

3 Rivers Historian

Fall 1999

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 2, No. 4

Construction Begins!

WITH THE TURN of several shovelfuls of dirt, the Three Rivers Museum board of directors officially launched the beginning of renovations to the Midland Valley Depot in Muskogee.

The museum's groundbreaking ceremony had been scheduled for September 13, but due to delays in finalizing the construction contract, the event was moved back to Monday, September 27 at 11:00 a.m. It was held on the grounds of the Midland Valley Depot where construction work has already begun to restore the old passenger depot.

The construction contract was awarded by the city of Muskogee to Oakridge Construction Company of Tulsa. Work on the depot began on Monday, October 18. Oakridge Construction has set a completion date of May 10, 2000.

An Oakridge representative attended the museum's groundbreaking ceremony along with renovation architect Mike Martin and many political and business leaders from the Muskogee area.

Muskogee Mayor Jim Bushnell welcomed the crowd of nearly 200 who gathered on the depot grounds for the groundbreaking ceremony and burial of the city of Muskogee's centennial time capsule.

"Many people have worked long and hard to make this day possible," the



Museum board members break ground to begin the renovation of the Midland Valley Depot

mayor said. "But this is only a beginning. The Three Rivers Museum will be an important part of the revitalization of downtown Muskogee."

Roger Bell, chairman of the Three Rivers Museum thanked the city of Muskogee and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation for making it possible to purchase and renovate the Midland Valley Depot which was built in 1916.

He also thanked the museum board for its dedication in pursuing the dream of creating a museum to tell the story of the founding, settlement and development of the Three Rivers area of Northeastern Oklahoma. The board members gathered beside the depot to ceremonially break ground on the next exciting

continued on page 2

Inside:

- 2** Business After Hours Report
- 3** Camp Gruber
- 4** The Chairman's Letter
- 6** Thanksgiving in Indian Territory
- 7** Welcome to New Members
- 8** Three Rivers People

Three Rivers Museum Board

Officers:

Chairman:

Roger Bell

Treasurer:

Dan Newell

Secretary:

Jonita Mullins

Collections Manager:

Linda Moore

Publicity Chairman:

Mark Hughes

Committees:

Architectural:

*Roger Bell - Chair

*Linda Moore

*Dan Newell

*Bud Stewart

Museum Development:

*Linda Moore - Chair

Jean Bounds

Carolyn Bresser

Charlotte Crank

Yvonne Gamblin

*Barbara Higbee

*Dianne Hill

*Jerry Hoffman

Robert Mix

*Shirley Rogers

*Wally Waits

Jack White

Membership &

Publicity:

*Mark Hughes - Chair

*Lynn Campbell

*Mildred Cousins

*Steve Cousparis

*Orville Eaton

*Jonita Mullins

*Dan Newell

*Bud Stewart

*Kit Stewart

Emeritus Members:

Delphia Warren

Dub West

*Indicates Current
Board Member

Business After Hours Gains Museum Members

THE BUSINESS AFTER HOURS hosted by the Three Rivers Museum in August brought several new memberships to the museum. On Thursday, August 19, the museum co-hosted the monthly Chamber of Commerce event along with Bank of Oklahoma and First National Bank. It was held in the main lobby of the historic Severs Building in downtown Muskogee.

The museum had the architect's rendering and floor plan design for the renovation of the Midland Valley Depot on display at the Business After Hours. It also displayed a small exhibit on the history of the Severs

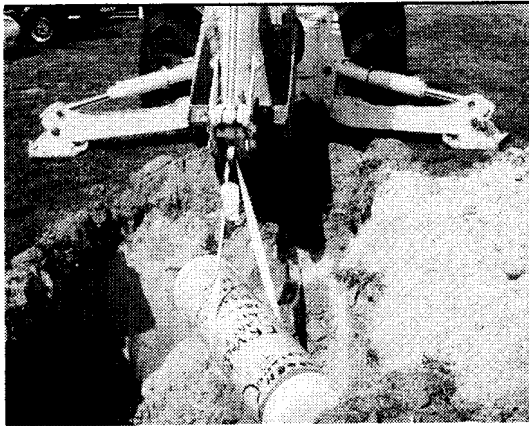
Building that was designed by collections manager, Linda Moore.

