

HISTORICAL SOCIETY**P.O. BOX 463****Perry MISSOURI 63462****<http://www.rootsweb.com/~morchs/>****Ralls County Historical Museum and Library****120 East Main Street, Perry Missouri****Open Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday 10:00-5:00****Or Phone 573-248-6147 or 573-565-2025 for an appointment****Dear Ralls County Members and Friends**

The Ralls County Historical Society will have its March meeting in the courtroom on the second floor of the Ralls County Courthouse in New London on Tuesday, March 24. The doors will open at 6:00 pm and the meeting will begin at 7:00 pm. After a short meeting, Judge Dave Mobley will present a program on historic Ralls County trials. This will be a continuance of his popular Ralls County Courthouse Sesquicentennial program. The public is welcomed and encouraged to attend both the meeting and programs.

Open of Research Center and Library

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Because of the amazing growth of our Museum and Library in the past five years, we will be expanding again. As of April 1 we will begin moving our family files, genealogy books and the rest of the library to the former Pack Rat antique shop one door east of our present museum. We have run out of space to display all of the museum items we have received from members and friends of Society. By moving the library and genealogy records to our new site we will free up space for these displays and have more room for researchers to use in the library. As soon as we can complete the move and have an open weekend we would like to have an open house to commemorate our fifth anniversary of the opening of the museum and library.

Memberships;

2009 Membership dues were due as of January 1; single membership \$10.00, family \$15.00 memberships and lifetime \$100.00. **Please note that we have changed our address to P.O. Box 463, Perry MO 63462.** Please send your checks to the address above or pay in person at the museum or the meeting. We have a goal of 200 members and we may have a chance make that this year.

Friends of the Short Line Railroad;

The Friends of the Short Line Railroad will meet at Chelle's Restaurant in Center MO April 18 at 10:30 am. Following the meeting there will be a tour our restored Center St. Louis-Hannibal "Short Line" depot that is across the street from Chelle's. The public is welcomed and encouraged to attend both the meeting and tour. Volunteers will be needed to get the depot ready for this and this year's weekend tours.

Ralls County Jail;

Our Ralls County Jail is a National Historic Landmark, but was listed as one of the most endangered landmarks in Missouri last year. The society is looking for any old photos, articles, or information on the jail people could share or donate. We are looking into grants or funding to restore the site and this information would be helpful in doing so.

Website;

Thanks to Rev, Dave Todd, We now have a second website and we will be soon updating our other site. The new site is <http://www.rallscounty.org/HistoricalSociety/index.html>. For samples of what we will have on these sites see below for "Short Line Railroad News" and note from one of our Ralls County scrapbooks.

<http://www.rallscounty.org/HistoricalSociety/SHORTLINENEWS.pdf>

<http://www.rallscounty.org/HistoricalSociety/scrapbook.pdf>

Perry High School Reunion;

On September 20 we will have the Perry High reunion at the Perry Catholic Church basement. It is hard to believe, but the last class of Perry High graduated fifty years ago in 1959. Both 1958 and 1959 classes will have a reunion the same weekend. All former Perry High School students and public are welcomed and encouraged to attend. The doors will be opened at 11:00 am for those for those wanting to visit their former classmates and friends. There will also be time to visit after the meal. We will close when the last person goes home. At noon there will be a catered meal, so reservations for the meal in advance will be required. The meal will be \$15.00 per person and reservations and payment should be received by Tuesday, September 15. Checks should be made out to the Ralls Historical Society and if mailed sent to Ralls County Historical Society, P.O. 463, Perry MO. 63462

Cemetery Clean Ups and Recording

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The NEMO River Valley Chapter of the Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen has asked for our help in cleaning the Mount Pleasant cemetery @ Mark Twain Lake. The dates being planned are April 23-26 and May 9-10. If you would like to volunteer any of these days please contact us as soon as possible.

The Greenlawn cemetery is being cleaned by community service people.

