News from the Prairie

SUMMER 2026

PRESERVING OUR GRAND PRAIRIE REGION'S HISTORY

Summer Quarterly Meeting Held in DeWitt

Grand Prairie Historical Society met at the First Christian Church fellowship hall in DeWitt Thursday, July 16. Around 32 were on hand for an interesting program on "Civil War Portraits," featuring a photographic history of Arkansas during that conflict. It was presented by Bobby Roberts, former director of the Central Arkansas Library System in Little Rock. He started the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies and was named American librarian of the year in 1997 by the Library Journal. Attendees were able to view many rare photos of Arkansas people and places from the Civil War period.

Following the program, the Society's business meeting was conducted by Vice-President Laura Beth Place of Gillett. She presented St. Charles Museum Director Naomi Mitchell a donation funded by a grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation of New York. Our member Nealon DeVore, a member of the Foundation, routed the grant to GPHS for the use of recognizing and commemorating underrepresented segments of our population. St. Charles Museum has an excellent display and interpretation of the people who lived along the White River on houseboats and made their living in various ways including fishing, shelling, logging, and day labor.

Reports were read from the other museums in the county. Vice-President Place recapped the Society's recent accomplishments, including the award from the Arkansas Historical Association for best use of graphics in a county or local historical journal. It was the 32nd award for the Society's journal, *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin* and this newsletter. The organization now has over 8,000 Facebook followers and 352 email recipients. Director Claudia Ahrens continued the progress report by recapping the various America 250 events held around the county. She mentioned the new David and Jimmie Leech Rotary Park on Main Street in Stuttgart, which will feature a sign worded by GPHS members, plus a general railroad history of the region published by the Society, which visitors can access via QR code once the park is complete.

Director Ahrens mentioned the contributions made by the Society over 35 years to the County Record Books Preservation Committee in DeWitt during their existence. It is estimated that around 50 books were preserved with GPHS funds, including some of the oldest records west of the Mississippi River. She also mentioned the several historical markers placed by the Society in recent years: three in Stuttgart, one in Crocketts Bluff, one in Immanuel, and one in Tichnor. Ahrens announced a new but long-awaited project: GPHS has purchased a resin replica of the Statue of Justice to be displayed in the DeWitt courthouse. Thanks to the support and cooperation of County Judge Eddie Best and Circuit Clerk Sarah Merchant, an attractive display will be created around the statue. A ten-foot Statue of Justice once stood atop the previous courthouse building, then after that edifice was torn down, "Lady Justice" was placed at the original Arkansas Post State Park next to Post Lake and enjoyed by visitors for many decades. A formal dedication of the statue will be announced and held in the near future. The next meeting of the Historical Society will take place on Thursday, October 15 at the Arts Center of the Grand Prairie in Stuttgart. Interpreter Robin Gabe of Plum Bayou Mounds Archaeological State Park will address the meeting on recent findings at the Native American site. The public is always welcome to attend our meetings.



Bobby Roberts presented a program on “Civil War Portraits.”



Laura Beth Place presents a grant check to St. Charles Museum Director Naomi Mitchell.

GRAND PRAIRIE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1953 in Arkansas County, the Society’s aim is to preserve the Arkansas Grand Prairie’s rich abundant history and make others aware of our unique heritage. We invite you to participate in and support our efforts.

Membership includes two issues (April and October) of our award-winning journal *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*, plus a quarterly *News from the Prairie* newsletter which is sent via email. The informative articles are an excellent and scholarly resource for those interested in the history of the Grand Prairie, Arkansas Post, and lower White River regions. The Society holds meetings with interesting programs from a variety of historians on the third Thursday of January, April, July, and October. We offer three household membership levels:

Annual Basic, $25.00
Annual Contributing, $50.00
Annual Supporting, $100.00

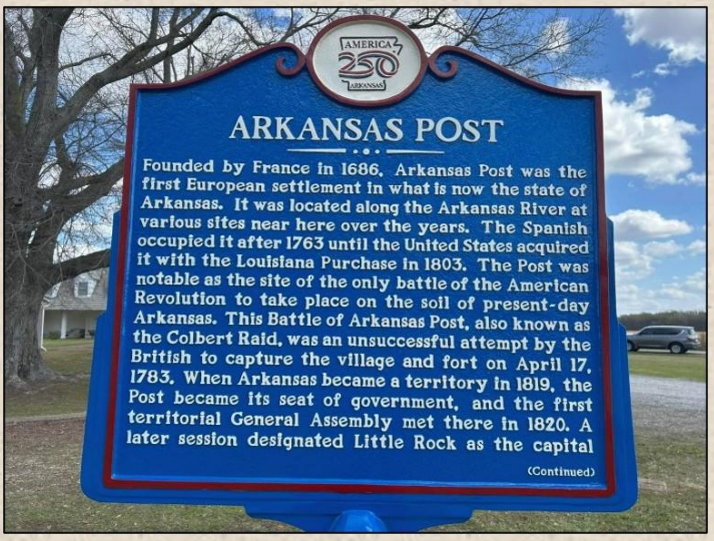
Membership dues may be mailed to Raeann Braithwaite, Treasurer, P. O. Box 15, Almyra, AR 72003, or paid online at www.grandprairiehistory.org. Visit us on Facebook at www.facebook/grandprairiehistory. We thank you for your support!

America250 Observances Held in Arkansas County

Various observances held recently around the Grand Prairie celebrated our Nation's semiquincentennial (250th) anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, with events in Stuttgart, DeWitt, and Arkansas Post. The first observance took place at the Arkansas Post Museum State Park on March 6, when members of the America250 Commission for Arkansas (below) gathered to dedicate a handsome marker commemorating the consequential role of Arkansas Post in the long history of the region from the Colonial period through the Civil War.



From left the commissioners are Dale James, Van Buren County Judge; Richard McCormac, Clinton Mayor; Col. Joel Lynch, Arkansas Army National Guard; Marty Ryall, Director of the Division of Arkansas Heritage; Sharri Jones of Pine Bluff; Dr. David Ware, Director of Arkansas State Archives; Dr. Ken Warden, Director of ADE Division of Higher Education; and 250 Commission Chairman Shea Lewis, Secretary of Arkansas Dept. of Heritage and Tourism. Arkansas Post National Memorial staff assisted the State Park with the event.





On July 3, two other events took place when Arkansas County officials and the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie held America250 observances. The festivities started that morning at the courthouse in DeWitt, where County Judge Eddie Best presented a program covering the long history of the region from the pre-Colonial Menard-Hodges Mound to the 1542 DeSoto Expedition, the first French Post of 1686, and the Colbert Raid of 1783 which was one of the final battles of the Revolutionary War. He touched on the 1813 establishment of Arkansas County as part of Missouri Territory and its prominence as capital of Arkansas Territory 1819–1821.

Judge Best mentioned the Statue of Justice which once stood atop the previous Arkansas County Courthouse in DeWitt, before being relocated to Arkansas Post State Park, where it was enjoyed by visitors from the 1930s to the 1960s. Grand Prairie Historical Society has donated a resin replica of the "Lady Justice" statue which will be displayed inside the courthouse and dedicated this year. Historical photographs and exhibits were displayed, such as photos of the St. Charles Civil War monument. Judge Best mentioned the 1863 Battle of Arkansas Post, the 1931 Helen Spence trial, Gillett's popular Coon Supper, DeWitt's role as the Arkansas County seat, the naming of DeWitt for DeWitt Clinton, and Stuttgart's national fame as the Rice and Duck Capital of the World.



Among those present for the event at DeWitt were (l. to r.):

Raeann Braithwaite, Almyra
Buzz Menard, Gillett
Barbara Menard, Gillett
Judge Eddie Best, Gillett
Glennda Fread, Almyra
Claudia Ahrens, Little Rock
Mayor Jimmy Black, DeWitt
Paul Braithwaite, Almyra

MAGP Celebrates America's 250th Birthday

On the morning of July 3, 2026, the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie in Stuttgart began its America250 celebration with the opening of their new temporary exhibit entitled "Rooted on the Grand Prairie." Inspired by the 1976 American Freedom Train that paraded United States history across the country, "Rooted on the Grand Prairie" was designed to do the same thing. It highlights five individuals and events whose legacy impacted the world beyond prairie grasses and rice fields.

