

How Curious – Moore-Lindsay House

What does Moore-Lindsay Historical House Museum tell us about life in the young city of Norman, Oklahoma, over a century ago?

MUSIC: How Curious theme

FX of door opening

Rachel Hopkin Script

Hello. Welcome to KGOU's How Curious. I'm Rachel Hopkin.

Amy Pence

Hello

Rachel-in-situ

I'm Rachel

Amy Pence

I'm Amy

Rachel Hopkin Script

The place where I've just arrived is the Moore Lindsay Historic House Museum in central Norman, Oklahoma. The museum manager Amy Pence has kindly welcomed me in.

Rachel-in-situ

I'm excited. I've been meaning to come to this place ever since I moved here, and I kept not coming and not coming, and I thought "well, I'll make a program about it and that way I'll definitely come."

Amy Pence

I love that.

Rachel Hopkin Script

So this episode is the result and in it, I explore what this House tells us about life in the young city of Norman, well over a century ago.

Amy Pence

So we are standing in the entry hall here and these photographs are photos of the families who lived here in the house.

Rachel Hopkin Script

You can see copies of these and other items discussed on the episode webpage – just search for KGOU and How Curious.

Amy Pence

We usually start out with this photo here because it gives me a good opportunity to explain the name of the Museum.

Rachel Hopkin Script

The photo is sepia toned and shows two couples plus a young girl in Victorian dress. One couple is standing beside a horse and buggy and the other couple plus the child are sitting in the buggy. The corner of a house is also visible.

Amy Pence

We are named after the two couples you can see in the photo. The ones standing up are William and Agnes Moore and they had this house built for them here in 1899. But they only lived in this house for about eight years. And then they moved to Oklahoma City, but they sold the house to Mrs. Moore's niece and you can see her and her husband there, Daisy and Harry Lindsay and also their daughter Agnes. And people often ask if this is this house, it is not, we believe it is probably the house that one of the two couples lived in in Missouri. They did come together to Oklahoma from Missouri.

Rachel Hopkin Script

From the spacious entrance hall, we moved into a large, light, and airy room through a pocket doorway.

Amy Pence

All right, so this room is, we call it the formal parlor. It was the room that was meant for the guests. So it was meant to be the most impressive room in the house. Most of the furniture that is in the House is donated but it is representative of what you would see in a home of this socioeconomic level in this area.

Rachel-in-situ

And what kind of socioeconomic level would that be?

Amy Pence

That's a great question. So for Norman at the time, this was incredibly wealthy. They spent \$5,000 to build this house at a time when the average home in Norman cost about \$500 to build.

Rachel-in-situ

Wow.

Amy Pence

Yeah, so it was definitely a grand home, one of the first really large homes in Norman, but they were only upper middle class. They weren't crazy wealthy. You didn't have that super, super high level of wealth here in Norman.

Rachel-in-situ

And are we talking about the Moores or the Lindsay's or both of them?

Amy Pence

Both of them, actually, yes.

Rachel-in-situ

And where did they get their money from?

Amy Pence

I do not know, actually. I know that when Mr. Moore listed his occupation, he just called himself a capitalist. And from the things I have learned about how he made money here in Norman, that's a pretty accurate description. He bought and sold property. He made loans to people. He would sometimes buy a plot of farmland and pay someone to plant it, and then once the grain was ready, he would sell it and then sell the farmland. So just different opportunities for someone

who already has money to make it more money without having to do a lot of work. So capitalist seems like a good description for that.

Rachel-in-situ

And do we know why they came here from Missouri?

Amy Pence

I don't know for sure. But my guess is that it was related to the land run. Now, they did not come in the land run. We believe they came right around 1895.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Of course, the land run in this area was in 1889.

Amy Pence

For the people who claimed land in the land run, you did not get the deed for that land for five years. So right around 1894, 1895... People are finally getting the deed to that land and able to then sell it. So we think that Mr. Moore having his fingers in that real estate pie probably came seeing an opportunity to make a little more money.

Rachel Hopkin Script

The land run basically turned Norman into an almost-instant city, but the first glimmerings of it date back a couple of decades more. Here's local historian Andy Rieger.

