

The HISTORIAN

BULLETIN NUMBER ONE HUNDRED SIXTEEN

April 2004

THE SEBRING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

QUARTERLY LUNCHEON MEETING SATURDAY APRIL 24, 2004 TO FEATURE AUSTIN HEACOCK

Luncheon is at Sebring Civic Center at 12:00 noon; bring a dish to pass and \$1.50 for service and rent of the building. Austin ("Austie") Heacock, a past president of Sebring Firemen, Inc., will present the program on the Sebring Fire Department. The son of Ford Heacock, Jr., Austie was formerly employed with the family insurance firm, retiring several years ago to pursue a career as a hunting guide. Austie grew up as a boy scout in Sebring, and loves to quote cowboy poetry. He has an extensive Indian arrowhead collection, many of which were acquired from Lake Jackson. Austie is a full time hunting guide, specializing in turkey hunting. This enterprise enables him to travel extensively to many areas in the United States, including the states of Montana, Louisiana and Texas. He also manages hunting leases.



THE SEBRING FIRE DEPARTMENT

By Carole Goad

In 1913, the Sebring Fire Department was organized by Chester Treadway. Their total equipment at that time consisted of two hand-drawn hose reels, which had been purchased by George E. Sebring, the founder of the town. The town had 25 water hydrants and a total of 1,000 feet of fire hose. Mr. Aaron Withers served as the first Fire Chief from 1913 until 1920.

In 1920, Walter Zachary became Fire Chief. At that time, a

Newly Completed Fire Station - 1927

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hand-drawn chemical cart was added to the equipment and a Ford Chemical Truck was purchased. In 1920, the first piece of real equipment was purchased: an American LaFrance Triple Combination Truck!

By 1923, the Fire Department had about 30 organized volunteers and was in need of additional hose conveyance. These volunteers purchased, with their own money, a Ford chassis with a capacity for 1200 feet of hose. This generous deed illustrated the spirit of the Fire Department that was to carry over to this date. Sebring Firemen have a long history of selfless service in many aspects of the life of this community.

Walter Zachary served as Fire Chief until 1925, at which time he moved away from Sebring. In late 1925, the Town Council appointed Allen Altvater Fire Chief, and he served in that capacity until 1934. Subsequent Fire Chiefs included Harold Long (1934-41), Austin Heacock (1941- 42), Forest Howard (1942-61), Thurman Haywood (1961- 69); Legare Smoak (1969- 79); and Eddie DeLoach (1979- 94). In late 1994, Kenny Haynes became Public Safety Commander, the duties of which included Fire Chief. He served as Public Safety Commander until October of 1999, whereupon he was named Fire Chief. Mr. Haynes continues to serve as Fire Chief in 2004.

The Sebring Fire Department is legendary in its service to this community. In 1929, Sebring firefighters decided to build an athletic field for the community. For this purpose, they incorporated, forming the Sebring Firemen, Inc. Going into debt, they acquired the present site, which was an abandoned orange grove at the intersection of Kenilworth Boulevard and Highlands Avenue. They cleared the grove by hand and with the assistance of mules! By 1931, Rex Beach threw out the first ball and opened this field for the use of the entire community. After the present Sebring High School was built, the High School began using this facility as their athletic field, and have called it home ever since.

Sebring Firemen also provided many Sebring youth with uniforms for their sports teams over the years.

Sebring Firemen, Inc. also established the Highlands County Fair in 1937 and continues to operate this event. In addition, other annual activities such as

the weekend flea market, the Bull-A-Rama and the 12 Hours of Barbecue are all sponsored by this organization.

In 1928, under the leadership of Chief Allen Altvater, Mr . Harry K. Brown, a retired professor of Chemistry who lived in Sebring, began teaching classes to Firefighters regarding the scientific study of the causes and nature of fire. These classes were very popular and beneficial, so the Sebring Firemen decided to have Mr. Brown's lectures published. Requests for this publication were received from universities, libraries, industrial companies and other fire departments. Subsequently, the Sebring Firemen, with cooperation from such groups as the National Board of Fire Underwriters and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, organized the Florida Fire College, the first session of which was held in Daytona Beach in May, 1930.

