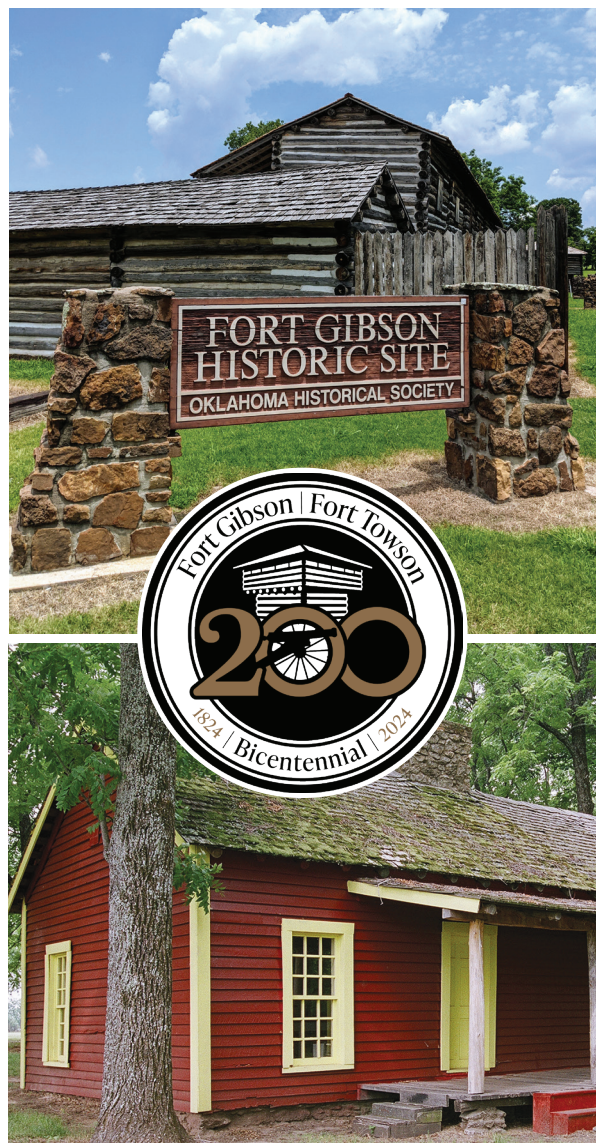


## 2024 Bicentennial Year for Fort Gibson and Fort Towson, established 1824



The Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) will commemorate the bicentennial of Fort Gibson and Fort Towson this year. Both forts were established in 1824 in Indian Territory—and 2024 marks 200 years since their inception. Fort Gibson was the first US military post in what would become the state of Oklahoma (and it was further west than any other post in the United States at that time). It was located near the confluence of the Verdigris, Neosho (Grand), and Arkansas Rivers.

Fort Gibson Historic Site will host a 200th Commemoration on Saturday, April 20. The town of Fort Gibson will mark the anniversary with a community parade that will end at the historic site. After the parade, OHS staff will begin bicentennial programming and honor the occasion with speeches from OHS Executive Director Trait Thompson, state legislators, and other dignitaries. Visitors can partake of cake and refreshments in the mess hall and tour the grounds, which consist of 80 acres and several historic structures and outbuildings.

In addition to the commemorative activities, education stations will be located around the historic site, with living historians conducting demonstrations about 19th-century foodways, weaponry, and civilian and soldier life. Many reenac-

tors will be camping at the fort all weekend, adding to the atmosphere of the day. Visitors can also sign up for Neosho River walking tours to view a replica 19th-century keelboat docked at the riverside, where supplies and people were ferried along water highways through transcontinental trade and later with the establishment of the fort and subsequent communities.

Fort Gibson Historic Site's 200th commemorative event will begin several months of regular programming with a living history demonstration to be held each weekend through the end of May. In addition, summer programs and events are also planned until the living history season begins again in September.

Throughout the year, visitors can see the permanent exhibits depicting the lives and history of people at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory. Exhibit themes include women employed by the military, enslaved people brought along the Trail of Tears, the officers at the post, Cherokee citizens who settled into communities around the post, civilians who traded with soldiers, and the local Nations in the region. Annual demonstrations include weapons care, drills, fiber arts, domestic skills, crafts and trades, games, cooking, river travel, watercraft care, and more!

### Early March living history events planned at Fort Towson

On Thursday, March 7, the Fort Towson Historic Site will host the annual Living History Education Day. It is a free event where living historians will demonstrate historical skills and educate guests while wearing period clothing, teaching guests what life was like at Fort Towson more than 180 years ago.

On Friday, March 8, and Saturday, March 9, the outpost's 1840s encampment will bring the fort back to life with reenactors wearing historical clothing while organizing period games, demonstrating the uses of historical tools, and camping in period tents on the grounds. From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., the public will experience tool demonstrations, see laundresses at work, and observe domestic skills, blacksmithing, drills, and activities specific to the fort's military history. Visitors can also learn about the history behind the sutler's store—a source of

goods and merchandise for soldiers and surrounding towns until the fort's closure in 1854. Fort Towson will commemorate its bicentennial on May 18. For more information about these events call 580-873-2634 or email [fttowson@history.ok.gov](mailto:fttowson@history.ok.gov).



