

3 Rivers Historian

Spring 2002

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 5, No. 2

Museum Hosts First Annual Railroad Day

The Three Rivers Museum held its first Railroad Day on Saturday, May 18 exactly 98 years after the very first Railroad Day was celebrated in Muskogee.

On that occasion in 1904, the city of Muskogee presented a silver tea service to Charles N. Haskell for his role in developing the railroads that were making Muskogee a railroad hub and Indian Territory's most important city.

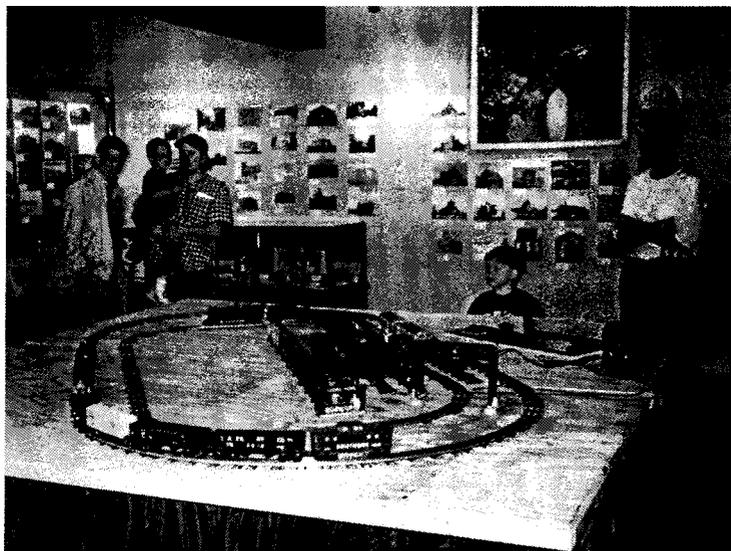
The museum acquired this heirloom tea service and now displays it proudly in the lobby which was once the passenger area of the Midland Valley Depot.

The Three Rivers Museum has devoted space in its main exhibit hall to the region's railroad history, but space limits how much railroad memorabilia can be displayed there.

For Railroad Day, additional displays were set up in the lobby to give visitors a greater understanding of just how large an impact early railroads had on the growth and development of almost every town in the Three Rivers region.

Retired railroad employees also contributed to the museum's Railroad Day. Seaborn Reich brought his telegraph key and gave demonstrations on the way early railroads communicated up and down the lines.

Mary Plummer manned an exhibit



Model Train layout at Railroad Day

filled with photos of railroad employees, books, manuals and employee rosters and visited with many of the retired railroad workers who came to the special event.

Agnes Brown brought the Carnegie medal won by her husband James A. Brown for his heroic effort in saving the life of Walter Grober following a head-on train collision in 1958.

Model trains were also featured on Railroad Day. Muskogee architect Jeff Andrews set up a model train layout and spent the day showing both younger and older visitors how the trains run.

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Railroad Day cont.

Jim Lemley brought several models to display in the main exhibit hall. Lemley had donated a model of the old KATY Depot to the museum and it is also on display in the exhibit hall.

The museum also brought out many old tools that the railroaders used in building, operating and maintaining the rail lines. Railroader J.D. Jordan hefted a 22-pound sledge hammer into the display and helped to identify some of the other tools for museum visitors.

The museum's staff and board of directors were pleased with the first Railroad Day, seeing an estimated 250 visitors come to the event. They plan to make Railroad Day an annual event and believe it will get bigger and better each year.

If you missed Railroad Day this year, you'll want to make your plans to come next year.



Seaborn Reich explains the telegraph

Museum News Briefs

Museum Receives "Hitching Post"



Hitching Post rock on the museum grounds

The Three Rivers Museum received a donated artifact of massive proportions when Mrs. Irene Bachner and Mrs. Lucy Rooney donated a large sandstone rock that had once been used as a hitching post.

The rock, estimated to weigh nearly one ton, had stood in front of the home of Dr. Sessler Hoss who had served as a physician for the Midland Valley Railroad. His home was located on North 16th Street in Muskogee.

Dr. Hoss' daughter, Irene Bachner, had given the hitching post to the Rooney family and it had stood in their yard near Honor Heights Park for a number of years. Mrs. Bachner and Mrs. Rooney agreed the Midland Valley Depot should be the new home of this old family relic.

