



Three Rivers Historian

Winter 2006

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 9, No. 1

Football Day Stirs Memories of Glory

Football Day was held at Three Rivers Museum on Saturday, November 19, 2005. The focus of the special event was on past football glories, especially of the Central High School and Manual Training High School football teams from the 1950s.

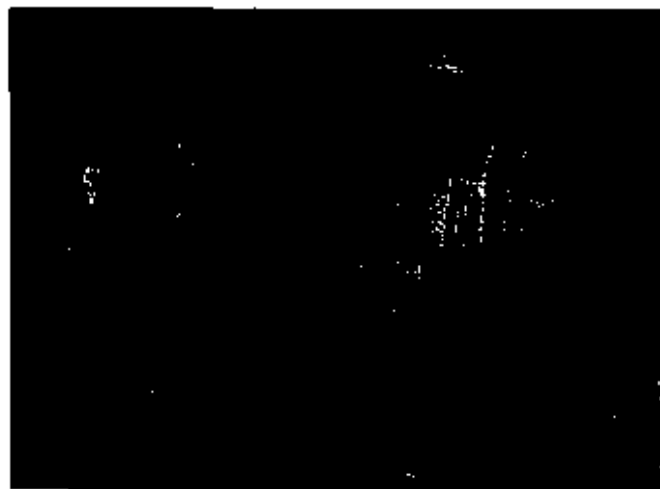
A special exhibit highlighted the teams, bands and cheering squads that were vital to team spirit. Football greats from other towns in the Three Forks area were also featured.

One such player was Rick Bryan who hails from Coweta and played football for both Oklahoma University and the Atlanta Falcons. Bryan was the guest speaker in the morning session at Three Rivers Museum.

Bryan reminisced about his playing days and the opportunities it brought him. "Football allowed me to do things I wanted to do," Bryan said.

Chet's Dairy Mart provided hot dogs for the event. Chet's has long displayed photos of Muskogee cheerleading squads in its restaurant and donated a set for display at the event.

In the afternoon session, Central High School alum Preston Carpenter



Pro football player Rick Bryan talks with a young fan and his father on Football Day.

spoke to a gathering of fellow players in the museum's conference room.

Carpenter enjoyed both a professional football and baseball career.

Museum chairman Roger Bell also moderated an open discussion on past football glory among the visitors who gathered at the museum. Players from both the Central High School and Manual Training High School championship teams were on hand.

Curtis Brackeen recalled the MTHS championship game against Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High School, won by a score of 2-0.

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Museum News Briefs

"Toys from the Past" filled Museum's Lobby

Three Rivers Museum for the second year, created a special Christmas display called "Toys from the Past" for the month of December. Utilizing toys from the museum's collection as well as dozens on loan from local residents, the exhibit included toys from nearly 10 decades.

Some of the toys were tucked in around the museum Christmas tree set up in the lobby. The Muskogee High School History Buffs Club decorated the tree and lobby for the holidays. This is an annual tradition for the History Buffs whose sponsor, Dianne Hill, is a member of the museum's board of directors.

The toys gave a glimpse not only of how children played in the past but of popular culture from decades gone by. The porcelain dolls of a hundred years ago were joined by Charlie McCarthy, Howdy Doody, Sonja Henie and Mary Hartline dolls. Raggedy Ann and Andy were also part of the display.

Metal toys, dishes and trucks were evident from the 1950s post World War II era. And then plastics such as "Flipper" and the "California Raisins" were included in the fun display.



Raggedy Ann and Andy were loaned by Rosa Lee Griffin and Becky Mayo.

Museum Wins Redbud Award

At the Oklahoma Governor's Conference on Tourism held in October 2005, the Three Rivers Museum was presented with the Redbud Award for Outstanding Attraction for 2005 for small budget venues.

The museum was recognized for its innovative programs, its outstanding restoration of the Midland Valley Depot and its success in preserving regional history for a diverse audience.

The Governor's Conference on Tourism is presented each year by the Oklahoma Tourism Industry Association.

Depot District Building Burns

The Midland Valley Headquarters building located on the northwest corner of Third and Elgin was damaged by fire on the evening of January 3, 2006. The building sits across the street from the Midland Valley Depot which houses the Three Rivers Museum and from the Frisco

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Muskogee's Great Fire of 1899

by Roger Bell

The true spirit of Muskogee pioneers was displayed during and after many fires that erupted in Muskogee before the turn of the century. These tragic fires tested the courage and fortitude of the men and women of this growing city.

After each of these fires, the residents worked together to build back their homes, businesses, and community "bigger and better than before." Their strength and ambition laid an important foundation for what Muskogee is today.

