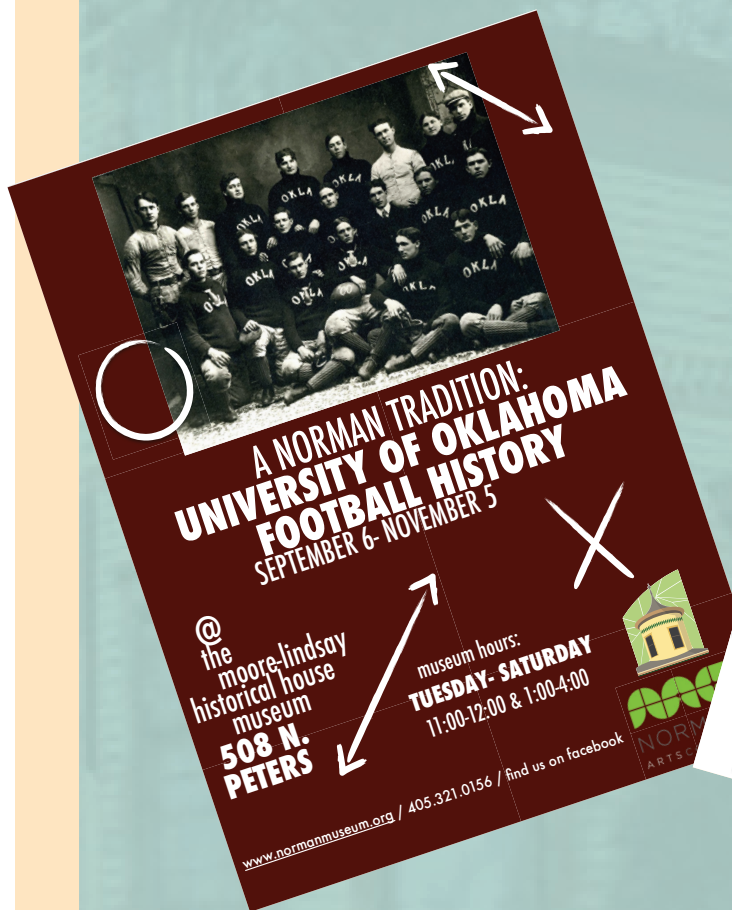




## The Round Tower

Cleveland County Historical Society  
Moore-Lindsay Historical House Museum

Exhibit  
Football Exhibition and Quilt Show  
September 6-November 5.



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## Norman's First Woman Mayor

There is a little rectangular shaped park just south of downtown, where Peters and Alameda streets intersect in the Miller Historic District. The City Parks Department named the park after June Benson, the first woman to serve as Mayor of Norman. The park was established in honor of Benson's work as policy committee chairman of the Community Development Block Grant program from 1972 to 1981. The program administered federal funds to low and moderate-income neighborhoods. Benson's major contribution was her financial oversight; she made sure funds from the program were used for the targeted neighborhoods rather than being funneled into city projects. June Benson started her political career in the early 1950s, when most women chose to stay at home and raise their children in the growing affluence of post-World War II America. June Tompkins Benson was a homemaker and mother, but she also had a penchant in public service.



June Benson Park in the historic Miller District

June Tompkins was born in Granite, Oklahoma on November 6, 1915. In 1933, she enrolled at the University of Oklahoma, where she studied in the Department of Government. After she graduated in 1937, she continued her education and received her master's degree in 1940. Her graduate thesis was entitled, "Election Practices in Oklahoma." In 1940 she married University of Oklahoma Government professor, Oliver Benson. With the United States' entrance into the Second World War in 1941, Oliver Benson enlisted into the Navy as yeoman 3rd class, he soon became a commissioned officer. He trained in the Japanese language at Boulder Colorado. After training, the Navy then ordered him to the Caroline Island. The Bensons moved back to Norman after the war in 1946, where Oliver Benson became head of the Department of Government.