Kelly Monument, a local company, donated the labor and truck for hauling the massive rock to its new location near the entrance of the Three Rivers Museum.

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Trouble in Threes: The Morris Bank Robberies

The Three Rivers Area

by Ron Morgan

Editor's note: *This concludes the article begun in the previous "Historian" about two robberies of the Morris bank by Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd in 1931. After the second robbery, the townspeople of Morris devised a plan to ensure that the bank would never be so easily robbed again.*

Around noon, three "nickel and dime" thieves pulled up to the Morris State Bank. The three, Troy Kittrell, Roscoe "Red" Ernest and a still unknown third man, had been on a three-day crime spree, kidnapping and stealing a couple's car in Okmulgee.

Then they proceeded to rob Hershel Blackburn's drug store of 25 dollars. They drove all around Okmulgee County looking for a "cushy" little bank to hit. They thought they had found one in Morris.

The three men drove up in a Ford Coup and parked near the bank. Kittrell and the third bandit entered the bank armed with pistols while Ernest stayed in the car, acting as wheelman for the job.

As the pair entered the building, only one teller — 25-year-old Clara Aggas, the survivor of one bank robbery already — was on duty. Teller Graham Smith had transferred to a bank in Okmulgee. Being robbed twice in the past few months didn't set too well with him.

Walking behind the counter with guns drawn, the bandits ordered Clara to gather up all the money in the bank and hand it over. Miss Aggas complied with the order, but thought of the recently installed burglar alarm, located near the vault

where the bulk of the money was kept.

She went there first and as she started removing cash, the plucky teller set off the alarm, which was connected to the marshal's office and the nearby gas station.

She then commenced to work as slowly as possible in filling the money sacks, giving the townspeople time to turn their guns on the bank. After the duo got the money, they forced Miss Aggas to accompany them to the getaway vehicle.

In the meantime, Marshal I.Z. Thomson heard the alarm and hurried to the neighboring gas station to retrieve his 32-70 Winchester. He then raced to the rear of the station, a position that had a commanding view of the bank's entrance.

Barron Skinner, the station owner who had armed himself with a shotgun, soon joined the marshal. Across the street at the hardware store, Forest Bradley ran upstairs to retrieve his rifle, then took his place at the second story window overlooking the bank's main door. Several other citizens quickly armed themselves and went directly to their assigned locations.

Red Ernest, sitting in the getaway car, noticed Marshal Thomson with his rifle at the rear of the gas station. He raised his

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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.

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.

gun and took a shot at Thomson, shattering the plate glass window that the lawman was standing near. The marshal was cut by flying glass and was hit by several shotgun pellets.

Bradley, looking at the scene from above the hardware store, saw this and shot two rounds from his 30-30 rifle at the bandit in the car below. The second shot took effect, sending the gunman slumping in the car seat.

At about the same time, the two bandits in the bank started towards the getaway car, Miss Aggas in tow, using the gutsy teller as a human shield. She walked toward the car ahead of the gunman.

She noticed Red Ernest draped over the steering wheel, blood gushing out of a gaping head wound. Suddenly multiple gunshots erupted toward the trio. Standing within a few feet of the Coup, Aggas felt a searing pain in her shoulder and jaw.

The two bandits pushed her into the back seat and shoved the wounded bandit into the back with her. She realized that he was horribly wounded and probably dead. Noticing that Miss Clara had been hit, the bystanders began screaming for the posse to cease fire, which they did.

The men got into the front seat and drove out of town on Route 266. A local man, Carl Bay, later told reporters that he was standing on his porch, armed with a rifle, watching the robbers escape. Bay was stopped by his sister from firing at the fleeing car because she feared he might hit Miss Aggas with a stray bullet. It seems the sister was the only one who thought of the possibility.

In their escape the robbers turned south and drove through the small town of Grayson. Turning off on a narrow dirt road, they drove a few hundred feet into a wooded area. The pair parked the car, got into another vehicle and fled the scene, leaving Clara Aggas alone in the car with the dead man. Neither bandit appeared injured, according to Aggas.

