

3 Rivers Historian

Spring 2000

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 3, No. 2

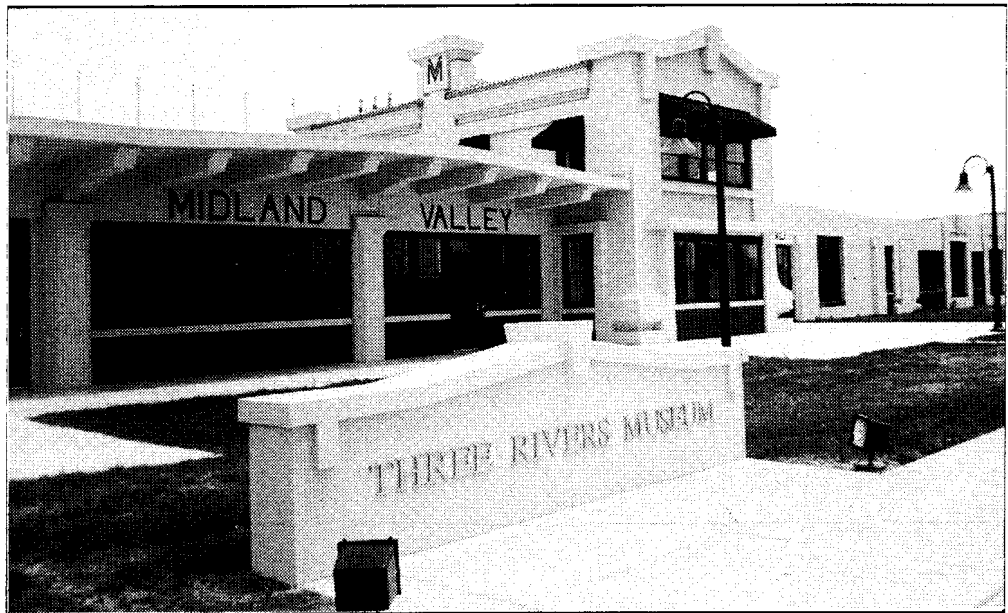
Construction Completed!

RENOVA-TIONS to the historic Midland Valley Railroad Depot in downtown Muskogee have been completed ahead of schedule. Work on the old building began in the fall last year and was expected to be completed by May 10, 2000.

Oakridge Construction, the contractor on the renovation project, conducted a final walk-through of the building with city of Muskogee and Three River Museum officials in the last week of April.

Architect for the project, Mike Martin, was complimentary of Oakridge's workmanship and pleased that the building was completed ahead of schedule. The depot has been restored with vintage style lighting fixtures and some wood flooring to maintain the historical integrity of the building. All the plans for restoration had been approved by the State Historical Preservation Office.

The Three Rivers Museum has received offers from the Muskogee Garden Club and A More Beautiful Muskogee to help with the landscaping of the



The Midland Valley Depot waits for museum visitors now that renovations have been completed.

grounds of the depot.

An eye-catching flag plaza stands behind the depot where the many flags that have flown over the Three Rivers area will be raised. The flag poles rise well above the depot and can be seen from some distance around the downtown area of Muskogee. Vintage light poles on the grounds will keep the building well lit at night.

The Muskogee City Council has approved a ten-year lease with the Three
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Members Enjoy Visitor from the Past

Officers:

Chairman:

Roger Bell

Treasurer:

Dan Newell

Secretary:

Jonita Mullins

Executive Director:

Linda Moore

Committees:

Grand Opening:

*Bud Stewart - Chair
Troy Baker, Morris Caves, Joel Cousins,
*Orville Eaton, Miriam Freedman, Ed Kuykendall, *Dan Newell, Duane Pickle, *Shirley Rogers, Bill Warner

Museum Development:

Linda Moore - Chair
Charlotte Crank, Yvonne Gamblin, *Barbara Higbee, *Dianne Hill, *Jerry Hoffman, *Shirley Rogers, *Wally Waits, Jack White

Membership & Publicity:

*Jonita Mullins - Chair
*Lynn Campbell, *Mildred Cousins, *Orville Eaton, *Dan Newell, *Bud Stewart, *Kit Stewart

Emeritus Members:

Delphia Warren
Dub West

*Indicates Current Board Member

ON APRIL 25, the Three Rivers Museum Board of Directors held a reception for museum members and Grand Opening contributors. The reception took place in Muskogee at Jasper's Restaurant Annex. Over 50 members and contributors attended the catered event.

