

# HISTORY OF FELLSMERE

by Richard B. Votapka, Fellsmere Historian

June 13, 2024

The land on which the City of Fellsmere and Fellsmere Farms is located was initially known as the “Cincinnatus Farms”. Interest in developing the headwaters of the St. Johns River dates back to May 4, 1892, when Anthony O. Russell of Cincinnati, Ohio, initially purchased four townships west of Sebastian from Matthew R. Marks. Over the next three years, Russell continued to purchase more land from Marks, Cecil G. Butt, William L. Palmer, and Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida, accumulating a total of 180 square miles (115,200 acres). At the time, the property was within Brevard County.<sup>1</sup>

Anthony O. Russell was a printer who introduced Bicycle playing cards in 1885. He, along with Robert Morgan, (another printer), and two financiers, founded the U.S. Playing Card Company, Cincinnati, Ohio. Russell became president of the company which brought him great wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Russell created a company known as “Cincinnatus Farms” to direct a huge land reclamation project, so he could develop farmlands in Florida.<sup>3</sup> Russell named the property “Cincinnatus” (of the San Sebastian Muck Lands).<sup>4</sup> On November 22, 1895, the *Indian River Advocate* published an article stating that Mr. Russell of Cincinnati said it would cost over \$1 million and take two years to drain 112,000 acres to put it in shape for cultivation and be ready for settlers. Russell also said that a railroad from Kissimmee would be constructed to a point on the Indian River near Sebastian.<sup>5</sup> On November 29, 1895, it was reported that the Cincinnatus Farms Land Development project, ten miles west of Sebastian, was steadily and surely developing. Work would probably be commenced on the dredging of the canal in the next three months.<sup>6</sup>

In February 1896, Russell stated that work for reclaiming his tract of land, known as the Cincinnatus Farms, would begin as soon as the 10 miles of railroad from Sebastian was completed, the survey for which had been completed.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Title Guaranty Company, “Abstract of Title No. 6308- Preamble”, March 15, 1915, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Greve, Charles Theodore. Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens, Volume II: “Major Anthony O. Russell Biography”, Chicago, IL: Biographical Publishing Company, 1904, p. 281; The History of Bicycle Playing Cards (<https://bicyclecards.com/article/our-history>); and The United States Playing Card Company ([https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Playing\\_Card\\_Company](https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Playing_Card_Company)).

<sup>3</sup> *Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere by D.M. Dominici, former Assistant Manager of the Fellsmere Sales Company”, April 22, 1927, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> 1895 Map of the San Sebastian Muck Lands “Cincinnatus”, Brevard County, Florida, owned by Anthony O. Russell of Cincinnati, Ohio, 1895.

<sup>5</sup> *Indian River Advocate* [Titusville, FL], “Large Drainage Project”, November 22, 1895, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, “A Great Drainage Scheme”, November 29, 1895, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, “Brevard County Prospects”, February 28, 1896, p. 4.

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The only way to access Cincinnatus Farms was by railroad. There were no improved roads (just trails at the time), and no navigable waterways that led to the project from any direction. Henry Flagler's "Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Indian River Railway" (later renamed the Florida East Coast Railway on September 9, 1895)<sup>8</sup> had constructed its track to Sebastian with the first train arriving on December 11, 1893.<sup>9</sup> The railway continued south with no branch line west to the muck lands and reached West Palm Beach on March 22, 1894.<sup>10</sup>

Anthony O. Russell purchased approximately 3,000 additional acres for his railroad right-of-way from Sebastian to his Cincinnatus property. With the addition of the railroad right-of-way, Russell's total property consisted of approximately 118,000 acres.<sup>11</sup> Following acquisition of the necessary right-of-way from Sebastian to Cincinnatus, construction of the Sebastian-Cincinnatus Farms Railroad began in April 1896. By May 1, 1896, William Lancaster, foreman for the right-of-way gang, reported that his gang had cut about one mile of right-of-way.<sup>12</sup> The Sebastian-Cincinnatus Farms Railroad was completed in November of the same year.<sup>13</sup>

Eventually, Russell planned to extend his railroad to Kissimmee but his advisors had underestimated the magnitude and cost of the project, so it was never extended past the original ten miles.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, Russell died in April 1900, and his dream died with him.<sup>15</sup> His sons, Willis and George, took over the company but eventually the company became embroiled in litigation. By 1909 there were eight different claims against the Russell estate, and development of the project had ceased.<sup>16</sup> The August 20, 1909, edition of the Fort Pierce News advertised a "Commissioners' Sale" by virtue of a decree of the Circuit Court for St. Lucie and Brevard Counties and 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit of Florida offering all of the

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<sup>8</sup> Bramson, Seth H. Speedway to Sunshine, The Story of the Florida East Coast Railway, Ontario, Canada: The Boston Mills Press, 1984, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> Sebastian Area Historical Society. Tales of Sebastian, "Sebastian Area Chronology" compiled by George Keyes, Historian and Member of the Sebastian Area Historical Society, Sebastian, FL, 1985, 2008, just prior to page 1.

<sup>10</sup> Bramson, Seth H. Speedway to Sunshine, The Story of the Florida East Coast Railway, Ontario, Canada: The Boston Mills Press, 1984, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *"Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere"*, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *The Indian River Advocate* [Titusville, FL], "Sebastian", May 1, 1896, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *The Indian River Advocate* [Titusville, FL], "Cincinnatus Farms", May 15, 1896, and November 20, 1896.

<sup>14</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *"Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere"*, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Greve, Charles Theodore. Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens, Volume II: "Major Anthony O. Russell Biography", Chicago, IL: Biographical Publishing Company, 1904, p. 281.

<sup>16</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *"Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere"*, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 8.

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Cincinnatus Farms property including the railroad right-of-way for sale to the public.<sup>17</sup> The legal advertisement contained the following wording at its conclusion: “*The Sebastian and Cincinnatus Farms Railroad, together with the land upon which it runs, and all spikes, rails, irons, and fastenings, of said railroad being about nine miles in length.*”<sup>18</sup> There was no mention of any railroad facilities such as a station, warehouse, repair shop, or other buildings that may have been erected.

Edward Nelson Fell (commonly referred to as E. Nelson Fell) was a native New Zealander and a mining engineer who founded the Town of Narcoossee, Florida, on October 1, 1884.<sup>19</sup> After spending years working and travelling abroad in Canada, England, Kazakhstan (Russia), Africa, and South America, he retired to his estate “Creedmoor” in Warrenton, Virginia, as a wealthy man at age 52 in 1909.<sup>20</sup> E. Nelson Fell was encouraged by his future son-in-law, Patrick Vans Agnew, and engineering colleague and neighbor Oscar Crosby to reconsider his retirement.<sup>21</sup> Vans Agnew and Crosby believed that there were tremendous opportunities for land development in Florida. Conditions had changed considerably during Fell’s absence; the troublesome conditions of the 1890’s were a thing of the past, and Florida experienced a population growth between 1900 and 1910.<sup>22</sup>

Floridians had elected a new governor, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward. Central to Broward’s program was his plan to mobilize the state’s resources to reclaim the Everglades through a system of drainage canals that would allow surplus water to drain into the Atlantic Ocean. The state spent nearly \$2 million on the Everglades project and by 1913, 142 miles of canals and two (2) locks were in place.<sup>23</sup>

Inspired by the Governor’s ambitious project, E. Nelson Fell and Oscar Crosby discussed the idea of launching a colossal land reclamation such as the State of Florida had with the Everglades project. Crosby believed it was possible to drain the region and sell the land for a handsome profit. Fell envisioned that the area could become an agricultural paradise.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ft. Pierce News* [Ft. Pierce, FL], “Legal Advertisements”, August 20, 1909, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Fell and Davidson Prospectus*, Orlando, FL: Sentinel Job Print, 1885, pp. 13 and 14.

<sup>20</sup> Vans Agnew, Frank. Frank and the Fells in Kazakhstan, edited by Jamie Vans Agnew (grandson of Marian Fell Vans Agnew). Cardiff, Wales: privately published on [www.Blurb.com](http://www.Blurb.com), 2020, and Patterson, Gordon. “*Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere*”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997”, pages 6 and 7.

<sup>21</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “*Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere*”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997”, p. 7, and Fell Family Ancestry Records, Jamie Vans, Custodian.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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In 1909, Fell researched land in Florida, trying to find the most suitable site. He dispatched his long-time friend, Captain Rose (the Florida State Chemist who he befriended in Narcoossee) to scout out prospects.<sup>25</sup> One of Florida's great boosters, Rose had a unique perspective on land possibilities. He believed the upper St. Johns region held great promise for agricultural development.<sup>26</sup>

Although E. Nelson Fell learned that Cincinnatus Farms was best suited for agricultural development, he also learned that the land was embroiled in litigation.<sup>27</sup> George Russell sued his brother Willis W. Russell, et al. on August 3, 1908, over their interests in the sale of the Cincinnatus property.<sup>28</sup> The suit was dismissed in March 1910.<sup>29</sup> All of the land and the Sebastian-Cincinnatus Farms Railroad was sold to John J. Heard of De Soto County, Florida. In turn, John J. Heard and his wife, Lowe B. Heard, sold the property and the railroad to E. Nelson and Anne Palmer Fell on March 9 and 11, 1910, respectively for \$91,875 and \$63,125 for a combined total of \$155,000.<sup>30</sup> The Fells paid approximately \$1.31 per acre for approximately 118,000 acres (115,200 acres for five townships and 2,800 acres for the Sebastian and Cincinnatus Farms railroad right-of-way). The five townships included 70,000 acres of muck lands, and 33,000 acres of prairie lands. The remainder was covered in upland pine woods.<sup>31</sup> E. Nelson Fell named the new development "Fellsmere" which meant "Fell - a "watery place" because most of it was developed on muckland which flooded periodically.<sup>32</sup>

On May 23, 1910, Fell and Crosby in Warrenton, Virginia, incorporated the Fellsmere Farms Company with a capital of \$2 million in St. Lucie County, Florida.<sup>33</sup> The company's headquarters were initially established at 68 William Street in New York City and later

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<sup>25</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *"Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere"*, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 8, and Heatherington, Alma. *The River of the Long Water*. Chulouta, FL: Mickler House Publishers, 1980, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *"Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere"*, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Indian River County Abstract Company, "Abstract of Title No. 10277", August 2, 1939, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.34.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 46 and 47

<sup>31</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Salutatory", February 21, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *"Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere,"* Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997, pp. 1 and 2.

<sup>33</sup> Florida Dept. of State, Division of Corporations, Fellsmere Farms Company Incorporation Documentation filed on May 23, 1910; Fellsmere Farms Company, Letters Patent, State of Florida, April 22, 1910, p.1; and Article 1 of the Fellsmere Farms Company incorporation documents.

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moved to 55 Liberty Street.<sup>34</sup> On June 1, 1910, the Fellsmere Farms Company filed a statement with St. Lucie County that the company had \$2,000,000 in capital and a limited indebtedness of \$2,000,000.<sup>35</sup>

On June 6, 1910, the initial board meeting of the Fellsmere Farms Company was held. Oscar Crosby was elected president and E. Nelson Fell was elected the company's vice president. Fell was charged with organizing the company's development.<sup>36</sup> At the meeting, E. Nelson and Anne Palmer Fell conveyed all of the Cincinnatus Farms property and the Sebastian and Cincinnatus Farms Railroad to the Fellsmere Farms Company for \$10.00.<sup>37</sup>

On July 1, 1910, the Fellsmere Farms Company encumbered all unsurveyed Township 31 South (except Section 16), Range 37 East, with other lands and sundry personal property to secure a 15-year Trust Mortgage with Bankers Trust Company of New York at 6% interest in gold bonds in the amount of \$1,500,000, payable July 1, 1925.<sup>38</sup>

The first order of business of the Fellsmere Farms Company was to employ J. G. White and Company, an engineering and contracting firm in New York City and London (on which Crosby served on the board of directors), to survey the land, prepare the plats, design the railroad and drainage system for 144 square miles of the Fellsmere Farms lands including the Town of Fellsmere.<sup>39</sup>

Before any drainage work could begin, the Fellsmere Farms Company had to re-construct the railroad from Sebastian to Fellsmere within the old Sebastian-Cincinnatus Railroad right-of-way. Fellsmere Farms Company General Manager Ernest H. Every, who had been affiliated for 20 years with railroad interests in Colorado, directed the construction of the standard gauge Fellsmere Railroad.<sup>40</sup> By September 1910, the Fellsmere Railroad was completed.<sup>41</sup>

Following its completion, the railroad was utilized to bring in all of the heavy equipment (such as draglines, dredges, ditching machines, and well-drilling machines), building

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<sup>34</sup> Fellsmere Farms Company Minutes, December 6, 1910, p. 55; and *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Frank Clark Endorses the Fellsmere Farms", March 7, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Incorporation Book 1, Page 203, Public Records of St. Lucie County, FL. June 1, 1910.

<sup>36</sup> Fellsmere Farms Company Minutes, June 6, 1910, pp. 3 and 7.

<sup>37</sup> Special Warranty Deed, Book 10, Page 76, Public Records of St. Lucie County, FL, filed June 20, 1910.

<sup>38</sup> Trust Mortgage between Fellsmere Farms Company and Bankers Trust Company, Book 4, Page 320, St. Lucie County Public Records, filed November 9, 1910.

<sup>39</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], February 21, 1912., p. 2; and *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], "Rinker's Florida Land Progress", May 25, 1911, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> *St. Lucie County Tribune* [Ft. Pierce, FL] "Sebastian", June 10, 1910, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, "Sebastian", September 9, 1910, p. 3.

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materials, supplies, and labor needed to develop Fellsmere.<sup>42</sup> Fellsmere is the only municipality still in Indian River County that is not adjacent to the Indian River and is landlocked. Therefore, nothing at the time could be brought into Fellsmere by riverboat such as was done for the early settlements of Roseland, Sebastian, Orchid, and Ft. Pierce because they were all along the navigable Indian River.<sup>43</sup>

The Fellsmere Railroad carried everything essential for its development. It wasn't until June 1916 that a nine-foot wide stabilized dirt road was improved from Sebastian to Fellsmere making it practical for trucks and automobiles to safely travel between Fellsmere and Sebastian.<sup>44</sup>

At the Fellsmere Farms Company board meeting of September 16, 1910, E. Nelson Fell presented an analysis of the plans of J. O. Wright and T. F. Richardson of J. G. White & Company for draining four townships with an additional estimate for draining a fifth township.<sup>45</sup> The drainage plans for Township 30 South, Range 36 East (36 square miles of land in Brevard County), were never implemented.<sup>46</sup>

On October 15, 1910, the Fellsmere Farms Company held a meeting to amend its charter to establish its principal office and place of business in Fellsmere.<sup>47</sup> On November 22, 1910, the company registered with the State of New York.<sup>48</sup>

At the December 6, 1910, Board of Directors meeting, General Manager Ernest H. Every reported that the railroad (from Sebastian to Fellsmere) had been thoroughly repaired, was in excellent working order, and that the rails for the extension to the canal line had been ordered. He also said that two excavators and the boiler for the third had been delivered and were being erected near the railroad. After December 25, 1910, the excavators would move under their own power to the canal site. Two other excavators had been shipped and it was hoped that the dredge would be shipped in December. Suitable wells and pumping

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<sup>42</sup> Hensley, Donald R., Jr. The Critters of Fellsmere, The Story of the Fellsmere and Trans Florida Central Railroad, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Bartow, FL: Tap Lines, 2017, p. 4, and Historic Properties Associates. "1995 Historic Properties Survey of Fellsmere, Florida", St. Augustine, FL, September 1995.

<sup>43</sup> Sebastian Area Historical Society. Tales of Sebastian. Keyes, George. "Steamboating" Sebastian, FL, 1990, p. 89-91.

<sup>44</sup> *Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere Sebastian Road is Completed", June 17, 1916, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Fellsmere Farms Company Minutes, September 16, 1910, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Diagram Illustrating Drainage System of the Fellsmere Farms Tract of 115,000 acres", February 21, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *The St. Lucie County Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "New Application for Amended Charter", December 2, 1910, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> New York State Secretary of State's Office Incorporation Filing for Fellsmere Farms Company, November 22, 1910.

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stations were being established along the canal right-of-way to supply the excavators with water. Subsidiary ditching at right angles to the drainage laterals (canals) was to be carried out by means of a type of machine similar to the Buckeye Ditcher which had been proven to work in the southern part of Florida.<sup>49</sup>

By December 1910, four railroad buildings were completed and the first commercial building, the W. C. Braddock Building, was built at the southwest corner of South Carolina Avenue and North Pine Street in Fellsmere. Work started on clearing land and developing the Town of Fellsmere and surveying the surrounding area around the town.<sup>50</sup>

On June 13, 1911, the Fellsmere Farms Company filed a "Limited Dedication" to the public in St. Lucie County. The company made known its intention to construct a complete drainage system for the unsurveyed part of Township 31 South, Range 37 East. It was to be incorporated with the large comprehensive drainage system for four townships: Township 32, Range 37; Township 31, Range 36; Township 32, Range 36; and Township 30, Range 36."<sup>51</sup>

The Fellsmere Farms Company initially appropriated \$1,000,000 for a complete drainage system in the Fellsmere Farms property for stormwater runoff to flow strictly by gravity without the use of pumps.<sup>52</sup> The drainage system was designed to lower the water table by five feet below the ground surface over the entire property.<sup>53</sup> Pieces of the Lidgerwood Machinery Company draglines (excavators) were brought into Fellsmere on railroad flat cars and assembled west of town.<sup>54</sup>

In early January 1911, four large Lidgerwood-Crawford draglines began excavating the 4-½ mile Outlet Canal and 8 mile Main Canal along the St. Lucie/Brevard County line. Each dragline had the capacity to excavate 1,200 cubic yards per day.<sup>55</sup> The Main and Outlet Canals were 122 feet wide forming a canal 8 to 18 feet deep. Both provided one continuous

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<sup>49</sup> Fellsmere Farms Company Minutes, New York City, December 6, 1910, p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., December 6, 1910, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Fellsmere Farms Company Limited Dedication, June 13, 1913, Plat Book 2, Pages 1 and 2, Public Records of St. Lucie County, FL.

<sup>52</sup> *Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "The Fellsmere Sales Company Advertisement", July 25, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], "Rinker's Florida Land Progress", May 25, 1911, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *The St. Lucie County Tribune* [Ft. Pierce, FL], "Fellsmere," December 2, 1910.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., "Fellsmere", December 2, 1910; *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], "Rinker's Florida Land Progress", May 25, 1911, p. 8; Patterson, Gordon. "Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere," Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997, p. 9.