The narrative begins with the "best known businesswoman in Arkansas" in the 1910s, Anna B. Stoops. She was the only woman manager of the Rice Carnival and the only woman in the country to run a municipal water and light plant. The exhibit also tells the story of the originators of the World's Championship Duck Calling Contest: Dr. H.V. Glenn, Thad McCollum, and Verne Tindall. Aside from the business and management world, "Rooted on the Grand Prairie" tells the fascinating story of the German-born artist, Andrew "Pete" Finken. The exhibit also delves into more recent history, exploring the story of Holman student-turned-winningest head

coach, Eddie L. Boone, and Arkansas State Representative Wanda Hildebrand Northcutt-Hartz. The exhibit is situated in the middle of the museum's West Room, purposefully located behind the Arkansas Wagon that was used during the nation's 1976 Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage to Valley Forge.



Left to right: Tom Bechdolt, Joe Howard, Jim Bechdolt, Jerry Howard, Kellie Brewer Simpson, and Mike Burnett.

Following the public opening of "Rooted on the Grand Prairie," the museum hosted a panel discussion with six individuals who participated in the Bicentennial Wagon Train. Tom Bechdolt, along with his wife and grandson, Jim Bechdolt, Joe Howard, Jerry Howard, and Kellie Brewer Simpson were a few of the people who paused their everyday life to pack a covered wagon and travel from Springdale, Arkansas, to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, for the spirit-filled celebration of America's 200th birthday. Chip Brown, another panelist, was fifteen years old when he was dismissed from school specifically to help drive the Louisiana Wagon. He remembers converging with the Arkansas Wagon and even driving it for a short time.

Kellie Brewer Simpson was an assistant teamster for the Arkansas Wagon at just fourteen years old. Her father, Herbert Brewer, was the state teamster for the Arkansas Wagon. Together, they lived on the wagon, traveling across the country from March to July in 1976. Mike Barnett, the grandson of Huntingburg Wagon Works wagon maker, was also in attendance, adding to the discussion about watching his grandfather add parts and pieces to the 61 wagons that were created in Jonesboro for the Bicentennial Wagon Train. Videos of these discussions are on the museum's Facebook page and more will be added to their YouTube channel in the following weeks.





Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie's new "Rooted on the Prairie" display.

Lastly, a reading of the Declaration of Independence was held at the Arkansas Post Museum State Park on July 4. Park Director Maria Jackson and GPHS member Dyan Bohnert delivered the reading. Visitors from Arkansas and points beyond were on hand. The Museum provided them with Arkansas State Park passports as well as commemorative America250 materials. All in all, the semiquincentennial observances in Arkansas County were enjoyable and well done by the many historians and volunteers involved.

Join or Renew Your Preserve Arkansas Membership

Preserve Arkansas was founded in 1981 to promote and preserve the history and culture of Arkansas. This year, we celebrate 45 years as Arkansas's only statewide nonprofit advocate for historic preservation. Our organization works to build stronger communities by reconnecting Arkansans to our heritage and empowering people to save and rehabilitate historic places. Our three pillars of Education, Advocacy, and Assistance have been helping Arkansans protect and preserve historic properties for more than four decades. Your membership ensures that we can provide this support year-round for the next 40+ years.

Whether you've supported us in the past by coming to an event, participating in a workshop, or donating, we hope you'll reaffirm your commitment to preservation by becoming a member today. Preserve Arkansas is the only statewide nonprofit advocate for the preservation of Arkansas's historic, architectural, and cultural resources. Our organization works to build stronger communities by reconnecting Arkansans to our heritage and empowering people to save and rehabilitate historic places. Support this work by becoming a member, making a one-time or tribute donation, or joining us in a corporate partnership. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 305, Little Rock, AR 72203. Call us at 501-372-4757. Thanks for your support, Rachel Patton, Executive Director.

