

3 Rivers Historian

Summer 2002

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 5, No. 3

Museum Will Operate Thomas-Foreman Home

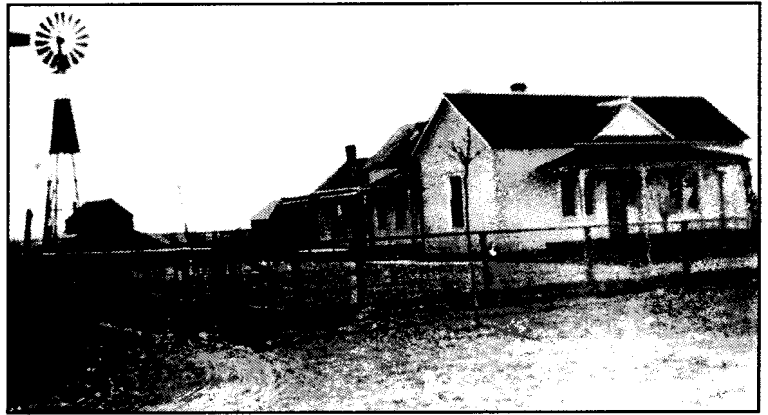
The Board of Directors of the Three Rivers Museum voted in its last meeting to contract with the Oklahoma Historical Society to operate the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home at 1419 W. Okmulgee Avenue in Muskogee.

The Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) owns the home but has not paid staff to operate it for several years. Volunteers, through "Friends of the Foremans," tried to keep the home open to the public for tours, but were unable to continue. The home has been closed for over a year.

Budget constraints by both OHS and the "Friends of the Foremans" have left the historic 1898 farmhouse in disrepair. A new roof and other renovations are badly needed before the house can again be opened to tourists.

The Three Rivers Museum has agreed to oversee the renovations and will try to have the home operational by fall. The museum will operate the home for one year. After that time, the board will review further options with OHS.

"Preserving the history of the region is part of the museum's mission statement," says executive director, Linda Moore. "We believe the Thomas-Foreman Home is an important piece of Three Rivers history and every effort should be made to save it."



The Thomas-Foreman Home shortly after construction in 1898

The Thomas-Foreman Home was built in 1898 by Judge John R. Thomas, Sr., a federal judge over Indian Territory. Judge Thomas, a former Congressman from Illinois and a Civil War veteran, bought the land for his farmhouse from Pleasant Porter, Chief of the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe.

Judge Thomas was joined in Muskogee by his daughter Carolyn and his son John R. Thomas, Jr. who became a celebrated hero of the Spanish-American War while serving with the Rough Riders.

Carolyn Thomas married Grant Foreman and the couple lived in this home for the remainder of their lives.

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Rivers
Museum
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Thomas-Foreman Home

Mr. Foreman came to Muskogee in 1899 to serve on the Dawes Commission which distributed land to the Five Civilized Tribes.

His work on the Dawes Commission spurred an interest in the history of Indians and Indian Territory. Together Grant and Carolyn Foreman wrote over 20 books on Oklahoma history as well as numerous articles for the *Oklahoma Chronicles* and state newspapers. They gained a reputation as leading authorities on the history of their adopted state and were inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1934.

The Thomas-Foreman Home contains an eclectic collection of books and memorabilia from the Foreman's many trips abroad and includes rare photos, documents and works of art. As one of Muskogee's oldest homes of some of its most prominent citizens, it is well worth a visit.

The Thomas-Foreman Home will seek donations to help with the expenses of renovating this historic building. If you would like to contribute to the preservation of this priceless piece of Three Rivers history, please use the donation form on page 8. ▼

 **Museum News Briefs**

**Museum Creates Severs
Anniversary Display**

The Three Rivers Museum has contributed to the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Severs Building in downtown Muskogee by creating a display on the history of the building. The display will be placed in the lobby of Bank of Oklahoma to be viewed during a week-long open house to begin September 3, 2002

The building opened as the Hotel Severs on September 1, 1912. Built by Muskogee businessman, F.B. Severs, it quickly gained a reputation as the finest hotel in Oklahoma. Famous visitors to the hotel included Sarah Bernhardt, Douglas Fairbanks, Helen Keller, Babe Ruth, Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman.

Summerfest 2002

The Three Rivers Museum took part in Muskogee's downtown Summer Block Party called Summerfest which was held on Saturday, June 22, 2002.

The museum's booth at the festival displayed enlargements of old postcards from Muskogee's earlier days. Many festival visitors stopped by the booth to reminisce about familiar landmarks that have changed or disappeared from Muskogee. Visitors were also given discount tickets to tour the museum.

Volunteers helped operate the booth throughout the hot first day of summer. Organizers of the event plan to make Summerfest an annual event.