To raise funds to pay for their endeavors, the Firemen put on variety shows for the community. These shows were a source of great joy for many years to citizens of Sebring. To illustrate the respect with which Sebring Firemen were held, famous author and local resident Rex Beach made the following remarks during a Firemen's fundraiser show for the Florida Fire College in 1931:

This entertainment is advertised as a benefit for the Sebring Fire Department, but, as a matter of fact, it is for you. Every dollar that goes to the firemen benefits you and me ten dollars worth. That's the kind of a Fire Department we have here. It is the most unique fire department I ever saw. It is more than a fire department, it is also a civic body and in some ways, the most important and the most efficient in our city.

It leads the way in every public-spirited enterprise. If you have a new idea for the betterment of Sebring, take it around to the Firehouse. You'll get quick action!

Who built a splendid athletic field and dedicated it to the free use of the public? The firemen did most of that with their own hands. Who wears Sebring's baseball, basketball and diamondball uniforms? Most of the boys are firemen.

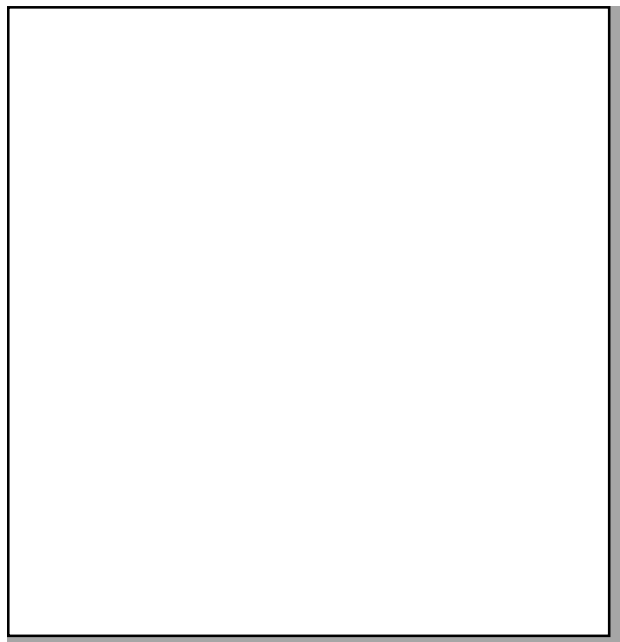
Who made the first energetic move toward

Sebring Fire Dept. con't

cleaning up and beautifying our city and who volunteered to plant and beautify a part of the road into Highlands Hammock? The Firemen! At the formal opening of that park they handled their share of the intricate details so that there wasn't a hitch. They led in the movement for fish and game conservation and for the protection of our county from forest fires.

If you want something done in Sebring, call the Fire Department. If your oil stove, or your fridgidaire or your husband won't work, call a fireman. If you quarrel with your girl friend, call a fireman and if she's good looking, you'll have no more trouble with her.

The Sebring Fire Department is probably the most revered institution in the city. Its members have always been loved and respected, and that remains so to this day.



Ruth and Culp Dottery

GENEROUS DONATION OF RUTH DOTTERY ESTATE

By Elizabeth Walker

The Sebring Historical Society was recently the recipient of a generous donation from the Estate of Ruth Dottery. Mrs. Dottery was a charter and life-

time member of the Society.

Born in Homer, Indiana on March 11, 1910, to James Ross Blythe and Kate McConnell Blythe, Ruth came to Sebring with her parents when Sebring was in its infancy. Her father was Sebring's first undertaker.

Ruth's husband, Culp, enjoyed recalling a day during the Great Depression when he and Ruth went to the Courthouse to get their marriage license. He gave the Clerk a \$20.00 bill to pay the \$2.00 fee. No one in the entire County Courthouse had change for a \$20.00 bill. How times have changed, he recalled. Culp Dottery and Ruth were married in 1931 at the Bea Villa on State Road 17 just south of Avon Park.

Culp and Ruth worked for the Sebring Historical Society diligently from its beginning until July, 1991. Ruth served as membership chairman all those years. Together, she and Culp collected, compiled and edited the Sebring Historical Society publication, then known as the Bulletin, for many years. Some of the early publications consisted often of twelve pages.

Ruth enjoyed personally delivering the Bulletin to members and kept them abreast of the Society activities. As charter members, the Dotterys devoted their lives to this effort with a dedication rarely found in any organization. Ruth was also an active member of the Eastern Star and a member of the First United Methodist Church.

It is so consistent with their loving nature and dedication that the Dotterys continue their generosity after death. They are greatly missed by the Society and the Community. Ruth joined her husband in death November 3, 2002.

AT THE ARCHIVES

By Carole Goad

We have four new displays in the Archives.

