

# THE HISTORIAN

BULLETIN NUMBER ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEEN

JULY 2004

THE SEBRING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## HISTORY OF FIRST METHODIST CHURCH THEME OF QUARTERLY LUNCHEON MEETING SATURDAY JULY 31, 2004

Luncheon is at the Sebring Civic Center at 12:00 noon. Bring a dish to pass and \$1.50 for service and rent of the building. Mrs. Verna Macbeth Hall will present the program during the meeting. Mrs. Hall was born and raised in Sebring and remains an active member of the First Methodist Church that she has served for many years. She is the mother of four children, sons Ross, Scott and Mark Macbeth, and daughter Vail Macbeth. Mrs. Hall is also well known in the community as an accomplished poet, having written about 300 poems.

### AUDREY JORDAN WASNER

*By Verdelle Sebring Medlin*

This is a story about a pioneer family that had its beginnings in DeSoto County. At the time that George Gilford Albritton was born in 1879, DeSoto County was a huge area that was subsequently divided in 1921 into five counties: DeSoto, Highlands, Hardee, Charlotte and Glades.

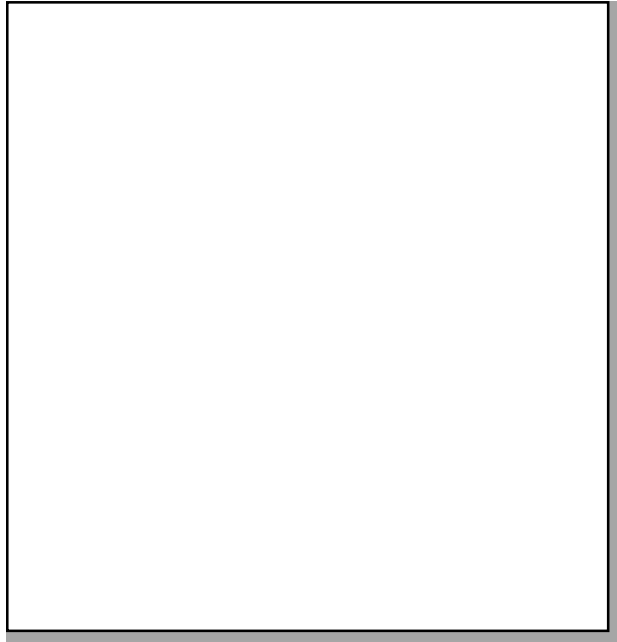
George Albritton married Martha Crews and they had two daughters: Leona and Viola. Leona married Harold Jordan and they had two daughters: Audrey, born December 17, 1931; and Janis, born July 2, 1934. This story is about Audrey.

As Audrey recalls, The George Albrittons lived in a tiny community called Spring Valley. Spring Valley was located south of where Hammock Road and Route 66 meet at the present time. Spring Valley was home for the Albrittons, Durrances, O'Berrys, Crews, and other families.



*1955 First Methodist Church Choir - (Photo Credit: Edw. P. Creasey)*

*(Lower Row, L-R) - Dale Hagler, DS; Bishop John Branscomb; Ed Rees, Minister; Ross MacBeth (as a child) (Middle Row, L-R) - Gail Payne; Lottie Alsmeyer; No Name; Myrtle Ferguson; Theon Sebring; No Name; No Name; Naomi Warren McCleaghan (Top Row L-R) - Louis Alsmeyer; Jerri Estes; Joe MacBeth; No Name; No Name; Lynelle Bunch; Florence Clayton Dunham; No Name; Vail Weems*



*Audrey Jordan Wasner*

Audrey recalls that her great grandfather was helpful in building the Crewsville Baptist Church, which is still in use today.

Audrey's mother was the oldest of six children. Her mother and her Aunt Viola were daughters of George's first wife. George's second wife, Bonnie Bell Parnell, had four children. Leona, Audrey's mother, was deputy clerk of the circuit court for Highlands County for 19 years.

Audrey's father, Harold Jordan, came to Sebring in 1927 or 1928 and married Leona in 1929. Harold was lino-type operator and ran the press for the local newspaper, The Sebring American. Mr. Rod Arkel was editor of the paper at the time. Harold worked there until 1939 and left in 1940, moving to West Palm Beach.

Audrey remembers playing "school" when she was seven or eight years old and her playmates were Jacquie (Sebring) Trevelyan, Patti (Weaver) Cox, Sandra (Weaver) Handley, and her sister, Janis. Audrey was the "teacher," and the other girls were her "students".

