



Iron County Historical Society Newsletter

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Fall
2026

Find us on
Facebook

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Museum Address

Arcadia Valley Chamber of
Commerce Visitor's Center
Arcadia, MO

October Meeting Information

2 p.m., Sunday, October 18, 2026, at the First Presbyterian Church of Ironton, corner of Reynolds & Knob Streets in Ironton

Program: **Witnesses to History: Stories from Park View Cemetery**
presented by John Abney

Refreshments Provided By: John Abney

October's Program: Witnesses to History: Stories from Park View Cemetery (Encore Presentation)

Presented by John Abney

In This Issue

**October's Program:
Witnesses to History .p. 1**

President's Message...p. 2

Society News & Notes p. 2

**Gift Idea for History
Lovers.....p. 3**

Bygone Railroading ..p. 4

The Grant Oak.....p. 5

**History of the Reagan
School.....p. 7**

**Who Will Carry the
Torch.....p. 8**



This is an encore presentation of a program originally presented in 2014. Park View Cemetery was originally created on land donated to Iron County in the late 1850s for use as a paupers' cemetery. During the Civil War, the cemetery became the initial resting place of hundreds of Union soldiers who died while stationed in the Arcadia Valley during that time. Shortly after the war, the soldiers' bodies were disinterred and removed

to Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

In the decades that followed, the cemetery became the final resting place for at least 300 people of African American descent. Over time, many of the surviving members of these families moved away seeking better opportunities and other family lines simply died out. As the years passed, the cemetery became overgrown and coupled with careless maintenance and vandalism, many of the headstones there were damaged or destroyed. Efforts in the early 2000s reversed this trend and returned the cemetery to the historical treasure it still is today.

The presentation tells the story of the cemetery and of the Lax family, one of the families with many family members buried there.

Preserving & Sharing Iron County's Rich History Since 1974

Iron County Historical Society

The Iron County Historical Society is a registered 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

Contributions can be made online at our website, at our museum or mailed to the Iron County Historical Society at P.O. Box 183, Ironton, MO 63650. THANK YOU!

President' Message: Jeremy Medley

Happy fall everyone! I hope you are all doing well and enjoying some cooler days after a hot August and September. If you missed our July program you can watch it on our historical society YouTube channel (see the link in the next article). Mr. Jim Finley gave a presentation on the history of Fall Festival which is celebrating 100 years this year. It was a great, detailed presentation that is a great addition to our county historical archives.

The October program is titled "Witnesses to History: Stories from Park View Cemetery." This will be presented by John Abney. This will occur the Sunday after Fall Festival. I hope to see everyone there. If you would like to give a presentation at one of our future meetings, please let me know. We are always in need of future programs. Also, we are in need of volunteers at the train station museum. Having the museum open on the weekends helps fund the historical society and pay the bills by allowing people to visit, buy books or other items that we sell. Please let one us know if you're interested or would like to learn what all is involved in this venture. Just like with all other clubs, groups and societies, we are in need of more members and member involvement to keep things running for many years into the future.

Society News & Notes – Highlights from the July 2026 Quarterly Meeting

*Note: You can read the full set of minutes by logging on to the website (www.ironcountyhistory.org) and clicking on the **Meeting Minutes** tab in the footer menu of the website.*

Prior to the start of the meeting, retired AVHS educator, Jim Finley presented his interesting and informative program on the history of the Fall Festival Parade that will celebrate its 100th anniversary this year. We were fortunate to have Mr. Marvin Pitney in attendance who recorded the presentation. The presentation can be viewed on the Society's YouTube Channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xb3VXEWqAFY&t=28s>

Jeremy Medley presented the Program Report. Information on upcoming programs are contained on our website's homepage (www.ironcountyhistory.org). In Wilma Cofer's absence, John Abney presented the Quarterly Treasurer's Reports, the Museum Director's Report and the Membership Report.

The Quarterly Treasurer's Report contained an ending balance of \$17,873.02 which included \$1,806.47 in receipts and \$2,607.28 in disbursements.

