

News from the Prairie

AUTUMN 2025

PRESERVING OUR GRAND PRAIRIE REGION'S HISTORY

Society Enjoys Dinner, Program, Meeting in Humphrey

Grand Prairie Historical Society held our autumn quarterly meeting October 16 in Humphrey at the A & C Fish Restaurant, located in the former school cafeteria. Our hosts, Mr. and Ms. McCarty, provided a delicious catfish dinner for nearly fifty attendees. GPHS Director Dr. Richard Wilson presented an interesting program on the settlement and growth of the Humphrey community. President Linda Fischer opened the business meeting with a welcome to the members and guests on hand. Jessie Walsh read the previous meeting's minutes, then Raeann Braithwaite delivered the treasurer's report. Museum reports were given by Claudia Ahrens for the St. Charles Museum and by Makena Munger for the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie (MAGP), where many upgrades and improvements are being made. Pres. Fischer announced that GPHS has made a monetary donation to the Stuttgart Library for the purchase of a new computer and printer to replace outmoded equipment. As well, the Society has made general purpose donations to the DeWitt and Gillett Libraries.

Our organization also purchased a new large-format scanner for the MAGP. In addition, we made a sponsoring donation to the Arkansas Genealogical Society in support of their online annual conference. Glenn Mosenthin announced that he was retiring as editor after 17 years but will remain as associate editor and contributor for the new editor, Makena Munger, who will take over journal production in 2026. He announced the dates of April 9-11 for Arkansas Historical Association's 2026 annual conference to be held in Monticello and also details of Preserve Arkansas's November 8 bus ramble. Mosenthin also asked for a vote to provide the Keaton Township Project with the grant GPHS received from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, who advocate for economic, climate, and racial justice. Society member Nealon DeVore, who also serves as the Foundation's board liaison, introduced himself and was thanked for his organization's current and past generosity to GPHS. The vote was unanimous for the grant's usage. See photos on page 7.

The nominating committee presented the following slate of officers for the 2026-27 term: Glenn Mosenthin, for president; Laura Beth Place, for vice-president; Jessie Walsh, secretary; and Raeann Braithwaite, treasurer. Outgoing VP Gay Hampton Rusk will replace Mosenthin on the board of directors, while Travis Trice and Dr. Richard Wilson will remain on the board for another three-year term. The other directors are Claudia Ahrens, Bill Shrum, and Tommy Strabala. These were unanimously approved. Pres. Fischer adjourned the meeting. The Grand Prairie Historical Society's next meeting is scheduled for January 15 at 7:00 p.m. in Stuttgart.

GPBS was Founded in Arkansas County, Arkansas in December 1953

Grand Prairie Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to promoting preservation and education of the regional heritage of Arkansas's Grand Prairie. We are one of the oldest historic preservation organizations in Arkansas. Quarterly meetings featuring informative programs are held on the third Thursdays of January, April, July, and October, unless otherwise posted. A potluck dinner is held during the April meeting. Annual membership dues are: Basic, \$25.00; Contributing, \$50.00; and Supporting, \$100.00. Dues are payable at the beginning of the year and can be remitted online at <https://www.grandprairiehistory.org> or to Raeann Braithwaite, Treasurer, P. O. Box 15, Almyra, AR 72003.

Stuttgart Army Airfield Commemorated with Marker

Grand Prairie Historical Society and the City of Stuttgart dedicated a commemorative marker in honor of the former Stuttgart Army Airfield on Thursday, November 13 at the Stuttgart Municipal Airport terminal building. The marker is located on the west (runway) side and in view of arriving and departing air travelers. Around 25 people were on hand for the ceremony. Stuttgart Mayor Norma Strabala welcomed attendees and outlined the recent improvements to the facility. Airport Director Anthony Tibbett spoke about the present tenants, improvements, and future plans for the busy facility. GPHS Director Glenn Mosenthin led the dedication by thanking attendees and asking for introductions of Grand Prairie DAR Chapter and Historical Society members. He presented a summary of the Army Airfield's history including its establishment by the US Army Air Forces in 1942, its various flight training missions, the prisoner-of-war camp, and the transfer to the City of Stuttgart. He mentioned the long-lasting economic and social impacts of having several thousand military personnel stationed locally. Many attendees shared their families' various connections to the Airfield, including civilian employees and service members, the employment of German POWs in family farming, and working for postwar agricultural flying services. Mosenthin thanked Mayor Strabala and her associates for providing an appropriate site for the marker and for hosting the dedication. The wording on the historical marker reads as follows:

“STUTTGART ARMY AIRFIELD—The United States Army Air Forces opened Stuttgart Army Airfield (SAAF) in October 1942 for the purpose of advanced pilot and crew training in Waco CG-4A Hadrian gliders for WW2 European operations. The 2,682-acre airfield consisted of four 5,000-foot runways and facilities for 6,000 personnel. Glider training was conducted until May 1943 and graduated over 500 cadets, after which time SAAF was used to train medium bomber and transport pilots using twin-engine planes including the Beechcraft AT-10 Wichita and Cessna AT-17 Bobcat. The advanced twin-engine school continued until December 1944, then was replaced by an air-ground coordination training school. Women's Army Corps (WAC) auxiliary cadets were also stationed at Stuttgart. The airfield contained a prisoner-of-war camp for captured German troops, many of whom were contracted by area farmers to work their land. SAAF also provided employment to many local citizens. The War Department closed the airfield in August 1946, and the property was later deeded to the City of Stuttgart. From 1959 to 1978, the Grand Prairie Grand Prix was held on the site using the airfield's runways and aprons. The former SAAF is now the site of Stuttgart Municipal Airport as well as an industrial park and a National Guard Armory. Marker Sponsored by the Grand Prairie Historical Society and Various Donors.” Below: Attendees with the marker at Stuttgart Municipal Airport.





A search of available Stuttgart city directories from the early rice era did not reveal the location of Robinson & Co. On the reverse of this postcard are references to Messrs. Sewell, Cart, Ritter, and Ivey. It was addressed to Myrtle Mayer in Quincy, Illinois and mailed in 1911. It is signed "Ira," who apparently was connected to the firm. *Editor.*



Stuttgart Library Director Clara Jane Timmerman, Glenda Molock, and GPHS President Linda Fischer. Right: GPHS Director Claudia Ahrens, Nathan Cummings Foundation Board Liaison Nealon DeVore, who is also a GPHS member, and Pres. Fischer. Timmerman is holding checks for donations GPHS has made to Arkansas County's libraries as well as to Arkansas Genealogical Society for their annual virtual conference.

A Grand Prairie Duck Haven

By Makena F. Munger

While we thank the Arkansas Grand Prairie's natural position along the Mississippi Flyway for its funneling of waterfowl, gratitude must also be shown towards early rice farmers and ingenious men who fortified havens of rest for the waterfowl on their migration.



Tindall Reservoir, circa 1930s. *Courtesy of Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie.*

Credited with being the first to flood his rice field by a reservoir, Verne Tindall's ingenuity not only aided in the modernization of rice irrigation, but it also revealed that flooded rice fields attracted ducks in innumerable amounts. This sparked statewide attention. Men began to purchase bottomland forests specifically to flood for the annual migration of ducks.



Freudenberg Reservoir (Maple Island) in Stuttgart, 1942. *Courtesy of MAGP.*

Frank Freudenberg, an avid duck hunter, took Tindall's idea of flooding rice fields a step further. Because trees and vegetation began to rot the longer they sat submerged in water, Freudenberg discovered a way to pump water from the rice fields to his reservoir, then pump the water back into the rice field at the end of the hunting season. This was one of the earliest forms of greentree reservoir hunting.



HUNT WITH F. E. HILLMAN

ROOM 403, RICELAND HOTEL
STUTT GART, ARK.

200 acres Pin Oak Flat on Mill Bayou 10¼ miles southeast of Stuttgart. Blinds and with guides. Per day-----\$7.50

110 acres Pin Oak Flat, on Mill Bayou 18¾ miles southeast of Stuttgart. With guides. Per day-----\$5.00

80 acre Flat on La Grue Bayou, 16½ miles southeast of Stuttgart. With guides. Per day-----\$5.00

F.E. Hillman hunting services, circa 1940s. *Courtesy of MAGP.*

Fred Eugene Hillman, local farmer, promoted his hunting services at the Riceland Hotel in the 1940s. He called his duck haven "Rest Lake."



