



Three Rivers Historian

Summer 2005

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 8, No. 3

Railroad Day Delights Young and Old

THREE RIVERS MUSEUM held its fourth annual Railroad Day on Saturday, May 14, 2005 at the Midland Valley Depot in Muskogee.

Railroad enthusiasts of all ages gathered at the museum to enjoy a day dedicated to trains and the railroad history that was so important to the settlement and development of towns in the Three Forks area.

Two extensive model train layouts were provided by the Northeast Oklahoma 'N' Scalars (NEONS) of Tulsa and by Muskogee modelers Jeff Andrews, Ron Geminn and John Vecchio.

Retired telegraphers Seaborn Reich and John Cato demonstrated how a telegraph operated and collectors Michael Fowler and Al Ellis displayed railroad memorabilia. Tom Harrington displayed a model steam engine.

On the grounds of the depot, children's games were a part of the fun of Railroad Day. A Kids Zone provided carnival games, a Moonwalk and a mini train ride for the youngest visitors. Honky the Clown entertained children with his balloon creations.



This Locomotive Smoker from Runt's Barbecue was a part of "all things trains" for Railroad Day.

Also a big attraction to visitors, both old and young alike, is the 1940s-era diesel switch engine on permanent display at the museum. Visitors can climb aboard the cab and get a feel for what driving the engine would be like.

Runt's Barbecue of Muskogee has become a regular favorite for lunch for Railroad Day. The popular restaurant always brings its train-shaped smoker to be part of the fun.

Sponsors for this year's Railroad Day were First National Bank of Muskogee, Georgia Pacific Corp. and John Vecchio. Special thanks go to our sponsors! ▼

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Three Rivers Museum Board & Staff

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Mildred Cousins
Orville Eaton
Dianne Hill
Jerry Hoffman
Shirley Rogers
Bud Stewart
Kit Stewart
Ed Warren

A Tribute to Delphia Warren

Emeritus Board Member Delphia Warren passed away July 6, 2005 at the age of 97. She was a long-time employee of the Midland Valley Railroad and author of the pledge to the Oklahoma flag. She will be greatly missed.

Museum News Briefs

Museums Participate in Okie Pass

THE MUSKOGEE MUSEUMS Association has created a combined ticket to five local museums called the Okie Pass. Basing its name on the iconic country song "Okie from Muskogee," this pass provides visitors to Muskogee with discounted tickets to each of the participating museums.

The museums that are included in the pass are Ataloa Lodge, Five Civilized Tribes Museum, Thomas-Foreman Historic Home, Three Rivers Museum and the USS *Batfish* and Military Museum. The pass also includes valuable coupons to Muskogee's River Country Water Park and the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah.

Cost of the Okie Pass is just \$11, which represents a 25% savings over the regular cost of museum tickets. The Okie Pass can be purchased at each of the participating museums as well as the Muskogee Chamber of Commerce office and the Muskogee Visitors Center.

Museum Hosts Oklahoma Mayors

MUSKOGEE WELCOMED dozens of Oklahoma Mayors for their annual Summer Retreat on June 23 to 25 sponsored by the Oklahoma Municipal League.

Besides attending sessions to learn

more about municipal government, the Oklahoma mayors were shown Muskogee's unique brand of hospitality. These top city leaders were welcomed on Thursday with an outdoor barbecue at the Three Forks Harbor and then treated to a shopping and museum tour on Friday.

On Friday evening the mayors and their guests gathered at Three Rivers Museum for a reception and tour of the museum.

Following this reception, the mayors went to the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in the Frisco Depot across Elgin Avenue for dinner and entertainment.

Many mayors are involved with the museums in their respective cities and expressed many compliments to Three Rivers Museum for its excellent renovation of the Midland Valley Depot.

Three Rivers Museum Board Receives Award

THE OKLAHOMA Historical Society (OHS) named the Three Rivers Museum as the Outstanding Local History Museum for 2004 at its annual meeting this past April.

Several members of the museum's board of directors, staff, and volunteers attended the OHS banquet to receive the award.



