



NEWS FROM THE PRAIRIE

SUMMER 2020

PRESERVING OUR REGION'S HISTORY

Society Conducts First Meetings via the Internet

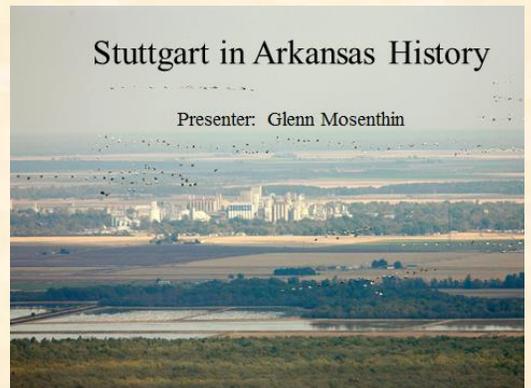
The Grand Prairie Historical Society held their first-ever virtual meetings, using the Zoom platform, this month when the group's officers and directors met July 9 for the second 2020 board meeting, followed by the summer quarterly meeting of the general membership on July 16. Both video conferences were a success, with progress made on several Society outreach efforts. During the board meeting, it was reported that a committee had conducted a treasury audit to coincide with the change in treasurers at the beginning of the year. A committee on youth outreach formulated a plan to award a yearly prize of \$250 to a young person aged 15-18 for the best essay on a historical subject of area interest. Their material will be published in our journal, the Historical Bulletin. GPHS will publicize this contest via social media. Our project of updating the roadside marker at Crocketts Bluff with some corrected wording is advancing well. The Arkansas Historical Preservation Program has approved our grant application for one-half the new marker's cost. We anticipate receiving the plaque in the coming months. It will be installed in the same place as the present one. The current plaque will remain in the community. The program committee presented plans for 2021 meetings as follows: January 21, DeWitt PCCUA campus; April 15 or 22 (depending on the date of the Arkansas Historical Association annual conference), Gillett Methodist Church; July 15, DeWitt PCCUA campus; and October 21, Holman Community Center, Stuttgart. The decision was made to meet virtually via Zoom for the upcoming October meeting due to covid.

The board elected to pursue the inclusion of more Grand Prairie area doctors in the Country Doctor Museum's Hall of Honor. A committee will begin working toward this. President Braithwaite also appointed a committee to produce a brochure for a driving tour of area historical markers and sites. At the general meeting a week later, participated in by some 25 members, these projects were presented and approved. Museum reports were given, although the impact of the virus has shut down most planned activities for the time being. The Bayou Meto United Methodist Women were praised for their efforts to obtain historical markers, through the AHPP grant program, for both the church and the nearby community cemetery. For the program, member Glenn

Mosenthin presented a PowerPoint entitled "Stuttgart in Arkansas History." The program was given at last year's Arkansas Historical Association annual conference in Stuttgart. Mosenthin chronicled the town's founding before pointing out some "firsts" and unique accomplishments, such as those by Anna Burns Stoops, the first woman utility plant owner in the US; Maude Bethel Lewis, Stuttgart's remarkable poet, pageant writer and director, civic club and library founder, and the original proponent of preserving the Arkansas Post site; Ataullah Ozai-Durrani, Afghani scientist who invented Minute Rice; and J. O. Dockery, the legendary pilot who pioneered so many aspects of agricultural aviation over a 70-year career.

Stuttgart in Arkansas History

Presenter: Glenn Mosenthin



Letter From the President

Dear Friends,

We've made history! By using technology to conduct our latest meeting, we've moved our organization even further into the new electronic age. Participating in this meeting served as a testament to our resilience, purpose and dedication. I hope that our founders would be proud of our efforts to continue the work of our Society in these extreme circumstances. We had a nice group and I was thrilled that some of our out-of-town members were able to join. I so appreciate the flexibility of our members to adapt to this new concept. Special thanks to Terry Rasco and Glenn Mosenthin for rolling with the necessary changes we made to the program. Our October meeting will be held via Zoom. Please prepare in advance by installing the Zoom program (free and safe) on your device and plan to join us. Members and guests welcome!

Exciting projects are moving along. Plans to replace the Crocketts Bluff historical marker have progressed and we expect to have a dedication ceremony later in the fall. We will sponsor a writing contest for teens ages 15-18 with a \$250 prize. More details are coming via email and on our social media outlets. We have a committee working on submitting prospective inductees into the Arkansas Country Doctors Hall of Honor. Another committee has been formed to study the feasibility of producing a brochure highlighting historical markers and sites in the Grand Prairie area. Thanks to whomever suggested that in the recent membership survey! I am proud to share that the pandemic and its restrictions have not slowed our work to preserve and promote our history.

