

The Historian

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The Sebring Historical Society

*Shining a light on our community's people and
Institutions of achievement*

Maj. Mary Holmes, Joan Hartt Present Salvation Army Program October 24

By Carole Goad

Major Mary Holmes, Sebring Salvation Army Commander; and Joan Hartt, Sebring Salvation Army Board of Directors member, will present the program on the Salvation Army as honored guests at our quarterly luncheon meeting on October 24, 2009, at 12:00 noon at the Sebring Civic Center.



*Major Mary Holmes
Sebring Salvation Army*

the daughter of Salvationists who moved to Florida when Mary was four years old. She subsequently graduated from high school in Daytona Beach. After working for several years at a bank in Orlando and with builder-developer, Centex Homes, she served with her late husband, Jerry, in corps in Deland, Key West, and Port St. Lucie from 1991 until her assignment in Sebring. Major Holmes is the mother of a son, Kenneth, who is a student at Embry Riddle

Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach.

Joan Hartt is the granddaughter of Edward and Catherine Higgins, both of whom were born in Great Britain and spent all of their adult lives in the service of the Salvation Army throughout the world.



Joan Hartt

In 1920, King George V appointed Edward as commander of the civil division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. General Edward Higgins ultimately became the chief commander of the Salvation Army worldwide. Edward and Catherine retired from Army service in 1937 and moved to Sebring. They were honored on November 26, 1944 at a tribute held at Sebring High School in honor of General Higgins' 80th birthday. At that time, General Higgins spoke about his 62 years with the Salvation Army.

Catherine was a devoted advocate for women's rights and stated

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“Because of the lead given by the (Salvation) Army forty and fifty years ago, women from every social level are today coming into their own and being admitted into almost all departments of the world’s work, including the highest professions.”

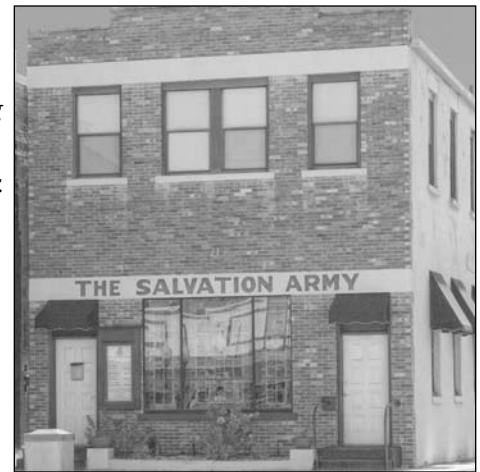
Joan Higgins Hartt was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1935, the daughter of W. Vernon and Catherine Higgins. The family moved to Sebring in 1937, the same year her grandparents retired here. Joan graduated from Sebring High School in 1953, and subsequently attended Jones Business College in Jacksonville and Florida State University in Tallahassee. Joan married Sanford P. Hartt in 1959 and moved to Avon Park. Joan and Sanford raised their five sons and one grandson. Sanford passed away in 2007. She remains involved in S.Y. Hartt & Son, Inc., the family citrus and cattle business operations.

Joan states that as the children grew up and went away to college and moved out, she became more involved in the community. She has served on the Salvation Army Advisory Board for many years; the South Florida Community College Board and the S.F.C.C. Foundation Board for the past 10 years. She also serves on the Children’s Museum Advisory Board; and the Highlands County Republican Executive Committee. She is also active at her church, St. Agnes Episcopal, where she serves on the Vestry.

Salvation Army Beginnings in England

The Salvation Army began in 1865 when William Booth, a London minister, felt called to minister to the poor, homeless and destitute in the slums of the city. His original intent was to convert these unfortunate people to Christ, then to send them to the established churches of the city. However, parishioners in those churches did not welcome these shabbily attired, unwashed people into their beautiful cathedrals. Booth aban-

The Salvation Army Building at 120 N. Ridgewood Dr. Built in 1914. Photo By Mike Sawyer



doned his plan to assimilate his converts into the traditional church, as church members were opposed to welcoming the poor and destitute into their congregations.

So Booth withdrew from the Church and embarked upon an evangelistic mission in the east end of London.

