

HUGO DAILY NEWS
Hugo, OK, July 22, 2005

ARTS COUNCIL WELCOMES 'PRESIDENTS' FOR ANNUAL MEETING

By Zach Maxwell, Staff Writer

A parade of president—some real, some acting—drew a large crowd to the annual meeting of the Choctaw County Arts Council on Thursday.

Outgoing council President Miriam Costilow delivered a heartfelt farewell address at the gathering, held at Choctaw County Library. And President Theodore Roosevelt (portrayed by Gary Gray) delivered an address from a fictional 1910 visit to Oklahoma.

Gray, as Roosevelt, depicted an event in Enid, which occurred 95 years ago next week. Keith Tolman, portraying Oklahoma Territorial Gov. Frank Frantz, introduced him. Gray delivered a blustery speech, which outlined Roosevelt's, many exploits, and added plenty of color to put forth the ex-president's boisterous personality.

"There's an entertainment value, but it's primarily history," Gray said after the performance. "You try to make it interesting for people. You are able to tell (a character's) best stories and you're also able to pick out their essence."

Gray has portrayed George Washington, James Garfield, Andrew Johnson, Franklin Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson and Douglas MacArthur over the past six years for a variety of venues. He is now working on a book about his seven study subjects entitled *MR. PRESIDENTS: Voices of Freedom, Equality and Dignity*.

He said the idea for bringing historical figures to life was part of the "Chautauqua Movement," a revived and revised version of 19th century traveling speakers, where professors and historians don costumes and step into the roles of the very figures they teach about.

As Roosevelt, Gray related stories of the president's ranching days in Dakota Territory, conservationist ideas which create Platt National Park in Sulphur (now Chickasaw National Recreation Area), and the Rough Rider days in Cuba. Choctaw light horsemen from southeast Oklahoma were recruited for the Rough Riders, Tolman said.