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12-½ mile drainage canal that conveyed water eastward to the St. Sebastian River.<sup>56</sup>

(The Outlet and Main Canals are south and parallel to the C-54 Canal, located just south of the Brevard /Indian River County line). The canals were cut at a rate of one mile per month.<sup>57</sup>

Three 40 foot wide by 90 foot long American Steel Dredge Company dredges with bucket capacities of 2-½ cubic yards were brought in pieces and assembled.<sup>58</sup> Assembly of the first dredge was started in May 1911, and dredging commenced in July 1911.<sup>59</sup> Four major north-south canals named “Laterals U, S, Q, and M” were dredged. These 12-mile-long canals drained all 144 square miles of the Fellsmere Farms Company property in St. Lucie County northward into the Main Canal that flowed east into the Outlet Canal. The Outlet Canal emptied into the west fork of the St. Sebastian River, northwest of Sebastian near Roseland.<sup>60</sup> All of the canals still exist today. The steam-powered draglines and three colossal dredges (the Fellsmere, the Governor Broward, and the St. Lucie) worked round the clock, 365 days per year.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to the dredges, large Buckeye ditching machines were used to excavate smaller east-west ditches which ran into the laterals.<sup>62</sup> One Buckeye machine could dig a ditch 9-½ feet on top and 2-½ feet on the bottom, 2-½ feet deep. The machine could excavate 2,500 cubic yards per mile and could dig a half mile per day.<sup>63</sup> The J. G. White Company engineers designed a drainage system consisting of 48 east-west ditches. Each ditch was spaced ¼ mile apart starting from Ditch 1 (south of the Main Canal) consecutively heading south for a distance of 12 miles. All ditches drained into the wide lateral canals.<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], “Rinker’s Florida Land Progress”, May 25, 1911, p. 8; Patterson, Gordon. “Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere,” Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], “Rinker’s Florida Land Progress”, May 25, 1911, p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> *St. Lucie County Tribune* [Ft. Pierce, FL], “Fellsmere Progress Attracts Visitors,” February 23, 1911, p 1; and *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], “Rinker’s Florida Land Progress”, May 25, 1911, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> *The Altmont Journal* [Altmont, Kansas], “Rinker’s Florida Land Progress”, May 25, 1911, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Diagram Illustrating Drainage System of the Fellsmere Farms Tract of 115,000 acres”, February 21, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Siewert, Walter A. A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now Fellsmere Water Control District). Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 2; and *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Progress of Drainage”, March 7, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Siewert, Walter A. A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now Fellsmere Water Control District). Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, pp. 2-5.

<sup>63</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Fellsmere Farms Will Be Famous”, February 21, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Plat of the Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision, Plat Book 2, Pages 1 and 2, Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida; *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Diagram Illustrating Drainage System of the Fellsmere



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engineers designed the drainage system to handle 0.10 inches of runoff per 24 hours over a watershed area of 465 square miles which is the watershed draining into Blue Cypress Lake (known as Lake Wilmington at the time Fellsmere was developed).<sup>65</sup> Present Florida Department of Transportation rainfall-intensity-duration- frequency curves for Indian River County shows a cumulative rainfall of 7.44 inches per 24 hours for a 10 year storm event and 8.64 inches per 24 hours for a 25 year storm event.<sup>66</sup> Of course, the J. G. White Company drainage engineers did not have accurate rainfall data at the time they designed the drainage system. The ¼" runoff used for the design of the Fellsmere drainage system proved woefully inadequate within a few years after development of Fellsmere had started.

The Vero Press edition of April 22, 1927, published a letter by Dominique Dominici, who was the former Assistant Manager of the Security Underwriters Corporation and later the Assistant Sales Manager of the Fellsmere Sales Company (when the entire sales force from Chattanooga, Tennessee was moved to Fellsmere).<sup>67</sup> Dominici wrote: "*Fellsmere was recognized as the cornerstone of Florida's earliest drainage development, and is in fact the foremost drainage project undertaken by private capital in the State* (of Florida)."<sup>68</sup>

The 144 square miles of land within St. Lucie County (four townships) was platted and recorded as the "Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision" on April 11, 1911, in the public records of St. Lucie County.<sup>69</sup> On July 31, 1911, the "Town of Fellsmere" was platted.<sup>70</sup>

During the latter part of 1910, Richard A. Conkling, Superintendent of the Fellsmere Farms Company Demonstration Farm, started cultivating a 1240 foot by 619 foot (17.62 acre) farm between Bay and Oak Streets and south of the mainline track of the Fellsmere Railroad to New York Avenue.<sup>71</sup> Prospective landowners who rode the train from Sebastian to

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Farms Tract of 115,000 acres", February 21, 1912, p. 1; and Map of Indian River County, Florida, prepared by R.D. Carter, Vero Beach, FL, 1946.

<sup>65</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Diagram Illustrating Drainage System of the Fellsmere Farms Tract of 115,000 acres", February 21, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> FL Dept. of Transportation Zone 7 Rainfall-Intensity-Duration- Frequency Curves, 2024.

<sup>67</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "The Security Underwriters Corporation Advertisement", February 21, 1912, p. 4; and Ibid., "News, Notes, and Personals", July 10, 1913, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "The Foundation of Florida's Drainage and Small Unit Farm Development," April 22, 1927, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Plat of the Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision, Plat Book 2, Pages 1 and 2, Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.

<sup>70</sup> Plat of the Town of Fellsmere, Plat Book 2, Pages 3 and 4, Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.

<sup>71</sup> *St. Lucie Tribune*, "Fellsmere", December 2, 1910; *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere's Thrifty Demonstration Farm", March 7, 1912, p. 4; and Town of Fellsmere, Descriptions of Improved Lots, Town Demonstration Farm, Blocks C,D,E, F, 21,40,41, and 60; 1915.

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Fellsmere could see the wonders of Fellsmere's rich organic soil in the Demonstration Farm as the train pulled into Fellsmere.<sup>72</sup> Crops such as tomatoes (800 crates per acre), peas, beans, beets, onions, turnips, cauliflower, cabbages, lettuce, okra, watermelons, cantaloupes, cucumbers, squash, eggplants, peppers, celery, strawberries, radishes, potatoes, spinach, and many other vegetables and fruits were grown on the farm. Sugar cane grew as high as 15 feet (yielding 40 tons to an acre at the Demonstration Farm), making it the largest yield of any test crop.<sup>73</sup> Celery as long as 18" was grown.<sup>74</sup>

Fellsmere's rich organic soil made it possible for almost any vegetable and citrus fruit to grow. Fellsmere gained a reputation throughout the United States and even Europe for its produce. Settlers came almost immediately to see for themselves and many bought 5, 10, 20, and 40 acre tracts to start farming Fellsmere.<sup>75</sup> Baron Oscar Von Loo and Leopold Van Acker of Belgium and E.C. Turner of New York, Brussels, Paris, and London visited Fellsmere in April 1912. Baron Von Loo was a promoter and financier. He brought Van Acker, a horticulturist and soils expert, who came to Fellsmere to examine the soils and climatic conditions. Van Acker and his brother owned 150 greenhouses in Belgium. E. C. Turner was a financier associated with Baron Von Loo in developing multi-million dollar developments throughout the world. Before returning to Belgium, Baron Von Loo bought a farm and entered into a contract to have a house built.<sup>76</sup> In August 1912, Captain Fred Hunter, Assistant Surveyor General of India came to Fellsmere and looked at the Demonstration Farm.<sup>77</sup>

In 1910, the Fellsmere Farms Company built a one story "Farm House" at the southeast corner of New York Avenue and Oak Street that could comfortably accommodate 100 guests.<sup>78</sup> It had a wrap-around porch on the north and west sides. The Farm House also hosted social events there such as picnics, concerts, dances, speeches, parties, and dinners.<sup>79</sup> James Martell, Sales Manager of the Fellsmere Sales Company, was usually the

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<sup>72</sup> Patterson, Gordon. "Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere's Thrifty Demonstration Farm", March 7, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Walter A. Siewert Collection, Photo of Baron Von Loo holding a yardstick next to celery stalks in April 1912, Indian River County Main Library Archives, Vero Beach Florida.

<sup>75</sup> Patterson, Gordon. "Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997, p. 10. Plat of the Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision, Plat Book 2, Pages 1 and 2, Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.

<sup>76</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Baron Von Loo Visits Fellsmere", April 18, 1912, p. 1, and

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, "News, Notes, and Personals", August 8, 1912, p. 3

<sup>78</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Selling of Fellsmere Farms is in Good Hands", February 21, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* (Fellsmere, FL), "Picnic at Farm House", July 11, 1912, p.1, "Enjoyable Concert at the Farm House", Sept. 19, 1912, p. 4; "Thanksgiving Day Greatly Enjoyed", Dec. 12, 1912, p.4; "Fellsmere Band", June 26,

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host for these events.<sup>80</sup>

At the end of 1910, Fellsmere was described as a “city of tents because many families lived in tents while waiting for their houses to be built.”<sup>81</sup> In the early part of 1911, the Fellsmere Farms Company completed the two story, 34 foot by 60 foot Fellsmere Inn (at the northeast corner of Broadway and New York Avenue) for the purpose of housing investors, home-seekers, families waiting for their houses to be built, and workers.<sup>82</sup> The Inn was moved twice from its original location - once in April 1915 and again in April 1924, its present location today.<sup>83</sup>

Daily train service from the Florida East Coast Railroad in Sebastian to Fellsmere assured that the Fellsmere Inn was filled to capacity during the early days of development.<sup>84</sup> The Fellsmere Inn is the oldest and only remaining wooden building on Broadway built by the Fellsmere Farms Company. As of 2024, it is a private residence that is not open to the public.

Initially, the Fellsmere Railroad ran two trains with woodburning engines per day to Sebastian connecting with Florida East Coast Railway Train No. 29, a southbound train, and No. 30, a northbound train. Train No. 30 went through Sebastian about 11:30 a. m. and No. 29 went through around 4:30 p.m.<sup>85</sup> The Fellsmere Railroad train took 45 minutes to travel the 10 miles between Fellsmere and Sebastian because there was a scheduled stop at the Sebastian River Bridge.<sup>86</sup>

On March 12, 1911, the first post office was established in the Vickers Brothers business building at the north end of Broadway. The back part of the Vickers Building was the W. C. Braddock building which was completed in December 1910. The Davis Department Store was located on the first floor of the building as was the post office, and the second floor

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1913, p. 4; “News, Notes, and Personals”, Feb. 3, 1917, p. 5; “News, Notes, and Personals”, April 27, 1918, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* (Fellsmere, FL), “Mr. Martell Gone to Canada”, July 20, 1913, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *The St. Lucie Tribune* [Ft. Pierce, FL], “Fellsmere”, December 2, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, December 30, 1910, p. 3, “Fellsmere Demonstrations”, May 2, 1912, p. 2; “The Farm House”, December 26, 1912, p. 1; “Homeseeker’s Rates”, October 30, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* (Fellsmere FL), “Building Improvements”, April 10, 1915, p. 1, and *The Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere Notes”, April 24, 1924, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “*Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere*” Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997, p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Newman, Anna Pearl Leonard. Stories of Early Life Along the Indian River, “The 1910s”, Stuart Daily News, Stuart, FL, 1953, pp. 25 and 28.

<sup>86</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Fellsmere Railroad Time Card”, February 21, 1912, p. 4

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the building housed the Woodmen of the World, Eastern Star, and International Order of the Odd Fellows.<sup>87</sup>

By January 1, 1912, 14 buildings had been constructed within the Fellsmere town limits which limits were approximately one square mile, although it was not a true square.<sup>88</sup>

Following the completion of the Fellsmere Inn, more commercial buildings were built on North Broadway. Originally, most houses were built along New York Avenue and adjacent side streets because artesian Well No. 1 (a 4" diameter well approximately 400 feet deep) supplied water to houses in that area. Artesian Well No. 1 (which is still in existence) is located at the northeast corner of New York Avenue and Myrtle Street. It is shown on the plat of the Town of Fellsmere.<sup>89</sup>

During November and December 1912, an eight room bungalow was built at the northeast corner of New York Avenue and Oak Street. It was to be used by women who came to Fellsmere to buy farms in the Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision.<sup>90</sup>

By November 1912, the East Coast Lumber and Supply Company built three long lumber sheds, an office, and a warehouse at the north end of town. The lumber yard covered three acres of ground. Lumber was brought in by the Fellsmere Railroad on an industrial siding.<sup>91</sup> D. H. Saunders, Manager of the East Coast Lumber and Supply Company, said, *"Every house built in Fellsmere was frame with pine siding and cypress shingles. In no time at all I had sold enough lumber to house 1,500 people. It was quite a thrill."*<sup>92</sup> All commercial buildings in the early days of Fellsmere were also constructed of wood. Unfortunately, many of them burned down or became dilapidated over time and had to be demolished. Today, the only remaining wooden buildings in the Fellsmere downtown historic district from its early days of development (1911-1925) are the Fellsmere Inn (completed in 1911), the First Methodist-Episcopal Church (now the Fellsmere Historical Church) completed in 1924, and the Fellsmere Estates Corporation administration building (now Marsh Landing Restaurant)

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<sup>87</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "A Disastrous Fire Visits Fellsmere", October 5, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "The Population of Fellsmere is 503", January 23, 1913, p. 1; and Plat Book 2, pp. 3 & 4, St. Lucie County Public Records, July 31, 1911.

<sup>89</sup> Plat of the Town of Fellsmere, Plat Book 2, Pages 3 and 4, Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.

<sup>90</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "News, Notes, and Personals", October 31, 1912, p.3; and November 14, 1912, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., "Fellsmere Lumber Yard is Assured"; "News, Notes, and Personals", November 14, 1912, p. 3; and "Fellsmere Lumber Yard", October 31, 1912, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., "News, Notes, and Personals", May 1, 1913, p. 3.; and *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Despite Planning Fellsmere's Boom Collapses In Flood", June 2, 1985, p. 8.

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completed in 1925. The Fellsmere Estates Corporation building appears to be a masonry building from its stucco exterior but actually it has a wood frame.<sup>93</sup>

The Fells wanted Fellsmere to be a progressive, forward thinking town. Fellsmere became the first master planned community in Indian River County (then St. Lucie Co. in 1911).<sup>94</sup> It had the first public water system, power and ice plant, telephone system, bank, concrete sidewalks, and paved roads.<sup>95</sup> Fellsmere also had the first masonry school building, library building, public swimming pool, tennis courts, golf course, and movie theatre, all within seven years from the start of its development.<sup>96</sup> Fellsmere was culturally minded as well. Besides having a church, Fellsmere had a bi-weekly newspaper, choral society, music club, operatic society, drama club, athletic association, library association, tennis club, baseball club, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, The Masons, Order of the Eastern Star, Royal Neighbors, Woodmen of the World, and many other community organizations.<sup>97</sup> Fellsmere also had horse and mule races in Washington Park which was between North Cypress and Maple Streets and New York and Pennsylvania Avenues.<sup>98</sup> Washington Park had a 50 foot wide elliptical race track within its 600 foot by 680 foot perimeter.<sup>99</sup> It had a grandstand and bandstand. Horse races were held in the afternoon.<sup>100</sup> Washington Park is now the site of the Fellsmere Elementary School which opened its doors on March 29, 1982.<sup>101</sup>

The Fellsmere Farmer was Fellsmere's first newspaper; its first edition was published on February 21, 1912.<sup>102</sup> The Fellsmere Farmer reported all the events of the day and Fellsmere's development progress in detail. Under the "News, Notes, and Personal"

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<sup>93</sup> Florida Master Site File No. IR00877 .

<sup>94</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "The Story of Fellsmere's Great Drainage Advance", March 18, 1916, p.8.

<sup>95</sup> Sebastian Area Historical Society. *Even More Tales of Sebastian*. Sebastian, FL, 2011, p. 61.

<sup>96</sup> *Fellsmere Flyer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere's First", Mid-August 1982, p. 1

<sup>97</sup> *Vero Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Pioneer Fellsmere", August 16, 1981, p. 22A; and *The Fellsmere Tribune* , "Church and Club Directory", March 4, 1916, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Newman, Anna Pearl Leonard. *Stories of Early Life Along the Indian River*, "The 1910s", Stuart Daily News, Stuart, FL, 1953, p. 26; and the Plat of the Town of Fellsmere, Plat Book 2, Pages 3 and 4, Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.

<sup>99</sup> Plat Book 2, Pages 3 and 4, Plat of the Town of Fellsmere, July 31, 1911, Public Records of Indian River County, FL; *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Plan Improvements in Vicinity of Park", August 5, 1916, p. 1; *Ibid.*, And "Everything Ready for Big Celebration – "Baseball, Horse Races, & Old Fashioned BBQ for September 14", September 9, 1914, p. 1.

Fellsmere City Council Minutes of August 13, 1935.

<sup>100</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL ], "Fellsmere Will Entertain Big Crowd July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926, p. 1, and Fellsmere City Council Minutes of August 13, 1935.

<sup>101</sup> Commemorative Plaque on the wall of the Fellsmere Elementary School Bearing the Date of March 29, 1982 when the school opened.

<sup>102</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], Volume 1, No.1, February 21, 1912, p.p. 1 & 2.

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section, the newspaper reported all of the social events such as who came to town and who departed. It contained a plethora of information about Fellsmere and Fellsmere Farms. The Fellsmere Farmer was replaced by the Fellsmere Tribune in January 1914. Publication of the Fellsmere Tribune continued until November 12, 1921, after which there were never any more daily newspapers published in Fellsmere.<sup>103</sup>

On July 11, 1912, the Fellsmere Farmer newspaper reported that *"A large water main has been substituted for a small one laid some time ago by the Fellsmere Farms Company and the new pipe now supplies water to residents from the vicinity of the well eastward as far as the Fellsmere Inn."*<sup>104</sup> The Fellsmere Inn was 2,250 feet (approximately ½ mile) east of Well No.1. The water main was located along New York Avenue and ran directly east to the Fellsmere Inn at the northeast corner of North Broadway and New York Avenue.<sup>105</sup>

In September 1912, the Fellsmere Farms Company was formed with headquarters at 55 Liberty Street, New York, New York. E. Nelson Fell assumed the presidency of the company. Before the formation of the Fellsmere Sales Company, real estate sales were transacted by the Security Underwriters Corporation whose headquarters was in Chattanooga, Tennessee.<sup>106</sup>

By November 1912, Demonstration Farm Superintendent Richard Conkling had planted a second demonstration muck farm at the junction of the Fellsmere Railroad and Lateral "U", approximately two miles west of town. Crops of cauliflower, cabbage, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, cucumbers, squash, beans, peas, beets, turnips, and radishes were planted in the beginning of November and were doing well in the rich soil by the end of November. Corn, Irish potatoes, sugar cane, cotton, oranges, grapefruit, figs, guavas, persimmons, avocados, mangoes, peaches, and plums were to be planted later by Conkling.<sup>107</sup>

The Fellsmere Sales Company office was built on the southwest corner of New York Avenue starting in December 1912, and by January 20, 1913, William L. Dreier, Director of Sales for the Fellsmere Sales Company, and his entire staff from Chattanooga, Tennessee, had relocated to the new facility.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], Volume VII, No.5, November 12, 1921, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "News, Notes, and Personals", July 11, 1912, p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> 1995 Historical Properties Survey of Fellsmere, FL, Historic Properties Associates, St. Augustine, FL, Sept. 1995, "Area Surveyed in Fellsmere" Map in Appendix Showing 38 Historic Houses and Buildings in close proximity to New York Avenue between Myrtle Street and Broadway.

