

# *The Historian*

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## **The Sebring Historical Society**

321 W Center Ave  
Sebring, Florida 33870-3109

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

## **The Story of the Hollenberg Family**

*By Carole Goad*

William Frederick (Fred) Hollenberg and his son George drove to Sebring from Alberta, Canada in 1915 in a Model-T Ford. Mrs. Hollenberg, the former Martha Jane Mitchell, arrived later by train. The Hollenbergs were the parents of four sons and four daughters, but only George moved to Sebring with the family at that time. They are one of the earliest Sebring families to make their way in the new town

in its developmental stages. The family was very active in the newly established Church of the Brethren.

A farmer by occupation, Fred Hollenberg came to Sebring to raise castor beans as that was a source of fuel for the aviation industry at that time. However, that enterprise "never got off the ground" in Sebring, according to his grandson, Ralph. Fred acquired land on Highlands Avenue where he built a house and a barn. He cleared the land by hand and with mules and grew citrus.

John Hollenberg, son of Fred and Martha, had served in the U.S. military during World War I and subsequently was attending college in North Manchester, Indiana. John, who was born in 1895, met his future wife, Ada Dunning, in college. Ada went to the mission field in China, while John fin-



*John & Ada Hollenberg - 1958*

ished college at Ohio State University, earning a degree in animal husbandry. After John graduated from college, he went to China to marry Ada in 1926.

Fred Hollenberg died in 1927 as John and Ada were on a ship coming home from China. John and Ada lived with his widowed mother for several years and attended to the citrus business started by his father. After a few years, John purchased a 160-acre block of land south of High-

lands Hammock where he developed citrus. Later, he expanded the operation to include raising cattle.

John and Ada Hollenberg became the parents of five children: Viola Elizabeth; John Ralph; George William; Edna Marie; and Dorothy Jane. George William was killed in an accident in 1947.

After the death of his mother, John and Ada bought the home of Charles Weigle, off Kenilworth Avenue, in the late 1930s. John then bought addi-

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tional property and built chicken houses and raised chickens. He raised "Rhode Island reds", a breed of chickens that he sold to a hatchery in Avon Park. He was a member of the Florida Poultry Association. Ada died in 1967.

John then married Bertha Sommer, a retired school teacher, in 1969. John and Bertha put a mobile home out on the property south of Highlands Hammock and moved there. After a couple of years, John's son, Ralph built them a home there. At the age of approximately 82, John broke his back in a fall from a ladder while picking oranges. Seriously injured, doctors told him he would never walk again without a massive back brace that kept his back immobile. After several months in the brace, a determined John discarded the brace and went out and worked on his tractor and resumed his regular hard work routine. He lived to be 95. In later years, John and Bertha lived in an apartment in The Palms.

Viola Elizabeth Hollenberg was born in 1929 and graduated from high school in Indiana. She married Harry Swank, Jr., a Sebring High School graduate, in January, 1950. Their children are: Kenneth, born in 1951; Barbara (1954); Donald (1956); Kathy (1958); Carol (1960); and Wanda (1962).

Harry farmed in Froid, Montana for three years after their marriage, while Viola was a homemaker and began raising the six children. In 1953, they moved to Poplar, Montana where they farmed until 2004. Their children all attended schools in Poplar and graduated high school there. After high school, all of the children went to McPherson College in Kansas, a Church of the Brethren college.

Over the years, Harry and Viola spent winters in Sebring, finally moving to Sebring in about



Harry & Viola (Hollenberg) Swank - 1995



Jean & Ralph Hollenberg

2004. In 2011, Harry and Viola returned to Kansas to live closer to their children, all of whom live there except Carol, who lives in Oklahoma. Viola states that she and Harry like to travel and in the early 1980s, they took a memorable trip to Austria with several family members.

John Ralph Hollenberg was born in 1931. In 1953, he married Jean Breidenstine of Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Children born to Ralph and Jean are: Anita, Bruce, Dean and Keith.

Anita was married to Myron "Terry" Byng and they have two sons, Jeremy and Darren. Anita was a renowned singer. She taught music at Sun 'N Lake Elementary School and Heartland Christian School. She passed away in 2006. Bruce is a computer programmer and lives in Maryland. His children are: Adam, Nathan and Audrey. Dean is a building contractor and married Patricia Mays, a teacher. They are the parents of twins, Stephanie & Melissa, and son Jonathan. Keith married Beth Bowser. He is a minister at York Church of the Brethren in York, Pennsylvania. They have two sons, Justin and Matthew.

