

Historical Society Website: daytontxhistory.com

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To reserve Parker Hall, call:

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Old School Museum: The Old School Museum is located next to Parker Hall at 111 West Houston St. in Dayton and is open Saturdays from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.

Dayton Historical Society: The Society has reconvened its monthly meetings effective June 28, 2021 at Parker Hall at 6 P.M. (the last Monday of each month) for a historical program presented by guest speaker(s). The program is preceded by a Society business meeting and followed by refreshments.

Dayton History News

Traversing America via the OST

Local news sources published articles last year about a parade to be held Sat. November 7, 2020.

The event was to commemorate the designation of the City of Dayton as an official Old Spanish Trail (OST) City.

Military veterans were the honored guests in a procession of pre-1985 antique, classic and muscle cars that were then on display at the Community Center after the parade.

A year prior, on June 24, 2019, the Dayton Historical Society had a special guest – Charlotte Kahl, Chairman of the OST 100 Centennial celebration.

A passionate historian regarding the Old Spanish Trail Highway Project, Kahl educated Dayton Historical Society meeting attendees about the first paved highway system that ran from the east to the west coast of America.

The Old Spanish Trail Centennial group was formed in 2002 to preserve the history of the highway and organize a series of historical reenactments.

At that same meeting, Janette Goulder-Frick provided a short program about the 1938 Dayton High School Band's participation in a Pensacola, Florida celebration commemorating completion of the Old Spanish Trail.

Leading the band group traveling in two school buses from Dayton to Florida were Daytonites – W. T. Jamison, Band Director Walter B. Stephenson, and Dayton School Superintendent V. W. Miller.



Stops were made along the way where the group was welcomed by mayors of various cities and treated to dinners in their honor. In St. Martinsville, they gave a concert to roughly 1,500 people.

Historically, the Old Spanish Trail Transcontinental Highway project was first conceived in 1915 to connect St. Augustine, Florida to New Orleans.

Within 4 years (by 1919), the vision had grown to include six historically significant cities – St. Augustine, New Orleans, San Antonio, El Paso, Tucson and San Diego.

It connected historical missions and forts built on the original Old Spanish Trail and its initial funding was provided by the states and counties through which the OST was going to pass.

Road construction was accomplished by horses hitched to graders. Paving didn't occur until 1928/1929.

A grand motorcade from Florida to California along the entire Old Spanish Trail will be held in 2029 via Dayton.

Lester Ray Wisegerber – Family Roots

One of Dayton’s citizens, Lester Ray Wisegerber, has served the city of Dayton and Liberty County in a variety of roles. In addition to a lengthy resume of accomplishments and contributions, Lester has some deep family roots in the Dayton/Old River area going back to 1826. (www.sfasu.edu/heritagecenter/8393.asp)

Wisegerbers

The paternal grandparents of Lester were Peter Wisegerber (1863-1929) and Margaretha (Maimra) Reichert (1870-1948) both of whom spoke German and were born in Landau, Odessa, Russia. They married in 1890 and immigrated to America in 1894.

Per 1900 census, Pete and Margaret were living in Plantersville, Grimes County, TX with their 4 children – 3 girls and 1 son all born in Texas.

Per 1910 census, they were living at a ‘Bohemian Settlement’ in Harris County with 11 children – 7 girls and 4 sons.

Per 1920 census, they had moved to Dayton and were living on “Winfree Dayton Road” with 4 girls, 1 son and 3 boarders.

Peter died on December, 8, 1929 and Margaret died April 15, 1948. Both are buried at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Crosby/Barrett, TX. The death certificate listed his occupation as a rice farmer.

The son listed on the 1920 census for Peter and Margaret was Joe Wisegerber – Lester’s father.

Joseph T. Wisegerber (1904-1964) was born in Plantersville, TX and married Margaret (Maggie) Griffith (1911-1983) who was born in Mont Belvieu. They were married 13 May 1929 in Harris County and were the parents of 2 children – Lester and Barbara.