Audrey started playing clarinet in the "rookie" band when she was in fourth grade under Prof. Gustat. She still plays clarinet in the South Florida Community College Highlands County Concert Band, and

also in the orchestra. Prof. Gustat and Inez Morgan (piano teacher and elementary school music teacher) were instrumental in Audrey's becoming a band director. Audrey left Sebring with her parents and completed high school in West Palm Beach. She went to the University of Miami and was a member of the Hurricane Band of the Hour, receiving her degree in music education with a major in instrumental music.

Audrey's husband, John Wasner, was in the Air Force and came to West Palm Beach in 1956. He met Audrey at the First Baptist Church in West Palm Beach in 1958, and they were married in August of 1958. After marrying John, he was transferred to Germany for three years. Upon returning to the United States, they lived in Goldsboro, North Carolina, for seven years until John received his Bachelor of Science Degree from Eastern Carolina University. Upon receiving his degree, they moved to Fort Lauderdale, where Audrey was band director and John was an industrial arts teacher.

When Audrey's aunt, Bonnie Albritton, became ill, she and John moved back to Sebring, rather than putting Aunt Bonnie in a nursing home. Audrey and John cared for Bonnie until her death. Audrey became re-acquainted with her old grammar school chums and became a member of "The Lunch Bunch," a group of local women "oldtimers" who meet at noon on Tuesdays in various local places, usually in Sebring.

I recently had lunch with "The Lunch Bunch" at Bon Appetite, a Sebring restaurant. The group has become some "bunch." It took one very large table and a small table to seat all 14 of us. I had chicken quesadillas -yum.

In his retirement, John enjoys cooking, fishing and being a handy man around the house. Audrey and John enjoy winters in Sebring and summer and fall in the North Carolina mountains.



### **ANY OLD GUSTAT RECORDINGS?**

Do any of you have any old recordings of Prof. Gustat's band performances? We are not sure that any were made, but if any such recordings exist, we would certainly like to know about it, and obtain these recordings or copies of them. Please call us at 863-471-2522. Thank You!!

## MEMORIES FROM THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GEORGE COYLE

By George J. Coyle

*Editor's note: This story was excerpted from a letter written by George Coyle and printed in the Letters to the Editor section of the Highlands Today newspaper on January 28, 2004. We know you will enjoy this warm, humorous and true story about a time in George's life!*

I was born on Franklin Street in 1933 during a ferocious hurricane in the depth of a worldwide economic depression and delivered by a veterinarian. So it is easy to see why I have spent a lifetime seeking my identity. After 45 years, I returned to my hometown -to my roots.

While showing my wife all of my memories, I discovered many things: the house on Franklin Street is now a drive-thru teller for Bank of America. The school where I went from first through twelfth grades has been scattered all over the city. The original Table Supply (Winn-Dixie) is a law office, and the location where it moved to on Pine Street was recently demolished.

The Arcade where my father operated the Mint Cafe (later Sebring Cafe) is now a park. The City Pier Band Shell, where our high school band played 13 free concerts each winter season, is gone. Teen Town for young people is now Highlands Little Theater. The Highlands County News on Pine Street, where I worked as a printers devil for Nate Broking, is an office machine repair shop.

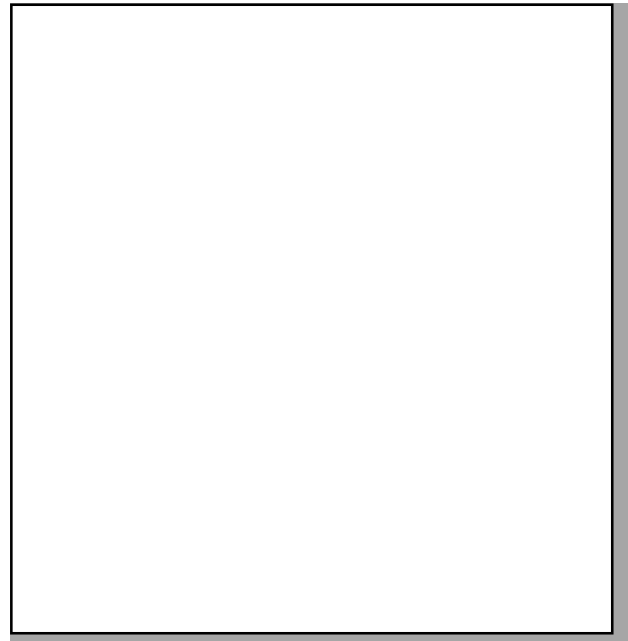
The Florida Theatre, Circle Theater, Palm Theater and Dixie Theaters where I worked as a projectionist -all gone. Harvey's Drive In and The Triangle Drive In are also gone. Oh yes, we have McDonalds, Wendy's and Burger King -but I do not know Mac, Wendy and BK -I knew Jesse Watson and Harvey.

