



Three Rivers Historian

Spring 2006

A Journal of the Three Rivers Museum

V. 9, No. 2

Museum Creates Surety Building Display

For the past year, the Surety Building in Muskogee has been undergoing an extensive renovation. The building, which was completed in 1910, is one of four multi-story buildings still standing in Muskogee's downtown.

Built for retail and office space in Muskogee's heyday, the Surety has now been converted to apartments on its seven upper floors. MGW Enterprises retains office space on the first floor.

Martha Griffin White, owner of MGW Enterprises, approached Three Rivers Museum about creating a display on the history of the Surety Building for the large glass showcase windows on each side of the building's front door.

This space was for many years used to display jewelry and other wares offered by McEntee's Jewelry. A long-time business in Muskogee, McEntee's Jewelry opened in the Surety Building in 1924. The McEntee's sign still graces the Surety Building and many people in the community refer to it as the McEntee's Building.

Museum Director Linda Moore created two displays for the showcase windows in the building — one on the his-



The Surety Building display features three photos of the building at different times in its history.

tory of the Surety Building and the other on the McEntee family and their business. ▀



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An Honored Place of Burial

The following is an excerpt from Bivouac of the Dead by Karen Wagner, a board member of Three Rivers Museum.

America's National Cemetery System originated during the Nation's Civil War. Prior to that time, a soldier hoped to be lucky enough to die at a military post so that he could have a coffin and a decent burial in the Post Burying Ground.

Too often, though, deaths occurred as the troops traveled, and the bodies were disposed of in shallow roadside graves. At battle sites, when there were several dead, trenches were dug and all the dead buried in a common grave.

These burials did not indicate a lack of caring; this was the most that could be done by caring companions. The need to move troops made hurried burials necessary; equipment for coffin making or lengthy digging was seldom at hand.

Shortly after the Civil War started . . . Congress authorized the President to make the necessary purchases of ground to be used as a National Cemetery. The plans to bury the dead more properly . . . indicate the feelings of pride and gratitude toward those fighting for the Union.

By the end of the War, there were about forty of these National Cemeteries containing the graves of over 100,000 Union soldiers. As successive wars and peacetimes produced more servicemen and veterans, additional cemeteries were established.

The Army established Fort Gibson as a military post in 1824 and occupied it until 1857. At the outset of the Civil War, Confederate troops established themselves at the abandoned post until Union troops moved into the territory and took the post over in 1863. Original estimates after the War were that some 2,000 Union dead were buried in the area and Fort Gibson was one of the locations selected for a National Cemetery.

The site chosen for the National Cemetery in 1868 was an area 450 feet square on



The tree-lined National Cemetery at Fort Gibson provides an honored place of burial for Oklahoma veterans.

the south side of the "Tablequah Road," in the southeast corner of the military reservation that surrounded the fort.

At the center and highest point of the cemetery was to be a flagstaff. A circular section around the flagstaff was designed for the interment of Commissioned Officers [known today as the Officer's Circle].

The cemetery was divided into four sections; these sections were divided by "drives," wide enough for carriages, which intersected the cemetery and passed around the Officer's Circle. Broad avenues surrounded the cemetery. Trees and shrubs would be planted throughout the grounds.

By June 1869, 2,117 bodies had been re-interred into the Fort Gibson National Cemetery. The majority had been moved from the many Burying Grounds in the area around the Fort.

Of the 2,117 bodies re-interred, 150 were identified, 1,967 were "Unknown." The graves moved into the National Cemeteries were generally those of unidentified Union soldiers. Approximately half of all Civil War graves are marked "Unknown."

With the massive re-interment operation completed, the National Cemetery now

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The Three Rivers Area

What makes up the Three Rivers Area?

It is defined to include Muskogee County, all the counties that border Muskogee County — Cherokee,

Haskell,

Mayes, McIntosh,

Okmulgee,

Sequoyah and

Wagoner

Counties.

The Three Rivers

Museum hopes to

collect and pre-

serve historical

artifacts from this

entire region.

Contact the

museum if you

have something to

donate at

686-6624.

Three Rivers Museum Board & Staff

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Marketing Director:

Jonita Mullins

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Dan Myers

Shirley Rogers

Bud Stewart

Karen Wagner

Edward Warren

Museum News Briefs

Downtown Walking Tour Offered in April

Three Rivers Museum will again host the Downtown Muskogee Walking Tour on Saturday, April 15, 2006 beginning at 10:00 a.m. at the museum.