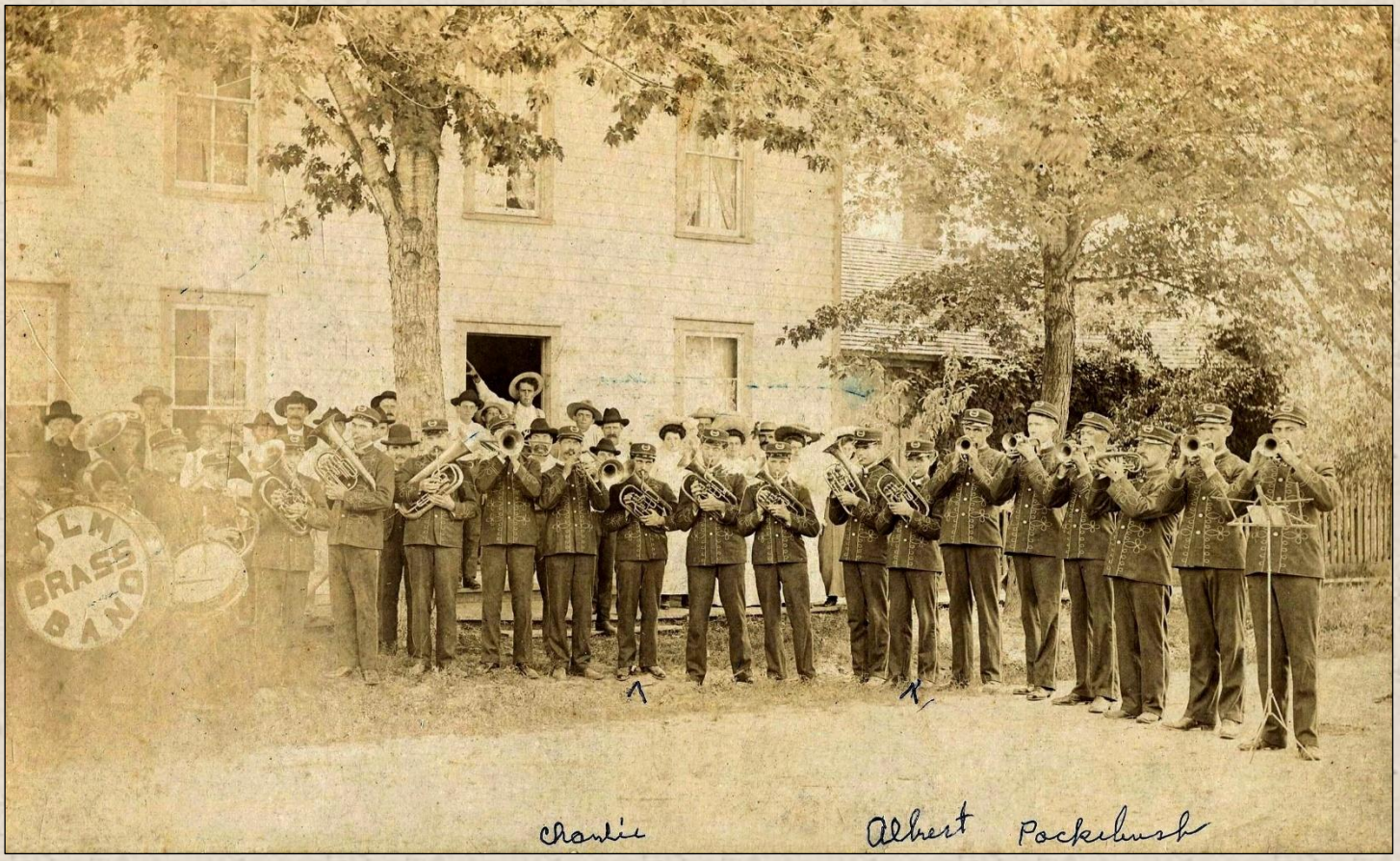
Fred Engelmann—Ulm's Cornet Player

By Makena Munger

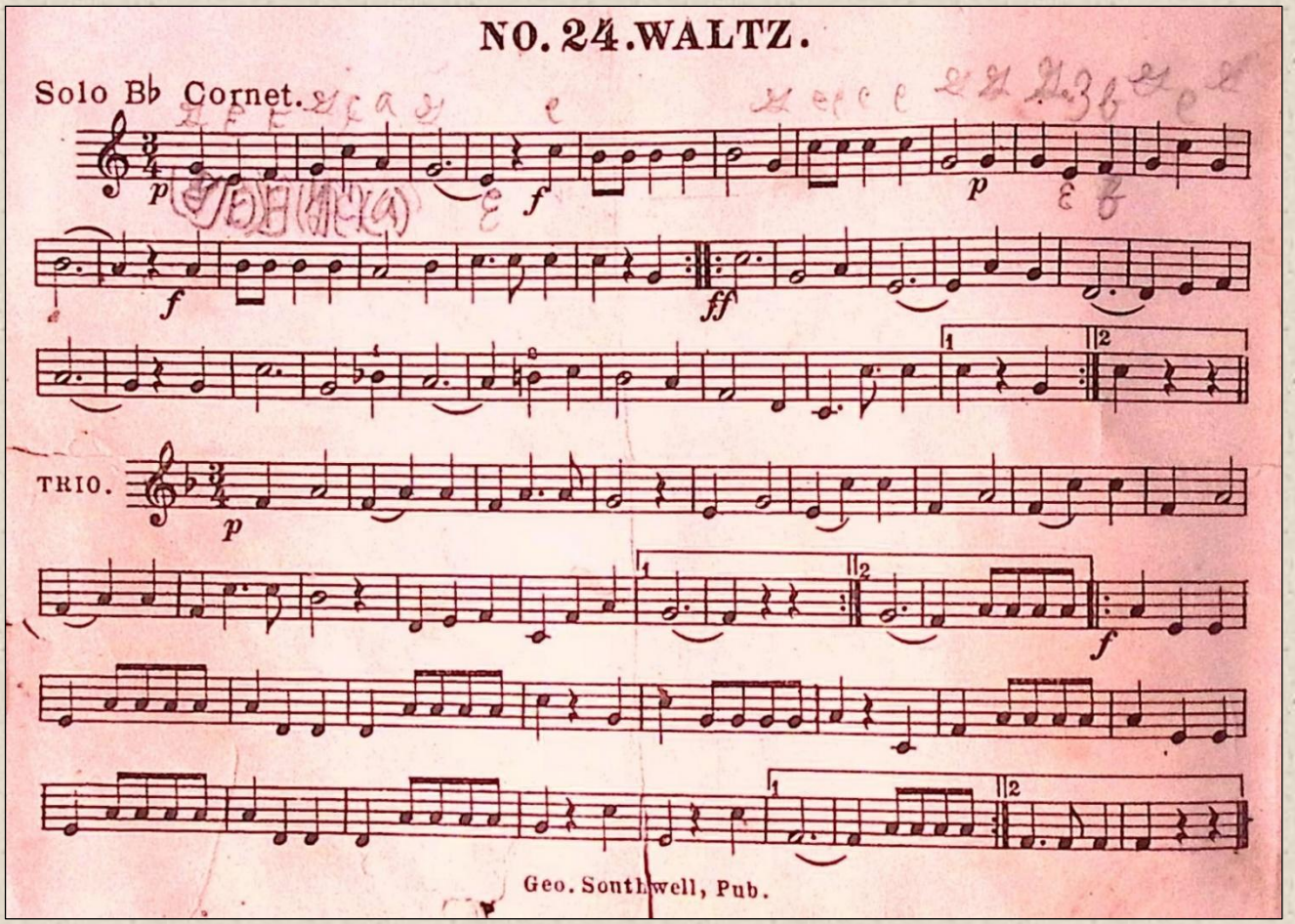
Music unites people. This fact has been relevant for millennium. The people of "The Illinois Settlement" used music to celebrate occasions, worship in church services, and to remind them of the togetherness that they brought with them from their home hundreds of miles away. Several families joined together in 1880 and followed the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri, to Helena, Arkansas. From there, they packed mules and continued westward and slightly north until they found a familiar land to their home in Illinois—the Arkansas Grand Prairie.

Friedrich Engelmann, also called Fred or Fritz, was a boy of about fifteen or sixteen years old when his parents began their journey to the Illinois Settlement on the Arkansas Grand Prairie. He and his family lived in Plum Hill in Washington County, Illinois. By this point, the Illinois Settlement was renamed Payer after one of the pioneer families who migrated South shortly before the Engelmanns. The little community would have one more name change, this time having been influenced by their neighboring town, Stuttgart. Most adults from the Illinois Settlement were born in Germany, and they remembered a German town named Ulm which was located near the German town of Stuttgart. Because of this, Payer is now Ulm, Arkansas.

As the town grew, the Ulm Brass Band was organized. The Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie has a display of an Ulm Brass Band uniform, as well as a cornet music book belonging to Fred. What makes this music book unique is the way Fred marked it on the inside. Certain pages are used more than others. Were these songs played by the band? One song has markings above the music notes, reminding him where the "G", "F", or "E" were. How long had Fred been playing the cornet? Did he have a favorite song to play? Although these may be questions we never have the answers to, these pictures and artifacts illuminate how the earliest settlers of the Arkansas Grand Prairie spent their leisure time.



