

Next Meeting is August 17th —

The next meeting of the GP Historical Organization is scheduled for August 17, 11:30 am at 1516 W. Main Street.

Please call Angela Giessner for reservations at

972-262-5151. Ron Lambert's organization, The Historical Network Publications will be on hand to talk about the upcoming GP History book.

They will provide an overview of our upcoming publication, Historic Grand Prairie.

Kathy Goolsby will also talk briefly about her role as the author of the book. Please let Angela know if you're going to attend so we can plan for lunch



A note from our History Book Author—Kathy Goolsby

Growing up, my family vacations all had one thing in common: cemeteries. Wherever we went, my mother always found at least one cemetery to visit. From battlefield burial grounds to country graveyards, she loved them all. I liked to tag along as my mother wandered up and down the rows. After awhile she'd tell me about the people buried there – a man who lost his wife and children to the flu epidemic, siblings felled by an accident, a couple who died on the same date a year apart.

With only the words engraved on the headstones, my mother connected the people and tried to find each one's place in life. My love of history was born among those headstones. Now I'm delighted to be writing a pictorial history of Grand Prairie. I know from working on the *Grand Prairie News* in the mid-1990s that this city's past is full of fascinating stories and interesting people. I hope to bring those stories and people to

life much as my mother resurrected so many once-forgotten souls. But to do this, I need your help. I'm already digging through the various history files around town, but I'm also looking for old diaries, letters, stories and photos among Grand Prairie residents. I'm hoping to interview people who have something to share, whether it's family history passed down through generations or their own memories that reflect life in Grand Prairie. Time is short – my deadline to the publisher is Feb. 28



The quote of the month is by Jay Leno:
"With hurricanes, tornados, fires out of control, mud slides, flooding, severe thunderstorms tearing up the country from one end to another, and with the threat of bird flu and terrorist attacks, "Are we sure this is a good time to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance?"

– so if you would like to contribute to this project, please contact me as soon as possible

Thank you—
 Kathy A. Goolsby

817-460-4942 or
 k_goolsby@comcast.net

Historic Grand Prairie, Texas

As many of you may know, the Grand Prairie Historical Organization has commissioned a History book for Grand Prairie. It is being published by a company called the Historical Publishing Network and will be titled *Historic Grand Prairie*. It will be a first class hard cover coffee table book.

Mr. Joe Bowman is working now selling business profiles for the publication, which will be in the rear of the

book. Mr. Bowman is having a fantastic response from the business community.

Kathy Goolsby is going to be the actual author of the book, and has started her research. Ms. Goolsby has been a history buff in Grand Prairie for many years and currently writes for the Dallas Morning News.

We are all very excited about this book. It's something that will be a great documentation of our community and the first such published since Marvin

Vail in 1954.

The books are going to sell for about \$35 and should be ready in the Fall of 2007. The plan will also be to re-release the book again in 2009 for Grand Prairie's 100th Anniversary.

If you have any pictures you would like considered for the book, please let us know.

As a member of the GPHO we plan to have your name included in this book in some fashion. Please help us keep the membership up by paying your dues today.

The Baghdad Supper Club—Grand Prairie—1928-1952

The Baghdad Supper Club was Dallas' ultrafashionable nightclub during its sporadic existence. Between 1929 and 1945, the club was open only intermittently as it passed through several bankruptcies and sales. Located ten miles west of Dallas at the Intersection of U.S. 80 and Baghdad Street in Grand Prairie, the night-

spot's Glory days ended in 1952 when the building burned to the ground.

Built in 1928, reputedly with Chicago money, the lavish Middle Eastern Motif of the Baghdad Supper club was highlighted by a \$10,000 solid ceiling Canopy imported from Istanbul. *Thank you to Kim Thorn for these pictures and narrative*



LAST ISSUE

If you have not paid dues in 2006, and you are not a Life Member of GPHO, this will be your last issue of the newsletter. On top of the GP History book that has already started, we have several great things planned. The Organization will have a page in the book, and our active members will be listed. Please help support the GP Historical Organization by sending in your membership dues today. That can be mailed to the PO Box on the last page of the newsletter, or to 4649 Vespesian Ln., GP 75052. Please make checks payable to the Grand Prairie Historical Organization.

Lifetime Members of GPHO

Carol Bell, Grant Bell, Brian W. Bingham, L.R. Cannon, Ouida Chapman Lewis, Lisa Chennault Brown, Helen Chennault, Thomas Chennault, Thomas B Chennault, City of Grand Prairie Marketing, H. Victor Copeland, Jerry Corley, Charles and Janice England, Olive Galloway, Norma Hale, Lee D. Herring, Thomas Hight, Jorja Jackson Clemson, Marie Kerr

Stufflebeme, Blythe Kizziar, Duane McGuffey, Betty Phillips, Charles Powers, Bob Roberts, Susan Shuffler,

Fynlon and Eugenia Simpson, Ouida Smith, Amy Sprinkles, Angela Sutton Giessner, Donald Taylor, Ruthe Thompson Jackson, Laura Thompson Potter

THE GOPHER BOWL **“A Friday Night Tradition”**

The history of The Gopher Bowl is intricately tied to the growth and development of Grand Prairie. G.P. in the 1950's had a population of approximately 27,500 and flourished with growth buoyed by construction, prior to World War II, of the North American Aviation plant and the influx of workers it brought from throughout the United States.