<sup>106</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere Sales Company Formed", September 19, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, "Growing Truck In Muck", November 28, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, "News, Notes, and Personals", December 26, 1912, p. 3; and "Director Dreier Arrives", January 23, 1913, p. 1.

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As of January 1, 1913, Fellsmere had a total of 61 buildings with the addition of 36 more residences, three stores, and eight other buildings. Its population had grown to 503. During January and February 1913, construction of a dozen more buildings including a restaurant, a store, a freight depot, two warehouses, and a number of residences were scheduled to start.<sup>109</sup> After February 1913, more businesses opened up including a bank, a packinghouse, several grocery stores, a meat market, two hotels, a boarding house, and an ice cream parlor. The Union Church (now known as the Fellsmere Community Bible Church) was built in early 1913 by local builder Victor Hadin at the northwest corner of Hickory Street and County Road 512. It is the oldest church in Fellsmere and the oldest church having continuous worship services in Indian River County. Reverend Fletcher D. Baker was the first minister.

On April 3, 1913, the first section of the J. G. Carter, R. L. James, and M. E. Hall Subdivision was platted on Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision Tracts 1439 and 1440 northeast of the platted limits for the Town of Fellsmere.<sup>110</sup> Carter, James, and Hall were all high-level employees of the Fellsmere Farms Company. This was the first subdivision consisting of 100 lots exclusively reserved for Afro-Americans residents. Two later additions (one in 1914 and one in 1949), added 74 lots and 56 lots respectively for a total of 250 lots in what is commonly referred to today as the “Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision”<sup>111</sup>. Prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 being passed by Congress and signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision remained as an exclusive African American subdivision.

On June 3, 1913, Oscar Crosby resigned from the Fellsmere Farms Company Board of Directors and E. Nelson Fell became president of the company.<sup>112</sup> E. Nelson Fell continued to serve as the president of the Fellsmere Sales Company.<sup>113</sup>

On June 6, 1913, Mrs. John (Delitha) Boswell came from Washington, Kansas, by train to

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<sup>109</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “The Population of Fellsmere is 503”, January 23, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Plat of J.G. Carter, R.L. James, and M.E. Hall Subdivision recorded on April 3, 1913 in Plat Book 3, Page 2 of the Public Records of St. Lucie County, Florida.

<sup>111</sup> Plat of Hall, Carter, James Subdivision recorded on July 2, 1914, in Plat Book 3, Page 31, of the Public Records of St. Lucie County, FL; Plat of Lincoln Park Subdivision recorded on February 27, 1926 in Plat Book 1, Page 60, of the Public Records of Indian River County, FL; and Plat of “A Subdivision Plat of Fellsmere Farms Company Lot No. 1353 in Township 31 South, Range 37 East, Indian River County recorded on June 13, 1949 in Plat Book 2, Page 98, of the Public Records of Indian River County, FL.

<sup>112</sup> The Fellsmere Farms Company Minutes Book, June 24, 1913, p. 253.

<sup>113</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “New York Offices Come to Fellsmere”, July 10, 1913, p. 1, and “News, Notes, and Personals”, September 19, 1912, p. 3.

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Fellsmere to join her husband who had come to Fellsmere the day before. Sadly, just 24 hours after her arrival, she died of a heart attack at age 53. Delitha was the first person to die in Fellsmere. Reverend Baker of the Fellsmere Union Church officiated at the funeral which was conducted at the Farm House on June 8, 1913. Delitha was buried in the Sebastian cemetery, since it was her husband's wish that she would be interred near Fellsmere as it was his intention to establish their future home in Fellsmere.<sup>114</sup> At that time, Fellsmere did not have a cemetery.

On June 15, 1913, the Fellsmere Electric Light and Ice Plant lit the entire town whose houses had been previously wired with knob and tube wiring in anticipation that Fellsmere would someday have its own electric generating plant. The plant was capable of lighting 500 homes.<sup>115</sup> Electricity generated from the plant was made available to residents of Fellsmere in the early evening. At 10:30 p.m., the plant operator would lower the electrical output of the plant to dim lights in Fellsmere. He had the lights blink twice in warning and then turned the power off shortly after.<sup>116</sup> Ice from the plant was delivered by a mule driven wagon.<sup>117</sup>

Upon visiting the Town of Fellsmere in July 1913, Sheriff Dan Carleton of St. Lucie County said that Fellsmere was the second largest town in St. Lucie County, and he expected it would be larger than Ft. Pierce within a few years.<sup>118</sup> Unfortunately, due to a catastrophic rainfall over the weekend of July 31 - August 1, 1915, Fellsmere suffered a severe setback in its development that prevented it from overtaking Ft. Pierce in population. Contrary to a local rumor, Fellsmere never became the county seat of St. Lucie County.

In 1913, the Fellsmere Farmers' Producers Union recognized the need for an additional drainage canal (lateral) just west of Fellsmere, and made it known to the Fellsmere Farms Company. On July 3, 1913, General Manager Ernest H. Every of the Fellsmere Farms Company sent a letter to the Farmers' Producers Union stating that although the engineers never advised the Company to excavate another lateral, the Company agreed to build the "Park Lateral" in deference to the wishes of the settlers.<sup>119</sup> The Park Lateral runs from Ditch 34 (about 3.75 miles south of Fellsmere) north to the Main Canal, approximately 1600 feet

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<sup>114</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere's First Sorrow", June 12, 1913, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., "Fellsmere Lighted With Electricity", June 26, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Newman, Anna Pearl Leonard. Stories of Early Life Along the Indian River, "The 1910s", Stuart Daily News, Stuart, FL, 1953, pp. 15 and 22.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>118</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "News, Notes, and Personals, July 10, 1913. p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., "Park Lateral", July 10, 1913, p. 1.



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west of the original Fellsmere city limits.<sup>120</sup>

The Fellsmere State Bank was opened on July 15, 1913, by Charles Piffard, E. Nelson Fell's close associate who had accompanied him to Siberia in 1902. The masonry bank building cost \$6,000 to build at the northwest corner of Colorado Avenue and Broadway, the main north-south artery in Fellsmere. Investors purchased capital stock in the bank worth \$25,000, and E. Nelson Fell served on the bank's board of directors. The bank building is still in existence and is now the Harry T. and Harriet V. Moore Community Center, named after two slain civil rights activists in the 1950s. The funds to restore and renovate the bank building were provided by the Harry T. and Harriet V. Moore Foundation.

In July 1913, the Fellsmere Farms Company and the Fellsmere Sales Company Board of Directors made the decision to transfer their head offices from New York to Fellsmere.<sup>121</sup>

In August 1913, C. Bardin of Jacksonville set up a plaster, cement, and concrete plant at the north end of Pine Street near the Fellsmere Railroad. C. Bardin entered into contract with the Fellsmere Farms Company to construct sidewalks on Broadway and Pennsylvania Avenue (present day County Road 512), South Carolina Avenue, Colorado Avenue, Wyoming Avenue, and many other streets in Fellsmere.<sup>122</sup>

In September 1913, a spacious garage was added on the south side of the Farm House to shelter two Ford automobiles which the sales force could use to show prospective buyers around town.<sup>123</sup>

On October 22, 1913, the plat of the Homewood Subdivision, immediately south of the Fellsmere City limits, was completed by the Fellsmere Farms Company. However, the plat of the subdivision offering the lots for sale didn't appear until approximately one year later in the November 7, 1914, edition of the Fellsmere Tribune. Homewood Subdivision was 2,580 feet wide by 6,793 feet long consisting of 40 nine-acre tracts. There were three east-west roads and ten north-south roads all having 40-foot-wide rights-of-way. Lot sizes ranged from 0.5 acres to 0.62 acres with 16 lots per tract.<sup>124</sup> Homewood Subdivision was never developed as platted and the roads shown on the plat were never constructed. On October 16, 1913, the Fellsmere Sales Company announced that lots in the new town of Broadmoor were on sale. Broadmoor was originally named "Deepland" but since the

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<sup>120</sup> Map of Indian River County, Florida, prepared by R.D. Carter, Vero Beach, FL, 1946.

<sup>121</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "New York Offices Come to Fellsmere", July 10, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, "New Industry Comes to Fellsmere", August 21, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, "For Viewing Lands", September 18, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Homewood", November 7, 1914, p. 8.

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Fellsmere Sales Company staff found that there was another town by the same name, the name of the new town was changed to "Broadmoor." Broadmoor (formerly Deepland) was located in Township 31, Range 37, five miles west of Fellsmere. It was one of the first towns to be established in a "muck district" in Florida, and was directly online on the extension of the Fellsmere Railroad at the junction of Lateral Q.<sup>125</sup> Broadmoor was  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile square (360 acres), consisted of 40 acre tracts, had twelve streets running north and south, and six avenues running east and west. Broadmoor was platted with nine business blocks and 57 residential blocks.<sup>126</sup>

Another town named "Grassland" was planned to be built but it never got off the drawing board. Grassland was to be the same size as Broadmoor. It was to be located in Township 32, Range 37, approximately 5½ miles south of the town of Fellsmere, and ½ mile east of Lateral "U" between ditches 35 and 40. The Fellsmere Railroad would have had to build a southerly extension off the mainline to reach Grassland.<sup>127</sup>

In November 1913, another stop at Kitching was added to the Fellsmere Railroad schedule per a request from a number of petitioners from the Eureka District near Roseland Road and the Wabasso-Sebastian Road intersection. Sylvanus Kitching, who had a general store on Main Street near the Florida East Coast Railway in Sebastian, had established a general store near the Wabasso-Sebastian Road intersection to serve the people in the area.<sup>128</sup>

In December 1913, the boring of a new well on Broadway had been completed and was ready for new water mains to be laid and connected to the well. A fine head of water was struck at 385 feet and boring was stopped at a depth of 405 feet.<sup>129</sup>

Marian Fell (oldest daughter of Fellsmere's founders E. Nelson and Anne Fell), was instrumental in founding the Fellsmere Library Association. On January 18, 1914, the first meeting of the "incorporators" of the Fellsmere Library Association was held during which the officers were formally elected.<sup>130</sup> The primary objective of the Association was to build and maintain a public library.<sup>131</sup> Marian Fell was a published translator who donated

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<sup>125</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "All of Fellsmere on Market Sept. 1", August 22, 1912, p. 1; "Broadmoor on the Market", October 16, 1913, p. 4; and 1911 Map of Fellsmere.

<sup>126</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Broadmoor Townsite Platted For Sale", October 30, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, "All of Fellsmere on Market Sept. 1, 1912", August 22, 1912, p. 1; and 1911 Map of Fellsmere.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, "News, Notes, and Personals", November 27, 1913, p. 3; and Sebastian Area Historical Society. Tales of Sebastian, Sebastian, FL, 1990, p. 65.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, "News, Notes, and Personals", December 20, 1913, p. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Fellsmere Library Association Minutes Book, January 18, 1914, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Cooper, Pamela J., "Marian Fell (1886-1935): Vero Beach, FL: self-published paper, 2004, p. 2.

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her publication royalties to the Association to fund the construction of the library at 63 North Cypress Street.<sup>132</sup> Marian undertook the translation of some of the works of the great Russian writer Anton Chekhov into English. Her own words provided an eloquent description of Chekhov's subject matter and at the same time evince her own keen insight into the Russia that was Chekhov's and, in a way, her own. In all, Marian Fell translated six of Chekhov's works.<sup>133</sup>

On January 15, 1914, the Fellsmere Water Company incorporated for the general purpose of drilling artesian wells, supplying water, laying pipes and mains, installing fire hydrants for fire protection, and any other incidental work to the operation of a water utility. Its initial capital stock was \$3000.<sup>134</sup>

On Saturday, March 14, 1914, the L.H. Eschman European Railway Circus rolled into Fellsmere for two performances, one at 2 p.m. and the other at 8 p.m. This was Fellsmere's first and only circus to come to town, and it was a first class one-ring show. It featured celebrated clowns of pantomime, contortionists, wire walkers, illusionists, equilibrists, and teeth ascensionists. The circus tents were pitched near the fertilizer warehouse on the north side of town. A great number of people attended the performances.<sup>135</sup>

By July 1914, the Fellsmere Farms Company divested its water utility business. The Fellsmere Water Company bought or leased all of the artesian wells, including Well No. 1, and all of the pipelines installed by the Fellsmere Farms Company. The Fellsmere Water Company later connected all of the Fellsmere Farms Company wells with its own to equalize the flow and also laid 3,500 feet of new water mains.<sup>136</sup>

On September 5, 1914, the "Plat of the Town of Broadmoor" was published in the Fellsmere Tribune showing all of the platted lots, streets, and two main parks - Lincoln and Jefferson Park. The main north south road was named "O' Fallon". Lots were offered for sale by the Fellsmere Sales Company. The plat of Broadmoor was recorded on December 9, 1912, in Plat Book 2, Page 9, in the public records of St. Lucie County, Florida.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Marian Fell Library, 1996, Continuation Sheet, Section 8, Page 1.

<sup>133</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], "Miss Fell's Translations", December 12, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], Ibid., "Fellsmere Water Company Incorporated", January 10, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., "First Railway Circus Coming", March 7, 1914, p. 5 and 6.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., "Personal and Local", July 4, 1914, p. 5, and August 1, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Broadmoor Site is Now Offered to the Public", September 5, 1914, p. 1; and "Plat of the Town of Broadmoor", September 5, 1914, p. 4.

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By December 5, 1914, the Max Mensch store in Broadmoor was open for business with a stock of goods.<sup>138</sup>

By the end of December 1914, A. E. Elliott had a contract to build a freighting steamboat for Max Mensch to operate on the canals in that region since the Fellsmere Railroad had not been extended to Broadmoor at the time.<sup>139</sup>

By January 1915, Fellsmere had a railroad, telegraph, company telephone, Union church, electric lights, ice plant, potable water system, post office, bank, two hotels besides the Farm House, lumber yard, concrete plant, packinghouse, school with approximately 125 pupils, three grocery stores, drug store, hardware and furniture store, two barber shops with baths, two shoemakers, laundry, bakery, jeweler, harness maker, plumber, two meat markets, restaurant, two real estate offices, citrus nursery, hay and feed store, several clubs and lodges, weekly newspaper, public library, a playhouse that showed movies, two tennis courts, baseball team, basketball team, and a dozen to 15 automobiles.<sup>140</sup> More than six miles of sidewalks were constructed.<sup>141</sup>

On January 9, 1915, Miss Vesta Harper consented to take charge of the new school that opened in Broadmoor.<sup>142</sup> On February 7, 1915, the new steamboat “Membro” was launched. It was used for transporting children to and from the Broadmoor school, for transporting goods, and for carrying pleasure parties through the canal system to Lake Wilmington (presently known as Blue Cypress Lake).<sup>143</sup>

By early 1915, Fellsmere had grown to a population to 896.<sup>144</sup> The time was right for Fellsmere to incorporate as a town. A meeting of the citizens was held on January 13, 1915, during which a “Committee of Incorporation” was appointed and attorney Patrick Vans Agnew (Marian Fell’s husband) presented relative merits of town charters under state law to all present.<sup>145</sup> The Committee of Incorporation again met in February 1915 with about 100 male electors in the Dixie Playhouse.<sup>146</sup> It was at this meeting that the male citizens of

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<sup>138</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL],, “Personal and Local”, December 5, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, “Personal and Local”, December 26, 1914, p.5

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, “Fellsmere’s Wonderful Record for Three Years”, January 9, 1915, p.1.

<sup>141</sup> Patterson, Gordon. *Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere*, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997“, p. 18.

<sup>142</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Personal and Local”, January 9, 1915, p.5.

<sup>143</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL],, “The Motorboat Membro Successfully Launched”, February 13, 1915.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, “The Story of Fellsmere’s Great Drainage Advance”, March 18, 1916, p.8.

<sup>145</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “The Charter of the Municipality of Fellsmere Adopted and its First Board of Commissioners Elected at Mass Meeting”, January 16, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL],, “Woman Suffrage in Fellsmere and How Obtained”, Jan. 27, 1917, p. 2.

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Fellsmere voted to accept the articles of incorporation.<sup>147</sup>

By unanimous vote, the citizens of Fellsmere approved the charter as prepared by Patrick Vans Agnew including the proposal that granted women the full and equal privilege for suffrage in the City's elections. The articles of incorporation (including the charter) were sent to the Florida legislature in the form of a bill for approval.<sup>148</sup>

Construction of a library in Fellsmere was started in February 1915 and completed in March 1915.<sup>149</sup> The library had its Grand Opening on May 1, 1915.<sup>150</sup> The library served as a popular site for lectures, recitals, public meetings, and a variety of functions hosted by the Fellsmere Library Association.<sup>151</sup> The Association named the building the "Marian Fell Library" in honor of Marian Fell, who, through her generosity, made it possible to build the library which still exists today.<sup>152</sup> It is owned by the City of Fellsmere, operated by the Indian River County Library System, and is the oldest library in Indian River County.

On April 23, 1915, the Florida Senate passed the Fellsmere charter bill unanimously.<sup>153</sup> On May 1, 1913, the Florida House of Representatives passed the Fellsmere charter bill by a vote of 26 to 16.<sup>154</sup> On May 12, 1915, Florida Governor Park Trammell signed the act that incorporated the Town of Fellsmere, and the charter immediately went into effect.<sup>155</sup> The City of Fellsmere became the first chartered municipality in what is now Indian River County (in 1915, Fellsmere was located in St. Lucie County).<sup>156</sup> Indian River County was created

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<sup>147</sup> Historical Marker for Woman's Suffrage in Fellsmere sponsored by the National Organization for Women, Indian River, and the Florida Department of State, 2004,

<sup>148</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Woman Suffrage in Fellsmere and How Obtained", January 27, 1917, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Personal and Local", February 13, 1915, p. 5; and Fellsmere Library Association Minutes Book, April 7, 1915, p. 35.

<sup>150</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "New Library Home Formally Dedicated", May 8, 1915, p. 1; and *Ibid.*, "News, Notes, and Personals", May 2, 1912, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Marian Fell Library, 1996, Continuation Sheet, Section 8, Page 2, and *Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers*, "Preservation Group Keeps Marian Fell Library Alive", April 27, 2008, p. B8.

<sup>152</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "New Library Home Formally Dedicated", May 8, 1915, p. 1; and *Ibid.*, "News, Notes, and Personals", May 2, 1912, p. 3.

