

From The Archives

Bartlesville Area History Museum

Treasure Hunting Encouraged!

History doesn't have to stay in the exhibits! Before you leave the museum, be sure to stop by our gift shop, where you'll find unique Oklahoma-themed treasures, local history books, fun souvenirs, and gifts that are a little more memorable than another coffee mug from a big-box store.

Whether you're searching for the perfect gift, a keepsake from your visit, or simply an excuse to treat yourself, our shelves are stocked with items that celebrate the stories, people, and places that make our region special.

After all, every good history adventure deserves a souvenir!



The Bartlesville Area History Museum Presents:

"From Revolution to Red Dirt: How America's Founding Shapes Oklahoma"

THE BARTLESVILLE AREA HISTORY MUSEUM
PRESENTS

FROM REVOLUTION TO RED DIRT
How America's Founding Shaped Oklahoma

Created in conjunction with America's 250th anniversary, the exhibit explores the connections between the nation's founding and the history of Oklahoma. Through artifacts, photographs, maps, and interpretive displays, visitors will discover how the ideals and events of the American Revolution influenced westward expansion, Native American history, territorial development, statehood, and life in Oklahoma today.

JUL 13 | OCT 2

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The exhibit highlights the ways national history became local history, demonstrating that the effects of the Revolution extended far beyond the original thirteen colonies and continued to shape communities across the continent for generations.

COLLECTIONS CORNER

Casey Sullivan, Collections Manager

In preparation for the 250th anniversary, there was a lot of research that was done for the newest exhibit. One of the questions we wanted to answer was, “what was Oklahoma like in 1776?” Of course, in order to understand that answer, one needs to know how and why that answer develops, which ultimately led to one of the most exciting bits of information. In 2022, recent archaeology digs near Arkansas City, KS, a mere 70 miles from Bartlesville, showed promise in uncovering a large-scale primitive city, encountered by Spanish conquistadors as early as the mid-1500s. I wanted to write about it here because I am not sure if it has enough publicity for its relative importance. Through retranslated diaries and journals of expeditions, we are learning of this city that spanned for miles and lasted for several generations. Understanding this complex reshapes our thoughts on how the Great Plains looked in Pre- and Post-Columbian times.

The city is named Etzanoa today for its previous inhabitants (believed to be ancestors of the Wichita tribe) and was believed to have existed from roughly 1450 A.D., contemporaneous with the thriving Aztec culture, to roughly 1700. This site was visited by the Spanish duo of Antonio de Umana and Francisco Leyba in 1594 and by Juan de Onate in 1601. Oñate estimated more than 1,200 houses for the settlement indicating a population of at least 12,000, if the houses were as large as those of contemporary Wichita tribes. The city was located on both sides of the Walnut River, near the confluence of the Arkansas River. Interest in the site has blossomed since 2013 when University of California, Berkely retranslated journals from the Onate expeditions to help pinpoint locations. This was further aided by Wichita State archaeologists who underwent excavations along Walnut Creek, unearthing a battle site believed to be where the Rayados (Spanish given term of a Wichita band) and the Onate expedition fought.

Lead anthropologist on this project, Donald Blakesly states, “Archaeologists have known for decades there were plenty of farmers on the Great Plains as well as nomads... They just didn’t get the press.”

This community, though, is thought to have been one of the largest Native American communities in the United States, one that archaeologists had trouble locating and researchers believed existed only in exaggerated accounts. Blakeslee believes, this discovery could rewrite not only Kansas history but also American history. The Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site in western Illinois is currently considered the biggest Native American urban complex ever built. Etzanoa, Blakeslee contends, is as big if not bigger.

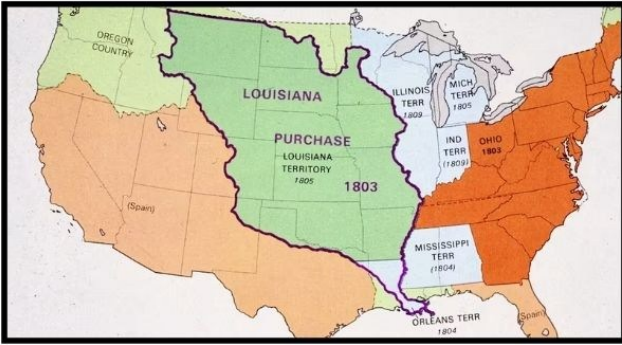
Other sites just south of Etzanoa, into Oklahoma, including the Bryson Paddock and Deer Creek sites, give supplemental credence to major Wichita presence in the area. What is astonishing to me is that the theory that the Great Plains have long been a large empty swath of land waiting to be tamed, has come closer to being diminished. While researchers have known there to be many tribes and villages in the area, nothing provided sufficient evidence to support the figures now believed to have inhabited the border of Kansas and Oklahoma. Until now. And it is even more special to think that perhaps the largest Native American “city” ever to exist is almost in Bartlesville’s backyard, roughly speaking. As we celebrate the country’s 250 years of existence it is significant to remember the land itself is much older and still has stories and secrets to reveal.