Reenactors riding in a horse-drawn farm wagon through last year's encampment at Fort Towson.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

### Oklahoma History Symposium “Perspectives in History”

**SATURDAY, MAY 4**

Presented by the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Oklahoma History Symposium is held each spring at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City. This one-day symposium offers scholars, historians, authors, and museum professionals a forum to share their work with history enthusiasts. This event is free and open to the public.

For more information visit [okhistory.org/about/symposium](http://okhistory.org/about/symposium) or email [symposium@history.ok.gov](mailto:symposium@history.ok.gov).



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*Mistletoe Leaves* (USPS 018-315) is published bimonthly by the Oklahoma Historical Society, 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-7917. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, OK (ISSN 1932-0108)

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Mistletoe Leaves*, 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-7917.

By authorization of the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) Board of Directors, 4,000 copies are prepared at a cost of \$1,276.10 bimonthly. The publication is financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. Contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Oklahoma Historical Society or the United States Department of the Interior. Mention of trade names does not constitute endorsement or recommendation by either organization. *Mistletoe Leaves* is published for the members and friends of the OHS in partial fulfillment of its mission to collect, preserve, and share the history and culture of the state of Oklahoma and its people. Students and teachers are invited to share studies and programs and to duplicate content as desired. Editors are welcome to reprint materials with credit. All Oklahoma Historical Society facilities are for the education and enjoyment of all. State and federal regulations prohibit unlawful discrimination in state and federally-assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, and/or handicap. Anyone denied benefits should contact the grievance manager of the Oklahoma Historical Society, 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-7917, telephone 405-837-7631 and/or the director, Office of Equal Opportunity, United States Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By Trait Thompson

As Executive Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, one of my favorite parts of the job is to visit the OHS's many museums and historic sites across Oklahoma. My annual travel log might add up to over 16,000 miles and more yearly.

One of the most frequent comments I get from people who follow my activities on social media is, "You're always going somewhere. I can't keep up with all the places you've been." Sometimes, they express their desire to travel and see new places and lament that they don't do it often enough. Interestingly, people think travel must cost thousands of dollars and involve spending hours in airports or on the road. There are certainly people who live a lifestyle like that, but that's not how all trips take shape. Don't get me wrong, I've had the good fortune to go on epic adventures in foreign countries, but that's the exception and not the norm. I am convinced that some of the best travel experiences can happen in your own backyard.

One of my favorite things to tell people is, "You'll be amazed at the world you can discover if you're willing to go an hour and a half outside your front door." For me, travel is about curiosity. It encourages new experiences like gaining a fresh perspective, meeting people, learning about the history of a community, trying a new menu item, and feeling the sense of place that can only be found in one spot. When you think about it, you realize you don't have to go thousands of miles to do this. You only have to travel to the next town on the map.

Or maybe you don't have to go that far. Have you ever been a tourist in your hometown? I guarantee there are shops you've never visited and restaurants where you live that you've never tried. A couple of years ago, when I was in my hometown in Texas, I decided to visit a museum that I'd driven by a thousand times. Until then, there was always someplace else to be, and I was always in a hurry, so I never went in. Until one day, I took the time. It was a rich experience that I had underestimated because the site seemed so familiar.

Why am I writing about this today? The simple reason is that spring has arrived, with longer days and warmer temperatures. At our locations across the state, furrows are being made, seeds are being planted, exhibits are being installed, talks are being planned, and programming of all sorts could be the next adventure you and your family embark upon.

This is the year that Fort Gibson and Fort Towson will commemorate their bicentennial. The OHC's Farm-to-Table Festival is right around the corner. At the Pawnee Bill Ranch, a new team of draft horses has joined the fold, training for their role in the Wild West Show in early June, and soon it will be time to experience "Spring on the Farm" at Hunter's Home.

The world waits an hour and a half outside your front door for you to discover it. Anthony Bourdain once wrote, "It seems that the more places I see and experience, the bigger I realize the world to be."

Isn't it time you saw and experienced your history and learned more about your origins? Make plans to get out there and discover something new. If your chosen experience involves one of our OHS museums or historic sites, be sure to reach out and tell us about it. We love it when people visit our locations for the first time.

## Bob Wills Day at the Capitol

The Oklahoma Arts Council and the Oklahoma Historical Society will host Bob Wills Day at the Oklahoma State Capitol on Monday, March 4. The annual event in the Capitol's second-floor rotunda celebrates the Oklahoma music icon, commemorating the life and legacy of the "King of Western Swing," who helped popularize the music genre during the 1930s and 40s. Free and open to the public, the event will feature live performances by Bob Wills' Texas Playboys under the direction of Jason Roberts, Kyle Dillingham & Horseshoe Road, Jay Steagall & The Part-Timers, and Oklahoma Swing.





## State Historic Preservation Office receives recognition

The National Register of Historic Places *Best Practices Review* publication recently recognized our State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Issue 6, January 2024. The National Park Service in Washington, DC, publishes the *Review*. The national publication publishes examples of the best practices for identifying, evaluating, and protecting America's historic and archeological resources.

SHPO was recognized as one of three in the US for their efforts to nominate the Abe Lincoln Trading Company in Clearview to the NRHP. The nomination was chosen for the publication because it conveyed the "significance of the community, its foundation, persistence, and continuation." The Abe Lincoln Trading Company was listed in 2023 under "Criterion A" for its local significance in Black heritage, commerce from 1903–1973, and Community Planning and Development. The store formerly operated as a dry goods and grocery store; a pharmacy and drugstore; and a bar and juke joint. It is the oldest building in the town of Clearview.