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Grant Foreman: Pioneer Historian

The Three Rivers Area

Editor's note: The following are edited excerpts from an *Oklahoma Chronicle's* article on Grant Foreman by Stanley Clark.

"Grant Foreman was born in Detroit, Illinois, June 3, 1869. After graduating from the University of Michigan Law School in June, 1891, he began practice in Chicago, later joining the firm of U.S. Senator William E. Mason.

"Foreman came to Muskogee in 1899 as a field worker for the Dawes Commission, which was engaged in allotting lands and winding up tribal affairs for the Five Civilized Tribes. Muskogee remained his home until his death, April 21, 1953.

"Foreman worked with the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes four years. This experience engendered an interest in the Indians and the territory he never lost.

"In 1903 Foreman resigned his position with the Commission to practice law with John R. Thomas, who came to Indian Territory as a federal judge in 1896. This partnership at Muskogee continued until Judge Thomas' untimely death in 1914.

"With sufficient income from oil and farm holdings, Foreman gave up active practice in the early 1920's. Thereafter he devoted his time to the intensive research and writings that brought national recognition.

"He was a member of the Muskogee City Council, 1907-1911, a period when many public improvements were underway. Streets were paved, the water system expanded and bonds voted to provide for an adequate public school building program.

"During these years his work in legal matters necessitated many trips to Washington where he examined War and Interior Department records relating to Indian Territory. He began adding to his personal library collections of copied manu-



Grant and Carolyn Foreman

scripts, pictures and government documents relating to the Five Civilized Tribes. This archival material was to give him the most extensive private library in the country on this subject.

"These developments increased Foreman's keen interest in local history. Years later he related how he and Mrs. Foreman accompanied a drayman to Sawokla, home of Miss Alice Robertson, and carted away valuable donations to furnish the history museum set up in the Muskogee Public Library. A few days later devastating fire completely destroyed the home. Interest in local history prompted the formation of the Muskogee County Historical Society in 1920.

"Judge [Robert L.] Williams proposed his nomination to the Board of Directors of the [Oklahoma] Historical Society. His energy, ability and time thenceforward were devoted to making the Society a pre-eminent institution. With associate members of the Board he conceived the idea of a great building to house museum items and records of historic import on the evolution of his adopted state.

"From his knowledge of the great historical value of records accumulated

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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.

Grant Foreman *cont.*

by the Indian agencies, he knew how important it would be for future generations to have these records permanently housed.

"Foreman visited Washington. Honorable W.W. Hastings, member of Congress from our second congressional district, heard his plea. Hastings and Foreman called on Department of Interior officials. These officials agreed to release the records when Oklahoma showed its good faith by providing adequate facilities to assure their safe-keeping.

"With this promise of cooperation from the nation's capitol, it was not too difficult to win state legislative approval for an appropriation to construct the present Oklahoma Historical Society building.

"Grant Foreman renewed the plea of the Board of Directors for federal legislation to make the transfer of the Indian records possible. Foreman prepared a rough draft for congressional legislation. Hastings personally assumed responsibility for its final passage. [It] was approved by President Roosevelt March 27, 1934.

"Thus was established through Dr. Foreman's influence the Indian Archives Division of the Society, nationally recognized by scholars and research students for its source materials. Additional accessions have been gained from Indian Agencies as records have been released to the Society.

Foreman knew that the collections of Indian records and newspapers in the Historical Society would involve any serious student in unnecessarily tedious research unless they were properly indexed. He introduced a resolution at the Board meeting April 25, 1935 in which attention was called to services which could be performed in cooperation with the federal government's work program (WPA).

"Dr. Foreman, at his own expense, assumed supervision over projects to catalog the records, mend and bind the newspaper volumes and to prepare a selected index. Every student who has reason to sample any of the more than one million index cards and use the catalogued documents can appreciate the foresight of Foreman in having these records made more accessible.

"On the date Foreman was elected to the Board of Directors of the State Historical Society, he was placed on the committee on publications. He gave this committee assignment the serious consideration it deserved and, more important, he contributed articles of lasting merit to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

"He once stated: 'To me there is no avocation, no occupation so interesting and so fascinating, none that offers such rich rewards in proportion to the industry and application devoted, as historical research.'

"Through the years he searched out records of missionaries, travelers and visitors to Indian Territory that had been published in church journals and early-day newspapers, uncovered private letters and journals, faded diaries and governmental reports and with proper foreword, editorial comment or footnotes published them in the *Chronicles*.

"During the time Dr. Foreman was an active member of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society until he resigned October 28, 1943 and was unanimously elected Director Emeritus for life, seldom did a quarterly issue of the *Chronicles* appear without a contribution by him.