In addition to gaining its first corporate member in Bank of Oklahoma, the museum also added several small business, family and individual memberships from the event. Bank of Oklahoma CEO Mike Leonard presented a \$500 check to museum chairman Roger Bell at the Business After Hours.

"The Three Rivers Museum is almost single-handedly changing a neglected area of downtown Muskogee by restoring the old Midland Valley Depot," Leonard said in presenting the check. "And Roger Bell has worked tirelessly on this project. Bank of Oklahoma is proud to support the museum's efforts and we encourage other businesses to do the same."

The museum is actively seeking other corporate members to join now as it prepares to furnish its museum office, conference room, kitchenette, gift shop and exhibit halls. Grant money from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation will cover only the costs of renovation and landscaping. Furnishing the museum will require several thousands of dollars in additional funds. If you would like your business to have a part in the development of the museum, please contact Roger Bell at 686-6624. ▽

Construction *cont.*



*The Muskogee centennial time capsule
was buried on the depot grounds*

phase of the museum's development.

The challenge for the museum's board now is to furnish the depot and develop its first exhibits. Volunteers are needed for every area of the museum's development. Please contact the museum if you would like to be a part of this historical project.

Three Rivers Historian

Fall 1999 V. 2, No. 4

P.O. Box 1813

Muskogee, OK 74402

918/686-6624

www.3riversmuseum.muskogee.ok.us

published quarterly by

Three Rivers Museum

copyright 1999

Editor-in-Chief: Roger Bell

Managing Editor: Jonita Mullins

Design and Production by JM Publishing
323 N. 13th St. • Muskogee, OK 74401 • 682-0312

Camp Gruber Played a Crucial Role in WW II

by Janet Allen

AMERICA'S entry into World War II brought many changes to the home front. Northeastern Oklahoma felt the impact firsthand on January 8, 1942, when the Cookson Hills was named as the site for a military training facility. The camp was named for Brigadier General Edmund Gruber, composer of "The Caisson Song."

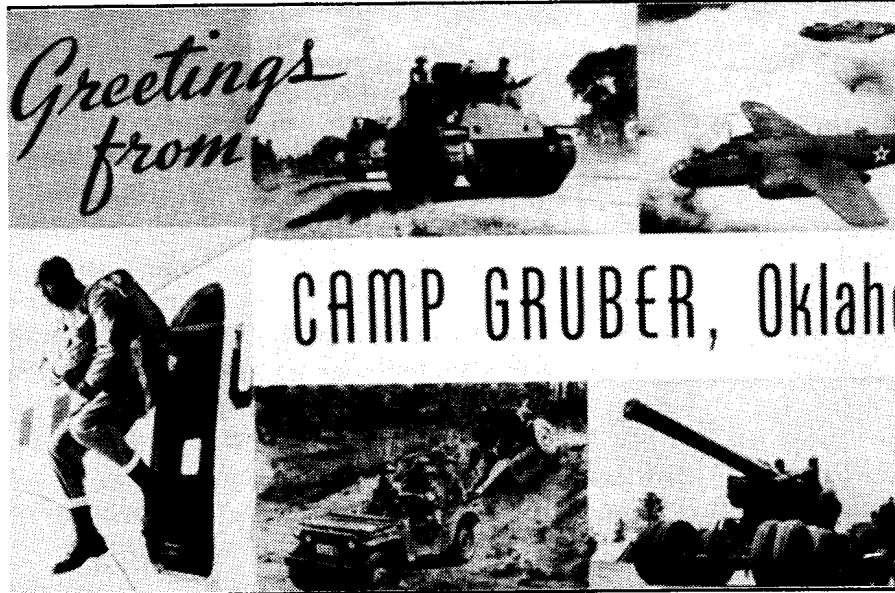
The camp was located on Highway 10, just 18 miles east of Muskogee. The Manhattan Construction Company of Muskogee was awarded the building contract and a work force of 12,000 began construction in February 1942. The production pace in the first month was so hectic that a building was completed every twenty minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It only took four months to build the camp at a cost of \$30 million.

When construction ended in late May 1942, the main post occupied 260 acres with 2,250 buildings. Included among the buildings were 479 barracks, 12 chapels, a 1,600-bed hospital and various social and recreational facilities. The camp had a central post office with three branches and at one time ranked fourth in the state in mail volume. Camp Gruber was a city within itself.