<sup>153</sup> *The Tampa Tribune* [Tampa, FL], "Senators Endorse Votes For Women", April 24, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Charter Bill Passed House", May 2, 1915.

<sup>155</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Woman Suffrage in Fellsmere and How Obtained", January 27, 1917, p. 2; and Laws of Florida, Chapter 7154, "An Act to Establish the Municipality of the Town of Fellsmere Under the Commission System of Municipal Government, and to Prescribe its Jurisdiction and Powers", pp. 519-547.

<sup>156</sup> Laws of Florida, Chapter 7154, "An Act to Establish the Municipality of the Town of Fellsmere Under the Commission System of Municipal Government, and to Prescribe its Jurisdiction and Powers", pp. 519-547

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from the north end of St. Lucie County in 1925.<sup>157</sup>

The Fellsmere Charter appointed C. W. Talmadge as Chief Commissioner to serve until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of February 1916; George F. Green as Vice Commissioner to serve until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of February 1917; and Wallace Sherwood as Secretary Commissioner to serve until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of February 1918. Regular meetings of the Commission were to be held monthly on the second Tuesday of each month at an hour to be fixed by the Commission. The Chief Commissioner was given the jurisdiction for trial of all offenses against the town ordinances. The Commission gave the authority to appoint all officers and employees, including a City Manager, as may be necessary for good government of the town. The charter also provided for establishing and setting apart separate limits or districts for white and Negro residents. Whites and Negroes were prohibited from establishing a residence in each other's districts.<sup>158</sup>

On May 18, 1915, six days after Fellsmere was incorporated, a meeting was held at the law office of Talmadge and Baker on Broadway. At the meeting, Town of Fellsmere Commissioners C. W. Talmadge, George F. Green, and Wallace Sherwood were sworn into office by D. H. Saunders, a Florida notary public.<sup>159</sup> The new commissioners proceeded to adopt 32 rules for governance of the town. On May 18 and 19, 1915, a total of 39 ordinances were adopted by the three commissioners.<sup>160</sup>

On May 25, 1915, Vice Commissioner George F. Green resigned after serving only one week in office (no reason was given).<sup>161</sup> A special election was required to be held under the new charter to fulfill the unexpired term for the office of Vice Commissioner.<sup>162</sup> By the end of May 1915, the Fellsmere Railroad was extended another six miles just past Broadmoor.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Laws of Florida, Chapter 7154, "An Act to Establish the Municipality of the Town of Fellsmere Under the Commission System of Municipal Government, and to Prescribe its Jurisdiction and Powers", pp. 519-547; Chapter 10148, "An Act for Creation of Indian River County in the State of Florida, and for the Organization and Government Thereof", pp. 294-301.

<sup>158</sup> Laws of Florida, Chapter 7154, "An Act to Establish the Municipality of the Town of Fellsmere Under the Commission System of Municipal Government, and to Prescribe its Jurisdiction and Powers", pp. 519-547.

<sup>159</sup> Town of Fellsmere Commission Minutes, May 18, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., May 18 and 19, 1915, pp. 2-33.

<sup>161</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], May 25, 1915, p. 34.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., June 19, 1915, p. 35.

<sup>163</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Drainage Progress on Fellsmere Farms", May 29, 1915, p. 1.

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On June 17, 1915, the special election was held in Fellsmere to elect a new Vice Commissioner.<sup>164</sup> Since the charter allowed women to vote, Mrs. Zena Dreier, wife of William Dreier (Director of Sales for the Fellsmere Sales Company), became the first woman in all of Florida and south of the Mason Dixon Line to cast her ballot in a municipal election. E. Nelson Fell voted for the Fellsmere Farms Company, marking the first vote ever cast for a corporation in the United States.<sup>165</sup> As a result of the election on June 17, 1915, R.L. (Richmond Leigh) James, Auditor of the Fellsmere Farms Company, was elected as Vice Commissioner.<sup>166</sup> He was sworn into office on June 19, 1915.<sup>167</sup>

By the summer of 1915, the Fellsmere Farms Company had expended about \$1,500,000 on the drainage system for the Fellsmere Farms Subdivision. Unfortunately, the improvements made were insufficient to drain the land to prevent flooding during extreme storm events.<sup>168</sup> From July 31 to August 1, 1915, a low pressure trough that reached across Florida deposited 8.8 inches of rain on an already saturated Town of Fellsmere and surrounding Fellsmere Farms Company subdivision lands which overwhelmed the entire drainage system.<sup>169</sup> The resultant flooding caused Fellsmere Farms Subdivision landowners to abandon their lands defaulting on their loans. The Town of Broadmoor (five miles to the west of Fellsmere) was flooded under five feet of water.<sup>170</sup> According to Gilbert Barkoskie, a dredge operator for the Fellsmere Farms Company, *“water was over the floors in the homes and buildings in Broadmoor. Some families gathered on the railroad bank with their possessions and livestock and others were waiting on their porches, having stacked their personal effects and chickens up out of the water waiting for a boat to evacuate them.”*<sup>171</sup>

Broadmoor’s post office opened on April 6, 1915, but after the torrential rains, it was washed away and never found.<sup>172</sup> People were rescued by boats and the Fellsmere Railroad.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Town of Fellsmere Commission Minutes Book, June 17, 1915, p. 35.

<sup>165</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Women and Corporations Vote at Fellsmere Town”, July 3, 1915, p. 1, and Director Dreier Arrives”, January 23, 1913, p. 1; and Historical Marker for Woman’s Suffrage in Fellsmere sponsored by the National Organization for Women, Indian River, and the Florida Department of State, 2004.

<sup>166</sup> Town of Fellsmere Commission Minutes Book, June 17, 1915, p. 34.

<sup>167</sup> Town of Fellsmere Commission Minutes Book, June 19, 1915, p. 35.

<sup>168</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “The Story of Fellsmere’s Great Advance”, March 18, 1916, p. 8.

<sup>169</sup> Siewert, Walter A., *A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District*, Ft. Pierce, FL: self-published by Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 8.

<sup>170</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere: Rich in its Memories at 75”, March 8, 1986, p. 1C.

<sup>171</sup> *Fellsmere Flyer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Spotlight on: Mr. Barkoskie”, April 9, 1983, p. 1; and Thompson, William. Pioneer Chit-Chat, “High Water in Fellsmere”, Vero Beach, FL, August 30, 1981.

<sup>172</sup> Newman, Anna Pearl Leonard. Stories of Early Life Along the Indian River, “The 1910s”, “Fellsmere” by Weona Cleveland, Stuart Daily News, Stuart, FL, 1953, p. 15.

<sup>173</sup> Siewert, Walter A., *A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District*, Ft. Pierce, FL: self-published by Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 9.

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The town didn't die after the torrential rains of 1915 as many people in Fellsmere thought it did. St. Lucie County public records show that residents of Broadmoor were still voting in County elections in late 1918, but, by January 7, 1920, the Town of Broadmoor seemed to have been abandoned because there is no record of anyone voting in Precinct 6 (Broadmoor) in St. Lucie County.<sup>174</sup>

The July 31-August 1, 1915, deluge flooded Fellsmere, but the town eventually recovered. Unfortunately, the disastrous flood stagnated its growth. Consequently, landowners defaulted on their loans because their property was literally underwater.

E. Nelson Fell came down from his estate "Creedmoor" in Warrenton, Virginia, in September 1915 to try to save the Fellsmere Farms Company from bankruptcy but ultimately, he could not.<sup>175</sup>

After the flood of July 31-August 1, 1915, construction of the Fellsmere Public School started on August 20, 1915.<sup>176</sup> The bid to construct the school at 22 South Orange Street was awarded to Arthur F. Sanders, a Fellsmere contractor, on May 4, 1915, by the St. Lucie County School Board.<sup>177</sup> However, the school's construction was delayed for several months before funding could be obtained from the sale of bonds.

The Fellsmere Public School at 22 South Orange Street was designed by renowned architect Frederick Homer Trimble.<sup>178</sup> It is a 22,680 square foot, two-story yellow brick building designed to hold classes for Grades 1 through 12.<sup>179</sup> It is the largest brick building in Fellsmere and the only building that has a raised basement. Although Architect Trimble donated the plans for the Fellsmere Public School free of charge to the St. Lucie County School Board in 1915, he was hired by the Board at \$100 per month to oversee its construction during 1915 and 1916.<sup>180</sup>

Frederick Trimble was Canadian born but educated at Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Road Improvement Bonds Carried Every Precinct", January 10, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>175</sup> Fellsmere Farms Company Minutes, August 17, 1915, pp. 457 and 458.

<sup>176</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Plans Contemplate New Buildings at Early Date". August 14, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, "Contract Let for \$30,000 Building for Fellsmere Tues.", May 7, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>178</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Board Accepts Plans for Fellsmere School House", Feb. 20, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>179</sup> Evelyn Mudge, *Chronology of the Fellsmere Schools*, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>180</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Contract Let for \$30,000 Building for Fellsmere Tues.", May 7, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>181</sup> Blackburn, William Fremont. History of Orange County, Florida, Part II Biographical, E.O. Painter Printing Co., De Land, FL, 1927 p. 43.



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During the early 1900's, Trimble initially served as a Methodist missionary in Fuzhou, China.<sup>182</sup> Due to his wife's illness, the couple returned to the United States and he embarked on his architectural career here in Fellsmere, Florida, in August 1914.<sup>183</sup> He not only designed the Fellsmere Public School but many of the Fellsmere Railroad buildings and the original post office building on Broadway.<sup>184</sup> He also designed several structures in Vero Beach, Florida.<sup>185</sup>

Contractor Sanders' first order of construction for the Fellsmere Public School was to build a shortline railroad to transport heavy and large quantities of building materials to the school site. The "Fellsmere Shortline Railroad" (as the locals nicknamed it) started at the Fellsmere Railroad, north of South Carolina Avenue, and ran down the center of North Cypress Street, approximately ½ mile to the school site. By September 1915, Sanders' crews had completed the Fellsmere Shortline Railroad. A. F. Sanders had a special railcar built in Palatka to haul materials to the school on 4" x 4" heart-of-pine rails spiked to 2" x 8" crossties. The little railcar was shipped to Fellsmere on a Florida East Coast Railway flat car.<sup>186</sup>

Sanders crew began work began on the school's foundation during the last week in September 1915, and it was completed in mid-December 1915. Work on the first floor started immediately after completion of the foundation.<sup>187</sup> On January 31, 1916, the school's 1,900-pound cornerstone was laid under the direction of Fellsmere's Grand Masonic Lodge. There was a huge celebration for the laying of the cornerstone which contained a special memorial box to serve as a time capsule for future generations, so they could access the box and retrieve the items.<sup>188</sup>

The Fellsmere Public School was completed by September 1916 almost one year after the start of construction at a cost of \$40,000.<sup>189</sup> The Fellsmere Public School was the first

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<sup>182</sup> History of Florida: Past and Present, Vol. II, p. 224.

<sup>183</sup> Information provided by Pam Cooper, Archivist at the Indian River County Main Library, Vero Beach, FL, 2011, and the Declaration for Naturalization of 1915.

<sup>184</sup> Historic Property Associates. "1995 Historic Properties Survey of Fellsmere", St. Augustine, FL, Sept. 1995, p. 8.

<sup>185</sup> *The Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], "Vero to Have Hotel Costing \$300,000 This Year", July 10, 1924, p.1; Architect Completes Plans for New Theatre", January 17, 1924, p. 7; Beautiful Apartment Hotel to be Erected in Royal Park This Summer", May 22, 1924, p.5; and "Apartment House Will Be Erected", February 12, 1925, p. 1; and "Plans Fine Home in Royal Park", April 2, 1925, p. 1; and "Meyer Home Has Unusual Features", May 14, 1925.

<sup>186</sup> *Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Work on School House is Progressing Nicely", September 25, 1915.

<sup>187</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Work on School House is Progressing Nicely", September 25, 1915, p. 1; and "Personal and Local", December 11, 1915, p. 5.

<sup>188</sup> *The St. Lucie County Tribune* [Ft. Pierce, FL], Cornerstone of Fellsmere's New \$35,000 School Laid Monday", February 1, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere's Magnificent New \$40,000 School Building", Feb. 3, 1917, p. 1.

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masonry school building in Fellsmere and in what is now Indian River County.<sup>190</sup> It is the oldest public school “building” in existence in Indian River County.

The school’s doors opened to 136 students on October 2, 1916. Principal Anderson A. Price, Assistant Principal Ina C. Elder, and five women teachers, Miss Jesse M. Hunter (the first teacher in Fellsmere in 1912), Miss Neva M. Hunter, Mrs. A. A. (Lula) Price, Miss Ethel Jones, and Miss Agnes Helseth provided instruction for Grades 1 through 12.<sup>191</sup>

On October 11, 1915, Fellsmere Farms Company Chief Engineer Irwin S. Lhoyd completed a survey for land to be acquired for a cemetery by the Town of Fellsmere at the River Bridge (west of the wooden bridge on the Sebastian- Fellsmere Road over the south prong of the St. Sebastian River).<sup>192</sup> The land for the cemetery was located adjacent to and north of the Fellsmere Railroad right-of-way, approximately 3/8 of a mile west of the St. Sebastian River and five miles east of Fellsmere.<sup>193</sup> The land was high and dry, not like the land in and around Fellsmere that had a high water table at the time.

On May 1, 1916, the ladies of the Library Association held the first flower show of “The City of Roses” on the front lawn of the Marian Fell Library building on North Cypress Street. There were many exhibits and prizes awarded to participants. Roses held first place followed closely by Easter lilies. There were gladiolas, carnations, pansies, ferns, palms, cacti, marigolds, begonias, poppies, asters, daisies, and numerous other beauties. The ladies served punch, cake, ice cream, sandwiches, coffee, and more during the event. There was a Maypole dance in the afternoon followed by a laughable one-act play “Our Aunt from California” performed by the young ladies of the Library Association. The show was deemed a complete success.<sup>194</sup>

On May 9, 1916, the Town of Fellsmere adopted Ordinance No. 48 accepting 11.45 acres donated by the Fellsmere Farms Company for a municipal cemetery legally designated as “Evergreen Cemetery”, a name selected by the ladies of the Fellsmere Library Association. Section 5 of the ordinance divided the cemetery into two parts – one acre at the northeast corner for colored persons and the remainder for white persons.<sup>195</sup> Both sections were

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., “Marvelous Growth of County Schools”, December 9, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., “Local School Scheduled To Open On October 2<sup>nd</sup>”, Sept. 23, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>192</sup> Plan Showing Land to be Acquired for a Cemetery, February 8, 1916.

<sup>193</sup> Map of Indian River County, Florida, prepared by R.D. Carter, Vero Beach, FL, 1946.

<sup>194</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], May 1<sup>st</sup> Will be a Great Day for Famous Fellsmere”, April 29, 1916, p. 1; and “Fellsmere’s First May Day Celebration and Flower Show A Complete Success”, May 6, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>195</sup> “Town Commission Held Two Important Meetings”, April 15, 1916, p.1; “Town Commissioners in Regular Monthly Session “, May 14, 1914, p.1; and Fellsmere Town Commissioners Meeting Minutes Book, May 9, 1916, pp. 98 and 99.

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physically separated by a brook that ran from west to east to the south prong of the St. Sebastian River. The brook was the principal factor in renaming the cemetery in 1927. On April 5, 1927, the cemetery was dedicated as the “Brookside Cemetery”.<sup>196</sup> On September 17, 1998, the Fellsmere City Council officially renamed it as the “Fellsmere Brookside Historic Cemetery”.<sup>197</sup> The cemetery is no longer segregated as it was in the past. The road that was once the Fellsmere Railroad right-of-way in front and on the south side of the cemetery is now Dryden Avenue.

One of the largest tombstones in the Brookside Cemetery is for the Count (Hugh) and Countess (Kathleen) of Nuremburg (Germany). Weona Cleveland, Melbourne Times Staff Writer, in her writings in the book entitled “The 1910’s” recalled the following about an unusual couple who lived in Fellsmere many years ago: *“Somewhere in the 1940s, Fellsmere acquired two rather mysterious but illustrious residents. The Count and Countess of Nuremberg, Germany lived on Maple Street. Apparently, no one in the community became well acquainted with them, because hardly anyone to this day can recall their given or their surnames or anything else about them.”*

One resident of Fellsmere said the count *“was quite a ladies’ man”* but another said he was devoted to his wife. The count walked around town quite a bit, but the countess was ill most of the time and remained at home. She died in Fellsmere on May 1, 1967, and was buried in Brookside Cemetery. The count moved away and was not heard from again, but after his death on July 17, 1974, his body was brought back to be buried next to his wife. No one seemed to know why the royal couple was living in Fellsmere, if they had money, or what their source of income was.”<sup>198</sup>

As a matter of coincidence, Clarence F. “Korky” Korker’s wife Geraldine “Gerry” (both longtime residents of Fellsmere) went to the same high school (New Milford, Connecticut High School) that Ilona Winifred “Winnie” Nuremburg, the daughter of the Nuremburgs, attended. Winnie graduated in 1944 and Gerry graduated in 1946. Gerry Korker had a photo of Winnie Nuremburg in her high school yearbook and her address and phone number in New Milford, Connecticut.

Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka, a friend of both Gerry and Korky Korker, contacted Winnie Nuremburg and her brother Hugo in 2009 to inquire about the Count and Countess of Nuremburg. According to Hugo, his father Hugh Nuremburg came to Canada when Hugh

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<sup>196</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Burial Place Made Beautiful After Many Years”, April 6, 1927, p.1.

<sup>197</sup> Fellsmere City Council Meeting Minutes of September 17, 1998.

<sup>198</sup> Cleveland, Weona. The 1910s, Melbourne, FL.

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was 18 years old in 1913. Hugh's father was a baron in Germany but according to his son, Hugo, Hugh was not a count and Eva was not a countess. Eva grew up in New Milford, Connecticut. Hugh married Eva Brandt on May 3, 1924, when he was 31 years old and Eva was 19. Hugh opened and operated the Times Square Coffee Pot Restaurant in New Milford, Connecticut, until he retired around age 60. Hugh and Eva had three children - Walter Alfred, Ilona Winifred "Winnie", and Hugo. Unfortunately, Hugh became enamored with a waitress, Kathleen Flynn, at his restaurant and eventually married her after divorcing Eva. It was believed that Hugh and Kathleen moved to Fellsmere around 1953 but neither Winnie nor Hugo knew why. Nor did they know why their father called himself a "Count" and his second wife a "Countess", a mystery that may never be resolved and which lies with Hugh Nuremberg in the grave at the Fellsmere "Brookside" Cemetery.<sup>199</sup>

As of June 15, 1916, the Town Commissioners appointed F. W. Dole, former assessor for Fellsmere, as the first city manager at a salary of \$85 per month.<sup>200</sup> The appointment was in accordance with Section 16 of the Fellsmere Charter approved by the Florida legislature in 1915.<sup>201</sup>

During the third week of June 1916, E. Nelson Fell left Fellsmere for the final time to return to his estate "Creedmoor" in Warrenton, Virginia, approximately 40 miles west of Alexandria, Virginia.<sup>202</sup> He did, however, write a letter in December 1916, indicating his continued interest in Fellsmere.<sup>203</sup> Fell lived at Creedmoor until his death on March 25, 1928, when he was 70 years old but he traveled to several places such as North Carolina and Guatemala spending several months there working.<sup>204</sup> Following E. Nelson Fell's death in 1928 and the death of Marian Fell's husband, Patrick Vans Agnew, in 1929, both Anne Fell (Nelson's wife), and her daughter Marian moved to England where they remained until they both died in the 1930s.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Information provided by Hugo Nuremberg to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka in 2009.