(1) We have a large display devoted to the history and accomplishments of our black brothers and sisters in Sebring. Included in this display are the stories of three of our black brothers who died in the

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At the Archives con't

service of this country: Sgt. Willie Lee Kirkland (1948-1969); Captain Dennis Smith Jr. (1943-1969); and Seaman James L. Stakley (1916-1945).

(2) We have a display illustrating the history of the Sebring Fire Department and Sebring Firemen Inc. Our quarterly luncheon meeting this month will feature a presentation on the Sebring Fire Department, which is legend in its accomplishments in this community.

(3) In addition there is a display about the First United Methodist Church including photographs of the "Church that was built in a day".

(4) A special display has been added that is entitled "Favorite Photographs of the Early Days of Sebring" and features the pioneers and early town buildings.

For the past two and one half years, three of the medals earned by Sebring's World War II hero, Major Tommy McGuire, have been on loan to the Museum of Florida History and were included in their traveling display. We appreciate the fact that the State of Florida has honored Major McGuire in this way. We now have had all of these medals returned and they are once again included in our permanent Tommy McGuire display.

The Sebring Historical Society will soon have a new website, which is being put together by Mr. Burke Even of Reality Images of Lake Placid. This website will include a listing of all reference books and books for sale at the Archives. It will also include "The Historian" publication.

We have plans in the works to convert the men's restroom in the Archives to additional usable space. This space will house our books for sale, city directories, etc. This movement of books will allow us to have more space in the main Archives for historical displays and to efficiently display our reference books. Hopefully this project will be completed in the next two to three months. Come on down and see the big improvement when this project is completed!

HURRICANE STRIKES MOORE HAVEN IN 1926

By: Alden Franklin Young

No one in Florida was aware of the damage hurricanes could do in 1926. Oldtimers knew of previous storms but the term "hurricane" was not part of our language at that time.

My brother Gene was not aware of hurricanes and their possible damage when he moved to Moore Haven in 1924. Gene had met his wife Ruth at the Church of the Brethren, shortly after we moved to Sebring in the summer of 1920. After running a grocery store for a year, Gene sold the grocery and picked Moore Haven as a good place to build a future. He bought a small soft drink bottling plant in Moore Haven. He also bought a house facing the Caloosahatchie Canal just about four blocks from his bottling plant.

The plant came complete with a heavy duty model T Ford truck. Gene would bottle drinks for two days a week, deliver them to Clewiston and Labelle and country stores for three days, then wash bottles and maintain the operation the remainder of the week. He made many friends at Church on Sunday. This summer was hot as usual and the cold drink business was good. About the first of September, school had just started and the farmers were busy getting their land in shape for the fall planting. Cabbage, corn and other crops including green beans were the major crops at that time.

Without warning, the storm hit. The storm stalled off Miami Beach nearly twenty hours, pushing about four feet of salt water onto the streets of downtown Miami.

Boats remained beached on Flagler Street and Biscayne Boulevard. The storm moved inland to Miami, and proceeded to Lake Okeechobee. All the communications lines out of Miami were disabled and news of the storm damage was slow in getting upstate. In Sebring, the Western Union Office in the middle of town posted a news release on its front window telling about the storm flooding Miami and moving northward. Many people gathered at the window to read this storm bulletin. By that time, the storm had already moved without warning into the Lake

Hurricane con't

Okeechobee area. As the wind velocity in Moore Haven increased higher and higher, buildings began to disintegrate; water got deeper on top of the ground in the middle of Moore Haven. The increase in wind speed blew more water out of Lake Okeechobee. People began to seek shelter in their homes. These homes were frame buildings not tied together to withstand such wind and water. Gene brought his bottling plant truck to the house and parked it next to their model T pickup truck. Only the large heavy truck was found after the flood. Gene's house was built on telephone poles driven twenty feet into the ground. His floor level was five feet above ground. As the water level in the house increased, the force of the wind and water had knocked all the window glass out of the house. Gene brought two mattresses into the living room, yanked the doors out of the middle of the house, and tied them together to make a float to support his wife and fourteen month old baby girl. Gene stood shoulder deep in water in the house for seven hours, as he anchored his wife and baby to prevent their washing out the open window and drowning. Whitecaps were breaking over his roof as the wind blew over one hundred fifty miles per hour. Prayer was the only strength they had to carry them forward. A few hours later the wind subsided, then ceased completely. Their prayers had been answered. As Gene looked up and down the street, he discovered his house was the only house remaining in the block. He could see the large wooden frame hotel building between his house and town had floated around the corner to the other side of the block, and was facing the other street. A couple hours after the water level peaked, the water level began to fall slowly, until it was only two feet deep in his house. His only thinking was "Thank God we are alive." Sebring was only sixty five miles north; our damage in Sebring was limited to tar paper and roofing paper being blown off the roofs, plus the large pine and oak trees broken up or damaged and partly blocking some of the streets.

