



News from the Prairie

WINTER 2026

PRESERVING OUR GRAND PRAIRIE REGION'S HISTORY

Winter Meeting Features Program on Leslie Family

Our organization's first meeting of 2026 took place at the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie in Stuttgart, with Museum Director Fara Foster presenting an interesting program, "Thomas H. Leslie: The Great Promoter," detailing the influence and accomplishments of Leslie and his family in drawing settlers and businesses to the region. His Stuttgart & Arkansas River Railroad enabled towns like Almyra, DeWitt, and Gillett to flourish with access to distant markets in the 1890s. Around 42 attendees were on hand for the winter quarterly meeting. The hospitality committee led by Vicky Wilson did their usual outstanding work in providing refreshments for the pre-meeting social period. Past President Raeann Braithwaite introduced incoming President Glenn Mosenthin, who in turn introduced the rest of the leadership team for 2026–2027: Laura Beth Place, vice president; Jessie Walsh, secretary; Braithwaite, treasurer; directors Gay Rusk, Claudia Ahrens, Bill Shrum, Travis Trice, Tommy Strabala, and Richard Wilson. He also introduced audiovisual coordinator Paul Braithwaite and our new journal editor Makena Munger. Braithwaite presented Mosenthin with an appreciation certificate for his years as editor.

President Mosenthin thanked members and the board for their confidence in nominating and voting him into office. He previously served two years as secretary, 21 as a director, and 17 years as editor. He will continue his contributions to the Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin and this newsletter as editor *emeritus*. Mosenthin recapped recent accomplishments and activities of the Society, including the installation of five historical markers. The benefits of the group's social media presence were mentioned. He expressed concern over the Society's need to restore membership to previous levels. Mosenthin stated that GPHS plans to partner in upcoming America250 observances with other groups in the coming year. He introduced new Arts Center of the Grand Prairie Director Dr. Elizabeth Hoskyn, who spoke about the Center's 70 years of service and its plans for future events. National Park Service Ranger David Albert reported on Arkansas Post National Memorial's planned events. Fara Foster gave a report on the Museum's ongoing renovations and coming events.



(left):
Fara Foster.

(right):
Braithwaite
presents
certificate to
Mosenthin.





Grand Prairie Historical Society
Awards This Certificate of Appreciation to
Glenn Mosenthin

In recognition of his service as editor of the *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*,
and his ongoing efforts in historical preservation.

Presented this 15th day of January, 2026.

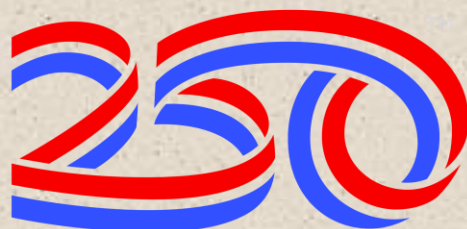
Linda Fischer, President

Travis Trice, Director

Calling for Articles Relating to America's 250th Anniversary!

On this coming July 4th, the United States will celebrate its 250th birthday. GPHS is seeking contributions to our April edition of the *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*. If you have ancestors who lived in early Colonial America during the Revolutionary War whose descendants relocated to Arkansas County, we invite you to share your genealogical research with us for publication. We are looking for family records and research that crosses multiple generations. Submit your article to hgmosenhin@gmail.com by March 31st.

AMERICA



Joan Rodgers

Presents

Her Dancing Pupils In

"Spotlight Parade"

Tuesday, April 18, 1950

8:00 o'clock

DeWitt High School Auditorium

Mechanical Doll ----- Suzanne Parker
Little Alice Bluegown ----- Rose Pittman
Cowboy Rhythm ----- Elizabeth Stagg
Queen of the Mat ----- Judy Stephenson
Mammy's Little Baby ----- Betty Sue Schillings
Reading—"The Bath Hour" ----- Carole King
(Pupil of Mrs. Jack Coleman)

Little Mexican Doll ----- Joann Bell
Prissy Misses ----- Patty Siems, Suzanne Parker
King of Harlem ----- Sid LaCotts
Limber Mis ----- Jerry Lou McKenzie
Snappy Tapper ----- Patty Sollars
Swinging Down the Lane—
Judy Stephenson, Betty Sue Schillings, Kathy Davis,
Rose Pittman, Jerry Lynn Rousseau, Elizabeth Stagg.