The Museum Director's Report highlighted the ongoing need for volunteers to help keep our museum open. It also provided an update on the mold remediation efforts in the caboose, which should reopen soon. Pam Inman told the group that a special open house was being planned by Our Town Tomorrow for early September

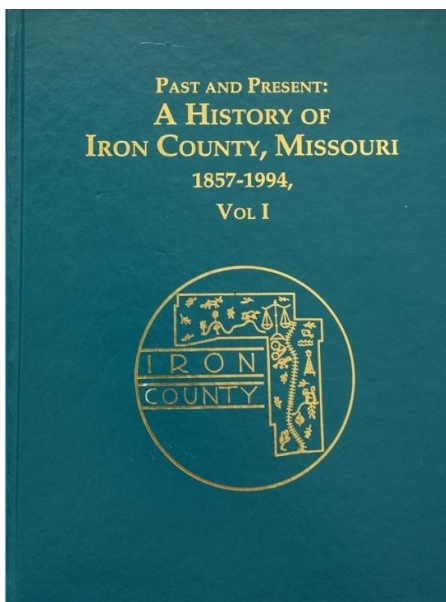
(time to be announced) at the visitors' center/museum. The open house will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the purchase of the visitors' center / museum building and the upcoming 10th anniversary of Amtrak train service to the Arcadia Valley.

Under **Old Business**, John Abney discussed the society's new website (mentioned above) and noted that, as planned, the quarterly newsletter moved to a digital only format beginning with the Summer 2026 edition. For this membership year only, members can request a printed / mailed copy of the newsletter at no cost. As was approved at this meeting, members (including lifetime members) wishing to receive a printed / mailed newsletter beginning with the Summer 2027 edition will be required to pay an additional \$5.00 per year on top of their dues to help defer the ever-increasing printing and mailing costs. Also under Old Business, Jeremy Medley discussed our plans to set up a booth at the Fall Mountain Music Festival this coming October. Jeremy also mentioned that we would like to have at least three or four more volunteers to assist with the event.

Two items were discussed under **New Business**. First, John Abney asked for volunteers to provide refreshments for the October 2026 and April 2027 Meetings (John Abney will provide the refreshments for the October meeting). Second, John Abney sought the membership's approval to upload a link to the electronic version of our "A Historical Snapshot of Iron County, Missouri 1857 – 2017) to our website and to send a copy of the book to the Family History Library in Salt Lake City with permission for them to scan the book and make it available on the free Family Search website. After three successful printings of the book, doing a fourth would be cost prohibitive and would take a long time to even approach the point of breaking even. Making the book available electronically allows for its continued use. His request was put into a motion and was carried unanimously by the membership.

Refreshments provided by Laurretta Walker and Lorelei Lee followed the meeting. As always, members and their guests are always welcome at our quarterly meetings and are encouraged to attend.

Looking for that Perfect History Lover's Gift?



Past and Present - A History of Iron (1857 - 1994), Vol. I

The definitive history and family history book covering the history of Iron County and the families that chose to call it home. This professionally published, hard bound book is a must have for any serious researcher of Iron County's history or family historian searching for information on their Iron County family. Published in 1994, this book provides a topical overview of Iron County's rich history and submissions by family members about the history of their own families makes up the balance of this book. Hard bound, indexed, 434 pages.

Stop by the museum and pick up your copy today or order from our on-line bookstore at: <https://ironcountyhistory.org/store> \$50.00 plus \$8.00 S&H

Bygone Railroading by George E. Mattingly

Transcribed by John Abney

Transcriber's note: *Originally appearing in the 10 July 1958 edition of the Iron County Register, this is one of the many articles written by George E. Mattingly. Mr. Mattingly was a Project Manager for the Missouri State Highway Department for over 20 years, much of that time in Iron County.*

It is not too long since the days of steam locomotives. Before the perfecting of diesels, the heavy grades on each side of Tip Top, south of Arcadia, restricted the hauling of long trains and was quite expensive due to this cause. But, with the advent of the diesels and the drive to make railroad travel more attractive; The railroad company lowered the tracks over Tip Top more than 100 feet. This grade reduction made possible longer trains and faster travel.

