



# Rivers Historian

Summer 2003

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 6, No. 3

## Summer Program Is a Success

**F**ive Muskogee museums joined together this summer to offer Muskogee school children a rare opportunity. The children along with a parent could visit each of the five participating museums free during the months of June and July. The program was called "Visit Muskogee First!"

The museums that participated were Ataloa Lodge, the Five Civilized Tribes Museum, the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home, the Three Rivers Museum and the USS Batfish War Memorial. Over 160 visitors — school children with their parents — took advantage of this opportunity to see Muskogee's rich history and heritage.

Besides receiving free admission, the families were also eligible to enter a drawing for a \$500 gift certificate sponsored by Wal-Mart and the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*. A second prize of a \$100 Savings Bond was provided by Bank of Oklahoma.

To be entered in the drawing for these prizes, the children had to complete a Scavenger Hunt by answering three questions about each museum. The answers to the questions could be found among the museum's exhibits.



*Visitors to the Three Rivers Museum this summer enjoyed climbing aboard our vintage engine.*

Winners of the prizes were drawn randomly, but they had to have completed the Scavenger Hunt correctly to qualify. The winners were announced on KTFX Radio in Muskogee on August 4. Cole Fite won the \$500 Wal-Mart gift certificate and Gwen O'Brien won the \$100 Savings Bond.

Response to the Visit Muskogee First Program has been positive, both from the parents and students and from the museums. Many parents expressed thanks for the chance to bring their children to see the treasures that exist in their own backyard. They also promised that they would be sure to return for visits in the future.

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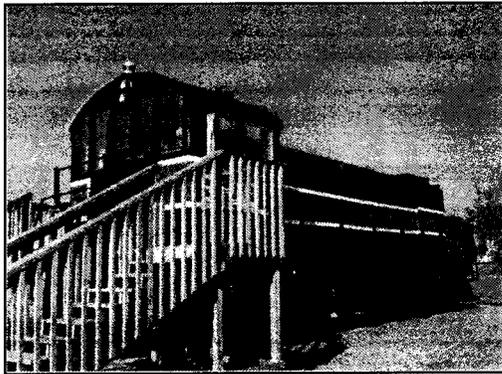
**Museum News Briefs**

**Engine Now Wears  
the Midland Valley Colors**

**T**he 1940s-era switch engine donated to Three Rivers Museum by Georgia Pacific has been painted in Midland Valley Railroad colors of black, red and white. Branchcomb Welding did the work on painting the vintage engine.

In addition to the new paint job, the engine also sports the Muskogee Roads logo on both sides. A black chain link fence surrounds the engine and steps have been built to enable visitors to climb aboard.

A concrete sidewalk was also poured from the museum to the gate of the fence. This work was provided by Wiedel Bros. Construction of Muskogee.



**Day Campers Visit Museum**

**F**irst Baptist Church in Muskogee brought its 60 day campers to visit the museum this past June. The campers were studying different modes of transportation as one part of their summer-long program.

The children enjoyed visiting a railroad depot and learning about the importance of the railroad in early-day transportation. After touring the museum, the campers climbed aboard the switch engine. The lesson most took from the museum was how old the depot is and how large trains are.

**Book Signing Hosted  
in August**

**T**hree Rivers Museum hosted a book signing with author June Smith on Saturday, August 16. Mrs. Smith compiled a collection of reminiscences about the history of Boynton, Oklahoma. The town just celebrated its centennial.

To commemorate this milestone in its history, Three Rivers Museum has on display in its lobby a small exhibit titled, "Remembering Boynton." The exhibit will run from August 6 to August 30.

**Museum Receives  
5,000th Visitor**

**T**hree Rivers Museum received its 5,000th visitor this past month. The museum has seen visitors from all over the country and even from around the world. Two visitors from the Nordamerika Native Museum in Zurich, Switzerland toured in August.

**Three Rivers Historian**

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

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# Roaring '20s Rampage

by R.D. Morgan

*In the last edition of the Historian, Bill and Albert Lawrence fled from justice after killing Muskogee County Deputy Sheriff Joe Morgan in Texas in June of 1924. The narrative continues with the cross-country manhunt to capture these cold-blooded killers.*

In Tarrant County, Texas, officials charged the Lawrence brothers with first-degree murder. Muskogee County Deputy Sheriff Mont Grady and Detective Ed Corbin, who had stayed in the "Lone Star" state to assist local officers in the hunt for the fugitives, sped to the home of Bill Lawrence's girlfriend, Billie Woods, in nearby Pittsburg.