Glow Worm ----- Anita Winkler
Dream of Hawaii ----- Patty Siems
Special ----- Jimmy Gingerich
Tap Militaire ----- Thresa Moore
Ballet Beautiful ----- Lillian Kay Morgan
Reading—"The Baffled Champion" ----- Bob Rollison
(Pupil of Mrs. Jack Coleman)

Cowboy Sweetheart ----- Jerry Lynn Rousseau
Miss Acrobat ----- Joan Almond
Rhumba Royale ----- Kathy Davis
Ding Dong Daddy ----- Kalynn Wilson
Boogie Woogie ----- Thresa Moore, Lillian Kay Morgan, Joann Bell
Goofus ----- Nancy Wilson
Gypsy Charmer ----- Patty Sollars
Song—"Canasta"

Jo Garot, Betty Jo Ruffin, Meredith Miller,
and Carolyn Colvert.

Guest Number ----- Jimmy Smith
Parasol Patter—
Joan Almond, Kalynn Wilson, Anita Winkler,
Jerry Lou McKenzie.

Stair Tap ----- Joan Rodgers
Ella Reed Blackmon, Accompanist

THIRD ANNUAL BEAUTY PAGEANT
FEATURING THE SELECTION AND CORONATION
—of—

MISS DEWITT OF 1954

JUNE 8, 1954

WAR MEMORIAL BUILDING
DeWitt, Arkansas

Sponsored by the DeWitt Jr. Chamber of Commerce

☆ ★ ☆ ★ ☆

Winner will be entered in the Miss Arkansas Contest
at Searcy June 23-24-25.

☆ ★ ☆ ★ ☆

PROGRAM

Master of Ceremonies, Chas. Pattillo

Music Directed by

Mr. and Mrs. Ben Quertermous and Miss Jamie Blackmon

Introduction of Judges

Promenade of Little Miss DeWitt contestants and escorts.

Final appearance of Miss DeWitt of 196???

Initial appearance of senior contestants in evening gowns.

