



NEWS FROM THE PRAIRIE

SUMMER 2021

PRESERVING OUR REGION'S HISTORY

Summer Meeting in DeWitt Features Local History

Grand Prairie Historical Society held our summer quarterly meeting at Phillips Community College, DeWitt, on Thursday, July 15. Around forty members and guests attended in person or via the internet. An interesting and informative presentation entitled “Why DeWitt?” was presented by member H. Terry Rasco, retired Little Rock architect and DeWitt native. Some of his award-winning designs are Ricebelt Vo-Tech School, DeWitt; Dale Bumpers USDA Rice Research Center and UA Rice Research Center, both east of Stuttgart; First United Methodist Church in DeWitt and in Stuttgart; and Farmers and Merchants Bank, DeWitt. Over the course of his career, Terry’s firm was awarded two national design awards, four regional design awards, and dozens of state awards for design excellence. His program featured highlights of his youth and family background, reasons for the location and naming of DeWitt, and numerous images of DeWitt throughout its history.

President Raeann Braithwaite presented certificates of appreciation to Facebook administrators John Cover and James Prange for their outstanding efforts in maintaining our social media presence. She informed attendees that our website is now hosted by Wix and is easier to use. The address remains www.grandprairiehistory.org. Braithwaite announced that the historical marker plaque in St. Charles near the boat launch site, installed by our organization in 1964, will be repainted in the near future. She also reported that a recent reprinting of John and Linda Cover’s 2006 book *Gillett, Arkansas: Celebrating 100 Years* is more than half sold out.

Museum reports were given by various members. Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie’s summer “Projects on the Prairie” programs have been a success. St. Charles Museum underwent a renovation which has brought about more displays. Both facilities had water problems from the recent flooding, but due to valiant efforts by employees and volunteers, no major damage was sustained. Arkansas Post National Memorial’s annual “Ghosts of the Past” program is set for October 16. Public Lands Day is on September 25, and will be held by the Arkansas Post Project Office, Corps of Engineers, at Merrisach Lake. Arkansas Post Museum State Park reports that the remodeling of the Peterson building is continuing. The Refeld-Hinman log cabin is being evaluated for needed repairs. A display commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Wayne Hampton Bridge, loaned to the museum by GPHS Vice-president Gay Hampton Rusk, is on view through July.

Director Glenn Mosenthin previewed a 16-panel pamphlet entitled “A Driving Tour of Arkansas County Historical Markers and Sites,” currently being published by GPHS. He announced the organization’s 2022 meeting venues. Those dates and locations are: January 20, Grand Prairie Arts Center, Stuttgart; April 21, Arkansas Post National Memorial; July 21, Phillips Community College, DeWitt; and October 20, Bayou Meto Schoolhouse Lodge. Pres. Braithwaite reminded attendees of the dedication ceremony to be held July 25 for the three new plaques at Bayou Meto Methodist Church, Bayou Meto Cemetery, and Bayou Meto Schoolhouse Lodge, beginning with the 11:00 church service. The summer meeting was then adjourned.



Pres. Raeann Braithwaite presented Honorary Director and Facebook Administrator John Cover with a certificate of appreciation for his efforts in our social media outreach. At right—Terry Rasco entertained attendees with his presentation on DeWitt area history.



Dedication of Bayou Meto Schoolhouse marker. (L to R): Glenn Mosenthin, Gay Hampton Rusk, Glennda Fread, Eddie Lumsden, Pat Lumsden, Ashley Sides (Ark. Historic Preservation Program), Stephanie Lumsden Bradley, Jennifer Lumsden Gill, Raeann Braithwaite, Paul Braithwaite, Steve Bradley (front), and Claudia Ahrens. See article next page.

Bayou Meto Community Holds Marker Dedications

Members of Bayou Meto United Methodist Church held their annual homecoming, along with a dedication of three historical markers, on Sunday, July 25. The marker plaques commemorate the church, the Bayou Meto Cemetery, and the nearby Bayou Meto Schoolhouse. The observance began with the morning worship service, during which a welcome was given by church member and GPHS officer Carol Roberson. Tom Jacobs gave the call to worship and opening prayer. Rev. Nan Nelson personally greeted the many members and visitors.

Roberson presented a dedicatory address to the gathering, describing the three plaques as “One for a cemetery that was dedicated and open to all. You did not have to be of a particular faith or status in life for it to become your final resting place. One for a building that is a place of worship, and goes by the name Methodist Church, but could have just as easily been a Baptist, Lutheran, or Catholic Church. It is a community church where all are welcome. One for a schoolhouse that taught not only the ‘Three Rs,’ but also taught us about life, sharing and being responsible citizens. Three signs, three places on the map, each one important on its own merits, but together they form a community—this community.”



Attendees gather outside Bayou Meto Methodist Church. *Photos courtesy Amanda Holsted.*

The service was followed by a luncheon in the fellowship hall and on the church grounds, allowing for proper distancing. At Bayou Meto Schoolhouse Lodge, owners Eddie & Pat Lumsden and Steve & Stephanie Bradley welcomed attendees and gave tours of the historic school building, which is listed on the Arkansas Register of Historic Places. It is the sole remaining rural school standing at its original location in Arkansas County, and now serves as a waterfowling lodge. Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, who provided matching funds for the plaques, was represented by Preservation Outreach Coordinator Ashley Sides.