George Lilly's (later Graybills) Sweet Shop on the Circle -gone. The Hoyt's chicken farm in Lake Sebring where my brother, sister and I spent every summer in that big clubhouse is now Sun 'N Lakes North. The beautiful manicured Kenilworth Golf Course is now an almost abandoned shopping center. The big Sebring Hotel, where my brother was a bell hop -demolished and replaced by Palms Health Center.


Dr. Martin's Hospital, over the Hinkley Durrance Hardware Store on the Circle where my sister Eloise was born -the space is still there, but Hinkley Durrance is gone. The big Dr. Martin Hospital on Center Street has been torn down. The famous Fisher's Restaurant on the Circle is gone. The Recreation Center built by the WPA (my dad made \$7.50 a week) was torn down and now a Wachovia Bank is there. Kahn's Department Store, which was "the" store in its day, is now a series of shops on Ridgewood Drive. Dr. Martin's Airport, behind Mickey's BBQ on Hammock Road and close to the CCC Camp, is now a housing development.

The third house where we lived on Matlo Avenue has burned down. The fourth house was a two-story apartment and is now a single family home and the address has been changed from Walnut Street to Franklin Street. The fifth house on Pine Street was torn down to make way for a venetian blind business.

So what do we have left? Our memories and the Sebring Historical Society. Send your photographs, tell



George Coyle

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*George Coyle can't*

your story, and preserve your family history with the Sebring Historical Society. The Sebring Historical Society is located downstairs in back of the Sebring Public Library at 321 Center Avenue. This is the former location of the beautiful home of the original George Sebring family -also gone.



## AT THE ARCHIVES

*By Carole Goad*

The biggest news at the Archives is the completion of our new “book room.” This was accomplished by converting the men’s restroom into this new usable space which now houses our books for sale, city directories, phone books, and other publications. Several new display cases are to be added with some exciting new displays planned. A big thank you to Tim Eures and Ron Johnson for doing some heavy “moving” last week in arranging some of these bookshelves and other large items in the Archives. Tim Eures is working on a “floor plan” to arrange furnishings and equipment in the Archives to accommodate the new display cases.

We have a new volunteer at the Archives. She is Jackie Koza and comes to us from St. Paul Minnesota, where she served on the Board and worked with the Dakota County Historical Society. Jackie is working on a very extensive notebook display on the businesses in Sebring. When finished, this display will comprise about four large notebook/binders. Jackie is doing a marvelous job, and we are very grateful to have her with us.

Three new notebook displays have been added: The History of the Sebring Fire Department; Prof. Gustat and the Sebring High School Band; and the Sebring International Raceway (three volumes). Five additional such projects are planned.

We give a grateful “welcome back” to Myrtle Card, who has been a faithful volunteer in the Archives for many years. She recently returned to us after recovering from a back injury incurred at her home. Myrtle archives news clippings into our files, and also keeps us smiling with her quiet wit and good humor.

## SOMEONE NEEDS ME

*By Marguerite Abbey*

Someone needs your smile today,  
Your hug, your listening ear.  
Someone needs encouragement and  
Gentle words of cheer.

Someone needs your helping hand,  
Your letters and what’s more,  
Someone needs your visit, to make  
Their spirits soar.

Someone needs affection  
When they are feeling blue,  
Listen, someone’s calling  
For a special friend like you.

*Editor’s Note: Marguerite Abbey passed away in August of 2003. She was the mother of Joyce Spinning, longtime Sebring resident who lives at Lake Josephine.*

## DONATIONS TO ARCHIVES

Donations of local historical items are welcome in the Sebring Historical Society’s Archives. At that time, a form is filled out with information about the donor and the item itself, and the form is signed. If you wish to donate something and give it to someone else to bring to the Archives, or if you give it to someone at a quarterly luncheon meeting, please include your name, address, phone number and some information about the item being donated. Thank you!