Special Bob Evans

Presentation of contestants in bathing suits

Special Ben and His Boys

And now Talent

Special Sam Sloan

An interview with our beauties

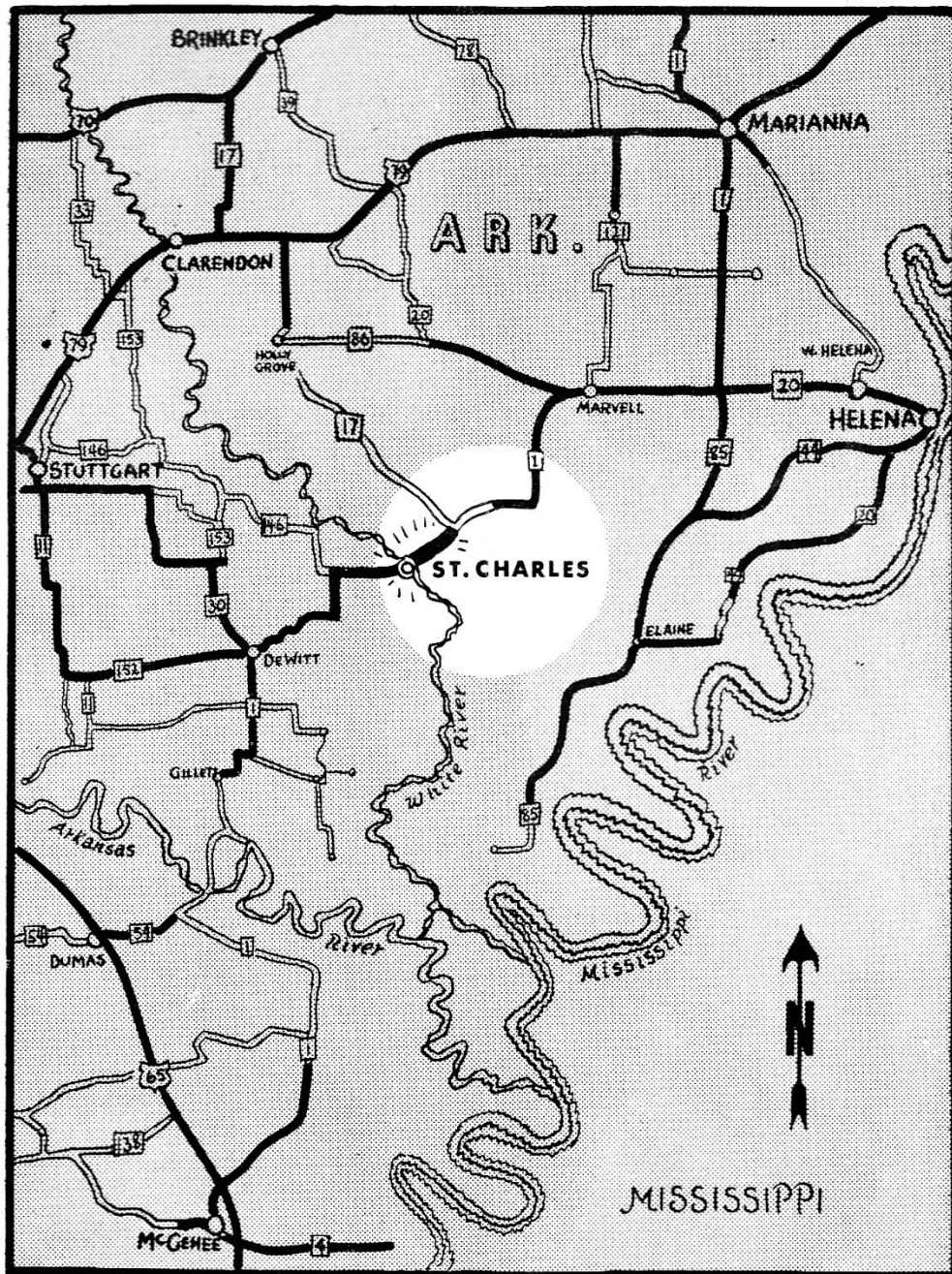
Special 4 Hits and 2 Misses

Coronation of Little Miss DeWitt

Crowning of Miss DeWitt of 1954 Mayor George Leibrock

Formal Opening

Highway No. 1 and 17



Connecting Arkansas, Monroe
and Phillips Counties

MARCH 4, 1955

Parade C. F. Downs, Chr.

PROGRAM

Presiding Walton Terry, Gen. Chr.

Band DeWitt H. S.

America Audience, led by L. E. Barnes

Invocation Rev. Rex Shreve

Greetings Jack Whitmore, Mayor of St. Charles

Response Visiting Mayors

Greetings from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pieter Van Huigen

History of Development of Highway No. 1 Geo. Pike, DeWitt

Band Marvell H. S.

Introduction of Visiting Post Commanders

Presentation of State Com. of American Legion

..... Rev. C. R. Roy, Com. Cochran-Simpson Post, St. Charles

Response State Commander

Band Helena H. S.

Introduction of Members of the General Assembly

Skit Bob Evans, Helena

Presentation of Arkansas Highway Officials

and Arkansas Highway Commission Ballard Deane

Address Cecil Lynch, Chr. of Ark. Highway Commissioners

Presentation of Gov. Orville Faubus

"Old Man River" Bob Evans

Cutting of Ribbons

Flowers Compliments of McKenzie Florists, DeWitt, Ark.

History of Highway No. 1 — The DeSoto Trail

Highway No. 1 in Eastern Arkansas has a fascinating history. A good part of it follows the trail of Hernando DeSoto, the first [known European] to venture west of the Mississippi River, and it claims to be the first road in the state. The “never conquered” Spanish cavalier and his band visited the St. Francis, White, and Arkansas River section in 1541–42, and he must have stamped an impressive imprint on East Arkansas and generations that have followed, for the people of this section have exhibited that invincible courage that conquers all odds, until this day they see the realization of their longtime dream—the completion of State Highway No. 1. When the highway through this section was built, there were no such things as state highways. The portion of the road that runs through Arkansas County was blacktopped by Southern Road Improvement District No. 5, commissioners of which were J. A. Smith, Ed LaFargue, H. P. Brown, R. W. Dudley and John Boone of DeWitt, and G. B. Deane of St. Charles. The road was constructed in 1921–22. It was blacktopped south of DeWitt only six miles, [with] the completion of the asphaltting on to Gillett taking place in the early ‘30s.

