



News from the Prairie

SUMMER 2023

PRESERVING OUR GRAND PRAIRIE REGION'S HISTORY

Citizens For Immanuel Hold Marker Dedication

A dedication ceremony for the new historical marker at Immanuel High School took place Saturday, May 27, with about 75 persons in attendance. The mistress of ceremonies was Janice Streeter of Citizens for Immanuel (CFI) Board of Directors. A welcome was given by Rev. George Steven Walker of Providence Missionary Baptist Church. Director Streeter introduced distinguished guests and acknowledged those who worked on the project. She presented a synopsis of Immanuel High School's history. The marker was unveiled by directors of both CFI and the White River District Association of the Missionary Baptist Church. The marker text was read by CFI Treasurer Frankie Owens.

Grand Prairie Historical Society (GPHS) Director Glenn Mosenthin spoke about the Curtis Sykes Memorial Grant Program and thanked Tatyana Oyinloye of the Arkansas State Archives for her assistance with the grant process which resulted in the marker. He also expressed appreciation to the Black History Commission of Arkansas for approving the grant. GPHS President Raeann Refeld Braithwaite gave remarks on the Society's preservation goals and outreach. Memories of Immanuel High School were given by Lela Jemerson Gamble, followed by several other alumni who shared their reflections. CFI Director James Phillips spoke on the future goals of the organization. Closing remarks were delivered by Citizens for Immanuel President Ray Butler. The dedication finished with a singing of the school's alma mater by the many Immanuel alumni present (below).





Citizens for Immanuel and White River District Missionary Baptist Association unveil the historical marker.



GPS members Glenn Mosenthin, Paul Braithwaite, Raeann Braithwaite, Marsha Winklepleck, Jessie Walsh, Glenda Fread, Carolyn McCoy, Barbara Holt Bryant, Claudia Ahrens, Bill Shrum, Travis Trice, (not pictured: Sonny Rhodes).



CFI officers Marilyn McCoy and Janice Streeter.



Immanuel High School alumnus Bill Wilder.

The marker wording is as follows: “The Immanuel Industrial Institute, a rural boarding school, was established in 1910 by the White River District Association of Missionary Baptist Churches to educate the African American children of the White River District. The first building was erected on the land purchased from Moses Katz and his wife for \$200.00. The first structure for Immanuel Industrial Institute was a two-story wood frame building. The lower level consisted of classrooms, a chapel, dining room and a kitchen. The upstairs was a dormitory for the women teachers and female students. The second building was a four-room cottage used to house the men and boys. The Immanuel Industrial Institute student population reached as many as 100 students during its first decade of existence. Some of the surrounding communities transported students by horse and wagons and others on the back of trucks. Many of the students walked to school.

The students that lived in the dormitory were able to pay for their schooling by working on Immanuel’s 40-acre farm. The two main industries of the school were a broom factory and a blacksmith shop. The curriculum included blacksmithing, carpentry, broom-making, painting, upholstery, art, music and the humanities. In 1923, P. A. Garrison, N. A. Johnson and S. E. Ryan, legal trustees, deeded two acres of the forty to the public school system for an African American public school site on which a Rosenwald building was erected, creating School District Number 70. In 1947, the Arkansas County Court dissolved School Districts No. 61 and No. 72 and annexed their territory to Immanuel. This paved the way for the formation of Arkansas County School District 73, creating Immanuel High School.

During the 1950s, Immanuel’s enrollment reached as many as 506 students. In 1966 District No. 73 and the Immanuel High School were dissolved. The administrators of the Immanuel School from opening until closing were: P. A. Garrison, H. Drier, D. B. Marshall, C. C. Butler, Miles Butler, Henry Wright, J. Kent, L. R. McNeil, J. H. Bankhead, O. B. Elders, Sr., Brooks Williams, Jesse Mason, L. G. Standfield, Elijah Coleman, A. Tate, L. Harris, Marie Fowler, J. S. Clemmons, E. E. Bogan, M. C. Arrant, F. W. Smith, P. G. Faison, Timothy Young, Clyde O’Neal, and Johnnie Phillips. In 1978, Immanuel Christian School was opened under the leadership of Rev. Thomas Phillips and his wife Pauline. The Christian School closed in 1989.”

