



Solomon Valley Museum Musings

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Rooks County

Frank Walker Museum & Rooks County Historical Society

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Rooks County Historical Museum (2018)

by Susan D. McFarland, Museum Coordinator

If you haven't been to the Rooks County Historical Museum on the south end of Stockton on U.S. Highway 183, you should come and visit relatively soon. We are in the middle of constructing a 1940s-era display and currently have a temporary display "Celebrating Education in Rooks County." Among other items to see is a stylized map showing where every country school that existed in the county was located and an "interactive" part, taking visitors through the experience of writing on slates with chalk to writing their names with a dip pen to typing on a manual typewriter to typing on an electric typewriter. We purposefully did not set up a computer; this interactive part was set up to appeal to the younger visitor and the odds are pretty good these younger visitors have a smart phone. It would be redundant. The "interactive part" for older adults is the opportunity to look through some of the oldest textbooks in our collection. My personal favorite is a Kansas history book, published in 1900. Think about how much history is not in that particular text.

The key to survival and, indeed, thriving in today's environment is "engagement of the visitor." That phrase means different things to different people. Just within this one exhibit, the country schools' map draws our older visitors like bees to honey while the interactive display in which visitors get the experience appeals to the younger crowd. While the younger set may not care for the old textbooks, I've noticed that the older adults, when it is pointed out they are welcome to take a "hands-on" look at the books, take advantage of the opportunity. It is a challenge to design an exhibit taking into account the different levels of "engagement" each age group expects and/or finds attractive, allowing for a whole lot of individuality within that group. What aging "baby-boomers" find appealing, the younger people aren't the least bit interested, and vice versa.

Museums aren't meant just for entertainment; they are also to educate. Rooks County has a fantastic story to tell and, even as an "outsider," I find the stories of individuals and the communities within the county compelling. The stories just need to be told. It's easy to forget not everyone has the grasp of Rooks County history even at my level of understanding (which is nothing compared with Rooks County natives). The stories just need to be told in ways that are accessible to everyone.

My favorite Rooks County history stories are the ones about the early settlers. In the last four years, I've read about the founders of the various communities and each one is unique and each one is inspiring. What is amazing is those early pioneers didn't hesitate to move if need be. There are at least two villages in Rooks County, Palco in the west and Codell in the east, that picked up and moved at least once just to be near the coming railroad. Codell started out life as "Motor" and, upon losing a dispute with the Union Pacific Railroad, picked up and moved to where the UP decided their depot was going to be. Palco went Codell one extra move: the good citizens of Cresson heard the railroad was coming, figured they were a mile or two away from where the tracks were going to be and moved accordingly, becoming "New

Cresson” in the process. When the railroad did come through at the original spot, the townfolk of “New Cresson” picked up once again and moved back to the original site, naming their new/old town after two engineers on the Union Pacific. It is stories like that this museum needs to illustrate in a fashion and style attractive to any and all people who walk through the doors.

We try to tell the story of the development of Rooks County through our displays. People aren’t always aware of the fact that each and every item and document in the museum was donated by either Rooks County residents or former residents. It’s not just in our displays, however, that our story is told. We have an almost complete census record of every year of development of Rooks County from 1903 to 2011. There is an entire filing cabinet filled with stories of the families who reside or have resided here. These are available to the general public for perusal. In addition, there are shelves of published family histories in book form that make for interesting reading, especially for budding family historians and/or genealogists.

The trick is using all of this material in telling the story. It is my hope in the future we will have more “interactive” displays with elements of the displays appealing to almost all age groups. You could spend more than just a couple of hours in this place, either just looking at all the displays in detail and/or wondering around in either our Genealogy Room or our Resource Room. All are welcome because almost all the material is available (the one exception are the census records from 1980 to 2011; those have information on current-living individuals and to protect the privacy of those individuals, we do limit access to those records).

All are welcome to visit, even when we’re not open. Our days of operation are Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. If you are in town on an “off” day, there are a couple of phone numbers printed right on the front door to call if you want a private showing.

Museum Musings, Rooks County Museum (2006)

by Jean Lindsey

This year (2006) we celebrated the 30th year of our Historical Society and the 20th year of having a museum in Stockton. It all started in 1973 when the PRIDE Committee met to discuss organizing a countywide historical society. In August 1974, State Historical Society officer Robert Richmond, grandson of a Stockton doctor, met as a consultant with 13 interested individuals and recommended the name Rooks County Historical Society. A motion to that effect was made and carried.

In 1975, the society was incorporated with meetings held in the courthouse with limited privileges as all but one show case of memorabilia was stored in homes of society members. In 1976 they took the responsibility of the Old Log Hotel replica which was built for the Kansas Centennial, where they housed some of their artifacts and was open to the public on special occasions. In 1977, they started gathering information prior to the year 1911 to publish in a book of Rooks County history which grew to two volumes titled *Lest We Forget* and published in 1980 (reprinted in 1998 and still available).

That same year a county tax levy was granted and plans were made for a Rooks County Museum which was completed in 1984. In 1991, they asked the county for funds to build an addition for storage, but the idea was tabled due to a shortage of funds. In February 1993, Frank Walker, a local individual who had benefited from the Stockton oil boom, offered funds to build a new museum if a site could be located along Hwy 183. Work on the new building started in 1994 and the first meeting in the new museum was in February 1995. After the fire that consumed the Big Barn north of Woodston, the Classic Big Barn Association donated a draft-horse sculpture by Pete Felton and funds for landscaping to the museum. After this was completed the dedication of the building and a “Thank You, Frank” celebration was held in June, 1998.

Some of the displays included in the museum today include: archeology items, one-room school, doctor's office, beauty parlor, barber shop, kitchen, living room, general store with post office, livery stable, the Woodston telephone central, the Plainville jail, room full of dolls, car tag collection, and a music room which includes instruments from the traveling Fuller Concert Co. Recent temporary displays have been: wedding and formal wear; World War II items, quilts, aprons, advertising, school memorabilia, vintage motorcycles, Modern Woodmen drill team photos and video, Olive Reed/Schafer memorabilia, World War I items, Rooks County Fair, and Webster Dam 50th Anniversary.

We have: presented a Kansas Day program enjoyed by around 400 school children with 20 portrayals of Kansas characters; received a small grant to purchase archival supplies so items can be freed from the cardboard boxes; received funds to purchase computer software to list all items collected for research purposes; found Birger Sandzen and Grant Wood paintings and a set of Civil War diaries when digging through storage boxes; had "picture parties" to identify photos, sorted by family, towns, and categories, which have been filed; and currently are sorting items to de-accession to fulfill the responsibility as written in our mission statement "to collect, preserve, and interpret the artifacts, writings and history reflecting the development and cultural diversity of Rooks County."

The museum is open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 10:00 to 4:00 and by appointment. Volunteer work nights are Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. Regular meetings are held the 3rd Sunday of each month (except August and December) at 2:00 p.m. at the museum meeting room, with special quarterly programs, the public always welcome. A newsletter is published quarterly. Dues are \$5 for individual, \$10 for family (send to Rooks County Historical Society, 913 S. Cedar, Stockton KS 67669); add \$3 to receive the newsletter.