The Walking Tour through historic downtown Muskogee has been shortened this year and should take an hour less time to complete. A lunch stop at Club Lunch is still included in the tour, however. Cost for the Walking Tour is \$15 and includes the boxed lunch.

Reservations are required for this tour. Please call 918-686-6624 if you plan to attend.

Fifth Annual Railroad Day Pulls Into the Station

The Midland Valley Railroad began operation in 1904 and Three Rivers Museum now occupies its depot at 220 Elgin in Muskogee. For Railroad Day on May 20, 2006, the history of the railroads will be told by Dr. John Fike at 10:30 a.m. He is a recognized authority on the subject.

A large collection of Midland Valley Railroad memorabilia will be displayed by Michael Fowler and former



telegraphers will be on hand to demonstrate their skill. Our diesel engine is available for tours and a moonwalk will be fun for the kids.

Plans also include an O-Gauge model layout presented by three local hobbyists as well as an N-Gauge layout brought by a Tulsa Club. Runt's Barbecue will sell lunch on the museum grounds.

Hours for the event are 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and cost is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children.

Radio Shack Donates Sound System

The local Radio Shack in Muskogee has donated a new sound system to the Three Rivers Museum for use in its conference room. Owner Bob Montgomery oversaw its installation.

The sound system will improve the quality of lectures and other presentations such as book signings that are held in the Dorothy Ball Conference Room.

The museum extends its thanks to Bob and Radio Shack for this gift. Radio Shack has also donated portable megaphone systems that museum staff use for the Walking Tour and other Caravan Tours outside the museum.

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An Honored Place of Burial

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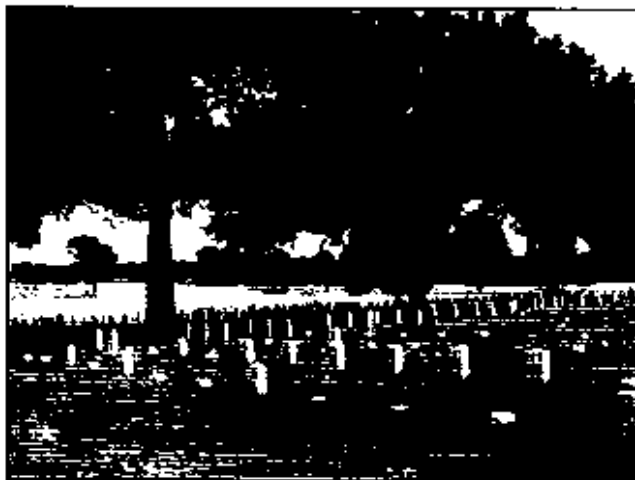
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Friends of the Thomas- Foreman Home

Roy & Lin Barmore
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Kathryn Burke
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Jim & Karen
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Settle
Mr. & Mrs. Ron
Spradlin
Marie Wadley

The Fort Gibson National Cemetery

served as the Post Cemetery and burials continued here as deaths occurred at the fort.

Other work progressed in developing the cemetery. A plaque for the gun monument was ordered during this time. [A hedge of Osage Oranges was planted around the cemetery.]

A Porter's Lodge was built across the road from the cemetery. This first lodge was a small three-room cottage occupied by the cemetery's first superintendent, William Thomas and his family.

In 1872, Secretary of War Belknap, whose father had died in 1851 and was buried at Fort Washita, wanted the body of his father moved from Fort Washita to Iowa. He requested that at the same time the

remains of soldiers and their families buried at Forts Washita and Arbuckle be re-interred at the National Cemetery at Fort Gibson.

Both these forts had been abandoned by the military and it seemed more reasonable to move these cemeteries to a place where graves were being tended, rather than try to maintain the cemeteries at abandoned posts.

During the winter of 1872-73 those graves at both old forts . . . were moved to the National Cemetery. There were about 150 in all and most of them were unidentified.

By 1876 headstones had been placed in the cemetery. All original stones and markers that were still in place had been moved to the cemetery with the graves. There had been few of these. The government provided a

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 \$30 Family
 \$100 Builder \$250 Friend
 \$500 Sustainer

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

The Fort Gibson National Cemetery

stone for each grave that did not have one, and replaced any wooden markers with stones.

