

# 3 Rivers Historian

Spring 2003

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 6, No. 2

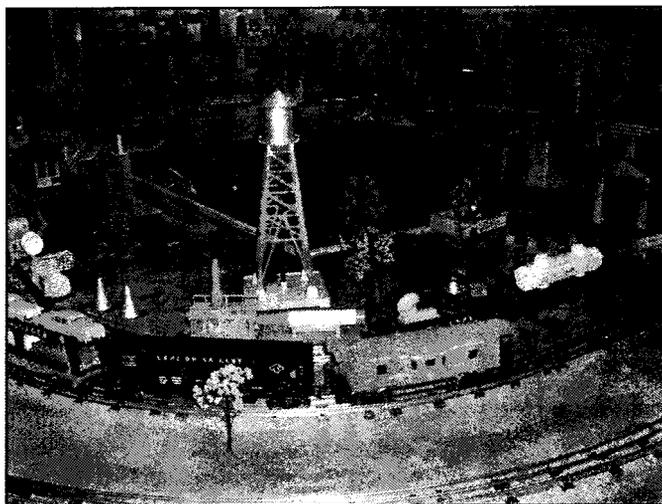
## Rail Fans Enjoy Railroad Day

**T**hree Rivers Museum held its second annual Railroad Day on Saturday, May 17 at the Midland Valley Depot. Over 125 guests enjoyed the all-day event that featured the museum's newly painted switch engine. The engine was opened to the public for the first time on Railroad Day. There is still some work to be done on the engine, but visitors can now get an up-close look at the vintage train.

Guest speaker for the event was Dr. John Fike, faculty member of Texas A&M University. Dr. Fike spoke in both a morning and afternoon session in the museum's conference room. His topics were "130 Years of Railroads at Three Rivers" and "The History of the Midland Valley Railroad — KO&G."

Returning for Railroad Day again this year was retired railroader Seaborn Reich who brought his telegraph key and demonstrated its use. Kids of all ages were fascinated with this early method of communication.

Also drawing kids to the museum's exhibit hall was a large model train layout built by Jeff Andrews, Ron Geminn and John Vecchio of Muskogee. Their H-gauge Lionel trains were reminiscent of the days when the railroad was the



*Five Lionel trains zip around this model layout*

most important mode of transportation in America.

Lunch for Railroad Day was served by Runt's Barbecue of Muskogee out on the museum's flag plaza. Runt's has been voted Muskogee's Best Barbecue Restaurant, and it is clear to see why. Everyone enjoyed lunch out in the sunshine.

The museum plans to continue its Railroad Day tradition with a similar event next year. "We hope to grow bigger and better every year," says Linda Moore, executive director of the museum. "And we hope more visitors will be a part of this event next year."

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## Three Rivers Museum Board & Staff

### Officers/Staff:

*Chairman:*

Roger Bell

*Executive Director:*

Linda Moore

*Marketing Director:*

Jonita Mullins

### Board of Directors:

Lynn Campbell  
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Dianne Hill  
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Kit Stewart  
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*Emeritus Member:*

Delphia Warren

## Museum News Briefs

### “Mystery Tours” Stop at Three Rivers



*One Kaleo Tour group poses for the camera in front of the museum.*

**K**aleo Tours out of Oklahoma City brought two busloads of tour groups to the museum in February. Booked as “Mystery” adventures, the tourists did not know their destination as they set out.

Since it was close to Valentine’s Day, the tours also featured a chocolate surprise at each stop. Three Rivers Museum provided these guests with chocolate cookies from Harmony House.

The Kaleo Tour organizers were very impressed with the museum and promised to bring other tours in the future. We were glad to accommodate their groups and hope we will see more groups visit soon and often!

## Next Caravan Tour: Honey Springs

**O**ur next Caravan Tour will be held on Saturday, June 7, 2003. We will feature a visit to the Honey Springs Battlefield near Checotah on this Caravan.

The Tour will begin at the museum at 9:00 a.m. for a video re-enactment of this Civil War battle. Then we’ll caravan to the actual battlefield site where a costumed interpreter will demonstrate the life of a Civil War soldier and guide us as we walk along marked trails across the battlefield.