Roger Bell, Dianne Hill, Shirley Rogers, Lin Moore, Mildred Cousins, Edward Warren, Linda Moore, Bud Stewart and Tessie Warren attended the OHS Awards Banquet

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Around an Indian Mound

The Three Rivers Area

An excerpt from *Persons and Places of Indian Territory* by C.W. "Dub" West

As I approached the historic Harris home, I observed the flag of the United States and that of the Confederacy flying from the flagpole atop the ancient Indian burial mound [on the Harris property in Muskogee]. This caused me to pause and begin construction of an unusual story, but even then I did not realize the true significance of this picture.

It did not take me long to find out that the grandfathers of Mr. and Mrs. William McKinley Hill both fought in the Battle of Honey Springs. [Red Bird Harris upheld the cause of the South and William Grayson fought to preserve the Union.]

I also found that this family represented not only the Harris and Hill families, but the Grayson, Rogers, Carter and Cordery families, all prominent Indian families of Indian Territory days.

Their son William Cheasquah Hill distinguished himself in the business world and their daughter Joan Hill has received acclaim all over the world for her art.

There has been much speculation and division of opinion concerning the purpose, date of construction, and the persons involved in building the Indian mounds of the Central United States. The importance of the Indian mound under consideration here lies in the fact that it has brought certain historic situations together that we can trace rather accurately and pass their heritage on to posterity.

Red Bird Harris was born near Atlanta, Georgia in July 1839. He came to Indian Territory in 1858 as a young man of 19 by steamboat and was proud of the fact that he came of his own volition. Red Bird settled in the Cherokee Nation west of Fort Smith and south of the Three Forks.

His wife, Sarah (Rogers) Harris, had also come to Indian Territory by steamboat in the early days to teach at Tullahassee Mission, operated by William and Ann Eliza Robertson. Chief Pleasant Porter and Alice Robertson were among her pupils.

In reminiscing about his days of courtship, Red Bird recalled that he and his bride-to-be "danced all night at the officers' ball at Fort Gibson." Fort Gibson had little in the way of entertainment other than occasional dances given for the officers and on very rare occasions for the enlisted men.

Sarah Harris was born in 1840 and died in 1910. She, as well as her husband Red Bird, are buried in the private cemetery east of the Indian mound on the Harris property. She was a double cousin of Will Rogers, as cousins had previously married cousins.

Her father was Dr. Robert Rogers, a mixed-blood Creek and her mother was Susan (Collins) Rogers. Sarah was one of the best educated persons in Indian Territory.

The Indian mound had been used as a reconnaissance point during the Civil War. With the coming of the War Between the States, Red Bird Harris readily agreed to give his permission for Fort Davis to be built on his land.

The location of the proposed Confederate fort offered an ideal place for reconnaissance since in those days Union-held Fort Gibson could easily be seen from the vantage point of the Indian mound. (This would still be possible at the present time were it not for the trees that block the view.)

The Confederates could observe the movements of the troops in and out of Fort Gibson and activities in general around the fort. On the other hand, the mound protected the Confederates from the view of Fort Gibson.

It was from this vantage point that the Confederates observed a wagon train on its way to Fort Gibson, which they captured and confiscated its supplies.

Tradition has it that each side shot occasional volleys from their cannons during the week and even picked off a sentry from time to time with a rifle. But on Sundays the soldiers from both forts often swam in

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.

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Around an Indian Mound

Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home

- Roy & Lin Barnore
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- Jim & Karen Ritchey
- Forney Sandlin
- Bill & Kathleen Settle
- Mr. & Mrs. Ron Spradlin
- Marie Wadley

the Arkansas River, the Confederates on the west bank and the federals on the east bank, often shouting to each other.

According to Dr. Grant Foreman, Muskogee was almost located on the site of old Fort Davis. After the Civil War, others settled in the vicinity, and when the Katy Railroad crossed the river, it was decided that a town would be established there.

It was found by their engineers, however, that the terrain was not level enough for a switching yard, and the location was changed to the present site of Muskogee.

The settlement of Fort Davis with the Harris holdings being in the center continued for some time. In 1885, Red Bird and Sarah Harris gave a bill of sale to Molly Megel

for some steers, giving the address as Fort Davis.