Most of the stones for this cemetery were the small blocks used for the unknown dead, and were identified only with a grave number. The regulation stone for identified soldiers had the grave number, the soldier's name, rank and the state from which he served. Most of the stones for the National Cemeteries were from marble quarried at Rutland, Vermont.

By the turn of the century the cemetery was becoming the shaded, park-like spot it had been planned to be. Maple, Cottonwood, Poplar, Apple, Cedar and, of course, the Osage Orange trees had grown to a good size in twenty years. Each "drive" was tree-lined and numerous trees were planted throughout the cemetery.

During the winter of 1878-79, 120 re-interments were made into the National Cemetery from the cemetery at Fort Towson. Only a few of these graves were identified, so the number of Unknown in the cemetery was now 2,208. These were the last unidentified remains buried in the cemetery.

In 1890 the Army once again abandoned Fort Gibson as a military post, and as agreed by the Treaty made in 1835, the land that had comprised the Military Reservation reverted to the Cherokee Nation, except for that piece of ground 600 feet by 500 feet which was the National Cemetery.

When the Military Reservation became . . . the property of the Cherokee Nation, the land was divided into lots and acreages, and in a few years there were houses and farms from the town of Fort Gibson to the National Cemetery. The "Tahlequah Road" that went past

the cemetery was not a Public Road, and so was used for farming, leaving the only road to the cemetery an opening through a field one mile longer than the old road and nearly impassible.

The Fort Gibson Town Council, feeling it was in the best interest of the community to have a road to the cemetery, wanted to cooperate in opening one, but most of the land involved was outside their jurisdiction.

In due time (1908), with strong local support, a Bill was passed in the Oklahoma State Congress to have a road to the National Cemetery improved, though the cemetery superintendent felt that the County should first pass a stock law so that the hogs could not run at large and destroy the road.

In some areas of the country, National Cemeteries were, for a time, looked upon as a Pauper's Cemetery, but the burials in Fort Gibson National Cemetery of prominent citizens indicates that to be buried in this National Cemetery was always considered an honor.

The annual Memorial Day ceremonies featured speakers who were leading citizens and politicians and the large numbers attending the ceremonies indicate the pride felt in Indian Territory's National Cemetery.

Because of the early graves moved into the cemetery, Fort Gibson presents a richer history than most of our National Cemeteries. The lives of the people buried here cover the time from 1780 through yesterday. Beginning with the War of 1812, an identified veteran of every war our nation has engaged in is buried in this cemetery. When the soldiers march no more, they come here to be buried. They marched to defend freedoms and the freedoms remain alive because they marched. ▼

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.threeriversmuseum.com

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.

Muskogee Experienced Many 'Firsts'

The first railroad in Indian Territory was the Missouri-Kansas & Texas (Katy). Its line moved southward from Kansas and reached the Arkansas River just north of what became Muskogee in December 1871.

The railroad bridge across the Arkansas was the first to be constructed in this area. The Katy steam engine, a General Grant, crossed this bridge on Christmas Day, 1871 and by New Year's Day of 1872 the track had reached a spot about one mile north of present day downtown Muskogee (the old Fort Davis site) where the railroad intended to build a depot.

The first store in Muskogee was moved to this location from Gibson Station, which had been the rail terminus while the river bridges were being built. J.S. Atkinson and A.W. Robb owned the store at Gibson, but they tore their building down and set it back up at the depot site.

Then the railroad decided the grade was too uneven at this location so they moved the depot to what became Broadway and Cherokee Street in Muskogee. Atkinson and Robb tore down their store once again and moved it to the new depot site.

Mr. Robb also built the first home in Muskogee and brought his family from Kansas to live in the new town of Muskogee. His daughter Jessie, was the "first white child" born in the community.

The first grist mill in Muskogee was built by James A. Foreman. He started with a wind-driven mill at first, but was soon so busy grinding corn and wheat that he quickly changed to a steam mill.

He later added a cotton gin to his operation and it became the first cotton gin in Indian Territory. Cotton from as far away as Paul's Valley was brought to Foreman's gin in Muskogee in the early 1870s.

The first building contractor in Muskogee was P.J. Byrne, who later became Muskogee's first mayor. Byrne's first contract was to build the Mitchell House, a popular hotel and restaurant operated by Mr. and Mrs. James Mitchell.