Ralph served in the U.S. military from 1952 through 1954. He started a building contracting



(L-R) Ralph, Dorothy, father John, Edna, Viola

business in 1956 with his partner, Archie Wolfe. They built many of the prominent buildings in Sebring, including the Sebring Public Library in 1965; Sebring City Hall in 1969 and Sebring Church of the Brethren in 1988. Jean served as bookkeeper for the business. She also was organist at Church of the Brethren. Ralph retired from the business in 2005 at the age of 74.

Edna Marie Hollenberg was born in 1934 in Sebring. She graduated from Sebring High School in 1952 and attended Manchester College in Indiana for two years. She returned to Sebring and married Henry Rutkosky in 1955. Their children, all born in Sebring, are: Lila, born in 1956, Randy (1959), Delores (1961), and Daniel (1962). The family lived in Sebring until 1965, when they moved to Clearwater, where they lived for four years. They moved to Tarpon Springs where they lived from 1970 until 1983, with the children attending Tarpon Springs schools. Henry was employed as a construction superintendent during those years.

In 1983, Edna's family returned to Sebring, and Henry took over the Hollenberg family farm south of Highlands Hammock. Edna assisted Henry in managing the farm, which was sold in 2010.

Edna's hobbies include quilting, carving, sewing and reading; while Henry likes fishing, hunting and golf. They attend the Baptist Church at Crewsville. Their daughter, Delores, lives in Sebring and works for Dr. Stevens.



*Susan, Christina & Wendy Jo  
Harry & Dorothy (Hollenberg) Light*

They have three grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Dorothy Jane Hollenberg was the youngest of the children of John & Ada. She was born in 1942 in Sebring. The family moved to Indiana for three years when Dorothy was a toddler, returning to Sebring in the spring of 1947. In the fall of that year, tragedy struck when the family was in an automobile accident and son, George William was killed. John and Ralph were seriously injured.

Dorothy graduated from Sebring High School in 1960, then attended Bridgewater College in Virginia where she earned a bachelor's degree in music education in 1964. She began her long and successful teaching and directing career right after graduation. She directed music at a church for 17 years, directed the Scranton District Youth Choir for 16 years, and the Wayne Choralaires, a community chorus for 20 years. She also sang in a quartet (in Hebrew!) for the High Holy Days at a Jewish Synagogue for 18 years.

In 1966, Dorothy married Harry Light. They became parents of three daughters: Susan Marie (Beiler), Christina Dianne (Mayes), and Wendy Jo (Latty). They have five grandchildren. Harry was with the Pennsylvania State Police for over 26 years, retiring in 1991. They moved to Lancaster County in 1994, spending about four subsequent winters in Sebring until both found "post-retirement jobs", he in a hardware store; she as a clerk in a water company.



*Henry & Edna Rutkosky Family - 1963  
Randy, Daniel, Edna, Lila, Delores and Henry*

*(cont'd on page 4)*

They are both active in the Mountville Church of the Brethren where Dorothy sings in the choir and in a ladies quartet.

Harry does not like to travel, but Dorothy has traveled with her siblings on two cruises in the Carribean and to Hawaii and Alaska. Harry and Dorothy did go to Niagara Falls for their 25th anniversary, a gift from their daughters.

Harry Light lived in Sebring from 1957 to 1962. His grandfather, Levi King, and two aunts, Hilda Liskey and Ethel Hummel, lived in Sebring and were active in the Church of the Brethren.

Although the preceding story was about John and Ada Hollenberg's family, it should be noted that John's brother, Frederick Mitchell Hollenberg, lived in Sebring from 1935 until 1948, where he served as interim pastor of the Sebring Church of the Brethren in 1948. He also pastored in the Bassinger, Lorida and Okeechobee churches. The children of Frederick and Nora (Reber) Hollenberg were all born in India, as their parents were missionaries there from 1920 to 1927. They all graduated from Sebring High School: Marsha, Class of 1939; Alfred, Class of 1942; and Edward, Class of 1944.

