Severs** *cont.*

On April 28, 1915, the Paragon Film Company made a silent movie at the Severs Hotel.

Esther Bailey and Duvall Bradley were the leading actors in this vintage flick.



The Severs Café became well known for its Severs Blend Coffee. It was produced locally and sold in cans that featured pictures of the Severs Hotel.



Alice Robertson, Oklahoma's first Congresswoman, held a reception at the Severs ballroom when she was elected to Congress in 1920.



The entire 1922 New York Yankees baseball team, including Babe Ruth, stayed at the hotel on April 2, 1922. They played an exhibition game against the Brooklyn Dodgers at Athletic Park (where the Civic Center is located today).

ranching business. By virtue of his Creek citizenship, he gained grazing rights for his cattle over a vast area and located a ranch near Bald Hill (west of Muskogee). He was one of the largest stockmen in the territory.

In 1890, he attempted to get an estimate of the number of cattle he owned. His men counted until they ran the figure to 25,000 head, then quit counting.

Severs was known as one of the prominent businessmen of the area up to statehood in 1907. After statehood, Severs knew that his life's work was coming to a conclusion. Sever though longed to create "something tangible for which he could be remembered."

Severs envisioned a large hotel for Muskogee. His home site was on the ideal location and he soon determined that it should be moved from that location to a new property on Terrace Boulevard.

In 1911, final arrangements were made for the financing of the hotel and work began. Though he was not well during this time and suffered several minor paralytic strokes, he watched the construction of the building closely.

In April 1912, the captain saw the Severs Crest flag raised and flown over the top of the hotel building during construction. He knew that his dream would soon be a reality.

Sadly, on April 16, Severs suffered a final stroke and died days later on April 22 at his home on Terrace Boulevard. He had lived a full and eventful life. His death was headline news in all newspapers in Muskogee and was prominently mentioned in most state newspapers at the time.

Severs left behind his wife Susie and three daughters, Bessie, Mary and Annie who had all married prominent men of the area. The funeral was held at his home on Terrace Boulevard. Pallbearers for the funeral were a who's who list of early Muskogee pioneers such as C.W. Turner; Charles Haskell, Oklahoma's first governor; Senator Robert L. Owen, Leo E. Bennett, Joseph Sondheimer and others.

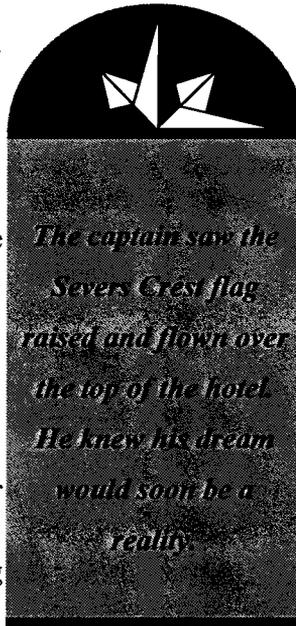
The Severs Hotel opened its doors for the first time on September 1, 1912 as the new "showplace of the community."

People from all over the area flocked to the hotel to see a building that was hailed as a marvel of modern engineering. The 10-story building was built with reinforced concrete, and at the time was considered "absolutely fire-proof."

The focal point of the hotel was the winding marble staircase leading from the first-floor lobby to the ballroom located on the second floor.

The Muskogee Transfer Co. arranged for special cabs that were trimmed in gold and driven by white horses to take passengers from the railroad depots to the hotel and back. This luxury service was the first of its kind in the state of Oklahoma.