When the first State Highway Commission was formed, Mr. Dudley assisted his good friend, Herbert Wilson, a member of the commission, in mapping out what we now know as Highway 1. It includes Desha, Arkansas, Phillips, Monroe, Lee, St. Francis, Cross, Poinsett, Craighead, Greene, and Clay Counties, and eight county seats, more than any other highway in the state: DeWitt, Marianna, Forrest City, Wynne, Harrisburg, Jonesboro, Paragould, and Piggott. First right-of-way for the road across the Indian Bay stretch was cut in 1930, and G. B. Deane, who has been a persistent missionary for this road these many years, operated a ferry at St. Charles for 17 years. In 1953 a group of citizens interested in completing the road through Indian Bay met in Little Rock and formed the Highway 1 Improvement Association. The towns of Helena, Marvell, St. Charles, DeWitt, and McGehee were represented at the meeting. G. B. Deane was made chairman of the association and E. T. Brown of Marvell, secretary. The efforts of this group finally reached the sympathetic ear of our Rep. W. F. Norrell, who secured a federal appropriation early in 1953, the State Highway Commission later agreeing to concrete the Indian Bay road and place a state-operated free ferry across the White at St. Charles. This fine road, a concrete runway, was completed in the fall of 1954, and the ferry is now in operation, thus ending a four-mile “bottle-neck” which has held up the opening of and further progress of this great section these many years. The future looks brighter than the past, for this road is included in the blueprint of the planned Mississippi River Parkway [later renamed Great River Road] which would run from the Canadian border to New Orleans. The blueprint follows this “DeSoto Trail.” —Written by Mrs. Mary Louise Wright [1955, for the dedication program]

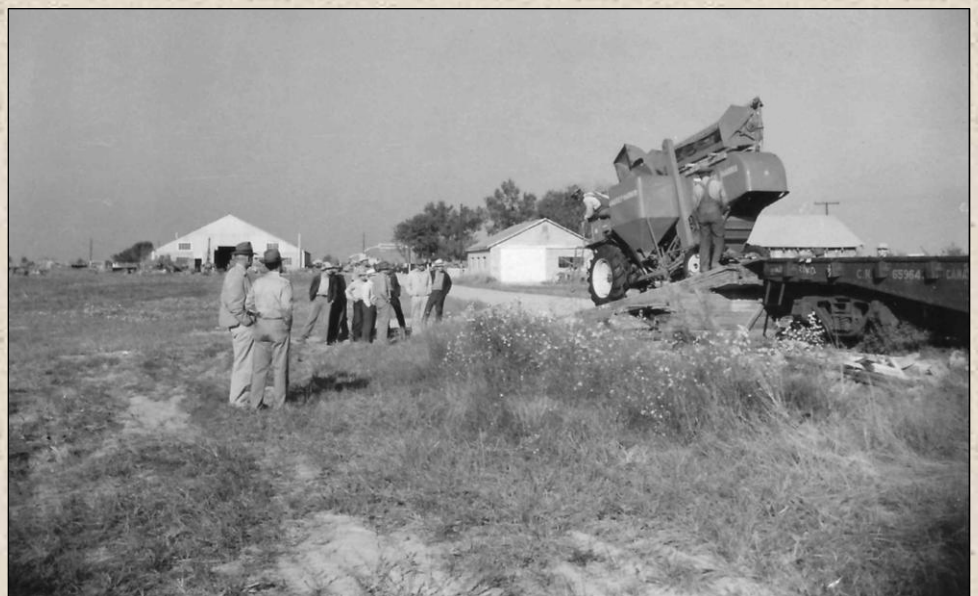
We Appreciate Our Premium Memberships!

They are Claudia Ahrens, Judge Morris Arnold, Larry Bauer, Catherine Beliveau, Ray Bohanon, David & Corita Boyd, Paul & Raeann Braithwaite, Bill & Martha Brothers, Jerry & Robin Burkett, Abby Burnett, Martha & Tom Cameron, Larry & Sandra Childers, Michael Crum, Phillip Daniels, Clark Daviss, Nealon DeVore, Dana & Scott Ellis, Ellen & Tom Fennell, Mary Fields, Leona Fletcher, Dennis Goeke, Patsy Hargrove, Roger Henderson, Barbara Holt, Tom & Margaret Holzhauer, James W. Kirkland, Dennis Lamb, Joel & Cindy Ledbetter, David Leech, George Lehmann, Eddie & Pat Lumsden, Patrick MacDonald, Gary McGaughey, Lester A. McKinley, Norma McKinney, Glenn Mosenthin, Delores Padgett, Tyler & Laura Beth Place, George Prange, Jean Prange, Jan Preiczer, Lester & Donna Quandt, James B. Rasco, Terry Rasco, Stephen Reid, Sonny & Julie Rhodes, Mark Rittman, Don Roth, Jack Sebree, Bill Shrum, Dr. Jerry & Susan Sparrow, Marian Stephenson, Gail Booth Stewart, Beth Trice Stough, Wendell & Paula Stratton, Jennifer Tilton, Travis Trice, Roger & Sondra Turner, Mary Jill Vacek, Charles & Wanda Vester, Joann West, Charles B. Whiteside III, John S. Whiteside, Charles Whiting, Tom & Martha Whiting, Vicki Whiting, Marsha Winkelpleck, Helen Wolfe, and Iris Wylie. (We regret omitting several of the above names in the October *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*—Ed.)

