

# Kaw City Museum News

A PUBLICATION OF THE KAW CITY MUSEUM -

SPRING 2018



*Museum visitors view vintage Kaw City school annuals*

## **Museum Records Become Useful Resource**

The Mormon Church is well-known for its vast collection of genealogy records. They have collected information since 1894 and maintain information on more than 3 billion deceased people. Recently, their researchers began looking for early information in the northern Oklahoma area and were excited to learn about Kaw City Museum and its historical records.

Years ago, workers at the Kay County Courthouse in Newkirk decided to clean house and began throwing away outdated records that were taking up needed space. Mrs. Judy Ford, a long-time Kaw City resident, proved the old adage, “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure,” is true. She gathered as many of the Kaw City tax record books as she could find that were being discarded, 113 in all, loaded them into her car and brought them to the Kaw City Museum for safe-keeping. Her quick thinking kept the historical information from being lost forever.

The Mormon’s genealogy team plans to bring their cameras to the museum and digitize all of the tax record books along with some of the museum’s old school records. This information will be available for free to anyone who visits their library in Salt Lake City. They have also committed to provide Kaw City Museum with digital copies of the tax books.

## **Museum Prepares for Annual Reunion - Sunday, May 27**

Mark your calendars and plan to attend Kaw City Museum’s Annual Reunion on Sunday, May 27 from 10am-5pm. Board members and volunteers will provide refreshments and look forward to meeting and greeting locals as well as visitors from across the country. An annual report from the Board will be presented in a brief meeting at 2pm, followed by a drawing for

door prizes. Whether you grew up in old Kaw City or you are new to the area, you’ll be wowed by the museum’s collections. Reserve plenty of time to view the countless displays of historical artifacts, photographs, maps, books, name bricks, furniture and even the names and plot locations of Grand View Cemetery. Admission is free.



*Left: Museum’s Memorial Weekend flag display Right: Dorothy Smith greets visitors at last year’s Annual Reunion*



## City Growth and Tragedy

W. T. Conklin came to Kaw City in 1904, two years after the town was established. Impressed and optimistic about the possibilities for the town's future, he began acquiring property and building. He bought a four-story mill and grain elevator from H. E. Guy, then began building a large stone building on the west side of Main Street which accommodated two businesses on the lower level and an opera house above.

The Conklin Opera House became one of the most popular places in town. It featured plays, school programs, traveling Chautauqua entertainment, dances, roller-skating and basketball. Several churches held Sunday services in the large facility before they had buildings of their own. Other businesses were soon built on each side of the Conklin building as the town continued to grow.

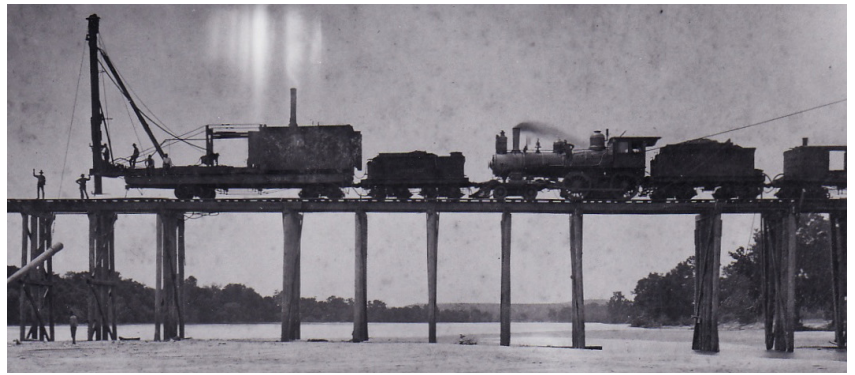
When oil was discovered just east of Kaw City in the early 1920's, the town exploded. Businesses sprung up and filled both sides of Main Street. Hotels and houses were quickly constructed to house the many newcomers. People with extra space took in boarders.

Wooden sidewalks gave way to cement walkways and the streets were paved with bricks. The town boasted of their big "white way", a series of attractive light posts lighting each corner of Main Street from the northern business area all the way up the hill to the south residential end of town.

Schools were built, while a merry-go-round, teeter-totters, tables and benches, swimming pool, skating rink and gazebo were added to the city park.

The town became one of the finest small towns in Kay County, attracting visitors from all over the country. Sadly, the good times came to an abrupt halt when Kaw City suffered a devastating flood in 1923. The north and south bridges, vital for trade, were destroyed. A train trestle on the east survived, but the connecting tracks were badly damaged. The north bridge was quickly replaced, but the south bridge was never rebuilt and the pace of Kaw City's growth was never the same.

Fourteen years later, tragedy struck again. On a freezing night in November, a fire started in an office under the Opera House. Volunteer firemen worked desperately to contain the flames but the elements were against them. Water fell back on their clothes and froze



*Railroad trestle constructed east of Kaw City over Arkansas River in 1902*



*The Conklin Opera House*

and the main hose attached to the hydrant broke. The firemen saw no way to control the fire. Expecting the whole side of the block to burn, they stood back and watched. But W.T. Conklin's son Glen and friend, Elmer Hillman refused to give up. Grabbing a spare hose, they attached it to another hydrant at the southwest corner of the block and ran with it to the alley. Climbing to the third story landing on abandoned, rickety wooden stairs, they broke through a sealed door to the Opera House and valiantly fought the raging blazes below. The Opera House and first floor stores were badly damaged. The grocery store and dry goods store were repaired and resumed operations but the Conklin Opera House, once a fun gathering place for the community, was closed forever.