The lawmen missed the murderers by only a few hours. The boys had evidently made a beeline directly to her residence soon after their escape from custody. The pair had failed to make a connection with the youthful "moll" due to her immediate departure for Muskogee on hearing the news of the pair's getaway.

The following day, the brothers were spotted getting gasoline in Jenny Lind, Arkansas. A massive five state manhunt was soon underway. Circulars showing the fugitive's photos were circulated to law enforcement agencies as far away as Canada. A \$2500 reward was posted for their capture.

Sheriff Ledbetter, in a news report, stated the fugitives were apparently seeking cover in the heavily timbered hills by day and traveling by night. Over the next week, reports came in of sightings in both Fort Smith and Rogers, Arkansas.

In early July, another report was

received of two men matching the Lawrence brothers' descriptions stealing a 1923 Buick automobile near Sedalia, Missouri. Authorities also suspected the pair of burglarizing several country stores in rural Southwest Missouri during this period.

Sometime in the next few weeks, young Billie Woods joined the outlaws in their flight from justice. In mid-July, a farmer reported seeing the boys in Belle Starr Canyon near Porum, Oklahoma.

Deputy Mont Grady along with Sequoyah County Sheriff John Johnson and a small posse rushed to the scene, but drew a blank.

On the evening of October 20, 1924, Patrolman Charles Wilson spotted a pair of burglars crawling out the window of a residence in the small community of Livingston, Montana. When the officer and a companion gave chase, the suspects ran into a rail yard and climbed into an empty boxcar. Upon demanding the men's surrender, the thieves answered with a volley of gunshots, one round striking Wilson in the neck, killing him instantly.

While retreating from the scene of the shooting, the assassins inadvertently dropped a small leather bag with the name of Joe Morgan etched in gold on the exterior.

The day after officer Wilson's murder, an apartment owner came forward positively identifying the Lawrence brothers, through mug shots, as residing at her hostelry over the past few days. A second murder warrant was promptly filed against the pair.

Several weeks later, Colorado

*continued on page 5*

## 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.

## 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.*

## Thomas-Foreman Home Will be Locally Owned

The Three Rivers Museum is completing negotiations with the Oklahoma Historical Society for ownership of the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home. The museum should hold the deed to the 1898 farmhouse by September 2003.

The museum had contracted with the Oklahoma Historical Society to operate the home for one year before ownership could be transferred. This contract will be completed in August. The costs of operating the historic home for one year and the costs of repairs made to the home will make up the purchase price of the house.

"Now that the home is going to be locally owned, we can no longer expect state support," says Three Rivers

Museum executive director, Linda Moore. "It becomes even more important for local citizens and businesses to help us see that this important piece of Muskogee history is preserved and protected."

The Thomas-Foreman Home does not receive support from the city of Muskogee at present. All expenditures for the home are handled by the Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home, a non-profit organization.

The historic home is still in need of a new roof. The beautiful wood shingles are showing their age and must soon be replaced. Leaks through the ceiling are putting the irreplaceable artifacts inside the home at risk.

## Help Us Fix the Roof!

Your tax-deductible donation to Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home will help us replace the wood shingle roof on this Muskogee treasure. All money sent to the Thomas-Foreman Home is kept separate from Three Rivers Museum funds. 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.

# Roaring '20s Rampage

officers spotted the stolen Muskogee police cruiser in a downtown garage in Denver. After observing the rig for a time, officers discovered it had been acquired by a local car dealership several days past. When questioned, the auto dealer claimed two men and a woman had traded the vehicle for a Ford Coupe.

The lawmen got a break the following day when a patrolman walking a beat, arrested Billie Woods loitering near the rail depot. When interviewed, she asserted the boys had dumped her due to her habit of constant complaining. The young woman, who was described as dirty and destitute, was jailed for several days before given a rail ticket back to Texas.

Shortly after the first of the year, officers received word from an informant claiming the Lawrences were hiding out at the home of their brother, George, in Wewoka, Oklahoma. Once again, a huge posse swarmed the site. Although officers discovered the Ford automobile the boys had purchased in Denver abandoned in the back yard, there was no sign of the suspects.