In the days of steam, trains often used two or more locomotives to pull the hill. In wet and icy winter weather, even this extra power went sour. They always kept in reserve at Arcadia, engines called “pushers”. They were on call day and night, but especially altered around the time for regular runs, either north or south.

They had a special spur in Arcadia, which was an all night Telegraph station. This spur and station were just north of the abandoned lumber yards. Water for the engines was pumped from Bethesda spring, on the Miller place east of the present garment factory. A small dam impounded a few days reserves.

Sand, for use in the engine rail sanders, was kept dry in a house at the siding. This was a haven for the wayfarers who used to tramp the tracks, as the highways were not as they are now. Here they were permitted to sleep at nights, in warmth and snugness on the warm sand. There was no coal shoot, so the fuel had to be tossed by hand shovels from the gondola on the adjoining track into the engine tender.

Many nights I have listened to the Sunshine Specials, as they toiled up the Tip Top hill. Choo, choo, chooooo, slower and slower and finally a gaspy choo—and then silence; but soon broken By the deep throated 4 blasts, from the whistle, calling out the flag man. This was soon heard in Arcadia and an answering 2 short toots from the pusher and off they went for the hill.

Frequently the pusher remained with the train until Gads Hill, south of Des Arc was topped. Here an equally steep grade, but not so long as tip top hill caused stalls also. This grade like Tip Top is now lowered and can be taken with ease by the trains. Going up behind the stalled train, the pusher kept its knuckle joint coupling closed, and eased against the closed coupling on the rear of the train. Thus when the train was over the hump, the pusher simply slowed down, the train proceeded and the pusher blew farewell. At Hogan which was also a full-time Telegraph station, to control the movements from that side, there was a “Wye” on which the pushers could turn around then work from that end. During the early days of the pushers, a train proceeded and the pusher blew farewell.

During the early days of the pushers, a train shuttled between Arcadia and Saint Louis, going to the big town in the morning and returning in the evening. It spent the night at Arcadia. This was called the “accommodation”.

For several years the conductor on this train was the jolly, pleasant Sam Andrews. He lived in the lovely old homestead now owned by Dick Baldwin, in Russellville. He was a fine ice skater, and one icy day skated behind a train from here to Middlebrook. When he got to the bridge, just north of the Ironton station, he simply pulled up on the end of the train and sat down again when across. I have seen him stop at the little lake on the Villa

grounds and borrow a pair of skates from an older boy, put them on, cut the pigeon wing like a youngster. He was over 80.

While all things, at times, give way to progress, it is with nostalgia that one recalls the activities of yore. All the romance and thrill went out of railroading when they ditched the steamers period to see them pulsating with the air compressor throbbing, the hiss of steam as the throttle was cracked, the chug of the exhaust as they got underway, and the moan of the whistle, in hands of an expert, as the train speed through the darkness.

One might call it retribution when we know that the latest power, “nuclear fusion”, simply goes back to the fundamental power, steam. The fusion generates intense heat, which turns water into steam and the steam activates the turbines for the power.

The Grant Oak by John Abney

Editor's note: The following was taken from the Where is it Wednesday column published on the historical society's Facebook page on August 5, 2026.

This week's *Where Is It Wednesday* returns us to the opening months of the Civil War and to the Arcadia Valley's brief but memorable connection to one of the Union's greatest commanders, Ulysses S. Grant. In the summer of 1861, Colonel Ulysses S. Grant was appointed to take charge of the 21st Illinois Infantry, then stationed in the Arcadia Valley. He arrived in Pilot Knob on August 8, 1861, establishing his headquarters on the property of James Lindsay—land that today forms part of the grounds of Ste. Marie du Lac Catholic Church in Ironton.