The museum board wished to express their thanks for the encouragement they have received from those who have supported the museum through the many years of its development. The museum has over 170 members from more than 15 different states. The interest so many individuals have expressed in preserving Three Rivers history has sustain the museum board as they have worked to bring the dream to reality.

Board chairman Roger Bell showed a slide presentation of "before and after" pictures of the Midland Valley Depot. The transformation in the historic building from the renovation work is impressive.

Museum members and contributors were also treated to a "visit from the past." Robert Bell, himself a museum member (and father of chairman Roger Bell), recreated



Robert Bell recreates Harry Truman's campaign speech in Muskogee, 1948

Harry S. Truman's campaign stop in Muskogee in 1948. The presidential candidate spoke to a crowd of Muskogeeans in Spaulding Park. Robert Bell delivered a portion of the speech President Truman gave that day.

Most members agreed this was the highlight of the evening. A few stated that they had been present during that historic event. Bringing history alive in this way is the goal of the museum — one which the support of museum members will make possible. ▽

Grand Opening Committee Meets Initial Goal



The eleven-member Grand Opening Committee has met its initial goal of raising \$50,000 for the opening of Three Rivers Museum. For the past few months the committee has solicited donations from the corporate community of Muskogee. Response from area businesses has been very positive.

The committee has extended its goal to add another \$25,000 in donations from individuals. The funds will be used to equip the museum and build its first exhibits for the Grand Opening next spring.

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Muskogee Was Site of First Federal Court in Indian Territory

by Roger L. Bell

DURING THE LATTER quarter of the 19th century, there was more lawlessness within a 50-mile radius of Muskogee than anywhere in the United States. The area had a reputation of being “the home of outlaws, the land of desperados, and the hotbed of crime.” Most of the lawlessness was brought into the Territory by criminals who fled here to escape arrest in the United States.

The criminal activity in this region was heightened by the fact that prior to 1889 there was no Federal court located in Indian Territory. Courts that held jurisdiction over this vast area were in the distant locations of Fort Smith, Arkansas, Paris Texas, and Wichita, Kansas. These courts were overwhelmed with the lawless activity of criminals drawn here by the lack of federal authority.

It was during this period that Judge Issac C. Parker of the Fort Smith Court gained the reputation as “the Hanging Judge” due to the many men who were convicted and hanged under the jurisdiction of his court.

All matters, except those between Indians (for which the tribals courts had jurisdiction), were handled by the federal courts in these bordering states of Indian Territory. Many bills were considered by the U.S. Congress to establish a federal court in the Territory.

But there was continued opposition to this from these bordering states with established court towns. They feared they would lose the business associated with the activity of their courts. Additionally, the Indian tribes themselves were hesitant to allow a U.S. court into their nations.

Despite this opposition, the call for a federal court in Indian Territory continued to be made. A large number of creditors petitioned the Congress for relief against debtors who

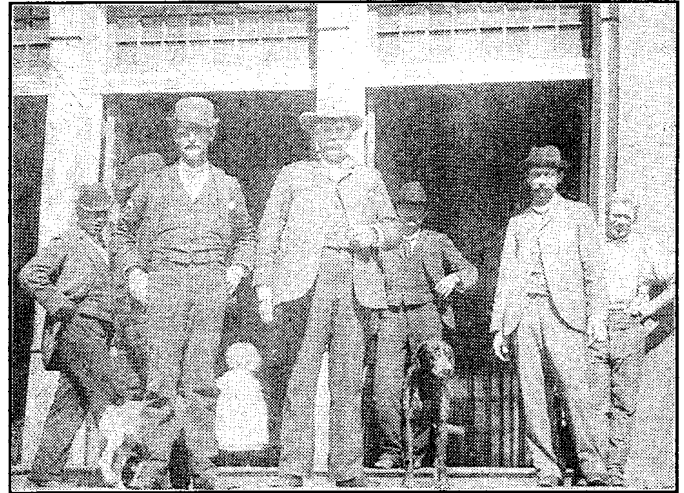
had sought refuge in the region to avoid their debts. Even the Fort Smith, Paris and Wichita courts did not have jurisdiction over persons in Indian Territory for the recovery of these debts.