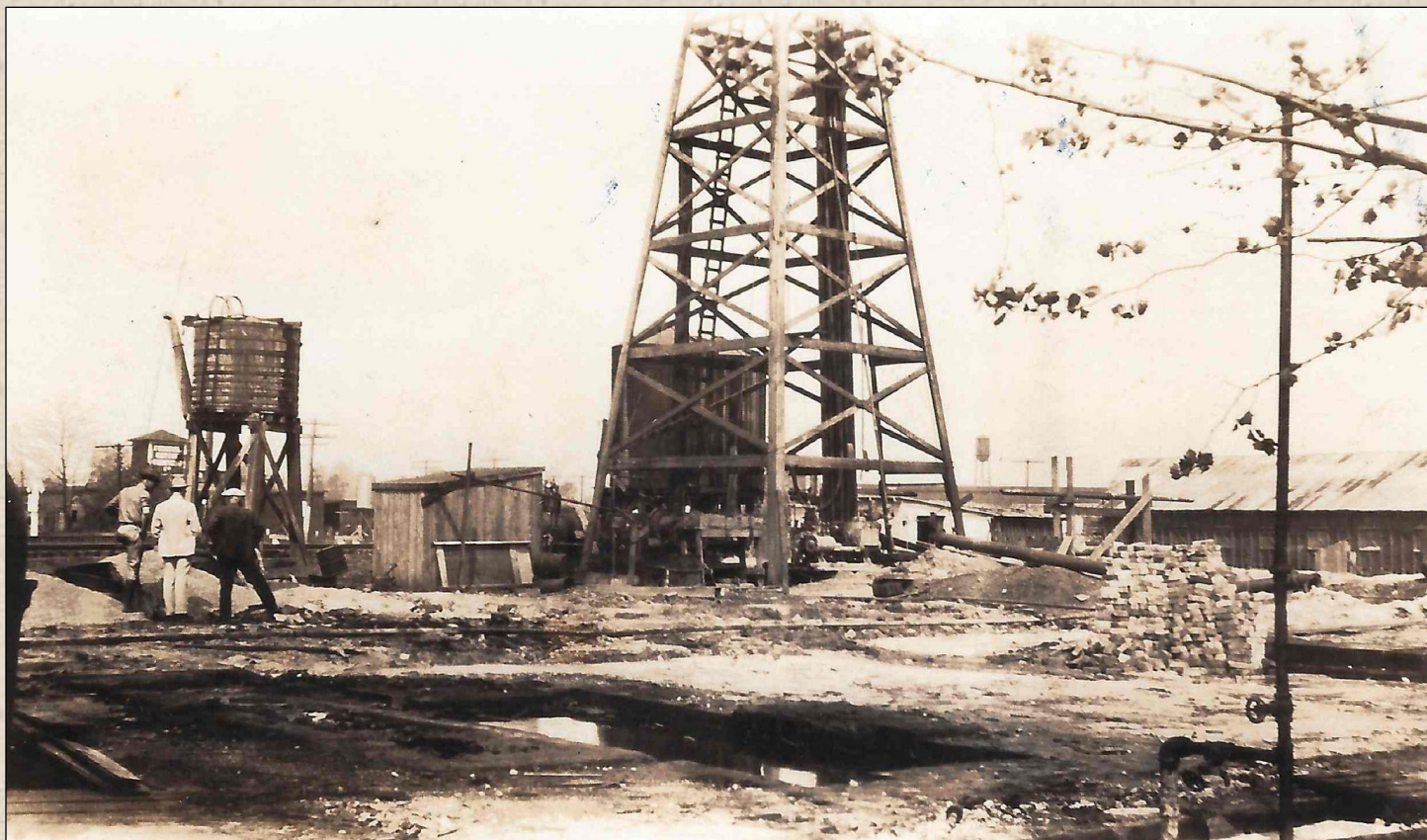
Layne Arkansas: 119 Years on the Grand Prairie