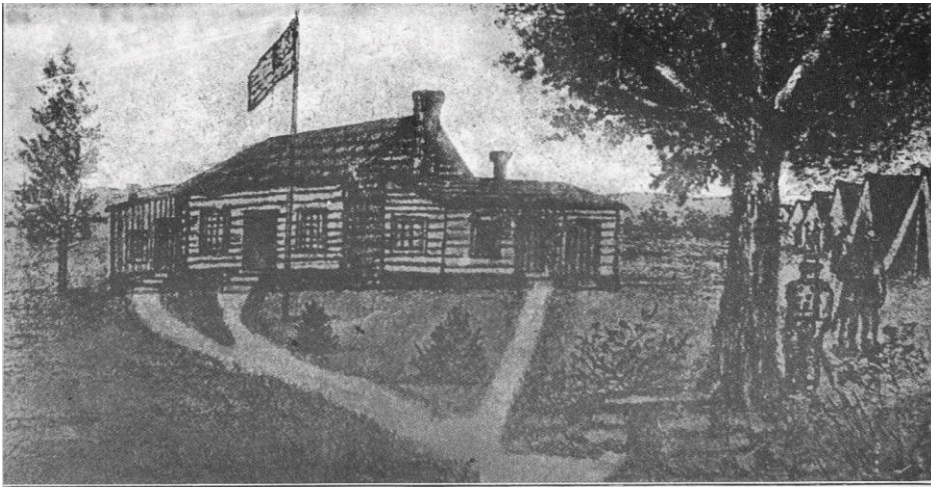
At the time, Lindsay's modest cabin stood on the property, and he offered it to Grant as a temporary headquarters. Just northeast of the cabin stood a large oak tree beside a spring. Local tradition holds that Grant was resting in the shade of that oak one afternoon when a rider approached with momentous news: his promotion to Brigadier General had been confirmed. Grant departed the Arcadia Valley soon afterward, but the tree that sheltered him on that late summer day would forever be remembered as the “Grant Oak.”

In 1886, surviving members of the 21st Illinois returned to the site to commemorate that moment. By then, Judge John Emerson owned the property and had undertaken an extensive renovation of the unfinished twelve-room brick mansion James Lindsay had begun years earlier. The veterans erected a bronze statue of a common soldier—symbolizing the men of the 21st Illinois—on a granite base inscribed with details of Grant's promotion. Although the original statue was later destroyed in a storm, a replacement was installed and still stands today.

The monument endures, but the Grant Oak survives only in memory. According to an article on Missouri's historic trees published in the September 1941 *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, the famed oak died in either 1940 or 1941 and was cut down on March 28, 1941.

This story serves as a reminder that, in the Arcadia Valley, even a quiet late summer afternoon beneath an oak tree can become a turning point in our nation's story.

The photos on the following page are from a portfolio of postcards created in the late 19th century entitled, “Historical Views of Colonel Grant's Headquarters – Ironton, Missouri 1861 – Now known as Emerson Park.”

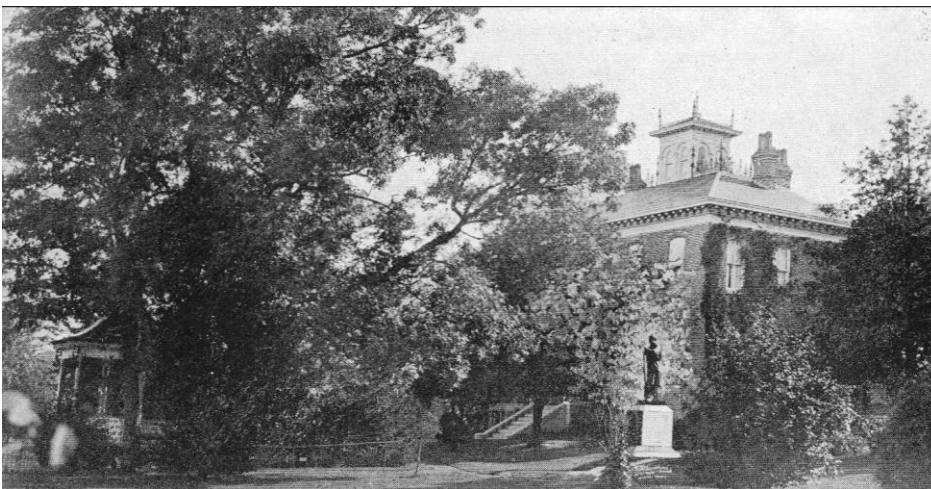


GRANT'S HEADQUARTERS WHILE IN COMMAND AT IRONTON, MO.,
August, 1861. The spring and the "Grant Oak" under which he received his commission as Brigadier-General.
"He came as Colonel and departed as General, and entered upon his career of victory." It was here
he drew the outlines of his plan of campaign for opening the Mississippi River.