As a long overdue accolade for his generous and unwavering support of the GPHS and for sharing his unmatched scholarship about our beloved Arkansas Post, we recently awarded Judge Morris Arnold a lifetime membership. We are honored to have his friendship and very grateful for his contributions to our mission. As the need to isolate continues, I bet many of you have cleaned and organized all of your nooks and crannies and completed all of those rainy-day projects. I have two suggestions for great items to add to your list. First, don't we all have a collection of material that we've stashed away thinking it would make a great *Grand Prairie Historical Bulletin* article? This is the perfect time to dust those off and get that article composed and sent to our editor, Glenn Mosenthin. Secondly, please participate in the Museum of the Grand Prairie's effort to record this moment in history. How has the pandemic affected you and your daily routine? What has been your experience with the pandemic? These reports would be interesting to read now, but will be most appreciated by generations to come when researching how our current situation affected life on the Grand Prairie. Call the museum at 870-673-7001 for more information.

I know we all look forward to being together again and I hope circumstances will allow us to do that in January. Until then, please continue to have faith, stay well and take care of each other.

Respectfully,

Raeann Braithwaite



This photo of students at Johnston School, near Bayou Meto, was submitted by Dana Horton. Back row—M. K. McCallie, Myrtle Bullock, Clarence Bullock, J. T. Powell, Bill Strickland, Mabel Bullock, John McCallie, and Louis Riley Bullock. Second row—John Luther Powell, Tina Halliburton, Lois DeVore, Albert Bullock. Front row—Ida Beth DeVore, Margaret Clark, Virgil Hynum, Adrian McCallie, Barbara Clark, Faye DeVore, Sarah McCallie, Katherine Halliburton, and Opal Halliburton.

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FURTHER INFORMATION UPON REQUEST

A good example of the promotional efforts of early Grand Prairie land agents. These entrepreneurs were vital in the settlement of this area, ensuring that it would become the center of the American rice industry. This ad was published in the *Arkansas Democrat* of November 21, 1909, and appeared in many Midwestern papers as well.

Fishing For Balloons

By: James Waggoner

In 1960, I was 6 years old. Something that you would not see now, I was allowed to walk unattended from our home on 8th and Rose to the carnival on Main Street [Stuttgart]. There was a “portable” duck calling stand located at 2nd and Main, along with a school bus for the contestants to keep warm while waiting for their turn. Going south, there were rides, games, and carnival food vendors. On 4th Street, there was a large tent with local vendor displays. Behind the tent was an area displaying farm equipment. Sometimes, there would be a working steam-powered tractor on display.

It has been over 14 years since I toured the carnival, but the games had not changed much since the 60s. There were also the same old rides and some newer ones. There are also new food vendors and many of the old ones. If you wanted something different, you had your choice of local eateries—City Cafe, Esquire Grill, the Riceland Hotel Coffee Shop. Then there were the many drug stores on both sides of the street. Most of them had a soda fountain and sold sandwiches with a bar or tables to sit at.

In 1960, the tent held displays mostly from local merchants. There were such wonders as Layne Arkansas displayed a water faucet floating in the air, with water flowing out of it and an irrigation pump with a quarter section cut out so you could see the inner workings. The telephone company displayed a working section of the “new” mechanical switching relay, used by the telephone company at that time. Many businesses would offer some type of contest for gift certificates or prizes. The local banks would give out tokens. One token was a tiny sealed glass jug with a brand new penny in it. (If I had only known what some of those tokens would be worth sixty years later.) There would be a table giving out samples of rice dishes.

For children, the most popular item given out in the tent were helium filled balloons. Each child was allowed one balloon. How the person giving them out could remember who had already received a balloon, I could never figure out. I did figure out a way to get more balloons though. You go Fishing For Balloons. To do this, first, you gather the strings from other balloons that broke. Tie all the strings together until you had a single string long enough to reach the roof of the tent. Why do you ask?

At the top of the tent, all the balloons that escaped from their previous owners were just waiting for someone to retrieve them. Once you had enough string, you would use your one balloon to bring down these lost balloons either by static electricity or by snagging their strings. If you were lucky enough and skillful enough, you could go home with more balloons than you could handle. And just what did you do with all of those balloons after you got home? Why, you would tie little plastic soldiers or other items to them and then set them free.

Grand Prairie Historical Society now offers three membership levels. Basic memberships will cost \$25.00 per household. Also, two new membership levels are available for those wishing to donate to the Society’s efforts. Annual membership levels include: Silver – \$25.00, Gold – \$50.00, and Platinum – \$100.00. Gold and Platinum members will be recognized in the *Historical Bulletin*. We accept and appreciate memorials and honorariums, and will provide letters of acknowledgement for tax purposes. If you’re not already a member, please join us!

Visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/grandprairiehistory.

Check out our website at www.grandprairiehistory.org



Aerial view looking west over Almyra, Arkansas, taken by longtime area photographer Harry Downing.

Our thanks to those who have purchased our new gold and platinum memberships.
We greatly appreciate your generous support of our organization!

Gold: Bob and Claudia Ahrens, David T. Carty, Marilyn Gibson, Eddie and Pat Lumsden, Glenn Mosenthin, Barbara Riley, Randall and Claudia Robison, Roger and Sonie Turner, James Waggoner, JoAnn West, and Lois Wilson.

Platinum: John Cover, Frank and Suzanne Buerkle Doughty, Christian Doughty, Paul Doughty, Richard Hill, and Charles Whiteside III.

**Grand Prairie
Historical Society**

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Glenn Mosenthin

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