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Rivers, Roads and Rails

Early transportation throughout the Three Rivers region naturally depended upon the rivers. With the Arkansas, Verdigris and Grand Rivers flowing together at Three Forks, this region became an early hub for traffic west of the Mississippi.

The rivers were important for the export of furs, salt and tobacco which early residents — the Wichita and Caddo Confederacy — traded with other tribes and then with Europeans at St. Louis, Arkansas Post and New Orleans.

As early as the 1780s, the Osage had begun to settle in the Three Forks region. Their principal trade partners were the Chouteau brothers at St. Louis. The Osage traveled overland from the Three Forks to St. Louis along a trail that became known as the Osage Trace. This trail, which followed the natural contours of the land, became the basis for many roads that followed.

With the establishment of Fort Smith, Fort Gibson and Fort Towson, military roads were built connecting these posts. It was along these roads that many of the Five Tribes made the final leg of their tearful trail into their new homeland, Indian Territory.

Since this new territory was set aside for Indians only, the Three Forks region soon became a place for pioneers to simply “pass through” on their way to settling the West. In the 1840s the Osage Trace was crowded with settlers heading out from St. Louis to Texas. The trail became known as the Texas Road.

Grant Foreman described the route of the Texas Road:

One branch came from Baxter Springs, Kansas, and followed the Verdigris and Grand rivers to Fort Gibson. The other



Railroads built the first bridges over the Arkansas River at Three Forks.

branch came from Saint Louis through Springfield and Maysville to Salina, and joined the other. The Texas road proceeded southwest from Fort Gibson past Honey Springs and crossed Canadian River just below where is now Eufaula.

Another road carrying pioneers through Three Forks was called the Cherokee Trail. Gold seekers to California and Colorado followed this trail from Fort Smith through the Three Forks area westward to join the Santa Fe Trail.

During the Civil War, several battles were fought in Indian Territory for control of the Texas Road, including the Battle of Honey Springs.

Following the Civil War, railroads began to forge into Indian Territory. The first was the Missouri-Kansas & Texas (KATY). The route chosen for this first rail line followed closely that of the Osage Trace, crossing the Arkansas River near the ford of the Texas Road. The railroad surveyors and engineers could not improve upon the instinct of the Indian and pioneer in choosing the best route.

Today, Highway 69 crosses through Oklahoma along this very same route. Travelers today may not realize they are following the path of Indian fur traders, pioneer settlers and railroad entrepreneurs. ▼

Sources for Rivers, Roads and Rails

“Early Trails of Oklahoma,” Grant Foreman, *Oklahoma Chronicles*, Vol. 3

Muskogee: City and County, Odie B. Faulk

Facts on Foreman

During his lifetime Grant Foreman

- published 15 books on Oklahoma history.
- edited four volumes of original manuscripts and had them published.
- contributed over 40 articles to the *Oklahoma Chronicles*.
- contributed over 90 special features to newspapers throughout the state.
- was elected an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa in 1931.
- received an honorary doctorate from Tulsa University in 1932.
- was elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1934.

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.

Grant Foreman *cont.*

“In 1936, a room in the Muskogee Public Library was designated the Foreman Library. Here his portrait hangs and here is housed a complete set of his published works.

“Three months after his election to the Board of Directors of Oklahoma Historical Society, Foreman was placed on a committee to mark historic spots in Oklahoma.

“By the mid-thirties, huge blocks of granite or marble, suitably engraved, were placed and dedicated at Three Forks, Union Mission, and Park Hill. A monument to Montford Stokes at Fort Gibson, one to General Mathew Arbuckle and the Seventh U.S. Cavalry, Fort Gibson, and one to Mill Francis at Bacone College were dedicated. The restoration of the monument over the grave of Rev. Epaphras Chapman at Union Mission was completed and a rock-walled curb was constructed around the old garrison well at Fort Gibson.

“Dr. Foreman found in War Department archives blueprints of the garrison grounds and buildings for Fort Gibson. These he showed to Judge Williams. Later he accompanied Williams to the town of Fort Gibson and they visited the site of the well used by the garrison, the grounds near the Grand River.

“Sometime later, as Foreman hoped, Williams had the idea the Stockade, as it originally existed in 1824, should be reconstructed. Through Judge Williams’ influence and that of General William S. Key, the state legislature created the Fort Gibson Stockade Commission.

“Through private donations and General Key’s influence with the Works Progress Administration, reconstruction of the Stockade was realized, a monument to the foresight and perseverance of Foreman.

“He had a more intimate knowledge of pioneers and places of historical importance in the Three Forks region than any other historian. As early as 1931, Dr. T.L.