Annual Potluck and Summer Program Held in DeWitt

Grand Prairie Historical Society enjoyed a potluck dinner prior to their summer quarterly meeting July 20 at the DeWitt campus of Phillips Community College-Univ. of Arkansas. Around fifty attendees were on hand. A program titled “Steamboats, Ironclads, and Arkansas Post,” was given by Arkansas Post National Memorial Superintendent Ron C.D. Fields. He portrayed both types of boats and their contents with numerous visual images. The steamboat was described by Fields as “the floating hardware store of its day.” Preserved examples of both boat types were shown. The ironclad gunboat USS *Cairo* is displayed at Vicksburg National Military Park after having been discovered and raised from the Yazoo River in the 1960s. (<https://www.nps.gov/vick/u-s-s-cairo-gunboat.htm>). The merchant steamer *Arabia*, a side-wheeler that sank in the Missouri River near today’s Kansas City in 1856 and was recovered in 1988, is preserved in a museum there. (<https://www.1856.com/>). Both vessels yielded a wealth of period artifacts giving insight into mid-19th century life. On a more local level, Supt. Fields’ presentation offered an in-depth look into the experiences and lifestyles that Arkansas Post inhabitants would have had in the early to mid-19th century. GPHS President Raeann Refeld Braithwaite conducted the business meeting with reports from the county’s museums and other updates. She informed attendees that the historical marker plaque for Stuttgart’s Love Rest Green Grove Cemetery, obtained through the Curtis Sykes Foundation, should be received in the coming weeks. A dedication by Green Grove Cemetery Association members will be scheduled and publicized following the marker’s installation.



GPHS members John Cover and Jim Prange enjoy a visit.

The Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of this region’s heritage. Four quarterly programs are held on the third Thursdays of January, April, July, and October in differing venues around the county. In addition, members receive four newsletters and two award-winning journals. The Society’s officers are Raeann Refeld Braithwaite, president; Gay Hampton Rusk, vice president; Carol Roberson, treasurer; and Jessie Walsh, secretary. The board of directors are Claudia Haller Ahrens, Linda Fischer, Glenn Mosenthin, Bill Shrum, Tommy Strabala, and Travis Trice. Glennda Refeld Fread serves as parliamentarian. Paul Braithwaite coordinates audio-visual production for the meetings. Interested citizens are encouraged to join the Society’s efforts by sending \$25 annual dues to Treasurer Carol Roberson, P.O. Box 3621, Little Rock, AR 72203. Visit the organization’s website at <https://www.grandprairiehistory.org/> and Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/grandprairiehistory>. The next GPHS meeting will be held October 19 at the Arts Center of the Grand Prairie in Stuttgart, with a presentation by Jessie Walsh of Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie on the renowned local artist A. P. “Pete” Finken (1883–1968). The public is always invited!

In the April 2023 *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin* article “Remembering Nady, Arkansas,” on page 49, first paragraph, the name Martha Lou Vansickle should instead read Nola Jean Vansickle. Your editor thanks our Director Emeritus John W. Cover, who was well acquainted with the family, for the correction. —HGM.

Judge Best Proclaimed May as Preservation Month

The month of May was National Preservation Month. This year's theme was "People Saving Places" to spotlight the work citizens and organizations do to preserve local heritage. Preservation is a team effort. In May, all levels—federal, state, county, local—were telling the stories of what goes into saving these special places. Recently, Grand Prairie Historical Society highlighted their brochure "Driving Tour of Arkansas County Historical Markers and Sites." On Tuesday, May 9, Arkansas County Judge Thomas "Eddie" Best issued the following proclamation declaring Arkansas County's participation in Preservation Month:

"To the people of Arkansas County and to all whom these presents shall come – Greetings:

Whereas, Historic Preservation is an effective tool for managing growth, revitalizing neighborhoods, fostering local pride and maintaining community character while enhancing livability; and

Whereas, Historic Preservation is relevant for communities across the nation, both urban and rural, and for Americans of all ages, all walks of life and all ethnic backgrounds; and

Whereas, it is important to celebrate the role of history in our lives and the contributions made by dedicated individuals in helping to preserve the tangible aspects of the heritage that has shaped us as a people; and

Whereas, May 2023 is designated as Preservation Month, co-sponsored by Arkansas County, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, the Department of Arkansas Heritage, the National Park Service, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the National Register of Historic Places for National Preservation.

Now, therefore, I, Thomas E. Best, Arkansas County Judge, do proclaim May 2023 as National Preservation Month.

It is further proclaimed that I, Thomas E. Best, call upon the people of Arkansas County to join their fellow citizens across the United States in recognizing and participating in this special observance.

In witness whereof, I, Thomas E. Best, have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of Arkansas County to be affixed on this 9th day of May in the year of our Lord, Two Thousand Twenty-Three.