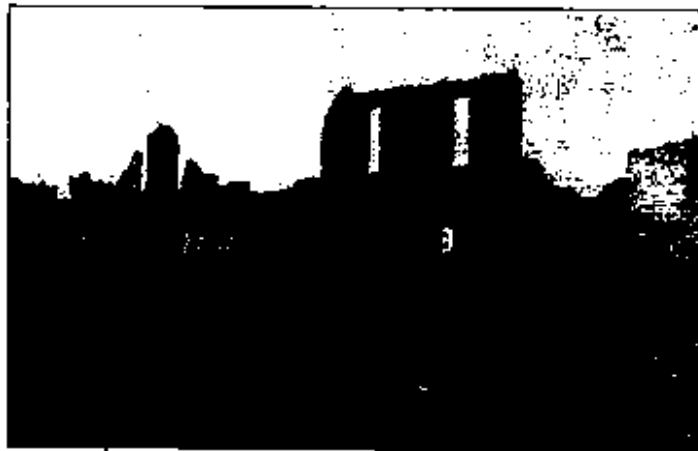
The largest and most destructive of these fires occurred on February 23, 1899. According to most historical accounts, the fire started about 5 a.m. at P.R. Caesar's Tailoring and Cleaning Plant on the east side of Second Street between Court and Broadway.

Stories of the time indicate that a worker at the plant poured kerosene over coals to build a fire. This caused an immediate explosion and a roaring blaze soon engulfed the building.

Within moments someone began shooting their firearm into the air as a warning. Train whistles soon "bellowed out" trying to alarm the sleeping residents of the danger that was at hand.

It was not long before citizens ran to the street to see what was happening. They were greeted by the sight of roaring flames and thick, black smoke.

The fire department soon arrived at the scene and began the unenviable task of fighting the blaze. The department at that time was strictly a volunteer organization with minimal equipment and training. The firemen were led by Chief Charles Seeking who was the owner and



The ruins of the Turner Hardware show the devastating effects of the Great Fire on downtown Muskogee.

operator of a grocery store on Baltimore Avenue.

A hose cart was eventually hauled to the fire site, however, by that time, the flames were roaring into the air with strong gusty winds fanning the flames. Water was obtained by the firemen from the KATY pond (near the present day site of Arrowhead Mall).

Historical accounts indicate that the firemen pointed a hose at the fire "out of which trickled a stream of water that fell three yards away from the firemen or else was blown back in their faces by the strong wind." Additionally, temperatures on that winter morning were near zero, making it an almost intolerable ordeal for these brave men.

The fire spread east towards Main Street and soon the Maddin Hardware Company building (present day site of Royal Casket Company) became a victim of the flames. The fire then turned south down Main Street destroying almost all property in its path.

The Turner Hardware Company was laid to ruins and soon the beautiful

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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,

Mayes, McIntosh,

Okmulgee,

Sequoyah and

Wagoner

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.

Friends of the Thomas- Foreman Home

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Pumps & Controls
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Forney Sandlin
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Settle
Mr. & Mrs. Ron
Spradlin
Marie Wadley

Building Burns

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Freight Depot, the home of the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame.

The building has stood vacant for a number of years but was known to have been used by vagrants as a shelter. The fire started on the second floor and did extensive damage there. Fire officials suspect arson as the cause of the fire and are investigating.

The Midland Valley Headquarters Building was the office for the Midland Valley Railroad for a number of years. Hundreds of railroad employees worked in the building over the years until the "Muskogee Roads" were sold in the mid 1960s.



The second floor of the headquarters building sustained the greatest damage in the fire.

The Midland Valley building shares the architectural style of the Midland Valley Depot. It is considered a part of the Depot District which has shown signs of revitalization with the renovation of the two railroad depots in recent years.

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 support 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.

Muskogee's Great Fire

Hotel Adams, the pride of Indian Territory, was turned to ashes. The English Block, the Turner Opera House, the KATY Passenger Depot, and others were all destroyed.

The *Muskogee Phoenix* later reported "the fire department did everything possible with its limited apparatus and helped to hold the fire in bounds. There were so many deeds of heroism that it would be impossible to enumerate them."

The fire was eventually held in check by the brick walls of the Patterson Mercantile Company and the First National Bank building on the south corners of Broadway and Main. The U.S. Court building was saved by "the most heroic of work as several times the front rooms were a roaring furnace."

Miraculously, there were no reports of deaths mentioned in historical accounts of the fire. The most seriously injured were the firemen who were "given whiskey without regard to where it was obtained, in order to keep them in condition to fight the blaze." One of the firemen, John Leiber did require serious medical attention as he was severely burned and scalded upon his face.

