

# Rivers Historian

Fall 2004

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 7, No. 4

## History Explorers Follow Spook Trail

**O**ver 60 people joined the History Explorers Club for a Ghost Stories Caravan Tour on Saturday, October 23, 2004. The event drew many first-time visitors to Three Rivers Museum to follow the spook trail around the Muskogee and Fort Gibson area.

Stops along the tour included the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home, the 6th Street Cemetery, the "Hanging Yard" at the site of Muskogee's first jail and the historic Tarvin Home on the old Texas Road (Cherokee Street).

At Bacone College, the director of Ataloa Lodge, John Timothy, gave a tour of the campus which has several buildings that boast of ghostly visits. In fact, John said the school could be called "Boo"cone College because many of its older buildings have stories of ghosts or other strange phenomenon associated with them.

From Bacone, the caravan moved east to the Fort Gibson area. Here the explorers visited the Cherokee Citizens Cemetery, the Fort Gibson National Cemetery and the Fort Gibson Stockade where the old Army Hospital and the nearby historic McBride Home offered more spine-chilling stories of ghostly appearances.



*Many first-time visitors to the museum learn about the 6th Street Cemetery in Muskogee.*

The last stop on the tour was the old Frozen Rock Cemetery that sits near the Arkansas River and dates back to before the Civil War. Just the sight of dozens of flashlights moving across the old, dark cemetery was scary enough!

The Ghost Stories Caravan Tour drew the largest crowd of any caravan tours hosted by the Three Rivers Museum. With such a good response, it is likely the museum will offer more Ghost Stories tours in the future.



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Museum News Briefs

Museum Remembers  
“Bygone Days of Haskell”

**T**he Three Rivers Museum created another special exhibit featuring a town in the Three Forks area in its ongoing series on the Towns of the Three Rivers.

This exhibit focused on Haskell, a small town in the northwestern corner of Muskogee County that celebrated its centennial this year. The special exhibit was on display from September 25 to October 16, 2004.

Haskell was established in 1904 on the Midland Valley Railroad’s “Arkansas River Route.” The town saw a number of interesting residents through its history including oil tycoon J. Paul Getty, US deputy marshal Bud Ledbetter and Depression-era gangster “Pretty Boy” Floyd.

Once known as “the Queen City of the Arkansas River Valley,” the town knew the boom and bust of cotton and oil, but settled into being a strong agricultural town with a steady population through 100 years of history.

Now known for its antique auction and its still-used brick streets, the little town looks forward to another 100 years of history.

The Three Rivers Museum seeks artifacts on every town in the Three Rivers region. If you would like your town represented, consider donating artifacts, old photos and documents that tell the story of your hometown.

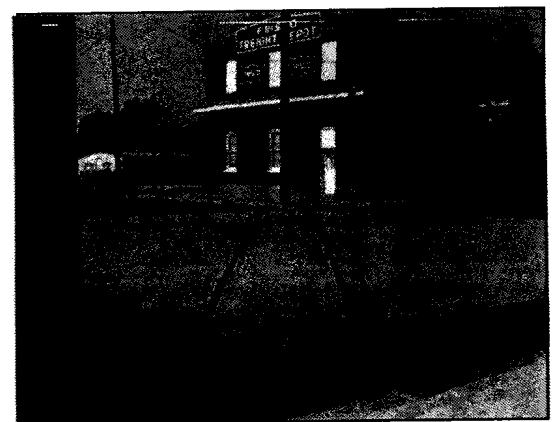


*The Midland Valley Station in Haskell was one of the first structures in the town created by the railroad.*

Work on Elgin Completed

**A**fter nearly a year of work, the construction on Elgin Street has been completed in the Depot District. The city had stripped the asphalt from the street back to the original brick paving. But the bricks were too uneven and deteriorated to be a viable driving surface. So new asphalt was put down, leaving the original brick exposed on each side of the street.

At the intersection of 3rd and Elgin a concrete square surrounded with a stamped-brick concrete border was created. A section of railroad tack spans this intersection from corner to corner as a reminder that Elgin was once crossed by four different railroads.