For a hands-on experience to learn more about the site, the Etzanoa Immersion Center just opened in June of this year, located in Arkansas City, KS and open on weekends according to the home site, Etzanoa.net.

Out of the Uprising

By Shayla Cummins, Museum Coordinator

While the Revolutionary War was fought far to the east, its outcome directly shaped the future Oklahoma by initiating the westward expansion, forcing the relocation of Native American tribes, and establishing the legal framework for the United States' acquisition of the land.



Following the war, the new United States sought to expand. The 1803 acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from France, which included all of modern-day Oklahoma, was made possible by the nation's newfound independence and growth.

The newly formed U.S. government used the post-war era to negotiate treaties that often resulted in broken promises and forced relocation of Native tribes. This culminated in the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Consequently, the area that is now Oklahoma became the intended destination for the five tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole) being removed from the Southeast, redefining the region as "Indian Territory".



The ideals and figures of the war heavily influenced how the state was organized when it opened to white settlement through the Oklahoma Land Runs. In the 1870s-1890s, the U.S. army had to manage the influx of white settlers, known as "Boomers" and "Sooners," who sought to claim land in the Indian Territory.

Ultimately, Oklahoma's unique modern identity as a cultural crossroads for over 30 sovereign tribal nations exists entirely because of the legal, territorial, and racial precedents established by the resolution of the Revolutionary War.

CELEBRATING HISTORY, ONE

May 11th



We were honored to host “1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Traveling Exhibit,” on loan from the Tulsa History Museum. This exhibit offered visitors a powerful exploration of one of the most pivotal and tragic events in Oklahoma’s history, shedding light on the destruction of the Greenwood District—once known as “Black Wall Street”—and its lasting impact.

May 26th

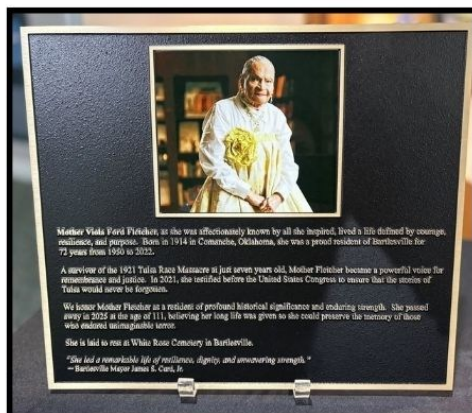
What a night of remembrance! We had a packed house for the unveiling of the permanent plaque honoring long term Bartlesville resident, Mother Viola Ford Fletcher, the oldest known survivor of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre!

The unveiling ceremony included remarks from Bartlesville Mayor Jim Curd, City Manager Mike Bailey, and special guest speaker Dr. Raymond Doswell, Executive Director of Greenwood Rising Black Wall Street History Center.



May 27th

The permanent plaque honoring long term Bartlesville resident, Viola Fletcher, the oldest known survivor of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, is now hanging in its permanent location. The installation of this permanent plaque reflects the museum’s ongoing commitment to honoring history, amplifying important voices, and ensuring that the lessons of the past remain present in the community.



EXCITING EVENT AT A TIME!

Living History Camp

Our second Living History Youth event was a huge hit! Campers tested out their acting skills, by dressing up in costumes and portraying some of Bartlesville's history heroes. Guests were able to meet Jacob Bartles, William Johnstone, George Keeler, and other famous, or not so famous Bartians from the past!



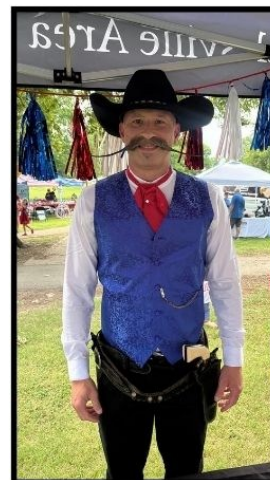
July 4th

For the first time, the Bartlesville Area History Museum (BAHM) hosted a booth at the Kiwanis Club Freedom Fest in celebration of America's 250th birthday. Visitors enjoyed patriotic giveaways including flags, glow sticks, and mustaches, along with cornhole, sack races, and a fun Independence Day-themed cannonball story. It was a wonderful opportunity to connect with the community while celebrating our nation's history.



Freedom Fest

As part of America's 250th birthday celebration, BAHM brought back the popular Jacob Bartles Beard and Mustache Contest. While storms prevented voting at the Freedom Fest bandshell, the contest continued online with voting moved to Facebook, allowing the community to join in from home.



Brian Schexnayder
"Best Styled Mustache:
The Prairie Curl," winner



Braxton Gothard, "Best
Beard: Frontier Whiskers,"
winner!

