News from the Prairie

AUTUMN 2026

PRESERVING OUR GRAND PRAIRIE REGION'S HISTORY

Fall Meeting Features Plum Bayou Mounds Program

The Grand Prairie Historical Society held their October quarterly meeting Thursday, October 15 at the Arts Center of the Grand Prairie in Stuttgart. Director Elizabeth Hoskyn gave us a welcome to open the meeting. Society President Glenn Mosenthin introduced the leadership team of officers and directors. The program was given by Lead Interpreter Robin Gabe of Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park. Ms. Gabe informed the thirty or so attendees of recent new findings from investigations conducted at the mound complex by archeologists. She explained the reasons for the facility's name change from Toltec to Plum Bayou some years ago. A PowerPoint presentation illustrated some of the artifacts from the site.

The quarterly business meeting was conducted by Pres. Mosenthin, who reminded the group that Arkansas Post National Memorial's popular "Ghosts of the Past" event was set for the following Saturday. He announced the dates for the Arkansas Historical Association's 2027 annual conference, which will be held April 1-3 in Russellville. He noted that GPHS has over 8,000 Facebook followers as well as an email list of 350 recipients who receive the *News from the Prairie* newsletter and meeting and event notices. Renewal of the director terms of Claudia Ahrens and Gay Rusk were passed by a unanimous vote. Meeting venues for 2027 were announced. They are: Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie, January 21; Gillett Methodist Church, April 15; First Christian Church, DeWitt, July 15; and Arts Center of the Grand Prairie, October 21. Program topics will be announced prior to meetings.

Mosenthin and Raeann Braithwaite reported on the necessary changes being made to signage at Scull Cemetery near Arkansas Post, which corrects information later found to be erroneous. Director Ahrens gave an update on the project to place a Statue of Justice display in the DeWitt Courthouse to commemorate the actual statue which once topped the old 1892-1933 building and was later displayed at Arkansas Post Lake. A dedication is planned for the near future. She also reported on the restoration of a valuable historical scrapbook at the St. Charles Museum, using grant funds received by GPHS from the Nathan Cummings Foundation in New York and sponsored by Society and Foundation member Nealon DeVore. Ahrens also informed the group of the new David and Jimmie Jo Leech Rotary pocket park at Second and Main in Stuttgart. Signage was written by Mosenthin, and a QR (quick read) code will be displayed directing users to an online article on area railroad history authored by the late James Bennett, who served this organization in many capacities.

A new $150 Sustaining Membership level was announced, to complement the Society's current $25, $50, and $100 levels. Grand Prairie Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of this region's heritage. Interested citizens are encouraged to join the Society's efforts by sending dues to Treasurer Raeann Braithwaite, P.O. Box 15, Almyra, AR 72003. Payment may also be made via the organization's website at www.GrandPrairieHistory.org. The next GPHS meeting will take place Thursday, January 21 at the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie. Details will be publicized closer to meeting time.





Left: Dr. Elizabeth Hoskyn, Director of the Arts Center of the Grand Prairie.

Right: Robin Gabe, Lead Interpreter at Plum Bayou Mounds Archeological State Park.

The Geography Examination for County Certificates in Arkansas, September 1894

These geography questions were prepared by the State of Arkansas Department of Education to be used in the examinations for county teaching certificates in the fall of 1894. Recent assessments of today's high school and even college graduates have uncovered an ignorance of geography, a subject that had to be passed to receive any grade of county teacher's license in 1894. Many seeking to qualify to teach in the rural schools of Arkansas County at this time had completed only eight grades of formal education. Yet even these aspirants were expected to demonstrate a minimum 60% proficiency in answering the questions that follow:

1. What two motions has the earth? Discuss the effects of these on the measurement of time.

2. If the earth's axis were inclined 20º instead of 23½º to the plane of its orbit, what would the width of each time zone be?

3. If it was desired to follow a parallel of latitude around the earth so as to pass through the most progressive and populous countries, which one would be chosen?

4. Give three proofs of the earth's rotundity, How many degrees of the earth's longitude correspond to one hour of time? Why?