Digital pictures have been taken of all the stones at many of the Ralls County cemeteries, by members Tony Elam (Lick Creek, Pleasant Grove, Wolfe, Muldrow, Fern Chapel, Olivet/Center and St. Paul) and Rouse Jarman (Brush Creek/St. Peters, New Oakland, Bethlehem and Demoss). We hope to soon have programs to list all the burials in the cemeteries we have recorded and may make them available on our website. The society has listed 138 known cemeteries in the county and has written listings of burials in most of them in our library. Our long term goal is to enter all of this information on our program and make it available to researchers on our website. We have already entered most of the information on the above digital photographed cemeteries. The program designed in a way that only basic knowledge of computer skills would be needed to enter the data. If have an interest or knowledge of one of the cemeteries in Ralls County, we would like for you to adopt that cemetery and help in entering the data on a computer or share your information with someone else. Many of the cemeteries were recorded many years ago and need updating too.

Florida Folklife Festival

Dates for this year's Florida Folklife Festival have been set. The event will be held Aug. 8 and 9. Last year's festivities were called off because of flooding. The festival is sponsored by The Friends of Florida Inc.

[Salt River Expo;](#) [\(click on the link\)](#)

The Mark Twain Lake Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers will have a "Salt River Expo" on May 15-17 @ Warren See South Spillway recreation area. (below the Clarence Cannon Dam). Society member John Hawkins who was a big help with our Ralls County Courthouse Sesquicentennial program is the main organizer of this event. If you can help can on the project or want more information you can contact him at 573-355-4365, johnhawkins1@live.com. For those who are on the internet there will be an attachment on this newsletter.

Preserving Oak Hill Rural School;

We have been asked to help a group working to preserve the Oak Hill School in Ralls County south of Hannibal. In the past we have had two of our meets at this school and a saw first hand the great work this group has done. I meet with the group on March 21 and we are making plans to create a fund to help in the restoration of the school to be use as an exhibit and sample of the many rural schools that some of you went to school at. We will be contacting the surrounding area school districts to welcome them to have the site for field trips and even use as a classroom for a day. On the last Saturday from April to November there will be a monthly open jam session the last Saturdays from April to November at the School house. The public and all musicians are welcome and are encouraged to attend. If you enjoy country, western, folk, gospel and any good music please try and attend. The first session will be April 25 from 6 pm to whenever. On May 9th there will also be an auction of terms and merchant certificates donated by friends and members. If you have any item you would like to donate please contact us at the numbers and address on the front page of this "Newsletter". Old school items are needed to furnish and use as displays.

Courthouse Doors;

The interior doors of the Ralls County courthouse have been replaced and the county has given us the original 1858 doors for our museum. We will have on display as soon as we can after our move.

School Bell and Sundial;

When the Perry school closed the school district donated the large bell that was first used at the Strother Institute in 1880s and the memorial sundial that dedicated by the former students of Mr. and Mrs.

French Strother in 1930. Recently the building was sold and the Perry Junior Chamber Commerce volunteered to move both to the Perry city park and restore the roof covering the bell.

Terri (Leake) Laird benefit;

There will be a benefit for Terri Leake Laird on March 28 from 11:00 am. To 8 pm @ Mark Twain High School gym. Terri is the daughter of society member's Sam and Sharon (Day) Leake and is battling cancer. There will be food and desserts will be available for sale all day. Music by Heaven Bound, Joyful Sound, Rachel Bringer & band, Chuck Wade, Tony Gilland and Larry Hilderbrand and others will be jamming. There will be an auction at 2 pm with more than r 95 items to be auctioned off. Just some of these include 2 hour Skid Loader work, 3 day duck hunting trip for 2 in NE Arkansas, 2 hour power washer service, 2 hour tree trimming, homemade quilt stand, and many Cardinal Tickets. Raffle between 7 pm and 8. Just some of the raffle items are Wii Nintendo entertainment center, home made rocking chair and handmade quilt.