Andy Rieger

Government surveyors came through what became the state of Oklahoma in 1870-something. And in that survey crew was a young Kentucky man named Abner Norman and he was made head of the survey crew. And they camped at a spring, down by where Lindsay Street and Classen and where the U-haul, there's a spring back there. There was an elm tree there, and perhaps in jest, his workers or his laborers burned or carved "Norman's camp" on one of the limbs of the tree. Years later, when the railroad came through there, they were looking for what to name it, and they remembered seeing on the tree, it said "Norman's camp," so it became Norman. But that's really how Norman developed, it developed as a railroad town.

Rachel Hopkin Script

That named stop on the railroad was crucial when it came to the land run which took place only a couple of years after the tracks were completed.

Andy Rieger

The federal government wanted people to move west and they had the land from the Louisiana purchases and different areas, ways of obtaining land and they wanted settlers and the way to get settlers was to offer them a carrot and the carrot was a quarter section of land, 160 acres. If you would farm it. Build a home on it and stay for a number of years, you could have that free and clear with no mortgage.

Rachel Hopkin Script

According to Sue Schrems, whose written several books about Norman history, it wasn't just prospective farmers who were lured by that carrot.

Sue Schrems

Before the land run, the Norman Town Company out of Purcell, a bunch of businessmen got together and knew exactly where they were going to stake their land and they were businessmen. And you'd have some guy might do the drug store, the hardware store. And so they came in and they didn't stake land outside to grow anything on. They staked their businesses. And so you have two different kinds of people then moving into the area. Those that move in and establish a farm, they needed those businesses.

Rachel Hopkin Script

From 1889 onwards, Norman grew quickly. Here's Andy Rieger again

Andy Rieger

Several things happened that caused people to want to come here. The major thing being the university was located here. So, think about this. We had a town in 1889. A couple years later, the university came here. A few years after that, we had a major state mental hospital here. So we had quite a bit going on.

Rachel-in-situ

And the university, how did that come to be here? I've never really thought about how does a university get started before, but yeah, how could that happen?

Andy Rieger

So the territorial legislature looked at different towns and decided what they would get. For example, McAlester, Oklahoma got the prison. Guthrie originally had the capital then it was moved to Oklahoma City. Stillwater got an A&M college, a mechanical and industrial. Edmond got a teacher's college in the University of Central Oklahoma. It was a teacher college. And the University of Oklahoma was awarded to Norman. It was a great prize. You would take that over a prison any day.

Rachel Hopkin Script

And that prestigious win was made much of in a pamphlet put out by some boosters in the young city encouraging others to move here. Although it was written after the Moores and Lindsays' relocation to Norman, it gives a great sense of the excitement generated by this growing community.

Text read by Robby Korth

Norman - a city of the first class, of business, social and moral standing - has the principle educational institution of the great Southwest.

Rachel Hopkin Script

The booklet highlights plenty of other prized local resources

Text read by Robby Korth

It is rated as one of the principle corn, cotton, cattle, and grain markets in the new state; has a good fire department, excellent waterworks system, one of the finest electric light plants in the state, a telephone system that is equal to the best, three national banks, and one of the largest and most finely equipped opera houses in the state.

Rachel Hopkin Script

There are several pages of this, including one containing the following passage.

Text read by Robby Korth

Climatic conditions could not be more favorable than here. Being south of the blizzard, east of the drought, and directly in the temperate zone, men are happy and women good looking and cheerful.

Rachel Hopkin Script

“Climatic conditions could not be more favorable than here.” Gosh, I’m not sure that’s a sentiment often expressed about central Oklahoma. In any case, although the Moores moved on fairly rapidly to Oklahoma City, the Lindsays settled in for the long haul. Harry Lindsay seems to have been involved in a local lumbar company. Daisy Lindsay didn’t officially work outside of the home although she was a keen gardener and apparently sold her roses downtown. Her love of flowers is still evident in the Moore Lindsay House.

Amy Pence

These two chairs are my favorite.

Rachel Hopkin Script

We’re back in the formal parlour of the Moore-Lindsay House where Amy Pence is showing me two dining chairs.

Amy Pence

They are actually family pieces. The seats of the chairs were hand embroidered with different flower designs by Mrs. Lindsey. She originally did five chairs, but the other three are still in the possession of family members, so we just have these two. But I just, I love them, and I can't imagine the kind of lifestyle to have time to embroider your furniture.

Rachel-in-situ

Oh that's funny, I'm in the middle of embroidering some of my furniture.

Amy Pence

Omigoodness, that’s amazing.