The submission was notable because it presented the comprehensive scholarship and research that connects the Abe Lincoln Trading building to the complex history of the community it served. The nomination, written by Matthew Pearce, eloquently describes how the building represents a thriving Black town that is evidence of "A surge of racial fulfillment and self-realization." It also included descriptions of its history within the Muscogee (Creek) Nation territory and that the businesses served an "intersection of people from differing ethnic heritages." The submission was made possible by a grant funded by the Underrepresented Community Grant program, through the Historic Preservation Fund, and administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. To learn more about SHPO programs and activities, go to [okhistory.org/shpo](http://okhistory.org/shpo).

## Matthew Pearce named State Historian



Matthew Pearce, Ph.D., has been named the next State Historian for the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS). He will provide expertise and scholarly perspectives to ensure an accurate interpretation of Oklahoma

history in programs, exhibits, and the media. He will also work to engage the statewide community in programs that help spread the OHS's mission of collecting, preserving, and sharing the history and culture of Oklahoma and its people.

Pearce grew up in Colorado. He initially wanted to be a high school history teacher and basketball coach. Instead of going straight into teaching after graduating from Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado, Pearce decided to try out graduate school in Oklahoma. He received his master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma. Pearce went on to teach history classes at the University of Oklahoma from 2014–2016 and again in 2018. Pearce became a full-time public historian in 2018 after being hired at Preservation and Design Studio, an Oklahoma City architecture firm that specialized

in rehabilitating historic properties.

Pearce joined the Oklahoma Historical Society in 2021 as the National Register of Historic Places coordinator for the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office. He was responsible for evaluating, reviewing, and preparing National Register nominations and often consulted with the public on historic preservation and Oklahoma history.

"Dr. Pearce brings a wealth of knowledge to this relatively new position, and I know he will do an incredible job of connecting the work of the OHS to that of historians throughout the state," said Trait Thompson, executive director of the OHS. "I have been very impressed with his passion for the subject matter and his ability to help others understand the complexity and nuance of Oklahoma history. Dr. Pearce will be a great asset to all the patrons we serve across the state."

In addition to being a lead authority on the history of Oklahoma and related matters, Pearce will also manage *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* and the historical marker program and will help review, evaluate, and select items to be published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. Pearce's first published article in graduate school appeared in a 2010 issue of *The Chronicles*.

## Chantry Banks to oversee museums and historic sites



Chantry Banks joined the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) administration, becoming the director of museums and historic sites in November 2023. He most recently served as Executive Director of Preservation

Oklahoma, a statewide nonprofit dedicated to preserving the places where Oklahoma's history lives.

A cordial host and natural leader, Banks has been at the forefront of inventing engaging programming for the Henry and Anna Overholser Mansion for many years, welcoming the public with trendy workshops. He created popular events at the mansion, including "Mysteries of the Mansion," "Scary Tales," and "History and Hops," to name a few.

As the director of the historic home, Banks found innovative ways to keep the historic Heritage Hills neighborhood en-

gaged in history by hosting archaeological workshops, evening soirees, concerts on the lawn, and urban campouts.

Under his competent leadership, he will manage the personnel, development, exhibits, repairs, and restorations of nearly two dozen OHS museums and historic sites across the state. Banks is enthusiastic about reviving the fiber arts program at Hunter's Home in Park Hill, among many other projects. He looks forward to inviting the public to the bicentennial commemoration events at Fort Gibson and Fort Towson this spring.

A native of Hammon, Banks has always been passionate about the history of Oklahoma and its people. He grew up on the site of the historic Cheyenne and Arapaho Cattle Company, western Oklahoma's million-acre cattle ranch. Banks has degrees in theatre from Southwestern Oklahoma State University and the University of Central Florida. "I am thrilled to join the Museums and Historic Sites team at OHS. I spent much of my life visiting our state's sites and can't believe I am part of it," said Banks, "I look forward to what we are going to accomplish over the next few years."

## OHS announces 2024 legislative agenda

The Oklahoma Historical Society's 2024 legislative agenda has been announced. It includes a request for increased funding to cover raises for some of its lowest-paid staff and increased operational costs. The OHS is also asking lawmakers to remove the cap on the agency's apportionments from the sales and use tax collections.

The agency requested \$1.25 million to help bring the salaries of 90 OHS staff members within 15% of the regional median. Approximately 75% of the 90 employees make less than \$45,000 a year before benefits and fall 15% or more below the regional median. The funding also includes targeted increases for other staff members who earn more than \$45,000 annually before benefits, but fall 25% or more below the regional median. This request was also included in the OHS' 2023 legislative agenda, but lawmakers did not appropriate any additional funding to cover the raises during the 2023 session.

"Our OHS employees are dedicated public servants who routinely go above and beyond the call of duty to provide a rich experience for our patrons across the state," said Trait Thompson, executive director of the OHS. "The current pay level of most of our staff does not reflect the value they provide, and it's well past time this is rectified."

