

## Document discovery sparks pilgrimage to past



**INTERESTING DISCOVERY:** George Mink II speaks to members of the Saline Ford Historical Preservation Society on Saturday June 12 2010 during a luncheon honoring descendents of the Joseph Arnold family, who came to visit Ashland and the family homestead after being contacted by Mink. (Staff Photo by Teresa Livers)

**By Teresa Livers**

Published: Thursday, June 17, 2010 3:09 AM CDT

ASHLAND – What started out as conversation during morning coffee turned into something much bigger and much more gratifying for a local man.

Several months ago, George Mink II met for coffee with his cronies at Platte Valley Antiques like he does many mornings. Having run across several old abstracts, Mink and company discussed how the documents were relatively worthless these days.

Mink determined he would trash the old papers when one of the guys started asking questions about where the land came from. As Mink started paying closer attention to the abstracts, he determined that the Joseph Arnold family had homesteaded the farm, four miles south of Ashland, on which Mink has resided since 1960.

He became interested in the Arnold family and started doing research on the Internet. As he learned more, he started to frequent The Ashland Gazette office where he would scour old newspapers looking for obituaries and various articles regarding the prominent Ashland family.

Mink discovered that Joseph and Geraldine Reynolds Arnold arrived in Ashland by covered wagon in the fall of 1864. The couple had 12 children. The Arnolds as well as several of their children are buried in the Ashland Cemetery.

Their oldest son, Bion, was extremely intelligent and later became known as one of the top electrical engineers in the U.S. While Mink was doing his research, he decided to look for information on Bion. In doing so, he came across a website in which a great-great grandson of Joseph Arnold had posted a message.

Grant Shepard of Dallas, Texas is a great-great grandson to Harold Arnold, Bion's younger brother. Around the first of March, Shepard posted a message on a genealogy web page, for one week, inquiring about whether anyone had any information regarding his ancestors. As luck would have it, Mink was in the right place at the right time, saw the message and contacted Shepard to tell him "we live on the homestead of Joseph and Geraldine Reynolds Arnold."

Mink and Shepard started talking about the old homestead when Shepard declared his desire to visit Ashland.

Mink, equally eager for the descendants to visit, extended an invitation.

Shepard and his mother, Hillary Arnold Shepard, also from Dallas, Texas, made their first trip to Ashland last weekend. They came together to tell members and guests of the Saline Ford Historical Preservation Society about some of the memories they have acquired regarding their ancestors as a result of Mink's interest.

The Shepards were thrilled to be in Ashland as was Mink to have them as his guest. For months, he'd been studying about this family and his enthusiasm was evident. His family joked about why he wasn't studying his own relatives rather than someone else's. Mink said his wife, Gay, couldn't believe that he extended an invitation to complete strangers to come to their home.

Nevertheless, Mink said, "It turned out very nice."

As Hillary Shepard shared memories of her uncles' intelligence and their impeccable work ethic as well as their "propensity to party hard," she said her father, Edward Arnold, did not talk about family a lot. She also admitted that she didn't ask a lot because as she was growing up, she honestly didn't care. It wasn't until her own son, Grant, started showing interest in his heritage that she began to realize the disservice she had shown her children.

"Shame on parents for not telling their kids what they know," she said.

Very grateful to Mink for his interest in the Arnolds, Hillary said, "Because of George, we're reestablishing our family. We're reconnecting."

After a long drive and little sleep, the Arnolds went to see the family plot in the Ashland Cemetery. Along with the original family marker, several of the Arnold headstones have recently been reset. Ashland residents Clarence Schamp, Claude Hurst, Dean Laune and Mink himself volunteered their time to do this, which was gratefully acknowledged by the Shepards.

Said Grant, upon their arrival, "We went to the cemetery, saw the Arnold stone and tingled. We felt like we were home."

While the story is far from told, both Mink and the Shepard's plan to continue investigating and researching the Arnold family and their ties to Ashland. Mink is hopeful he will be able to share "the rest of the story" with Gazette readers in the weeks to come.

It all started with a piece of paper but led to so much more. Grant Shepard put it quite succinctly when he said, "It's not a road trip, it's a pilgrimage."

**This is the first in a series of stories regarding the Joseph Arnold family and their historic ties to Ashland.**

**Reprinted with grateful acknowledgement to Teresa Livers and the Ashland Gazette**