Its vast parade ground was nearly two miles in length and lined by barracks on one side. Gravel sidewalks linked the buildings, but the streets within the main post were paved.

A bus service provided transportation within the camp, at a cost of five cents. A rail system extended tracks into the post, allowing easy loading and unloading of troops and supplies.

The camp had two officer clubs and three service clubs for enlisted men. Physical recreation facilities were also provided. Three swimming pools, a sports arena, 24



This postcard from the 1940's was one of several depicting life at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma

softball and ten baseball diamonds were located throughout the complex. Camp Gruber soldiers, known as the "Huskies" played Service League Football with area colleges.

The camp theaters brought the latest movies to the troops. Four large theaters seated over 900 people on wooden benches. Boxing matches and USO shows provided special entertainment bringing such visitors as Cary Grant and Joe Louis.

Camp Gruber also had its own soldier celebrities. Arthur Johnston, the Hollywood composer of "Pennies From Heaven," and actor William Holden were stationed at the training facility.

Camp Gruber opened on May 21, 1942, with Col. H.C. Luck as post commander. The first infantry division at the facility was the 88th, known as the "Cloverleaf" division from its World War I service.

The 202nd field artillery began its training at Gruber in October 1942. One of its servicemen, Lee Pray, was right at home at Camp

continued on page 4

**Camp Gruber
opened on May 21,
1942, with Col.
H.C. Luck as
commander.**



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.

Letter from the Chairman

Dear Friends of Three Rivers Museum,

The renovation of our building has begun and all the volunteers and board members are very excited. It is just the next step in the making of our goal a reality.

We still need help in several areas:

- We need more artifacts from the area to make our interesting history come alive. If you have old kitchen utensils, furniture, business items, business logos, photos, or documents, please contact us. We will be glad to pick them up at your convenience.
- When our building is completed, the grant money will have been spent. Then we must furnish the interior and create the exhibits ourselves. We need funding for display materials, display case design, and all the supplies necessary to bring the items into an interesting form for people to enjoy.
- Membership support is also necessary to provide on-going funding for daily expenses of operations such as phone services and website maintenance. The cost of producing our journal, office supplies and everything else required to conduct business can only be met with help from our members.

If you can help in any of these areas, please contact us by e-mail, regular mail or by phone at 686-6624. We will respond promptly and will appreciate your interest in our exciting project.

Sincerely,



Roger Bell, Chairman

Camp Gruber cont.

Gruber. He was training on part of his family's 1,400 acres requisitioned by the U.S. government.

On Sunday, April 18, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited Gruber to watch the 88th division parade. After enjoying the parade, the President visited with the troops who were scheduled for deployment. The 88th had trained for nearly a year at Camp Gruber before shipping out to Fort Sam Houston, Texas and then Europe.

In May 1943, intensive flooding plagued the city of Muskogee. Soldiers from the 88th

division, 508th Engineer, assisted in civilian rescue operations. On the night of May 11, members of the 508th were assisting area residents when flood waters from the Arkansas River capsized their boat and cause the deaths of six servicemen.

In June 1943, it was announced that a prisoner of war camp was to be established at Gruber. When completed, the facility had a capacity of 5,750 prisoners. The prison camp was located across Highway 10 and a half mile south of the U.S. complex.

The first prisoners of war arrived by train and were then marched or transported by truck to the compound. Camp Gruber housed only German captives, veterans of

Camp Gruber cont.

Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps.

Under the Geneva Convention, POWs could be required to work, if that work was to benefit their captors. In turn, the captives were paid eighty cents a day.

Camp Gruber POWs worked in two areas. Farmers in need of help used them to harvest crops. During December 1943, more than 4,000 acres of spinach was harvested in Muskogee County by the prisoners. Prisoners also worked at a rock quarry located three miles from Camp Gruber.

On July 14, 1943, the 42nd Infantry Division was reactivated at Camp Gruber under the division command of Gen. Harry J. Collins. Like the 88th division, the 42nd had a history of World War I service. Its most famous member was General Douglas McArthur who gave it its nickname of the "Rainbow" division.

