

3 Rivers Historian

Winter 1999

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 2, No. 1

Depot Renovations Slated for Spring

RENOVATIONS on the Midland Valley Depot at Third and Elgin Streets in Muskogee are set to begin in mid-Spring 1999. The plans, as developed by architect Mike Martin, are to convert the old passenger depot into a museum facility to house the Three Rivers Museum. The Midland Valley Depot sat abandoned, empty and for sale for a number of years before the city of Muskogee negotiated its purchase last year.

Grant money from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, earmarked for the reclamation of abandoned rail systems, was used for the purchase of the depot and will cover the bulk of the renovation costs. The city of Muskogee will provide a percentage of matching funds for the renovations as well.

Because the city owns the depot and will oversee its renovation, contractor bids for the work will have to follow city policy and be approved by the Muskogee City Council. In meeting with the museum's board, Mike Martin reported that all bids should be submitted and given final approval by the City Council by March. The plans are currently under review by the Oklahoma Historical Society and must meet their strict guidelines.

In addition to renovating the Midland Valley Depot, an adjacent building — once occupied by Acme-Reese Air Conditioning — will also be renovated and become a part of the museum complex. The metal building will be refurbished to be compatible with the architectural style of the depot. This building will house the museum's office space, a small research library, a conference room



Museum board officers unveil the new sign in front of the Depot

and kitchenette. It will also provide storage for artifacts and a work area for the development of museum exhibits. An atrium will connect the two buildings.

A meeting room, galley kitchen, public restrooms, ticket counter and gift shop will occupy the center area of the former depot. The gift shop will be located in what was once the ticket office of the railroad station.

The exhibit room will be located in the former freight area of the depot in a space of about 100 x 30 feet. The Historic Society will require that the old wood floor be kept in place in the exhibit room and the gift shop. Tract lights will run along the old concrete beams above to give maximum versatility in lighting the exhibits.

Architect Mike Martin has expressed an
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Museum Website Wins Award

THE THREE RIVERS MUSEUM website (www.3riversmuseum.muskogee.ok.us) on the internet recently was awarded the *Oklahoma Webpage Excellence Award* which is reserved for the "very best Oklahoma-related web pages."

The award was given to the site after a thorough review of the site for accuracy, web design, function, interest, and content. "Your site is a prime example of the quality of website that it takes to win this prestigious award" said Gayla Nelson, website judge, in presenting the award.

The Three Rivers Museum webpage has been up and running since September of 1998

and of this writing has had over 900 visitors. Many visitors to the site have left comments in the guest book or have e-mailed the museum for informa-

tion or requests. Through the website, people all over the country are learning about our developing museum.

The site has had many visitors from Oklahoma, but also has had visitors from Georgia, Washington, Pennsylvania, California, Oregon, and many other locations. Visitor Gordon Ogden of Texas even sent an artifact donation to the museum after viewing the site.

The website is a work in progress. We are adding new items quite regularly. We now have around ten historical stories on the history page and have several more planned in the near future. Our goal for the site is to generate increased interest in the museum and to inform visitors of the rich history of our region.

The museum website was designed by board chairman Roger Bell. If you haven't visited yet, stop by on the internet and see this award-winning site. ▽



Museum Displays Can Be Viewed At Severs Building

THE THREE RIVERS MUSEUM now has several mini exhibits about the Severs Building (once the Severs Hotel) on display in the building's lobby to give visitors a taste of what the museum will offer when it occupies the renovated Midland Valley Depot.

The Severs Building was built by and named for F.B. Severs, a prominent businessman in early Oklahoma. The building, which stood empty for several years, was bought and renovated by First National Bank and is now on the historical register.

The museum development committee, led by Linda Moore, is responsible for creating these exhibits detailing the history and renovation of the building. Stop in the lobby of the Severs Building and find a little history. ▽

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River Transportation Was Important to the Region

by Lynn A. Campbell

IN THE EARLY DAYS of this country, people were traveling and pushing westward almost from its beginning. It is hard for modern travelers to grasp how difficult a cross-country journey was for those first early explorers and settlers. The many rivers in this vast country presented both opportunities and obstacles in early-day travel.

In this region, three rivers converged — the Arkansas, the Verdigris and the Grand. These rivers provided one of the earliest means of transportation and brought trade and settlement to the region.