5. Going south from the equator, what changes would be observed in climate, vegetation, and mode of living?

6. In a voyage on the Mississippi from source to mouth, tell what states, cities, and industries may be seen.

7. Sketch a map of South America and locate on it the principal mountain systems, the principal river systems, three important seaports, and three inland cities.

8. Name an important British possession in Asia and give two of its large rivers and two of its important cities.

9. Name the six largest rivers of Europe and locate each.

10. Discuss the Suez Canal and the proposed Nicaragua Canal. Where is the Soudan?

Grand Prairie History Quiz

General Samuel Mitchell founded and owned Gum Pond Plantation and lived there from 1860–1867. The home site was later the Buerkle, Pettit, and Wilkes property. It was located behind (west) of the current Baptist Health Medical Center in Stuttgart. General Mitchell hailed from the Shelbyville, Tennessee area and registered many achievements during his 76 years. Which of the following does not apply to Samuel Mitchell? (Answer appears on page 6).

a) Grand Master of the Arkansas Grand Masonic Lodge

b) Foundation breeder of the Tennessee Walking Horse

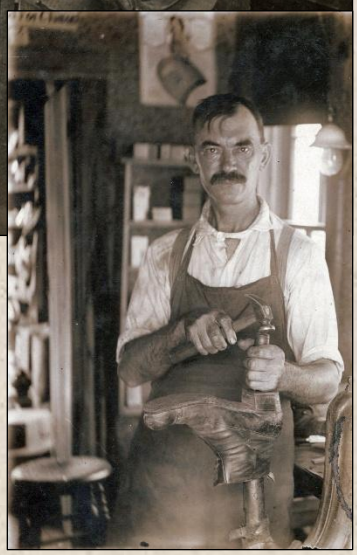
c) General Andrew Jackson's *aide-de-camp* at the Battle of New Orleans.

d) Knight Templar in the Nashville, Tennessee Masonic Commandery.

e) Commanded an Arkansas Confederate Infantry unit.

f) State Legislator in both the Tennessee and Arkansas General Assemblies.





In the early 20th century, the Simmermachers owned a shoe repair shop on Fourth Street between Main and Maple in Stuttgart. Pictured are Isabel Alwilda Wickwire-Simmermacher (1868-1919), Johann Jacob "Jake" Simmermacher (1862-1938). and his brother John Peter Simmermacher (1869-1957). "Jake" Simmermacher is shown at right. *Courtesy of the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie*.

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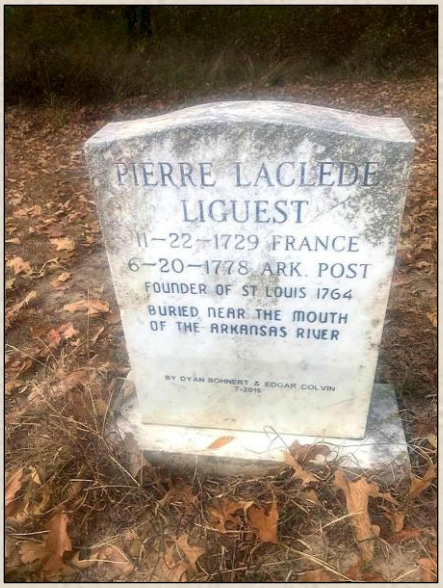
Advertisement from an unknown 1950s aviation magazine showing Bill Berry and J.R. Oliver.

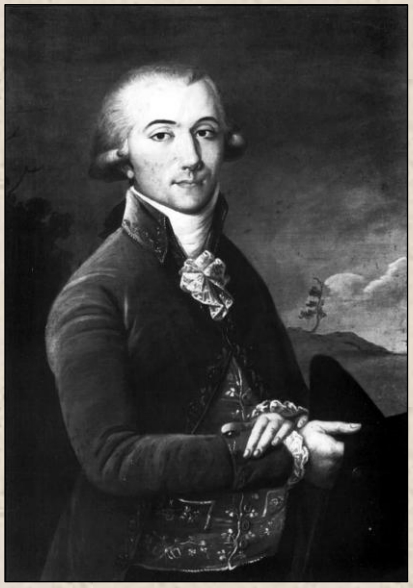
Society Adds Clarification to Scull Cemetery's Laclède Marker Stone