The Ulm Brass Band. *Images courtesy Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie*.



On no account should the checks be puffed out, or the lips make any sound in the mouthpiece.

DOTS.

A Dot placed after any note increases its value one half. Thus:—

is equal to or to

A passage that repeats, sometimes has two endings indicated thus: 1º 2º

That marked 1º is to be played the first time and the other 2º the second time.

Abbreviations are employed in written music, to avoid repetitions of a single note or passage. Thus in stead of writing four eighth notes a half note marked with a thick line will indicate the same; or for or for or for etc.

The *sign* 𝄋, when it occurs the second time, shows that the player must return to a similar sign, and continue to the word *Fine*, or a *Pause* 𝄐 over the first *double bar*, which signifies the end, or conclusion. When the return extends to the commencement of the piece, it is usual to prefix the letters D. C., the abbreviation of the Italian words *Da Capo*, "from the beginning."

A *Pause* 𝄐 marks, that a beat of the measure is suspended, and that a note, or rest, must be prolonged so long as the performer thinks proper. A pause over a rest should be treated in a similar manner.

Strike the tone thus: tu tu tu

The Sharps and Flats placed next to the Clef are called the *Signature*.

Open Tones. C G C E G C

1st Valve Tones. B♭ F B♭ D F B♭

2d Valve Tones. B F♯ B D♯ F♯ B

3d Valve Tones. A E A C♯ E A

1st & 2d Valve Tones. A E A C♯ E A

1st & 3d Valve Tones. G D G B D G

2d & 3d Valve Tones. A♭ E♭ A♭ C E♭ A♭

1st, 2d & 3d Valve Tones. F♯ C♯ F♯ A♯ C♯ F♯

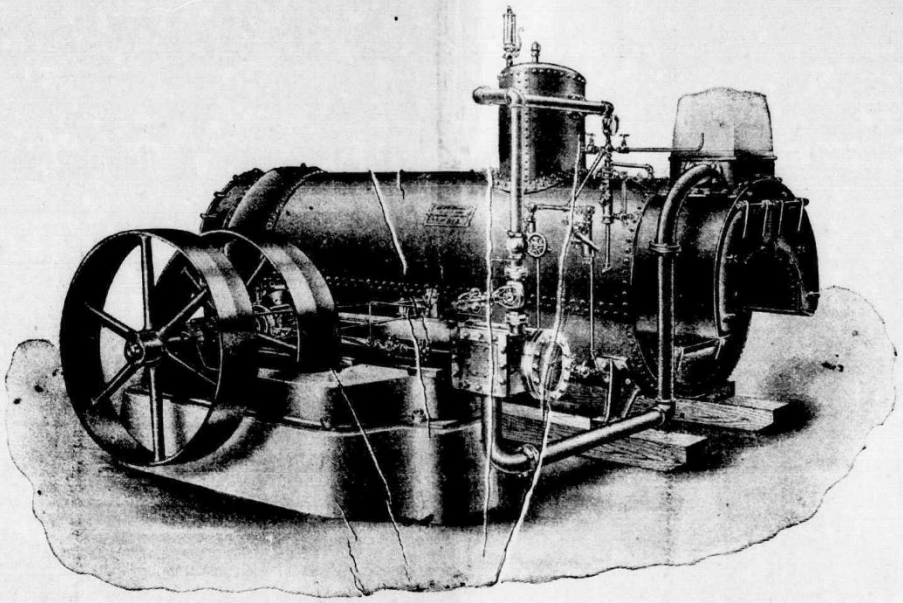
EX. or

Pages from Fred Engelmann's cornet music book. *MAGP*.



Finch's Esso Servicenter at Sixth and Main Streets, Stuttgart in the 1950s. Posing with the 1954 Oldsmobile in the below image are the station crew. Identified are Horace Shrum (with air hose) and owner Eugene Finch (to his right). *Museum of Ark. Grand Prairie*.





How Will You Buy Your Pumping Outfit, Mr. Rice Grower?

Will you be content to search out the power that can be bought for less money, quality not considered?

Will you rush right in without investigating records and place your order for an outfit that has repeatedly fallen down on the kind of work you will expect it to do?

Will you buy a firebox boiler when records prove that they are not suited for this class of service and that many of them go down in one seasons use?