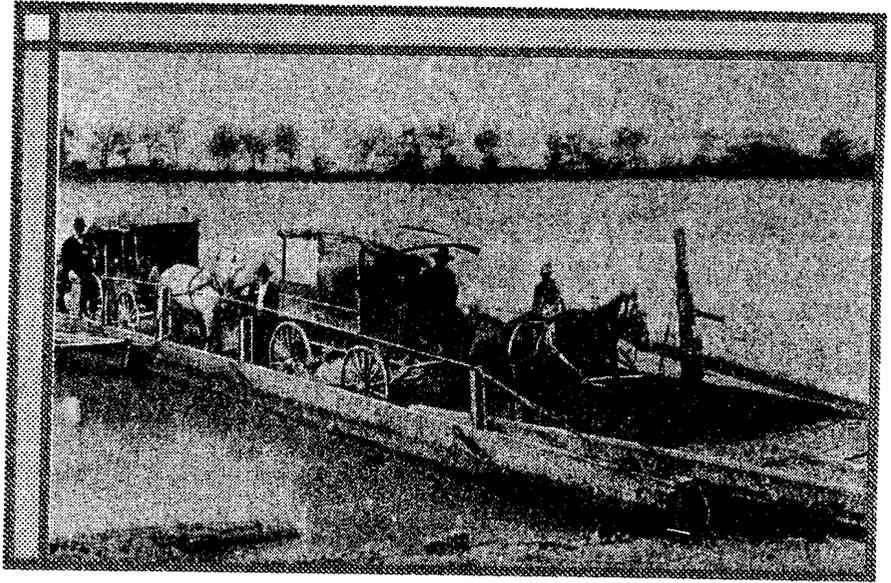
The Indians and early French traders explored and traded on the rivers by canoe. The French trader Pierre Chouteau saw economic opportunity in the area of the three rivers and persuaded the Osage tribe to move their villages from the Osage River in Missouri to the valleys of the Verdigris and the Grand. Shortly afterward, in about 1802, he established a trading post located near Grand Saline, in present day Mayes County.

The earliest commercial activities on the Arkansas River were centered about sixty miles above the mouth of the river at what was then known as Arkansas Post.

This was said to be the first white settlement in the Mississippi River Valley.

The convergence of the Verdigris and Grand with the Arkansas gave this section of country a great advantage for development and travel. The Three Rivers area, as it became known, offered a site for a commercial center that was unsurpassed anywhere in the southwest.

The first white settlers known to locate on the Grand River were people of the Union Mission. Their two flatboats entered the mouth of the Grand on February 10, 1821



The Webbers' Falls cable ferry circa 1903

after a journey of ten months from New York. Without river navigation, the journey would have taken much longer.

By the time the first mission stations and first military posts had been established in "Indian Country," the keel-boat had become the most efficient and popular means of river transportation. The first troop transport to Fort Gibson could not have been done without the keel-boat.

The keel-boat was a staunch little vessel from fifty to seventy feet in length. These boats were

brought upstream by several methods. The most common was by the use of a raw-hide tow-line pulled by twenty to thirty men who walked along the banks.

By the 1840's and 1850's, steamboat navigation on the Arkansas River was in its heyday. There were 22 landings between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson for the use of the steamboats. Most of the boats were fairly small and a large number of them were wrecked on submerged trees.

"In this day of four-lane highways, wide bridges, and good cars, people seldom think of the great difficulty of travel in the early days of this country."

"The Arkansas River was a principal highway for traffic and trade in the country until the building of the first railroads."

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Our Mission

The Three Rivers Museum is a regional museum dedicated to the history of the Three Rivers area of Oklahoma by collecting, preserving and displaying documentary, physical and visual artifacts; by supporting research and publication of the region's history; and by developing and making available its resources to the public for education, information and entertainment. The Three Rivers Museum hopes its efforts will establish a respect for the region's past and will contribute quality and value to its future.

Letter from the Chairman

Dear Friends of Three Rivers Museum,

I want to personally extend my thanks to the many persons and organizations that have pledged their support to the Three Rivers Museum in the last few years. Your financial commitment to our organization has been extremely important in our progress and continuing development.

As our project enters the "building phase," we now more than ever need a strong membership base in order to reach our goals. I hope each of you will help us by telling your friends and neighbors about our project and by continuing to renew your membership to the Three Rivers Museum. We certainly welcome your input and involvement in every phase of our development.

The definition of membership is "to belong or to be a part of." It is our sincere goal for each of our members to feel that they are an important part and have a sense of belonging to our organization. The continuing development of the "Three Rivers Historian" is an integral part of these efforts. We are also working on plans for membership activities and programs for the near future.

For those who have not yet joined our organization, I hope you will consider sending in your membership today. Together, we can create a dynamic, educational museum, which will be the pride of our entire region.