The badly wounded and terrorized bank teller climbed out of the car and crawled several hundred feet to the main highway, where her fiancé, Barron Skinner, found her.

Skinner had followed the bandit car out of town, but had lost sight of it near Grayson. When he was driving down the main highway for a second look, he sighted Clara lying along the side of the road. Skinner loaded the bleeding woman into his car and rushed her to the Okmulgee hospital.

Meanwhile law officers led by Sheriff Storemont of Okmulgee County and V.S. Cannon of Muskogee County set

up roadblocks and conducted a massive three-county manhunt. Darkness soon set in and aided the bandits in their escape.

When the law officers came upon the abandoned auto, they began searching the area. They found the remnant of a recent campfire and concluded that the bandits had spent the night before the bank robbery there.

That night, following the robbery, the car that the bandits had stolen several days earlier from Charles Wilson of Okmulgee was towed to the Okmulgee City Hall. The bullet-riddled and blood-soaked car was put on display and the public was charged a dime to view it.

“Suddenly multiple gunshots erupted toward the trio. Clara Aggas felt a searing pain in her shoulder and jaw.”

Robberies cont.



Sources for Morris Bank Robberies

The proceeds were given to the Oklahoma Unemployment Fund.

At City Hospital, doctors reconstructed Miss Clara's jaw and treated the bullet wound to her right shoulder. She was listed in critical condition. Her mother collapsed upon hearing of her daughter's injuries and was rushed to the same hospital in Okmulgee. The mother was also listed in critical condition, having been in ill health for a long time.

At the Ward Funeral Home in Okmulgee, where Ernest's body had been taken, hundreds of citizens had gathered. It was decided to let the public view the dead body. His wife and son arrived from Oklahoma City the next day to claim the bandit's body. He was buried in Lincoln County, Oklahoma.

Several weeks later Troy Kittrell of Dewar, Oklahoma, was captured in Detroit, Michigan. He quickly confessed to the Morris bank robbery but claimed not to know the name of the third robber, who was never caught.

Kittrell also claimed that he had been strong armed into helping rob the bank and the drug store by Ernest and the unknown bandit. He stated that the others had threatened his life at a campsite the night before the robbery.

Troy Kittrell was sentenced to 25 years at the Oklahoma State Prison. The \$700 taken from the Morris bank robbery was never recovered.

Eugene Gum, secretary of the Bankers Association, came to town to pay the \$500 reward to the killer of Red Ernest. A recent Bankers Association meeting had ruled that a reward would only be paid for the capture of dead bandits, not live ones.

Miss Clara Aggas, the gutsy survivor of two robberies, spent months in hos-

pitals undergoing skin grafts and reconstructive surgery. On November 3, 1932, she wedded her rescuer, Barron Skinner. They honeymooned in Oklahoma City.

Clara never returned to her job at the bank. She had three daughters and six grandchildren. Clara Aggas Skinner passed away at the age of 88 on December 5, 1994 and is buried at Memorial Park in Tulsa.

Jess Ring moved to the Morris area after the gas pump station he worked at burned to the ground in 1934. He died in 1947 and is buried in Morris. The little house in Haskell where he gave sanctuary to Charles Floyd burned in 1997.

"Pretty Boy" Floyd was killed in 1934 in Ohio by a posse led by the F. B.I.'s Melvin Purvis. He is buried in Atkins, Oklahoma. His accomplice, George Birdwell, was killed in 1932 while trying to rob the Bank of Boley. He is buried near his brother and father in Seminole, Oklahoma.

After the third robbery, a policy of never keeping over a couple hundred dollars at the Morris bank was implemented. A day's notice was required to cash large sums, the bulk of the cash being kept in Okmulgee.

The bank soon made further improvements by installing bulletproof glass at the tellers' windows and steel bars. Without such improvements, insurance rates for a bank robbed three times would have been exorbitant.

