

GRANT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

October 6, 2026

In July 1976, a group of local history enthusiasts founded the Grant County Historical Society. Meeting at the Grant County Public Library, they formalized their mission to inform and educate the public and share the area's history, which previously had no dedicated organization. Recognizing that this history could be lost without efforts to engage the community, they adopted the motto "Preserving Yesterday, Today, for Tomorrow." As membership grew, the society incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 1985.

Several members decided to research and write a comprehensive history of Grant County. Virgil Chandler wrote a series of three books on *Cemeteries in Grant County*. Janet Pease compiled a series of nine volumes of *Abstracted Court Records of Grant, Pendleton, and Harrison Counties*, the last completed in 2006.

A crowning achievement was the *History of Grant County, Kentucky*, edited by John B. Conrad. People from all occupations contributed to the book, describing life in each community. The railroads, banks, schools, churches, and merchandisers of the county were detailed in the book. Homes, roads, lakes and streams, farm work and various notable people are all richly described in the book.

Robert Bickers compiled up to six notebooks of vital records of births, marriages, deaths, and ages pulled from old editions of *The Grant County News*. These reference books can be seen at the Grant County Public Library in Williamstown, Ky. Ken Stone, former Grant County News editor, compiled a book of photographs, *Another Place in Time, Photographs from Grant County's Past*, published 1994, transported one back in time. He wrote short excerpts to explain who, what, when, and where the people and places were depicted. All these books were immensely helpful to genealogists with their research.

The society meets once a month on the second Monday. No meetings are held in December, January, or February. One reason is the possibility of inclement weather and Daylight-Saving Time makes 6:00 pm meetings in the dark. Before covid-19, we had regular speakers come to talk about history they were interested in. We had Robert Webster who authored a book on the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire. We have had Paul Kencotte, Ron Bryant from *Waveland*, a Lexington, Ky plantation, Karl J. Lietzenmayer, from Kenton County, Melissa C. Jurgensen, Paul Simpson, and funny man Marvin Sullivan. Sometimes a member will present a program of historical interest to the society.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of past members, we were able to save a log house and a stagecoach stop, the Sherman Tavern. The tavern was especially hard because the school board bought the farm and wanted to tear down the house and outbuildings. They were planning a new school, Sherman Elementary, due to growth in the surrounding area. It took an earnest effort to change their minds. Eventually, it was decided the Grant County Fiscal Court would add it to the Park Dept. and members of The Friends of Sherman Tavern would keep the place in shape for visitors. It would still be owned by the school board.

One member of the historical society was instrumental with her plans for the Sherman Tavern. Edna Cummins and others spent hundreds of hours cleaning out the house and recruiting members to help. She organized yard sales, raising money for renovations. She was a fantastic cook, owned a restaurant at one time, and went into the catering business. Each year she organized "The Annual Sherman Tavern Chicken Dinner" benefit. There was, of course, fried chicken with all the fixin's, homemade desserts, and live music afterward. One of the selling points to the school board was the easy access to the tavern by the school children from Sherman Elementary. They would be able to see the old fireplaces, wood plank floors, tall ceilings in rooms, and the steep stairs going to the second floor. The grounds have old trees, a root cellar, a brick privy, a chicken house, now a farm museum, and a cemetery. There is also a well that looks like a wishing well, covered by wood planks.

The school was uniquely designed to echo the 19th century building in front of it. There is clapboard siding on the walls in the courtyard, quilt designs built into the floors, and the clocks have quilt designs on them also. There was a cupola on top of the building.

The William Arnold Memorial Log House is located on Main Street in Williamstown, KY. Captain William Arnold was a founding member of Williamstown, and a Revolutionary War soldier.

It has been moved from its original location twice. The first time it was located on the grounds of the Williamstown Baptist Church. Then it found a new home in its present location. Members of the GC Historical Society Virgil Chandler, Betty Barnes, and Barbara Brown were instrumental in preserving and promoting the log house. It is called a log house because it is a two-story structure. A cabin has only one level. Over time, repairs and replacements were needed to keep the log house in good repair. The society paid for new windows and the chinking between the logs. The city of Williamstown maintains the grounds. They installed a wheelchair ramp for access. The Tourism and Convention Commission, with the city, added a covered picnic area next to the log house.

The William Arnold Memorial Log House offers a look into life in the earliest days of settlements in Kentucky. Artifacts of the time include a rock fireplace, a rope bed, a spinning wheel, an old quilt, and other items of interest. A tremendous boost came to the society when Jamie Baker, the Grant County Tourist and Convention Commission director, realized tourists going to the Ark Encounter, needed something to fill the time until the Ark opened. She set aside money to hire historical society members to open the log house and the tavern, with specific hours to accommodate visitors. Visitors from all over the United States and the world have helped fund projects with their donations and purchases of souvenirs. Examples include a bicentennial throw celebrating 200 years since the founding of Williamstown in 1820, mugs, coasters, and handcrafted items made by local artisans.

Where is the Grant County Historical Society going from here, in the next 50 years? The hope is to eventually be able to move into the Courthouse space promised several years ago. Having speakers willing to travel to Williamstown, to enlighten the membership on a historical event or an archaic process, or a historically significant person.

When the time is right, publishing a sequel to the *History of Grant County, Kentucky* book, documenting the next 50 years from the 1990's would be a lofty goal. Do not think it has not been historic since 1992 when the history book was printed. Since then, the nation has suffered setbacks, but Grant County has bounced back from most of them. Growth in business and population because of tourism, and the desire of people to leave urban life, is changing the landscape of Grant County. Planning for the future will be key to keeping a pleasant community in which to live. Historians will be watching.

Charlotte Blackburn Schmidt

Corresponding Secretary

Grant County Historical Society

www.historyofgrantcounty.org