Roger Bell
Chairman

Renovations . . . cont.

interest and willingness to include architectural artifacts in the design of the building's renovation. Some offers of stained glass windows from an old church, doors formerly used in the County Courthouse and old brick have been received by the museum. If further donations are to be used, they must be received soon or it will be too late to incorporate them into the design.

A flag plaza will be established behind the

depot and will be visible from the Columbus Street Overpass. Old railroad cars and trolley cars will also occupy permanent exhibits sites behind the museum. Muskogee's Parks Department will be responsible for landscaping and maintaining the grounds of the museum. Parks Department head, Mark Wilkerson, will oversee plans for the landscaping.

The architect and the Three Rivers Museum Board anticipates the completion of renovations by late fall of 1999. The museum will then begin preparations for its first exhibits to be open to the public sometime in the summer or fall of 2000. ▽

River Transportation . . . cont.

Low water on the Arkansas often meant tedious delays but during periods of high water, rapid progress could be made. The small steamboats of weak power sometimes had to be towed because of the strong currents at Webbers Falls. Steamboat navigation lasted for several years after the Civil War, then their use declined.

While the three rivers provided the means for many types of transportation, they were also often an obstacle for the westward migration of settlers across the country. The migration trails of westward bound travelers often had to detour far out of their way to locate a safe place to ford the rivers. At these locations, river ferries would often begin a much-needed business.

Ferries were the most often used means of transportation over rivers in the nineteenth century because there were very few bridges. Larger cities such as St. Louis, Memphis, Vicksburg and New Orleans had grown up along the Mississippi River and all had thriving ferry businesses. But west of the Mississippi, the ferries were few and far between.

Gradually, as westward travel increased, small ferries for the smaller rivers became more common. As new communities developed along the rivers, ferries provided a valuable service for local travel.

One such ferry crossed the Arkansas River between Webbers Falls and what is now Gore (originally called Illinois Station and later Campbell). This ferry was established by William Wallace Campbell, a local physician and businessman after he returned from service during the Civil War.

Dr. Campbell lived near the Arkansas and in the early days the only way to cross the river was to ford it. When the river was too high, travelers would be stranded near Dr. Campbell's home. He often had strangers staying in his house, sometimes for days or even weeks until the river went down enough for crossing.

Dr. Campbell saw the need for a more reliable means to cross the Arkansas so he bought two ferries. A steam ferry was used

for high water and a cable ferry functioned when the river was running low.

The Webbers Falls ferry proved invaluable to the settlement of the Three Rivers area and continued in use until a bridge was built over the Arkansas River at Webbers Falls in 1923.

The Arkansas and Verdigris Rivers are today important components in the McClellan-Kerr Navigation System that links the Three Rivers area with the Mississippi River and the world. Barge traffic carrying products such as coal and wheat continues the long service of the rivers to transportation and commerce in Oklahoma. ▽

Sources for "River Transportation" and "William Campbell"
♦Marguerite McFadden, *Muskogee Phoenix*, April 4 & 11, 1976
♦Murial Wright, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, v. 8, 1930
♦D.C. Gideon, *Early History of Oklahoma*
♦Pictures and historical information from the collection of Paul Eichling of Gore
♦Historical material from the collection of Nan Campbell Butner

William Campbell: a Three Rivers Veteran and Entrepreneur

by Lynn Campbell

William Wallace Campbell was born in the Saline District of the Cherokee Nation on March 8, 1836. He was the son of John Campbell and Eliza Holt.

Dr. Campbell attended the old Cherokee Male Seminary in Tahlequah and then went to medical school at the University of Tennessee at Nashville where he graduated in 1861. By 1863, Campbell was serving the Confederacy in the War Between the States as Assistant Surgeon in the 17th South Carolina Regiment. He served in that capacity until the end of the war, sometimes acting as General Lee's personal physician.

According to his roster of service, Campbell was present at Appomattox on April 9, 1865 when the war ended. He was "paroled as a prisoner of war belonging to the Army of Northern Virginia who have been this

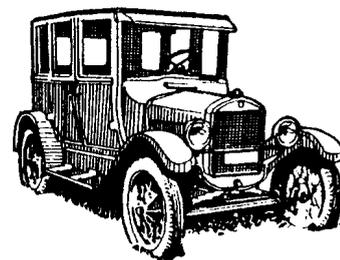
day surrendered by General Robert E. Lee."

Dr. Campbell then went to Texas where his family had refugeed and stayed there a short time. They soon returned to the Cherokee Nation and settled in Webbers Falls where he opened what became a large medical practice serving the surrounding 50 miles. He also became involved in several business ventures.

In 1866, William married his cousin, Mary Holt, and they had five children. He established the town of Campbell (present day Gore) just across the river from Webbers Falls and lived there for the next 30 years until his death in 1903. Both William and Mary are buried in the family part of the Gore cemetery along with their children and many other family members.