Grand Prairie Historical Society has added clarifying wording to the commemorative marker for St. Louis, Mo. co-founder Pierre Laclède Liguest, who died near the mouth of the Arkansas River in 1778. The new verbiage reads "Buried near the Mouth of the Arkansas River." Before this addition, the marker gave the impression that Laclède was buried in Scull Cemetery itself. At the time the Society placed the marker stone around a decade ago, the only source we had to go by was an erroneous entry in a cemetery inscription book published in 1984.[1] As of 1778 the Post of Arkansas was located downriver at the so-called "Fort Desha" site, which was only a few miles above the mouth of the Arkansas. It was moved back upriver to the current National Memorial site in 1779. *Switzler's Illustrated History of Missouri* gives a clear narrative on the death and burial of Laclède:

> "Nearly two years after the Declaration of American Independence; that is, on June 20, 1778, and on his return from a business trip to New Orleans, Laclède died at the mouth of the Arkansas River, aged fifty-four years, and was there buried. His grave has no doubt long since been washed into the river." [footnote] "The spot where Laclède was buried is about 200 yards back from the west bank of the Mississippi River, on the second bench, so-called, just above the town of Napoleon, in a deep, heavy grove of timber in a light sandy soil, and on that account the place became a famous graveyard for sixty or seventy years. There is no stone to distinguish one grave from another; Laclède's grave, therefore, cannot be identified. No doubt, moreover, it was long since washed into the Mississippi River. [Hon. J.F. Darby of St. Louis]."[2]

In addition, esteemed Missouri historian Judge Wilson Primm reported in 1831 that Maj. Pierre Chouteau made a declaration in 1781 stating that he saw the spot where Laclède was buried "on the south bank of the Arkansas River at its mouth, under the shade of the forest trees, the rude coffin, hastily constructed of the oar-benches of his barge, and which enclosed his body, was deposited in the grave."[3] A book was published in 2025 debunking cemetery myths including Scull and its Laclède stone. Several Arkansas media outlets circulated this info, and an entry was published on the online *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* which also named GPHS as having erroneously indicated Laclède as having been buried there. Had we been consulted at the time, the Society would have had the opportunity to explain that we were at that very time making arrangements to add the correct wording about Laclède's burial site, as well as to delete the "oldest cemetery in Arkansas" wording on the main signage, since no evidence or proof of that has been located. We hope this will clear up any misunderstanding on the subject.





[1] Arkansas County Extension Homemakers Council, *Cemetery Records of Arkansas County, Arkansas* (DeWitt, AR: ACEH Council, 1984), 249: "Scull Cemetery, Arkansas County, Ark…'Louis [sic] Laclède, founder of St. Louis, was buried here in 1778.'"

[2] C. R. Barns, ed., *Switzler's Illustrated History of Missouri from 1541 to 1881* (St. Louis: C.R. Barns Publ., 1881), 148-150.

[3] "Anniversary Celebration," *Report of the Celebration of the Anniversary of the Founding of St. Louis on the Fifteenth Day of February, A.D. 1847* (St. Louis: Chambers & Knapp Publ., 1847), 13.

The Arkansas Historical Association Welcomes 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.

2027 Grand Prairie Historical Society meeting dates/places:

January 21, 2027–Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie, Stuttgart; April 15–Gillett Methodist Church (with potluck); July 15–First Christian Church, DeWitt; October 21, Arts Center of the Grand Prairie, Stuttgart.

GPHS household membership levels: Basic, $25; Contributing, $50; Supporting, $100, and Sustaining, $150.

Grand Prairie Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to promoting preservation and education of the heritage of Arkansas's Grand Prairie region.

Answer to quiz on page 3 is (e). Gen. Samuel Mitchell did not serve in the Confederate military.

Grand Prairie Historical Society

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