In the Know With Nowlin

Denise Nowlin, Education Coordinator

Summer 2026 has started off with a bang! We have already hosted two fun camps for kids, with one more coming soon. Our first camp in May was a Living History Camp where the kids got to reenact people who lived in Bartlesville in the past. We got to meet Jacob Bartles, George Keeler, William Johnstone, Irma Houchin, Frances Yates, and many other not so famous pioneers of Bartlesville.

During our second camp, we learned a bit about the Declaration of Independence and what it was like to be a kid in the 1700s. We got to see how people would have cooked their food, and learned some of the games that kids used to play back in those days. It is surprising that some of the games that kids played back then, are still enjoyed by kids today.

It has been a pleasure watching the younger generation learn about the history of both our community and our country. We hope that their time at the museum will help them to become the next generation of history heroes. We hope that if kids enjoy learning about history now when they are young, they will go on throughout their lives with an interest in studying more about the past. It helps them to understand that life did not start when they were born, but that people have lived, and events have taken place for thousands of years. Whether you are a history buff like me, or a family genealogist, take time to share your passion with the kids in your life. They may thank you in the future.

One of the things that we are making here at the museum is a time capsule for the future. Kids from our camps brought toys and memorabilia from their lives that will go into the time capsule. My husband even brought a few semi quincentennial coins to add to the box. If you have something that you would like to include in our time capsule, please bring it by the museum and we will add it to the collected items.

We hope that you will take the time to bring the kids in your life to the museum this summer. We have lots of interactive items in our museum that help enhance the adventure of visiting the museum. Come meet Frank Griggs and learn about how the Delaware, Cherokee, and Osage Indian tribes all have made this part of Oklahoma their home. You will also learn a little bit about the oil boom that took place in this region, as well as how Bartlesville was the home of some of America's early aviation pioneers. There are so many things to discover here at the Bartlesville Area History Museum, and we hope that you will come visit us soon.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Opening of the BAHM new exhibit from July 10th, through October 2nd

"From Revolution to Red Dirt: How America's Founding Shapes Oklahoma"

Discover the connections between the Nations founding and Oklahoma's history.

July 7-9-America at 250 Camp Group two- Kids ages 6 to 10 are invited to take a journey back in time to see what it would have been like to be a kid in 1776.

July 16th – Lunch and Learn, Richard Boles 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m.

To give the educational presentation

"African American and Native American Contributions to the American Revolution".

August 20th - Lunch and Learn, Jake Tiger 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m.

To give educational presentation

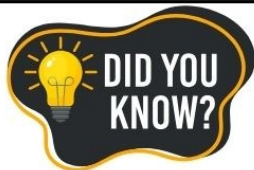
detailing the forcible removal of the Seminoles to Indian Territory.

September 17th - Lunch and Learn, Tanya McCoy 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m..

Author Tanya McCoy, discussion and book signing for her book " "Haunted Route 66, Oklahoma"

For more updates on special events please follow us on social media platforms or visit our website at

<https://www.bartlesvillehistory.com/events/>



Despite being widely celebrated, July 4th didn't become a federal holiday until 1870 and It wasn't declared a paid holiday for federal employees until 1941.

Day in the Registrar Life

By Kasey Werts, BAHM Registrar



What started as a high school civics class project in 1944 soon grew to become known as the Candy Strippers Program, created for teenagers to volunteer at their local hospital. The program got its name from the iconic red and white striped uniforms. The museum recently received a candy striper uniform that Amy Befort wore in the late-80s during her time volunteering at Jane Phillips in the geriatric unit. In the 1990s the uniforms were phased out and replaced with modern uniforms like polos and scrubs.

WHAT'S IN YOUR ATTIC?

Want to donate a family heirloom, antique find, photos or other materials?

Please contact Kasey Werts at (918) 338-4268 or kawerts@cityofbartlesville.org



MUSEUM STAFF

DIRECTOR - KILEY ROBERSON
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR- CINDY YELL
COLLECTIONS MANAGER - CASEY SULLIVAN
MUSEUM COORDINATOR - SHAYLA CUMMINS
REGISTRAR - KASEY WERTS
EDUCATION COORDINATOR - DENISE NOWLIN

VISITATION STATS

VISITORS FOR 2026:701

STATES: AK, AL, AR, CA, CO, FL, GA, HI,IA,
ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, MD, MN, MO, NM, NC,
NY, PA, OK, OR, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA

COUNTRIES: CANADA, PUERTO RICO,
GUATEMALA, VENEZUELA

Bartlesville Area History Museum

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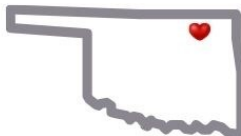
Past Perfect online database:

bartlesvillehistory.pastperfectonline.com

MUSEUM HOURS

Monday - Friday: 8:00-4:00

Closed Saturday, Sunday, and Holidays



PROTECT. COLLECT. PRESERVE. SHARE.

SCAN HERE!



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on events, exhibits and
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exclusives!

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AASLH

American Association
for State and Local History