



Kaw City Museum Inc.

PO Box 56
Kaw City, OK 74641-0056

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Museum Memberships

Kaw City Museum is a tax-exempt non-profit 501c3 organization. Memberships, purchases and donations are vital to the museum's operation, upkeep and future growth. Thank you for your continued support.

Family Membership.....\$10
Donor Membership.....\$25
Founder Membership.....\$100
Patron Membership.....\$200

Please mail your tax deductible donation to Kaw City Museum, PO Box 56, Kaw City, OK 74641.

Hours of Operation

Saturdays & Sundays 1-5 pm

Memorial Weekend-Labor Day Weekend
(Including Memorial Day and Labor Day)

To Open by Appointment Contact:
Dorothy at 316.640.6617
Jeannie Pappan at 580.716.2795

Subscribe to kawcitymuseum.com
for updates

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Tell Us Your Story

Kaw City Museum is dedicated to preserving the history of the old town and the people who lived in the Kaw area. If you have stories, historical details, or photographs we could either have or duplicate, please notify us so they can be added to the museum's historical collection. Contact Susan Rutledge at susanrutledge@mac.com.

Kaw City Museum News

A PUBLICATION OF THE KAW CITY MUSEUM

SPRING 2024

The Destiny of a Once Vibrant Oklahoma Town



Main Street businesses were filled with dirty flood waters from the Arkansas River.
Photo courtesy of Clarence Kneedler

Kaw Lake, one of the ten largest lakes in Oklahoma, boasts over 17,000 surface acres of fishing and boating, with additional recreation areas for its visitors to enjoy. But few are left who remember the small town beneath its waters, that once thrived in the early 1900s. The "Flood of '23" that brought life, business and trade to a halt may have been prophetic, as the remains of old Kaw City now lie at the bottom of a lake.

Located in the Ox Bow Bend of the Arkansas River, Kaw City started out as a farm

and ranch community, experiencing steady growth until 1919 when oil was discovered east of town in what was called the Burbank Oil Field. Overnight, Kaw City exploded with activity, becoming the hub for oil field supplies that were shipped in by rail and hauled out across the river to the oil fields. Horse-drawn wagons piled with long wooden beams passed through the wide dirt streets on their way to becoming additional oil derricks east of town. Sleeping quarters were at a premium as the town rapidly filled with hundreds of oil field workers and businessmen. The town's two hotels filled to capacity and residents housed oil field workers in their barns and stables.

Construction of homes and new businesses supported three lumber yards, unprecedented for a town that size. Even existing businesses expanded and updated to accommodate the growth. Cement walkways replaced wooden sidewalks downtown and Main Street was modernized with the placement of red bricks on the roadways and streetlights.

Then on June 23, 1923 disaster struck. Major flood waters from the Arkansas River inundated the business district. Wooden structures including a two-story hotel on the north end of town were hit the hardest by the ravaging waters and were badly damaged. Some chose not to rebuild. Swift waters savaged the land, carrying tons of dirt downstream, leaving deep gullies in their path. The majority of brick and stone businesses along Main Street's five blocks survived the onslaught of turbulent waters, but it took massive cleanup efforts to shovel

(continued inside)



The American Lumber Company never rebuilt after the flood.
Photo courtesy of Pearl Lattin Rutherford



Damaging flood waters even moved houses off their foundation.

Photo courtesy Pearl Lattin Rutheford

several churches and the residential areas on higher ground to normal. A determined business community rallied and rebuilt. Ike Clubb's hotel and bank building, already under construction before the flood, was completed and its doors opened in 1924. The *Town Tavern*, a Kansas City, Missouri publication, featured a story about the hotel, calling it "the world's finest forty-two room hotel."

Soon after the opening of the hotel, Laura Clubb began moving her collection of world-famous paintings into the hotel, filling the walls of the lobby, dining room and hallways with paintings from the "Old Masters". Visitors from throughout the United States and many foreign countries traveled to Kaw City to see the renowned art pieces, putting Kaw City on the map. Annette Pittman, granddaughter of Laura Clubb recalls busloads of tourists, sometimes numbering up to 1,000 people on the weekends, pouring through the doors to view the paintings.