GPHS members with AHPP Coordinator Ashley Sides, posing with Bayou Meto Church marker. (L to R): Paul Braithwaite, Carol Roberson, Gay Rusk, Ashley Sides (AHPP), Raeann Braithwaite, Glendna Fread, Jerry Lynn Staton (front), Claudia Ahrens, Glenn Mosenthin.



Posing with Bayou Meto Cemetery marker are, (L to R): Glenn Mosenthin, Claudia Ahrens, Gay Rusk, Ashley Sides (AHPP), Raeann Braithwaite, Paul Braithwaite, Glendna Fread.

Message from our President



Hello Friends!

Oh, how marvelous it was to have our first indoor, in-person meeting since January 2020! It was so good to be back in a room full of Grand Prairie history loving folks and to have so many connect with us on Zoom. Terry Rasco's program on DeWitt history was fabulous and well worth the wait, after being postponed from last year when we couldn't meet. Many thanks to all who helped make this a productive and enjoyable meeting, especially to Paul Braithwaite for juggling the many technology needs that make it possible for us to see, hear and Zoom.

As I type this, our new brochure, "A Driving Tour of Arkansas County Historical Markers and Sites" is being printed. I cannot wait for you to see it! It's a fabulous way to bring people's attention to our significant historical treasures and another opportunity to share our history. Look for it soon in our area museums and libraries or visit our website for a free downloadable copy. My deepest appreciation and admiration to Glenn Mosenthin, Claudia Ahrens and Gay Rusk for taking this idea and running with it. The brochure turned out to be even more than I envisioned thanks to the hard work of these dedicated committee members.

You'll see in this newsletter that many attended the dedication ceremony for the Bayou Meto United Methodist Church and Cemetery and the Schoolhouse Lodge historical markers. Although these markers were not a project of GPHS, I was glad to represent our organization and express our appreciation for their commitment to preserving their history. Please make plans to see these beautiful markers. I'm so looking forward to our next meeting to be held on October 15, 2021 at Holman Heritage Center in Stuttgart. We're hoping to have a "by reservation" meal prior to our meeting with proceeds from the \$15 cost going to Holman. Our program is still in the works but promises to be another excellent one that you won't want to miss! More details will follow closer to time. Until we're together again, take care and enjoy these dog days of summer!

Respectfully,

Raeann Braithwaite

Grand Prairie Historical Society on Social Media

We email our *News from the Prairie* newsletter to around 325 members and friends of our Society. Feel free to submit your comments, articles and/or photographs to us at grandprairiehistory@gmail.com. We welcome your input. Invite your friends to join our mailing list by emailing us, or signing up directly from our newly-updated website at www.grandprairiehistory.org. There are many photos and articles available for viewing, along with a wealth of additional information. We feature the ability to pay your dues (to join or renew) online via PayPal. We have over 6,400 people from almost every state and a few foreign countries following us on Facebook. Visit our page at www.facebook.com/grandprairiehistory.

Upcoming Meetings

Please make plans to join us for our remaining 2021 meeting on October 21 at the Holman Heritage Community Center, Stuttgart, featuring a program on the facility's history and outreach. Our 2022 meeting dates and sites are: January 20, Grand Prairie Arts Center, Stuttgart; April 21, Arkansas Post National Memorial (our annual potluck); July 21, Phillips Community College, DeWitt; and October 20, Bayou Meto Schoolhouse Lodge.



This Easter photograph at the Wittenauer home in Fairmount is believed to have been taken around 1930–1940. The home was located along today's Arkansas Hwy. 343. Frank and Harry Wittenauer moved to Fairmount in 1907. *Submitted by James Waggoner.*



This postcard was sent from Stuttgart January 12, 1909 by C. M. Elliott to Annie Speelman of Scott, Paulding County, Ohio. It reads "Well Annie this is a fine looking country. It is far nicer than Paulding. There is a little snow and 15 above zero this morning, Jan, 12. Good by, C. M. Elliott." The card was apparently produced by Layne & Bowler, to attract customers to their product lines. Visible on the card are the inscriptions "#5 Layne Pump, J.P. Rich Farm, Stuttgart, Ark." and "1550 Gal's." *Submitted by James Waggoner.*



These ca. 1950s scenes are from near Fourth and Main Streets in Stuttgart. Submitted by Scott Carle.

GPHS Reprints Gillett Centennial History

Gillett, Arkansas

1906



2006



Celebrating 100 Years

November 21, 1906 – 2006

Grand Prairie Historical Society was pleased to sponsor the reprinting of *Gillett, Arkansas: Celebrating 100 Years*, by John and Linda Cover, originally published by the Gillett Centennial Celebration Committee in 2006. This well-researched glimpse into the history and people of a typical Arkansas Grand Prairie community includes the incorporation petition, a list of mayors, a plat of the new town, and names of service members from Arkansas County killed in action during all the wars. Articles include narratives on the arrival of the earliest families, establishment of the town, coming of the railroad, a list of postmasters, and school and church histories. Of special interest are a series of articles written by longtime Gillett teacher Sybil Youngblood Hightower, who also served as GPHS editor for many years. The authors bring readers up to the 2000s with their coverage of various topics from the modern era. Photographs from all periods are liberally sprinkled throughout the book. Those interested in Gillett's history may order a copy for \$25 postpaid from our website, www.grandprairiehistory.org, or P.O. Box 15, Almyra, AR 72003.

Please send articles and photos to your editor for the October issue of the *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin*!

Grand Prairie Historical Society

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