

Director 12-15-06

Gragert Named Will Rogers Museums Director

Will Rogers Memorial Commission members today named Steven K. Gragert as director of Will Rogers Museums. Interim director since the resignation in October of Michelle Lefebvre-Carter, he is the fifth person to hold the position since the Claremore Museum opened in 1938. In the position, he will be in charge of administration of the museum in Claremore and birthplace ranch at Oologah.

Gragert came to Claremore two and a half years ago as archivist and librarian. At the same time he was finishing work on the final two books in the five-volume "Papers of Will Rogers" series, a collaboration of Rogers State University and the Will Rogers Memorial Commission.

He was named Museums' associate director 18 months ago.

"We were pleased to have many qualified people to apply for the job," said Jim Hartz, Commission chairman. "There were several well-qualified applicants, but none that match in all respects to Steve."

"We thank everyone for their interest."

Hartz said he has been in contact with Kem Rogers (the family member serving on the commission). He could not be here today, but he fully supports Steve and is very pleased with management during the interim."

The first director of the Claremore museum was Paula Love, Will Rogers's great-niece, who helped open the museum 58 years ago. She was followed by Dr. Reba Collins, historian, author and Will Rogers expert; Joe Carter, veteran newsman and author of Will Rogers books; and Lefebvre-Carter.

Gragert's relationship with Will Rogers and the Museums is not new. He served as director of the Will Rogers Research Project at Oklahoma State University 1976-1983. Working with the late Dr. Reba Collins, then executive director of the Claremore museums, and Will Rogers Jr., he edited or co-edited 17 of the 22 volumes in the scholarly series "The Writings of Will Rogers," published by Oklahoma State University Press.

He earned a bachelor of arts degree from Bethany College and master of arts in American history from Wichita State University. He has graduate studies in American history at OSU and taught at OSU and Oklahoma Baptist University.

Gragert and his wife, Helen, live in Claremore.