



# News from the Prairie

## WINTER 2023

*PRESERVING OUR GRAND PRAIRIE REGION'S HISTORY*

## Army Airfields and Awards Highlight January Meeting

Our Society's winter quarterly meeting took place January 19 at Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie, hosted by Executive Director Fara Foster and Exhibits and Events Coordinator Jessie Walsh. We had a fantastic crowd of nearly fifty on hand. Following a social hour with snacks and drinks courtesy of our refreshment committee, President Raeann Refeld Braithwaite presented an Award of Merit to our 2022 Youth Essay Contest winner, Chandler Merritt of Humphrey, who is a DeWitt High School senior as well as a student at Phillips Community College-DeWitt. Her essay "Secret Depths of the Delta: A Naturalistic Take on Its Geography and Ecosystems" will appear in our April *Historical Bulletin*. Grand Prairie Chapter DAR members Braithwaite, Glenna Fread, Cheryl Vickers, Claudia Ahrens, and Gay Rusk presented Society Director Glenn Mosenthin with a Community Service Award from the DAR for his ongoing contributions to historical preservation and outreach work. David Hillman presented GPHS a donation which the Society will use for county record book preservation in honor of him, his father Webster Hillman, and aunt Ellen West (the latter two being longtime Society officers).

Members and guests enjoyed a presentation given by Ron Lanoue of Little Rock on the development of World War II Army Airfields in East Arkansas. He described events surrounding the establishment of these bases and their auxiliary landing fields, including those at Almyra, Roe, Hazen, and Goldman. Mr. Lanoue was director of Arkansas Legal Services Partnership until his 2010 retirement. His father was stationed at Walnut Ridge Army Airfield during WWII. Pres. Braithwaite delivered a "State of the Society" address outlining the many goals and efforts our group has been able to accomplish despite the pandemic's challenges. She said "We've done a great job of continuing our mission in these trying times, but we have to look to the future. Please consider what you might do for our Society and let us know your interest. We need your help with content for our journal. Please work with Editor Glenn on your submissions to keep our *Historical Bulletin* winning awards. It takes the efforts of all of us to keep momentum going and continue preserving and promoting our Grand Prairie's history."

GPHS has decided to make a further donation to the restoration of county record books in honor of Director Emeritus John Cover's thirty years of service to our Society as an officer and director. Pres. Braithwaite gave an update on the two historical marker plaques being manufactured for Immanuel School and the Love Rest Green Grove Cemetery. The markers are being funded by the Black History Commission of Arkansas via their Curtis H. Sykes Memorial Grant Program. We anticipate receiving the markers in late spring to early summer. Sewah Studios of Marietta, Ohio, the manufacturer, is owned in part by LeeAndra Smith, a 1988 Stuttgart High School graduate. The group elected to place a paver brick at Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie in honor of David Hillman for his generous donation to the record book project. Pres. Braithwaite reminded attendees of our next meeting on April 20, with a program by Dr. Andrew R. Beaupré, Arkansas Archeological Survey's Research Station Archeologist for University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff. The meeting will be held at the Gillett United Methodist Church, 310 W. Leslie Ave. Further details and updates will be made public as the date draws closer.



# Message from our President



Dear friends,

I'd like to take a few minutes to present the state of our Society, beginning with revisiting and adding to our list of accomplishments since 2020. We missed holding a regular meeting for the first time in our 67-year history when we were forced to cancel our April 2020 meeting. Since then, despite challenges brought on by a global pandemic, we have not missed another and even with virtual meetings when necessary, have continued to offer outstanding programs and publish our award-winning journal, the *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*. We participated in the Independence Day celebration held annually at Crockett's Bluff with Glenn Mosenthin speaking on the research leading to a process that he, Larry Fortune, and Jim Prange undertook to replace the old marker plaque with an historically accurate version.

We participated in the dedication ceremony for historical markers placed at Bayou Meto United Methodist Church and cemetery and Eddie and Pat Lumsden's Schoolhouse Lodge. The Engagement at St. Charles and Battle of Arkansas Post historical markers have been professionally repainted. Thanks to the efforts of Travis Trice, the St. Charles Battle monument was given a thorough cleaning, removing years of dirt and biological discoloration. We sponsored a booth at the Arkansas County Fair, in collaboration with the *DeWitt Era Enterprise*. We established a writing contest open to 15–18-year-olds with winners selected for two consecutive years. We are displaying an ongoing exhibit at Arkansas Post Museum State Park, highlighting regional history and our Society. We created a driving tour brochure of area historical markers that has proven popular locally and statewide through Arkansas Welcome Centers. We donated a total of \$4000 to the Arkansas County Records Preservation Committee.