Muskogee became a home away from home for the Camp Gruber soldiers. Victory Bus Lines provided transportation between Muskogee and the camp. A round trip fare cost 61 cents. Muskogee citizens adopted the troops at Camp Gruber and took them into their hearts and homes.

On November 13, 1944, the 42nd division left Camp Gruber for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. The next stop was Germany.

Earlene Salyers of Muskogee recalls that day. "When the 42nd left, people lined the streets and everyone waved. Soldiers sat on the hoods and fenders of the transports and tossed candy and little American flags to the kids. It was hard to see them go — very hard — because you knew a lot of them personally, and you knew a lot of them wouldn't be coming back. A lot of people cried that day."

Service at Camp Gruber was not confined to combat soldiers. The infantry divisions did not completely evacuate the post, since some soldiers and units were permanently stationed at the camp. Drilling and training of all types were conducted at the post. In addition to men training for com-

bat, Camp Gruber also had a Women's Army Corp (WAC) detachment. The unit was unique, for its members were black.

May 8, 1945 was VE Day in Europe. After three years overseas, Camp Gruber's third infantry division would be returning stateside. The 86th was giving the nickname "Kid Division" because of the youthful age of its corp. While in Europe, the "Kid Division" liberated over 200,000 allied prisoners of war.

The infantry divisions returning to Camp Gruber compiled a remarkable record of service. The 88th "Cloverleaf" were the first allied troops to enter Rome on June 4, 1944. The 88th saw 344 days of combat and suffered high casualties. The men of the 88th were awarded numerous honors including two Congressional Medals of Honor.

The 42nd "Rainbow" division went into combat during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. By April 1945, the unit was in Munich. It was the "Rainbow" division that liberated the notorious Dachau concentration camp on April 29, 1945.

Camp Gruber closed the prisoner compound in May 1946. The highest number of POWs confined at the camp was 4,702. During the camp's three year history, eight men escaped. All were quickly captured or they turned themselves in. The former captives did not return immediately to Germany; some were sent to work in war-ravaged countries to help repair damages.

Camp Gruber closed at the end of the war and the process of dismantling the camp began. The buildings, with few exceptions, were sold or donated for civilian use. The remaining concrete foundations are now consumed by grass, but represent the magnitude of the camp in its prime. The prisoner compound no longer has buildings and is overgrown with thicket.

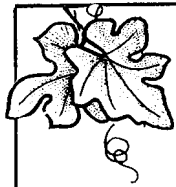
Camp Gruber reopened in 1977 for reserve and active unit training. In 1988, the National Guard Air Assault School was opened. The school is the only air assault training for the National Guard and is rated number one of all air assault schools in the nation. ▽

Camp Gruber Loans Maps to Three Rivers Museum

The Oklahoma National Guard has announced that Camp Gruber will lend ten World War II era maps and construction drawings to the Three Rivers Museum.

The museum was selected to display the maps because of its interest in the military history of the region. The museum's staff will provide professional curation services that will insure the expert preservation and protection of the maps and drawings.

According to LTC Ronald Ragland of the Oklahoma National Guard, "Camp Gruber is not equipped or staffed to be a museum. It is in the best interest of all concerned for the Guard to support the Three River Museum's mission to preserve our history."



Thanksgiving in Indian Territory

IN THE November 28, 1912 issue of the Muskogee *Phoenix*, Miss Alice Robertson recounted an early Thanksgiving spent in Indian Territory in 1867. She was a girl at that time, living with her family in a mission at Tullahassee. The family had just buried twin baby brothers who had died during a fever epidemic. The Creek Agency was located across the Arkansas River near Fern Mountain. Miss Robertson wrote:

“When the cooler days of autumn came, the prevalent fever of the summer left us and father had begun to go on his preaching tours again. Our disbanded Sunday school, interrupted by the weeks of fever that had invaded almost every cabin of our neighbors, again gathered the people together on Sunday.

“Our first white visitor since October was the Colonel’s son, who had ridden over to invite us to Thanksgiving dinner at the Agency. Father and mother looked doubtful, but sister and brother and I thought it would be very fine to go to the Agency for Thanksgiving dinner. Reading the wishfulness in our faces, they accepted the invitation.

“Thanksgiving morning came with skies of gloom and threatening rain. The harsh ‘honk, honk’ of myriads of geese flying in close flanks southward warned of coming cold. Father shook his head as he scanned the storm signs, but our eager faces prevailed, and we made haste to start for fear we might be stopped by the weather.