Rachel Hopkin Script

This is actually true, but I’m not doing whole seats like Mrs. Lindsay, just some decorative patches to cover up the worst parts of my cat-claw-ravaged sofa.

Rachel-in-situ

And the house itself, does it belong to a particular style?

Amy Pence

It is a Queen Anne style, or some people I have heard insist that it is actually a Princess Anne, because it is not, you know, they weren't that really upper class, they were that upper middle class, so, it's not as grand or as decorative as a full queen. So some of the features that are pretty typical are an asymmetrical façade with the turret on one side and the wraparound porch; different gables and peaks to the roof; and lots of colors on the facade. This one, I believe, has seven colors.

Rachel-in-situ

It's primarily yellow, isn't it? It is. And is that what it would have been back then?

Amy Pence

It was, it's always been some shade of yellow, except I think during the 50s, when it didn't belong to the family, but the city brought it back to yellow when they purchased it.

Rachel-in-situ

I love that bright red window there. That's gorgeous

Amy Pence

Isn't it amazing?

Rachel Hopkin Script

I've just noticed a beautiful round ruby red window.

Amy Pence

Unfortunately, it's not the original glass anymore, but it has always been round and it's always been red, and I've been told that that is so that when the ladies are in this room with their guests, the light coming through gives them that rosy glow to their cheeks, because wearing visible makeup would have been a little scandalous.

Rachel-in-situ

So tell me, I'm standing now in front of the window. Do I suddenly look rosy-cheeked?

Amy Pence

Oh, you do look a little bit more, yes. Now, I think by modern standards, it's not necessarily the most flattering light in the world. It's a little red, but...

Rachel-in-situ

It is quite red. Yeah, I feel a bit devilish, actually.

Amy Pence

But I love the idea. Well, we can't wear makeup, so we have to find some way to make ourselves look a little better while we're here with our guests.

Rachel Hopkin Script

The Moore-Lindsay House is in an area of Norman that's within easy walking distance of what would have been the primary business section of the city around East Main St – remember, back then they didn't have cars. It earned the nickname of Silk Stocking row because of its well-dressed and well heeled residents which included bankers and businessmen and apparently a territorial governor at one point.

Harry Lindsay died in the 1930s but Daisy Lindsay lived until 1951, making her the longest resident of the House. Although she passed over 70 years ago, she's still remembered today, including by one of her great grandchildren, Bill Wantland, who is himself an extremely spry 90-something. He spoke of her to me with much fondness.

Bill Wantland

She was just a wonderful, wonderful woman and I spent a lot of time at the house. She was a fantastic cook so sometimes we'd go for the weekend and she's fix breakfast on Sunday mornings for us, but she would always give us milk and cookies to tide us over till the breakfast

was ready. And then after church, she'd have the Sunday dinner, and she'd almost always have two meats, four vegetables, sometimes more than one dessert.

Rachel-in-situ

And did she do the cooking herself ...

Bill Wantland

Oh yes.

Rachel-in-situ

...or did she have a maid?

Bill Wantland

Well, she had a housekeeper but she did the cooking. She was a fantastic cook

Rachel-in-situ

I asked Bill if she'd ever talked about perhaps historically significant times in the young city.

Bill Wantland

I remember the one thing that my great-grandmother talked about is... What happened when statehood came. Because Oklahoma territory, you had the sale of alcoholic beverages; Indian territory was totally dry. But when the state became a state, the two territories were merged, and alcohol became illegal in Oklahoma until 1959. But on the last night of the territory, all the saloons in Norman opened up for free. They had to get rid of the liquor. And then at midnight, they had to pour it out. And people were there with pots and pans and everything to get what was going to be poured.

Rachel-in-situ

That's hysterical, I didn't know that. Did you get the impression that your great grandmother liked living in Norman?

Bill Wantland

Oh yes, she adored it.

Rachel Hopkin Script

Thanks so much to Bill Wantland and all of the contributors to today's episode including reader Robby Korth, plus Mike Tower.

The Moore Lindsay Historical House Museum is of course open to the public. I've put a link to it on this episode's webpage. Search for KGOU and How Curious.

How Curious is a KGOU Public Radio production. The Managing Editor is Logan Layden. David Graey composed our theme music and I'm Rachel Hopkin.

As ever, if you have an idea for a future episode, please drop us a line at curious@kgou.org.