William Booth, like all Great Reformers throughout history and in this present day, was reviled, ridiculed and ostracized because of his efforts to alleviate the suffering of the poor. But Booth knew that he was in the perfect will of God and he decided to found a church especially for the poor. He established the East London Christian Mission and in 1878, he summoned his son, Bramwell Booth and his good friend, George Railton to read a proof of the Christian Mission’s annual report, which read at the top: “The Christian Mission is a Volunteer Army”. Bramwell objected to the mission being referred to as “volunteer”, stating that he was compelled to do God’s work. So Booth crossed out the word “volunteer” and wrote “Salvation”; thus the name Salvation Army was instituted.

Salvation Army Comes to U.S.

The Salvation Army arrived in the United States on March 10, 1880, when Commissioner George Scott Railton and seven women officers knelt in prayer in Battery Park in New York City to thank God for their safe voyage to our country. Just as in

(cont’d on page 3)

(Salvation Army cont'd from page 2)

England, they were met with ridicule and hostility, and were attacked and arrested. Several of them were even killed in their attempt to minister to the most needy people. Historically, change and reform have never been achieved easily.

By the early 1900s, the Salvation Army had spread around the world, having officers and soldiers in 36 countries, including the United States. The Army organization was well-structured and flexible, and was the inspiration for many badly needed services, including women's social work, the first food "bank", child day care and missionary hospitals. During World War II, the Salvation Army operated 3,000 service units for the armed forces, which was the forerunner of the USO. In 2009, the Salvation Army serves in 106 nations around the world, going where the need is the greatest and directed by the faith of the Army "soldiers" and their love for all people.

Salvationists in Early Sebring

Many of the earliest pioneers in Sebring were Salvation Army officers and "soldiers". The Munselle, Higgins, Gearing and Newcomb families, members of the Stephan/Whitehouse family, and others were prominent in their contributions to the organization and its Sebring mission. And notably, the founder of the town, George E. Sebring, was a long-time supporter of the Salvation Army and donated the land where the Corps building is located at 120 North Ridgewood Drive. Built in 1914, this is one of the oldest buildings in Sebring. The building has a beautiful stained glass window that was given in memory of General Edward Higgins. The window contains the image of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.

Retired Salvation Army Major Everett Case, who commanded the Sebring unit from 1987 through 1990, stated that the "eyes of the world were focused on Sebring" because of the fact that General Edward Higgins had retired and moved with his

wife to Sebring in 1937, as their son was manager of the Kenilworth Lodge at the time. Case further stated "Many of the Army's top world leaders retired here and died here. There are 67 officers buried in Pinecrest Cemetery. This is where the Army's work in Florida really began. And through the years, Sebring became the most prominent Army city in Florida." Actually, Sebring became the top retirement city for retired Army officers. The international organization for retired Army officers, the SAROA (Salvation Army Retired Officers Association) was founded in Sebring.

The good works of the Army are well known throughout the world. This now highly respected charity is known for its worldwide ministry of feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, maintaining hospitals for the sick, for assisting the indigent in finding low-cost housing, providing day care for children of low-income working parents, and serving needs in time of war and disaster.

Specific services provided by the Sebring Corps include feeding the hungry, spiritual guidance, hospital and nursing home visitation, prison visitation, disaster and emergency services, individual and family counseling, correctional services (probation services for clients who have committed a misdemeanor), providing decent school clothing, shoes and school supplies for children, services to the Armed Forces, providing Christmas food and gifts for the needy, rent/housing and utilities assistance.

Recently, the Army has enlarged and remodeled their Sebring Thrift Store located at 3135 Kenilworth Boulevard. Their hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm; and Saturday from 8:30 am to 2:00 pm.

Mission Statement

The mission statement of this remarkable charity is: "The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible.

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Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.” This statement is beautiful in its simplicity and straightforward in its intent.

The aims and accomplishments of the Salvation Army are a mirror image of the message contained in the Bible and the ministry of Jesus. And He has surely blessed them with His guiding spirit. It is difficult to imagine how anyone, especially those church members of a century ago, could have justified their hatred and scorn toward William Booth in his efforts to simply minister to the less fortunate among us.

Great Fashion Show Idea!

By Carole Goad

Lillian Georgia Barnes recently visited us in the Archives and spoke about her life here in Sebring. She moved here in 1980 and was active in many organizations, including the Sebring Garden Club. She told of a Garden Club project that took place in 1984 or 1985.