We will also visit historic cemeteries in the area where Civil War veterans of the Battle of Honey Springs are buried. We will stop for lunch in Checotah. You will be responsible for purchasing your own lunch and providing your own transportation. Carpooling is encouraged. Cost of admission and materials will be \$5 per person.

## Doctors’ Day Exhibit Displayed

**T**he Eastern Oklahoma Medical Alliance created a special exhibit for Doctors’ Day held in March. The exhibit celebrated Muskogee’s medical history with articles, photos and antique medical instruments.

The exhibit was displayed for a Doctors’ Day reception held at the museum on March 28. Mrs. Ann Ong was one of the main organizers of the event and the display.

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

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Managing Editor: Jonita Mullins

# Roaring '20s Rampage

by R.D. Morgan

*This is a true story of a series of brutal, cold-blooded crimes and the sure and swift punishment that followed. The narrative begins in Muskogee in 1924.*

**O**n the afternoon of June 15, 1924, Muskogee County Sheriff Bud Ledbetter ordered two of his officers, ex-County Sheriff John S. Barger, now serving as a Special Traffic Patrolman, and Deputy Sheriff Joseph P. Morgan to travel to Sanderson, Texas in order to escort a pair of brothers back to Oklahoma to stand trial for auto theft.

Just prior to departing for Texas, Barger told a fellow officer that he and his companion thought of the trip as a routine assignment. Neither of the fugitives was noted as particularly dangerous. Little did the officers realize they were about to become involved in a nightmare.

The fugitives in question were officially identified as Muskogee natives William "Bill" Lawrence (sometimes spelled Laurence) and his younger sibling Albert. Twenty-five-year-old Bill was known in law enforcement circles as a "born loser." A small-time but incorrigible thief, he reportedly operated with little flair but iron nerve.

According to news reports, the young man had been the victim of several traumatic incidents during his childhood. At the age of twelve, he suffered a fractured skull when he was kicked in the head by a horse. Friends and family members described him as "nutty," after the incident.

A year later, Bill's father, who was not just the primary breadwinner but also the sole disciplinarian in the family, died prematurely, leaving the family



*Deputy Sheriff Joe Morgan*

rudderless and poverty stricken.

Minus his father's firm hand and likely suffering from mental illness due to his past head injury, Bill quickly evolved into a hard-core juvenile delinquent, pilfering auto parts from area salvage yards as well as breaking into several local "Mom and Pop" grocery stores, stealing cigarettes, and candy.

Although Bill was arrested several times in his early teens, his overly indulgent mother was always able to persuade the Judge to drop the charges. His younger brother, Albert, nicknamed "Babe," was, according to police, a brash, swaggering young man who put all his energies into broadcasting his phony "tough guy" persona.

In 1917, Bill teamed up with a local bad man named Crittinton. The duo began raiding the Midland Valley Rail Yards in both Fort Gibson and Muskogee, hijacking loads of sugar, which was a hot commodity due to a shortage caused by the World War. With government rationing of the sweetener, a fifty-pound sack of the "white gold" was at the time fetching upwards of \$100.00.

In the spring of 1918, the pair was nabbed by a couple of railroad dicks while breaking into a boxcar near Fort Gibson. Lawrence was sentenced to a

*continued on page 5*

## The Three Rivers Area

What makes up the Three Rivers Area?

It is defined to include Muskogee County, all the counties that border Muskogee County — Cherokee, Haskell, McIntosh, Okmulgee, Wagoner — as well as Southern Mayes and Western Sequoyah Counties.

The Three Rivers Museum hopes to collect and preserve historical artifacts from this entire region. Contact the museum if you have something to donate at 686-6624.

*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.*

The Thomas-Foreman Historic Home re-opened to the public on Saturday, April 5, 2003. After being closed for over two years, the home has been cleaned and refurbished and made ready for visitors. New interpretive text panels throughout the house give visitors a history of the home and the five fascinating people who have been associated with it through the years.

Three Rivers Museum of Muskogee has overseen the needed repairs since contracting with the Oklahoma Historical Society to operate the 1898 farmhouse. Staff of the museum have helped design the panels to provide a better understanding of the historical significance of this Muskogee home.