<sup>200</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Fellsmere to Have a Town Manager", June 17, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>201</sup> Laws of Florida, Chapter 7154, "An Act to Establish the Municipality of the Town of Fellsmere Under the Commission System of Municipal Government, and to Prescribe its Jurisdiction and Powers", p. 523.

<sup>202</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Personal and Local", June 24, 1916, p. 5. (Note: There is no mention in the *Fellsmere Tribune* after June 24, 1916 to November 12, 1921 (the last issue) of E. Nelson Fell having ever returned to Fellsmere.)

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, "Personal and Local", December 23, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>204</sup> *The Fauquier Democrat* [Warrenton, VA], "Death of E. Nelson Fell", March 28, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, "Former Resident of Warrenton Dies in England", January 27, 1937, p. 1; and Jamie Vans Barnbarroch, grandson of Marian Fell Vans Agnew, and Find A Grave Memorial.

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On July 1, 1916, 11 months after the flood of 1915, the Fellsmere Farms Company failed to meet its interest payment. The Columbia Trust Company of New York City in turn filed suit which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Fellsmere Farm Company<sup>206</sup>. On January 4, 1917, the Circuit Court of Florida of the 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit in Ft. Pierce placed the Fellsmere Farms Company in receivership and W. H. Tallis, vice president and treasurer of the Fellsmere Farms Company, was placed in charge of the company's assets.<sup>207</sup> Two years of legal struggles followed.<sup>208</sup>

As of January 1917, the Fellsmere Farms Company had opened a waterway from the Fellsmere Farms Subdivision, excavated 65 miles of main canals (laterals) and 215 miles of drainage ditches, and constructed 33 miles of earthen dikes.<sup>209</sup>

On February 23, 1917, the citizens of Fellsmere formed the Fellsmere Commercial Club which elected James A. Martell as president.<sup>210</sup> The Club was organized to promote and protect the welfare of the past and present citizens of Fellsmere.<sup>211</sup> The draft of the constitution and bylaws were adopted at the meeting.<sup>212</sup> The Club members met again on March 2, 1917, in regard to conferring with the receiver of the Fellsmere Farms Company to secure definite information as to the status of the contract holders on Fellsmere. Club members also listened to a presentation from Walter Ware, manager of the motion picture department of the Chicago Herald about making a motion picture of Fellsmere for advertising purposes.<sup>213</sup>

On March 5, 1917, the Fellsmere Electric Light and Ice Plant that was originally placed in operation on June 15, 1913, was purchased and promptly shut down by the new owners for reasons unknown.<sup>214</sup> Fortunately, the State Bank of Fellsmere President Charles Piffard, whose mother was married to Mr. Morse of the Fairbanks and Morse Company, was able to secure a Fairbanks Morse 25 HP engine within a three week period to resume

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<sup>206</sup> Patterson, Gordon. Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere", Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 19., and The Fellsmere Tribune [Fellsmere, FL], "Commercial Club Hold Weekly meet", June 2, 1917, p.1.

<sup>207</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Company's Affairs Are To Be Adjusted", January 6, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Patterson, Gordon. Ditches and Dreams: Nelson Fell and the Rise of Fellsmere", Melbourne, FL: The Florida Quarterly, Summer 1997", p. 19.

<sup>209</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "Foundation for Prosperity", January 27, 1917, p. 4; and "Great Canals and Dykes Completed", January 13, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., "Commercial Club is Now a Reality" and "Working Plans for Commercial Club". February 24, 1917, p.1.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., "To All Warranty Deed and Contract Holders of Fellsmere Property", June 9, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., "Commercial Club is Now a Reality" and "Working Plans for Commercial Club". February 24, 1917, p.1.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., "Interesting Session Commercial Club", March 3, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., "Municipal Ownership of Light Plant is Desired", March 10, 1917, p. 1; and Fellsmere Lighted With Electricity", June 26, 1913, p.4.

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generating electricity.<sup>215</sup> On March 30, 1917, the lights came back on once again in Fellsmere.<sup>216</sup>

On March 22, 1917, Town Commissioners King, James, and Dole signed a \$100,000 paving contract to pave Broadway, New York Avenue, and a portion of South Carolina Avenue in concrete, and portions of other roads in marl such as Colorado Avenue, Idaho Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, Oleander Street, Cypress Street, Orange Street, Washington Park driveway, and Pine Street.<sup>217</sup>

During the week of May 13, 1917, C. W. Hitchcock, director, and John Tuqua, cameraman, of the Chicago Herald motion picture department met with Commercial Club Publicity Committee and then filmed homes, the school, crops, basketball and tennis court grounds, many of the drainage canals, and Lake Wilmington (Blue Cypress Lake).<sup>218</sup>

On May 16, 1917, six months after the Fellsmere Public School was opened and with the United States involved in World War I, Chief Commissioner George E. King sent a telegram to President Woodrow Wilson on May 16, 1917, offering the new Fellsmere Public School for hospital purposes for “*diseased and wound wracked soldiers*.” It was acknowledged on May 17, 1917, by President Woodrow Wilson’s office who expressed deep appreciation for Fellsmere’s patriotic assurances and generosity. Furthermore, the telegram stated that Fellsmere’s message would be brought to the attention of the Secretary of War. Despite the offer from Fellsmere and acknowledgment by the White House, the Fellsmere Public School was never used as a hospital. <sup>219</sup>

On May 18, 1917, the Fellsmere Commercial Club ran a large notice in the Fellsmere Tribune for “Contract Holders and Owners of Land on Fellsmere, Florida” to take immediate steps to protect their rights, to secure legal advice, and to donate to the “Protective Fund.”

On June 9, 1917, the Fellsmere Commercial Club ran a full page notice “To All Warranty Deed and Contract Holders of Fellsmere Property”. The notice detailed all of the dates and activities of the “Protective Committee” of the Club relating to the receivership of the Fellsmere Farms Company between March 14, 1917, and May 16, 1917. The Club advised all deed and contract holders that the club they needed legal representation to protect their interests and recommended the Honorable W. H. Baker after spending two hours with

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<sup>215</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “State Bank of Fellsmere Advertisement”, March 10, 1917, p. 5, and “News, Notes, and Personals”, January 10, 1914, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, “Fellsmere Developments Are Coming Right Along”, March 31, 1917, p. 1

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, “The Fellsmere Way”, March 24, 1917, p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, “Publicity Movies Made of Fellsmere”, May 19, 1917, p. 1

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, “School Building for a Federal Hospital”, May 26, 1917, p. 1.

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Patrick Vans Agnew, attorney for the Fellsmere Farms Company, on June 6, 1917, to discuss the situation with him and obtain advice.<sup>220</sup>

On October 1, 1917, the final decree of the circuit court of the 15<sup>th</sup> judicial district of Florida ordered the sale of the Fellsmere Farms Company lands to take place on November 5, 1917, subject to the concessions made to contract holders secured through the efforts of the Fellsmere Commercial Club Protective Committee.<sup>221</sup>

On July 14, 1917, the publicity film made by the Chicago Herald was shown at the Dixie Playhouse on Broadway to a full house. The Fellsmere Commercial Club planned to circulate it throughout the country for publicity purposes.<sup>222</sup>

On November 10, 1917, a notice was published in the Fellsmere Tribune that the master's sale of the Fellsmere Farms Company properties was postponed until January 7, 1918, by the direction of the court. No reason was given.<sup>223</sup>

On January 7, 1918, the properties of the Fellsmere Farms Company were auctioned at the Courthouse in Ft. Pierce. Felix T. Hughes, a representative of the First Mortgage Bondholders, of New York bid \$330,000. Steps had already been taken to organize a company to take up the development and operation of the Fellsmere tract.<sup>224</sup>

On March 23, 1918, the Fellsmere Company formally took possession of the Fellsmere Farms Company properties. Judge Cary D. Landis of Deland conveyed all rights, titles, etc. of the Fellsmere Farms Company to the Fellsmere Company. The Fellsmere Company stated that it was willing to enter into a contract with contract holders of the Fellsmere Farms Company that would protect them on past payments for deeds issued to them upon final payment.<sup>225</sup>

In June 1918, the Fellsmere Company issued 200 deeds to present and prospective residents on the Fellsmere tract in accordance with the decree of the circuit court in the foreclosure proceedings.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "To All Warranty Deed and Contract Holders of Fellsmere Property", June 9, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* "The Sale of Fellsmere Property to be Nov. 5", October 13, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Movie Film is a Most Interesting One", July 21, 1917, p. 1

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, "Master's Sale of Farms Postponed to January", November 10, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Farms Is Now in New Hands", January 12, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Company Takes Possession", April 6, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, "The Fellsmere Company is Now Issuing Deeds", June 8, 1918, p. 1.

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On April 8, 1919, the Fellsmere Drainage District was established by decree signed by Judge E. B. Donnell of the 15<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit of Florida for St. Lucie County. The drainage district covered 50,000 acres within a leveed area. The district would enlarge the drainage canals and provide a complete system of sublaterals. The value of the property transferred from the Fellsmere Company to the Fellsmere Drainage District was approximately \$1 million at the time.<sup>227</sup>

Three supervisors for the Fellsmere Drainage District were elected on May 3, 1919. They were Fellsmere Company President W. H. Tallis, former Fellsmere Farms Company General Manager Ernest H. Every, and W. K. Jackson. T. W. McCluer was elected chairman and Frank Heiser, who later founded the Fellsmere Sugar Company in 1932, was elected secretary. It was determined at the meeting that the district office would be located in the Broadway Inn.<sup>228</sup> On May 12, 1919, the District Board of Supervisors met and appointed the State Bank of Fellsmere President Charles Piffard as treasurer and former Fellsmere Farms Chief Engineer Irwin S. Lhoyd as “Chief Engineer” of the District.<sup>229</sup>

Built in 1919 by Robert Elley, the Church of God in Christ was the first church constructed in the Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision. The little 22-foot-wide by 40-foot-long church at 1001 Lincoln Street is the oldest surviving church in the Fellsmere African American community located northeast of the original town limits of Fellsmere. Worship services are still held in the tiny church every Sunday.<sup>230</sup>

On September 29, 1919, President Carl Fisher of Dixie Air Line in Indianapolis, Indiana, sent a letter to the Fellsmere Tribune announcing plans to hold an inaugural flight sometime during the latter part of November 1919. He stated that, “*Cities that do not have already laid out and marked their landing fields are accordingly requested to do so at once.*” The shape of the landing field was to be 1,500 feet by 1,800 feet. The field had to be level and clear free of obstacles, and 150 foot long by 10 foot wide arms of a white cross marked with lime had to be in the center of the field.<sup>231</sup> The flight would be the first transcontinental airplane route in the United States via Fellsmere.<sup>232</sup> William Tallis, President of the Fellsmere Company, said that his company would secure the necessary land but the Commercial Club or Town Commissioners would have to have the field laid out, photo-

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<sup>227</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Fellsmere to Have Drainage District”, April 13, 1919, p. 1 and 5.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, “Fellsmere Drainage District Holds Meet”, May 10, 1919, p. 1

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, “Drainage Supervisors of Fellsmere Met Monday”, May 17, 1919, p. 1

<sup>230</sup> Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka’s Interview with Elder Donald Brown on May 20, 2022.

<sup>231</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Fellsmere Station for Dixie Air Line”, October 11, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>232</sup> *Fellsmere Flyer* [Fellsmere, FL], October 1982, p. 2.



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graphed, and maps furnished to Carl Fisher.<sup>233</sup> By February 28, 1920, the landing field did not materialize according to an article.<sup>234</sup> There was no more mention in the Fellsmere Tribune of the landing field for the remainder of 1920. However, in October 1982, the Fellsmere Flyer reported that *“the airfield, which is located on Ditch 12 on Kim Rider’s property, now a nursery, still has cement pads an inch below the surface, and played a part on getting man off the ground”*.<sup>235</sup>

In 1920, the population of Fellsmere had dwindled to 333 according to the United States Census Bureau.<sup>236</sup>

In 1922, the State Bank of Fellsmere at the northwest corner of Broadway and Colorado Avenue closed after a state auditor found that \$36,000 from the bank was missing causing the bank to close its doors on March 16, 1922.<sup>237</sup> In February 1924, John Sutherland, Vice President of the Fellsmere Chamber of Commerce, called a meeting for the organization of a new Fellsmere bank. The new bank, the Citizens Bank of Fellsmere, was to be located in the former State Bank of Fellsmere building and start operating in April 1924.<sup>238</sup> Despite the fact that the Citizens Bank of Fellsmere was shown on the May 1924 Sanborn Map of Fellsmere at the location of the old State Bank of Fellsmere, it wasn’t formally incorporated until June 6, 1924.<sup>239</sup> The bank experienced only moderate success for about one year and then it closed in 1925.<sup>240</sup>

Construction of the First Methodist Episcopal Church at the northeast corner of Broadway and Oregon Avenue was started in 1922.<sup>241</sup> Local contractor and congregant Clayton E. Nourse designed the Church, was in charge of construction, and was one of the main carpenters. He and other members of the congregation built the church over a two year period. By the summer of 1922, the congregation was able to hold services in the shell of the building. Work was entirely completed by April 1924, and the church was dedicated by Bishop Ernest G. Richardson of Atlanta, Georgia, on April 6, 1924.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Fellsmere Station for Dixie Air Line”, October 11, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>234</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Permanent Landing Field at Fellsmere”, February 28, 1920, p.1.

<sup>235</sup> *Fellsmere Flyer* [Fellsmere, FL], “Ditch 12 in History”, October 1982, p.2.

<sup>236</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Fellsmere Population 333”, July 31, 1920, p. 5.

<sup>237</sup> *Kissimmee Valley Gazette* [Kissimmee, FL], “Who Can Be Trusted?”, March 31, 1922, p. 4; and *The Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Shocking Accident”, February 27, 1922.

<sup>238</sup> *The Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere Bank Being Organized”, February 28, 1924, p. 5.

<sup>239</sup> Florida Division of Corporations –Citizens Bank of Fellsmere Document No. 013780

<sup>240</sup> 1995 Historical Properties Survey of Fellsmere, FL, Historic Properties Associates, St. Augustine, FL, Sept. 1995, p. 11.

<sup>241</sup> Fellsmere United Methodist Remembrances on the 74<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by Beatrice Pennington., p. 3.

<sup>242</sup> The History of the Fellsmere United Methodist Church by the Committee on Records and History 1965-1968, p.3

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In 1925, Milford Weigle, the choirmaster of the Fellsmere Methodist Episcopal Church, procured the bell for the church.<sup>243</sup> The bell is rung every Sunday just before the worship service begin. Milford Weigle, whose son Ellsworth Weigle, operated the Fellsmere Garage between 1925 and 1945, was one of four men who participated in the 1905 First Transcontinental Automobile Race from New York City to Portland, Oregon, and was on the winning team. Milford Weigle was nationally acclaimed prior to him coming to Fellsmere in 1916.<sup>244</sup>

On December 19, 1923, the Standard Agricultural Chemical Company was incorporated. It took over the Fellsmere Company that previously took over the assets and operations of the Fellsmere Farms Company in 1917 after its bankruptcy.<sup>245</sup> Frank Heiser, an early landowner/farmer of Fellsmere who came to town in 1912, along with other leaders of the Fellsmere Company helped to establish the Standard Agricultural Chemical Company.<sup>246</sup>

On February 18, 1924, the Trans Florida Central Railroad applied for incorporation to authorize the new railroad to acquire the Fellsmere Railroad from Sebastian to Broadmoor. The men who filed for incorporation were Patrick Vans Agnew (Marian Fell Vans Agnew's husband), F. R. Medendsen, and G.E. Currier all from Winter Park, Florida, where Patrick and Marian were living at the time.<sup>247</sup>

Formation of the Trans Florida Central Railroad and acquisition of the Fellsmere Railroad was part of the plan of the Standard Agricultural Chemical Corporation to construct a large fertilizer plant in Broadmoor which was well underway by February 1924.<sup>248</sup> Frank Heiser, one of Fellsmere's leading citizens, served as the general manager of the company.<sup>249</sup> The Standard Agriculture Chemical Company became the largest single landowner in Indian River County in the 1920s under Frank Heiser's leadership.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Fellsmere United Methodist Remembrances on the 74<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by Beatrice Pennington, p. 1 and 2.

<sup>244</sup> *American History Magazine*, "The First Transcontinental Car Race Crossed the Oregon Trail, June 12, 2006, p. 1; and Find-A-Grave, Memorial, Dwight Brainard Huss (1873-1964); The Detroit Free Press {Detroit, FL}, "Old Scout Wins Transcontinental Race", June 25, 1905, p. 9; and Barbara Weigle Robinson, daughter of Ellsworth Weigle, interviewed by Rich Votapka, Fellsmere Historian, on June 25, 2022.

<sup>245</sup> Deed Book 53, Page 235, St. Lucie County, Florida Public Records.

<sup>246</sup> *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], "News, Notes, and Personal", November 28, 1912, p. 3; and Patterson, Gordon. "Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere", Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, pp. 414.

<sup>247</sup> *Kissimmee Valley Gazette* [Kissimmee, FL], "Fellsmere Railroad to Be Incorporated", February 15, 1924, p. 4.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Patterson, Gordon. "Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere", Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, pp. 411 and 414.

<sup>250</sup> *Vero Beach Press* [Vero Beach, FL], "Railroad is Largest Taxpayer in County", July 1, 1926, p.1.