The women decided to have a very special and unique fashion show, using outfits purchased entirely at the Salvation Army Thrift Store. The show was a great success. The women were dressed beautifully in their “new” outfits and each one told how much they paid for each item, demonstrating the wonderful things you could buy from the Salvation Army – at extremely reasonable prices!

Laurie Ellis’ Mission to Nigeria

By Carole Goad

In the October 2003 issue of *The Historian*, we published a story about Patricia Ellis Lefiles, who moved to Highlands County from Miami in 1981 following the death of her husband in 1979. This remarkable mother of 11 children subsequently cared for 500 foster children, many of them with special needs, and ultimately adopted two additional children. Four of her children graduated from Sebring High School. They are: Nancy Ellis, Class of 1985; Robert Ellis, Class of 1986; Angela Ellis, Class of 1996; and Teresa Ellis, Class of 1997. The following is the story of Patricia’s daughter, Laurie Ellis,



*Laurie Ellis and her mom,
Patricia Ellis Lefiles.*

Laurie Ellis, who graduated from high school in Miami, prior to her mother’s move to Sebring.

Following her graduation from high school in Miami, Laurie Ellis attended Miami Dade Community College on an athletic scholarship, followed by her recruitment by the University of South Florida to play Lady Bulls softball. While a senior in college, she began working part time at the YMCA at Brandon, eventually working her way up to a 23 year career and the position of Chief Operating Officer for the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA organization.

During her service with the Y, she had the opportunity to work with people of all ages, but the most important of those, as she states, occurred when she was “driving past some migrant children who were playing inside a drainage pipe abandoned in a broken glass and stagnant water-filled ditch.” She states that she began thinking that less than five miles away, the Y offered a pool and a clean, supervised playground. So Laurie arranged to have the children bused to the Y for their recreation. She stated that she also discovered that during holiday breaks, “many of the children didn’t eat because their schools normally provided breakfast and lunch.” So Laurie started a canned food drive to help families in need. She stated that her Y organization also involved the children in leadership training programs and she was “encouraged by their growth and good citizenship”.

This experience and action on Laurie’s part was only one example of the kind of service she has rendered during her life to people in need. The decision that she would make in 2008, to resign the job she loved and go on a volunteer two-year mission to Nigeria, followed a lifetime of caring for and serving those less fortunate.

Laurie decided that she would work through the international charitable organization called Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), which sponsors the non-profit organization called the Fantsuam Foundation, whose goal was to “eliminate poverty through economic empowerment programs in rural areas of Nigeria by raising the social status of women, young adults and people living with AIDS.”

In October 2008, Laurie traveled to Nigeria and began several weeks of orienta-



Laurie Ellis and young African friend.

tion as to the language, culture and living conditions that she would be experiencing. Following orientation, she and other members of her group of volunteers were off to the village they would be serving, Kagoro, Nigeria, located on the west coast of Africa on the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa.

Laurie has communicated extensively with her family here in Sebring since arriving in Africa. The following are just excerpts of her writings during her mission. They describe a country in the throes of poverty, whose people are kind, friendly, welcoming, resourceful and grateful for what little they do have. They also describe a country where food is scarce, where children are always hungry, where most of the medical care is primitive and is too often denied to those who cannot pay for it.

During her travels in Nigeria, Laurie found that any journey that required “motor” travel began in a “Motor Park”, which is a large open dirt area where one can catch a ride from either a taxi, bus or okada (motor bike). There is no exact schedule for any vehicle; one must wait until one of these modes of

(cont’d on page 6)

(Laurie Ellis cont'd from page 5)

transportation shows up. Laurie describes a bush taxi as similar to a “12 passenger van stuffed with 22 adults, two children, one live chicken and luggage for all. Exhaust fumes and gusts of warm air greet rear passengers”. Traffic in Nigeria is extremely disorganized. Laurie says, “Take New York City and multiply it by ten and remove all of the rules. Cars do not stay in any particular lane and travel at quite a high rate of speed. No formal training is necessary and no license is required to become a taxi driver.”

Laurie states that “Everything in this country (Nigeria) centers around two things...religion and food.” Nigerians are committed to their faith; they don’t have enough food or material items, but they have family and they have God.” They thank God every day for what blessings they do have. Church services are a celebration of the genuine love and appreciation and gratitude for what God has provided to them. These celebrations of blessings are tempered by the constant lack of food, by hungry children rummaging in garbage pits and in trees trying to find anything at all to eat. This is the biggest challenge that missionaries and aid workers find in Nigeria and in other third world countries, and it is heartbreaking to see the enormous numbers of hungry children.