*The railroad track and stamped brick border of the Depot District intersection are visible here.*

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# Jim Clark: Muskogee County Desparado

by R.D. Morgan and Lester Clark

## Part I

1973, Wagoner, Oklahoma

The old man, dressed in khaki britches and a starched shirt, set down his long handled hoe and took a moment to bring a yellow rose to his face captivated by its sweet aroma. Gazing at his well-tended garden overflowing with okra, green beans, and tomato plants, he paused, a look of melancholy coming over his face.

His thoughts turned back to his boyhood. He remembered himself as a teenager sitting on the side of the road, barefoot and dressed in shabby hand-me-down overalls, watching the cars fly past heading to exotic places.

The boy sat there dreaming of a life far away from the poverty and boredom of the rented hardscrabble cotton farm he shared with his family. Suddenly he stood erect, walked to the road's edge, and with a look of grim determination on his face thrust his thumb toward an oncoming automobile.

Now, fifty-odd years later, standing motionless surrounded by his lush garden, modest home, and loving wife, the old man silently cursed that fateful decision under his breath with bitterness in his heart.

James Nolen Clark was born on February 26, 1902 in Mountainburg, Arkansas. His family migrated to Muskogee County Oklahoma around 1905 settling on a farm near the small community of Oktaha.

Jim had a fairly normal boyhood until 1918, when his father made the life-altering decision to put up the farm and nearly all the family's possessions as collateral on a cattle venture. Due to the World War, the price of beef was at an all time high.

Unluckily for him the war abruptly ended and cattle prices plummeted. The family literally hit rock bottom, losing the farm and every cent they had in the bank.

Starved off their home place, the father went to work sharecropping a nearby derelict cotton farm. Even with two boys and a grown man laboring in the fields, times were tough;



*Jim Clark's mug shot from one of his many arrests.*

they just couldn't make ends meet. Before long, the old folks threw in the towel, relocating to their eldest son's place at Gooseneck Bend.

Young Jim went to work for the Bradley Dairy, but the prospect of hauling milk for piddling wages forced him to leave the area in hopes of making his fortune in the rich Osage oilfields.

Jim quickly discovered life as a roughneck was no bed of roses. Laboring twelve and fourteen hour shifts in raw filthy conditions held little appeal to the young man.

He soon fell in with bad company hanging out in boomtown pool halls and whiskey parlors peddling illegal rotgut booze, stealing oilfield equipment and horseflesh. Predictably, the twenty-one year old's luck ran out in the winter of 1923 when he was arrested for larceny, convicted and sentenced to one year at Oklahoma's Granite Prison, a facility for first-time offenders.

On his release, he traveled to West Texas where he once again tried his hand at oilfield work but before long he fell back into the irresponsible lifestyle of theft and whiskey running. In 1927, he was thrown into the slammer in Midland, Texas charged with attempted robbery (a street mugging).

On gaining his freedom, Clark drifted up to the oilfields in Hughes County Oklahoma where in March of 1928 he was arrested for armed robbery. He pled guilty and was sentenced to the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester for five years as inmate #18793. His life was beginning to take a critical downward slide into hopelessness.

*continued on page 4*

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 re-

gion. Contact the

museum if you

have something to

donate at 686-6624.



# Friends of the Thomas- Foreman Home

Roy & Lin Barmore  
 Bethany Bowline  
 Bradley Funeral Home  
 Kathryn Burke/Marion  
 Weber  
 Mary Ann Burrows  
 C&L RV Center  
 CHS Class of '46  
 James Crotty  
 Joel Cousins  
 Margo Dollar  
 Jim Egan Trust  
 Max & Peggy Eversole  
 Harmony House  
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 Kirshner Foundation  
 Loftis Furniture  
 Moffitt Parker & Com-  
 pany  
 Muskogee Convention &  
 Tourism  
 Muskogee Co. Historical  
 Society  
 Muskogee Daily Phoe-  
 nix  
 Muskogee Rotary Club  
 Optimists International  
 Marjorie Paxson  
 Pumps & Controls  
 Jim & Karen Ritchey  
 Forney Sandlin  
 Bill & Kathleen Settle  
 Jennifer Sparks  
 Ronnie & Nita Spradlin  
 Jon & Martha Stoodley

## Jim Clark: Desperado

Upon gaining his parole in January 1931, he traveled back to his brother's place at Gooseneck Bend where he tried his hand at farming for nearly a year before being arrested by Muskogee County authorities for stealing a cow.