The Hollenberg family have historically been hard-working, honorable citizens. They are devoted to their family and their church. They have earned and have enjoyed the respect and admiration of this community.



*Edna (Hollenberg) & Henry Rutkosky*

## Javier Cruz, Sebring High Scholarship Winner

*By Carole Goad*

Javier Cruz has been awarded our Historical Society \$500 scholarship for 2011. Javier is a 2011 Sebring High School graduate and was highly recommended by the faculty at the school based on his outstanding scholarship and citizenship.

Javier is a math major who will be attending the University of South Florida in Tampa this fall. He will be majoring in computer engineering. He stated that he will be working his way through college with the help of some scholarship assistance.

While in high school, Javier earned a final grade point average (GPA) of 4.60 and graduated Summa Cum Laude. He is a member of Mu Alpha Theta, an honors math society. He was also a member of "Schools for Schools", an organization of high school students devoted to raising funds to assist needy schools and students in other countries with supplies and equipment. While in high school, Javier has worked part time at Burger King.

Javier is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Margarito Cruz. He has two grown sisters, Rosie and Rosa; and three younger siblings, Roger, Adriana and Ricardo, who are students at Cracker Trail Elementary School. Javier is a member of St. Catherine's Church in Sebring. His interests are soccer, running and reading.

We wish Javier the very best in his college education and in his future. We are privileged to have played this small part in ensuring his success.



*Javier Cruz*

# Civil War Remembrance

*By Beth Simeone, with Merle B. Stauffer*

***Editor's Note: Beth Simeone interviewed Mr. Merle Stauffer of Sebring in 2011 who recalled his grandparents' accounts of the Battle of Antietam, fought at Sharpsburg, Maryland, from September 16-18, 1862, where 23,100 Americans died. This oral history as documented by Merle B. Stauffer is now at the Antietam Museum Archives. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln on September 22, 1862.***

This year begins the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Who today can say they heard a first-hand account of the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862? I had the good fortune to learn some of this history from Merle Stauffer who sat with his grandparents and talked of the "olden days".

Merle, now 96, was born near Mt. Morris, Illinois and has lived in Sebring since 1950 with his wife Kitty, also 96. Seeking a warmer climate than Illinois, they drove down Route 17 from Avon Park (Route 27 was scrub, did not exist, Merle said). All the businesses were on the Sebring Circle. He had graduated from Northwestern University in Chicago and Kitty was a teacher, but there were no jobs in Sebring.

Finding a Laundromat business for sale on Commerce Street, they bought it and set to work. Soon, he had people bringing laundry all the way from Avon Park and Lake Placid (remember there was no highway 27). Next, Merle bought special equipment that did "flat wear" – a nice ironed finish. This brought hotel business, including Kenilworth Lodge. Merle states that Harder Hall wanted Merle to come out there to do their laundry using their equipment, but he declined. Business grew. He hired more employees and in the winter tourist season, they worked from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm, seven days a week at the "Stauffer Launderette", 39 South Commerce Avenue.

After 25 years of hard work, they sold the business and retired to enjoy traveling in three different RVs and cruising the Caribbean. Today, they live quietly in Sebring having celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary in March.

Merle stated that his grandparents met and married in 1879, each having migrated to Illinois with many Marylanders of the Dunkard faith (Church of the Brethren). Grandfather Daniel H. Blecker was born at Boonsboro, Maryland. Grandmother

Elizabeth Miller Blecker, was born in Sharpsburg, Maryland and always wore the black bonnet of the Dunkard women during her adult life. As a child, she attended the Sharpsburg Dunkard Church, now historically significant as a battle site at Antietam. It was located next to the Miller Farm, Cornfield and Bloody Lane where 23,000 Union and Confederate casualties occurred on September 17, 1862.

The Dunkards were pacifists and did not believe in fighting. Their clear memories were recorded by Merle. ***The following are excerpts from Merle's memoirs:***

"The Battle of Antietam started around Grandma's home. Soldiers from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts were camped in Great Grandfather's orchard and pasture to be near the spring water. Some of the regiments from New York were dressed in knickers and blue shirts. These men fought with knives and swords. At one time, this regiment fought a terrific battle within 100 feet of Grandma's home. She witnessed the battle from the house. During the Battle of Antietam, Grandma, her sisters and brothers were huddled in the cellar. The barn buildings were damaged, and the house narrowly escaped destruction. Cannon balls dropped dangerously near the house. In fact, one came in through the window and dropped on the bed. If it had hit the floor, all three stores could have been destroyed.