“The bed of the little open wagon was filled with hay and over that a buffalo robe bought from the Osages in the summer. Buffaloes were plentiful in those days out west of Tulsa where the Osages lived. They used to come to the Creek Agency and we bought robes and dried meat from them.

“Father and mother sat on the seat in front, and sister, brother and I sat behind on the buffalo robe wrapped in father’s big gray blanket that served as his bed when he went on preaching tours.

“We had to ford the Arkansas. Father had come down the day before on Old Jim, our one horse, to test the channel, finding that there was no danger, though it was a little deep in places.

“This was our first visit to this Creek Agency because before the war, it was located between the Arkansas and the Verdigris on our side of the Arkansas.

“The Agency residence was a big double log cabin of hewed logs with stone chimneys at either end and a porch in front. All the family came out to meet us — the Colonel and his wife, their son and his wife, holding 6-week-old baby Nora.

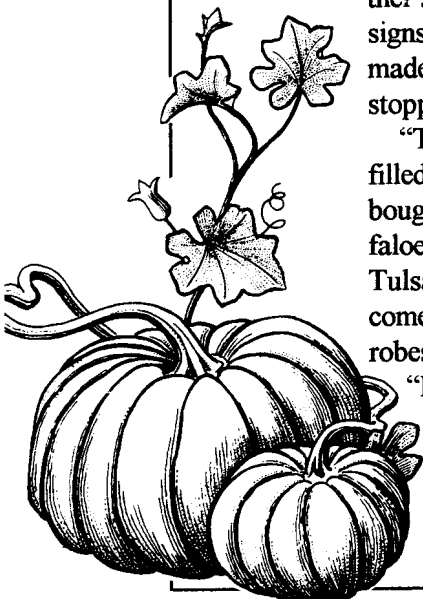
“The good time began as we were brought in before the blazing logs of the great fireplace and made very warm and comfy after our cold ride. On the mantle were boughs of brilliant scarlet berries and mistletoe. We children were bidden as soon as we were warm to help ourselves to the apples and nuts set invitingly on a table.

“Such a dinner it was when we were called into the other room where there was another big fire and more woodsy decorations of berries and foliage. Father said grace, reverently, but not taking too much time telling the Lord why we were thankful. How we watched the Colonel dexterously cut long wide slices of white meat while his son was slicing as dexterously on a roasted venison before him.

“Presently our plates were heaped with turkey and rice stuffing, a specialty of Aunt Big Sarah, most famous cook in the Creek Nation. We had sweet potatoes browned with butter and sugar and canned corn and tomatoes. For bread, besides Aunt Big Sarah’s famous biscuits, was one of her no less famous corn pones baked in a skillet on the hearth. For dessert we had pumpkin pie, pound cake and canned peaches.

“We children had all tried to remember mother’s injunctions as to our manners and we tried to eat slowly and quietly and to use

continued on page 8



Welcome to These Museum Members

MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP has increased by 40% over the last six months. We'd like to recognize all our (♦)new members and those who have continued their support by renewing their membership.

Individual

- Ernest Anthis
- Bethany Bowline
- Charles Bowman
- ♦ Max Boydston
- Carolyn Bresser
- Mary Ann Burrows
- Debi Busch
- David Cannarsa
- ♦ Al Cheeseman
- ♦ Peggy Dollarhide
- Molly Edmondson
- Pat Ferry
- C.G. Fullenwider
- Sue Gaston
- ♦ Alice Hendrickson
- ♦ May Hodges
- ♦ Gladys Horner
- Merton Jeanes
- ♦ Georgia Leeds
- ♦ Sue Neirman
- Rudolph Nemic
- ♦ Ann Williams Pierce
- Rosemary Rice
- ♦ Olive Oldham Rogers
- Lynn Rowsey