Early Motoring In Muskogee

by Wally Waits



THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE driven in Muskogee was owned by Homer B. Spaulding. According to the *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, the date of the auto's debut was 1900, but contemporary references to this event have not been found.¹ However, the city of Muskogee passed its first speed limit in 1906, in reaction to the concerns of the "horse and mule" crowd even though automobile usage was still limited at this time.² Nevertheless, new-fangled "smoke wagons" were growing in popularity and increasing their appearance on Muskogee streets.

In 1907, local businessmen were quickly forming businesses to take advantage of the economic opportunities brought by increasing interest in automobiles. Thus was born the Southwestern Automobile and Motor Vehicle Company.

The stated purpose of the company was "to manufacture, buy, sell, import, export, and generally deal in Automobiles and vehicles of every description, also engines, machines, and appliances for the generation of steam, electric, gasoline [sic], or other power for the purpose of propelling cars, carriages, wagons, trucks, and vehicles of every kind." The company was also to "deal in Automobile Supplies." These supplies included such things as

tires and fenders, oil and grease, lights and switches, etc.³

Automobiles might have been driven to Muskogee for this company. This is the likely way Mr. Spaulding's vehicle arrived. But it is probable that most of the new automobiles were shipped by rail.

The following newspaper article gives an idea of the great interest the new business of automobiles stirred among Muskogeeans.

"Nine Smoke Wagons Coming

*The Southwestern Automobile Co. of this city has placed an order for nine large cars, which are expected to arrive within two weeks. Another car was ordered from here, but will be sent north until this fall."*⁴

By the end of 1907, touring in automobiles was the rage in Muskogee. Trips to neighboring towns were regularly reported in the newspapers as if they were racing results.

"Hayes and Gordon of Southwestern Automobile Co. make record time to Okmulgee,
continued on next page

¹ *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, November 11, 1916, p. 8, c.4.

² By comparison, there were no references to automobile usage or purchase in the *Muskogee Phoenix* during June, 1906.

³ U.S. District Court, Articles of Incorporation, vol.4 (1907-1910) p. 282, roll USC 18.

⁴ *Muskogee Phoenix*, June 12, 1907, p.6, c. 1.

⁵ *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, August 1, 1907, p.3, c.4

⁶ *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, July 22, 1907, p.3, c.3

⁷ *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, September 28, 1907, p.5, c.5.

⁸ *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, June 15, 1907, p. 1, c. 3.

Moore Attends OMA Fall Conference

THREE RIVERS MUSEUM collections manager, Linda Moore, attended the fall conference of the Oklahoma Museums Association (OMA) last September in Ardmore at the Lake Murray State Lodge.

The OMA is a state organization, with a central office in Oklahoma City, whose purpose is to aid museum personnel in education and communication.

Nearly 100 participants registered from all over the state to attend the three-day meeting. The days were filled with lectures on a number of topics related to museum operation

such as lighting design, environmental monitoring and control, grant proposal writing, photographic displays and educational projects with schools. The keynote speaker presented a stirring talk on the planned Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial for which he was a consultant.

The evening events included visits to museums in Ardmore, dinner each night, and opportunities for participants to get acquainted and "talk shop." The final event was the annual business meeting and election of officers held in conjunction with an awards luncheon. ▽



leaving at 8:30 a.m. and arriving at 1:00 p.m."⁵

"Party of businessmen make trip to Taft and Creekola in 8 hours."⁶

"Fred C. Letcher buys new Toledo touring car and will attempt to make trip to Porum in an hour."⁷

However, not everyone was happy to see the growing interest in motoring in Muskogee. The largest opponents against cars still wanted the traditional horse and wagon or buggy. Another group opposed to the growing use of automobiles was the businessmen who felt their livelihood was being threatened.

Hack drivers saw a decline in business and were opposed to the loss of their authority on the streets of Muskogee. The deliverymen had already seen long-distance hauling taken over by the railroads, leaving them with the short-haul traffic to the towns not served by railroads.

The following article provides a glimpse of the drama being played out as the new age of technology collided with the old-world customs of the draymen.

"Autos and Cab Drivers Have Clashed

The cab men and the auto owners have clashed. Last night a cab driver drove against one of the new machines of the Southwest Company and it is thought that he did so intentionally."⁸

The rage to own and drive automobiles by the general public in Muskogee began in 1907 and never slackened. It continues today. ▽

Centennial Time Capsule to be Buried at Museum Site

MUSKOGEE'S CENTENNIAL celebration began last year with the opening of a time capsule. The year of celebration ended with a new time capsule being created. The time capsule was sealed on December 31, but it will be buried at a later date on the grounds of the Midland Valley Depot which will house the Three Rivers Museum.