The Morris State Bank was destroyed in a 1984 tornado that killed nine people and injured dozens of others. Probably Oklahoma's most unlucky bank, it was relocated and rebuilt following the tornado and appears to prosper today. ▼

Books:

Mike Wallis, *Pretty Boy: The Life and Times of Charles A. Floyd*

Morris Historical Society, *Morris History*

Okmulgee Historical Society, *Okmulgee County History*

Newspapers:

Okmulgee Daily Times
Haskell News
Muskogee Phoenix
Morris News

Individuals:

Graham Smith, Okmulgee
Ben Reynolds, Morris
Tom Duncan, Morris
Stephen Guy, Haskell
R.D. Harrison, Haskell
Toni Brashera, Haskell
John Mackey, Haskell
Jess Hargraves, Bixby
Harper Edwards, Sallisaw
Claudia Chilcoat, Haskell

Muskogee's First Railroad Day Held in 1904

Editor's Note: *The following is an excerpt from the Muskogee Daily Phoenix account of the first Railroad Day held in Muskogee. It was published May 19, 1904*

Railroad Day has been celebrated in Muskogee, and the visitors who came will never meet with a warmer or heartier welcome in any city, on any occasion, than was extended to them in Muskogee.

Early and late the trains on the various roads were emptied of thousands of persons, all of them anxious to see Muskogee, some of them taking advantage of cheap rates to come here to see their friends, and some of them coming to celebrate. And all those who came were satisfied with the trip.

In the morning the fire boys gave an exhibition of rapid work in extinguishing a fire, and right well did they perform their part. Many enthusiastic and admiring expressions were heard concerning the Muskogee fire department.

Excellent music was furnished during the day by the Merchant's Band. The visitors were met and shown every courtesy by the citizens of Muskogee, and one of the novel features of the entertainment was the shooting of an oil well in the southeast part of the city. A gas well was also one of the attractions, and large numbers of people visited it during the day.

When the noon hour arrived, an excellent lunch was ready for all those who chose to partake, and there were many who so desired. The two lunch rooms were under control of Gus Lubbes, and right well did he perform his duties. He stated that during the day at least 4,000 persons had been fed, and each one of that number had received all that they wanted to eat.

In the afternoon, many took advantage of the free excursions to see the country traversed by the Muskogee Union and the Midland Valley railroads.

The ball game at Henry Kendall College

was the chief attraction during the afternoon, and a large crowd was in attendance. The contest was between the Muskogee first nine and a team composed of the best players from Pryor Creek and Vinita. At the end of nine innings, the score stood 5 to 3 in favor of Muskogee, the latter team taking down the purse of \$25 given by the Chamber of Commerce.

In the evening the visiting railroad men, together with the Chamber of Commerce, enjoyed a smoker at the Elks' Club rooms. All the railroad officials in the city had been invited and many were present.

President Hopkins, of the Chamber of Commerce, addressed those present, stating that the object of the meeting was to round off the celebration of Railroad Day in Muskogee.

Mr. Hopkins said that many railroad officials in different cities had been invited to be present, and those who could not attend sent telegrams expressing their well wishes.

Mayor Rutherford was then presented and made a very neat speech in which he referred to Mr. C.N. Haskell as being the foremost figure in the building of Muskogee, owing to many railroads being projected and built into Muskogee by that gentleman. He also eulogized Mr. Haskell for the fair treatment of everyone with whom he had had any dealings or came in contact with.

At the conclusion of his speech, Mr. Rutherford uncovered an elaborate and beautiful solid silver tea set, and in a few choice words presented the same to Mr. Haskell on behalf of the citizens of Muskogee as a token of the esteem in which he is held for

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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.

Welcome to These Museum Members

MUSEUM 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

Lavonne Baker
 ♦ Mrs. A. Camp Bonds
 Marion Bowman
 Janey Boydston
 ♦ Agnes Brown
 Lynn Campbell
 Margo Dollar
 Orville Eaton
 Susie Eisenschmidt
 ♦ James D. Gibson, Jr.
 Robert Granger
 Norma Carol Hale
 ♦ Leisha Haworth
 Kathy Hewitt
 Dianne Hill
 Mary Frances Hodges
 ♦ Gene Hyden
 Bonnie Jennings
 Adelaide Johnson
 J. Wm. Keithan
 ♦ Larry Lee
 Betty Sue Nemic
 Joan O'Dell
 Jared Roberts

Shirley Rogers
 Kay Baim Shapiro
 Marjorie Szabo
 Fred Truster
 Margaret Vardeman
 Delphia Warren
 Martha Griffin White
 Harold Wilson
 Blanche Zaroor