The Severs Hotel was truly the crown jewel of building boom in Muskogee at that time. It stands today as a testimony to the vision of Captain Frederick Severs. ▼



# Welcome to These Museum Members

**M**USEUM 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  
 Katherine Biggs  
 Betty Begun  
 Carolyn Bresser  
 Mary Ann Burrows  
 ♦ Andrea Chancellor  
 Geraldine Farris  
 Helen Fite  
 C.G. Fullenwilder  
 Sue Gaston  
 Lillian Jayne  
 Grace Lemon  
 Muskogee Public Library  
 Barbara Newell  
 Lillian Ragsdale  
 Rosemary Rice  
 Drew Wilcoxon

Crank  
 Andy & Audrey Ewing  
 John & Linda Fike  
 Nick & Laurie Fuller  
 John W. Griffin Family  
 Terry & Jeanie Grubbs  
 Jack & Bette Hodge  
 Elmer & Judy Hoffman  
 Holloway Blueprint & Copy Shop  
 Dave & Dale Holloway  
 ♦ Jerry Marshall  
 Lin & Linda Moore  
 Harold & Marjorie Patterson  
 Duane & Virginia Pickle  
 Ben & Marcia Robinson  
 ♦ Bill & Bobbye Stacy  
 Boyd & Nancy Steveson  
 Michael & Wren Stratton

Jim A. Egan Trust  
 Pat Ferry  
 Larry Hoffman Insurance  
 Kathryn Lathim  
 ♦ John R. Neal  
 Oklahoma Natural Gas  
 Joe Teaff  
 ♦ Sam & Catherine Tyrrell

## Sponsor

Karen & Carter Bradley  
 Moffitt, Parker & Co., Inc.  
 Oklahoma Gas & Electric  
 ♦ Marjorie Paxson

## Sustainer

## Patron

## Benefactor

♦ A More Beautiful Muskogee

## Builder

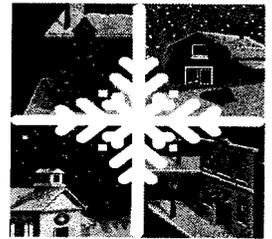
♦ Muskogee Antiques Club  
 Eloise & John H. Cable, Jr.  
 Joel Cousins

## Family

H.C. & Suzanne Chancellor  
 ♦ John & Vivyan Cook  
 Stephen & Charlotte

For  
**One-of-a-Kind  
 Gifts**

shop the  
**Whistestop  
 Gift Shop**



- ❁ Recipes & Remembrances Cookbook
- ❁ History books by local authors
- ❁ Train toys and memorabilia

Museum members receive a 10% discount!

# 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  
 220 Elgin, Muskogee, OK 74401



## ► 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.

Please call us at 686-6624.

### **Editor's Note:**

The "Three Rivers Historian" needs your historical articles.

Please submit them to:

Three Rivers Historian,

Attn: Managing

Editor,

220 Elgin, Muskogee, OK 74401.

Or you can send us an e-mail at [3rivers-museum@oknet1.net](mailto:3rivers-museum@oknet1.net)

### **Museum Hours:**

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

Call about group reservations and rates

**686-6624**

**686-6624**

## ► Three Rivers People

### Orville Eaton is a Muskogee Booster

**F**ew people qualify as a more active and avid supporter of Muskogee and its future than museum board member Orvill Eaton.

A long-time resident of Muskogee, Orville has seen much of its history firsthand. He has worked for many years with the Three Rivers Museum board to see the museum open and become a success.

Orville was a teacher in the Muskogee school system for years. After his retirement from teaching, he continued working in education as a part of the GED program.

Eaton also served as mayor for Muskogee and collected important pieces of Muskogee memorabilia while in office. Much of this he has donated to the museum. His 1912 panoramic photo of the skyline of Muskogee is on display near the gift shop.

"We appreciate Orville's interest and support of the Three Rivers Museum," says board chairman Roger Bell. "With his connections to so many civic groups in the city, he has been a great asset to our project."

## Music Exhibit Draws Good Reviews

A special music exhibit titled "Starmaker" created by the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame ran from September 11 to October 26 to good reviews by everyone who toured it.



*A collection of musical posters from concerts and festivals around the world filled the exhibit hall.*



*Starmaker Jim Halsey explains some of the artifacts in his re-created "office" to Representative Barbara Staggs.*

