It's been there about three years now, and valuable booty is continuing to be added to it. It doesn't take a secret map to locate it, and it is not on a deserted isle. The Treasure Chest I write about is the Archive Room in the Harlingen Public Library. It has become THE place for the deposition of paper, oral and visual tapes, and photographic items dealing primarily with Harlingen's past and current activities. It also, to a lesser extent, contains material dealing with Lower Rio Grande Valley history. The Archive Room is located on the second floor of the library adjacent to the inter-net servers and periodical room. Because it secures many one-of-a-kind documents, often in fragile condition, public access to the room without the presence of a trained library volunteer or employee is limited. The hours of the room when volunteers are present are: Monday 11-12 am and 2-4 pm; Tuesday 10 to 2; Wednesday 10-12; and Thursday 2-4. The room is also open by appointment. Contact Tim Reynolds at the Reference Desk and, if he is not in, leave the subject of your interest so pertinent matter can be pulled from the stacks or files.

And now I want to delve into the many kinds of treasure you may encounter on a visit. There are scrapbooks galore. No, this no new phenomenon; current scrapbooking is merely a resurrection of an old hobby but wearing the face of modern technology. The old scrapbooks have newspaper articles, photos, invitations, reminiscences, poems, stories, talks and speeches, etc. Among the many scrapbooks available for perusing in the Archive Room are these:

- Garden Clubs
- A. W. Cunningham Biography
- Hub Club
- PEO
- Chamber of Commerce
- Hurricane Buelah
- PTA
- Bicycle Tour
- Afflatus Club
- Fiesta Turista
- Harlingen, Holland
- Bougainvillea Trail
- Art League
- Eisenhower Visit
- Women's Club
- Odd Personal Ones with Miscellaneous Subjects
- Junior Music Lovers Club
- The Library

In addition to these the Library Staff has compiled oversized books with all City Government history and related items for specific years. These comprise an important documentation of the physical and political changes occurring in the community. Some rare archival items are very old Valley magazines, mainly promoting agriculture and land sales. A few of these go back nearly 100 years. Complementing these are some limited edition books such as those by Allhands, an early railroad engineer who also had a gift for recording the development of the Valley.

Early real estate abstracts would trace Valley land ownership back to Spanish and Mexican Land Grants. In revealing how they were subsequently subdivided among family and eventually land speculators one can glean considerable knowledge of the individuals who peopled the area. The Archive Room has a number of such abstracts. A collection of Harlingen High School Annuals goes back to the 1930s. Other later school annuals as from HHSS, TSTC, MMA, middle schools, etc. now line the shelves. They provide amusing reading and refresh memories of long-forgotten classmates.

NEXT WEEK: More diamonds in the rough.
Last week I wrote of the little known treasures to be found in the Archive Room of the Harlingen Public Library. The trove has much more to entice your visit. There are numerous special editions of the Valley Morning Star in the archives. These include the annual Saludos Amigos supplements, Harlingen's Golden Anniversary, Hurricane Buelah Special, Historical Markers of Cameron County, and of that nature. There is a separate map cabinet containing all sorts of intriguing Harlingen and Valley maps, some dating back to the 19th Century. They clearly present the ever-evolving face of the region. Plat maps of early Harlingen show its modest beginnings. Still in the process of being catalogued are 4,000 blueprints of Valley construction projects. 1,500 of these are catalogued and available for scrutiny. One of the more valuable assets of the room is its collection of telephone directories. For Harlingen these go back to the year 1930. The nature of these directories for about 39 years was that they not only provided telephone numbers but listed occupations, the spouse's name, whether a widow, and the number of occupants in the residence. Each also had a reverse directory section in which by looking at a street address one could determine its occupants. How businesses moved, closed and changed, as well as when people arrived and departed, can be traced with a little time and effort. Then there are the vertical files. These are alphabetized-by-subject-matter records kept in filing cabinets. These are broken down into two main categories. These are any subjects dealing with (1) Harlingen and (2) the Rio Grande Valley other than Harlingen. It is from these with a little probing and patience one may discover long lost facts regarding relatives, weather incidents, business and agriculture, churches, and subjects from A to Z. A special section under "Railroads" was donated by a railfan and contains not only Valley railroad history but also items from railroads across the country. Two vertical file cabinets are devoted to legal sized documents and photographs. Eventually these will be filled from paper and photographic items being brought over from the Harlingen Arts and Heritage Museum. These items were not catalogued and characterized while at the museum so were not readily available for public use nor was the museum staff trained to utilize the material. While it will take time to screen the many documents on permanent loan from the museum, once archived they will greatly widen the knowledge of our city and its past. Our city is young by relative standards. Children of its pioneers still reside among us. They and their children, now realizing how important it is to preserve the early history of our community and its first citizens, are donating more and more unique and pertinent items to the Harlingen Historical Preservation Society and the Library in the knowledge that it will be available to future generations. It is no small task to prepare and preserve so many treasures. Together library staff and volunteers will computer-scan fragile and decomposing items and reprint the important ones on acid-free paper for public use. The expression is "One man's trash is another man's treasures." Come discover your own treasures in the Archive Room of the Harlingen Public Library. There is something for everyone.