The OHS requested nearly \$1 million to cover increased operational expenses and the impacts of inflation. This money would provide funding for rising IT costs, higher construction and maintenance costs, larger-than-expected property insurance premiums, higher employer-paid taxes, and mandatory benefit allowance increases for all full-time employees at OHS.

There is also a request to remove the cap

on the agency's apportionments from sales and use tax collection. The OHS partnered with the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department in this effort.

The OHS is currently capped at around \$1.6 million. Without the cap, the FY23 collections for the OHS would have been \$2.24 million. The additional money will help further address ongoing deferred maintenance needs. OHS museums and historic sites have approximately \$94 million in deferred maintenance needs. The effects of aging infrastructure can be seen in the increased number and cost of emergencies in the past few years.

Bills to remove the cap are authored by State Representative Mark Lawson (R-Sapulpa), State Senator Brenda Stanley (R-Midwest City), and State Senator George Burns (R-Pollard). A bill passed by lawmakers in 2022 authorized \$46 million in Legacy Capital Financing funds to address about half of the deferred maintenance needs.

Duke R. Ligon, president of the OHS Board of Directors, noted, "We have a responsibility to properly care for our historic properties. In recent months, OHS has seen failing roofs, numerous plumbing problems, expensive boiler and chiller repairs, worn out HVAC systems, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Providing a proper work environment for our staff and giving our guests a first-class experience starts with maintaining our physical assets."

The OHS also worked with State Representative Ty Burns (R-Pawnee) and State Senator Chuck Hall (R-Perry) to file HB3802 and SB1368, respectively. These bills would allow the OHS to purchase light-duty trucks directly for use at museums and historic sites across Oklahoma.



## Annual Chuck Wagon Gathering at CTM

Visit the Chisholm Trail Museum on Saturday, March 23, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a day filled with cowboy fun! Drop in and see a variety of working chuck wagons from across the region as they prepare some of their favorite dishes. Activities will include live music by Kyle Dillingham and Horseshoe Road, cooking demonstrations with sample food, gunfights, Wild West Show performers, Medicine Man shows, and more.

Make sure to visit [thechisholm.org](http://thechisholm.org) for parking information, schedules, and more!

The daytime activities are free! Don't hesitate to contact the museum at 405-375-5176 for more information. The Chisholm Trail Museum is located at 605 Zellers Ave. in Kingfisher.

## Will Rogers Memorial Museum spring break fun

Spend afternoons during spring break at the Will Rogers Memorial Museum. Events are planned every day from March 18 to 22, between 1 and 3 p.m. to keep kids learning and entertained during their school break. Each activity is based on some aspect of Will Rogers' extraordinary life, ranging from his time as a cowboy to his love of aviation.

All children under 17 are admitted free during spring break thanks to a donation by Win and Kay Ingersoll. The only activity requiring registration is Friday's Mid-Afternoon Frolic Talent Show.

On Monday, March 18, activities include blacksmithing demonstrations, traditional dyeing, weave spinners, lacemakers, quilters, and a rare behind-the-scenes tour of the museum's vault. On Tuesday, March 19, 19th-century activities include candle dipping, trick roping, corn grinding, butter churning, and games. Wednesday, March 20, will focus on aviation, complete with an Air Evac helicopter visit. Thursday, March 21, is all about movies, with visits from Stormtroopers, superheroes, and film professionals. The fun wraps up on Friday with the Mid-Afternoon Frolic Talent Show. Visit [willrogers.com/springbreak](http://willrogers.com/springbreak) to register.

## New team of draft horses for PBR

The Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum has two new additions: a young team of Belgian draft horses. Dexter and Dallas were raised and trained by Haste Draft Horses and Mules in Kentucky, where owner Steven Haste specializes in heavy horses. On January 18, Dexter and Dallas were delivered to Pawnee Bill's historic 500-acre working ranch by Haste.

The draft horses, bred for their strength, are a welcome addition to the ranch thanks to the support of donors who generously gave to the cause. A large donation given by Janis Blanton made purchasing the team possible early this year. She said, "I was in the right place at the right time to be able to make a difference for the ranch for years to come." Blanton's donation will impact the experiences of countless visitors.

Every donation makes it possible for the ranch staff to have the team pull the signature stagecoach and Conestoga wagon. The team will be performing at this year's Wild West show to be held on Saturday, June 8. If you would like to donate to this cause or meet Dexter and Dallas in person, please visit the ranch. Call 918-762-2513 for more information.