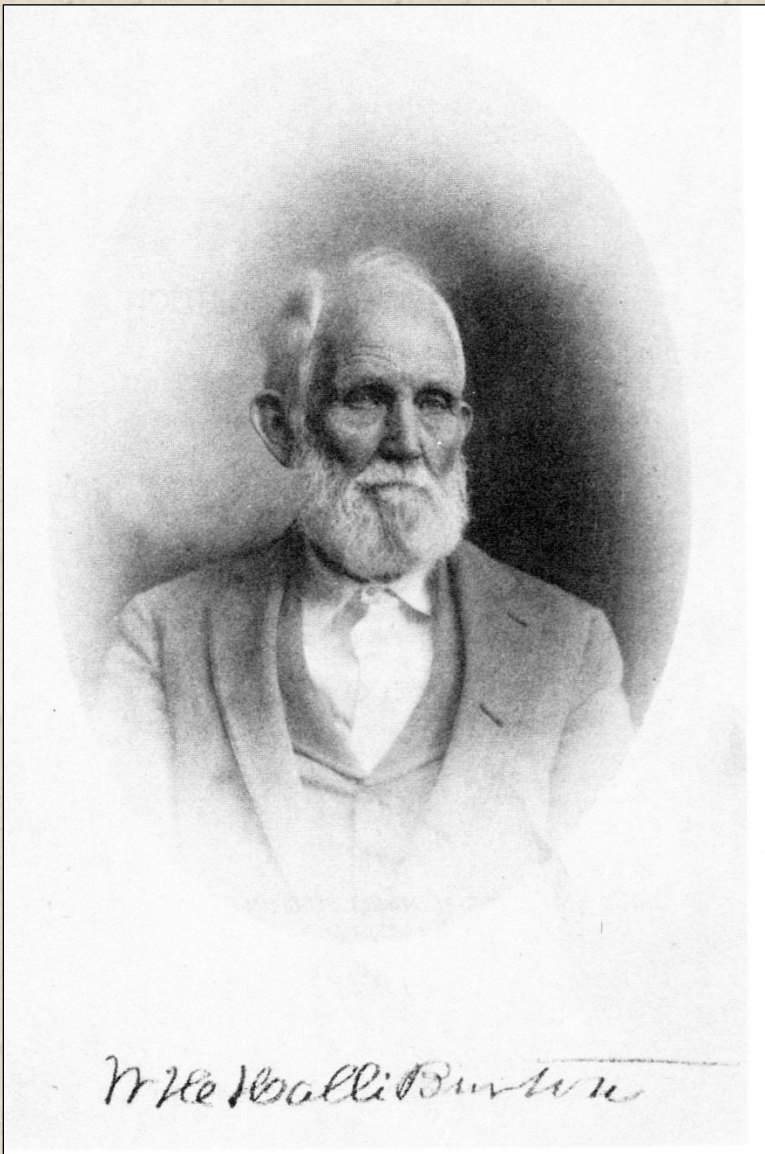
George Wilcox's Lake, 1934. *Courtesy of MAGP.*

George Wilcox, another early duck hunter, used his lakes around Mount Adams (20 miles east of Stuttgart) to provide a safe place of rest for the incoming waterfowl. As duck hunting became popularized on the Grand Prairie in the 1930s, hunters were known to slaughter as many ducks as they could. Wilcox did not allow shooting on his lakes. Instead, he guided them along the outskirts of his lakes to hunt, allowing the waterfowl to eat and rest in peace.

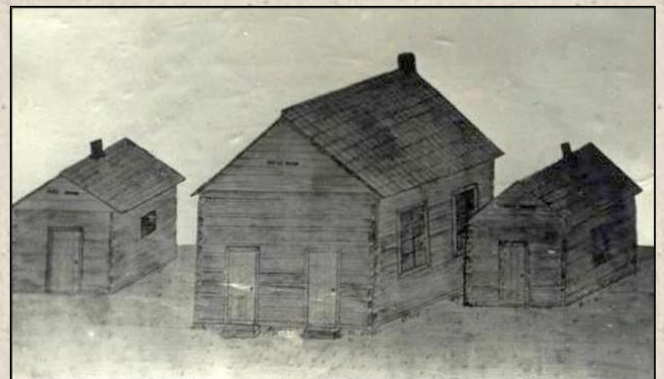
*An Excerpt from A Topographical Description and History of
Arkansas County Arkansas from 1541 to 1875 by W.H. HalliBurton*

“At the January term, 1859, of the county court, the clerk thereof was ordered to draw from the county treasurer of Arkansas County the sum of **three hundred forty-seven dollars and fifty cents** to finish paying Stephens and Willis for building the county jail, showing that at a former term of court, this building had been ordered built. The building was wood and was, with other buildings in the town of DeWitt, burned by the Federal soldiers during the war between the States.

During the summer months of this year, a number of the cattlemen on and near the south end of the Grand Prairie discovered that their cattle were mysteriously disappearing. When this discovery was made, an investigation to ascertain what became of the cattle was begun and it was found that the missing cattle were being secretly killed for beef and sold by parties living in that part of the county. Among other evidences of such killing, a number of heads and hides were found in an unused well in the yard of the suspected parties. These discoveries prompted the formation of a “**Vigilance Committee**” composed of some of the best citizens of the county, under whose direction such steps were taken that quite a number of the suspected parties left the county and have not returned.”