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On June 2, 1924, the Trans Florida Central Railroad (dubbed the “Dinky Line”) took over operations of the Fellsmere Railroad.<sup>251</sup> The line from Fellsmere to Broadmoor hadn’t been used since the latter part of 1918 when Broadmoor ceased to exist. The track had to be cleared of vegetation and rotten ties had to be replaced.<sup>252</sup> Due to the efforts of Fellsmere entrepreneur Frank Heiser, the Standard Ammoniates Company completed the huge \$250,000 fertilizer plant in 1924 that processed the muck (rich organic soil) in the area of Broadmoor.<sup>253</sup> By the time it was completed, the muck plant had over 200 dryers and had the capacity to dry 200,000 tons of muck per year.<sup>254</sup> Tons of dried muck were shipped to the Florida East Coast Railway at Sebastian and the enriched muck was shipped by rail to fertilizer processing plants all over the United States.<sup>255</sup> Unfortunately, after only three years in 1927, shipping costs became too high, causing the plant to cease operations.<sup>256</sup>

Frank Heiser served as General Manager and later Vice President of the Trans Florida Central Railroad from 1925 to 1931.<sup>257</sup>

After Indian River County was established in 1925, the Florida legislature annulled the 1915 Charter of the Town of Fellsmere and authorized a Charter for the City of Fellsmere. The new charter created a mayor and council form of government that eliminated the commission form of government under the old charter. On December 4, 1925, Governor John Martin appointed P.H. McEachron as mayor and R. L. Kinney, J. J. Bustin, J. M. Pennington, R. J. Dunnam, and L. A. Sloan as councilmen. Mayor McEachron then appointed F. W. Dole as Clerk of the City of Fellsmere.<sup>258</sup>

In 1925, there was a land boom in Florida.<sup>259</sup> Drove of people from the North were purchasing land to come to the “Land of Sunshine”. The famous New York real estate

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<sup>251</sup> Hensley, Donald R. Jr. The Critters of Fellsmere, The Story of the Fellsmere and Trans Florida Central Railroad, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Bartow, FL: Tap Lines, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., pages 8 and 12.

<sup>253</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 414, and *The Kissimmee Valley Gazette* {Kissimmee, FL}, March 14, 1924, p. 11, and *The Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere Frolic Draws Big Crowd”, April 10, 1924, p. 4.

<sup>254</sup> *The Vero Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Chemical Company Pursuing Work on Fellsmere Plant”, January 24, 1924.

<sup>255</sup> Hensley, Donald R. Jr. The Critters of Fellsmere, The Story of the Fellsmere and Trans Florida Central Railroad, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Bartow, FL: Tap Lines, 2017, p. 12.

<sup>256</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 414; and Siewert, Walter A., *A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District*, Ft. Pierce, FL: self-published by Walter A. Siewert, 1988.

<sup>257</sup> Trans Florida Central Railroad Company Time Schedules for 1925 through 1931.

<sup>258</sup> City of Fellsmere Council Meeting Minutes of December 4, 1925.

<sup>259</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 18.

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developer and master builder tycoon, Louis Gold, bought 100 square miles of land in Fellsmere in March 1925.<sup>260</sup>

On July 27, 1925, Louis Gold met with the Fellsmere town commissioners and presented his plans for development. These plans included the donation of a plot of land for the building a community house and he donated \$3,000 for its construction. He also promised to build a public swimming pool in Washington Park, and outlined his intention to build 500 hundred homes, to extend Broadway and Pennsylvania Avenue (now CR 512), and to complete the street lighting system to illuminate every street in Fellsmere.<sup>261</sup> On August 8, 1925, the Fellsmere Estates Corporation was incorporated with Louis Gold as its president.<sup>262</sup> Construction of the Fellsmere Estates Corporation administrative building (now Marsh Landing Restaurant) at 44 North Broadway began by October 1925.<sup>263</sup> The building was completed on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1925, just in time for Gold to host two “jollification” events for the residents of Fellsmere on Christmas Day.<sup>264</sup>

The presence of the Fellsmere Estates Corporation in Fellsmere was short lived. After the hurricane of 1926, real estate sales continued a steady decline. The Florida real estate boom was in decline.<sup>265</sup> In July 1926, Louis Gold resigned as president of the corporation but Frank Heiser retained his position of treasurer and general manager. Frank was known as the “practical construction engineer and general manager of the famous Fellsmere properties acquired by Louis Gold”.<sup>266</sup>

On July 10, 1927, the Fellsmere City Council approved an ordinance entitled “An Ordinance Providing for the Establishment of a Municipal Water Works and Water Supply for the City of Fellsmere, Florida, and for providing for the Purchase and Payment for the same.” On that day, the City of Fellsmere purchased the Fellsmere Water Company, the private utility company that had provided water to city residents since it was incorporated on January 15, 1914.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Fellsmere Chamber of Commerce, “A Field of Fertility”, Fellsmere, FL: 1925, p. 9; and *Vero Beach Press* [Vero Beach, FL], (no article title), December 1925.

<sup>261</sup> *Melbourne Times* [Melbourne, FL], “Fellsmere is in the Forefront in Building”, August 19, 1925.

<sup>262</sup> State of Florida Dept. of State Document No. 100785, Fellsmere Estates Corporation incorporated on 8-8-1925.

<sup>263</sup> *Vero Beach Press* [Vero Beach, FL], (no article title), October 3, 1925, p. 6.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., “Fellsmere Plans Big Celebration- Christmas Jollification When Gold Arrives”, December 24, 1925, p. 1; and 1925 Town of Fellsmere Map by the Fellsmere Estates Corporation.

<sup>265</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 19.

<sup>266</sup> Fellsmere Chamber of Commerce, “A Field of Fertility”, Fellsmere, FL: 1925, p. 9.

<sup>267</sup> Fellsmere City Council Meeting Minutes of July 10, 1927, p. 43; and *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], Ibid., “Fellsmere Water Company Incorporated”, January 10, 1914, p. 5.

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Two hurricanes occurred in 1928, one on August 7<sup>th</sup>, and the other on September 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>268</sup> On October 24, 1929, known as “Black Thursday”, the stock market crashed and stock values fell almost steadily for the next three years resulting in the “Great Depression.”<sup>269</sup> Default on land payments and outright abandonment of purchase contracts multiplied by the score. The “Daily Record of Sales” of the Fellsmere Estates Corporation was becoming a negative report of “tracts returned” and contracts cancelled”.<sup>270</sup> Frank Heiser became the Vice President of the Fellsmere Estates Corporation on July 30, 1927, and Registered Agent on December 31, 1927.<sup>271</sup> By 1930, the Fellsmere Estates Corporation had all but ceased operations in Fellsmere. The Fellsmere Estates Corporation was ultimately dissolved on May 16, 1946.<sup>272</sup>

On February 28, 1929, the Fellsmere City Council adopted Ordinance 37A to sell Fellsmere’s electric power and light system and ice property to the Florida Power and Light Company as authorized by a special election held on December 20, 1928.<sup>273</sup>

Undaunted by the demise of the muck plant in 1927 and the collapse of the real estate/housing market soon afterward, Frank Heiser decided to experiment with raising sugarcane in the rich, fertile soil of Fellsmere. In 1927, he planted a test crop and in 1929, he planted 100 acres of sugar cane with remarkable success.<sup>274</sup> The resultant crop proved to be so successful that Frank Heiser decided that a sugar mill should be built in Fellsmere. In 1931, Heiser planted 1000 acres of sugar cane.<sup>275</sup>

While he was employed by the Fellsmere Estates Corporation in the 1920s, Louis Gold involved Heiser in his business meetings and ventures in New York City.<sup>276</sup> While there,

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<sup>268</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 22.

<sup>269</sup> The World Book Encyclopedia, Volume 8, World Book, Inc. Chicago, IL, 1986, p. 340b.

<sup>270</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p.20 and 21.

<sup>271</sup> State of Florida Office of the Secretary of State Certificate as to Appointment of Resident Agent and naming Officers and Directors of a Corporation, July 30, 1927 and December 31, 1927.

<sup>272</sup> State of Florida Dept. of State Document No. 100785, dissolution of the Fellsmere Estates Corp., May 14, 1946.

<sup>273</sup> Fellsmere City Council Meeting Minutes of February 28, 1929, p.72.

<sup>274</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 414.

<sup>275</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 416.

<sup>276</sup> *Vero Beach Press* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere Estates Corporation Elects A New President”, July 18, 1926, p. 1.

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Heiser developed strong business ties with four wealthy businessmen, which business ties he was able to use to his advantage in raising \$1 million in capital in the early 1930s to fund the construction of a sugar mill.<sup>277</sup>

Frank Heiser made endless trips to New York from Fellsmere. His wife, Stella, said that her husband Frank lived in three places – Fellsmere, New York, and on the train.<sup>278</sup> His trips were well worth his efforts because despite the on-going Great Depression of the 1930s and reluctance of investors to take risks, Heiser was able to secure enough financial backing to raise the capital and incorporate the Fellsmere Sugar Company on December 14, 1931.<sup>279</sup>

With no time to waste, Frank Heiser dispatched sugar engineer T. B. Ford from Cuba in early 1931 to scout Cuba and Louisiana for materials to build a sugar mill. After T. B. Ford found an old dilapidated sugar mill in Louisiana, it was purchased by the Fellsmere Sugar Company. Frank Heiser had it dismantled and shipped to Fellsmere on 57 railroad flat cars hauled over the Trans Central Florida Railroad to the sugar mill site, approximately 3½ miles southwest of the City of Fellsmere.<sup>280</sup> A single track was built from the Trans Florida Central Railroad south to the mill site approximately 2½ miles long. The track was halfway between Laterals “U” and “S”. The dirt road alongside the track was known as “Railroad Avenue”.<sup>281</sup> Much of the track is still there today but is mostly buried under the soil.

Frank Heiser established the Fellsmere Sugar Company headquarters in the Fellsmere Estates Corporation administration building on Broadway in Fellsmere.<sup>282</sup> By the end of 1932, Heiser had a huge sugar mill built approximately three miles southwest of Fellsmere.<sup>283</sup> The 1932-1933 grinding season was short, harvesting only 640 acres.<sup>284</sup> However, enough sugar was harvested by April 7, 1933 (the end of the first season), to

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<sup>277</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, pp. 415, 416.

<sup>278</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p.20 and 21.

<sup>279</sup> State of Florida Dept. of State Document No. 125611, Fellsmere Sugar Company incorporated on 12- 14-1931.

<sup>280</sup> Hensley, Donald R., Jr., The Critters of Fellsmere, The Story of the Fellsmere and Trans Florida Central Railroad, Bartow, FL: Donald R. Hensley, Jr., 2017, p. 16., and 1946 Map of Indian River County prepared by R.D. Carter.

<sup>281</sup> Personal observation by Fellsmere Historian Rich Votapka in 1988.

<sup>282</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 425.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. p. 418; and 1946 Map of Indian River County by R. D. Carter, Vero Beach, FL.

<sup>284</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 27.

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produce two million pounds of high grade raw sugar.<sup>285</sup> The mill employed 225 people during the Great Depression when unemployment reached 25% of the work force by 1933 within the United States.<sup>286</sup> Most of the working men employed lived in Fellsmere and the surrounding area. The population of Fellsmere in 1930 was 356 people.<sup>287</sup>

Frank Heiser, who was also the President of the Fellsmere Drainage District from 1925-1946,<sup>288</sup> realized that good drainage was essential for the success of his cane fields.<sup>289</sup> When the Fellsmere Drainage District ran out of funds for maintenance of drainage ditches and canals, Heiser moved the District office into the Fellsmere Estates Corporation building in 1933 and paid for the District secretary and treasurer.<sup>290</sup> He also had the Fellsmere Sugar Company make many drainage improvements to ensure they would protect the cane fields.<sup>291</sup>

Not content with just making “raw” sugar, Heiser solicited more capital for the construction of the first sugar refinery to make granulated sugar. Although his investors thought Heiser was crazy, he nevertheless secured the capital he needed. The refinery was started in September 1935 and completed in December of the same year. The refined sugar known as “Florida Crystals” was shipped along the Eastern seaboard.<sup>292</sup> Florida Crystals bore the distinction of being the first refined sugar produced in the State of Florida from Florida-grown sugar cane.<sup>293</sup> The sugar mill saved the City of Fellsmere from going bankrupt.<sup>294</sup>

Heiser reorganized the Fellsmere Sugar Company into the Fellsmere Producers Association. In 1943, a group of Puerto Rican sugar producers purchased the Association

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<sup>285</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere,” Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, April 1997, p. 419.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., and The World Book Encyclopedia, Volume 8, World Book, Inc. Chicago, IL, 1986, p. 340c.

<sup>287</sup> National Register of Historic Places, “Historical Resources of Fellsmere, FL,” October 8, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>288</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 36.

<sup>289</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 416.

<sup>290</sup> Siewert, Walter A., A History of the Fellsmere Drainage District (Now the Fellsmere Water Control District), Ft. Pierce, FL: Walter A. Siewert, 1988, p. 27.

<sup>291</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, p. 416.

<sup>292</sup> Patterson, Gordon. “Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere”, Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, Spring 1997, pp. 423-425.

<sup>293</sup> Florida Crystals advertisement in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Indian River County Rodeo Program and Souvenir Booklet, Vero Beach, February 9-10, 1957.

<sup>294</sup> Gail Kinney Griffin, “Recollections,” The Siewert Collection, Indian River County Main Library, Archive Section, Vero Beach, FL.

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and all of its properties and Frank Heiser moved to Jacksonville, Florida.<sup>295</sup> Besides E. Nelson Fell, who founded Fellsmere, Frank Heiser was the second most important individual in Fellsmere's historical past for all of his achievements and for saving the City of Fellsmere from economic collapse during the Great Depression.

On February 27, 1927, the Fellsmere City Council voted to have the Merchants State Bank of Melbourne and Indian River County Bank of Sebastian be designated as depositories of the City of Fellsmere. Both institutions were to guarantee 100% security.<sup>296</sup>

In 1930, F. H. Conrad of Indiantown set up a sawmill in the vicinity of the Kitching siding on the Trans Florida Central railroad because of the abundant timber in the vicinity. He purchased 1,500 acres of timberland on the north side of Sebastian. Conrad estimated that from 15 to 20 workers including the sawmill operators would be kept busy for at least a year to 18 months. The dense grade of pine grown in the section around Sebastian rendered an exceptionally strong and lasting for use in building bridges on the New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroads. The logs were to be transported to the sawmill by huge trucks. The milled lumber was hauled to Sebastian by the Trans Florida Central Railroad to the Florida East Coast Railway which would ship it up north.<sup>297</sup>

From 1925, the old State Bank of Fellsmere/Citizen's Bank building remained vacant for approximately 19 years. On October 6, 1944, Fellsmere City Councilman Dixon made a motion to designate the old Fellsmere State Bank building for municipal and recreational purposes.<sup>298</sup> At its November 1, 1944, meeting, the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners adopted the City of Fellsmere's October 6, 1944, resolution, and unanimously approved dedicating the former bank property to the City of Fellsmere as long as it remained dedicated or devoted to public use, and that the property would be exempt from taxes.<sup>299</sup>

During the 1930s through the 1960s, many of the residents within the Town of Fellsmere as well as the residents of the Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision (the African American community) were employed by the Fellsmere Sugar Company, and its successors. They also worked for Gulf and Western Industries after it came to town in 1967.

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<sup>295</sup> Patterson, Gordon. "Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere," Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, April 1997, pp. 424, 425, and 428.

<sup>296</sup> Fellsmere City Council Minutes of February 11, 1927.

<sup>297</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "New Industry For Fellsmere District", May 9, 1930, p. 7.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, October 6, 1944.

<sup>299</sup> Indian River County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of the November 1, 1944 Meeting, pages 3 & 4.



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The one and only permanent school for the African American community was built in 1938.<sup>300</sup> It was built on a two acre parcel owned by the St. Lucie County Board of Education at the southeast corner of 130<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Willow Street) and 100<sup>th</sup> Place (First Street).<sup>301</sup>

In 1945, the old State Bank of Fellsmere City became Fellsmere City Hall and Police Station. The building was also used as a community center until 1982. In 1945, the population of Fellsmere fell below its pre-Depression level reaching 312.<sup>302</sup>

By the end of World War II, all of the industrial buildings in Fellsmere such as the packinghouses, electric light and ice plant, warehouses, lumber yard, concrete plant, and cotton gin had been demolished. Also, all of the buildings that had initially been built by the Fellsmere Railroad had been demolished except for the Section Foremen's duplex.<sup>303</sup>

Between 1945 and 1960, the population of Fellsmere virtually remained unchanged over a 15-year period.<sup>304</sup> In 1960, the population was 732.<sup>305</sup> In 1948, both the First Baptist Church at 103 N. Magnolia Street and the River of Life Church of God (now the Fellsmere Chapel as of 2022) at 99 N. Pine Street were built.<sup>306</sup> After the old wooden building that housed the Fellsmere Cash Grocery at 106 North Broadway burnt down in December 1950, owners Joe and Dorothy Bussey rebuilt it as a masonry building the following year which still stands today as the Fellsmere Grocery.<sup>307</sup>

In 1946, Fred Hoertz, a famous maritime artist, and his wife, Gertie bought a two-story house and a 16-acre orange grove at 13820 97<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>308</sup> Fred got his start in New York City by painting fishing schooners, pilot boats, old square rigged sailing vessels, and ultimately the ocean liners, the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. While in his twenties, Hoertz was credited with originating the idea of camouflaging American ships in World War I.<sup>309</sup> Fred maintained a studio at his home in Fellsmere and one in New York City. When

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<sup>300</sup> Fellsmere History, Clarence F. "Korky" Korker Collection, Dr. Evelyn Mudge. Box 5, Folder 10, Item FEL-05-010-0010, Main Indian River County Library, Vero Beach, FL.

<sup>301</sup> Plat of Lincoln Park Subdivision (with First Street, now 100<sup>th</sup> Place, and Broad Street, now 100<sup>th</sup> Lane) recorded on February 27, 1926 in Plat Book 1, Page 60, of the Public Records of Indian River County, Florida.

<sup>302</sup> National Register of Historic Places, "Historical Resources of Fellsmere, FL," October 8, 1996, p. 11. .

<sup>303</sup> 1945 Aerial Photograph of the City of Fellsmere.

<sup>304</sup> Florida 7<sup>th</sup> Census of the State of Florida; 1945. Office of the FL. Commissioner of Agriculture, and U.S. Census Population 1960: Florida-Number of Inhabitants.

<sup>305</sup> Population Trends for Fellsmere, Fellsmere Developmental Plan, Adley & Associates, 1973.

<sup>306</sup> Florida Master Site Files IR01661 and IR01828.

<sup>307</sup> Screws, Mary Jo Bussey, Interview by Richard B. Votapka on March 28, 2020.

<sup>308</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "For Sale", February 20, 1948, page 5A.

<sup>309</sup> Ask Art-The Artist's Bluebook (this is confirmed by an article titled "Why Camouflage?" by C. Stewart Wark that was published in the Morse Drydock Dial, April 1919, page 4.

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Fred painted ships for the United States government for publications such as the Naval Institute Proceedings, there were special locks on his studio door.<sup>310</sup> Following the sinking of the Andria Doria ocean liner in July 1956, Hoertz was commissioned by the Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution Magazine to paint the collision for their articles.