A debate in Congress ensued to determine the best course of action. Senator John Tyler Morgan, a Democrat from Alabama, said upon the floor of the U.S. Senate, “We have got, sooner or later, to incorporate them into this Union, either as a State or as a Territorial government, and this is a step in the right direction. It is the first step to take, that of establishing courts there for the administration of justice.”

Eventually, in early 1889, Congress passed an act establishing a United States Court in the bustling, dusty railroad town of Muskogee, I.T. The Muskogee court, however, was only to have jurisdiction over misdemeanor cases and in civil matters involving sums up to \$100. Then it could only exercise its authority where matter arose between non-Indians or between non-Indians and Indians. Cases between the tribesmen were still to be settled in tribal courts.

On April 1, 1889, the new court was placed in session. For days prior to this event, newcomers streamed into Muskogee. Many of them were lawyers who intended to make Muskogee their future home. Others

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Federal marshals line the steps of the first federal courthouse in Indian Territory

In early 1889, Congress established a U.S. Court in the bustling, dusty railroad town of Muskogee, I.T.

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

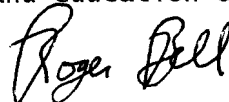
Dear Friends of Three Rivers Museum,

As you know by reading this issue, the museum building is now completed. This is certainly a great accomplishment for our organization. Grant money that provided for the depot renovations, however, cannot be used to equip the building or provide for our first exhibits.

Efforts have been underway for the last few months through our "Grand Opening Committee" to raise the necessary funds for these additional expenses. The enthusiastic response from the Muskogee community to our efforts has been a pleasant surprise. Many businesses and individuals have come forward with monetary donations and pledges to provide funding for these needed items. As of this writing, we have approximately 87% of our \$75,000 goal in donations and pledges.

I also want to acknowledge all the members of our committee who have been working so diligently over the past few months in this campaign. Troy Baker, Morris Caves, Joel Cousins, Orville Eaton, Miriam Freedman, Ed Kuykendall, Dan Newell, Duane Pickle, Shirley Rogers, Bill Warner and committee chairman Bud Stewart have done a wonderful job in coordinating and implementing this campaign. Jonita Mullins deserves recognition for her "behind the scenes" work in letter writing and campaign promotion.

I would like to remind our readers that we still need donations. Contributors of \$1,000 or more will be listed on a plaque to be permanently displayed in the museum. Additionally, a gala reception will be held in their honor prior to Grand Opening. All contributors should know they have played an important part in the development of the Three Rivers Museum and have provided a home for the preservation and education of our region's history.



Roger Bell, Chairman

Construction Completed *cont.*

continued from page 1

Rivers Museum to occupy the restored depot and operate a regional museum on the site.

Once liability insurance has been purchased and a security system has been installed in the building, the museum will be able to move into the depot. Museum Director, Linda Moore, estimates the moving date will be in mid June. The lease agreement with the city of Muskogee begins on May 23, 2000.

"We've worked very hard to get to this point," museum chairman Roger Bell told the board members at their annual meeting in March. "But now the real work is about to begin. We must design, develop and build the exhibits that will tell the history of the Three Rivers area."

Plans for the first exhibits are underway and the research is being done by Museum Development committee members. The projected date for the Grand Opening is March 3, 2001.

First Federal Court *cont.*

Sources for First Federal Court

continued from page 3

came only to be present at the opening of the first U.S. Court in Indian Territory.

According to newspaper accounts, "Flags were draped from the buildings along the streets and people were greatly elated and excited."

At that time, there were no court buildings erected in Muskogee. The upstairs room of the Knights of Pythias Lodge was hastily made into temporary quarters for the court.

At 10:30 a.m. the court was assembled. The room was packed with local residents and visitors. Judge James M. Shackelford of Indiana soon called the meeting to order and a prayer was offered by the Rev. J.Y. Bryce of the M.E. Church. Afterwards the judge motioned for Marshall Thomas B. Needles to open court. The words, "Hear ye, hear ye, the Court of Muskogee is now in session," then rang out for the first time in Indian Territory.

The first session of the court held for the actual business of trying cases occurred on June 3, 1889. The court was crowded with lawyers, officers of the court, jurors, witnesses and visitors.

The case was a criminal proceeding against A. Husted who was charged with intimidating and assaulting settlers in Oklahoma Territory. A jury was sworn in, but it was soon discovered that of the 36 men all but three were Indians. The law provided that only U.S. citizens could serve as jurors in a U.S. court. So a new jury had to be called and the trial then proceeded.