"We hope our new displays will

help answer the question people have about who the Thomases and the Foremans were," says Linda Moore, executive director of Three Rivers Museum.

A long-time supporter of the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home is Jerry Marshall of Muskogee. Mrs. Marshall worked at the Home on the Saturday of Grand Opening dressed in period costume. Her knowledge of the home and gracious Victorian-era costume made the Grand Opening extra special.

Attendance was high on Saturday, April 5 as many visitors to Muskogee for the Azalea Festival and Chili Cook-off also stopped by the Historic Home.

## Help Us Raise the Roof!

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

Friends of the  
Thomas-Foreman Home\*  
1419 W. Okmulgee Ave.  
Muskogee, OK 74401

**Thank you!**

\*Friends is a 501c3 corporation.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

Please mark your donation level below. Donors will receive the Home's quarterly newsletter **The Trellis** and free admission to the Thomas-Foreman Home.

\_\_\_ \$20 Individual      \_\_\_ \$30 Family  
\_\_\_ \$100 Builder      \_\_\_ \$250 Friend  
                                 \_\_\_ \$500 Sustainer

Make checks payable to Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home.

# Roaring '20s Rampage

one-year term in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary.

Within months of his parole in early 1919, he was arrested at his home in Keefeton, Oklahoma on an auto theft charge. When officers searched the residence, they discovered 300 pairs of shoes that had recently been reported stolen from the KATY rail yard. Once again, the young thug was sentenced to a term at the state rock pile.

On his release from prison in 1920, Bill was hired as a mechanic at a Muskogee garage. He married and for a time seemed to be following the straight and narrow. Unfortunately, when his wife died in childbirth in early 1923 the young man promptly returned to his wicked ways.

Shortly after the untimely demise of his spouse and baby, Bill was charged with both auto-theft and cattle rustling in Okmulgee County. According to a statement made by his mother several years after the event, the youth was brutally beaten by Sheriff's deputies while being interrogated following his arrest.

A week after the alleged beating, Bill was released from the Okmulgee County jail upon posting a \$4,000 bond. On the evening of May 18, 1924, he, his brother Babe, and a companion, Cletus Benson, stole a car in Durant, Oklahoma.

The following night, the trio broke into the county garage located at 802 South Cherokee Street in Muskogee. Unfortunately for them, an elderly man who was out walking his dog noticed something amiss and called the cops.

On arriving at the scene, police promptly captured Benson still sitting in the stolen getaway car while the

Lawrences fled the scene in the officer's parked police cruiser. After a few hours of harsh questioning, Benson admitted the identities of his companions in crime. A warrant was immediately issued for the arrest of the Lawrence brothers.

Driving in a southerly direction at breakneck speeds, the fugitives hoped to evade justice by fleeing to Mexico. Stopping in Pittsburg, Texas they picked up Bill's teenage sweetheart, Billie Woods.

The following day, June 14, 1924, US Border patrol agents arrested the trio attempting to cross into Mexico. On questioning, Babe admitted the car they were driving was stolen. Officers quickly contacted authorities in Muskogee. Miss Woods was released the following day after the brothers voluntarily signed extradition papers.

Arriving in Texas by passenger train on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Oklahoma officers, Barger and Morgan, quickly took charge of the fugitives. After filling out the necessary paperwork, the party started the long journey back to the Sooner state driving the stolen police cruiser.

According to statements later made by Officer Barger, he was at the wheel while Deputy Morgan sat next to him in the front seat. The prisoners were shackled together in the rear.

On an isolated section of road just south of Fort Worth, Texas, Babe suddenly reached forward yanking Deputy Morgan's pistol from his holster. When Morgan attempted to retrieve his firearm, the young man squeezed the trigger of the gun sending a round into the officer's head.

On hearing the deafening blast, Barger lost control of the vehicle that  
*continued on page 6*

## Where Is the Three Rivers Museum?

The museum is located in downtown Muskogee at 220 Elgin. Take Hwy 69 to Okmulgee Ave. Then east on Okmulgee Ave. to 3rd St. Then go south on 3rd St. to Elgin.