Once again, he was sent to "Big Mac," as the Oklahoma prison was dubbed, on a three-year term. In early May he was assigned to Road Camp #1 as a trusty-cook. Three weeks later he made a dash to freedom into the nearby timber when a guard turned his back.

Clark immediately made his way into the notorious Cookson Hills, an area long known as a bandit's hideout. Finding sanctuary at the cabin of an old prison buddy near Peggs, Oklahoma he connected with two other escaped cons named Frank Sawyer and Ed Davis.

In an effort to drum up some operating funds, the trio drove Sawyer's beat-up automobile to Oklahoma City in search of a small bank to heist. Finding

nothing to suit their fancy, the gang hijacked a pair of picnicking young ladies, near the town of Yukon and took their late model Buick automobile and valuables.

Driving the back roads into Missouri the trio scouted out the little bank at Rich Hill. With only a dollar to their name, they attempted to knock off the financial institution but Sawyer lost his nerve at the last moment.

Sitting on the side of the road near the community of Nevada several hours after the incident they were spotted by a suspicious farmer who turned them into the local sheriff's department. An hour later, a heavily armed posse led by Vernon County Sheriff W. E. Butner snuck up on the dozing fugitives. Caught unaware, Clark and his pals surrendered peaceably.

Unfortunately for the men, the whole area was presently up in arms over a recent nearby Fort Scott, Kansas bank robbery.

## Join the Friends of the Home

Your donation to Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home will help us maintain 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. Your contribution is tax deductible.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

Please mark your donation level below. Donors will receive 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.

# Jim Clark: Desperado

The trio's car matched the description of the one used by the Fort Scott robbers.

Although the three loudly proclaimed their innocence, they were charged with the Kansas bank job and amazingly found guilty, all three being sentenced to life imprisonment at the Kansas State Penitentiary in Lansing.

On his arrival at Lansing, Clark was assigned to caring for the mules used at the prison's coal mines. Meanwhile, Harvey Bailey, the true brains behind the Fort Scott job, was captured near Kansas City. He too was convicted of the bank heist and promptly sent to Lansing where he joined Clark and his crime partners.

After serving roughly a year at the institution, Jim and his buddies began making plans for a bustout. Joining them was Harvey Bailey as well as a notorious cop-killer named Wilbur Underhill. Bailey induced an outside connection to smuggle in several automatic pistols in a bale of sisal hemp bound for the prison's twine factory.

On the morning of May 30, 1933, Clark and ten others made their move, initiating one of the most spectacular prison escapes in American history. With a baseball game going on between two amateur clubs, the conspirators took advantage of the distraction to kidnap the warden and several guards, forcing their way over the wall. In the ensuing melee, Harvey Bailey was shot in the leg by a tower guard.

On gaining their freedom, the escapees broke into two groups. Clark's bunch included Harvey Bailey, "Big" Bob Brady, and Wilbur Underhill, as well as Frank Sawyer and Ed Davis. With the warden and a pair of hacks in tow, the band flagged down a car and headed south towards Oklahoma using less traveled back roads.

A massive manhunt involving several hundred officers from four states was organized setting up roadblocks across Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The dramatic mass escape was reported on the front pages of the nation's newspapers. Rural residents across the area bolted their doors and armed themselves in fear.

On crossing the Oklahoma border, the convicts released the hostages before making

their way into the Cookson Hills where Sawyer left the group but was quickly captured. Several days later the group transported Bailey to Oklahoma City where they engaged a private nurse to tend his wound. Then Underhill and Davis retreating back to their hill sanctuary while Clark and Brady fled to a hideout near Shawnee.

Low on funds, Brady, Clark and Davis soon connected with a pair of thugs named George Shipley and Jess Littrell traveling to Arkansas where they knocked off the bank at Black Rock on the morning of June 16.

The following day a gang of assassins ambushed a party of officers in the parking lot of Kansas City's Union Station while the lawmen were transporting a notorious thug named Frank "Jelly" Nash to Leavenworth Penitentiary. When the gunsmoke cleared, four officers, including a federal agent, as well as Nash lay dead.