Her father's barn was used as a hospital. Two rooms of their house were used by the surgeons. Here they amputated arms and legs of the wounded soldiers.

After the battle, Grandma's aunt asked that she and the rest of the children come to her place in order to escape further danger. They drove the 10 miles in one full day by horse and wagon. Dead

*(cont'd on page 6)*

men were scattered so thickly on the fields, it was impossible to find the road. All along the route they had to clear the dead soldiers from their path.

At one time, some of the officers met Lincoln at Grandma's house. Her father, Francis Miller, furnished a goose and turkey dinner for his distinguished guests. Grandma said Lincoln rode a small white horse to the meeting. He was a tall, dark complexioned man with black hair.

In October, Lincoln came to Antietam to meet with General George B. McClellan about his military performance. He had many more soldiers than General Robert E Lee, who was tactically superior. In November, Lincoln relieved McClellan of his command, replacing him with Burnside, whom Lee then defeated at Fredericksburg.

At 18, Grandpa Blecker was drafted for service in the Union Army. However, his father belonged to a group of men banded together so that they could pay to be exempt. Three of them were drafted, including Grandpa and the group "chipped in" paying for their release.

He then worked in a blacksmith shop near Boonsboro during the war. He shod many of the soldiers' horses. One Saturday evening, he noticed his employer hiding behind a small hill. Then he noticed a rebel soldier riding up to the shop. Grandpa jumped behind the screen that covered the fireplace instructing the blacksmith's wife to say that none of the men were home. The rebel rode up and asked if anyone could shoe his horse. The woman replied that the men were away. "Oh yes," the rebel replied, "I guess they all go to town on Saturday night." The men hid because they didn't want to shoe his horse because his Confederate money was valueless.

At one time, the two armies met on South Mountain nearby. Grandpa and the "boss" decided to watch the battle. Perched on the fence, they soon became targets for stray cannon balls. "I don't think it's safe here," Grandpa said. Both hurried back to shelter. After a hard fought battle, the Southerners retreated. They passed the house where Grandpa was rooming, but so quietly he didn't hear them. At that same time, "Stonewall" Jackson captured 15,000 Union troops. The Union troops followed in the Confederates' wake. During the Union march, people would put pails of water on their porches for the soldiers to drink. The officers, however, refused to let their men

drink saying "March On! We haven't time for that." These armies met next in the Battle of Antietam.

Grandma Elizabeth's grandfather, Jacob Miller, had a weaving business with 12 looms. He invented a seamless grain sack and the 3-ply carpet. He was prominent in politics, serving as a squire, judge of elections, county commissioner and one term in the state legislature. When the Whig Party established its first newspaper in Hagerstown, Maryland, Mr. Miller was one of the committee convened to arrange publication of a newspaper in the Democratic interest. When the Civil War broke out, his sympathies were with the South, which caused him to be persecuted in various ways by members of the opposite party, who several times drove him from the polls. On one occasion, he and his sons, Morgan, Andrew R., Samuel H. and daughter, Savilla, were arrested by the Federal authorities and conveyed as prisoners to Harper's Ferry. They were incarcerated for three weeks in a dirty, disagreeable prison and then released to get home as best they could without ever knowing what they were arrested for.

When the Union soldiers were around, you had to be a Union. When Rebels were around, you had to be a Rebel. Bread was taken from the oven by the soldiers who were tired of hardtack and beans. The soldiers would take anything they could lay their hands on such as chickens, household articles, etc. Grandma traded a piece of bread for a flatiron from one soldier and received a kettle in exchange for a piece of bread from another."



*From President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address March 4, 1865.*

*"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan - to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."*

## Greg Harris Speaks At July 23 Meeting

Greg Harris is the featured speaker at our Saturday, July 23 quarterly luncheon meeting at 12:00 noon at the Jack Stroup Civic Center on Lake Jackson. Harris is the newly appointed Director of the Sebring YMCA and is also a County Commissioner representing District 5.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Harris and his family have lived in Sebring for 25 years. His long leadership career has included serving on advisory boards of Highlands Regional Medical Center, Salvation Army, Junior Achievement and Sebring Sunrise Rotary Club. He is a certified residential contractor, a mentor for the Take Stock in Children program, and former Director of the Sebring Chamber of Commerce. He is a member of Grace Bible Church.