Bit of Ralls County History

The Hannibal Courier-Post, Wednesday, December 30, 1953

100 Years Ago Town Of Center Was Virgin Soil

Claims Connection With Mark Twain's Military Career

By Mrs. Mabel Keithly, Staff Correspondent

CENTER, Mo., Dec. 30 – Before 1853 the town of Center was virgin soil on which the prairie grass grew to a height that would seem fabulous to this generation and the deer, the wolf and the prairie chicken were plentiful. In the year 1853 the land on which the town now stands was fenced for the first time and leased from Col. W.C. Splawn. It was then known as Splawn's "black swamp" its principal product being frogs and green heads (horseflies) enemy of man and his livestock on the prairie.

The settlement on the north and west was the old Robert Briggs farm, on the south and east W.S. Tipton, W.C. Splawn and Nimrod Waters.

In the early seventies the counties in Missouri were seized with an epidemic of railroad fever. Ralls County engaged in the enterprise of building the shoreline from Hannibal to St. Louis via Gilmore and also the branch from New London to Perry.

The grade for the latter route was built twenty years before the track was laid.

With the beginning, T. Jeff Ellis built the first house on the site of the present town of Center starting a grocery and drug store. This building still stands and can be seen on the lot belonging to Mrs. Mabel Keithly, wife of the late E.A. Keithly of Center. This first house is located at the rear of the home and is one half blocks south of Center's first bank building which still stands and is occupied. The old bank building was built in 1889 and the brick were fired three blocks south where Bennett Stuart's home and lots are located. In the day books of George Osterhout who was president of this bank, we find an entry where lumber and building materials were hauled by wagon from Hannibal taking two days to make the trip. The teams were put up and fed. Lodging and board were supplied at the Marion House at the cost of \$1.00 for the entire trip. This oldest bank building of Center is directly across the street west of the present Center State Bank.

Center was originally called "Jeff Town" being named for Jeff Ellis the first man to live on "the swamp". Soon after James Mason built another house, which was later occupied by Landia Whitmore a jolly, round and efficient sheriff of the county, [sic] Sheriff Whitmore married Evelyn Mairrah [sic] Ralls descendent of Daniels Ralls and both are buried in Olivet Cemetery of Center. Just about this period the present town was regularly, planted by J.M. Mason and given the name of Center. From this small beginning has sprung up the present town of Center, and most of the business men who contributed to its growth and development were native citizens of the county and immediate neighborhood. B.C. Briggs and M.L. Hulse were the next to engage in business later G.H. Smith, N.B. Smith and others.

About the year 1876 Ralls Lodge No. 33 A.F. and A.M. soon after removed to the town thus Center has the oldest lodge of Masons working under its original charter in the county and observed with appropriate ceremonies the Centennial of Ralls Lodge No. 33 A.F. and A.M. in June of this year.

In the list of Worshipful Masters of Ralls Lodge No. 33 A.F. and A.M. from 1853 to 1953 we find that Col. John Ralls who organized the lodge and for whom Ralls Lodge No. 33 A.F. and A.M. is named served nine times as Worshipful Master over a period of years and Col. W.C. Splawn served the lodge in the same capacity two years. Col. John Ralls the son of the man for whom Ralls County was named is buried in Olivet Cemetery at Center.

In the year 1889 G.W. Osterhout, W.W. Epperson and others moved into the town and built homes. Soon after the prospect of completing the Perry branch road gave an impetus to the building of more substantial business structures.

It was at this time that the first bank building was built, including the adjoining storeroom, now occupied by the Cash Beavers station and office [sic] the second story of this storeroom was completed by the Baptists and seated for a church. The Methodist church house was the first built in the town and is one of the oldest of their denomination in the county. In 1890 the Christian church house was moved from Olivet Cemetery one mile north to its present location. This is the oldest organization of the Christian church in Ralls County. The Baptists built their first meeting house in 1890. It was partially destroyed by fire in 1897. The present church house was erected in 1898 in Splawn's addition. In 1889 Dr. N.A. Foster built the first brick building in the north settlement of town, "across the tracks" to many natives of Center. Dr. Foster was also the first resident physician.