

THE HISTORIAN

The Newsletter of
THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 12 Boynton Beach FL 33435-0012

Voncile Smith, President

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Voncile Smith, Editor

BOYNTON COMMISSION GRANTS REPRIEVE FOR 1927 HISTORIC HIGH SCHOOL

The Boynton City Commission decided on August 20 to spare the old high school from demolition. They have asked the Community Development Agency, which oversees downtown revitalization to explore new ideas for saving the site including the possibility for a partnership with a private developer.

At the meeting Harvey Oyer, an advocate for preservation and former Mayor, said it was difficult to interest investors in the project when some city officials were recommending that the school be razed and the site made into a parking lot.

Commissioner Charlie Fisher noted that the Boynton Woman's Club, the 1913 Schoolhouse Children's Museum, and the historic old high school were the only major buildings in the city with historic significance. Vice-Mayor Ron Weiland said the building was too much of a historic treasure to abandon. Commissioner Mack McCray favors preservation, and Mayor Broening, while indicating support for preservation, said finding money to help save the school would be difficult.

Representatives from the Board of Trustees of the Historical Society will meet with Doug Hutchinson, CRA Director to discuss what the Society can do to help.

HELP PROVIDE COPY FOR THE HISTORIAN

To enable the Society to serve you better, and to save knowledge of the history of the area, we need news from you the readers. I am happy to prepare the copy and to arrange for the distribution of *The Historian*, but I am limited in what I know. You can mail me information at the Society's P.O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, call me at 561-734-5653 or email me at vms317@bellsouth.net.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETS SEPTEMBER 9

Callie Rousseau Brown will present portions of her book on the Rousseaus at the meeting of the Boynton Beach Historical Society on Monday, September 9, 2002 at 7:30 p.m. at the Boynton Woman's Club, 1010 South Federal Highway. The Rousseau family has lived in Florida for several generations. Mrs. Brown was born in Boynton Beach and taught in Boynton for many years in a career that began in the 1913 Schoolhouse in 1930. She will recall some of her early experiences as a teacher as well as provide insight into aspects of the Rousseau family life.

Refreshments will be served. All meetings of the Historical Society are open free to the general public.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

We hope to have our program schedule essentially confirmed by our September meeting. Programs will be announced in more detail when dates and places have been set. The following are pending currently:

We are planning to cooperate with the Friends of the Library to sponsor two programs from the Florida Humanities Council. One of these scheduled for March 10, 2003 is *The Highwaymen: African-American Florida Landscape Artists*. Gary Monroe whose book by that title was published by the University Presses of Florida will be the speaker.

The Highwaymen were painters from the Ft. Pierce area who were influenced by and trained under artist Beanie Backus. They traveled up and down U.S. Highway #1 during the 1950s and 1960s selling their Florida landscape paintings from the backs of their cars. Although originally called "Motel Art," these paintings have become very collectible (and expensive). Several people in the area, including members of the Historical Society, will (continued on page 2)

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loan some of these paintings temporarily to the Library for an exhibit held in conjunction with the FHC program.

For the October 14 meeting, we expect to have Judge Nelson Bailey appear in Cracker costume astride his horse and accompanied by his cattle cur and his cattle whip talk to us about Florida history from the outdoor stage at the Schoolhouse Children's Museum. (We assume he will dismount from his horse if he uses the stage.)

Janet DeVries will speak to the Society at one meeting this year about the Historical Society Archives, what materials we have, and how the materials have been organized.

We expect to have another Florida Humanities Council program co-sponsored with the Friends of the Library for Black History Month in February. Details for this will be forthcoming.

For the May meeting when we have the installation of new officers and our annual covered dish dinner, Betty Thomas and other family members will discuss the life and works of famous artist painter Bernard Thomas.

NEW MEMBERS

The names of several members who joined the Society prior to the mailing of the last issue of *The Historian* were inadvertently omitted. Your editor sincerely apologizes. (She could blame the computer, but it's really her fault for not proofreading more carefully.) These members are

Patron Membership:

Mr. and Mrs. Brian Edwards (Valerie Lacey)

Family Membership:

Mr. and Mrs. John I. Rogers (Carnella)
Mr. Jeff Morgan

Individual Membership:

Ms. Lynn Grace
Mrs. Helen McGregor
Mrs. Robert E. Raborn (Lenore Benson)
Mrs. Eleanor Murray Sala
Mr. James D. Shelton
Ms. Eleanor Marie Shepard
Mr. Barnie Shuhi
Ms. Dorian B. Trauger
Ms. Lorraine Vicki
Mr. Jim Warnke
Mr. Raymond Weeks

New Members – continued

The following have joined since the last newsletter:

Family Membership:

Dr. and Mrs. Robert Bourque (Frances)
Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Oyer III (Amy)
Maj and Mrs. Paul D. Price (Frances R.)