The authorities immediately suspected the Kansas escapees as the party involved in the deadly affair. Responding to the accusation, Harvey Bailey, who was still recovering from his wound, composed an open letter sent to the *Daily Oklahoman* decrying the gang's innocence. The correspondence was signed and fingerprinted by the entire group.

On the afternoon of July 3, 1933, Bailey, using a cane for support, along with Clark, Brady, Davis, and Underhill robbed the First National Bank of Clinton, Oklahoma for \$15,000 in cash. A month later, the same group robbed the Peoples Bank of Kingfisher followed by a raid on the First National Bank of Geary, Oklahoma on September 15.

Following the Geary job the gang broke up. Clark and Brady traveled to Arizona for a short vacation. But on October 6, the pair went back to work knocking off a bank at Frederick, Oklahoma before fleeing to Texas.

The day after the Frederick heist the duo was involved in a brief gun duel with officers at a roadblock near Tucumcari, New Mexico. Brady was wounded and both men were captured and transported back to the Kansas State Penitentiary in Lansing where they were tossed into solitary confinement.

*To be continued in the next issue.*

## 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)

*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.*

## Ghostly Appearance at Frozen Rock Cemetery

**I**t was a dark quiet evening in Muskogee on April 24, 1932. On this night, seven Muskogee boys were drawn to the remote Frozen Rock Cemetery east of Muskogee by stories of a “ghostly figure” that had been sighted earlier by one of the boys. The group entered the cemetery whispering and laughing and walked towards a large tombstone in the cemetery.

Suddenly, before their eyes appeared what was later described as a “fluttering visitor from the beyond.” Low moaning sounds soon filled the cemetery. The boys burst from the cemetery in a full sprint and within hours the story of the “Frozen Rock Ghost” was told all across the area.

The following night on the 25th, a small group of curious people from the area went to the cemetery to see if the ghost stories told by the boys were true. These “ghost hunters” were met with the sounds of “low moans from a vault” and a “tinkling of bells” in the cemetery. They later reported that the ghost then made his grand appearance rising up from a tombstone. The visitors then fled from the cemetery in a state of terror.

Later that night, approximately 100 or more people returned to the cemetery with some of the previous visitors. Many of the men in the group were armed with shotguns and other weapons. After a short wait, the ghost greeted the crowd once again as it rose up from a tombstone. Screams and shouts were heard from the crowd and some of the visitors began to run from the cemetery.

One of the bravest of the men move toward the ghost and shot three times at it with a shotgun, but the ghost continued to move up and down over the grave. Eerie low moans were also heard from near the grave. Soon after the shots were fired,

the visitors left the cemetery in haste and headed for their homes.

The next morning stories of a “ghostly visitor, midnight seances and other unusual activities” at the cemetery were told throughout the area. The *Phoenix* later reported that the entire city had “neared a point of hysteria.” The police department was even asked by some terrified residents to form a posse to stamp out the ghost.

The *Muskogee Phoenix* picked up on the story and a reporter and photographer went to the site the following evening on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The scene on this night was described as “a circus atmosphere.” The *Phoenix* reported, “A crowd of 2000 people jammed the vicinity of the Frozen Rock cemetery at midnight last night. Highways for two miles in three directions were blocked with automobiles. There was little chance for the purported spirit to rise because all the ground was covered with the tramping feet of curious Muskogeeans.”

Once during the night, a great clamor came from the crowd when a gigantic flash filled the cemetery. Screams were heard throughout the cemetery, but soon the crowd discovered that the flash was only from the newspaper photographer who was taking pictures of the crowd in the cemetery. This picture appeared the next day in the *Phoenix*. The ghost though failed to make an appearance during the night. The following night another large contingent of people flooded the cemetery, but once again the ghost did not show.