## Thelma Thompson Griffin

### Sebring High School Class of 1939 Autobiography, Written in 1982

I am a member of the 1939 graduating class of Sebring High School. I participated in the Glee Club, basketball and other activities.

On July 9, 1939, I married Willard Griffin of Avon Park. We have three children, Lynelle Collier of Sebring, Linda Parrish of Parrish, Florida, and Doyle Griffin of Leesburg. We also have six grandchildren. Most of our 43 years of marriage we have lived in Avon Park and are members of the United Methodist Church.

Willard retired two years ago from I.H. Ford Motor Company with 29 years in management. He now spends his time assisting me and taking care of his cattle. I am employed in Operator Services with United Telephone Company and look forward to retiring in June of 1984 with 20 years of service.

## Centennial Book

### MEMORIALS, SPONSORSHIPS, ADS

As you know, the Sebring Centennial book is being written and will be published early next year (about February 2012). There is an opportunity to purchase space in this commemorative book.

Advertisements in this book may be purchased. The prices are: \$250 for one fourth page; \$500 for one half page; \$800 for a full page; \$1,800 for an inside cover (2) only; and \$2,000 for the back cover.

These advertisements may consist of your business ad, your business history, or a memorial tribute to a family member.

There are two additional options:

(1) You may purchase one line on a memorial page (minimum donation is \$50) consisting of the name of the person to be remembered, and your name. The wording on this page will be *In Loving Remembrance of (person's name), By (your name)*.

(2) You may purchase one line on a sponsorship *Patrons* page (minimum donation is \$100) that states: *We are grateful for the generous support of these persons in our efforts to celebrate the Sebring Centennial by publishing the commemorative Centennial book:*  
*(Name of person or family contributing)*

Please contact us at 863-471-2522 or e-mail at [caroleg@myhlc.org](mailto:caroleg@myhlc.org) if you wish to participate in the above options. Many thanks for your support!

## Kay Taylor Wise

Sebring High School Class of 1961  
Autobiography, written in 2011

I have many good memories of Sebring High School, and some of the best were of band trips. I always liked to get my 8-9 hours of sleep each night, so I often got down on the floor of the bus on the ride home to try to sleep. Not very comfortable! I loved being in the Junior Class play, Saturday nights just hanging out at someone's house (usually Gary's) to listen to records and dance, eating those yummy slaw burgers at the Triangle Restaurant, meeting up with friends at Harvey's, Teen Town dances, sock hops after the ballgames, pep rally days when we burned the "Red Devils", and soooo much more!

I got my degree in elementary education from the University of South Florida, and taught school for 16 years. I am retired and loving every minute of my life.

I truly believe we lived in the very best of times. I am thankful to have my wonderful husband Travis (SHS Class of 1958) for the past 48 years, three sweet and caring daughters, and seven precious grandchildren. I am a woman that is much blessed! Travis and I are very active in our church, love to travel, and spend time with family and friends.

**2011 Luncheon Meetings**  
**at Sebring Civic Center:**

**July 23**  
**October 22**

## Verna Williams Crump

Sebring High School Class of 1939  
Autobiography, written in 1982

After graduating from S.H.S., I worked for three years in the old Tropical State Bank on the Circle. I was introduced to C.C. Crump, who was stationed at Hendricks Field, by Bob Bever in 1941. We were married in March of 1942.

We have two sons, Terry, 38 and Stephen, 30. Terry married Penny Butler (Doc & Mrs. Burch's niece and has visited in Sebring many times). We have two beautiful grandsons (are there any other kind?), ages 4 and 2. Son Stephen is single. Both live in Atlanta.

We moved often during the first 13 years, but settled in Miami 27 years ago. We like South Florida, but wish I had listened to Mrs. McIntosh and studied harder in Spanish I and II.

## For the "Does Anything Ever Change" File

In reviewing and archiving files of the City of Sebring, we recently ran across this little gem. It is a letter dated October 5, 1938 to a Mr. Charles Williams of Lakeland, Florida. The letter is from Mr. Ed Hasti, Sebring City Clerk at the time.