Thomas E. Best, Arkansas County Judge"

Historical Society board members Glenda Fread and Bill Shrum, shown with County Judge Eddie Best (rt.) and the proclamation. Fread displays the "Driving Tour of Arkansas County Historical Markers and Sites," brochure recently published by GPHS.



MUSEUM OF THE ARKANSAS GRAND PRAIRIE

PRESENTED TO THE GRAND PRAIRIE HISTORICAL SOCIETY JULY 20, 2023

Our third seasonal exhibit for 2023 opened June 8. “The Grand Prairie Grand Prix” was a race started by the Stuttgart Junior Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with the Sports Car Club of America in 1959. The original plan was to raise enough money to build a baseball field at John Cain Park, which was accomplished and more. The race ran successfully until 1978, when increasing costs of putting on the event led to its demise. At its peak, the race brought in as many as 15,000 guests to the Stuttgart Air Base. We are grateful to several contributors who lent their histories and artifacts to the museum for this exhibit.

This exhibit was unveiled with our June *“Coffee with the Curator”* topic of the same title. Our May program was titled, “A Tale of Two Parks,” telling the history of both John Cain and J.B. Bryant Parks. This timely topic was planned with the 85th anniversary of the opening of John Cain on July 4 in mind as well as the summer park season. All of our CWC presentations can be viewed on both Facebook and YouTube.

Further scheduled topics include:

- August 3, 10am: *Gum Pond Before the Buerkles* with guest speaker Glenn Mosenthin
- September 7, 10am: *The History of the Museum - 50 Years in the Making*
- October 5, 10am: Guest Speaker Rachel Silva with Preserve Arkansas

Our summer has been very fruitful, kicking off with “Projects on the Prairie” on June 13. This programming for children has included a lesson in pointillism with Monica Petter, historical presentation from the Stuttgart Fire Department, and a lesson in identifying and painting decoys with AFGC’s Lori Bailey. Our staff has taught our student historians how to build and race their own sports cars and entertain themselves with games the early prairie settlers would have played. Our last event will be an archeological topic hosted by the Old State House Museum.

We were joined by 60 of our closest female friends on June 22 for our Annual Summer Ladies Luncheon. Two of those friends graciously provided the beverages, catering and program that focused on wonderful things that are “Prairie Grown.” Ashley Smith with The Salad Smith & More, and Sarah Shelton-James with BWG Herbal Teas were as informative as they were enjoyable.

Lastly, we have been working to research, reimagine, and rehabilitate several of our exhibits. The Gazebo and the Prairie Privy were both restored this summer with the support of two local donors. We have had the pleasure and support of our summer intern, Makena Munger, who has been instrumental in reimagining the graphic display for the Firehouse as well as planning for a completely new exhibit highlighting the history of the Masons on the Arkansas Grand Prairie. We are looking forward to seeing these exhibits completed over the coming weeks.

Fara Foster

Executive Director

Visit us Tuesday - Friday: 8am - 4pm; Saturday: 10am - 4pm

921 E. 4th St., Stuttgart, AR 72160

Phone 870-673-7001

Report from Arkansas Post Museum State Park

Summer is in full swing. Large numbers of visitors have explored the museum this year. As of July, the museum has welcomed over, 10,000 unique visitors. Staffing crises still plague State Parks. The museum has not been spared. There is one full-time employee who has worked alone for seven months with no end in sight. However, there is a position available. Part time tour guide that works every Saturday and Sunday for \$12.51 per hour. This will mean some holiday work as well. For more information on how to apply, please contact Maria Jackson.

In late spring a press release was issued explaining that “Communications Director Alexa Henning said in a written statement ... that Gov. Sanders is committed to elevating our State Parks, not closing them or firing our excellent and dedicated parks staff.” This was in response to some articles published in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. The new exhibit by the Grand Prairie Historical Society has been installed and is an excellent addition. Visitors have enjoyed looking it over. Programs and tours continue despite the staffing shortage and hot weather. The full schedule is available online at www.arkansasstateparks.com/parks/arkansas-post-museum.

