

9-8-2017

Oklahoma Missile Site: Aiming for the Historic Marker

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Abstract

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Recommended Citation

Brewer, Landry, "Oklahoma Missile Site: Aiming for the Historic Marker" (2017). *Faculty Articles & Research*. 2.
https://dc.swosu.edu/caap_general_articles/2

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Oklahoma Missile Site: Aiming for the Historic Marker

Landry Brewer, Instructor of History, Southwestern Oklahoma State University-Sayre

Goal: Place a historic marker at the site near Willow, Oklahoma, that housed an Atlas F Intercontinental Ballistic Missile 1962-1965.

The Process

STEP 1: Submit application, narrative history, suggested marker text, picture of the proposed marker location and written authorization from the Willow property owner to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Fall 2016 I began researching the 12 Atlas F Intercontinental Ballistic Missile sites that ringed Altus (OK) Air Force Base in the early 1960s and submitted a paper based on that research to the journal of the Oklahoma Historical Society, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* (which is scheduled to be published in the fall 2017 edition). I secured permission from the Willow, OK, missile-site property owner to walk the site in December 2016.

Believing all of the sites deserved public recognition, I petitioned the OHS for a historic marker to be placed at the Willow missile site. All of the required paperwork, including my research paper to satisfy the "narrative history" requirement, was submitted to the Oklahoma Historical Society January 3, 2017. The OHS notified me June 8, 2017 that my application was approved by its Historic Marker Program Committee.

STEP 2: Upon securing approval from Oklahoma Historical Society, raise \$2,340 to pay for historic marker.

Because the Oklahoma Historical Society lacks funds to purchase historic markers, I was responsible for marker payment. I began a fundraising campaign and partnered with the Old Greer County Museum in Mangum, Oklahoma, and the museum agreed to receive all marker donations and, as a 501(c)3, supply donors with letters verifying a tax-deductible donation.

STEP 3: Market the endeavor.

Southwestern Oklahoma State University issued a press release about my historic marker fundraising endeavor and partnership with the Old Greer County Museum. In addition to the story being broadcast by local radio stations and printed by local newspapers, KFOR NewsChannel 4 in Oklahoma City broadcast a segment during a Wednesday evening newscast that was rebroadcast multiple times through the following weekend. Also, the Old Greer County Museum included the release in its emailed newsletter, and one of the newsletter's readers offered to pay the entire cost of the marker. Surplus donation money will be used for any marker delivery, installation and maintenance costs. The marker is scheduled to be delivered to Willow this October. I would like to schedule a dedication ceremony. Suggestions?

Conclusions

• MARKETING WORKS

Making the public, especially community members who have an interest in preserving their local history, aware of the project is vital in gaining public support and financing for historic marker procurement. After the press release about the project was distributed to area media and shared on Facebook, I was invited to speak to several civic organizations in western Oklahoma and the eastern Texas Panhandle.

• PARTNERING WITH A MUSEUM FOR DONATION COLLECTION WORKS

Because of its mission and its 501(c)3 status, a history museum is an ideal historic marker fundraising partner. The Old Greer County Museum in Mangum not only acted as a donation repository, but it also aided in marketing the project which resulted in the offer to pay for the marker.

• PURSUING A BELIEF IN THE VALUE OF A HISTORIC SITE WORKS

The most important aspect of such a project is recognizing the historic value of the site for which you petition a state historical society for a marker, then being willing to put in the necessary time and effort to succeed.

Willow, OK, Atlas Missile Site 2016
Photos by Landry Brewer



Willow, OK, Atlas Missile Site, c. 1965; USAF Photo

ATLAS F INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE

- 82.5 feet long
- 10 feet wide
- Range: 6,400 to 9,000 miles
- Traveled 6,788 miles (to reach Soviet Union) in 43 minutes
- Maintained by US Air Force crew 24 hours/day in living quarters adjacent to underground silo

ALTUS, OK, AFB MISSILE SITES

- 12 Atlas missile sites: 1960-1965
- 11 in SW Oklahoma, 1 in N Texas
- Cost: \$21 million each
- American Cold War nuclear arsenal
- All Altus-area missiles put on alert during Cuban Missile Crisis (Oct. 1962)



Missile Silo Top Obscured by Farm Equipment



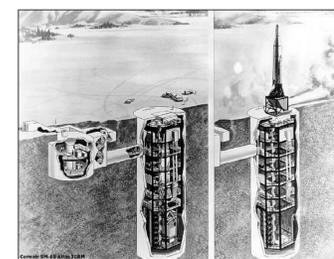
Launch Control Center Entrance



Missile Silo Top, S'West Corner of West Door



Proposed Marker Location



Launch Control Center (LCC) Connected to Missile Silo



Willow, OK, Atlas Missile Site, c. 1965; USAF Photo