The GPISD Board of Trustees approved original construction of the 7,500-seat stadium on February 13, 1956. Smith & Warder Architects & Engineers was selected to draw plans for the new football stadium. General Contractor Lewis C. Krodel was awarded the construction contract in May 8, 1956.

Dirt work began May 1956. The stadium quickly became known as the Gopher Bowl possibly because it was carved from a natural ravine on the north side of GPHS. Cost of construction was \$200,000. Construction of the Gopher Bowl was completed in four and one-half months. School Superintendent H. H. Chambers boasted that the Gopher Bowl was paid for “with cash”. There are existing copies of an 8 mm film of the actual construction.

Though school district officials have searched, there appears to be no factual information pertaining to how the name “Gopher Bowl” actually came to be other than a Sunday, February 12, 1956, news headline that reads, “Trustees to Consider New GPHS Grid Bowl”. The same article includes mention of “plans for a new 7,500 seat, bowl-type football stadium.”

Mr. Clarence Brown, Mr. Benton Ford, Mr. Wayne Henslee and Mr. Bruce Bean all related the same information regarding the ravine behind the high school, but they had little clue as to naming the Bowl. Originally, the ravine was filled with mesquite trees and used as a dump by residents of several homes that were along what is now know as Stadium at Tarrant Road. (This would be the Scheppler family that sold the land to the school district.) Superintendent H.H. Chambers and Mr. Lloyd Boze had the land cleared and used the ravine for a practice field to save the Gopher Field for regular games. Gopher Field was located on the west side of the high school and was demolished in preparation for the construction of Turner Gym.

In speaking with Mr. Bean, Mr. Brown and Mr. Ford, who all worked for Superintendent Chambers, the gentlemen related that it would not have been out of character for Superintendent Chambers to assume responsibility for naming the stadium the “Gopher Bowl.” The superintendent had “more latitude in those days”.

Board minutes from 1955, 1956 and 1957 do not indicate that the Board took action in naming the Gopher Bowl. Minutes from February 13, 1956, indicate a motion was made to authorize the building of a football stadium and call Smith & Warder to complete plans. On March 5, 1956, the building of a football stadium was authorized. The same motion was made at the May 1956 meeting authorizing the building of a football stadium and awarding of the contract to Lewis Krodel. The motions were all the same. The first motion set Smith & Warder to draw plans, the next motion set Medart and Sneed to do excavation, and the third motion set Lewis Krodel to do actual construction.

The *Dallas Times Herald*, in an August 8, 1956, headline, publicized the new athletic facility at GPHS as “Grand Prairie’s Little Cotton Bowl.” Board of Trustees President Ralph Clark declared the Gopher Bowl “A Texas Showplace” as the Bowl neared completion. Other Board Members that year were: Lee D. Herring, Secretary, A.W. Sowell, Dr. Wm.L. Colip, Dr. John O.Wilson, Vernon A. Jackson and J.M. Holland. H.H. Chambers was GPISD’s Superintendent.

The first game was played on September 28, 1956, against Waco’s University High School. The Gophers were victorious in their first game in the newly dedicated Gopher Bowl.

Through the years, The Gopher Bowl has undergone many renovations, but the March 1, 2003, bond referendum changed the appearance forever. The referendum included \$4M to complete much-needed improvements including the addition of new reserved chair-back seating, synthetic turf, essential drainage upgrades, new lighting, restrooms, concession stands, extra safety wall padding at the lower bowl perimeter and a state-of-the art sound system. A highlight of the upgrade included the addition of a signature three-story press box located above the home stands. This renovation had the “new” bowl ready for the 2004 Football Season. This placed The Gopher Bowl among the premiere sports facilities in the state of Texas.

As one of the more important landmarks in GP, the Gopher Bowl turning 50 is an important event for GP. However, as the GP Historical Commission was debating the issue on May 23 of this year, Commission McAlister pointed out that it would be marker #56. That really made the decision easy, since the Bowl was constructed in 1956.

Sam Buckmeyer with GPISD is currently preparing a State Historical Designation application. Hopefully soon we can say that the Gopher Bowl is a



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Preserving the History of Grand Prairie

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The Grand Prairie Historical Organization's purpose is to search out, record, collate, preserve, and pass on to the next generation, the history of Grand Prairie, Texas, and its Southwest Dallas County environs, including the appropriate marking of authentic historical sites.

The dues year of the Organization shall be from January 1 in each year through Dec. 31 of the same year. The following classes of membership apply:

Regular Membership: The annual dues for single members shall be fifteen dollars (\$15.00) and twenty-five (\$25.00) for couples .

Life Membership: Any person 45 years or older who contributes \$200 shall be a member for life without further payment of dues.

Gold Star Membership: Payment of 10 years in advance, \$150 (no age limit).

Patron Membership: Any person who contributes five hundred dollars (\$500.00) or more to the Organization shall be a Life Member thereof and shall, in addition thereof be appropriately recognized as a Patron of the Grand Prairie Historical Organization.

Corporate Membership: Any small business that contributes \$250.00 shall be classified as a corporate member.

Dues should be mailed to Mrs. Giessner. Her information is listed to the left.



An interior shot of the Baghdad Club in Grand Prairie. Gives a good view of the \$10,000 ceiling Canopy.

Thank you to Kim Thorne for these great pictures and description.