A typical meal consists of vegetable soup made with a green leafy vegetable chopped up, boiled cow skin and some sort of smashed up fish and gari. Gari is a doughy ball of starch that you take apart with your hands and dip into your vegetable soup. Nigerians eat such starchy foods, due to lack of fruits, vegetables and protein. Too often, even the meal described above is not available and hunger prevails.

The Fantsuam Foundation hosted The Day of Change event on December 8, 2008, wherein a “Children’s Parliament” was introduced and proceeded to enact stories of local children being killed because they were thought to have “brought evil into their homes or because they were accused of giving one or both of their parents HIV/AIDS.” All local and regional dignitaries attended this event as abuse and killing of children by their families, neighbors, teachers and society in general has become endemic. Because of the huge stigma of HIV/AIDS, coupled with the desperation born of such extreme and widespread poverty, it appears that many adults feel that they have to blame someone for inflicting them with the disease. A member of the Nigerian House of Representatives spoke at the event, outlining a children’s “bill of rights” that implored all persons to report any and all actual or suspected child abuse to the proper authorities.

Because of the devastation and death caused by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa, many grandmothers have had to take over the raising of their orphaned grandchildren. The Fantsuam Foundation provides a small monthly stipend to these grandmothers to assist them in providing some food and other necessities of life to their grandchildren; however, the need is so great and the funds available are not nearly enough to help such large numbers of them.

Because of widespread hunger, Laurie states that the children and chickens are always competing for food they may find. One of these food items is the “chinge” (pronounced chin-gay). This is a white-winged relative of the termite that lives underground and surfaces during the rainy season in the early morning hours. Laurie has observed

children and chickens in her village running up and down the streets swatting these flying insects out of the air. The children put them in a cup of water to kill them, then take them home to cook on an open fire.

During her stay in Nigeria, Laurie has seen the birth of a child and the death of several children in her village. The birth took place at the local medical clinic, which is a small hut, with a “birthing room”. The mother was attended by two mid-wives, with no medication or anything resembling modern technology at all. Under these primitive conditions, she gave birth to a baby boy, and was allowed to rest for just one hour, then took her new baby and walked to her home. This is the norm in the village of Kagoro.

Laurie states that her saddest day in Kagoro was when a little four year old boy died only because his mother could not afford to pay for medical care. The doctor at the hospital refused to accept the boy because his mother had no money. The boy was subsequently found to have had hepatitis, which could have been treated if the child had not been born in a country where 70 percent of the people live below the poverty level, and being one of the 70 percent, the odds were stacked against this little boy.

“When you look around our village”, states Laurie, “the kids are just like the kids back home. They play, they laugh, they cry and they love it when adults make time for them. But, the one thing these kids don’t have enough of is food”.

Laurie Ellis continues her mission at Kagoro, doing the best she can with limited resources for the people she has come to care so much for. Her mother and other family members send all that they can to

help her and the children. The need is so great.



African children at Fantsuam - Sponsored Parliament

In Loving Memory of

Poppa and Momma

Joseph and Anna Georgia

and Siblings – Beatrice, Dante and Theodore Georgia

With Love,

Lillian Georgia Barnes

I would like to contribute a financial gift to the Sebring Historical Society to be used as follows:

_____ *To support Needy Student Scholarships*
 _____ *General Operating Fund*

*Mail to: Sebring Historical Society
 321 W. Center Ave.
 Sebring, FL 33870*

Your Name & Address: _____

2009

Aviation in Sebring in 1920s

By Alden Franklin Young

Editor's Note: Alden Young, Sebring High School Class of 1933, passed away on February 19, 2008, at the age of 92. After high school graduation, he became an amateur radio operator (HAM) in 1933 and held a radiotelegraph first class license from 1934. He married Elizabeth Catterton, who died in 1976. He served tours as a ships radio officer and as an air controller until joining the Consolidated Vultee Air Transport Command where he served in the Pacific theater of World War II. After the War, he moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida where he established a successful electrical business. An avid photographer, he was also a member of several HAM radio nets and author of one book and a number of published articles and stories. He has written several short articles about life in Sebring's earlier days and the following is one of them.

