

# Questers celebrate 40th anniversary safely

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One of Bella Vista's many clubs held its first face-to-face meeting since February last week, with social distancing and masks. The Butterfield Trails Chapter of Questers International was also celebrating its 40th anniversary.

The group met in the back room of the Bella Vista History Museum which has been closed since the coronavirus threat developed last spring. It was a group of about 13, with chairs spaced out for social distancing. Members received a snack as they left the museum, but food was not served during the meeting.

Questers International started in 1944 when Jessie Elizabeth Barden bought an antique syrup pitcher and put it on her desk at the Red Cross office, state president Esther Osbahr told the group. When her co-workers began asking about the pitcher and eventually bringing some of their own antiques to display on their own desks, Barden realized that many people were interested in antiques.

Eventually, Barden organized a group of 14 for a "show and tell" at her home and the club was born. Their mission statement is about education "with respect to places, objects or events of historical significance."

Two chapters formed in Bella Vista in 1980, but the Blowing Springs chapter disbanded earlier this year. The Trail of Tears chapter is also in Bella Vista; that one was organized in 1979.



Lynn Atkins/The Weekly Vista

Xyta Lucas, president of the Bella Vista Historical Society and a member of Questers, leads a tour of the Summit Cemetery last week as the Butterfield Trails chapter of Questers International celebrates 40 years.

Usually, meetings are monthly with one member presenting on a history topic. Last week, Osbahr announced that member Camile Hatcher received an award for her presentation about the Elaine Massacre.

After the meeting, Hatcher explained that in 2019 she stumbled on a news story that said the 100th anniversary of the Elaine Massacre was coming up. She immediately began planning her presentation.

The Elaine Massacre in September 1919 happened when Black sharecroppers who had been treated unfairly tried to organize a union. Shots were fired when

the sharecroppers met in a local church and the sharecroppers fired back, killing five white men.

In response, hundreds of white men from the region took part in a three-day killing spree with more than 200 men, women and children killed. Homes and a school were burned.

Twelve Black men were arrested for the killings of the five white men. They were tortured and six pleaded guilty. Their cases lasted five and a half years and made their way to the Supreme Court. Eventually, they were set free.

Quester chapters often have projects. The Butterfield Trails chapter has been working with

the Gravette Museum to furnish the historic Kindley House, president Betsy Mertz said. As that project winds down, the chapter may be looking for another project to take up.

Xyta Lucas, president of the Bella Vista Historical Society, told the group about the Summit Cemetery, located near the Metfield Clubhouse. The Historical Society now owns the 3-acre site which includes the foundation of the old community building. The building served as both a church and a school, but the school was consolidated into the Bentonville School District in 1947 and — after some research — the Historical

Society found that the school district took over the ownership of the land around it at that time. Two years ago, representatives of the district signed a quitclaim deed to give the land to the Historical Society.

Although the city of Bella Vista does some mowing at the cemetery, volunteers also work on the grounds. Recently, small white crosses were added to mark each grave. The most recent burial in the cemetery was in 1952, but some graves are decorated each Memorial Day. Lucas doesn't know who decorates the graves but assumes some family members remain in the area.

No one knows exactly how many graves there are or who they belong to, Lucas said. She hopes to bring in professionals who can survey the ground and find unmarked graves in the area.

The Trail of Tears Chapter has been helping at the Gamble Cemetery in Centerton, Osbahr said. It's the family cemetery for a member of the Butterfield group, Betsy Meek, and she is one of its caretakers. She took the job over when her mother died but didn't realize how much work she was taking on.

The Gamble Cemetery is now surrounded by residential developments and has suffered from vandalism. The Trail of Tears Chapter has helped pay for some monuments to be repaired.

No decision was made by the Butterfield group about a project or about future meetings. Like many others in the area, the Questers are waiting until the coronavirus is no longer a threat.