The morning following the raid, a Wewoka resident, J. L. Mainaird, reported the theft of his 1922 Nash Sport Model Touring car. Lawmen suspected the pair of outlaws had switched cars in response to being tipped-off to the upcoming raid.

Nothing was heard of the fugitives' whereabouts until the evening of February 4, 1925, when Phoenix, Arizona Police Officer Haze Burch spotted a pair of individuals attempting to siphon gasoline from a parked car. When the lawman approached the pair, one of the men suddenly turned, firing three rounds from a revolver in the officer's



*Phoenix Police Officer Haze Burch  
courtesy the Phoenix, Arizona  
Police Department*

direction, one missile striking him in the mid-section.

After Burch fell to the ground, he fired several bullets at the fleeing pair, none of which took effect. Although the fallen officer was rushed to a nearby hospital, he died within the hour due to internal bleeding.

Haze Burch would go down in history as the first officer from the Phoenix Police Department to die in the line of duty. After the shooting, the fugitives fled on foot into the vast, treeless Arizona desert.

Throughout the cold moonless night, several huge posses scoured the area in search of the killers. Less than an hour after the fatal shooting a 1922 Nash Sport Model automobile with Oklahoma tags was discovered abandoned less than a quarter mile away from the crime scene. The cars description and license plates matched that of the vehicle stolen in Wewoka, Oklahoma on January 13 by the Lawrence brothers.

The following morning, Constable  
*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.

## We're on the Web!

Stay up to date with Museum News and Special Events by visiting our website at [www.3riversmuseum.com](http://www.3riversmuseum.com)

# Roaring '20s Rampage

## Sources for Roaring 20s Rampage:

### Newspapers:

*Muskogee Phoenix* 1923-26, 1938

*Muskogee Times-Democrat* 1924-25

*Oklmulgee Daily Times* 1922-24

*Arizona Republican* 1924-25

### Books:

*Enter Without Knocking*, Daniel G. Moore, 1969, University of Arizona Press

### Other:

Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department, Historical Division

The Phoenix Law Enforcement Association

National Law Enforcement Memorial

Greenhill Cemetery achieves, Muskogee Oklahoma

US Census-1910-20

Muskogee Public Library archives and microfilm

Montana Fallen Officers Memorial

Oklahoma Law Enforcement Memorial

R. L. McDonald received word from a Mexican farm worker that he had spotted a pair of unsavory looking individuals climbing up Tempe Butte; a lofty bald knob located roughly ten miles from the scene of the ambush. McDonald, armed with a high-powered Winchester rifle, drove to the base of the butte where he left his vehicle and began slowly making his way on foot up the hillside.

Near the top of the incline, he spotted the pair of fugitives huddled under a large rock sound asleep. The officer easily got the drop on the pair, whom he described as completely exhausted, sweat-soaked, and disheveled.

After transporting his manacled captives to the nearby town of Tempe, McDonald, who would receive a \$2500 reward for his single-handed act of heroism, contacted authorities in nearby Phoenix, informing them of his catch.

On receiving word of the fugitives capture, Phoenix officers immediately retrieved the pair, transporting them to the Maricopa County Jail. Later that day, a large group of hostile citizens began assembling on the lawn in front of the jail, hurling threats towards the prisoners.

Lawmen, fearing mob violence, rushed the captives to the safety of the Arizona State Prison in nearby Florence. When Muskogee officials received word of the brothers capture, they reportedly expressed deep satisfaction.

When questioned, Bill admitted slaying officer Burch, but claimed the shooting was an act of self-defense. Although he later recanted his confession, he was charged with first degree-murder. Neither suspect would admit to shooting either Deputy Morgan or the Montana officer.

Babe Lawrence was transported to Texas where he would be tried for the killing of Joe Morgan. Within a few months, Bill Lawrence would be convicted of the murder of Patrolman Haze Burch, who was survived by a widow and three children.

Bill would be sentenced to death by hanging, and in the early morning hours of January 8, 1926, he stepped on to the gallows still proclaiming his innocence. When asked if he had any last words, he said: "I have accepted Christ, and forgive you all for what you are about to do." He then turned to the executioner and calmly said: "Lets do it."

Nine minutes and twenty-two seconds after the trap was sprung, he was officially declared dead. When interviewed by reporters shortly after the execution, the prison warden stated: "The boy sure had nerve. He may not of lived like a man, but he died like one."