While Hoertz was living in Fellsmere for about six years, he was appointed as Fellsmere City Clerk on June 11, 1948, following the resignation of City Clerk Ralph Harris. Hoertz served as City Clerk for a little more than two months before he resigned.<sup>311</sup>

On April 14, 1950, Fellsmere Mayor Watts appointed Fred to act as the publicity agent to determine the content for a full page article in the Press Journal in regard to the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Indian River County.<sup>312</sup> In 1952, the orange grove that Fred and Gertie owned had failed. As a result, Fred and Gertie moved to Atlanta where Fred painted many paintings for Lockheed Aircraft, the Coca Cola Bottling Company, and for the Ingalls Shipbuilding Company in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>313</sup>

There is a large 4-foot by 8-foot oil painting of the Fellsmere sugar refinery in the lobby of Fellsmere City Hall painted by Fred Hoertz during the time he lived in Fellsmere. Although he didn't sign his name to this painting, Hoertz put his initials "FJH" on the right side of the painting. Below Hoertz's initials, lies an anchor, a trademark of his found on almost all of his paintings. Hoertz's works are still sold today in auction houses around the world.

From 1948 to 1952, freight traffic on the Trans Florida Central Railroad from the Fellsmere sugar mill/refinery steadily declined from 320 carloads in 1948 to only 30 carloads in 1952. On October 6, 1952, after the railroad experienced years of substantial loss post-World War II, the Interstate Commerce Commission authorized the Trans Florida Central Railroad to shut down and abandon its line.<sup>314</sup> On November 30, 1952, the railroad ceased operations after 42 years of service.<sup>315</sup> Although the Trans Florida Central Railroad no longer carried passengers, it was briefly used by the sugar company to haul refined sugar

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<sup>310</sup> Interview by Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka with long-time Fellsmere resident Phil Smith on July 26, 2022.

<sup>311</sup> Fellsmere City Council Minutes, June 11, 1948 and August 18, 1948.

<sup>312</sup> Fellsmere City Council Minutes, April 14, 1950.

<sup>313</sup> *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine* [Atlanta, GA], "Ship Artists" by Roger Honkanen, August 16, 1964, p. 22.

<sup>314</sup> *The Bradenton Herald* [Bradenton, FL], "Sebastian-Broadmoor Line Abandoned by ICC Rule", Oct. 6, 1952, p. 1.

<sup>315</sup> Hensley, Donald R., Jr. *The Critters of Fellsmere, The Story of the Fellsmere and Trans Florida Central Railroad*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Bartow, FL: Tap Lines, 2017, p. 18.

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to the Florida East Coast Railway in Sebastian. Eventually, all of the refined sugar was hauled by trucks. The Trans Florida Central Railroad tracks were removed from the Sebastian to Fellsmere line between 1956 and 1957 when Mackle Brothers started developing subdivisions in Sebastian north of County Road 512.<sup>316</sup>

The Fellsmere Riding Club was formed in 1954 by Gilbert Barkoskie, Fred Bass, Herbert Herndon, Carson Platt, Charley Savage and Marvin and Clifford Tyson.<sup>317</sup> It is the first and oldest riding club in Indian River County.<sup>318</sup> The club held its first annual rodeo on the first Sunday in March 1955. Rodeos have been held on “Fellsmere Cracker Day”, the first Sunday in March, since then to the present day.<sup>319</sup> The Fellsmere Riding Club built an arena at 13101 99<sup>th</sup> Street, the southwest corner of Willow Street (130<sup>th</sup> Avenue) and 99<sup>th</sup> Street northeast of Fellsmere to hold rodeos.<sup>320</sup> The 28 acre property lies on Tracts 1436, 1437, and 1438 in the Fellsmere Farms Company Subdivision immediately north of the old Fellsmere Railroad right-of-way.<sup>321</sup>

The arena is approximately 100 feet wide by 247 feet long. Initially, spectators would back their pickup trucks up to the arena and sit on the tailgates to watch. This went on until the mid-1980s. Around that time, a 600 square foot concession stand and cook shack were built on the south side of the arena and bucking chutes were purchased and installed.<sup>322</sup>

In the early 1990’s, grandstands for the spectators were purchased and installed. The grandstand on the north side is approximately 192 feet long by 28 feet wide and can seat 1500 people. Each grandstand has 15 rows of seats. The grandstand on the south side is approximately 96 feet long by 28 feet wide and can seat approximately 750 people. Because many people will stand if they can’t get a seat in the grandstands, between 2500 and 3000 spectators can watch a rodeo.<sup>323</sup> By the late 1990s, a new paneled arena and a second set of pens were built.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Information provided by Jerry Peterson, bulldozer operator for the Thompson Contracting Company of Ft. Pierce, FL, who physically removed the track and railroad crossings with his Caterpillar D7 bulldozer during 1956-57. Jerry Peterson provided the information to Fellsmere Historian Richard Votapka in 2015.

<sup>317</sup> Information provided by Beverly Tyson, Marvin Tyson’s wife to Fellsmere Historian Richard Votapka on January 24, 2019.

<sup>318</sup> Information provided by Wayne Henderson, Registered Agent for the Fellsmere Riding Club, to Fellsmere Historian Richard Votapka on June 11, 2024.

<sup>319</sup> The Fellsmere Riding Club website, 2024.

<sup>320</sup> Florida Division of Corporations, Document No. N9700001158.

<sup>321</sup> Indian River County Property Appraiser’s Website 2024 for 13101 99<sup>th</sup> St., Fellsmere, FL.

<sup>322</sup> Fellsmere Riding Club website.

<sup>323</sup> Information provided by Wayne Henderson, Registered Agent for the Fellsmere Riding Club.

<sup>324</sup> Fellsmere Riding Club website.

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Currently in 2024, the Fellsmere Riding Club has about 80 members, and 140 boys and girls have signed up for the rodeos in 2024. The club holds a minimum of five events per year. The Bullfrog Bash is held in January when the Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival is ongoing and Fellsmere Cracker Day Rodeo is always held in March. There are three “Youth Rodeos” per year. One is the Steve Mauldin Memorial Youth Rodeo held in memory of a rider from Okeechobee, who was tragically killed in a traffic accident on August 2, 2006, at a young age. Wayne Henderson, a member of the club since 1989, said he wouldn’t be in the club if it wasn’t for the youth involved because they are the future of the Fellsmere Riding Club.<sup>325</sup>

Featured events at the rodeos include bull riding, barrel racing, break-away roping, team roping, mutton busting, chute dogging (steer wrestling), goat-tying, and goat-untying. Adult winners receive a belt buckle (the traditional mark of a rodeo champion) and prize money. Youths receive belt buckles, too, but if one youth enters three different events (in a minimum of two rodeos) and comes out on top as the winner, he or she receives a saddle with a value between \$900 and \$950. In 2023, a young girl was the overall winner and received a saddle. In 2022, there was an 80 year old man who rode a bull for more than eight seconds. When news of the impending bull ride was publicized, Wayne Henderson said the Fellsmere Riding Club had the largest crowd that he can ever remember during his time as a member.<sup>326</sup>

In 1961, Manny Garcia , a refugee from Castro’s revolution in Cuba, escaped to the United States and bought 2,800 acres (4.4 square miles on the west side of County Road 512, approximately 1-½ miles north of State Road 60. After purchasing the property, he had to run three 24-inch pumps day and night, pumping 2,400 gallons of water per minute into the canals to keep the land dry. Soon after drying out the land, he bought 3,000 head of cattle to roam the 15 pastures of the “MG Ranch” as it was named. Garcia built a 20 stall barn and a one mile regulation race track and called the entire operation the “Diamond G Farm”.<sup>327</sup>

Manny Garcia began specializing in thoroughbreds and bought a number of stallions. He soon started training foals by the time they were two years old. He named the racing stable

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<sup>325</sup> Information provided by Wayne Henderson, Registered Agent for the Fellsmere Riding Club, to Fellsmere Historian Richard Votapka on June 11, 2024.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> *Vero Beach Magazine* [Vero Beach, FL], “A Story of Courage, Fortitude, and Independence”, April 2015, pp. 166-176.

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“Camino Del Rio” after the street in Vero Beach where he and his family lived. By the late 1960s, a number of horses bred and trained at Diamond G galloped to the winner’s circle.<sup>328</sup>

By 1966, Manny Garcia had 42 horses on his ranch; 17 of them were ready for the Tropical Park Raceway when it opened in Miami. His two-year-old colt, Icymino, won the \$15,000 added handicap race at Atlantic City, New Jersey, on October 11, 1966. After that race, Icymino was sent to Laurel Park, Maryland, to rest while waiting to be picked for the \$100,000 race at Garden State Raceway in New Jersey.<sup>329</sup>

The Chat and Chew Restaurant at 1 South Pine Street was built in 1962 and until 1980 was the only restaurant in town except for the Fellsmere Inn that opened its dining room to the public for meals on weekends. It was not only a place to eat but one of the principal places in Fellsmere for friendly conversation and socialization. For many years it was the only restaurant in Fellsmere that served the public during the week.<sup>330</sup>

In 1964, the Indian River County School Board closed the Fellsmere Public School to Grades 7 through 12 and students in those grades were bused to the Vero Beach High School, approximately 20 miles to the south.<sup>331</sup> The reason given by the school board to bus all the Fellsmere students was that “*children would be offered a far better education at the Vero Beach Junior and Senior High Schools than can be offered under the present circumstances.*”<sup>332</sup> Grades 1 through 6 remained at the school until 1982 when they were transferred to the Fellsmere Elementary School on North Cypress Street.<sup>333</sup>

The Board also took action to bus the Fellsmere Elementary (African American students) in the Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision to the Douglas Elementary School in Wabasso (approximately 10 miles to the south). Following closure of the Fellsmere Elementary School in 1967, the Board of Public Instruction of Indian River County deeded the land to the City of Fellsmere on November 10, 1969.<sup>334</sup> After the Fellsmere Elementary School

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<sup>328</sup> *Vero Beach Magazine* [Vero Beach, FL], “A Story of Courage, Fortitude, and Independence”, April 2015, pp. 166-176.

<sup>329</sup> *The Palm Beach Post* [West Palm Beach, FL], “Icymino Wins Handicap for N.J. Breeds”, October 14, 1966, p. 35

<sup>330</sup> Interview with Lisa Hearndon by Richard B. Votapka on March 4, 2020.

<sup>331</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Indian River County School Board Votes to Close Fellsmere, Winter Beach Schools”; February 13, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>332</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “IRC School Board Votes to Close Fellsmere, Winter Beach Schools”, February 13, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>333</sup> Information provided to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka by Fellsmere Mayor Joel Tyson in 2015.

<sup>334</sup> Fellsmere History, Clarence F. “Korky” Korker Collection, Dr. Evelyn Mudge, Box 5, Folder 10, Item FEL-05-010-0010, Main Indian River County Library, Vero Beach, FL., and Warranty Deed for Board of Public Instruction of Indian River County to the City of Fellsmere, November 10, 1969, O.R. Book 518, p. 825, Public

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closed, the children from the Hall, Carter, and James and Lincoln Park Subdivisions had to walk to the Fellsmere Public School on South Orange Street until 1982, when the school closed because the Indian River County School District didn't provide buses for them.<sup>335</sup>

The old Fellsmere Elementary School served as a community center for residents of the Hall, Carter, and James, and Lincoln Park Subdivisions to hold community meetings and social gatherings for youths to attend Saturday night movies, dances, birthday parties, and other special events.<sup>336</sup> Unfortunately, the old building fell into neglect and disrepair, and was eventually demolished in October 1996.<sup>337</sup>

In 1965, the South Puerto Rico Sugar Company transferred its sugar quota south to Okeelanta (approximately 84 miles south of Fellsmere).<sup>338</sup>

In 1966, Robert Parker of the Florida Internal Improvement Trust Fund met with state, county, City of Fellsmere, and Fellsmere Water Control District officials to resolve all outstanding taxes and penalties allowing that the City of Fellsmere be given a free and clear title to 400 acres that the state had confiscated in 1939 for unpaid taxes during the Great Depression. The 400 acres (0.625 square miles) was south of County Road 512 and within the Fellsmere City limits.<sup>339</sup>

In 1967, Gulf and Western Industries acquired the land creating huge agricultural farmlands by planting citrus trees and raising cattle on the property where sugar cane had been grown. It called the property "Fellsmere Farms" and provided employment for many residents.<sup>340</sup> Sun Ag started managing Fellsmere Farms in 1988.<sup>341</sup>

From 1965 to 1970, the population of Fellsmere only increased by 81 inhabitants to 813.<sup>342</sup>

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Records of Indian River County, Florida.

<sup>335</sup> Brown, Pastor Annie Mae. "Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision –The Forgotten Treasure", 2022.

<sup>336</sup> Information from Selma Lewis and Annie Mae Brown, former students of the Fellsmere Elementary School.

<sup>337</sup> City of Fellsmere "Award for the Bid for Demolition of the Community Center Bldg. at 1339 North Willow St.", September 20, 1996, and Fellsmere Division of Building Inspection, September 27, 1996.

<sup>338</sup> Patterson, Gordon. "Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere," Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, April 1997, p. 428.

<sup>339</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "50 Years Ago, Getting Land Back:", May 25, 2016, and information provided by Larry Napier, City of Fellsmere Finance Director to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on May 25, 2016.

<sup>340</sup> Patterson, Gordon. "Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere," Melbourne, FL: The Florida Historical Quarterly, April 1997, p. 428.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., and information provided by Michael Monroe, General Manager of Fellsmere Farms, to Richard B. Votapka on May 28, 2015.

<sup>342</sup> U.S. Census Population 1980: Florida-Number of Inhabitants, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

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On February 10, 1967, Andrew Clayton became the first African American elected to the Fellsmere City Council. He served for four years until February 12, 1973.<sup>343</sup>

From 1985 to 1989, Jonathan Washington, the youngest son of George A. Washington, was elected to serve two terms on the council. A plaque in Fellsmere City Hall commemorates Jonathan for all of his dedicated community service during his short life.<sup>344</sup>

On December 19, 1970, Hilarro and Rebecca Herrera moved their family from Apopka, Florida, to Fellsmere to become the first Hispanic family to relocate to the City of Fellsmere. Hilarro had been sent to Fellsmere by his employer to disassemble some towers and found that Gulf and Western Industries had much work available picking citrus fruit west of the city. Fernando Herrera, who grew up in Fellsmere, was elected to the Fellsmere City Council in 2002 and has served for 20 years as Councilman and Vice Mayor as of 2024.<sup>345</sup>

On May 9, 1973, the Fellsmere Drainage District changed its name by resolution to the "Fellsmere Water Control District."<sup>346</sup> On February 20, 1976, the Fellsmere Polo Club was incorporated making it the first polo club and grounds in Indian River County.<sup>347</sup> The Fellsmere Polo Club was accepted into the United States Polo Association.<sup>348</sup> The polo grounds were located on the east side of County Road 512, approximately 2.15 miles south of where Country Road 512 makes a 90° turn at the Fellsmere Farms/Sun Ag, LLC. entrance road. The polo grounds were about 550 feet east of County Road 512, where a 220-foot- long by 75-foot-wide barn exists today.<sup>349</sup>

On November 25, 1973, the cornerstone was laid at 1023 Lincoln Street for a new Mount. Olive Missionary Baptist Church. The brick and mortar structure was built after years of fund raising to replace the old wooden church that was located directly opposite the old church on the north side of Lincoln Street.

On February 23, 1981, an exchange agreement was signed between the Indian River County School District and the City of Fellsmere deeding Washington Park to the Indian

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<sup>343</sup> Fellsmere City Council Minutes of February 10, 1967 and February 12, 1971.

<sup>344</sup> Memorial Plaque in Honor of Councilman Jonathan Washington (1945-1989), Fellsmere, Florida City Hall.

<sup>345</sup> Information provided by Fellsmere Vice Mayor Fernando Herrera and Fellsmere City Clerk Maria Suarez-Sanchez to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on June 11, 2024.

<sup>346</sup> Fellsmere Drainage District Meeting Minutes, Book 1, Page 576.

<sup>347</sup> Florida Division of Corporations Document No. 497081.

<sup>348</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Polo in County", April 3, 1975, Section C, p. 3.

<sup>349</sup> Information provided by long-time Fellsmere resident Danny Emmons to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on June 12, 2024.

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River County School District in exchange for transferring the Fellsmere Public School to the City for use as Fellsmere City Hall.<sup>350</sup>

On March 29, 1982, the last day for the old Fellsmere Public School, the students gathered around the flagpole in front of the school. The janitor lowered the flag, and the students walked up North Cypress Street to the new Fellsmere Elementary School. Gilbert Barkoskie, who as a young man had unlocked the school on October 2, 1916, for the first time, went to the front doors of the old school and locked them for the last time.<sup>351</sup>

After the Fellsmere Elementary School was completed in July of 1982, the City of Fellsmere administration, police and public works departments, and the City Council chambers were all moved to the old Fellsmere Public School.<sup>352</sup>

Since the 1980s, Fellsmere has grown slowly and much of its economy is based upon the agricultural industry to the west of the City of Fellsmere. Many Hispanic workers have continued to move into the area to work on the farmlands and in the citrus industry, especially for such large firms as B & W Quality Growers and Fellsmere Farms (Sun Ag).

B & W Quality Growers is now the world's largest grower of distinctive leafy greens, including watercress, arugula, spinach, and ong choy. In 1995, the firm moved its headquarters to 7798 County Road 512, west of Fellsmere. In 2013, the firm had approximately 230 full-time employees including administrative, packinghouse and harvesting staff. The majority of its work force in the fields consists of Hispanic workers. B & W Quality Growers leafy greens are sold in local supermarkets but also sold across North America and Europe.<sup>353</sup>

Fellsmere Farms/Sun Ag LLC. at 7735 County Road 512, Fellsmere, is the largest employer in the area. As of 2015, there were 450 employees working for its farm operation, and this number did not include those who worked for the companies that leased land from Fellsmere Farms for their agricultural and aquacultural businesses. Fellsmere Farms had

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<sup>350</sup> O.R. Book 618, Page 2988, Indian River County Public Records, Exchange Agreement.

<sup>351</sup> Commemorative Plaque on the wall of the Fellsmere Elementary School Bearing the Date the School Opened; *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Fellsmere Lassoes Rancher for Florida 2000 Honor", December 19, 1998, p. A7; and Information provided to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka by Fellsmere Mayor Joel Tyson in 2015.

<sup>352</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Fellsmere School Has Foundations in History", July 19, 1982, p. 8; and Commemorative Plaque on the wall of the Fellsmere Elementary School Bearing the Date of March 29, 1982 when the school opened.

<sup>353</sup> B & W Quality Growers website and *Indian River County Newsweekly* [Vero Beach], "Watercress Giant Operates in Fellsmere", September 11, 2013, p. 6.



