



Solomon Valley Museum Musings

To Read More about
Solomon Valley History
visit our website at

www.hwy24.org

Graham County

Graham County Historical Society Museum -- Hill City
103 E. Cherry, Hill City, 67642 -- 785-421-2854
Graham County Historical Society & Museum

Also See ► Morland (bottom of page 2)

Also See ► Graham County Oil Museum
800 West Highway 24, Hill City, KS 67642 -- 785-421-5621

Museum Musings -- At the end of September 1971, a notice appeared in the Hill City Times inviting "all interested parties" to attend the October 2 organizational meeting of the Graham County Historical Society. The seven individuals who appeared at that first meeting and a number of local history aficionados who soon joined the group drafted a mission statement, drafted a constitution, and applied for a charter. Thus the groundwork was laid for the organization that developed the museum and association archival repository.

Soon after organizing, the Society made its first acquisitions: a tape recorder was purchased to collect both facts and lore from the county's "old timers" and a single file cabinet was secured. Then the group's goal "to discover and collect materials to illustrate the history of the area" began. Early in 1972 Jennie Dunwoody, a longtime common school teacher in Graham County, donated a number of early photographs of county scenes, and Della Grantham offered her pristine copies of historical editions of the Hill City Times. These were the first of the Society's thousands of accessions.

In its formative years the historical group was quite literally an organization without a home. Public meetings and executive council sessions were held at the county administrative facility, including district courtroom, jury room, and commissioners' meeting area.

It was not until the new Graham County Public Library was constructed in the 1970s—an effort spearheaded by Margaret and John Moore, charter members of the Historical Society—that the group acquired a permanent abode. The basement room, 890 square feet, and its fireproof fault, 580 square feet, were, within 20 years, packed with historical bounty.

Early in the current decade a larger facility became available when a commodious building constructed to house the U.S. Department of Agriculture offices and later utilized by an area telephone company was vacated. The building's owners, a Great Bend construction-investment group, made the 3,780-square-foot building available, and the Historical Society had a spacious home.

Currently the building features a large general display area with additional rooms specifically devoted to military, school, farm, vintage clothing, and library-research interests. Still another room, plus the walls of the Society's meeting room, is devoted exclusively to the presentation of one of the state's most comprehensive displays of quilts.

The law library of W. L. Sayers, a renowned African-American attorney, has been donated to the museum by the Sayers family; the vast collection of historical family items of Konrad Hocker, including antique glass, is displayed; and the medical instruments of four extraordinarily popular and

successful Graham County doctors are available for public scrutiny.

Recently memorials honoring a number of local citizens have been “earmarked” to provide funds for display purchases; additional contributions have enable the Society to purchased desperately-needed storage for the library-housed GCHS archives, a separate facility which constitutes a “paper repository” of well over 100 years of newspaper issues, countless priceless photographs, files of common school records, a large number of family histories, cemetery and obituary records, organization minutes, settlements’ histories, and various other historical records.

A concentrated effort is being made to publicize the museum and archives: various service groups and other clubs have held meetings at the museum (including the Solomon Valley Hwy 24 Heritage Alliance), school groups have toured the museum, and sundry activities of the Society are publicized in an effort to make its work and offerings both visible and viable. Additionally, interested volunteers from the Society, Graham County Arts Council, and the community at large are preparing for the second annual autumn cemetery “Speaking Stones Tour,” an informative and nostalgic tribute to outstanding and interesting personalities from the county’s past.

The museum at 103 East Cherry is open on both Friday and Saturday of each week from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., and the archives at 414 North West, are accessible on the first and third Saturdays of each month from 2:00-4:00 p.m. Additionally, these individuals will avail themselves to anyone desiring access to the GCHS’s facilities at other times: Anita Middleton, 421-2448; Betty Elliott, 421-2543; Elsie Brandyberry, 421-5730; and Jan and Lowell Beecher, 421-5421. E-mail inquiries may be addressed to queenb@ruraltel.net. We hope you will visit our splendid museum.

by Lowell Beecher

Graham County

Morland Community Foundation Inc. -- Morland

509 W. Main, Morland

Museum Musings -- In 1922 a fire destroyed a main street building in Morland known as the Opera House. This beautiful building housed several retail businesses and the two local banks. In 1923 an article in the county newspaper states that the Morland State Bank is being rebuilt to be “completely fireproof.” Today that austere concrete and steel building, located at Main and Tiger, is one of two locations housing historical collections and displays donated by local residents to the Morland Community Foundation.

Items that might be of special interest to visitors include the small wooden U. S. Post Office window, wooden door mailboxes, and mail sorting-boxes from the town of Fremont. Fremont existed from 1881 until 1892 when the name was officially changed to Morland.

Katherine (Pratt) Mermis collected milk glass while traveling Western Kansas with her husband during the 1930s. He was appointed by the State Bank Commissioner to close banks during the Great Depression, and she spent her idle time browsing shops and businesses looking for pieces of milk glass. Before her death, Mrs. Mermis donated the extensive glass collection to the Foundation.

A second location is the former USD 280 Superintendent's office located at 509 W. Main, Morland. The USD 281 Board of Education donated the building to the Foundation after USD 280 closed. The Board of Education donated the Morland High School memorabilia consisting of trophies, awards, class pictures, etc., to the Morland Alumni Association. The Foundation is pleased to be able to partner with the Alumni Association in preserving the memorabilia, along with the histories of the Morland schools. These displays are of special interest to those who attended Morland schools.

The facilities can be toured by contacting the Citizens State Bank at 511 W. Main or by calling 785-627-5345.

Another site in Morland that has been equated to a museum is known as the “Old Kobler Drug Store.” Albert and Anna Kobler operated a pharmacy, variety store, and soda fountain in the building from 1929 to 1957. The first floor has been renovated and decorated with historical items from the area. “Prairie Junction,” as it is now called, is a full-service restaurant open 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Those that enjoy a bit of nostalgia and reminiscing will find cattle brands of local ranchers, cast iron implement seats, numerous advertising products from local businesses, and many other antique items. Visitors enjoy trying to identify some of these objects. There are some items displayed that have stumped even the most knowledgeable old timers.

by Faye Minium