We continue to enhance and maintain a popular Facebook page and website. Our first live-streamed meeting via Facebook has been viewed 1100 times. We began to offer various levels of membership—basic, supporting and contributing—and they are bringing in considerable extra revenue for the Society's preservation efforts. We now offer our fully indexed, complete collection of the *Historical Bulletin* in DVD and flash drive format and have all past *Bulletin* issues available for instant download from our website. We reprinted and offer for sale John and Linda Cover's *Gillett, Arkansas: Celebrating 100 Years 1906–2006*. Our Society was the winner of the AHA's Walter L. Brown Award for Best Newsletter published in 2021. This was our 25th publication award.

With funding support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, we donated to Holman Heritage Center's building restoration efforts and to Citizens for Immanuel for their outreach efforts. With funding support from the Black History Commission of Arkansas, we've placed an historical marker at Holman Heritage Center in Stuttgart, have another on order for Immanuel High School, and will assist in placing one at Love Rest Green Grove Cemetery. Presently, we have 6,875 Facebook followers, an increase of 1401 since 2020. Our newsletter is emailed to 335 addresses, and our new website has had 745 views since its inception in 2021. Our membership for 2022 was at 198, down 67 from our pre-pandemic high of 265. We've done a great job of continuing our mission in these trying times, but we have to look to the future. The decline in membership concerns me.

I want to issue a challenge to each of you. Please invite your friends to join us. We need your help with content for our *Bulletin*. Work with Editor Glenn on submissions to keep our journal winning awards. We've done some wonderful things to fulfil our mission, so let's not stop or even slow down. It takes the efforts of all of us to keep the momentum going and to continue to preserve and promote the history of our beloved Grand Prairie.

*Raeann Refeld Braithwaite*





Grand Prairie Historical Society  
Awards This Certificate of Merit to  
Chandler Merritt

In recognition of her essay "Secret Depths of the Delta,"  
winner of the Second Annual GPHS Essay Contest.

Presented this 19th day of January 2023.

Raeann Braithwaite  
Raeann Braithwaite, President

Glenn Mosenthin  
Glenn Mosenthin, Director



THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF THE

*Daughters of the American Revolution*

Certificate of Award

presented to

*Glenn Mosenthin*  
for

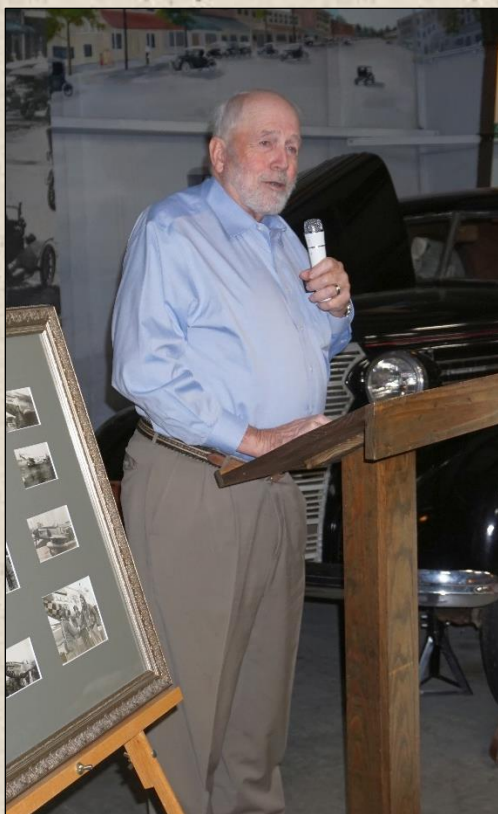
*Excellence in Community Service*

January 19, 2023  
Date

Nonnie Carroll  
Chapter Regent / State Regent  
NSDAR

Nichelle Cousins Wherry  
National Chair  
Community Service Awards Committee





Clockwise from top left: GPHS Pres. Raeann Braithwaite presents 2022 Essay Contest Award to DeWitt High School senior Chandler Merritt. Ron Lanoue presents a program on the WWII Army Airfields of East Arkansas. David Hillman donates generously to the county record book project in order to restore old courthouse books in need of preservation. Arkansas County has some of the oldest record books west of the Mississippi River. Grand Prairie DAR members Raeann Braithwaite and Claudia Ahrens present Glenn Mosenthin with his award.