The trial was concluded on the following day after the presentation of several motions. The jury was composed of many prominent men of Muskogee at that time. The foreman was J.A. Patterson of the Patterson Mercantile Company. After deliberating all night, the jury returned a guilty verdict.

The federal court remained in its tempo-

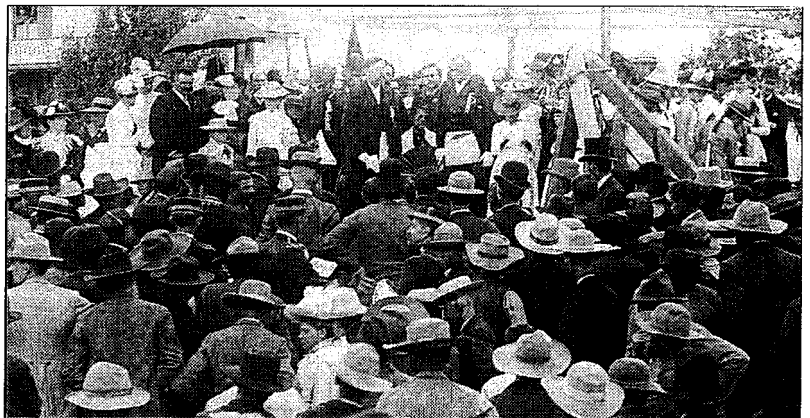
rary quarters for only a short period of time. On Monday, June 24, 1889, a celebration was held in Muskogee in honor of the occasion of laying the cornerstone for the new courthouse. The Grand Lodge of Masons of Indian Territory were in charge of the ceremony.

The Muskogee Phoenix reported that "Monday morning trains brought in a large number of persons . . . and when about nine o'clock the band began to play, Main Street in Muskogee resembled, (we imagine) on a small scale, Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington on Inauguration Day."

The Masons gathered in their hall above the post office, then led by the band, marched to the grounds where, with considerable ceremony, the laying of the cornerstone took place. Following the ceremony, a barbecue was served to all involved.

On March 1, 1895, the U.S. Congress passed another act which established further responsibilities for the Muskogee Court and divided the Territory into three districts. The northern district was located in Muskogee, the central district was at McAlester and the southern district was placed at Ardmore. Judge Springer was named judge of the northern district at that time.

The establishment of the Muskogee Court was a large step in bringing law and order to Indian Territory. The Court along with its many deputy marshals slowly brought justice to the area. ▽



A crowd gathered for the laying of the cornerstone of the first federal courthouse in Muskogee

"Oklahoma's First Court," by Grant Foreman, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*

Indian Territory and the United States 1866-1906, by Jeffrey Burton, University of Oklahoma Press, 1995

"West of Hell's Fringe," by Glenn Shirley

Muskogee Daily Phoenix, June 25, 1889



The Three Rivers Area



Three Rivers People

Jonita Mullins Gets the Word Out

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.


Three years ago, Jonita Mullins was asked to work on the design and production of a quarterly journal for the Three Rivers Museum. The first issue of the newsletter — the “Three Rivers Historian” — was published in September of 1998 with just four pages and a mailing list of barely the minimum 200 required for a bulk mailing. The newsletter quickly grew to eight pages and is now mailed out to nearly 400 readers.

Shortly after she began working on the museum’s newsletter, Jonita was also asked to serve as the secretary of the Board of Directors. Most recently she has taken on another role with the museum, now serving as the chairman of the Membership and Publicity Committee.

This committee is faced with the formidable task of getting out the word on the newest museum in northeastern Oklahoma.

“Working for the Three Rivers Museum has allowed me to combine my training in publishing and marketing with with my interest in history,” Jonita says. “It has been a challenging and rewarding task to develop the museum’s journal. I hope it will continue to grow and will become a recognized resource on the history of the Three Rivers area.”

Jonita grew up in Haskell in Muskogee County and is now a resident of the Founders’ Place Historical District in Muskogee. She earned a degree in English from Oklahoma State University and has worked in magazine and book publishing for the past 19 years.



From the Mailbag

We appreciate hearing from our readers about the Three Rivers Historian and about Three Rivers history.