## REMINISCENCES

By Bill Schlosser

Note: This is continued from the April 2004 Historian.

In about the middle 1930s, Frank Morgan, his wife and four daughters, moved into the house across Lakeview from Sebring Mini Storage. Mr. Morgan told me when he first came to Sebring in 1932, he was selling cars for L.D. Poer Chevrolet. Then in the 1940s, he worked in the new Post Office on Ridgewood Drive and Pine Street. It had just been built in about 1938. It replaced the old Arcade Post Office that had just been torn down there.

I had just gotten out of the Service in March 1955. Mr. Morgan was selling cars for Waters & Blackman Ford on Ridgewood Drive. The back door came out right by the back of the Fire Station. Mr. Morgan was telling me the Highway Patrol officer had his car in the Ford place and had it tuned up. The Highway Patrol officer and another fellow got in the car. They went down to Highway 98. It was just a newly paved road at that time. When it was still clay, it was known as the washboard road. You bounced out of one hole into another. Anyway, the Highway Patrol car was going 100 miles per hour. He had just slowed down and pulled off the shoulder of the road to turn around, when a tire blew out. Mr. Morgan told me, "Bill, if I had been in that car, there would have been only two people who knew how scared I was, me and the laundry man."

Mrs. Morgan had a small one-room building on Pine Street across the street from the old school house. She used to give music lessons there. Today, the First Baptist Church parking lot is there. In about the 1950s, Mr. Morgan moved the one-room building to their home on Lakeview Drive. They added the one room to the northwest corner of their home. On the northeast corner, they built a screened porch. Mrs. Morgan's hobby was collecting pitchers. She had many of them. In the 1950s, Mr. Morgan had a Model T Car. He would park it on the corner of Lakeview Drive and Jasmine Way. One day, Mr. Morgan said to me, "Bill, my wife and my daughters sure give me a rough time about my car. They say, 'Daddy, why don't you park that old thing around back where it don't look so bad.'" Mr. Morgan said to me, "I'm proud of my car."

## DAN CASON GOOD CITIZEN OF SEBRING

We were recently advised that Dan Cason, lifelong citizen of Sebring, had gone to Pinecrest Cemetery and trimmed all of the trees and shrubbery and did other cleaning of the grounds. This was done on his own time and without any compensation. While conducting this work, Mr. Cason actually uncovered some very old tombstones that had been completely covered over with vegetation, allowing the descendants of those persons to be able to identify their graves.

Because of this act of generosity and kindness to our community, the Sebring Historical Society will present Mr. Cason a special award at our quarterly luncheon event on July 31. We are very proud to have a person of this caliber as a citizen of this community.

Dan Cason was born and raised in Sebring. He is the son of the late William and Minnie Cason, who had four children: sons, Bubba, Jack and Dan; and daughter, June. Dan worked for many years at the Whitehouse IGA grocery. He served in the United States Navy between World War II and the Korean War.

Mr. Terrell Morris, local funeral director, has described Dan Cason as a "quiet, upstanding citizen". The Sebring Historical Society concurs, and we are grateful to Mr. Cason for all of his efforts.

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## SNOB HOLLOW OFFICERS QUARTERS

By Jack Ingle

The land area involving the above development was originally a sandy wet marsh, except for the north end and east side.

Allen Altvater, Sr. formed a company to do sand dredging back in the mid-twenties. The dredge was a wooden barge approximately 20 by 12 feet and at least four feet above the water line. It was equipped with a large Fairbanks diesel motor to run a large centrifugal pump. The dredge did many

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*Snob Hollow con't*

sand pumping projects on and around Lake Jackson. The first project was pumping in sand to narrow the distance between little and big Lake Jackson so that a shorter two-lane modern bridge could be constructed. To keep the sand from washing back, great log cribs were constructed. These logs, spiked together, remained in place for years. They now have all rotted and disappeared.

In building the road circling Lake Jackson, there were numerous low pockets of land that were also filled in with this sand dredge. The last project was to fill in the officers quarters land area. It was a lengthy project, but went well. Just after completion, dredging jobs dried up. The barge was pulled up on the shore waiting for other jobs when the Florida boom ended. It just sat there on the shore with the pump gone and parts missing from the motor.