Red Bird Harris was one of the outstanding leaders among his people. He was often consulted in matters of tribal government. His brother, Colonel Harris, was Principal Chief of the Cherokees and often consulted him concerning items of importance.

He was also consulted by other leaders as evidenced by a letter from Chief W. H. Mayes concerning a trip to Mexico to consider the removal of the Cherokees to Mexico.

According to a note on the tribute given later by D.M. Wisdom, Red Bird practiced law for a period at Fort Smith with Colonel Wisdom's father. He was also one of the early prominent cattlemen of Indian Territory.

D.M. Wisdom, elected mayor of

Join the Friends of the Home

Your donation to Friends of the Thomas-Foreman Home will help us maintain 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. Your contribution is tax deductible.

Yes, I want to support the Thomas-Foreman Home!

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Please mark your donation level below. Donors will receive free admission to the Thomas-Foreman Home.

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

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



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

Around an Indian Mound

Muskogee in 1901 and a former Indian Agent of the Five Civilized Tribes and vice president of First National Bank, gave a glowing tribute to Red Bird in the memorial service at the latter's death in 1903.

It illustrates the high esteem that a former Indian agent and prominent Muskogee citizen had for Red Bird and the flowery oratory of the time as well as the place of the Indian in our culture.

A contemporary of Red Bird Harris was William Grayson who was born in 1842 in what is now Muskogee County. He was the son of Sandy and Lucy Grayson.

Sandy Grayson's father was a Scotchman who married a fullblood Creek woman. The Grayson family were always able to speak good English and various members were often called upon to be interpreters.

At the age of 19, William Grayson joined the Union Army at Fort Gibson and fought several skirmishes in Indian Territory, among which was the Battle of Honey Springs. [Red Bird Harris fought for the Confederacy in this battle.] His most useful service was as a scout, since he knew the country very well.

After the War Between the States, he returned to his ranch and continued the occupation of his father as a farmer and stockman. He was especially anxious that his children receive an education as he was deprived of such in his youth.

His daughter Lucy Grayson married George Washington Hill. When a small boy, George's widowed mother died, leaving him an orphan. The soldiers at Fort Gibson promptly adopted him as their mascot. It was in this atmosphere that young George grew up without a

formal education.

In spite of this unfortunate start, George became a member of the Creek Light Horse, a member of the Creek Board of Education, prosecuting attorney for the Creeks, legal council for the tribe and Principal Chief of the Creek Nation. His wife Lucy coached and tutored her husband, and by her help and his determination, he became one of the best educated men of his tribe.

[Cheasquah Bird Harris son of Red Bird and Sarah Harris was a contemporary of George and Lucy Hill. He was born and reared on the Harris homestead where the Indian mound is located. This place is now occupied by his descendants and he is buried in the family cemetery.]

As a young man, Cheasquah worked on the Nevins Ferry. He and Lewis Jobe, another pioneer in Indian Territory, operated the first ranch in Muskogee County. [Together they established the Harris Jobe School.]

Nellie Carter Harris, the wife of Cheasquah Bird Harris, was a member of another pioneer family. She and her father are pictured in the laying of the cornerstone of the United States Courthouse in 1890.

The son of George and Lucy Hill married the daughter of Cheasquah and Nellie Harris. William and Winnie (Harris) Hill continued the occupation of the Harris homestead where old Fort Davis had been located. To honor their grandfathers, the Hills chose to fly both the United States and Confederate flags upon the ancient Indian mound. These two prominent Cherokee and Creek families continue today with descendants still occupying the homestead around the Indian mound.

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.

Tales from Three Rivers

Muskogee Veteran Was Part of "America's Best"

Charles Kilgore, a Muskogee Central High School student back in 1936, considered himself lucky to be able to serve in the Oklahoma National Guard where he received one day's pay for just two hours of work at the armory each week. At that time, one day's pay for a private was 97 cents.