# MUSEUM OF THE ARKANSAS GRAND PRAIRIE

Since our last report to the Grand Prairie Historical Society, we've hosted several groups and events, including:

- Grand Prairie Master Gardeners Annual Meeting: November 2
- Coffee with the Curator:
  - Early Rice Festival: November 4
  - The Life and Work of Pete Finken: January 5
- Acrylic Pour Class (taught by Monica Petter): November 4
- Elementary School Field Trips:
  - Marvell ISD 4th Grade: November 4
  - LRISD BTW Elementary 2nd Grade: December 13
- Spaghetti with Santa: December 1

The Museum was gifted with a waterfowl landscape mural by A. P. "Pete" Finken in late September by the American Legion. The 26' x 7' mural had hung for many years in the Legion's facility on Park Avenue and in their facility on 6th at Main before that. The mural was in poor condition, having suffered years of abuse at the hands of people who simply had no understanding of its value. Because of the financial windfall gained from an unexpected fundraiser in December, our board approved the investment to professionally restore the mural. Pinnacle Fine Art Restoration started the process on December 2 and completed it January 12. Once framed, it will be permanently displayed in our Arkansas Waterfowler Hall of Fame.

Interest in the mural led to the "Coffee with the Curator" topic presented last week, titled "The Life and Word of Pete Finken." By far our best attended event thus far, we received advance input and collaboration from members of Mr. Finken's family, most notably his grandson, Dr. Scott Carle. For those who were unable to attend or would like to revisit the presentation, it has been shared to our Facebook and YouTube platforms.

We reopened to visitor traffic on Tuesday, January 17 after being closed for two weeks. We dove further into a clean-out of our Conservatory so we will become better acquainted with our collections and be better able to enhance our exhibits. We are currently seeking any information GPHS members may have on our quilt collection to help us decide if the quilts should be housed in our collection or elsewhere. We also have numerous excess items available for sale, such as linens, toys, dolls, and vintage clothing items. This project organically led us to our next two "Coffee with the Curator" topics:

- February 2, 10am: Photo Identification and Conversation
- March 2, 10am: 1930s Stuttgart Ricebirdette Basketball

Lastly, we are in the process of upgrading our Museum collection software so our records can be maintained digitally. I expect this ongoing project to take up to five years to complete. I am currently seeking both volunteer help for this project in addition to a paid staff member to work on this and assist with daily museum business.

*Fara Foster*

Executive Director

# Remembering DeWitt, Arkansas

By Paul B. Wooldridge

Nothing was easy for the old-time railroad agent. Every day brought new problems. He needed to be a telegrapher, know all about train rules and regulations, Western Union tariffs, express tariffs, freight tariffs (both carload and less-than-carload), passenger tariffs and tickets, handling mail, express and baggage in addition to a hundred daily and monthly reports. In my 25 years as a Cotton Belt agent, every new agency greeted me with a stack of damage claims, the bane of an agent's existence, which resulted in reams of worthless correspondence. Damage claims, such as a steel plow thrown through a record player, damaging it beyond repair. I had a \$12,000 claim against a hopper car loaded with bulk clean rice because a dead mouse was allegedly found in it. A boxcar loaded with 100 bales of compressed cotton bound overseas for Sweden caught fire while being switched in the Pine Bluff yards. Every morning would bring a stack of mail to be answered.

So, tired of answering claim correspondence, I started the practice of personally inspecting the interior of every car spotted for loading, sweeping, cleaning and upgrading every car. In 25 years' time I knocked in or pulled over a million protruding nails, wearing out several steel-handled hammers. I must have used more than 500 gallons of Mulehide roofing, patching holes in roofs and sides of boxcars. Railroad equipment is subjected to very, very rough treatment. Officials wearing business suits and working in air-conditioned offices will never know how hot it gets in a steel boxcar when the outside temperature is 100 degrees. At DeWitt we used carload after carload of Waldorf cardboard panels to replace missing side and end walls.