Years later, W.T.'s granddaughter, Annette Pittman retrieved the "good luck" horseshoe that hung above the doorway where performers entered the stage and held it as part of her private collection. In May, the horseshoe will be donated and ceremoniously hung above the Kaw City Museum's Brill Building entrance at the 2018 Annual Kaw City Museum Reunion.



*Please help us identify these four ladies standing in front of the depot*

their President and the plan was under way. The Kaw City Depot was the logical building to house the museum. Built in 1902, it was as old as the city itself. It had been the center of activity, bringing in supplies, people, and mail. Even though it was in disrepair, it was made of wood and could be moved. Hundreds of letters went out in all directions telling about the plans and asking for donations. This was to be the people's museum.

The depot was the final float in the "Last Day" celebration. Power lines kept it from making the full ride through town, but the two-hole out-door-john float, loaded with children, was cheered as it passed by. Several days later, the power lines were removed and the depot was moved to its permanent location, 910 Washunga Drive in the new Kaw City, where it remains today.

### **Museum Projects**

Time takes its toll on buildings. This year was no exception for the museum as the air conditioner compressor had to be replaced. Next, the museum began getting huge water bills during the winter when the museum was closed for the season. A bill for 8,000 gallons followed by one for 22,000 gallons was puzzling. There was no sign of a leak. After much searching, the cause was discovered. The copper water lines had developed pinholes and were leaking underground. It is hoped the problem is alleviated and that there will be no leaks in the cement foundation.

The museum board is actively recruiting new members to add to its roster. The success of this endeavor is vital for the future of the museum. The non-profit organization is operated entirely by memberships, donations, and the sale of books and various items donated to the museum.

A large crowd toured the museum after attending the annual Eagle Watch program that is held in Kaw City every year. Individuals come from many communities in the area for the event.

### **A Museum Is Born**

The Kaw City Museum came into being through the outpouring of love from people who lived in the old town of Kaw City. As the end of an era approached, it seemed everything would be gone and the small town would be forgotten.

The city fathers arranged to relocate Kaw City on a hill two miles west to make way for the construction of the Kaw Dam, but it would never be the same. As the time grew closer for families to leave their homes and the few remaining businesses to lock their doors, the people of Kaw City shared a camaraderie and desire to find a way to hold on to a bit of the past. An idea to construct a museum in the new town emerged and quickly spread. Some of the residents organized a meeting, elected Bob Cline as

### **The Old May Be New To Some**

Kaw City had a rich past that the Kaw City Museum has focused on preserving. Perhaps life was simpler, but it was also harder. You'll find examples of life before appliances and technology, and gain a new appreciation of the people who came before us. Harry S. Truman once said, "There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know." Explore the museum to find the "new" amidst the "old".



*The Name Brick walkway connects the Depot to the Brill Building. Its walls are filled with dozens of framed pictures of the graduating classes from the old town high school. It looks like a young visitor has identified a photograph of someone special to him from the Class of 1957.*

## 2018-2019 Board Members and Officers

President - Jack Godberson

Vice President - Rick Fleharty

Secretary - Pilar Burgert

Treasurer - Carolyn Godberson

Historian/Editor - Annette Pittman

3-Yr. Term: Pilar Burgert, Jim Deakins, Rick Fleharty.

2-Yr. Term: Ray Russell, Barbara Stevens, Johnny

Stevens. 1-Yr. Term: Carolyn Godberson, Jack

Godberson, Dorothy Smith.

### Museum Hours

#### Special Times for Memorial Weekend:

Saturday, May 26 - 1pm-5pm

Sunday, May 27 - 10am-5pm

Monday, May 28 - 1pm-5pm

#### Regular Summer Hours:

June 2 -Labor Day

Saturdays and Sundays - 1pm-5pm

*To request an additional time, contact Jack Godberson  
(580) 716-6883 or Dorothy Smith (580) 269-2085.*

Location: 910 Washunga Drive in Kaw City, OK

Website: [kawcitymuseum.com](http://kawcitymuseum.com)

### Museum Memberships

Kaw City Museum is a tax-exempt non-profit organization operated by donations of time and money. Memberships, purchases, donations are vital to the operation, upkeep and future growth of the museum and its grounds. Thank you for your continued support.

Family Membership..... \$10

Donor Membership..... \$25

Founder Membership..... \$100

Patron Membership..... \$200

### Available for Purchase

The award-winning two-volume Kay County history book is out of print so be sure to get yours before they are gone. The history of each town is well documented with reference guides for further information. Family pictures, Kaw area photographs and stories are included. You can also buy the Museum's popular cookbook, postcard size pictures of Kaw City, and DVD's of old photographs. All proceeds go directly to the museum.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Kaw City Museum Inc.