Kilgore had been able to sign up with the Guard at the age of 15 because he was big for his age and assumed to be older than he was. He was part of the medical detachment of the 180th Infantry at Muskogee. It took him six months to work up the courage to tell his parents that he had joined the service.

He attended summer camp at Fort Sill and was promoted to Private First Class at the end of the camp. He served three more years in the medical corps then attended a semester at Oklahoma A&M in Stillwater and made corporal while in the ROTC there.

The following summer he received a letter advising him that the National Guard had been called to federal service and he was to report to the Muskogee Armory for the Division's movement to Fort Sill for training.

Kilgore and his Division were at Fort Sill for about a year and then moved out to Camp Barklay, Texas. He was there on December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II.

He went on to Fort Benning, Georgia and graduated as 2nd lieutenant in Au-

gust 1942. His first assignment was as a platoon leader in Company G-302 of the 94th Division. He was later transferred to the 180th Infantry of the 45th Thunderbird Division. With the Thunderbirds, Kilgore shipped out to North Africa for amphibious training and then invaded Sicily in July 1943.

This Mediterranean island was strongly fortified by German troops including Hermann Goring's Panzer Division and a large contingent of Luftwaffe fighters and bombers.

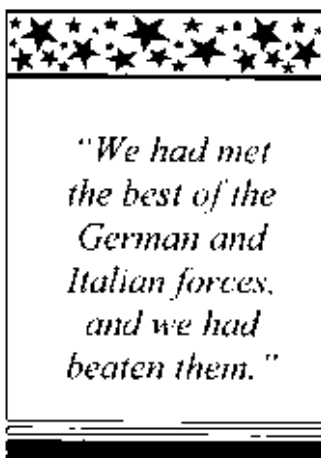
The Thunderbirds' first objective was to capture the airfield at Biscari, Sicily. They were expected to capture it on the first day, but it took three days of furious fighting to seize the airfield.

The 45th Thunderbirds continued across Sicily through July 1943 and captured the island in

just over a month. Casualties were high for the Americans, but even higher for the enemy.

Kilgore states, "We had met the best of the German and Italian forces, and we had beaten them." General George S. Patton commended the Thunderbirds as being one of the best divisions in the history of American arms. The Sicilian campaign gave these brave soldiers their baptism of fire.

The 45th Division went on to fight in Italy and France and then Germany itself. Charles Kilgore was a highly decorated member of this proud fighting force. Among his medals are the Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Purple Heart. Kilgore displays his medals proudly at My Place Barbecue on Gibson Street in Muskogee.



Contact Us

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

To make a donation, please call us at 686-6624.

Museum Hours:

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

Call about group
reservations
and rates

686-6624

Test Your Knowledge of Three Rivers History

Questions:

1. What Three Rivers area landmark is pictured to the right?
2. What was the nickname of the Oklahoma National Guard's 45th Division in World War II?
3. What was Sam Houston's Cherokee name?
4. Where was the Sequoyah State Convention held in Muskogee in 1905?



Answers:
1. Boynton's National Guard Armory
2. Thunderbirds
3. The Raven
4. Horton Theater

Recent Acquisitions

The Three Rivers Museum continually receives artifacts relating to the history of the Three Forks region. Some of our most recent acquisitions speak to the wide variety of historical subjects that the museum can cover.

Max Eversole — tire clamps for patching rubber tires, Jim Egan estate Education Foundation — MHS year-books

Ginger McCall — plaques and photos from Walter Martin family

Walter Grober — watch he was wearing when the Midland Valley RR crash occurred in 1958

Mary McDaniel—scrapbooks of Sooner Chapter of the ABWA

We cannot list every item, but wish to give you a small sampling of what we have received. We are grateful to every donor who has shared an artifact with us.

New in the Whistle Stop Gift Shop

Museum Coupon Book

This \$5 coupon book offers a savings of \$80 in discounts from a dozen Green County museums. A great value for summer vacation plans with the family!

We also carry a wide array of other books on local history by local authors. Come by and see our selection!

If you're shopping for a train enthusiast, the Whistle Stop has the best selection of train-related items in Muskogee.

Museum members receive a 10% discount!
Show your membership card and ask for your discount when you visit.