The Muskogee City Council minutes of February 27, 1899, reveal that a sinister crime may have also taken place during the tragedy. Councilman A.W. Robb reported at the meeting that "some of the fire hose was cut during the fire by unknown parties."

Mayor Patrick Byrne later offered a resolution during the meeting that a \$100 reward be put forth by the council for any information that led to the

"arrest and conviction of the person or persons who cut the fire hose during the conflagration." There is no evidence that this person was ever apprehended.

The building and personal property losses were devastating to the community. "Brick, stone, scrap iron, smoldering embers are all that remain of the splendid stores, shops, hotels, opera house, and offices of yesterday," the paper reported.

Many of the persons affected by the damage had no insurance of any kind.

The largest individual loss was that of C.W. Turner who had an estimated loss of \$200,000.

Other large losses included the Hotel Adams, the Maddin Hardware Company, and the Times Publishing Company. Total losses at the time were estimated at near one million dollars.

After the fire, members of the community gathered at the Sondheimer Plant on Second and Okmulgee Street to discuss the disaster. In the midst of cries of the affected and the cold, biting temperatures, the assembled citizens began to talk about the future of their city.

The voice of pioneer merchant C.W. Turner rose above the crowd. "I've made it before and can do it again."

Another rough-handed workman was in the gathering and ran his hand down his torn and dirty clothing and said, "This is all." And then he held up his vigorous muscles and proclaimed, "I can make some more."

Like the Phoenix bird, they intended that their city "would rise from the ashes" once again. They would not let another disaster spoil their plans of creating the most progressive city in the Indian Territory.

Like the Phoenix, they intended that their city "would rise from the ashes" once again.

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

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.

Courthouse Was the Finest in Southwest

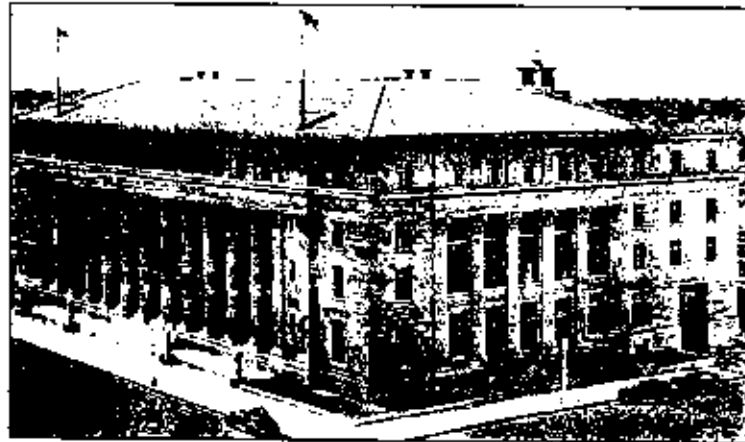
The day after Thanksgiving in November 1915, the entire city of Muskogee was invited to a reception at the just completed federal building at Fifth and Okmulgee. The \$750,000 project had taken two years to complete and was, in the words of the Phoenix, "the most beautiful in the Southwest." It was the city's most expensive structure up to that time.

Congressman C.E. Creager, who had come to Muskogee to work for the Dawes Commission, was instrumental in getting the government funding for the federal building. At that time the offices of the federal government were scattered throughout the city; the district court had its offices in the Metropolitan Building at Fourth and Okmulgee.

With the completion of the federal building, the court, the post office, the federal marshal's service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other U.S. agencies were to combine in one building. In all, space for 70 offices was contained in the 64,000 square feet of floor space. And the building had all the modern conveniences — an electric elevator, a vacuum cleaning system and a fan system to cool it during Oklahoma's hot summers.

Of particular note were the four marble columns located on the first floor in the post office. Topped with Corinthian capstones, these columns reached from floor to vaulted ceiling and each column consisted of a single piece of marble.

The lighting for the building was impressive as well. The chandeliers were from the famed glass maker Tiffany's and cost \$20,000. Tiffany's sent out



one of its own representatives to oversee the installation of the lights in the federal building. A custodian for the building was quoted as saying that the chandeliers in the judge's chambers gave enough light "for any judge to read his own conscience."

Of course, over the years changes came to the federal building. The post office moved across the street and the Bureau of Indian Affairs found other office space as well. An addition to the west side of the building expanded the floor space and a fifth floor was added. The dropped acoustic panels and false walls were put in to hide computer cables, but they hid the beautiful vaulted ceilings, wainscoting and elaborate trim work.

Fortunately the building has been undergoing an extensive restoration in the past few years and it is being returned to its 1915 beauty, an effort led by Judge James H. Payne.