# OHS Calendar of Events

## March

- 1–31 #ExploreOHS Travel Contest, OHS museums and historic sites, statewide
- 1 *Trust and Betrayal in Osage Country* exhibit closes, Oklahoma History Center Museum, Oklahoma City
- 1 *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* discussion and book signing presented by Cynthia Culver Prescott, Pioneer Woman Statue and Museum, Ponca City
- 2 *Encountering John Brown* exhibit closes, Honey Springs Battlefield, Checotah
- 2 History Alive! on the Cherokee Strip, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 2 Oklahoma Women's History Conference, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 2 Poetry Writing and Zine Making workshop with Alannah Banae, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 4 Bob Wills Day at the Capitol, Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City
- 6 Lunch and Learn: "Creativity in the Preservation World: How to Reach a Younger Generation" with Jessica Scott, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City
- 7 Living History Education Day, Fort Towson Historic Site, Fort Towson
- 8 Museum After Dark: Lantern Tours, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 8–9 1840s Encampment, Fort Towson Historic Site, Fort Towson
- 9 Quilting Workshop, Sod House Museum, Aline
- 14 Black-Owned Business Panel, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 16 2024 Oklahoma Farm-to-Table Festival, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 16 Artillery Demonstrations, Honey Springs Battlefield, Checotah
- 16 History Alive! on the Cherokee Strip, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 18–22 Spring Break Activities, Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore
- 20 Oklahoma Historical Society Executive Committee meeting, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 21 Oklahoma Historical Society Awards Banquet, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 21 From the Stacks: Readings from the Carnegie Library, Oklahoma Territorial Museum and Carnegie Library, Guthrie
- 23 Chuck Wagon Gathering, Chisholm Trail Museum and Horizon Hill, Kingfisher
- 23 Hominy Making Workshop, Hunter's Home, Park Hill
- 29 Vietnam War-Era Veterans Commemoration Ceremony, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City

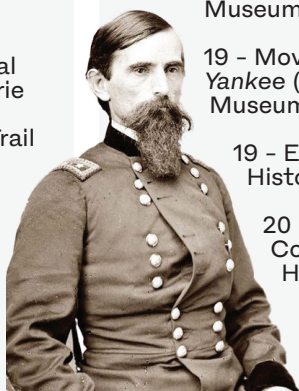


- 29 Movie Night featuring *Stan and Ollie* (2018), Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore
- 30 "I Thought This Place Doomed" presentation by Dr. Michelle Martin, Honey Springs Battlefield, Checotah
- 30 *Into the Mirror* exhibit opens, Oklahoma History Center Museum, Oklahoma City
- 30 Pawnee Bill Annual Easter Egg Hunt, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, Pawnee
- 30 Easter Egg Hunt, Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore
- 31 Sunrise Service, Pawnee Bill Ranch and Museum, Pawnee



## April

- 6 Spring Bake Day, Fort Gibson Historic Site, Fort Gibson
- 6 History Alive! on the Cherokee Strip, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 8 1840s Solar Eclipse Watch Party, Fort Towson Historic Site, Fort Towson
- 9 Everyday Oklahoma: "Rocks, Ruts and Springs: Remnants of Early Trails through Oklahoma" webinar, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City
- 10 Pop Night, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 11 Lunch and Learn: "'Aunt' Minerva and 'Uncle' Wallis: How to Research African American Ancestors" with R. B. Ward webinar, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City
- 12 "Liquid History: Beer Garden," Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 13 Quilting Workshop, Sod House Museum, Aline
- 13 Carved in Stone: Gravestone Symbols and Their Meanings workshop, Chisholm Trail Museum and Horizon Hill, Kingfisher
- 15 Kilgen Theatre Organ performance featuring Rosemary Bailey, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 17 Oklahoma Historical Society Executive Committee meeting, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 18 Historic Preservation Review Committee meeting, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 18 From the Stacks: Readings from the Carnegie Library, Oklahoma Territorial Museum and Carnegie Library, Guthrie
- 19 - Movie Night featuring *A Connecticut Yankee* (1931), Will Rogers Memorial Museum, Claremore
- 19 - Education Day, Fort Gibson Historic Site, Fort Gibson
- 20 - 200th Anniversary Commemoration, Fort Gibson Historic Site, Fort Gibson



Ben Hur author Lew Wallace

- 20 History Alive! on the Cherokee Strip, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 20 Pinhole Camera Workshop with Jim Meeks, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City
- 21 *Discover Greatness: An Illustrated History of the Negro Leagues* exhibit closes, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, Enid
- 27 Poultry of Antiquity: Using Historical Techniques to Raise Poultry Breeds, Hunter's Home, Park Hill



Dave Fowler,  
OHS  
Regional  
Director

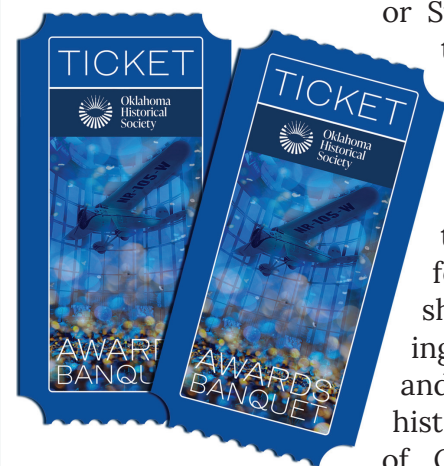
Please visit [okhistory.org/events](http://okhistory.org/events) for additional information about OHS programming.

## Celebrating the contributions of Oklahoma historians

The Oklahoma Historical Society will celebrate the contributions of Oklahoma historians at the 2024 Oklahoma Historical Society Awards Banquet to be held at the Oklahoma History Center. The Awards Banquet will take place at 6 p.m. on Thursday, March 21.

Each year, the Awards Banquet brings together historians, educators, and civic leaders to honor individuals in our state who have made a significant impact on our understanding of Oklahoma history.

This year, the Oklahoma Historical Society is honored to induct Hannibal B. Johnson and Debra Echo-Hawk to the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame for their lifelong contributions to Oklahoma history. The event will also honor State Representative Bob Ed Culver, Tahlequah, and State Senator Kevin Matthews, Tulsa, for their leadership in collecting, preserving, and sharing the history of the state of Oklahoma. Additional awards will



be presented to outstanding educators, students, writers, and projects around the state.