The railroad's contract with the Order of Telegraphers union specifically stated that we were not required to clean or condition railroad equipment. What I did, however, was very successful. For example, one day Trainmaster Ware dropped by the depot at Caruthersville, Mo. He told me that there had been a claim of \$100 or more against every boxcar loaded with bulk soybeans at Blytheville, Ark. He added, "There have been no claims against the soybeans you handle." During the fall, business at DeWitt was especially good as we would handle as high as 75 carloads in one day, counting both inbound and outbound on the Gillett branch. We were told repeatedly that the Gillett branch was a "gold mine" for the railroad. With the rice mills operating day and night shifts, I'd often work until 2 a.m. and be back on duty at 7 a.m., being sure the rice mills had good equipment. I also worked on Sunday without pay. There was no logic in charging \$1,000 in freight charges and paying out \$2,000 in damage claims, spending endless hours answering needless claim correspondence.

At DeWitt I had my only clerical assistant, Joe Bryant, the best clerk any agent ever had. As soon as we'd finish our daily mountain of paperwork, we would clean, inspect, and upgrade equipment. One night about 10 p.m. we were checking car seals and a cut of outbound loads when we found a load with the door not closed. We put three railroad spikes in the door hasp and I hammered away with a sledge hammer. One of the spikes flew like a bullet just inches past Joe's head. I still cringe at his narrow escape. Mr. Frank Pitts, our very good friend with the rail-road's commercial department, told Joe and myself on one occasion, "You two men are saving the Cotton Belt \$80,000 a year in claims alone."

I well remember the last day at DeWitt in June 1973. With all that business the trainmaster had said the railroad would have to keep at least one man on duty but it was not to be. The last day was hectic and very sad for Joe and myself. But before we locked up the station for good, a group of railroad officials held a private meeting with rice mill representatives, assuring them of continued good service. The group returned to the station and one Southern Pacific official turned to Joe and myself and said, "What on earth have you two men done to these people? The owner of the C & L Rice Mill had tears in his eyes when he told us he knew that the present situation was just too good to last. These people love you!" So I closed and locked the door on the last branch line agency on the Cotton Belt. It had been quite an experience, extending over 25 long and difficult years.

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This article originally appeared in Paul B. Wooldridge's *Cotton Belt Memories*, self-published in 2006.



# Kicked off the Train

In an Arkansas Supreme Court decision dated January 20, 1913, the St. Louis-Southwestern (Cotton Belt) Railway was found liable for having “kicked a passenger off the train.” Here is how it happened. On December 7, 1911 a Mr. Branch entered the Argenta (now North Little Rock) ticket office of the Cotton Belt, formerly located in the company’s depot adjacent to the Main Street Bridge at Maple and Washington Streets. He purchased a round trip ticket at the regular fare from Argenta to DeWitt. He boarded the Cotton Belt local train and rode it to DeWitt, down the branch line via England and Stuttgart. On the following day, he boarded a train at the Stuttgart depot. Upon boarding he was required to show his ticket, at which point he was informed he would have to change trains at Altheimer. He wasn’t informed that his ticket would not be valid for the entire trip.

As the train pulled in to Altheimer, the Pine Bluff-Little Rock local awaited on an adjacent track. Mr. Branch was allowed to board and take a seat. Shortly after departing Altheimer, the conductor walked by collecting tickets. On seeing Mr. Branch’s ticket, he informed him that he owed the railroad an additional 57 cents in order to ride through to Argenta. Branch refused to pay the extra amount and attempted to explain his situation. When the train reached Tucker, it was stopped and Branch was put off the train. He explained that he was made to wait at Tucker since there was no hotel accommodation for passengers. He waited by the depot until the next morning, then caught a train to Pine Bluff, then changed to a train over the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad to Little Rock. Fare was paid from Tucker to Pine Bluff amounting to 72 cents. A hotel bill of \$2.00 was incurred, plus rail fare of \$1.25 more for the journey from Pine Bluff to the capital city. Branch also contended that he was evicted from the rail car in the presence of other passengers, leading to shame and humiliation on his part.