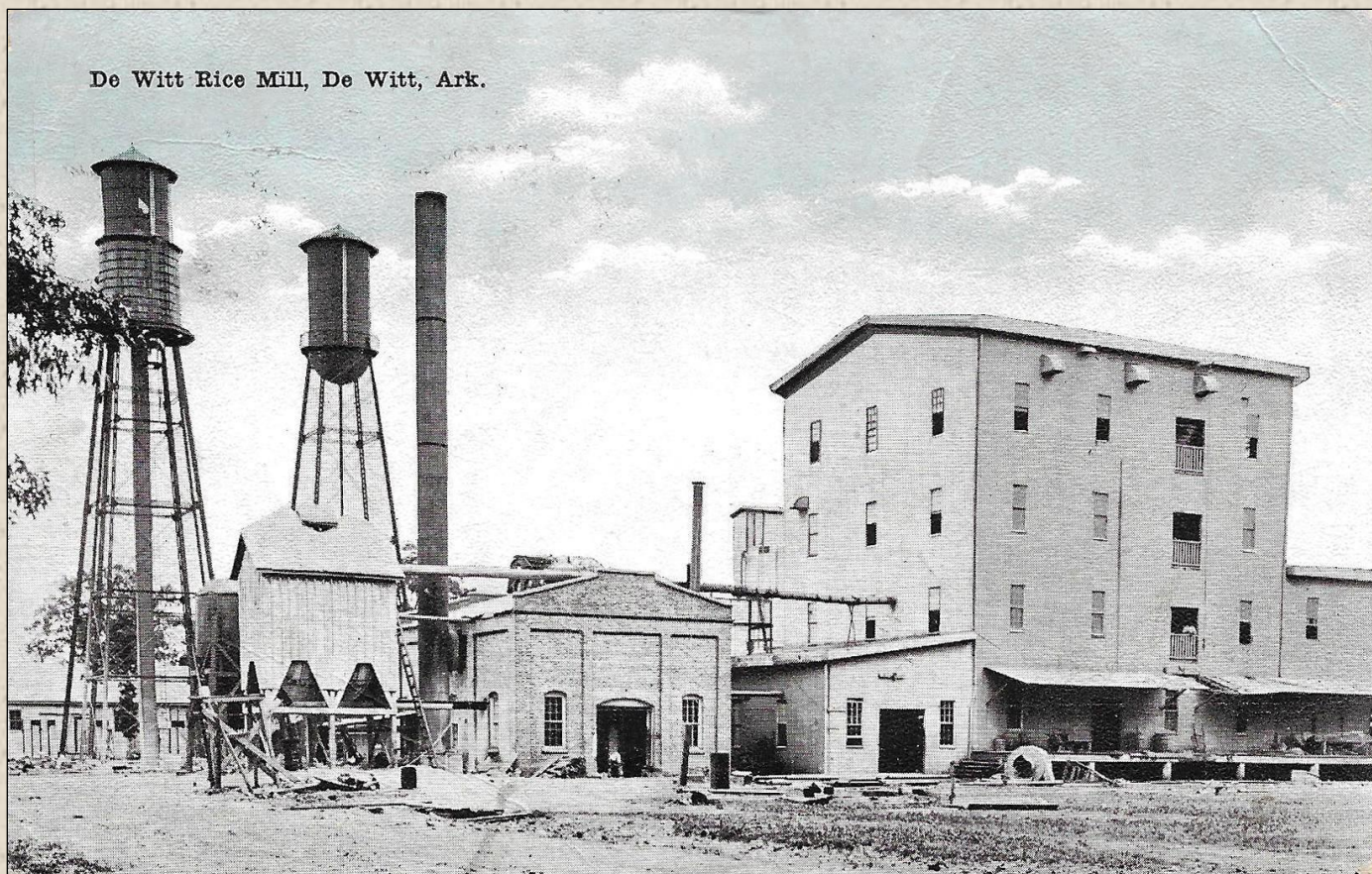
Maria Jackson

Facility Manager II
Arkansas Post Museum State Park
5530 Hwy 165 South, Gillett, AR 72055
maria.jackson@arkansas.gov
Phone (870)-548-2634



St. Louis-Southwestern (Cotton Belt) Railway's fast freight trains pass near Stuttgart in 1960. *J. Parker Lamb photo.*

De Witt Rice Mill, De Witt, Ark.



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 for \$20; Individual, two years, for \$35;
- Family, one year for \$30; Family, two years for \$45;
- Foreign, one year for \$30; Student, one year, for \$15;
- Contributing, one year, for \$50; Sustaining, one year for \$100;
- Supporting, one year, for \$200;
- Life Membership for \$500 (payable over three years);
- Permanent Membership for \$1,000 (payable over five years).



Renewal and new memberships may be paid securely online at www.arkansashistoricalassociation.org.

Grand Prairie Historical Society

P. O. Box 3621
Little Rock, AR 72203
870-830-1425
www.grandprairiehistory.org

Officers

President: Raeann Braithwaite
Vice-Pres: Gay Hampton Rusk
Secretary: Jessie Walsh
Treasurer: Carol Roberson

Newsletter Editor

Glenn Mosenthin

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