June Benson's interest in taking an active part in city government began with her involvement in the League of Women Voters (LWV). She served as Voter Service Chairman and League president from 1949-1951. Benson was a member of the State Board of LWV until 1953, when she decided to run for Norman City Commissioner. (In the 1950s, Norman City Council was the Norman Board of Commissioners and Norman Councilmen were referred to as Norman Commissioners.) One hundred citizens signed a petition to place Benson's name on the ballot. Benson served as a Norman elected official until 1961. She was the first woman to be elected to the Norman City Commission.

In 1957, June Benson sought the job of Norman's Mayor. Election procedures, as stated in the city charter, allowed that the Mayor of Norman was chosen by a vote of the city commissioners. The commissioners chose mayoral candidates from the pool of fellow commissioners. In 1957, there were seven nominated out of the eight city commissioners. June Benson won on the sixth ballot. At age 41, Benson was the 1st woman mayor of Norman, and she was the first woman to be elected as mayor of any city in Oklahoma.

June Benson presided over some interesting and difficult issues during her tenure as mayor. For example in June 1957, the city commissioners passed ordinance 1051, which limited the power and authority of the Park Board. It seems that the Park Board under ordinance 904, had purchasing power and the power to hire and to fire city employees. It was discovered that ordinance 904 was in violation of the city charter. To remedy this situation, the city passed ordinance 1051 restoring these powers to the city manager. There was such an uproar by the citizens of Norman over ordinance 1051 restricting the board's power that Mayor Benson called a special meeting of the commissioners. The commissioners voted to kill the new ordinance thereby restoring the Park Board's powers.

Another sticky issue that again brought out the citizens to protest was a move by city commissioners to commandeer a newly completed remodel of an 18,000 sq. foot building from the Department of Police; the city commissioners had previously designated the building for police administration. The city's brazen move to occupy the newly remodeled building was in response to the failure of a bond measure to fund new city offices. The citizens of Norman had repeatedly voted down a bond measure. The city commissioners worked around the citizens of Norman by voting to move the city offices, the city clerk, and the municipal agencies into the newly remodeled building, thereby omitting the Department of Police from obtaining the building. Many citizens spoke out against the commissioners, a University of Oklahoma Professor, Laurence D. Posten, told the commission that they were committing political suicide with the decision to take over the new building. The only two commissioners, who voted against the measure to take over the new facility, were Mayor Benson and former Mayor, James Lansing.

Mayor Benson had a somewhat contentious relationship with her fellow commissioners. So much so, that in December 1959 the commissioners voted to ask the Mayor to resign. The commissioners complained that Benson had taken action without their knowledge. They were especially critical after Benson submitted her nominees for the planning committee. The commissioners rejected her submission. She submitted the same people three times, each time her candidates were rejected. This was evidently evidence that she would not work with the commissioners. Even though the commissioners asked Mayor Benson to step down, there was no law or ordinance that could force the mayor to quit. Benson stayed on as Mayor and worked with the commission; the issue of the commissioners asking for her resignation was not brought up again.

June Benson served as an elected official of Norman until 1961. She then served on the state board of the League of Women Voters until 1970. She served on Norman Advisory Board for Environmental Control. In 1979, Governor Nigh appointed Benson to the Oklahoma Pollution Control Coordinating Board. She held this position until her death in 1981.



Little Girl Statue in June Benson Park

## New to the Archives



The Cleveland County Historical Society is always grateful for accept artifact donations from citizens of Norman and Cleveland County. New to our archives is a collection of artifacts donated by Mike Simmons. The artifacts relate to his father, Homer Simmons, who distinguished himself at the University of Oklahoma as a scholar and athlete and as 1st lieutenant in the Navy during WWII.



## New to the Archives



In 1942 Homer Simmons, University of Oklahoma, won the Hal Heiman Trophy for achievement in academics and athletics, and for distinguished service in the N.R.O.T.C. In 1943, Simmons entered the Navy and ultimately climbed to the rank of first lieutenant. He commanded Company A of the 1st Marine Division, 1st Armored Regiment's tanks during the invasions of Tinian and Saipan in the Pacific. After the United States dropping the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan on August 9th, 1945, Simmons was one of the first officers to enter the bombed out city. After serving twenty-two months as a Marine officer, Simmons was released from active duty. This was just in time to try out for the Philadelphia Eagles. He played part of the 1946 season as a pro, but left because of injury. In 1947 he was hired by Seminole High School as a history teacher and football coach. His team won the state championship in 1953 and the Oklahoman named him Coach of the Year.