The next morning on April 28, three Muskogee boys turned themselves in

*continued on page 8*



# 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

- Ruth Adams
- Katherine Biggs
- James Boyer
- Carolyn Bresser
- Mary Ann Burrows
- Lynn Campbell
- Richard Carr
- Geraldine Farris
- Brenda Freeman
- C.G. Fullenwider
- Sue Gaston
- Martha Griffin
- Gary Herron
- Jeep Hunnicut
- Merton Jeanes
- ♦ Beverly Johnson
- Christina Lamb
- Kathryn Lathim
- Barbara Newell
- Dorothy Pack
- Lillian Ragsdale
- Avalon Reece
- Rosemary Rice

- Shirley Rogers
- Lucy Rooney
- Marie Story

### Family

- Al Cheeseman
- John & Vivyan Cook
- Stephen & Charlotte Crank
- Sarah Dixon
- Andy & Audrey Ewing
- John & Linda Fike
- ♦ Robert & Carolyn Gibbs
- ♦ Mae & Bob Graham
- John Griffin
- Terry & Jeanie Grubbs
- Jack & Bette Hodge
- Dave & Dale Holloway
- Phillip & Dixie Hopper
- Don & Jimmie Jones
- Lin & Linda Moore
- Harold & Marjorie Patterson
- Duane & Virginia Pickle
- Ben & Marcia Robinson
- ♦ Odie & June Smith

- Bill & Bobbye Stacy
- Nancy Steveson
- Jon & Martha Stoodley
- Michael & Wren Stratton

### Builder

- Eloise & John Cable
- Joel Cousins
- Jim Egan
- Larry Hoffman Insurance
- Lillian Jayne
- Shirley Lawrence
- Joe Teaff
- Sam & Catherine Tyrrell
- Wally & Faye Waits

### Sponsor

- Moffitt, Parker & Co.
- Muskogee Federal Credit Union

## New in the Whistle Stop Gift Shop

New books in the gift shop include:

*Oklahoma Music Guide* and *Just for Kicks* by George Carney and Hugh Foley  
*Haskell: A Centennial Celebration* by Jonita Mullins



We also carry a wide array of other books on local history by local authors. Come by and see our selection!



If you're shopping for a train enthusiast, the Whistle Stop has the best selection of train-related items in Muskogee.

Museum members receive a 10% discount!

# BECOME A MUSEUM MEMBER!

Be a part of preserving history for future generations. Become a Three Rivers Museum member today. An annual membership provides 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



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.

### Museum Hours:

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

Call about group  
reservations  
and rates

**686-6624**

## Frozen Rock Cemetery *cont.*

to Muskogee authorities. They admitted at that time to being the "Frozen Rock Ghost." The boys told the officers how they had decided to start the hoax after telling ghost stories one evening.

The "chief ghost" was James Hames who had rigged up a sheet on a broomstick and formed an imposing "10-foot ghoul." Another boy, Coble Parker, helped out by beating on a bucket attached to a picket fence and on occasion would don a black outfit and merge with the white. The third unidentified boy had provided additional moans and rang a small bell.

The boys later said that the ghost business became too "big time" for them

when the large amounts of people arrived in the cemetery. They admitted that the shot from the shotgun had created a hole in the sheet and that had caused them the greatest fear. James Hames told the officers that when the man with the shotgun had approached, he quickly crouched down and held the sheet up as high as he could on the stick and then the shot went through the sheet.

No charges were filed against the boys and they were released. The *Muskogee Phoenix* reported that the ghost haunting "was great fun while it lasted." The ghost mystery had been solved and Muskogee soon turned its attention to other matters. ▼

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## Recent Acquisitions

The Three Rivers Museum continually receives artifacts relating to the history of the Three Forks region. Some of our most recent acquisitions speak to the wide variety of historical subjects that the museum can cover.

We cannot list every item, but wish to give you a small sampling of what we have received. The museum staff is grateful to every donor who has shared an artifact with us.

Barney Williams donated photos and a program about the Veterans Hospital.

Ruby Lambert brought in scrapbooks with newspaper clippings about Muskogee history.

Uvilla Cox gave the museum a parasol that has been in her family since 1895.

Rita Roller brought photos of several African Americans in the Montgomery and Mathis families.

Marjorie Szabo donated items from the Muskogee Garden Club & League of Women Voters.

Oneta Beaver sent a military uniform, photos and papers of G.W. Ping.

Brenda Bolding, Bruce French, JoAnn Branam, Ron and Naomi Morgan, Linda Cole, Richard Lechner all donated items relating to Haskell's history.

Jackie Mabe gave the museum a sign for Muskogee Fair from the 1970s.

Glenn Smith donated a photo of the first OG&E company picnic held at Hyde Park in 1924.

Thanks to all who have donated artifacts!