Individual Membership:

Mr. Kelley M. Kirton
Ms. Marjorie Anne McGregor Miller
Ms. Mary Lou Muster Ryder
Ms. Marion Alice Weaver Wester
Mr. Thomas E. "Tommy Joe" Woolbright

SOME OVERDUE THANK YOU'S

To: VFW Post 10150, Boynton beach for a gift of \$100.00.

Wal-Mart Foundation, for \$500.00 for Improvement of landscaping and environment within the City of Boynton Beach.

James B. and Georgie P. Raulerson, Memorial Gift to honor Peggy Meridith Stanley.

New Memorial Gifts

Special thanks to members and friends who have made recent gifts to the Society and include

Gloria Partin Turner (Mrs. Bernard) gifts to honor the memory of:

Jacqueline "Jackie" Partin Bassetta
Katherine "Kay" Toe Laer Corcoran
Thomas Corcoran
Clorice Keatts
Julie Weems Monahan
Clyde Harris
Dow Ross
Otley Scott
James Thurber

Anonymous Donor, gifts to honor the memory of
Versie Swilley
James Alwyn Winchester

Anonymous Donor, gifts to honor 3 teachers from 1913 Schoolhouse:
Annie Shepard
Mabel Rousseau Tuite
Ava Weaver

REMEMBERING A NEIGHBOR

EXCERPTS FROM A LOVELY LETTER

The following is from a letter sent to Harvey E. Oyer, Jr. after the writer received a copy of the Spring/Summer Historian. Margaret Harris is a member of the Garnett family, pioneers in this area, who married Clyde Harris in 1935. Many of us remember Mr. Harris as a teaching principal at the historic Boynton High School. This principalship included the entire Boynton School, grades 1-12, so the 1913 schoolhouse was part of the program under his direction.

Dear Harvey,

The Boynton of early years was made up of a distinctive group of people. I knew it better than Clyde because the church was an important part of my life from the time I was born until I married (1909-1935). It was Clyde's first principalship, beginning in 1940 and ending in 1943 when he became a naval officer. We continued to live there while he was principal of Lake Worth High School for two years. We moved to West Palm Beach when he became principal of PBHS in 1948. While living in West Palm Beach for 32 years and then in Lake Worth for sixteen years, we continued to attend funerals and other important gatherings in Boynton. We often made the statement (and you may quote me), "Boynton people are the most loyal people we have ever known." I also remember a remark I frequently heard from my mother when speaking of many of her church friends, "She is a good woman." Our memories of Boynton are of people who loved and respected each other. We lived happily in Lake Worth and West Palm Beach, but Boynton was unique.

No one knew my father for a longer period of time than Mrs. Voss [Harvey's grandmother]. Rebecca Merkel told me that Mrs Voss told her that Andrew Garnett was the most Christ-like man she had ever known. I never heard him speak ill of any one. I believe the latter could be said of many Boynton Old-Timers . . .

I am glad you and others of your family are actively preserving the history which Charlie Pierce and Lillie Voss began.

Sincerely,
[Signed] Margaret Harris

In our fervor to salvage the history of Boynton Beach before too much of the old and irreplaceable is lost forever, we have sometimes overlooked the many contributions to the City's development by one portion of our population, long time Boynton Beach residents and fellow Americans who just happen to be primarily of African descent.

Do you know or remember what a Gold Star Mother is? That is an official designation for a mother who has lost a child killed in combat fighting for the United States. Mrs. Hilda Girtman Pitts was named by the American Legion here in Boynton as the Gold Star Mother Of-the-Year in 1999 for the loss of one of her sons, Cleveland Pitts, during the War in Viet Nam. There are but a handful of parents in Boynton Beach who have faced this kind of sacrifice. Fortunately we do not have many God Star Mothers, but we must not forget the sorrow of the ones who gave this great gift to their country.

As we approach the first anniversary of 9-11, it seems fitting that we remember all Americans who have been lost in the quest for peace and freedom.

Hilda Girtman Pitts was born in Boynton Beach almost 89 years ago. Her parents were also Floridians—her father, Willie Girtman, was born in Apopka and lived in West Palm Beach for several years before coming to Boynton. Her mother, Julia, was from Lakeland.

Hilda Girtman married Solomon Pitts and they had eight children. Many days you can see her sitting in or just outside the shop, *Mrs. Hilda's Antiques*, operated on East Ocean Avenue in the 500 Building by her son James Pitts.

If you have the opportunity, stop by to see her, and thank her for her sacrifice for America.

**Special thanks to Investment
Representatives at EDWARD JONES,
901 N. Congress Avenue, Boynton
Beach, FL 33426, for the mailing of
our newsletter.**