Homer Simmons was born November 28, 1920 at Bigheart (now Barnsdall) in Osage County. His family moved to Seminole in 1930 where he graduated in 1939. He won a football scholarship and attended Oklahoma University graduating in May 1943. He joined the Marines and left for the Pacific by fall, 1943. In 1946, Simmons was hired as assistant football coach at Seminole high school and he served as head coach in 1952. In 1955 he moved to Amarillo, Texas as assistant coach and in 1958, he was hired as head coach. The Simmons family moved back to Norman in 1959, when Homer accepted a position as Norman High School football coach, his 1961 team won the State Championship. He had a long career with Norman schools as the Director of Purchasing, retiring in 1986.

Homer Simmons was inducted into the Oklahoma Coaches' Association Distinguished Service Award circle alongside legendary OSU coach Henry Iba, Mickey McBride and SEOSU legendary basketball coach, Bloomer Sullivan. Homer Simmons died March 27, 1997 in Norman and is buried at Warren Cemetery.



Homer Simmons

*Schedule of Up-coming events at the Moore-Lindsay  
Historical House Museum*

October 14: Art Walk 6:00-9:00pm

October 31: Trick or Treating at the Museum

November 24-November 25:

Museum Closed for Thanksgiving

November 26: Opening of

“Holiday Traditions of the Victorian Era.”

December 9: Victorian Holiday Open House 6:00-9:00pm



## Meet the Board of Directors of the Cleveland County Historical Society

### Rob Millions---President

Rob is a graduate of Norman High School and the University of Oklahoma. He presently works at Riverwind Casino. He aspires to work in the museum industry. He currently volunteers at the Moore-Lindsay Historical House Museum.

### Barbara Millions--President and society historian

Barbara has her degree in history from the University of Oklahoma. She is employed by the University in the Department of History as department manager.

### Sue Schrems---Treasurer

Sue graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a Ph.D. in history. She taught history at Rose State College for 20 years.

### Riley Millions---Secretary

Riley is a graduate of Norman High School and University of Science and Arts, Chickasha, Oklahoma. He is a graphic artists and works for the Norman Transcript.

Vernon Maddux graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a master's degree in history. He is presenting teaching at Oklahoma City Community College

### Dan Reinke

### Museum Manager--Stephanie Hixon

For the last two years, Stephanie has been museum manager of the Moore-Lindsay House Museum. In December, she will graduate from the University of Oklahoma with a master's degree in Museum studies.

### Parks and Recreation advisor--James Briggs

## Membership Renewal

Help maintain the Moore-Lindsay Historical House Museum with your membership in the Cleveland and County Historical Society. The Historical Society, established in 1967, oversees the operation of the City owned Moore-Lindsay Historical House Museum established in 1973 at 508 N. Peters. Your financial support through membership in the Society goes toward operation of the museum and helps to fund historical displays and educational exhibits.

There are three Levels of Membership, all members receive the quarterly newsletter, The Round Tower and access to our photo and paper archives and Sanborn Maps.

1. Standard: \$15.00

Includes online quarterly newsletter

2. Heritage: \$30.00

Includes quarterly online newsletter & copy of *Norman 1889-1949* (Arcadia Press 2012)

3. Premium : \$50.00

Includes online quarterly newsletter, limited edition museum replica Christmas ornament and copy of *Norman 1889-1949* (Arcadia Press 2012)

Mail your membership to Cleveland County Historical Society, 508 N. Peters, Norman Oklahoma 73069 **OR: Visit <http://www.normanmuseum.org/membership.html> and use credit card or paypal.**

We appreciate your financial support.