For a complete list of award winners and to purchase tickets to the event, please visit [okhistory.org/awardsbanquet](http://okhistory.org/awardsbanquet). Ticket sales will close on March 11. For event information or sponsorship opportunities, please contact Brittney Berling, OHS development officer at [brittney.berling@history.ok.gov](mailto:brittney.berling@history.ok.gov).



## 1840s Eclipse watch party

The Fort Towson Historic Site will host a solar eclipse watch party with a period encampment on Monday, April 8, from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. The event costs \$10 per person at the gate, with no charge for military or Oklahoma Historical Society members.

NASA estimates the Fort Towson Historic Site and areas of southeastern Oklahoma will see the partial solar eclipse between 12:28 p.m. and 3:06 p.m., with 3 minutes and 47 seconds

of totality between 1:45 and 1:50 p.m. on April 8.

Guests can spend the day exploring the scenic site and learning about Fort Towson's role in westward expansion. The site will come to life with 1840s-era tents, living historians in uniform and historic demonstrations. To accommodate guests traveling to the area to experience the rare total solar eclipse, the site will be open every day between Tuesday, April 2, and Saturday, April 13—including Sunday, April 7. For more information, call 580-873-2634 or email [fttowson@history.ok.gov](mailto:fttowson@history.ok.gov).

## Keeping the thread

The loss of Martha Ray this past November came as a shock to many in the OHS community. She served as the manager of historic homes and sites service center for many years. From directing the Pawnee Bill Ranch Wild West show to volunteering as Mrs. Claus, Martha was gracious with her time and talents even in retirement.

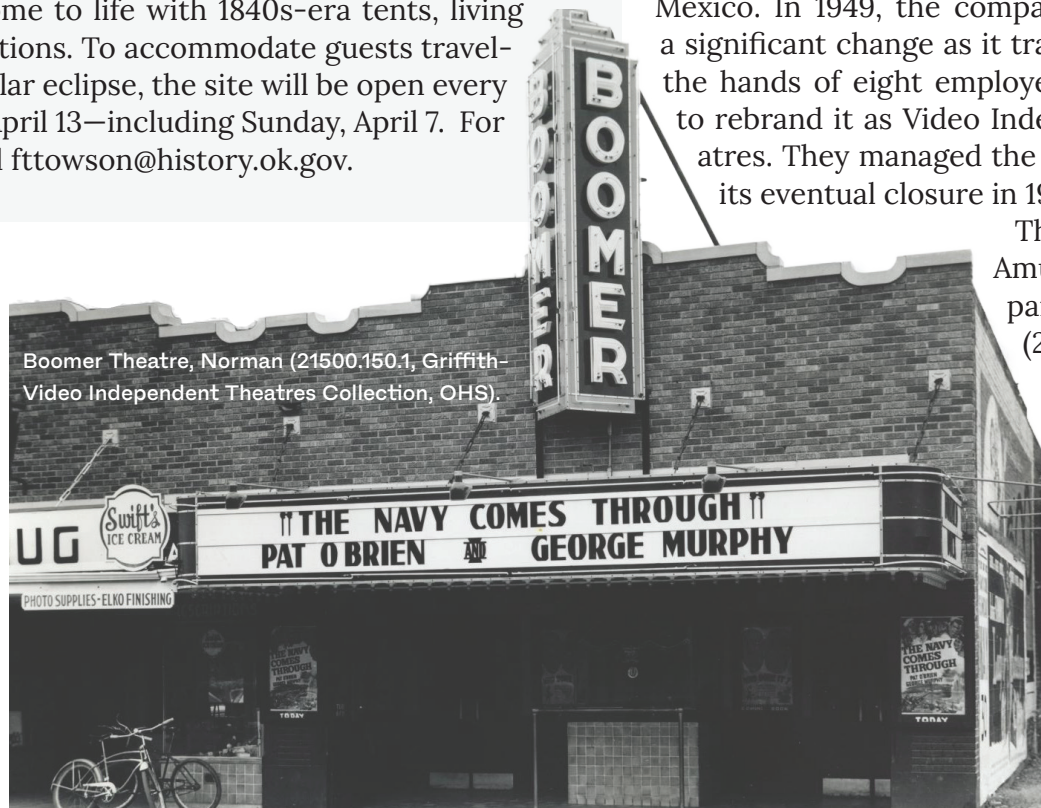
Martha was an award-winning quilter. She led the monthly quilting workshop at the Sod House Museum for fourteen years, which always met on the second Saturday of each month. The group became known by many as the "Sod House Quilters." Many quilt stores in the area knew about the long-standing group.

Perhaps the thing that will be missed the most by that group is how Ray touched the hearts of her students. She found ways to create fun and laughter while making quilting enjoyable. Ray encouraged the quilters by telling them, "Remember, this is your quilt, and you can make any changes you want!"



While she will be truly missed, the Sod House Quilters have decided to keep gathering every month. "We think Martha would want it to continue," said Renee Trindle, Sod House Museum director. "In this way, we can keep her memory alive. Martha would want to see us still learning and enjoying quilting."