Ballenger, History Department, Northeastern State College, Tahlequah, set up student tours via bus to surrounding points of interest, under the guidance of Dr. Foreman.

“Out of this interest grew the Indian-Pioneer History project of 1937-38 in which WPA workers under Dr. Foreman’s supervision interviewed pioneers, chartered trails and roads, copied inscriptions from forgotten cemeteries, uncovered diaries and manuscripts and recorded reminiscences of early day settlers throughout the state. Any discriminating student finds the records a rich source of information on the life and times of that territorial period.

“No appraisal of Dr. Foreman’s contributions to Oklahoma would be complete without paying proper deference to Mrs. Foreman. Grant Foreman married Carolyn Thomas, daughter of Judge and Mrs. John R. Thomas, July 27, 1905. This gracious and cultured lady established a home that reflected the refinements and interests of a gentle educated couple. Their simple and modest home, dominated by their library collections, and containing unusual mementos of their world travels, was made richer and finer by their gracious hospitality.

“On the afternoon of April 23, 1953, Board members, the staff of the Historical Society and other friends both Indian and white, gathered in Greenhill Cemetery overlooking his beloved Three Forks country in memory of this great and good man.” ▼

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

Marty Anthis
Rachel Baker
Sabina Beckman
Rolleen Bishop
Ruth Box
James Boyer
Richard Carr
Michael Joseph
Cristantiello
Mildred Cousins
Dorothy Fite
Elizabeth Gibson
Gladys Horner
Jeep Hunnicutt
Tommie Sue Leahy
Dorothy D. Pack
Cecil Roark
Bill Ryser

Family

Annette Adkins

Mitchell & Fleeta Baker
James & Emma Lee
Bankhead
Roger & Tammy Bell
Sylvia Billingham
Fred & Dorothy Bliss
Jack & Genevieve Farr
Walter & Georgelene
Grober
Gainor Ingersoll Miller
♦ Ron & Naomi Morgan
Carlile & Linda Roberts
Bud & Kit Stewart
Gordon & Dorothy
Swanson
Wally Waits
Revere and Mary Young

Builder

Troy & Modine Baker
♦ Mark & Teresa Hughes
Virginia C. Taylor

Trust Company of OK
♦ Lillian Young

Sponsor

Pioneer Abstract & Title
Fanne Lu Yaffe

Sustainer

V. David and Billie Lynn
Miller
Muskogee Federal Credit
Union
Mr. & Mrs. W.S. Warner
Jr.

Patron

Miriam Freedman

Benefactor

Golda Martin

Tribute to Barbara Higbee

Barbara Higbee, a long-time member of the Three Rivers Museum's Board of Directors passed away on Saturday, August 24, 2002 as the result of a tragic auto accident.

It is with great sadness that the Three Rivers Museum Board of Directors bids farewell to our friend and colleague. Barbara was an enthusiastic supporter of the Three Rivers Museum and will be greatly missed.

The Museum Board extends its condolences to Barbara's many friends and family.

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 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, 220 Elgin, Muskogee, OK 74402.

Or you can send us an e-mail at 3rivers-museum@oknet1.net

Museum Hours:

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

Call about group reservations and rates

686-6624

► Three Rivers Events

Fall Will Focus on American Freedom

Special Music Exhibit Planned

The Three Rivers Museum will host a special exhibit **The Freedom to Create: Making Music Oklahoma Style** in conjunction with the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame from September 11 to October 26, 2002. The museum joins other museums across the country in celebrating American Freedoms as part of a memorial to September 11 victims and heroes.

The exhibit will feature memorabilia from Oklahoma musicians who have been inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame. The induction ceremony this year will be held on Tuesday, October 8 at the Muskogee Civic Center. Inductees will include: Charlie Christian, Joe Diffe, Hank Thompson, and Kay Starr.

Three Rivers Military History Day

On Saturday, November 9, 2002, the Three Rivers Museum will salute Three Rivers veterans with a special Military History Day. The Three Rivers region has a rich military history dating back to the establishment of Fort Gibson in 1824.

Visitors to the museum will view military uniforms, weapons, and vehicles as well as demonstrations by military re-enactors. Veterans from the Three Rivers region are invited to attend this event as special guests of the museum.

Military History Day will be open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with a special admission price of \$2 per person.

Your Donation Needed

Your generous donation to the restoration of the Thomas-Foreman Home is needed right now. Repairs will include replacing the roof, interior maintenance, yard maintenance and tree removal.

If you want to help the Three Rivers Museum preserve this important part of Three Rivers history, please send your contribution today. Checks should be made out to the Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home.

Thank you for your interest and support!

Name _____

Address _____

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

Send to:
Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home
1419 W. Okmulgee
Muskogee, OK 74401