Burial of the time capsule will coincide with a dedication ceremony the museum plans to hold when renovations to the depot are set to begin.

Dr. Frank Borovetz, Jr., chairman of the centennial committee, reported that the committee received Braille documents from Parkview School, commemorative Coke™ bottles from Love Bottling, and other old documents from individuals. Some items from the original time capsule were also included.

The time capsule was made of PVC pipe and should not leak. The capsule will be opened in 25 years. Items in the capsule will then be donated to the Three Rivers Museum. ▽

The Three Rivers Area

What makes up the Three Rivers Area? The focal point of the area is the confluence of the Arkansas, Grand and Verdigris Rivers north of Muskogee. But the area is much larger than this. It is defined to include Muskogee County, all the counties that border Muskogee County as well as Southern Mayes and Northern Sequoyah Counties. The Three Rivers Museum hopes to collect and preserve historical artifacts from this entire region.

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 Business Membership \$100
 Sponsor Membership \$250 Corporate Membership \$500

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

Mail to: Three Rivers Museum
P.O. Box 1813, Muskogee, OK 74402



Contact Us

The Three Rivers Museum can use your help. Volunteers are a vitally important part of our organization.

If you would like to be a part of The Three Rivers Museum by joining one of our committees, helping with our newsletter distribution or with collecting and cataloging the artifacts donated to the museum, or in some other way, please give us a call at 686-6624.

Become a museum volunteer today!

Editor's Note:

The "Three Rivers Historian" needs your historical articles. If you have information on historical events, people or places in the Three Rivers area, 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 3riversmuseum.muskogee.ok.us

Three Rivers People

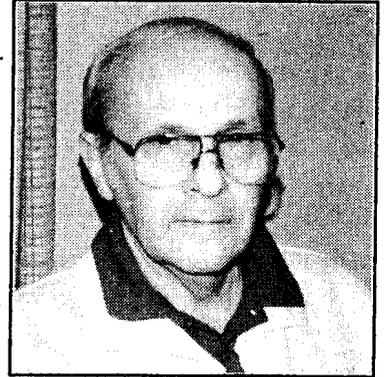
Jim Lemley Builds Depot Model

VOLUNTEER Jim Lemley of Muskogee is now in the process of building a replica model of the former M, K & T (KATY) railroad depot in Muskogee for the Three Rivers Museum. As of this writing, Jim has spent over 100 hours on the project and anticipates an additional 200 hours or more will be required to complete the display.

The model will feature the depot from the 1910-1920 time period. Details of the original structure will be featured in the model including a steam engine, railroad cars, the former magazine stand as well as many other items. Lemley has spent countless hours studying pictures and diagrams of the building to ensure that the details of the model will be as authentic as possible.

This depot model is the first building and the most ambitious project that Jim has attempted. Jim started building wooden models around 1992 as a hobby. Each model is a "labor of love" to Jim. To date he has built approximately 30 models including airplanes,

military vehicles, construction equipment, and railroad stock. Some of his models are now on display at the Muskogee Public Li-



brary. "Every piece of my models is hand made," Jim explains. "I feel like I can build a model of anything I set my mind to."

The depot display is scheduled to be ready for the opening of the museum and will be featured in one of the inaugural exhibits.

"Volunteers like Jim truly represent the spirit of our project," says Roger Bell, museum chairman. "This model will be a treasure to our museum and will certainly be greatly received."

Jim is a graduate of Porter High School and the former Muskogee Jr. College.

Museum Wish List ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

The development of a new museum will require many office, storage and conference room supplies and equipment. The museum has established a special fund for donations toward the purchase of this much-needed equipment. We would also gladly accept donations of supplies or used office equipment.

Below is a list of several items the museum will need. Your help would be appreciated in obtaining these and other related items. Please call the museum at 686-6624 if you would would like to donate any of these supplies. You may also designate a cash donation to be used for a specific item.

- ♦ Metal shelving
- ♦ Metal file cabinets

- ♦ Hand cart or dolly
- ♦ Telephones
- ♦ Answering machine
- ♦ Chairs
- ♦ Conference tables
- ♦ Slide projector
- ♦ Speaker's podium
- ♦ VCR
- ♦ Television
- ♦ Bookcases
- ♦ Microwave
- ♦ Refrigerator
- ♦ Cash register
- ♦ Computer equipment
- ♦ Picture frames
- ♦ Closed-circuit television and monitoring equipment.