Most all the citrus the size of marbles and larger formed a carpet on the ground. There was very little marketable citrus that year in Sebring.

A few hours later, news came about Moore Haven and the estimated number of people missing and drowned was made public. The entire front page of

the Sebring American two days later carried a list of people assumed dead, missing or drowned. This proved short of the final number which totalled about one thousand eight hundred people from the Moore Haven area.

A rescue party was organized to go to Moore Haven and assist the survivors. My dad loaded his car with jugs of water, canned and dry food and accompanied the other men. Mom was from sturdy Chickasaw Indian ancestry and insisted she accompany my dad. She did. They drove to where the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad grade was the only dry ground to be seen. The entire rescue operation walked and carried as many supplies down the railroad grade as possible. All the wildlife was on this railroad grade, including rattlesnakes, water moccasins, deer, raccoons, opossums, rats and bobcats. Everyone was friendly in their attempt to survive. The rescue party met people walking from Moore Haven part of the way down the grade. In some places the water washed against the tracks, and the force of the wind lifted the rails up still fastened to the ties, and tilted the track over sort of sideways. My dad and mother made it all the way into Moore Haven, and found Gene, his wife and their baby alive, hungry and thirsty. Baby June was hungry but no food was present. Mom had brought a slice of bread in her pocket. The bread was dried out, but the baby grabbed it and ate this dry bread like it was a steak. Dad brought Gene's wife and baby to Sebring. Gene remained to try and find any of his property.

He did find his model T Heavy truck, dried it out and made it run. He never found the pickup truck. Only the piling of the bottling plant remained. As he rummaged in the mud, Gene found one small keg of Delaware Punch Grape Concentrate. It was heavy and settled in the mud. Gene again remarked "God brought us through the storm and kept the grape drink to give us energy. We are so much better off than the families now buried in the mud that will never be found".

After the effects of the storm were put aside, rebuilding was the big effort. Gene decided not to remain in Moore Haven. Dad gave Gene a lot on

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Orange Drive in Sebring. Gene, helped by dad and Harry Fasnacht, cut the house into sections and moved the sections to Orange Drive where they reassembled and remodeled the house. About sixteen years later, the School Board decided to expand Sebring High. Gene again moved his house to the corner of North Commerce and Maple, where it remains today.**

**** Editor's Note: This house is now known as the "Twin Oaks Antique and Tea Room" and the address is listed as 246 North Commerce. Thanks to Joyce Bovard for this information.**

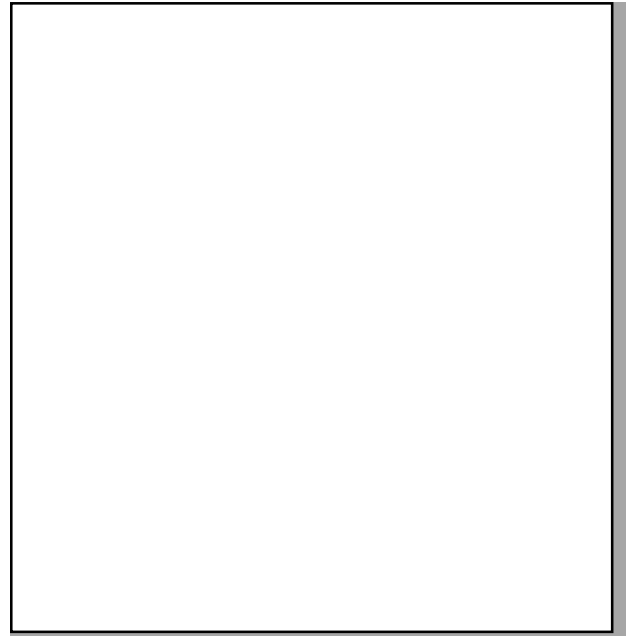
Baby Rescued from Moore Haven Hurricane

By Verdelle Sebring Medlin

Juanita Haskins Stewart was 18 months old when the Hurricane hit Moore Haven in 1926. Baby "Nita" was an orphaned infant, and her family had apparently all perished during the tragedy. Mr. Fairfield "Fax" Haskins, prominent local attorney, found Nita floating in a washtub after the hurricane, and he and his wife adopted her and raised her. I was born about that time, and my Mother used to tell me that a picture window blew into my crib and she had to pick the glass off me.