Per Joe’s obituary, “Wisegerber had been in rice farming and ranching since 1919. He was the owner of the Rice Growers, Tractors and Equipment Co., and was a member of Texas Rice Promotion Association, American Rice Growers and Richmond Production Credit Association.” Services were held at Dayton’s First Methodist Church.

Griffiths

The local Griffith lineage begins with Henry Moody Griffith Sr. (1797-1869), 3rd great-grandfather of Lester who settled in Old River-Winfree, TX while it was still under Mexican rule.

Henry was the son of Dr. Joshua Griffith (1769-1813) of Maryland and Jemimah Hazelton (1755-1818). His great-grandfather William Sr. settled in Annapolis, MD from Wales in 1695.

Widow Amelia Barrow (1802-1861) married Henry on 28 April 1824 in Opelousas, LA. She was the daughter of Reuben Barrow Sr. (1758-1824) and Maria “Mary” Jane Johnson (1772-1807) of Louisiana.

Henry and Amelia arrived in what is now Chambers County in Dec. 1824 along with Amelia’s brothers.

He received a land grant in the Atascosito District from Mexico in 1830 on which he farmed and raised cattle and horses south of Dayton.

Texas Governor A. J. Hamilton appointed Henry as Sheriff of Chambers County which he held from 1865-1868.

In 1835, Henry sold 1,047 acres of his land to William Duncan. Deed stated “tract of land known as the big hill but hereafter to be called Mont Bellview”. Henry’s nephew Amos Barber bought the 100 acres known as Barber’s Hill. A historical marker in Henry’s honor is in Joe Matthews Park in Mont Belvieu.

Between Lester’s mother Maggie and his 3rd great-grandparents Henry Sr. & Amelia were the following generations:
 - GP: Gus Griffith (1889-1962) & Della Frazar (1892-1929)
 - 1GG: Edward Griffith (1861-1945) & Christina Franssen (1862-1947)
 - 2GG: Henry Griffith Jr. (1844-1922) & Rebecca Ann Hartman (1844-1879)

Grandparent Gus Griffith was born in Dayton, the eldest of 7 children, while Della was born in Old River, the 2nd of 7 children of Jesse & Susan Frazar.

They were the parents of 3 children: Maggie, Milo (1913-1979) and J.D. (1915-1998). Both are buried at Linney Cemetery.

In his obituary, Gus was referred to as a retired farmer and rancher as well as a “prominent pioneer, native and lifelong resident of Dayton.”

1st great-grandfather Edward was born in Old River, the 2nd of 7 children while Christina was born in Cove, TX – the 5th of 12 children to Hugo and Metta Franssen who came from Netherlands in 1844. He is buried at the Griffith-Icet cemetery in Cove, TX while she is buried at the Hartman Cemetery in Old River (unmarked grave).

2nd great-grandfather Henry Bankhead Jr. was born in Old River, the 5th of 8 children of Henry Sr. and Amelia Barrow while Rebecca was born in Louisiana, the 7th of 7 children of Edward & Mary Hartman who immigrated from Germany in 1832. Both are buried at Reeves Cemetery in Old River.

Excerpt – The Streets of Dayton book (by Caroline Wadzeck)

“Houston Street, originally named Akron, was one of the main thoroughfares in Dayton before 1910 because of the large two-story school built there in 1909 and because it was the road one took to connect with other roads to go to Houston (the OST, now U.S. Highway 90, didn’t come through Dayton until after 1922).

No one remembers when the street was named, just that it was always called Houston Street. Lester Ray Wisegerber lived in his great-grandparents’ house on West Houston as a boy in the late 1930s (behind where RaceWay gas station is today). He said the road had a shell surface then and flooded badly when it rained. In the early 1950s, the street had a gravel surface.

One of Lester Ray’s memories of living there was that it was his job as a young child of about 6 years old to take the family cow, Mary Frances, to the end of the street (toward present-day Highway 146) and stake it so it could graze. Then in the evening, he would take the cow home so his mother could milk it.

Much later, Lester Ray and his wife, Betty Jo George, and children lived in the same house, and the children would watch Dayton Bronco football games by standing on a fence across the street, the football stadium having been built on Houston St.”