- Kay Baim Shapiro
- ♦ Fred Truster
- ♦ Caroline Williams

Family

- ♦ Hershel & Patsy Beaver
- ♦ Perry Benson, Jr.
- Lynn Campbell
- Richard & Tasha Carr
- ♦ Valerie Rogers Carter
- E.P. Couch
- Stephen & Charlotte Crank
- Swen & Jo Lynn Digranes
- Phyllis Durland
- Andy & Audry Ewing
- Geraldine Farris
- ♦ John & Linda Fike
- ♦ Ernest & Dorothy Fischer
- ♦ Carl & Julie Flaherty
- Dorothy Gardner
- John Griffin Family
- ♦ Terry & Jeanie Grubbs
- ♦ Robert & Barbara Haggard
- Clay & Joy Harrell
- Jack & Bette Hodge
- Dave & Dale Holloway
- Edward & Phyllis Kuykendall

- James & Grace Lemon
- ♦ John & Barbara Lomax
- ♦ Weldon Marshall Family
- Lin & Linda Moore
- ♦ Greg & Barbara Newell
- Harold Patterson Family
- Duane & Virginia Pickle
- ♦ Mary & Frank Plummer
- ♦ Cliff & Suzanne Rogers
- ♦ Dudley & Paula Rogers
- ♦ Joe & Cindy Rogers
- Joe & Josephine Teaff
- ♦ Michael & Wren Stratton
- ♦ Jack & Eva White
- ♦ Charlie & Brenda Wilbourn

Small Business

- Joel Cousins
- ♦ Elmer Hoffman
- ♦ Larry Hoffman
- Pioneer Abstract & Title
- ♦ Three Rivers Pools & Spas
- W.S. Warner, Jr.

Sponsor

- Golda Martin
- Pumps & Controls
- ♦ Ramey & Elizabeth Harper
- ♦ Tim & Lela Robinson

Corporate

- ♦ Bank of Oklahoma



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 as well as Southern Mayes and Western 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: _____

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 our Museum Development Committee would be happy to meet with anyone who would like to make a donation of such artifacts.

Please call us at 686-6624 about making a donation to the Three Rivers Museum. Together we can preserve the past for future generations.

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

A Salute to Delphia Warren

DELPHIA WARREN has not only been involved in preserving history for many years, but she has also participated in the making of history in the state of Oklahoma. She served for many years on the board of the Three Rivers Museum and is now an emeritus board member.

In 1992 Delphia helped organize the Fourteen Flags Festival held at the Fairgrounds in Muskogee. Fourteen flags, representing nations, states and territories that at various times had claim to what is now Oklahoma, were raised at the festival. Delphia had the honor of presenting the current Oklahoma flag at the Festival.

Oklahoma has had two state flags in its history. The second flag was adopted as the official flag of the state in 1925 as the result of a design contest sponsored by the DAR. The Oklahoma flag has a blue field that represents the blue skies of the state. On it, an Osage warrior's buckskin shield depicts defensive warfare. The shield is crossed by two symbols of peace — the peace pipe and the olive branch. The symbols of peace gave recognition to the fact that Oklahoma was

formed from two territories — Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory.

As chairman of the State Pride in Oklahoma Committee in 1982, Delphia wrote a salute to the Oklahoma flag which

was adopted as the official flag salute by the state legislature in 1982 for the state's Diamond Jubilee. The flag salute was made a part of Oklahoma school curriculum in 1992. The Oklahoma flag salute, by Delphia Warren, reads:



Delphia helps bury the centennial time capsule

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
★ **"I salute the flag of the state of Oklahoma;** ★
★ **its symbols of peace unite all people."** ★
★ ★
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Thanksgiving in Indian Territory cont.

our napkins. We did not have them at home in those days of poverty, and we behaved very well, mother said.

"Before we left the table, the threatening storm broke in a tempest of wind and rain. The rain changed to sleet, and the fury of the wind increased constantly. It was not safe to venture forth in the storm, so it was decided we would stay all night.

"What charm there was in the preparations for the night. First, the Colonel's wife brought the Bible to father and he read the 103rd Psalm. Then we sang, 'How Firm a Foundation' and father prayed.

"Such a time there was making beds for all of us. Sister and I had the buffalo robe and father's big gray blanket both to sleep on with the most beautiful comforter spread over us.

"The wind calmed, the driving sleet changed to softly drifting snow, the logs in the fireplace burned low and the wonderful Thanksgiving day was ended with my dreamy fancy that the angels were watching by the twin mounds under the big oak tree at home to see that snow blankets were spread soft and smooth and the little graves were not deserted." ▽