My memories of the Midland Valley Depot include riding my bike in that direction going to Athletic Park to the baseball games in the 1930’s. Athletic Park was where the Civic Center is now.

I lived on the corner of 14th and Elgin and remember the homeless and hungry hobos who would get off the train cars near the Depot. They would begin walking down Elgin and very often would make it to our house.

They were always very polite and offered to work for food which my mom always provided for them. There was a lot of unemployment in those days and these people just drifted from town to town by hopping in open box railroad cars near the depots. I remember the depot had some benches and a small ticket office.

— Ted S. Hine
Muskogee, OK

We’d like to hear from you too. Write to us and share your knowledge of Three Rivers history.

Welcome to These Museum Members

Grand Opening Contributors

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.

Benefactor

- BancFirst
- The Beckman Co.
- Sabina Beckman
- Richard Bradley
- Morris Caves
- Dillard's
- Nick & Laurie Fuller
- Johnston Terminal
- Kirk's Drug
- Rae Lindsey
- Muskogee Bridge
- Muskogee Daily
- Phoenix
- Pioneer Abstract & Title Pumps & Controls, Inc.
- Betty Brown Rawlins
- W.S. Warner, Jr.
- Waterloo Industries
- Wilolamb International
- Fannie Lu Yaffe
- Yaffe Companies, Inc.

Individual

- ♦ Dorothy Abbott
- Annette Adkins
- Lavonne Baker
- Marion Bowman
- James Boyer
- ♦ Margo Dollar
- Orville Eaton
- ♦ Betty Gibson
- Myra Gormley
- Robert Granger
- Martha Griffin
- Charles Kilgore
- Evelyn Moore
- Jared Roberts
- ♦ Joe Robinson
- ♦ Margie Semore
- Margaret Vardeman
- Delphia Warren
- Blanche Zaroor

- ♦ James & Emma Lee Bankhead
- Robert & Louise Bell
- Roger & Tammy Bell
- ♦ Fred & Dorothy Bliss
- Morris & Mary Caves
- ♦ John and Sally Derr
- Max Eversole
- Jack & Genevieve Farr
- Dianne Hill
- ♦ Paul Ingersoll
- ♦ Raymond & Nancy Ivens
- Edward & Phyllis Kuykendall
- Ray & Margaret Ann Lehman
- ♦ Gainor Ingersoll Miller
- Dan & Kristy Newell
- ♦ Mike and Ruth Pagliaro
- James & Karen Ritchey
- ♦ Andrew & Susan Roberts
- Bud & Kit Stewart

Builder

- ♦ City of Muskogee
- ♦ Anne Davenport
- ♦ Gerber-Coburn Optical
- ♦ Dorothy Hays
- ♦ Holloway Blueprint
- ♦ OK Natural Gas
- ♦ Lee & Mary Phipps
- ♦ Virginia Taylor
- ♦ Robert & Wendella Thomason
- ♦ Ron Wright

Sponsor

- Mr. & Mrs. W.S. Warner, Jr.
- ♦ Trust Co. of Oklahoma

Sustainer

- ♦ H.E. Anderson Co.
- ♦ Preston Jones

Family

- ♦ Betty Barger

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 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 Museum

Volunteer Today!

The Three Rivers Museum is anticipating a Grand Opening in March of 2001. We will need many volunteers to help with the operation of the museum. If you would like to offer your time and service, please complete this Volunteer Survey below.



We Need You!

Areas of Service

<input type="checkbox"/> General	<input type="checkbox"/> Janitorial
<input type="checkbox"/> Museum Docent	<input type="checkbox"/> Grounds Maintenance
<input type="checkbox"/> Gift Shop	
<input type="checkbox"/> Information/Ticket Booth	Skilled Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Office/Clerical	<input type="checkbox"/> Carpentry
<input type="checkbox"/> Mailings	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer
<input type="checkbox"/> Cataloging Artifacts	<input type="checkbox"/> Artist
<input type="checkbox"/> Collecting Artifacts	<input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design
<input type="checkbox"/> Historical Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Building Exhibits

The museum will be open for visitors on Wednesday through Saturday. However we can use volunteers on any day of the week except Sunday. Please circle which days you can work.

Days Available to Work

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

The museum will be open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Please circle the times you can work.

Times Available to Work

Mornings Afternoons

List any special skills you have _____

Your Name _____
 Address _____
 Phone _____
 e-mail _____
 Mail to:

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