The big, pumped-out holes in the lake were favorite fishing spots for speckled perch, since the water was very deep. Then came along a big hurricane, either the 1926 or 1928 one, that washed the barge back into the pumped-out holes where it sunk and remains today. Speckled perch fishing remained good at the barge site, but you had to be careful not to get your line hung up.

Officers quarters got its local nomenclature when it was built to house officer personnel as Hendricks Field (now Sebring Airport) was being constructed as a B 17 training base during World War II.

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### Mayor McGee's Collection

*By Jack Ingle*

Mac McGee was a very large and outgoing man. He and his wife, Mary, owned and operated the Santa Rosa Hotel.

Mac was Sebring's Mayor for many years and spent a great amount of time on the sidewalks and visiting the downtown merchants.

In the week or so before halloween, he would ask people for a dollar. Those who knew him were aware of the purpose of the request. If you didn't know and asked what it was for, he would just say "Don't ask, just give a dollar."

The collection all went to provide candy for the children at the end of the halloween parade.

*Editor's Note: M.F. McGee served as Sebring's mayor from 1936 to 1941, and again from 1943 to 1948.*

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### About Getting That Exercise

*By Verdelle Sebring Medlin*

In my capacity as "roving reporter," I interviewed a few of the "walkers" in Highlands County. I asked Elsa Kahn, "why do you walk". Elsa stated, "Marvin and I walk for our health and to enjoy the scenery on the Hammock walk, which is our favorite. We walk about three miles every other day." Elsa also reminded me that Louise Stiles and Jean Hancock have been walking every day for many years.

Other answers were: "My husband/wife makes me join him/her because he/she doesn't like to walk alone. I really hate to walk!" Another walker said, "I enjoy the quiet of the morning and listening to the birds sing". Some couples where I live (in a mobile home park) go tootling around together in their golf carts. You usually find them around 5:00 o'clock in the evening.

Caroline Yosada, of Lake Placid, runs almost every day. For her first race, she won a trophy that said, "Dead Last." Since then, she has placed first in her age group and has the trophies lined up on the window sill across from her dental hygienist chair!



## FRANKLIN STREET

*By Jack Ingle*

Franklin Street runs from Park Street about eight city blocks, ending at Bay Street, which borders the Kenilworth Hotel. Observing Franklin Street on a map, it looks so misplaced that you wonder about the original street planning. From an old timer's source, I've been told that the first city planning had it laid out as an extension of the ACL Railroad, that was to have made it possible for hotel guests to disembark at the hotel. Then plans were changed to convert it into a street. Of course, in this period, there were almost no buildings along the projected path.

The Kenilworth Lodge was built by the Sebring family shortly after the City was begun in 1912. At that time, railroad passenger service to Sebring was of major importance.

The old ACL railroad passenger and freight station at the intersection of North Ridgewood and Eucalyptus Avenue was only recently torn down to make way for the Sebring Parkway. Until the ACL railroad was abandoned, a side track serviced the businesses on Park Street. Over the years, they included the ice plant, Highlands Fertilizer, a lumber yard, the Sebring Power Plant and others. Isn't it fortunate that the original street plan was changed!

## DEEP SEA DIVING IN LAKE JACKSON

*By Jack Ingle*

In about 1936, an older man gave me a home-made diving helmet. It was made out of an oval car gas tank. It had been contoured and padded to fit over your shoulders and had a small glass window. There were air hose attachments and hooks around the bottom side to hang weights on for holding the helmet down against the air pressure inside. The only difficulty in diving was trying to keep yourself upright.

There were four or five high school boys in our neighborhood that formed a diving club. Our first major diving project was to explore the sunken sand pumping barge off shore on deserted land where officers quarters is now located. We had my father's cypress plank boat as our base of operation. We had tire pumps to pump down air. It took teamwork to hang on the diving helmet weights while getting the helmet on and pumping air.

After several trips of getting enough weights and coordinating the operation, we could keep a person down. When it was time for a new diver, the air pump person just quit pumping and the diver came up. There wasn't any other way to communicate.

The project kind of wore down after a few episodes and for sure when we lost my father's good boat anchor, which we had been using as a diving weight.

### MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The following memorials have recently been received from

April 2004 through June 2004

By Wanda Whitehouse, Memorial Chairman

*Ann Lampe • Ted Feickert • Janne McKinzie Gimse • Albert Knight  
and Deborah Harriss,  
daughter of Norma L. (Dutton) Harriss and the late Albert (Red) Harriss.*

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

**Wanda Whitehouse**, Memorial Chairman

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