The photo at the top left depicts a drawing of James Lindsay's log cabin offered to Colonel Grant for use as his headquarters. In the foreground to the right is the Grant Oak.



The photograph in the middle is from the dedication of the Grant Monument in 1886. The original bronze statue portion of the monument was destroyed in a storm and has since been replaced.



The bottom photograph shows what became known as the Emerson Mansion with the Grant Oak in the foreground to the left along with the gazebo. To the right in the foreground is the Grant Monument.

History of the Reagan School

Editor's note: The following comes from, "Readin, 'Ritin and 'Rithmetic A History of Schools in Iron County, Missouri 1840 – 1981". This book, available for purchase at the museum or through our online bookstore at our website contains the histories of Iron County schools. In the early 1930s, then Superintendent of Iron County Schools, Mrs. Lillian Allers Knudson encouraged the teachers and students of the county's schols to write a history of their school. The following is the history of the Reagan School that was created at that time.

The Old School: The school got its name from the Reagan family, Mr. Reagan gave the land to the people to build a school on. The old school was built out of lumber by Arthur and Walter Hale in 1904. On the inside of the building they had home-made seats and desks. The directors at that time were John Mayes, Banks Reagan, Sam Jones. There were twelve families in the community at that time. They had about one acre for [a] playground. Some of the teachers at that time were Mable Rood, Alice Twomey, Maud Twomey, Lora Bishop, Lillie Bishop, Bessie Tolleson, Minnie Hill, Allie Pattonm Fred Orrick, Susie Johnson, Elfie Kammkolz, Blance O'Neal, Ora Crocker, Beatrice Brown, Elsie Reagan, Myrtle Ashlock.

The New School: The men of the district built the new school building. It was built in the year 1923 and the funds were raised by bonding the district. They got their drinking water from the spring at the bottom of the hill. The board members at that time were Alfred Moyer Sam Jones, Emmett Reagan. The teachers of the new school were: Alfred Jones, Goldie Bay, Mariette Comfort, Alma Banes, Cleo Eye, Walter Spitzmiller. Franklin E. Reagan, former student at our school won distinction in high school as a debater. He later graduated from Missouri University and became Prosecuting Attorney of Boone County; now he is an Assistant Attorney General of Missouri.



Map showing approximate location of the Reagan School



Reagan School, 1911
ICHS Photo

Who Will Carry the Torch? by John Abney



One of the benefits of making our current newsletter available to the public at our website (www.ironcountyhistory.org) is the expanded outreach it gives us. It is to the non-historical society members that this article is addressed.

Every community relies on a memory. In Iron County, that memory doesn't just live in text books or municipal vaults—it lives in the photographs of early towns, the handwritten letters of its citizens, the ledgers of historic businesses, and the family trees that trace our roots across Iron County and the surrounding Ozark hills.

For over half a century, safeguarding that collective memory has been the solemn and joyful duty of the **Iron County Historical Society**. But today, we stand at a critical crossroad, and we must speak candidly with the public we serve: **without a new generation stepping forward, the future of our historical society—and the history it protects—is deeply uncertain.**

When the Iron County Historical Society was established in 1974, its founders set out with a simple, enduring mission: to preserve and share the rich, vibrant heritage of Iron County. For decades, that mission flourished through a natural generational relay. As the founding leaders aged out, a new wave of dedicated residents was always standing ready to step up, take the baton, and assume leadership positions.