"Dear Mr. Williams,

I regret to report that the City Council re-engaged A. Gilbert Lester and Company as the City Auditors for this year. It seemed that the fact that they were discontinued a year ago for apparently no reason except political, and since that faction of the Council is not in power now, that they employed the former auditors. Maybe things will change again during the next year or so.

With kind regards, I remain,  
Ed Hasti, City Clerk.

# Ronald Ellis Askeland

## Sebring High School Class of 1961 - Autobiography, written in 2011

After graduating from Sebring High School, I attended the University of Florida earning a Bachelor of Science (Zoology) degree in 1965. I then went to the University of Maryland and received my Doctor of Dental Surgery degree in 1969.

I volunteered and spent a year in the Army Dental Corps in Brooklyn, New York and then I was sent to Vietnam as a MASH dentist with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. I returned stateside to practice restorative dentistry in Pompano Beach, Florida where I practice two days a week with my oldest son, Daryl.

I was very fortunate to meet the love of my life, Jo Ellen French, in Baltimore, Maryland and we have been married since 1968. We have three children, Daryl, Ryan and Amber. They are all happily married and have

given us five wonderful grandchildren who continue to delight us. Both of our sons are dentists and our daughter works in the financial industry.

Jo Ellen and I love to travel, play tennis and enjoy the grandchildren. I still love to ski, hunt, sail, scuba dive, golf, etc. Our lives are full and we are fortunate to enjoy relatively good health.

We look forward to seeing you all at future SHS class reunions.

My best memories of our high school years include great friends, Coach Taveniere, basketball, fun on Lake Jackson, "great dates", and the carefree times of our youth.

My worst memory was crashing my convertible into a tree in the school parking lot!

### MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SEBRING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*have been received from April 2011 through June 2011 in honor and memory of our dear friends and family members as follow:*

*In Memory of James Taveniere, from Cynthia Schumacher; Nina Shuman*

*In Memory of Evelyn Johnson, from Bob & Jean Mosier; Ed & Louise Koch*

*In Memory of Patricia Stallard,*

*Judy Mackay,*

*Willard K. Durrance,*

*Shelly Tomlinson,*

*Don Hansen, from Bob & Jean Mosier*

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*The Sebring Historical Society gratefully accepts memorial gifts, which may be sent to: 2011  
Wanda Whitehouse, Memorial Chairman, 9230 Spring Valley Lane, Sebring, FL 33875-5977*

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# Early History of Highlands County Schools

*By Lena Reddick Suggs*

Sebring, which was founded in 1912, had its first school in August, 1912, in a wooden "shotgun" structure. There were 53 children with one teacher on a monthly salary of \$65. There were only 8 school-aged children living in Sebring. When the Desoto School Board refused to finance a school for such a small number, the Sebringites brought in children from the surrounding areas. Considering that an automobile traveling from Avon Park to Sebring in 1913 required much pushing and a half-day's time, bringing in this many children from the country was a mammoth achievement.

Prior to 1921 and on into the 1920s, both Sebring and Desoto city had teacheries constructed nearby the schools. Most of the teachers were unmarried and they operated the teacheries much like a dormitory.

The teachers in the other school centers boarded with families in the community, usually for \$15 or \$20 per month. Often the teachers assisted with household chores and, in many ways, became a part of the family. In the rural communities, it was necessary for teachers to walk a mile or more to school.

There were hardships for many teachers. In 1936, a Miss Crawford petitioned the School Board for assistance in the renovation of a small unfurnished building without doors or windows where she was forced to live. This was a rural community with a one-teacher school. The Board refused because they did not want to set a precedent, but they did raise her salary \$5.00 per month.

The Highlands County teacher was usually a woman, sometimes an unmarried career person or otherwise a single girl, just out of high school, who took the State Teachers examination and passed. The high school teachers had at least two years of college. They were drawn to Florida from other states

because of the higher pay. The young teacher sometimes used her position as a stepping stone to marriage. Some married teachers continued working although communities frowned upon two bread-earners in the same family during the Depression.

Character, certainly as late of the 1940s, was scrutinized much more carefully than was education. Many "do's" and "don'ts" with an emphasis on the "don'ts" restricted the teacher in her social life.