William Henry HalliBurton (1816-1912) was one of the most influential men in Arkansas County. He was elected Arkansas' chief war tax collector by the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis, practiced law in Arkansas County Circuit Court, and served in the Arkansas legislature throughout his career. HalliBurton was also a key figure in the establishment of DeWitt. Perhaps one of his most noteworthy achievements was his compilation of Arkansas County's history (*A Topographical Description of Arkansas County From 1541-1875*), written after his retirement from law in 1896. *Transcribed by Makena Munger, editor.*



First Arkansas County Courthouse in DeWitt (1855–1861), located on the east side of South Main between 1st and 2nd Streets. *Arkansas Post Museum State Park.*

Remembering our Meeting at Montgomery Point Lock & Dam in October 2013



Around 25 Society members and guests were treated to a tour of the facility. We visited the lock's control room and the dam's inner workings which are under the White River shortly upstream of its mouth at the Mississippi River.

Lock operator Donnie Shepherd informs the group of the control room's many functions.



As good fortune would have it, a set of barges enroute downstream from the Tulsa Port of Catoosa arrived and needed lowering down to the level of the nearby Mississippi. The tug *Winchester* is shown here with a set of barge loads of agricultural commodities. Attendees were treated to a real-time demonstration of the locking procedure.

Photos courtesy Claudia Haller Ahrens.

As a follow-up to the rice scandal article in the October *Historical Bulletin*, member Clark Daviss, whose great-grandfather was Judge George W. Clark, submitted this article from an unknown newspaper of late 1923 or early 1924:

Threats Against Life of Judge Clark Because of His Courageous Official Work

A newspaper correspondence from DeWitt, where Circuit Judge George W. Clark endeavored to carry out his solemn oath to the people to enforce the law and punish the guilty, tells the Judge Clark's life was threatened to terrify him into checking his efforts to have the supremacy of the law maintained in the rice scandal which in Stuttgart had already resulted in the assault of two editors and the wrecking of a news-paper plant, for which the offenders were later indicted by a special grand jury called by Judge Clark, who was compelled to call three grand juries to secure indictments at DeWitt in the investigation of the rice troubles and defending the rights of the farmers. Those who are well acquainted with Judge Clark know exactly how he received the threat of cowardly would-be assassins, and he promptly threw down the gauntlet to all who had whispered that his life would be the penalty for his conscientious discharge of his duty as an officer of the court.

Judge Clark, instead of "easing off," challenged his would-be assailants from the bench and defied them to interfere in the court's functioning, and warned the individuals, the names of several having been given to him, that he would prosecute the guilty, high and low, influential and unimportant, regardless of all threats against his life. He deplored the disposition of some men to wrong others and then to try to use the law to save them from just punishment, and he reminded the good people of that part of the State that law enforcement was a paramount duty of every decent citizen and cautioned against the element that seeks assassination of courageous and honest citizens who loyally and sacrificingly seek to develop and prosper Arkansas and give the Wonder State a national reputation inviting to capital and good people to come here and invest their money and establish permanent homes.

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 sponsoring member of the Arkansas Historical Association.





These three photos were contributed by member Clark Daviss of Hanford, CA. The top two are youth groups from the First Methodist Church of Stuttgart in the early 1950s, taken at the Fairbanks-Morse clubhouse at Aberdeen.



This image shows the damage from the disastrous fire and explosion at Rice Growers Cooperative's Mill A, then being used for hull storage. The spontaneous combustion of the Stuttgart facility took place June 3, 1963.

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 by the public. Hours: Monday—Friday and the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month, 9–12 and 1–4. Phone: 501-682-6900.
<https://www.arkansasheritage.com/arkansasstatearchives/home>

Arkansas Colonials 1686–1804: A Collection of French and Spanish Records Listing Early Europeans in Arkansas, compiled by Morris S. Arnold and Dorothy Jones Core, is available from GPHS for \$25 postpaid. This 104-page book was published by the Society in 1986 and includes censuses, militia, and other civil records from Arkansas Post in the French and Spanish periods. The book is indexed by surnames.

Arkansas Colonials

1686 – 1804



Abstract of the Catholic Register of Arkansas 1764–1858, compiled by Dorothy Jones Core, is available from GPHS for \$25 postpaid. This 100-page book is an abstract of baptisms, marriages, and burials by Catholic priests in the Parish of Arkansas, including the only records kept during the Spanish era. Accurate translations by language professor Nicole Wable Hatfield. Originally published in 1976, this indexed reference was long out of print. To order these reprinted editions, send payment to P.O. Box 15, Almyra, AR 72003 or order online at www.grandprairiehistory.org.

ABSTRACT of the CATHOLIC REGISTER of ARKANSAS (1764–1858)



2026 Grand Prairie Historical Society meeting dates/places:

January 15, 2026 – Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie, Stuttgart, 7 p.m.

April 16, 2026 – Gillett Methodist Church, 7 p.m., preceded by a potluck dinner at 6 p.m.

July 16, 2026 – TBA, DeWitt, 7 p.m.

October 15, 2026 – Arts Center of the Grand Prairie, Stuttgart, 7 p.m.

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Grand Prairie Historical Society

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