The first doctor to practice medicine in Muskogee was Dr.

George W. Cummings whom Alice Robertson described as "a man of somewhat eccentric character, but having the genuine kindness and sympathy that marks a loved physician." Cummings operated a drug store in connection with his practice as many doctors did back then. It was a small

wooden building with a very large sign that simply gave the address 500 Main Street.

The first school in Muskogee was a small private school in a tiny box house downtown. The teacher at this school was Miss Retta Robb, the sister of A.W. Robb. Soon a Sunday school was added and the first sermon preached in Muskogee was in this same wooden house. Rev. Timothy Hill of Kansas City, sent by the Presbyterian Mission Board, was the first minister.

These are just a few of the many firsts Muskogee has seen down through the years. And no doubt, there are still other firsts yet to come.

- Jontia Mullins

Muskogee has enjoyed many firsts through its long and colorful history from 1872 to the present.

Thanks to These Museum Members

We would like to welcome all our new members and thank all of those supporters who have renewed their membership. We appreciate your continued support of the Three Rivers Museum.

New and Renewed Memberships for the First Quarter 2006

Since 1998

Charles & Winnie
Bowman
Orville & Joan Eaton
Dorothy Gardner

Since 1999

Robert & Louise Bell
Paul & Telitha Day
Robert & Jewell
Granger
Jerry & Paula Hoffman
Adelaide Johnson
Ray & Margaret Ann
Lehman
Muskogee Public
Library
Mary Plummer
Ronald & Molly
Reeves

Jared & Katherine
Roberts
Fred & Jean Truster
Joan Weakland

Since 2000

Children's Clinic
Dorothy Hays
Bonnie Jennings
Mike & Ruth Pagliaro
Andrew & Susan Roberts
Rex & Martha Slack
Nancy & Phil Stolper

Since 2001

James & Ruth Bates
Kathryn Burke
Olivelle Graves
Elva Johnson
Ann Roe

Since 2002

Margaret Cain
Ann Barker Ong

Since 2003

Allen County Public
Library
A More Beautiful
Muskogee
Dena & Bob Hudson
Robert Motter, Jr.
Robert Pyle
Claybourn & Billie
Seward
Tom & Jean Yadon

Since 2004

Kamlesh & Vijay
Aggarwal
George Garrett

Shirley Harvey
Muskogee Parks &
Recreation
Buck Ross
Forney Sandlin
S.D. Stewart, Jr.
Edward & Tessie
Warren

Since 2005

Robert Gaddy
Dan & Mary Myers
Mike & Trude Norman

New in 2006

Daniel Haston
C.H.S. Class of '53
David & Debbie
Russell
Ronald & Liza White

Keep History Alive! Become A Museum Member.

Be a part of preserving history for future generations. Become a Three Rivers Museum member today. An annual membership provides you with the quarterly journal, free admission to the museum and a 10% discount on purchases in the museum gift shop. Three Rivers Museum is a 501c3 entity. Your donation is tax deductible.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

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

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

My check for \$ _____ is enclosed.

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



Suggestions?

Three Rivers Museum is your museum. Tell us what you think about the museum and the quarterly journal. Tell us what you would like to see in the future. You can help us make Three Rivers Museum better.

Test Your Knowledge of Three Rivers History

Questions:

1. What is the building at right and where is it located?
2. Who was the "first white child born in Muskogee?"
3. For whom was the city of Checotah named?
4. When was the Fort Gibson National Cemetery created?



ANSWERS:
1. Bacone Chapel, Muskogee (photo by Fred Williams) 2. Jessie Robb 3. Chief Samuel Checote 4. 1868

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.

Lyle & Shirley Bibb—Citizens Bank teller window; photos of KO&G engines; 1918 CHS football team photo

Hershel Beaver—metal parts of railroad passenger benches

Dorothy Godfrey -- water fountains from Central High School

Keith Birdsong—Samples of US postage stamps he designed

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

The Oklahoma Women's Almanac
by Robert Darcy and Jennifer Paus-tenbaugh

"The stories told by this almanac record the accomplishments of Oklahoma women." — Gov. Brad Henry



We will again offer the Okie Pass this year — that's a discounted combined ticket to all 5 of Muskogee's museums!



The gift shop also has a variety of cookbooks including our own Recipes & Remembrances.

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