In 1947, Laura Clubb donated her large collection of paintings to Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa, and Kaw City returned to being a quiet farming and ranching community until the entire town was forced to relocate, making way for the same waters it had fought so hard to recover from years ago. The next time you visit Kaw Lake, take a moment to imagine the rich history resting underneath those beautiful waters.

Kaw City School Sign Donated to Museum



are (L-R) Charlotte Hillman Taylor, Doris Bowker Wilgus, Tom Rennie, Eve Lee Ham Jacobs, Kay Boxley Weger, Robert Herbig and Bud Bowker. Photo courtesy of Bill and Doris Weger.

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thick layers of mud from their walls and floors.

The railroad bridge withstood the swift flood waters but the other two bridges, one on the north leading to the Kaw Indian Reservation in Washunga and the south bridge crossing the river toward Ponca City were both washed out. A ferry provided passage across the river until a new north bridge could be built, but the south bridge was gone forever. Oil field supplies had to be rerouted around Kaw City until the area's railroad tracks could be replaced. Trade was significantly impacted.

Despite substantial damage, the people of Kaw City were resilient. Neighbor helped neighbor and everyone pitched in to do what they could. The school, were largely unharmed and life gradually returned



Annette Pittman honored by museum.

Photo courtesy of Susan Rutledge

Her first-hand knowledge and sharp memory of decades of Kay County history make her a valuable resource for anyone seeking information about the "good old days."

Annette Pittman Honored by Museum

Annette Cline Pittman, long-time supporter of the Kaw City Museum, was presented with a plaque honoring and appreciating both her and her late husband Bob Cline at the 2023 Annual Reunion. Bob and Annette grew up in Kaw City and were instrumental in obtaining and moving the train depot from Old Kaw City to the town's new site in 1972, and developing it into a museum that has preserved the history of their hometown.

At age 92, Annette is the single remaining graduate in Kaw City's Class of '49. The oldest daughter of Glen and Madelyn Conklin, Annette was the granddaughter of Ike and Laura Clubb, all Kaw Citians. She spent much of her childhood days at the Clubb Hotel, filled with what *Harlow's Weekly* called "the finest private collection of paintings in the world" and can talk your leg off about all things related to Laura Clubb. She inherited her grandmother's love for art and enjoyed a career as a graphic artist and painter. Although Ms. Pittman now lives in Prosper, Texas with her daughter, she continues to serve as the museum's historian and faithfully attends every reunion.

Kaw City Museum's Annual Reunion

Sunday, May 26 from 11:00 am-5:00 pm - 910 Washunga Drive, Kaw City, OK

The Kaw City Museum Board invites you to attend this year's Annual Reunion on the Sunday of Memorial Weekend. Board members and volunteers will be on hand to greet local residents as well as visitors from across the country. Whether you grew up in old Kaw City or you are new to the area, you're sure to enjoy the countless displays of historical artifacts, photographs, maps, books, name bricks, furniture and even the names and plot locations of Grandview Cemetery. Admission is free.

Historical Resources and Gifts Available for Purchase

Kaw City - A Pictorial History can be purchased from the museum for a donation of \$20 or more. Written to benefit the museum by native Kaw Citian Annette Pittman and her daughter, Susan Rutledge, this one-of-a-kind pictorial history includes 200 photographs that span a dozen decades, collected from Old Kaw City's residents. Worn and aged images provide a glimpse of Kaw City's early days.

The award winning two-volume Kay County history book, *North Central Oklahoma, Rooted in the Past- Growing for the Future*, can still be purchased from Kaw City Museum while supplies last. It is out of print, so order yours before they are all gone! In the two books, Kay County's town histories are well documented, the large genealogy section provides the history and pictures of hundreds of Kay County families, and many Kaw City area photographs and stories are included.

Also available are the museum's popular cookbook, a selection of postcard-sized pictures of Old Kaw City, and a DVD presentation of old photographs copied from private collections or from donated pictures. All proceeds go directly to the museum. For ordering information please contact Annette Pittman at susanrutledge@mac.com or (580) 716-4959.