The Quilting Workshop meets on the second Saturday of each month from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Sod House Museum for \$5 per person. Call 580-463-2441 to learn more.



## "Aunt" Minerva and "Uncle" Wallace webinar

On Thursday, April 11, from noon to 1:15 p.m., Shelby Ward will present a "Lunch and Learn" webinar about the composers of spirituals, "Uncle" Wallace and "Aunt" Minerva Willis. They were enslaved in the old Choctaw Nation area of Oklahoma during the mid-19th century.

For almost one hundred years, scholars assumed that Wallace Willis and Minerva Willis were husband and wife. Research conducted in 2019–21 by Shelby Ward, a historian, attorney, genealogist, and descendant of the Willis family, uncovered documentary evidence revealing that Wallace and Minerva Willis were father and daughter, not husband and wife. This fact was made evident in Wallace Willis's obituary, written by Rev. Alexander Reid and published in the December 1884 issue of *The Fisk Herald*, and it is corroborated in legal documents. Visit [okhistory.org/SHPO](http://okhistory.org/SHPO) to register for this webinar and see a full selection of SHPO programming.

## Griffith Amusement Company Collection

By Jan Richardson

In 1915, the Griffith Brothers, Louis, Henry, and Rupert founded the Griffith Amusement Company in San Marcos, Texas, just twelve years before the debut of the first sound feature film. Their cinema venture prospered, leading them to relocate it to Oklahoma City at 11 N. Lee by 1936, where they oversaw a network of 125 movie theaters across Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. In 1949, the company underwent a significant change as it transitioned into the hands of eight employees who opted to rebrand it as Video Independent Theatres. They managed the company until its eventual closure in 1970.

The Griffith Amusement Company Collection (2007.126, 13 boxes, three oversized) is a unique repository of historical materials. It meticulously documents the history of the Griffith Brothers' Company

from 1916 to 1951 and offers insights into the subsequent era when it evolved into Video Independent Theatres (1951-1970). This collection not only delves into the corporate aspects of these enterprises, including business transactions but also illuminates the personal lives and narratives of the individuals who played pivotal roles within them.

Among the documents are scrapbooks and newspaper articles that provide an intimate glimpse into the individuals who shaped these early pioneers of modern cinema. The Griffith Amusement Company Collection is available for viewing at the OHS's John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick Research Center Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Appointments are encouraged. The Research Center is located inside the Oklahoma History Center. For more information, call 405-522-5225 or email [research@history.ok.gov](mailto:research@history.ok.gov).

Jan H. Richardson is the processing archivist in the OHS Research Division's Manuscript Archives.



## 2024 Farm-to-Table Festival

The Oklahoma History Center will hold the 2024 Oklahoma Farm-to-Table Festival on Saturday, March 16, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The free, family-friendly event will encourage the exploration of historic and modern agriculture. There will be hands-on activities and demonstrations for visitors of all ages.

The festival will offer many educational opportunities and experiences, including chuckwagon cooking and nutrition demonstrations, livestock, a petting zoo, various crafts, and story time. In addition, several “Made-in-Oklahoma” vendors will attend to illustrate how their products are created and distributed. Musical entertainment will be on the main stage. The event will take place indoors and outdoors.

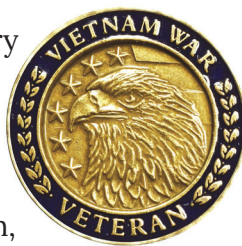
The Oklahoma Farm-to-Table Festival is an education-focused event partially sponsored by the Inasmuch Foundation. Call 405-522-0765 for more information.



On Saturday, April 20, from 1 to 4 p.m., photographer and artist Jim Meeks will lead a pinhole camera workshop. Visit [store.okhistory.org](http://store.okhistory.org) to purchase tickets for the upcoming workshop.

## Vietnam War-Era Veterans Pinning Ceremony

The Oklahoma History Center, in association with Villages OKC, the local offices of Humana, Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight, and the Force 50 Foundation, will host a pinning ceremony honoring all the servicemen and servicewomen, active or reservists who served anywhere in the world during the Vietnam War-era.



The featured speakers are retired Col. Peter Plank and retired Col. Chuck DeBellevue. Plank is a former paratrooper who helped found the Liberty Jump Team. DeBellevue was a flying ace of the Vietnam War after shooting down six enemy aircraft.

The event will be held in the Devon Great Hall of the Oklahoma History Center on Friday, March 29, from 10 a.m. to noon, with doors opening at 9:30 a.m. This event is free and open to the public.

## Rosemary Bailey Kilgen Theatre Organ performance

On Monday, April 15, from 7 to 8:30 p.m., a Kilgen Theatre Organ performance at the Oklahoma History Center will feature organist Rosemary Bailey.

Bailey started playing music at age five when she learned to play classical piano music. She added jazz and traditional popular styles into her repertoire. By age nine, Bailey was already performing around the United States. A year later, Hammond Organ hired her as a concert artist. Bailey’s career playing jazz piano and organ has continued to thrive.

She has performed with artists including Victor Borge, Pete Nero, and the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Bailey was a featured soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She has performed in more than a dozen countries.

Tickets are available online at [store.okhistory.org](http://store.okhistory.org). They are \$10 for Oklahoma Historical Society members and \$20 for the general public.