When I was 7 to 11 years of age in the early 1920s, I was quite adventurous and would ride my bicycle to anything that was of an exciting nature.

Captain W.R. Maynard was a World War I pilot. He had an open cockpit plane, possibly World War I surplus, which he would bring to the golf course at the Kenilworth Lodge and carry passengers. My sister, Opal Hodge, was one of the recipients of a free ride given to several students in Sebring High School as a reward for her grade average. I do not remember the details, except it was a free ride down to Lake Okeechobee and back.

Captain Maynard's son, Burke, was also a pilot. He had a damaged ankle from an aircraft crash and walked with a severe limp. The two Maynards did a considerable amount of flying in and around Highlands County. They were also accused of bringing

whiskey from the Bahama Islands to pre-arranged landing spots on the prairie in the cow pastures near Arcadia. I cannot confirm this, but



stories were long and loud of this happening.

We also had a sheriff named Bob Hancock, who owned a Viele Monocoupe airplane. This was one of the first planes built with an enclosed pilot and passenger area, and resembled today's aircraft. He was the only sheriff in Florida who had an airplane and pilot's license at that time. Among other accomplishments, he made a landing in the water in a lake (I don't remember which lake) without hurting himself too much. They pulled the plane out of the lake, repaired it and he flew it again.

The above happenings were prior to the L shaped airport that was built by the WPA on the road connecting Lake Jackson and what was then Hooker's Hammock (now Highlands Hammock). The runways were made of red clay trucked in from Frank Tauchen's clay pit between Sebring and Desoto City. Frank also supplied many thousands of dollars worth of clay for the base of the runways at Hendricks Field.

The open celebration of this airport was attended by several hundred people and I believe it was the first official airport in Highlands County. I was there opening day to watch several planes including a Ford Tri-Motor plane come and go. I believe there was an ox roast at the celebration.

Someone else, but I don't know who, had an airplane with floats which landed in Lake Jackson for a year or so. I do not know what happened to the plane, but I rescued one of the floats that had been abandoned in Lake Jackson, and used it for a canoe. This was about 1928. I was selling the Sebring American newspaper during most of that time. Rod Arkell, the owner and publisher, actively carried this news.

MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

have been received from June 2009 through August 2009 in honor and memory of our dear friends and family members as follow:

In Memory of James Crawford, from Haywood & Betty Taylor

In Memory of Phyllis Steiner, from Daniel D. Balint, Jr.

*In Memory of Charlotte Naylor Breed, from Thornton & Jacquie Trevelyan;
Haywood & Betty Taylor; Billy & Anne Sebring*

In Memory of Jack Arehart, from Robert & Jean Mosier

In Memory of Nell McKenzie from Robert & Jean Mosier

In Memory of Ted Gose, from Robert & Jean Mosier; Billy & Anne Sebring

*The Sebring Historical Society gratefully accepts memorial gifts, which may be sent to:
Wanda Whitehouse, Memorial Chairman, 9230 Spring Valley Lane, Sebring, FL 33875-5977*

2009

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Travel in 1924 Model “T” Ford Days

By Alden Franklin Young

(Sebring High School Class of 1933)

My dad had purchased a 1924 Model T touring car, with the snap-in curtains in case of rain. The windshield wiper was hand operated. In case of heavy rain, you operated the wiper with one hand, and steered with the other. Gas feed was a lever sticking out of the steering column on the right hand side, and spark advancement control was on the left side. Your feet operated the brake pedal, the combination clutch and run pedal, and the reverse pedal. Your hands and feet were both busy, part of the time.

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Model Ts had a nice wide running board, nearly a foot wide. It had a collapsible luggage carrier on the driver side. Entry was from the passenger side.

My family camped with a side tent from over the top of the car down to the ground on the driver side. There was room for four army cots. We took three with us, because we only had three people. On the fourth night, we camped in a church yard in southern Alabama. The woods surrounding the church yard contained many sand rocks. It had been four years since I was in a rocky area. Rocks were unknown to me. Early the next morning, I collected about a bushel of beautiful rocks. I was real unhappy when my dad told me I could find the rocks again on the return trip. But for now, they had to be left here.