If children carried home stories, such as preferential treatment of certain pupils, the parents, trustees or even the Board members would, unannounced, and very quietly, enter and observe the teacher in action.

On the whole, however, the teacher occupied a special niche in the community as an example of exemplary behavior. Patronage, of a kind, for the sake of their children was practiced more than it is today. The Board, when convinced of the integrity of any teacher who was unjustly criticized, would back the teacher.

By 1921, there were janitors...at first they made only \$40 monthly. During the Depression, some salaries were cut to \$25. Sometimes their janitorial duties were combined with a contract for transporting school children living more than two miles from the school for 10 to 20 cents daily in private vehicles. It was not until the 1930s that the County had a public school bus system.

Teachers assisted the janitors in many of their cleaning chores as well as ground beautification because they believed the pupils should learn the practical aspects of life. Pupil participation in making their surroundings beautiful and clean was important.

Colonel F.N.K. Bailey came in 1925 as County Superintendent. He set the high moral standards, the teaching excellence, and financial

*(cont'd on page 11)*

integrity, for which Highlands was known. When other nearby counties were issuing script payment to teachers, Highlands County managed to pay its school employees until the last two months of the 1932-1933 term.

Col. Bailey, with the aid of the School Board and many sympathetic citizens, took drastic steps to raise money for the schools. Property owners around Desoto City were threatened with land seizure if they did not pay their back school taxes.

The most spectacular feat was securing an injunction and stopping a train south of Sebring. The train was not allowed to move until the railroad agreed to pay its back taxes.

School textbooks before 1933 had to be purchased by the parents, but in 1933, the Highlands County School Board ruled that children unable to buy textbooks would be furnished these by the County. Today, textbooks are furnished to all students.

The economic and political changes, some local and some national and international, are reflected in the highlights and achievements of Highlands County educational system.

The Florida "boom" was evidenced in the architecture of the high school buildings. These were built in Avon Park (1924); in Sebring (1916 with improvements in 1926); in Desoto City (1925); and in Lake Placid (1925 and 1933). "War babies" made the building of modern elementary and junior high schools in all three areas a necessity in 1954, 1955 and 1957. Some of these continued to be used as middle schools until new buildings were erected.

A Ridge Area School for exceptional students was constructed and funded largely by a community organization. Today (as of 1975), this school is completely funded by State and County monies and provides a pre-school program. Many of the handicapped students, by law, are today being placed in regular classrooms.

These buildings of the early 1920s continued to serve until the impetus of the 1970s...(when)...all kinds of improvements signaled a time of emphasis on caring for children, some yet unborn, that America might continue being the greatest nation in the world.

Changes in the curriculum began to reflect the advances in the scientific world. With the advent of Russia's Sputnik, the challenge became evident for other countries to keep pace. Science rooms became more sophisticated using better equipment and materials. Mobile science units with special instruction and coordinators came into being and gave new impetus to academic learning. Government financed aid programs in math, reading and science all flourished. Summer school programs were instituted to reinforce needed basic skills.

The world's need to communicate engendered interest in linguistics. Rooms equipped with electronic devices made concentrated study of languages possible. Because of the influx of Cubans and other migrants into Florida, migrant programs were established.

Free lunches, once a project of the PTA became a vital part of the health and social aspects of education. With Federal assistance, many students began receiving a well-balanced noon meal and, in some instances, a daily breakfast.

The Civil Rights movements brought about improved school programs for blacks, and finally, in the late 1960s, full integration.

Actually, all Florida schools owe not only their financial, but professional improvements to the Minimum Foundation Program begun in 1947 as a basic. It was then that all teachers, administrators, and non-teaching personnel contributed to the planning and implementation of all kinds of programs. Teachers became more professional, confident and demanding.

*Sebring Historical Society  
321 W Center Ave  
Sebring, Florida 33870-3109*

**You are invited to join us at the Sebring Historical Society's  
Quarterly Luncheon Meeting on  
Saturday, July 23, 2011 at 12:00 noon at the  
Jack Stroup (Sebring) Civic Center at Lake Jackson.**

**Just bring a dish to share and \$1.50 each for beverage  
and table service.**

**We are very pleased to welcome Mr. Greg Harris, who will be our  
special speaker. He is Director of the Sebring YMCA, and was elected  
last year to serve District 5 on the Highlands County  
Board of Commissioners.**