## We're on the Web!

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

# Roaring '20s Rampage

## Sources for Roaring '20s Rampage:

### Newspapers:

*Muskogee Phoenix* 1923-26, 1938

*Muskogee Times-Democrat* 1924-25

*Okmulgee Daily Times* 1922-24

*Arizona Republican* 1924-5

### Books:

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

### Other:

Phoenix, Arizona, Police Department, Historical Division

The Phoenix Law Enforcement Association

National Law Enforcement Memorial

Greenhill Cemetery Archives, Muskogee Oklahoma

US Census-1910-20

Muskogee Public Library archives and microfilm

Montana Fallen Officers Memorial

Oklahoma Law Enforcement Memorial

fishtailed into a steep ditch then crashed into a corner fence post before coming to an abrupt halt. Turning toward the prisoners he found himself staring down the barrel of his companion's handgun.

While Babe held the gun on Officer Barger, Bill Lawrence rifled the dying Deputy's pockets gaining possession of the keys to the handcuffs. Barger was then ordered to continue driving north.

Nearing a ranch gate, he was instructed to pull into the lane and park near a small grove of cottonwood trees. After halting the car, Bill Lawrence dragged Morgan's body to a nearby shallow ditch where it was abandoned.

The boys then forced Barger to dismount the vehicle and walk to a spot about twenty yards off the roadway where they handcuffed him to a tree. Before taking their leave, the brothers robbed him of his watch and wallet.

While doing so, they taunted the officer, laughing and telling him he would never capture them in his lifetime. Barger then observed the pair pause at the location of Deputy Morgan's corpse just long enough to strip it of its valuables before leaping into the car and speeding off in a cloud of dust.

For the next hour, the lawman cried out for help, all the while staring at his poor dead partner who lay bleeding only a few feet away. By and by, his screams caught the attention of a ranch hand who was mending fence nearby.

The cowboy took one look at the stark crime scene and refused to help the officer, opting to contact the local sheriff's department instead. When deputies arrived nearly an hour later, Barger, who was parched from the hot sun, took a long drink from an offered canteen before telling his tragic tale to the assembled lawmen.

On receipt of the news of the ambush,

Sheriff Ledbetter and two carloads of deputies left Muskogee for Texas. After consulting with Texas lawmen, Ledbetter, along with a distraught Officer Barger accompanied the body of Deputy Morgan back to Muskogee by rail.

On June 19, Morgan's funeral was held at the Calvary Baptist Church, where Reverend Thomas Smith preached to a packed house, which included several dozen of his fellow officers.

Morgan, who was survived by his widow, two sons and a daughter, had not only been a well-respected member of the law enforcement community, but of the business community as well. He and his wife had operated a grocery store located at 1501 Gibson Street for several years. Later that day, Morgan was laid to rest in Greenhill Cemetery in Muskogee.

At roughly the same time the fallen hero was being interred, reporters from the *Muskogee Phoenix* were interviewing the mother of the Lawrence boys at her home at 1201 Baltimore Street. As her body shook with sobs, she blamed the police for turning her boys to a life of crime. She also stated, "I wonder if my boys thought of what this would do to their mother." She claimed she had done her best to raise her sons to be decent citizens after her husband's death, but admitted she had failed.

That evening she was arbitrarily fired from her job as a waitress at a downtown diner. The owner claimed the prevailing public opinion made having her working in the establishment bad for business. ▼

*The cross-country manhunt to capture the Lawrence brothers will be in the next issue of the Historian.*

# 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 V. Adams  
♦ Allen County Public Library  
Lavonne Baker  
Janey Boydston  
Richard Carr  
Valerie Rogers Carter  
♦ Barbara Downs  
Orville Eaton  
James Gibson, Jr.  
Robert Granger  
Leisha Haworth  
Alice Hendrickson  
Kathy Hewitt  
Bonnie Jennings  
Adelaide Johnson  
Elva Johnson  
J. Wm. Keithan  
Larry Lee  
Betty Su Nemic  
Joan O'Dell  
Jared Roberts  
Cliff Rogers  
Dudley Rogers  
Joe Rogers