Will you buy a bricked in tubular boiler without considering the cost of brick and the subsequent cost of heating them.

Will you buy a high speed, automatic engine hoping to get economy when records show that you will get the opposite?

OR

Will you go at this power matter in a business way and see for yourself what the different types are doing in just the kind of work you will want.

If you will take the precaution to ask the man who uses power, you will find that *Huber* boilers and engines are giving absolute satisfaction. That they are developing more power on less fuel; that they cost less to maintain and that they are the most durable and most reasonably priced outfit on the market. Remember this: There are outfits that are sold here that are not suitable for the work and you owe it to yourself to make the fullest investigation before placing your order.

We are prepared to give you estimates on complete plant including well and pump and either steam or gasoline power and guarantee to save you money. Size of power ranges from 20 to 80 h. p. in steam engines and from 25 to 75 h. p. in gasoline engines.

Ask for descriptive literature of *Huber* power, also pamphlet telling what it is doing in Arkansas Rice Fields. *Investigate* and compare with others and you will buy the Huber.

The Huber Manufacturing Company

Office and Warehouse Main St., North of Railroad Stuttgart, Arkansas

Advertisement from the November 1, 1910 *Airdome Bulletin*, a short-lived Stuttgart newspaper.

Arkansas Genealogical Society Fall Conference, Saturday, October 17, 2026: "Finding the Forgotten: Reconstructing Lives, Families, and Communities."

Registration fee - $25.00

Topics:

J. Mark Lowe, FUGA: Locating "hard to find" Family with New Tools and Old Tested Methods Famer, Rancher, or Sharecropper: Shaping a Profile for your Rural Ancestor.

Dr. Deborah Abbott: Cluster Genealogy: Finding Your Lost Ancestor Using Manuscripts and Oral Collections in Your Genealogical Research.

Join the Arkansas Genealogical Society for our annual Fall Conference, featuring renowned genealogists and educators, J. Mark Lowe, FUGA, and Dr. Deborah Abbott. They will each guide you in achieving your family history goals through engaging and informative sessions.

Conference schedule, Saturday, October 17, 2026, 8:30 AM- 2:45 PM:

8:30 AM: Webinar Opens - Welcome Screen and Technical Check

9:00 AM: Webinar Commencement

9:15 AM: Session 1: J. Mark Lowe, FUGA - Locating "hard to find" Family with New Tools and Old Tested Methods

10:15 AM: Break

10:30 AM: Session 2: J. Mark Lowe, FUGA - Famer, Rancher, or Sharecropper: Shaping a Profile for your Rural Ancestor

11:30 AM: Lunch Break

12:30 PM: Session 3: Dr. Deborah Abbott-Cluster Genealogy: Finding Your Lost Ancestor

1:30 PM: Break

1:45 PM: Session 4: Dr. Deborah Abbott - Using Manuscripts and Oral Collections in Your Genealogical Research

2:45 PM: Break - Instructions for Annual Meeting

3:00 PM: Annual Meeting (Members Only) Arkansas Genealogical Society Fall Conference 2026 Featuring J. Mark Lowe, FUGA and Dr. Deborah Abbott

The Arkansas Historical Association Invites Your Membership

Join the Arkansas Historical Association and receive four issues of the Arkansas Historical Quarterly per year, as well as the Association's newsletter for the following rates:

- Individual, one year, $25;
- Individual, two years, $45
- Family, one year, $35;
- Family, two years, $55
- Foreign, one year, $30;
- Student, one year, $15
- Contributing, one year, $55;
- Sustaining, one year, $100
- Supporting, one year, $200
- Life Membership, $500 (payable over three years)
- Permanent Membership, $1,000 (payable over five years).

One-Year Corporate/Business Memberships:

- Sponsor, $120;
- Patron, $500;
- Benefactor, $1,000
- Renewal and new memberships can be paid online at arkansashistoricalassociation.org.

Grand Prairie Historical Society is a proud sponsoring member of the Association.

Visit the Arkansas State Archives

The mission of the Arkansas State Archives is to keep and care for the official archives of the State of Arkansas; collect material bearing on the history of Arkansas from the earliest times; copy and edit official records and other historical material; and encourage historical work and research for the public. Hours: Monday–Friday and the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month, 9-12 and 1-4. Phone: 502-682-6900.
https://www.arkansasheritage.com/arkansasstatearchives/home.



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