With the addition of five portraits of past chief justices for the Eastern District of Oklahoma — Ralph Campbell, Robert Williams, Joseph Morris, Frank Seay and Michael Burrage — the building might still boast of being one of the finest in the Southwest.

Thanks to These Museum Members

We would like to welcome all our new members and thank those who have renewed their membership. We appreciate your support of the Three Rivers Museum.

Since 1995

Lin & Linda Moore

Since 1998

Bethany Bowline
Carolyn Bresser
Mildred Cousins
Phyllis Durland
Pat Ferry
John W. Griffin
Martha Griffin
Clay & Joy Harrell
Pioneer Abstract
Pumps & Controls, Inc.
W.S. & Nancy Warner

Since 1999

Robert & Jean Anthis
Troy & Modine Baker
Bank of Oklahoma
Morris & Mary Caves
Al Cheeseman
John & Linda Fike
Nick & Laurie Fuller

Ray & Margaret Ann
Lehman
Barbara Newell
Michael & Wren Stratton

Since 2000

Acme Engineering
Mitchell & Fleeta Baker
Roy & Lin Barmore
Sabina Beckman
Bill & Ann Boies
Karen & Carter Bradley
Richard & Leigh Bradley
Eloise & John Cable
Rodney & Tish Callahan
H.C. & Suzanne Chancellor
Children's Clinic
Mary Pat Cole
Geraldine Bates Hannah
Lillian Jayne
Kirschner Foundation
Tommy Sue Leahy
David & Billie Lynn Miller
Moffitt, Parker & Co.

Arnold & Nita Moore
Carl & Janet Moore
Muskogee Federal Credit
Union
Muskogee Phoenix
Shirley Rogers
Nancy Steveson
Nancy & Phil Stolper
Fannie Lu Yaffe

Since 2001

Katherine Biggs
Rodney & Tish Callahan
Delores & Merle Grober
OG&E

Since 2002

Stan & Marianne Smith

Since 2003

Jim & Billie Alexander
Ronald F. Barton
Betty Franks

Gary Herron
Don & Jimmie Jones
Christina Lamb
Jerry Marshall
Sannnye Rodden
Lucy Rooney
Elizabeth Sullivan
James Voss

Since 2004

Bob Bornfleth
Jim & Jennifer Crotty
Kay Dumesnil
John & Helen Geminn
Ron & Janna Geminn
Dr. & Mrs. Ted Hine
Wallace Kilbourne
Arr Cee Mabe
Glenn Smith

New in 2005

Wayne & Delia Brown
Betty Eller
Jim & Becky Goforth
Muskogee Co. Geographical Society
Georgia Perkins
Shipping Plus

Keep History Alive! Become A Museum Member.

Be a part of preserving history for future generations. Become a Three Rivers Museum member today. An annual membership provides you with the quarterly journal, free admission to the museum and a 10% discount on purchases in the museum gift shop. Three Rivers Museum is a 501c3 entity. Your donation is tax deductible.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

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

Clip or copy and mail to: Three Rivers Museum
220 Elgin, Muskogee, OK 74401

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

Contact Us

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

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

♦♦♦

Suggestions?

Three Rivers Museum is your museum. Tell us what you think about the museum and the quarterly journal. Tell us what you would like to see in the future. You can help us make Three Rivers Museum better.

Three Rivers Trivia

Test Your Knowledge of Three Rivers History

Questions:

1. What is the building at right and where is it located?
2. Which of the Three Rivers was once called the Persimmon River?
3. When did the current federal courthouse open in Muskogee?
4. Why was Fort Gibson established at the Three Forks in 1824?



ANSWERS:
1. Presbyterian Church, Fort Gibson. 2. The Verdigris River. 3. 1915. 4. To keep peace between the Osages and Cherokees

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.

Perry Benson - memorabilia from towns created by the Midland Valley Railroad and named for the Ingersoll family

Rosemary Rice — 2 antique dolls, a crib, a child's china tea set and an examining light used by Dr. Rice in his OB/Pediatric practice in Muskogee

Eloise & John Cable — 1989-2005 issues of the Chronicles of Oklahoma

Sherwin Kahn - Klar Bros. Jewelry signs

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

New in the Whistle Stop Gift Shop

One of a Kind
by Kathryn Conley

The author tells the story of her husband Gene Conley from Muskogee, the only player to win a World Series and NBA championship.

♦♦♦

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

♦♦♦

The gift shop also has a wide array of cookbooks including our own Recipes & Remembrances.

Museum members receive a 10% discount! Show your membership card and ask for your discount when you visit.