Shirley Rogers  
Kay Shapiro  
♦ Jennifer Sparks  
Marjorie Szabo  
June Tucker  
Margaret Vardeman  
Delphia Warren  
Betty Weaver  
Blanche Zaroor  
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James & Ruth Bates  
Robert & Louise Bell  
Perry Benson, Jr.  
Frank & Kay Borovetz  
Frank Boydston, Jr.  
Charles Bowman  
Jim Brown/Ann  
Franklin  
James & Ruth Carnagey  
Olivia Cole  
E.P. & Mary Ann Couch  
Paul & Telitha Day  
♦ Steve & Michi Dyke  
C.G. Fullenwider  
Earl & Olivelle Graves

Robert & Barbara Haggard  
Richard Haughland  
Jerry & Paula Hoffman  
♦ Dena & Bob Hudson  
Charles & Viva Kilgore  
Edward & Phyllis Kuykendall  
Ray & Margaret Ann Lehman  
♦ Jim & Charlene Lemley  
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Acme Engineering  
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Martha Harper  
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Muskogee Phoenix  
♦ Optimist International

## Sponsor

Margo Dollar

## Sustainer

Bank of Oklahoma  
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## New Books in the Whistlestop Gift Shop

### *Acres of Aspiration* by Hannibal Johnson

"Johnson's beautifully written book gives us a compelling view of the struggles waged by black pioneers . . . They stayed the course and built towns as monuments to black survival."

### *Seminole Burning* by Daniel Littlefield, Jr.

"The true story of mob vengeance on two innocent Seminole teenagers in Oklahoma and the history of the first successful prosecution of lynchers in America at a trial held in Muskogee."

Museum members receive a 10% discount!

# THREE RIVERS MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP

You can be a part of history! Join the Three Rivers Museum today. Your annual membership fee entitles you to a membership card, subscription to the quarterly journal, free admission to the museum and a 10% discount on purchases in the museum gift shop.

Please complete this form and mail with your check made payable to the Three Rivers Museum.

\_\_\_ Individual Membership \$25    \_\_\_ Family Membership \$35    \_\_\_ Builder Membership \$100  
\_\_\_ Sponsor Membership \$250    \_\_\_ Sustainer Membership \$500

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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



## Contact Us

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

A representative from the Museum would be happy to meet with anyone who would like to make a donation. Please call us at 686-6624.

**Editor's Note:**  
The "Three Rivers Historian" needs your historical articles. Please submit them to: Three Rivers Historian, Attn: Managing Editor, 220 Elgin, Muskogee, OK 74401.

### Museum Hours:

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

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

## Three Rivers People

### Kit Stewart Watched Museum Grow

Kit Stewart has been a member of the board of directors of the Three Rivers Museum for so long she can't exactly remember when she started.

"Dorothy Ball got Bud and me involved with the museum several years ago," Kit says. "We went to the same church and she persuaded us to join. We feel as if we have grown up with this museum."

Besides serving on the board, Kit is a willing volunteer to help with special events such as the museum's recent Railroad Day. Kit greeted guests, sold tickets and handed out programs at this event.

"Kit is a great asset to the museum



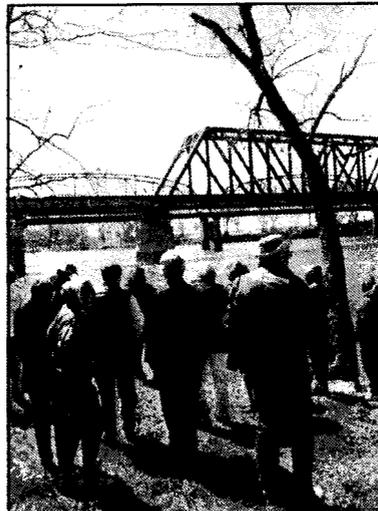
*Kit, second from left, joins other museum board members at a ribbon cutting for the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home.*

and we are pleased to have her as a board member and as an active volunteer," says Roger Bell, board chairman.

## Three Forks Caravan Tour

Nearly 30 people took our Three Forks History Caravan Tour this past March to sites around Muskogee, Fort Gibson and Okay. Guest speaker for the event was Dr. Brad Agnew from Northeastern State University. Here are some photos from the tour.

*The tour group gathers at a steamboat landing site on the Grand River near Fort Gibson.*



*Tour participants listen as a Fort Gibson re-enactor explains how bread was baked at the fort.*