They published newsletters, hosted quarterly meetings, and published books highlighting Iron County's history. In 1984, they created the historical society's museum and have continued to add to that collection ever since. They've hosted special events, celebrated milestones in Iron County's history, and worked with individuals and groups on a wide array of topics and projects.

Sometime in the not-so-distant future, however, all of this could be coming to a halt.

While our current board and longtime members remain deeply committed, we are—with very few exceptions—facing a sharp reality: we lack the younger generation needed to carry this tradition into the future. The torch is waiting to be passed, but fewer hands are reaching out to take it.

To understand what hangs in the balance, one must look at what the Iron County Historical Society provides to our community. Our museum serves as the central repository for Iron County's rich history. It is a living home for hundreds of rare artifacts, historical photographs, oral histories, church and school records, and extensive family genealogies. Beyond maintaining these physical archives, the society:

- Hosts quarterly public meetings and educational presentations.
- Assists residents, descendants, and researchers in tracing their local ancestry.
- Maintains a website and Facebook page that shares and celebrates Iron County's history.

Without an organized group to steward these assets, none of this work happens automatically. It is easy to assume that history, once written down or saved, stays safe forever. Sadly, history is far more fragile than we think.

When historical societies close their doors, the loss to a community is profound and often permanent. Without an active local society and repository, unique historical collections are frequently broken up. Artifacts donated in good faith by local families are either returned to those that donated them, donated to other museums; sometimes to be boxed away in distant institutional basements, or—worst of all—discarded when there is no one left to recognize their value.

When a historical society disappears, a community loses its anchor. Future generations lose the ability to answer basic questions about where they came from, who built the towns they walk through, and how their families contributed to the Ozark landscape. Once a story is scattered to the wind, it is almost impossible to gather back together.

I am writing this message not out of defeat, but out of urgency and hope. We know that Iron County is full of creative, energetic, and talented individuals—young adults, working families, new residents, and local history buffs alike.

We cannot let Iron County's story slip away, but we cannot save it alone.

You do not need to be a historian, a scholar, or a lifelong resident to make a difference. We need people with all types of skills and interests:

- **Tech-savvy volunteers** to help digitize archives, manage social media, modernize our online access and take our quarterly newsletter in new and exciting directions.
- **Museum volunteers** to allow us to be open more than three days a week.
- **Event planners and organizers** to help coordinate public meetings and community outreach.
- **Storytellers and writers** to contribute to our publications and document local memories.
- **Future board members and leaders** willing to learn the ropes alongside our current team.
- **Museum leadership** to not only keep our museum open and functioning, but to take it into the future with new ideas and new technologies to help share Iron County's important history.

Whether you can give two hours a month or step into a leadership role, **your presence matters.**

Those that read this newsletter regularly know that this is not the first time that I have made this type of plea. They say that the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result. As each year passes, however, the clock continues to tick down to that day when there won't be time for a smooth transition in a critical position within the historical society. I'm afraid of what will happen when that day arrives.

Please don't wait for "that day" or assume someone else will take on the work. Join us at our next quarterly meeting, drop by the museum, or reach out to see how you can help. Together, we can ensure that the story of Iron County remains vibrant, protected, and accessible for generations to come.

You can get involved today! You can stop by the museum to see what we do firsthand. You can attend one of our quarterly meetings (generally held on the third Sunday of January, April, July, and October.) Finally, you can email us at askus@ironcountyhistory.org or visit our website at ironcountyhistory.org to learn more about volunteer opportunities and membership.

Iron County Historical Society
Membership Application



Date _____ New _____ Renewal _____

Name _____ Spouse _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Signature _____ Received by _____

Printed Newsletter: Yes /No (Circle one and see note below if yes)

Membership Year begins on April 1st of one year and ends on March 31st of the following year.

Please complete the form and return **with membership dues of \$10.00 (\$15.00 if you want a printed /mailed copy of the quarterly newsletter)** to: Iron County Historical Society, P.O. Box 183, Ironton, MO 63650. For information please call (573) 546-3513 and leave a message. **Alternatively, you can also renew your membership on-line by clicking on the "Join / Renew" tab at www.ironcountyhistory.org**

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