## Oklahoma National History Day contest

This year, the Oklahoma National History Day (OkNHD) junior division contest will be held at the Oklahoma History Center (OHC) on Wednesday, May 1, and the senior division contest will be held Thursday, May 2. Each year, thousands of Oklahoma students participate in the OkNHD program. OkNHD is a part of National History Day and a highly regarded academic program for students grades 6–12. OkNHD is evaluated by business leaders, educators, and nonprofit professionals. Please consider serving as a judge for the state contest! For information about becoming a judge, visit [ok.nhd.org](http://ok.nhd.org). For more information, contact Sarah Dumas, OHCM Deputy Director, at [sarah.dumas@history.ok.gov](mailto:sarah.dumas@history.ok.gov) or 405-522-0785.

## Inaugural Impressions: Oklahoma’s First Ladies Go to the Ball



This summer, the Oklahoma History Center Museum (OHCM) will be dressed to the nines as it opens an exhibit in the Noble Gallery highlighting the gowns Oklahoma’s first ladies wore to their inaugural balls.

The exhibit *Inaugural Impressions: Oklahoma’s First Ladies Go to the Ball* will open on Friday, June 7.

An array of fashions worn by first ladies will be displayed, along with biographies that explore their contributions to the people of Oklahoma. *Inaugural Impressions* will be open in the Noble Gallery through May 30, 2025.

The inaugural dress of Kim Henry (2007.015, Kim Henry Collection, OHS).

## Oklahoma Women’s History Conference



MODERATED BY SARAH EPPLER JANDA & PATRICIA LOUGHLIN

A free Oklahoma Women’s History Conference will be held on Saturday, March 2, from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Oklahoma History Center. The moderators will be the editors of *This Land is Herland: Gendered Activism in Oklahoma from the 1870s to the 2010s* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2021).

The first panel discussion will take place from 1 to 2:15 p.m. The topic is early Oklahoma women’s activism, featuring speakers Heather Clemmer, Sunu Kodumthara, and Farina King. There will be a break and book signing from 2:15 to 2:45

p.m., followed by another panel discussion from 2:45 to 4 p.m. about modern women’s activism with speakers Rachel Watson, Chelsea Ball, and Lindsey Churchill. The event is free and open to the public. No registration is required. The conference is being organized by staff at the Pioneer Woman Museum and Statue. For more information, please call 580-765-6108.

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PERIODICALS

# Mistletoe Leaves

Vol. 55, No. 2

March/April 2024

## Guitar donation made to OKPOP

The Oklahoma Museum of Popular Culture (OKPOP) has acquired an important artifact from instrumental guitar rock luminaries The Ventures. A 1965 candy-apple red Mosrite Ventures II Model guitar played by legendary Ventures guitarist Nokie Edwards (1935 - 2018) has found a new home at the OKPOP Museum. The Ventures' hits included classic tracks like "Walk Don't Run" and the theme for the hit television show *Hawaii Five-O*. The group sold nearly 100 million albums, and they continue to be the top-selling instrumental rock band of all time and are inductees in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Grammy Hall of Fame.

Nokie Edwards, born in Lahoma, joined co-founders Don Wilson and Bob Bogle of Wagoner to form The Ventures in the late 1950s. Another Okie, John Durrill from Durant, joined the band in 1968. Together, they created their own brand of instrumental rock music that resonated with young guitar players, inspiring a unique sound.

Nokie Edwards introduced the band to Durant native Semie Moseley. He was a master luthier who co-founded Mosrite Guitars, which gained popularity with musicians for its high-quality engineering. The guitar's thin neck made it easier to play. In 1963, Moseley custom-designed "the Mosrite Ventures Model" for The Ventures, and they were produced from 1963 to 1968.

The acquisition of the guitar was made possible by the OKPOP Foundation, OKPOP's nonprofit fundraising group whose mission is to support the efforts of the OKPOP Museum to collect, preserve, and share Oklahoma's pop culture history. This artifact will find a home on the third floor of the OKPOP Museum, which will help to tell the remarkable story of how these talented Oklahomans impacted rock and roll.

The 1965 Ventures II Mosrite guitar model has an innovative German-carved body with a thin, narrow neck, single coil pickups, and Mosrite's proprietary vibrato tailpiece.



Go to [okpop.org/about](http://okpop.org/about) to read more about the plans for all three exhibit floors and gallery spaces, which intermix modern technology and interactive play places designed to create participatory guest experiences.



## Travel Contest

The Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS) is excited to host its annual #ExploreOHS Travel Contest, which will be held Friday, March 1, through Sunday, March 31. During these dates, participants will travel to OHS museums and historic sites across the state—competing to see who can visit the most sites!

This contest is open to the public, and all entries must be submitted on social media using the #ExploreOHS hashtag. The person (or family/group traveling together) who visits the largest number of OHS sites during the contest period will win a prize pack of OHS swag and your choice of:

- Option 1 – Behind-the-scenes tour (for up to 6 people) of the Oklahoma History Center Museum or the Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center
- Option 2 – Ride on a parade float through downtown Fort Gibson with staff from Fort Gibson Historic Site on April 20, 2024

For complete contest rules and eligibility requirements, please visit [okhistory.org/exploreohs](http://okhistory.org/exploreohs).