Nita and I were good friends in school. She was about one year ahead of me in school. Nita and I took many Red Cross Instructor swimming classes together and tried to "waterproof" all of the kids in Highlands County. We also grew up together in Girl Scouts. I think she eventually found an Aunt that lived in Winter Haven.

Nita married a G. I. that was stationed at Hendricks Field (now the Sebring Airport). She and her husband had one son, Todd, and were eventually divorced. Nita overcame another tragedy in her life when her son died of drowning in Daytona Beach. Todd was about 15 years old, and was an excellent swimmer, but evidently he got caught in the undertow. He was on a outing with a friend who invited him to go to the beach. As I recall, they never found Todd's body. Nita survived this tragic event and continued to work with the Red Cross in teaching children swimming and life saving. Nita passed away in 1998.



William & Mildred Schlosser

REMINISCENCES

By Bill Schlosser

Editor's Note:

Bill Schlosser is a lifelong resident of Sebring, and is the son of a Sebring "pioneer." He and his wife, Mildred, still reside here. Mr. Schlosser has a keen memory for the past and fond memories of events and places his father told him about. Here are some memories of Sebring he has provided especially for the "Historian."

I'm going to tell a little bit of how I remember the 1930s from Sparta Road. Going up Lakeview, there wasn't anything but woods on both sides of the road up to Crescent Drive. Crescent Drive wasn't there then. After you pass Crescent Drive, on the left between Lakeview and Lake Jackson, all there was were pine trees, swamp and cut throat grass. On the right side of Lakeview about a hundred feet or so, there was a big hole in the side of the hill. That was the Jimmie Whitaker sand pit. Mr. Whitaker told me years ago that he came to Sebring in 1924. He started hauling with a Model T one-ton truck. In 1925, Townsend Lumber Company opened on Park Street.

On the north side of the old Sebring Utilities, then a little ways around on the north side of the old Ice

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Reminiscences con't

Plant was Satterwhite Concrete Block Plant. Mr. Whitaker used to haul sand to both of those places and around town to anybody else that wanted sand. The first truck I can remember Mr. Whitaker having was a 1932 Ford Model B one and one-half ton flat bed. In the 1940s, Mr. Whitaker had a 1940 Ford V8 one and one-half ton truck with a dump body, and a 1940 Ford V8 one and one-half ton flat bed.

Coming on up Lakeview to Villa Road in the 1930s, that was a clay road. It went about 200 feet and turned right and ran past the back side of the bamboos that are still out there in the field. It went out to Kenilworth Dairy. On the south side of Villa Road and Lakeview, there was a small house next to where that big oak tree is today. The Swank family was living there. Out behind the house, there was a barn on the other side of the road. Kenilworth Golf Course kept their equipment in there. Mr. Swank was caretaker of Kenilworth Golf Course until about the end of 1937. Then, Gene Sebring took over until about the end of 1944. Then, Hollis Richards took over until about the end of 1947. Then Mr. Sanders took over until it closed in 1969.

In about 1972, Mr. Wall bought Kenilworth Golf Course. He put a chain link fence all the way around the golf course. He had put cattle in there. One day, he found some of them dead. So he sold the rest of

the cattle. In late 1978, Town Square opened.

Back to the north side of Villa Road -Sebring Mini Storage is there today. In the 1930s, there were several rows of grapefruit trees from Villa Road to Kenilworth Boulevard. You could get down and look under the trees and see people playing golf on the other side. Coming out Lakeview just after you pass the stop light and Lutheran Church, you can still see where one of the greens used to be.

Editor's Note: See More

"Reminiscences" of Bill Schlosser in next Historian.



MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The following memorials have recently been received from

January 2004 through March 2004

By Wanda Whitehouse, Memorial Chairman

*Caroline Martin Cobb • Bill Bond • Donald R. Snapp • Carrie Baker • Eula Livingston
William Page • Jamie Whitaker • Joe Bagnato • Nellie Robbins • Betty Hoffman
Ellis Watson • Dr. James Satterwhite • Letta Brunke • Dr. Robert Rengarts • Susan Rudasill*

*In Honor Of The 50th Wedding Anniversary Of
Billy and Anne Sebring*

Anyone who would like to make a donation may do so by submitting to

Wanda Whitehouse, Memorial Chairman

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