Bill Lawrence's body was shipped by rail to Muskogee where he was buried next to his wife and father in Greenhill Cemetery.

Babe Lawrence was convicted by a jury of his peers and sentenced to life imprisonment in Texas. No one would ever be charged with the death of Livingston, Montana, police officer Charles Wilson.

John Barger, who lived the remainder of his life haunted by the memories of that dreadful day in 1924, passed from this world on April 26, 1938. He is also buried at Greenhill Cemetery only a few feet from the grave of his friend and colleague, Deputy Joseph P. Morgan.

# Thanks 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

Marty Anthis  
 Rachel Baker  
 Sabina Beckman  
 Rolleen Bishop  
 James Boyer  
 ♦ Floyd Brittain  
 Agnes Brown  
 Lynn Campbell  
 Mildred Cousins  
 Dorothy Fite  
 ♦ Brenda Freeman  
 Elizabeth Gibson  
 ♦ Gary Herron  
 Deep Hunnicutt  
 ♦ Christina Lamb  
 Octavia Lambert  
 Tommie Sue Leahy  
 Floretta Leatherman  
 Dorothy Pack  
 ♦ Betty Perkins  
 Bill Ryser

## Family

Mitchell & Fleeta Baker  
 James & Emma Lee  
 Bankhead  
 Fred & Dorothy Bliss  
 ♦ Gene & Patsy Buse  
 ♦ Jess & Phyllis Epple  
 Max & Peggy Eversole  
 Jack & Genevieve Farr  
 Carl & Julie Flaherty  
 Cindy Gaston  
 Delores & Merle Grober  
 Walter & Georgelene Grober  
 ♦ Don & Jimmie Jones  
 Ron & Naomi Morgan  
 Carlile & Linda Roberts  
 Bud & Kit Stewart  
 Gordon & Dorothy Swanson  
 Wally & Faye Waits  
 ♦ Leon & Ocella White  
 Revere & Mary Young

## Builder

Troy & Modine Baker  
 ♦ Central H.S. Class of '47  
 Trust Company of Oklahoma

## Sponsor

Pioneer Abstract & Title  
 Fanne Lu Yaffe

## Sustainer

David & Billie Lynn Miller  
 Muskogee Federal Credit Union  
 Mr. & Mrs. W.S. Warner, Jr.

## Benefactor

Miriam Freedman

## Books in the Whistlestop Gift Shop

*I Remember Boynton*  
 by Delores June Smith

"This book is the result of my desire to capture some early memories of Boynton for the Boynton Centennial Celebration in April 2003.

"I am just a teller of tales — those I remember from long ago, and from the memory of others, which is a chain of living links to the past and the people of Boynton." — June Smith

### *Recipes & Remembrances*

This collection of recipes from local individuals makes a great gift!

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.

### Museum Hours:

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

Call about group reservations and rates  
**686-6624**

## Three Rivers Events

### Fall Events Promise Drama, Excitement

#### Special Exhibit: The Price of Freedom

The Three Rivers Museum will create and display a special exhibit titled "The Price of Freedom" from October 15 to November 15 during regular museum hours. Cost is \$3 for adults and \$1.50 for students.

From the time Fort Gibson was established at the Three Forks in 1824, this region's heroes have been involved in the fight for America's safety and freedom. We honor service men and women and the Country they served in this patriotic exhibit.

#### Next Caravan Tour: Belle Starr, the Bandit Queen

Separate fact from the legend as we travel to the haunts and hideouts of Belle Starr and her gang. Notorious not only as an outlaw herself, Belle Starr was just as famous for the company she kept. This fascinating woman made a mark on Three Forks history that has swelled to mythic proportions.

We'll meet at the museum at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday October 25 and then carpool to places significant to Belle's wild ride through history. Cost is \$4 for the tour and handout materials.

## Honey Springs Caravan Tour

In June, the museum hosted a Caravan Tour to the Civil War battlefield known as Honey Springs. We walked the trails of the site where the Union troops defeated a larger Confederate force. We also visited two cemeteries and stopped at a Confederate lookout spot called Chimney Mountain.



*Remnants of the old Texas Road still run through the Honey Springs Battlefield site.*



*Civil War interpreter Howard McKinnis explains the layout of the battlefield.*