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Wild land, museum in far western

BY KAREN KRIEN

The Saint Francis Herald

Cheyenne County, the farthest northwest county in Kansas, is full of fun sites, activities and places of interest. High on the list of things to do most of the year is a visit to the Cheyenne County Museum in St. Francis and a drive to The Arikaree Breaks, better known as "The Breaks," north of St. Francis.

The museum is open 2 to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, and 2 to 5 p.m. on Sundays. It sits on the south side of U.S. 36 going through St. Francis. The native rocks on the front mark only a hint of the local history inside.

Built in 1986, it contains a little bit of everything. There are even prehistoric fossils uncovered in the area. They are set in a diorama which shows life as it progressed over the years on the high plains. There are collections and books filled with facts about the county including the Cheyenne County History Book, the book of personal recollections of the 1935 flood which moved through the northwest part of the county, and the Veterans' Book. There is other information about the county, cemeteries and burial facts.

What many find interesting are the "rooms" which portray life as it was at the turn of the century. Besides the rooms in homes, there is the old dentist office, the soda fountain, the newspaper and many others.

The museum also has information concerning the activities of Cheyenne County including many pamphlets with detailed instructions on getting to many of the sites to see in the county.

A trip through history at the museum is free. There is a place for donations but people can spend the whole afternoon and not spend a cent.

Also located on the property is Ye Ole Country Church. Weddings and other functions are held in the church which still has the old pump organ and pews. The Historical Society has been slowly restoring it back to its original beauty. Nearby, there is a picnic area where people can enjoy their lunch.

Arikaree Breaks

The Breaks are amazing.

The county may easily have more variation in the terrain than any other county in the state. The Republican River leisurely flows through the northwest corner. Farther to the east is rough terrain of The Breaks. There are acres of flat fertile wheat ground and pastures throughout the rest of the county.

"The Arikaree Breaks" is becoming more and more known having appeared in a number of magazines and this year, was in the running for the "8 Wonders of Kansas." Located approximately 10 miles north of St. Francis, The Breaks has extremely rough terrain with deep ravines and gullies. After miles of farm and pasture land, it is a surprise to drive around a curve and behold the site of what some call "The Mini Grand Canyon."

The Breaks are 36 miles long and approximately 2- to 3-miles wide. There are well-maintained public roads and places to pull over to view the scenery.

Thresher show

Keeping with the history, Bird City, also in the county, is the home of the Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Show. For three full days, this year on July 30, 31 and Aug. 1, the massive old steam engines will be in action.

People come from all over the United States to see these huge steam engines in action as races are held, wheat is threshed and parades around the grounds are held daily. The Tri-State Antique Auto Club has an outstanding display of vehicles and, for those looking for old tractor/vehicle parts, to hats, to antiques, to books, there is the Swap Meet and Flea Market.

The Thresher show ground takes the people back to the days of long ago when cows were milked, butter was churned, fields were often farmed with horse-drawn machinery and life, while often more difficult, was far-less hectic.

Each day of the show, there are demonstrations and exhibits, lines of antique engines are on display and the sod house, old church and school house are open to the public. There is the old cook wagon, a printing press, blacksmith shop and a quilt show, just to name a few.

In the evenings, special entertainment is held including an old fashioned literary at the country schoolhouse and a barbecue.

There is a small admission to enter the grounds each day or a pass for the entire show can be purchased.

Many people like to bring their families to the show so they can better see how life was like in the days of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers.

First town from the west

St. Francis is the first town in Kansas on U.S. 36 when travelers come from the eastern plains of Colorado. There are three communities in Cheyenne County: St. Francis, Bird City and Wheeler.

Wheeler may be only a dot on the map, having a population of around 25 people but it is known for having the shortest highway in Kansas. Located at the junction of K-27 and U.S. 36, K-217 going north is 1 mile long, ending at the railroad tracks.

Even *Rider*, a motorcycling magazine, recognized U.S. 36 for the "best of small-town America, with friendly folk serving up eggs and homemade sausage in the cafes, and clean and inexpensive motels."

Events depend on volunteers

With only 2,955 people, there are a variety of activities held in the county each year and most are run by volunteers — the people living in the county who are proud of their communities and activities.

Two new activities are planned in the county this year.

On May 5, a Cinco de Mayo celebration will be held from 5 to 8 p.m. in Van Doren Park in Bird City. It will have a carnival-like atmosphere with authentic Mexican food, music and a piñata.

On May 31 in downtown St. Francis, the 75th celebration honoring Sawhill Park will be held in the park on Washington Street. Starting at 2 p.m., it is to be a gala event with games, booths, music and food.