Family

James & Ruth Bates
 ♦ Jim Beck
 Robert & Louise Bell
 Perry Benson, Jr.
 Frank & Kay Borovetz
 Charles Bowman
 Frank Boydston, Jr.
 ♦ Jim Brown/Ann Franklin
 Christine Cannarsa Family
 James & Ruth Carnagey
 Olivia Cole
 E.P. Couch
 Paul & Telitha Day
 Max Eversole

Carl & Julie Flaherty
 Ben & Cindy Gaston
 Earl & Olivelle Graves
 Delores & Merle Grober
 Robert & Barbara Haggard
 Barbara Higbee
 Jerry & Paula Hoffman
 Charles & Viva Kilgore
 Edward & Phyllis Kuykendall
 ♦ Bill & Octavia Lambert
 ♦ Gary & Lynette Lambert
 Floretta Leatherman
 Ray & Margaret Ann Lehman
 Duane & Nola Mason
 Robert & Carol Mix
 Cletys & Linda Nordin
 Mike & Ruth Pagliaro
 Mary & Frank Plummer
 ♦ Ted Ragsdale Family
 Rolland & Melba Ranks
 Ronald & Molly Reeves
 James & Karen Ritchey
 Andrew & Susan Roberts
 Bob Ross

Ross & Barbara Staggs
 Nancy & Phil Stolper
 Betty Weaver
 Marion Weber/Kathryn
 Burke
 Charlie & Brenda Wilbourn
 George & Shirle Williams
 Jay & Margaret Williams
 Marvin & Virginia Wright

Builder

Robert & Jean Anthis Morris & Mary Caves
 City of Muskogee
 Martha Harper
 Muskogee Daily Phoenix
 Dan & Vicki Rackley

Sponsor

Acme Engineering
 Bank of Oklahoma
 Dorothy Hays
 ♦ Ann Barker Ong

Sustainer

Pumps & Controls

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
 P.O. Box 1813, Muskogee, OK 74402



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 about making a donation to the Three Rivers Museum.

Editor's Note:

The "Three Rivers Historian" needs your historical articles.

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 www.3riversmuseum.com

Museum Hours:

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

Call about group reservations and rates

686-6624

Three Rivers People

Barbara Higbee: Collector & Friend

Barbara Higbee has been a long-time supporter of the Three Rivers Museum and like so many of its board members has served the museum as a board member almost since its beginning.

Barbara is well-known in the Muskogee area for her extensive vintage post-card collection and the slide show she presents on it to civic clubs and other interested groups.

Most of the inaugural exhibits in the Three Rivers Museum contain photos or other artifacts that Barbara has donated to the museum. She is also a good source of information about the area's history.

Besides working for the museum, Barbara also works for the county election board. She has always been active in the community and involved in civic func-



Barbara Higbee at our anniversary reception

tions.

"We appreciate all the hours of time and effort Barbara has donated to the Three Rivers Museum throughout the long process of getting the museum started," says board chairman, Roger Bell. "Her contribution has made a big difference in what we have been able to accomplish here."

The First Railroad Day cont.

what he has done for the town, and for his gentlemanly conduct and fair dealing on any and all occasions and with everyone, from highest to lowest.

This was a complete surprise to Mr. Haskell, who in reply stated that the rapid strides made and being made by Muskogee, were due to no one man, but to those citizens here who were always ready and willing to contribute to anything that might be of benefit to Muskogee.

Mr. Haskell feelingly thanked the donors for the beautiful and costly gift, saying that words failed him in the expression of his appreciation of the esteem in which he was held by the citizens of Muskogee.

In his remarks Mr. Haskell paid a

very nice tribute to the management of the M.K. & T., in which he stated that in all his railroad building, that he had received the highest consideration at the hands of Mr. Allen, the vice president and general manager of that road, and that in scores of ways had the new railroads building into Muskogee been assisted by the M.K. & T., which was the pioneer road in this country. This is a courtesy highly appreciated by railroad men, and Mr. Haskell stated before the assembly that they must not consider that the new roads had opposition from those already in the field, but that on the other hand they had received great assistance and encouragement from them. They were all interested in building a greater Muskogee and the way to do that was to build more railroads. ▼