The Model T had a gasoline tank in the rear. There was no fuel pump. If the hill became too steep, you would turn the car around and back up the hill. We encountered Birmingham, and the main street was too steep. We, among others, were backing up the hill. Other vehicles were passing us, going in the same direction, which was up. This was only about two blocks long, and it seemed rather funny that cars headed in opposite directions would both be going the same way.

We went across the Mississippi River at Memphis. The bridge and viaduct extended for miles, with flood debris all over the land under the bridge. They had just finished cleaning up from a flood they had several months previous.

We visited my home birthplace in Missouri. My cousins and I slept in the hayloft

in the barn. We thought it was fun, camping in the hay.

My dad finished his business of collecting from our sharecropper, and we returned to Florida. At that time, there were very few direction signs in any of the towns. You had to stop and ask someone the way to go to the next town. Sometimes, they would not know. Many times, they said they had never been out of town and did not know how to get out of town. Our trip was exceptional in that we did not have a flat tire, and we only got lost once.

Compare this trip with a trip down the interstate today. We go more miles in one day now than 10 days back then.



Hope

Hope is the white upon angels wings.
It sounds like the shout of victory,
It tastes like the bread He broke for us to share,
And smells like the roses blooming in the air.
Hope looks like the glory of God.
It makes you feel safe through the years.

Written in 1996 by *Elizabeth Crews*
Lake Placid middle School student

A Halloween Surprise

By Jack Ingle

Written May 4, 2004

Somehow, I associate this true incident with a newspaper cartoon I once saw. It was a very proper British man sniffing the air. Below was listed his title: Sir Cedrick Cesspool.

In the mid 1930s, Sebring usually celebrated Halloween on Saturdays with a costume parade down North Ridgewood around the Circle. It was for the children who were in costumes and being judged by various age groups. Usually, a fire truck and car with the town mayor led the parade. Halloween was also a time of grownup or older teenage pranks, such as a cow being locked up in the school auditorium. My family had, of course, been involved in the parade. No one locked their home doors in those days.

Shortly after going to bed that Halloween night, Mother heard a thump, thump coming from the front of the house toward the sleeping porch. She woke up Dad and they both listened. At first, they thought it might be an intruder, but finally decided it had to be a rat dragging something like a shoe, maybe. Anyway, having dismissed the intruder idea, Dad got up and turned on the lights. Low and behold, a peg-legged skunk was glaring at him. This got all of us in the house awake and watching.

A strategy was quickly adopted to open the back door and show the striped polecat on his way. The only trouble was, he didn't want to go. Plan two: Prop the door open, get him in position and knock him out the door with a broom.

The door was on an open-screened back porch. It would have been a bigger disaster

if it had been in the main part of the house. When the broom hit the skunk, he let go with whatever skunks do. It was weeks before the aroma wore off. On top of it all, our minister had been invited for Sunday dinner the next day. The skunk had a peg leg that had healed over. Possibly, it had been caught in a trap and was a pet. We never knew how it got into the house. It was either a Halloween prank or just a coincidence on Halloween.

Highlands Little Theater New Display in Archives

Ruth Handley recently brought in a large number of photographs, playbills, articles and other documents relating to the history of our Highlands Little Theater (HLT). These were in the collections of Sebring's beloved High School teacher and Theater devotee, Roy Riedy, who passed away on May 31, 2008.

Mr. Riedy had taught English, Humanities and Theater at Sebring High School for 27 years. He was also a drama critic, author and mentor to youth. He was universally loved in our community and had already written two volumes about the HLT, which were donated by him to our Archives.

These items trace the HLT back to its beginnings in 1974, and have been organized into an archival collection display. We are grateful to Ruth Handley for securing the collection and bringing it into the Archives so that we may preserve it and display it appropriately. - Many thanks Ruth.

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**You are invited to join us at the Sebring Historical Society's
Quarterly Luncheon Meeting on
Saturday, October 24, 2009, at 12:00 noon at the
Sebring Civic Center at Lake Jackson.**

**Just bring a dish to share, and \$1.50 each for beverage,
table service and rent of the building.**

**We are pleased to welcome Major Mary Holmes, Commander of the
Sebring Salvation Army; and Joan Hartt, member of the Salvation
Army Board of Directors, who will be our guest speakers. The subject
of our program will be the history and programs of the Salvation
Army.**

(See story on page 1.)