According to tariffs in place at the time, the tickets Mr. Branch purchased entitled him to ride the Central Arkansas & Eastern Railway directly from Argenta to Stuttgart. This was a recently constructed short line being operated under lease by the Cotton Belt. From Stuttgart, the ticket was valid for passage over the Cotton Belt’s branch to DeWitt. The return trip was valid from DeWitt to North Little Rock via England. The Cotton Belt denied in the lawsuit that the tickets the passenger held were good for passage via any other routing. The rail lines of the Cotton Belt crisscrossed this area of the state, connecting England, Altheimer and Stuttgart in a triangle. In the suit, the railroad evidenced a tariff which called for a 57-cent additional fare collection to travel via Altheimer as opposed to routing via England. The court noted that the Stuttgart to England (ex-CA&E) operation had only existed a few months at the time of the incident.

The lower court awarded Mr. Branch \$25.00. The Cotton Belt appealed to the Arkansas Supreme Court on the contention that the penalty was excessive. The superior court’s decision resulted in the following law:

1. Carriers—Wrongful Eviction of Passenger—Where a railway company required a passenger to show his ticket before boarding a train, and after permitting him to board the train, the passenger was then ejected from the train because his ticket read over a different line of the railway company’s road, the railway company will be liable for ejecting the passenger.
2. Carriers—Damages for Ejecting a Passenger—A passenger improperly ejected from a train may recover damages to the extent of actual expenses incurred thereby, and humiliation being an element of damage in a suit for wrongful eviction, a verdict of \$25.00 is not excessive.

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From *Arkansas Reports*, Vol. 106 (1912–1913), p. 269.

## Report from Arkansas Post National Memorial

Arkansas Post National Memorial is currently working to fill the two vacant interpretation positions and the administrative assistant. The visitor center remains closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays due to low staffing. Regular programs and events are expected to resume once staffing levels return to normal.

*Kirby McCallie*

Integrated Resource Manager  
Arkansas Post National Memorial  
1741 Old Post Road, Gillett, AR 72055  
Phone (870) 548-2207 ext. 304



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## Report from Arkansas Post Museum State Park

The Refeld-Hinman cabin was winterized with the help of Cane Creek State Park employees. Visitors may notice some bracing work has been added to the south pen. This is the first step in stabilizing the exterior walls, as replacement logs will be placed over time as the old ones deteriorate. The sign for the Peterson Building has been taken down and is being refinished at another park. It should be back up by spring and look good as new. Work continues as the Museum builds new exhibits and refurbishes existing ones. Next on the list will be a hunting display that should be completed this winter. It will feature the rifle collection along with photos and hunting artifacts. Our part time tour guide Seth Borchert (pronounced “Berkit”) has been deployed to Syria. His deployment with the National Guard will extend for the entire year of 2023. The Museum and State Parks wish him the very best and have assured him and his family that he will be given a place within the State Park family when he returns.

*Maria Jackson*

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Arkansas Post Museum State Park  
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## GPHS Membership Information