By Makena F. Munger

The rice industry in America is synonymous with Stuttgart, Arkansas. From rice's birth on the Grand Prairie in 1904, it became a coveted land for agriculture businessmen. One man in particular, Maylon E. Layne, brought his irrigation well business from the Dakotas and Texas to Stuttgart in 1907 after hearing of the rice boom. Layne-Bowler Company set up business on West 2nd Street and continued to operate there until 1982 when they moved to 2015 South Main Street (location of the Reinsch horse racing track). The Layne-Bowler Company in Stuttgart was managed by E.J. Basye when it began in 1907. In the early 1920s when it transitioned to Layne Arkansas Company, Basye, along with H.N. Allen Sickel managed the business with M.H. Koch as the secretary-treasurer. Other men noted as working in the field were W.E. Burdett, Edd House, Brown Sanderson, and John Whiley.¹ In early 2026, Layne, a Granite Company, closed. It operated in Stuttgart for 119 years, being the city's oldest continuous business.



¹ "Layne Arkansas: Stuttgart's Oldest Continuous Industry," Layne Arkansas folder, Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie Archives.



The above photographs were given to the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie after the company closed.

From the Editor

"History is who we are and why we are the way we are." David McCullough

This quote has stuck with me as I have endeavored on my personal journey through history. The longer I surround myself with relics and research, the more I come to appreciate the world around me. We are all recipients of history, and because of that fact, I believe that each of us are to be stewards of history. That is exactly what the Grand Prairie Historical Society has embarked on for over 70 years. As your new Editor, I also intend to steward the history that has been revealed to me by presenting it in our semi-annual *Historical Bulletin* and adding pieces into our newsletter. Further, I invite you to take part! Do you have information about Grand Prairie communities, schools, churches, families, or events? Do you have old images of local families or buildings? Please consider sending these to either me (makenamfm@gmail.com) or to the President and Associate Editor Glenn Mosenthin (hgmosenthin@gmail.com), so that they can be published in our upcoming April 2026 *Historical Bulletin*! —Makena F. Munger.



From the President

Welcome to our forty-second edition of *News from the Prairie*. We began publishing it ten years ago in an effort to expand our outreach into social media and other forms of contact. At this same time, our Facebook page was rolled out (www.facebook.com/grandprairiehistory) as was our internet web page (www.grandprairiehistory.com). GPHS has benefitted greatly from these. In addition, we send meeting notices and recaps to nearly 350 email recipients. Even with these ongoing efforts, our membership numbers have decreased over time. Twenty years ago, we had nearly 400 household memberships, but recently we have fallen to below 200. This trend is not uncommon for organizations such as ours. I know of many groups who have similarly lost membership totals. There are many reasons for this—the pandemic, a lack of interest in history until people are farther along in age or retired, and a plethora of competing organizations, events, and interests that occupy spare time. I have made it my main priority to do all possible to interact with prospective members in various ways, hopefully to restore membership levels and increase interest in history, which is largely underemphasized in today's education world. Growth in numbers will allow us to continue our ongoing work in historic preservation. We are proud to have been able to place five markers in recent years, improve the condition of several old county record books, and contribute to the needs of libraries, museums, and other preservation groups in our area. We are most grateful for the support of all our membership. GPHS welcomes your input, whether in the form of journal articles, suggestions, or your ongoing support! —Glenn Mosenthin, President, Grand Prairie Historical Society.



Our Organization was Founded December 1953 in Arkansas County, Arkansas

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.

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.

Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock

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. Address: 1 Capitol Mall, Suite 2B-215, Little Rock, AR 72201. www.arkansasheritage.com/arkansasstatearchives/home.

2026 Grand Prairie Historical Society meeting dates and places:

- January 15, 2026 – Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie, Stuttgart, 7 pm.
- April 16, 2026 – Gillett Methodist Church, 7 p.m., preceded by a potluck dinner at 6 pm.
- July 16, 2026 – 420 & Turnrow Coffee Shop, DeWitt, 7 pm.
- October 15, 2026 – Arts Center of the Grand Prairie, Stuttgart, 7 pm.

(January, July and October meetings feature a social period with refreshments at 6:30 pm.)

Grand Prairie Historical Society

P. O. Box 15
Almyra, AR 72003
870-830-1425

www.grandprairiehistory.org

Officers

President – Glenn Mosenthin
Vice-pres. – Laura Beth Place
Secretary – Jessie Walsh
Treasurer – Raeann Braithwaite

Newsletter Editors

Makena Munger
Glenn Mosenthin
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