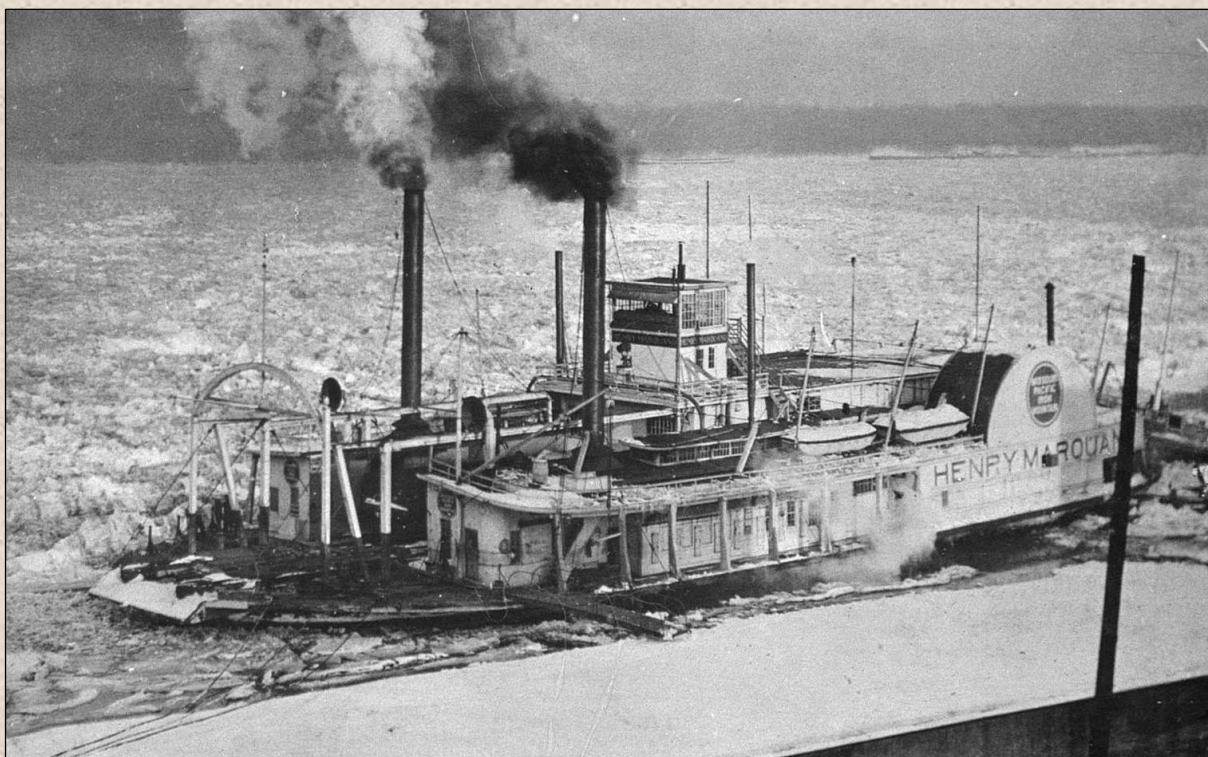
Grand Prairie Historical Society memberships include four quarterly newsletters and two issues per year (April and October) of our journal, the *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*. We offer three levels of membership: Basic, \$25.00; Contributing, \$50.00; and Supporting, \$100.00. Persons choosing the two premium memberships will be recognized in the October *Historical Bulletin*. Please join our efforts in heritage preservation by sending your dues to:

Carol Roberson, GPHS Treasurer  
P. O. Box 3621  
Little Rock, AR 72203





Army Air Forces cadet Ted Harwood Sr. is shown at Stuttgart Army Airfield on a frozen Christmas Day, 1943. His son Ted Harwood II of California is writing a book based on his father's experiences. Harwood Sr. received advanced twin-engine flight training in Class 44B at Stuttgart from December 1943 to January 1944.



The *Henry Marquand* was the original Cairo, Illinois – Birds Point, Missouri ferry steamer in use by the Cotton Belt and Iron Mountain Railroads to cross the Mighty Mississippi. It operated at this location until the 1905 opening of the Iron Mountain's bridge at Thebes, Illinois. After other assignments and storage, the *Marquand* was scrapped at New Orleans in 1927. Here it is shown during a hard freeze on the Mississippi. Many Midwestern families rode this ferry on their rail journeys to and from their new Grand Prairie homes.





The Pickwick Hotel and Anton Boysen's real estate office were located on the southeast corner of Union (Second) and Main Streets in Stuttgart. The Chicago-based Boysen and his local agent and fellow Dane, Jens E. Balle, attracted a great many Midwestern farmers, a lot of whom were German speakers, to the Grand Prairie. This had a lasting impact on Stuttgart and the region. A typical promotional quote from Boysen was "The climate [of the Grand Prairie] is in all respects all that can be required, and the health among settlers is better than anywhere in Illinois. I can thus cheerfully advise everybody to go down and examine this beautiful country, and in fact, I think that everyone who intends to buy a home owes it to himself to see this magnificent prairie before he purchases a home anywhere else."

## 2023 Meetings of Grand Prairie Historical Society

April 20	Gillett United Methodist Church
July 20	Phillips Community College, DeWitt
October 19	Arts Center of the Grand Prairie, Stuttgart

### Grand Prairie Historical Society

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[www.grandprairiehistory.org](http://www.grandprairiehistory.org)

#### Officers

President: Raeann Braithwaite  
Vice-Pres: Gay Hampton Rusk  
Secretary: Glenn Mosenthin  
Treasurer: Carol Roberson

#### Newsletter Editor

Glenn Mosenthin

GPHS is a 501(c)(3)  
organization.