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11,000 acres of the farm's 18,345 acres devoted to citrus. It also had over 1,000 head of beef cattle. B& W leased 1,400 acres from Fellsmere Farms for growing its produce. The firm had leased 120 acres to Florida Organic Aquaculture several years ago. The former Fellsmere Farms which had 77,000 acres in 1977, has conveyed more than 24,000 acres of agricultural lands to public conservation. The former Fellsmere Farms properties now include the Blue Cypress Lake, the 6,500-acre Stick Marsh, the 7,000-acre Headwaters Lake, and the 3,000-acre Egan Lake.<sup>354</sup>

In 1982, Alvin Thomas became the first black mayor of the City of Fellsmere. He had arrived on October 20, 1959, from Jamaica to pick oranges and cut sugar cane for the Puerto Rican Sugar Producers, who had bought the Fellsmere Sugars Producers Association in 1943. He was appointed to the Fellsmere City Council in 1978. When the City of Fellsmere hovered near bankruptcy in 1978, Thomas refused to join three other council members in an attempt to dissolve the City. Instead, he helped eradicate a \$176,000 debt owed by the City (with an annual budget of \$34,000) by holding cake sales and an auction. The City of Fellsmere owed money to the Florida Department of Natural Resources for state land that previous councils had sold without reimbursing the state. The state demanded repayment about the time of Thomas's appointment to the city council but the city had already spent the money. Three council members resigned in an attempt to give the city back to the state. Since Alvin Thomas succeeded in his efforts to repay the state and save the city from dissolution, he was elected to the council in 1979, appointed vice mayor, and became mayor when Joe Suit resigned as mayor in 1982. Many people were at first strictly against him because he was black but due to his efforts to save the city, people changed their opinions of him.<sup>355</sup>

In 1986, the New Bethel A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) Church, a masonry structure, was built at 1056 Lincoln Street in the Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision to replace the old wooden church built in 1925.<sup>356</sup> With the Church of God, the Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church, and the New Bethel A.M.E. Church being on the same street, local residents often refer to Lincoln Street as "Church" Street.

In 1987, the Garcia properties were sold to the St. John's River Water Management District and were flooded. Manny Garcia said, "It took 18 years of constant pumping to keep the properties dry and by simply removing the pumps and cutting a couple of dikes to the

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<sup>354</sup> *Treasure Coast Progress & Innovation* [Stuart, FL], "Fellsmere Farms: Citrus, watercress, cattle, shrimp, and more", May 2015, p. 13.

<sup>355</sup> *Miami Herald* [Miami, FL], "Black Mayor Stars in Hamlet", December 3, 1984, p. 13.

<sup>356</sup> Indian River County, Florida Property Appraiser's 2022 Information for the Bethel AME Church, and Sept. 1995 Historic Properties Survey of Fellsmere, Historic Property Associates, Inc., St. Augustine, Florida, p. 6.

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canals, the entire property was under water within a week.”<sup>357</sup> Today, the race track can be seen under water in aerial photographs and is just north of the air boat launching ramp on the west side of County Road 512 heading north 1-½ miles from State Road 60.

In 1989, Fellsmere’s finances were so bad that the City Council borrowed \$50,000 from Herb Knowles, a local contractor, to pay for Social Security, income tax, employee health benefits, and outstanding bills including legal fees that the city had accumulated. The loan was paid back in two years. In 1999, Mayor Bob Baker honored Knowles at a City Council meeting for volunteering the \$50,000 loan for Fellsmere to continue to run City operations.<sup>358</sup>

From Thursday, January 17, 1991, to Saturday, January 19, 1991, the first Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival was held and was so successful that it became an annual event ever since. The festival has been traditionally held on the grounds of the Fellsmere Public School (now Fellsmere City Hall) on the third weekend of January ever since the first festival.<sup>359</sup>

The Guinness Book of World Records has acclaimed the Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival for being the “*world’s largest frog leg festival*” and for “*selling the most frog legs in one day*” at any festival in the world. Its annual proceeds go toward helping the youth of the community and charitable organizations.<sup>360</sup>

In 1991, the Iglesia Tabernaculo Dios Shamma (God Shamma Tabernacle Church) opened its doors at 6 North Pine Street. It is a Hispanic Christian/Jewish Synagogue.

In September 1991, long-time resident and Fellsmere City Councilman Frank Clavelin launched a petition drive to have the City of Fellsmere disincorporated. He claimed that residents of Fellsmere were overtaxed and weren’t getting anything in return. Mayor J. P. Brooks claimed that Clavelin was disgruntled because of a code enforcement case involving skirts on Clavelin’s mobile homes at his mobile home park.<sup>361</sup> Clavelin had a mobile home park at the northwest corner of Fellsmere at the intersection of Myrtle Street and South Carolina Avenue. Nearly 50 people signed the petition including a present councilman, a former mayor, and six former councilmen.<sup>362</sup> In arguing against the disin-

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<sup>357</sup> *Vero Beach Magazine* [Vero Beach, FL], “A Story of Courage, Fortitude and Independence”, April 2015, pp. 166-176.

<sup>358</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], Fellsmere Finances Improve Considerably Over Past Years, March 17, 1996; and “Small-town Hero”, May 2, 1999.

<sup>359</sup> Fran Adams Commentary, July 24, 2022.

<sup>360</sup> Guinness Book of World Records Plaques in Marsh Landing Restaurant at 44 N. Broadway, Fellsmere, FL.

<sup>361</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Disband Fellsmere, Petition Suggests”, September 7, 1991.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

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corporation, Mayor Brooks said the original petition was not legal because many of the people who signed it were not registered voters and 41% of the people paid no ad valorem taxes to the city. He said the main consideration of residents' discontent was to get rid of the code enforcement office and the board. In addition, people didn't think that the Fellsmere Police Department wasn't doing a good job. Indian River County's Legislative Delegation members State of Florida Senator Patsy Kurth and State of Florida Representatives Bud Bronson and Charles Sembler declined to bring a local bill to the state legislature to put the issue on the ballot for a referendum vote.<sup>363</sup>

Despite the City of Fellsmere being in bad financial shape, it limped along until 1994 when the city hired John Little as the city's administrator. John Little was the former City Manager of Vero Beach, Florida. From 1994 through 1996, John Little turned the City of Fellsmere's finances around by "*appointment of a sharp citizen's finance committee, a meticulous auditor, an alert and better trained staff, and a better City Council.*"<sup>364</sup> The city's finances slowly but steadily improved under his leadership.

On December 12, 1992, the Lady of Guadalupe Mission at 12896 County Road 512, approximately 800 feet east of Willow Street in the City of Fellsmere, opened its doors to parishioners. It was considered a Catholic "mission" because it wasn't financially self-supporting. Most of the families who attend derive their income from construction work or agriculture. However, financially it is difficult for the families to donate enough to meet the expenses of the mission. Individuals in Indian River County, mostly Catholics, donate to the mission by giving anywhere from \$100 to \$100,000.<sup>365</sup>

Administratively, it is under the auspices of the St. Sebastian Catholic Church. However, the St. Helen Catholic Church in Vero Beach actually directs the mission.<sup>366</sup> Four weekend masses are celebrated and one mass is held on Wednesday evenings.<sup>367</sup> Mission priest Reverend Adrian Torres stated that church attendance is strong because "*the church is the center of the lives of people of Hispanic heritage.*" The mission's campus is the site of community soccer games and family weekend picnics.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL] "Fellsmere Disincorporation a City Problem, Legislators Say", October 18, 1991, p. 4A.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Finances Improve Considerably Over Past Years", March 17, 1996.

<sup>365</sup> *Scripps News*, "Fellsmere Church Expansion Fundraising Nets \$900K", June 10, 2006.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> Lady of Guadalupe Mission website, 2024.

<sup>368</sup> *Scripps News*, "Fellsmere Church Expansion Fundraising Nets \$900K", June 10, 2006.

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The mission had very humble beginnings. San Juanita Chico was one of the mission's original organizers. Back in the 1980s, she came to Fellsmere with 10 children to be with her relatives after her husband drowned in a lake while they visited her native Mexico. Back then in Fellsmere, migrant farm workers attended the service she helped start by going door-to-door to recruit parishioners.<sup>369</sup> Since that time, Fellsmere's Hispanic population has grown tremendously, and membership at the Lady of Guadalupe has swelled. The Hispanic population in 2022 was 80% of the population.<sup>370</sup>

In the mid-1990s, Fellsmere's municipal water system was constructed, catapulting the City of Fellsmere firmly into the utilities business. Groundbreaking for Fellsmere's new municipal water system took place on November 8, 1993. During the next year, four shallow 10 inch diameter wells were installed followed by the distribution system, a small water treatment plant east of Willow Street and just north of 97<sup>th</sup> Street, and an elevated water storage tank was built at the northwest corner of Broadway and California Avenue.<sup>371</sup> The Farmers Home Administration gave Fellsmere a \$2 million grant and a low-interest loan for \$1.8 million to construct the system. The loan had to be paid back by the city over a 38 year period but all the money in the loan had to be spent before money from the grant could be applied to the project. Project Engineer Earl Masteller remarked that "*Without this type of loan, there's no way that Fellsmere could have this type of viable project.*"<sup>372</sup>

In 1995, the Indian River County Fire Department completed and opened a new fire station on the west side of Broadway just north of the old State Bank of Fellsmere building.<sup>373</sup> Also, during 1995, the City of Fellsmere constructed a water system within the African American community of Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision to bring treated potable water to the residents. Until that time, residents had their own private wells which usually yielded sulfur water that smelled like rotten eggs. The water system in the Lincoln Park Subdivision wasn't installed until 2017, three years after Lincoln Park was annexed into the City of Fellsmere in 2014.<sup>374</sup>

On March 16, 1996, the new Indian River County Fire Department Station No. 10 at 62 Broadway, Fellsmere, was dedicated at the Fellsmere Day celebration.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> *Scripps News*, "Fellsmere Church Expansion Fundraising Nets \$900K", June 10, 2006.

<sup>370</sup> U.S. Population Census for Fellsmere, 2020.

<sup>371</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Fellsmere Water System Inches Closer to Bidding", July 1, 1993, p. 7.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Digs for Water", November 9, 1993, p. 6A.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere's Way of Life, Slower Pace, Charm", December 29, 1997.

<sup>374</sup> Kevin Burg, City of Fellsmere Utilities Director, August 25, 2022.

<sup>375</sup> Fellsmere Day Program for March 16, 1996, and *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Fellsmere's Way of Life Offers Slower Pace, Charm", December 29, 1997, p. 23.

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In 1997, the City of Fellsmere applied for and received a \$300,000 grant from the Florida Legislature and Department of Environmental Protection in Memory of Harry T. and Harriet V. Moore. The Moores were an African American couple who were very active in the civil rights movement. While home during Christmas Day in 1951, they were killed by Ku Klux Klan members who had detonated three pounds of dynamite under the house. The State of Florida established a grant in their memory.<sup>376</sup>

In 1998, the 47.7-acre, \$8 million MESA (Music, Entertainment, Sports, and Activities) Park complex was built east of Fellsmere on the north side of County Road 512, 0.8 miles east of Willow Street. MESA Park was founded by Don Studley with former Redgate Communications officials Jeff Parsons and Kathy Gates. The trio invested about \$5 million into the project.<sup>377</sup>

The park had a 10,000 seat amphitheater that was intended for concerts, plays, operas and music festivals. The grounds on the park were intended to hold swamp-buggy races, motorcross races, tractor pulls, and monster trucks. The park was supposed to employ 50-70 people.<sup>378</sup> Country western singers George Jones, Hank Williams, Jr., Clint Black, and Neal McCoy played there.<sup>379</sup> Chuck Mangione, renowned flugelhorn player, as well as other big name artists played there over the course of three years.<sup>380</sup> By 2001, MESA Park had lost \$4.5 million.<sup>381</sup> The two partners who owned the park became embroiled in lawsuits resulting in the property being auctioned on September 25, 2003.<sup>382</sup>

Following receipt of the old State Bank of Fellsmere property, the Fellsmere City Council pledged \$75,000 toward Florida Historic Preservation Small Category matching grant through the state's Bureau of Historic Preservation to convert the old building back into a community center.<sup>383</sup> One of the challenges was to bring the building into compliance with

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<sup>376</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Community Center's Renovation About Done; Dedication on February 24", December 28, 2000.

<sup>377</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Plans for Motorsports Park in Fellsmere at Full-Throttle", August 18, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, "MESA Park Will Have Big Impact", June 29, 1998, p. 4A; and "Swamped- MESA Park Swamp-Buggy Track Splashes Into Success", November 15, 1996, p. A8, and *Florida Today* [Cocoa, FL], "Firm Readies Sale of Mesa Park", August 28, 2003, p. 41.

<sup>379</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Plans for Motorsports Park in Fellsmere at Full-Throttle", August 18, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>380</sup> Personal attendance at MESA Park concerts by Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka and wife, Linda.

<sup>381</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Plans for Motorsports Park in Fellsmere at Full-Throttle", August 18, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>382</sup> *Florida Today* [Cocoa, FL], "Firm Readies Sale of Mesa Park", August 28, 2003, p. 41.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere Banks On Its History", December 5, 1997, p. 10.

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the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), especially the bathrooms so they would be handicap accessible.<sup>384</sup>

In 1999, the City of Fellsmere applied for a \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a commercial sewer line (sewage force main) along County Road 512. The grant was for a five-mile sewage force main to be extended from the Indian River County sewerage system from Interstate 95 west to the city's central business district on Broadway. It was the city's first wastewater line and was solely for commercial purposes. Marsh Landing Restaurant and the Fellsmere Inn were to be connected to the system. Fellsmere City Hall and the Fellsmere Elementary School were expected to connect to the system as well.<sup>385</sup>

On November 23, 2000, the Fellsmere City Council accepted a \$793,000 bid from Maxwell Contracting of Cocoa to install the pressurized sewage force main from I-95 to the City of Fellsmere along the County Road 512 corridor. At the time, Fellsmere had obtained \$835,000 in funds from federal and state grants in addition to \$25,000 of its own funds.<sup>386</sup> Construction started in 2001 and was completed in late 2002.<sup>387</sup>

In 2000, renovation of the old State Bank of Fellsmere building was completed and opened its doors to the public as the Harry T. and Harriet V. Moore Community Center which still remains to this day.<sup>388</sup>

On February 18, 2005, the City of Fellsmere hired Jason Nunemaker as full-time city manager.<sup>389</sup> Under his leadership, the City's finances greatly improved and many grants were procured to make improvements to the city's infrastructure. One of his crowning achievements was to secure a \$3.2 million loan to restore the Fellsmere Public School for use as Fellsmere City Hall. Several major annexations of land were made under his administration.

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<sup>384</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Fellsmere Hurries to Apply for Grant", November 29, 1997, p. 6A.

<sup>385</sup> *Florida Today* [Cocoa, FL], "Sewer Service for Fellsmere Moves Closer", March 11, 1999, p. 57.

<sup>386</sup> *Sebastian Sun* [Sebastian, FL], "Time to Pipe Up for Fellsmere Sewer", November 24, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>387</sup> Information provided from Kevin Burge, City of Fellsmere Utilities Director, to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka, on June 24, 2024, and *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Fellsmere Grants MESA Park Extension on Code Violations", June 20, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>388</sup> Commemorative plaque on the front wall of the Fellsmere Community Center in 2024.

<sup>389</sup> Information provided by Fellsmere City Clerk Maria Suarez-Sanchez to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on June 11, 2024.

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Broadmoor was officially vacated by the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners on December 2, 2008.<sup>390</sup> The Town of Broadmoor appears on the 1946 of Indian River County map prepared by R. D. Carter, identified by a white square and name only, where the town once stood.<sup>391</sup> The area once occupied by Broadmoor is now totally underwater in the headwaters of the St. Johns River in the west part of Indian River County.

In October 2009, Treasure Coast Motorsports tried to revitalize mud-bogging races at MESA Park but cancelled all future events in November 2009 after low racer and spectator turnout.<sup>392</sup>

On October 21, 2010, Fellsmere's administrative offices began moving into the newly restored old school. The Fellsmere Public School building was once again re-opened to the public on October 25, 2010, but this time as the Fellsmere Government Center and the Boys & Girls Club which was located in the basement of the school.<sup>393</sup>

On April 4, 2012, groundbreaking ceremonies for the 225-acre National Elephant Center were held north of Fellsmere at the north end of Indian River County just south of the Fellsmere Grade, a road that goes six miles west to the Stick Marsh and once went from 138<sup>th</sup> Avenue (County Road 507) to Kenansville on State Road 441 up until the mid-1940s. The first phase of the center was to construct a barn, a keeper station, and four elephant paddocks with enough pasture for up to 10 elephants. The National Elephant Center was a collaboration of 73 zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The center was to offer space for elephants until new zoo space was available and for other elephants where their own zoos could no longer care for them. The full project was estimated to cost \$12.5 million to allow 36 elephants to stay at the facility.<sup>394</sup>

In May 2013, the National Elephant Center opened its doors to four African elephants. Unfortunately, a 10-year-old elephant died in January 2014, followed by the death of a 36-year-old elephant five months later. In December 2015, the two remaining elephants were relocated to other facilities.<sup>395</sup> On August 4, 2016, center officials filed papers to withdraw

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<sup>390</sup> Indian River Board of County Commissioners, "St. Johns River Water Management District's Request for Vacation of the Plat of Broadmoor Subdivision", December 2, 2008.

<sup>391</sup> Map of Indian River County, Florida, prepared by R.D. Carter, Vero Beach, FL, 1946.

<sup>392</sup> *Vero News* [Vero Beach, FL], "Mud Bog Mania at MESA Park Sputters Out After Faulty Start", November 20, 2009; and *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "Motorsports Park Ends Mud-Bogging After 2 Events," November 2009.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, "Fellsmere City Offices to Begin Moving into Old School City Hall Complex", October 21, 2020.

<sup>394</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], "National Elephant Center-A Giant Step for Pachyderms", April 6, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, "Elephant Deaths Details Emerge", April 9, 2017, p. 1.

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from doing business in Florida.<sup>396</sup>

On May 1, 2013, after six years of finding investors, property, and a suitable location, officials from Florida Organic Aquaculture broke ground on its facility west of Fellsmere to cultivate “*happy, healthy shrimp*” to be sold to area restaurants and grocers. Florida Organic Aquaculture located its operation near Fellsmere Farms/Sun Ag, LLC where County Road 512 makes a 90° turn. Florida Organic Aquaculture constructed two of the nation’s largest pole-barns, 4.2-acre structures the length of 3.5 football fields. CEO Cliff Morris, a native and immigrant from South Africa, stated that Florida Organic Aquaculture “*will put Fellsmere on the aquaculture map of the world.*”<sup>397</sup>

The total project was estimated to cost \$13 million and would employ 60 to 70 people of which 60% of the work force would be unskilled workers.<sup>398</sup>

Florida Organic Aquaculture had planned to build eight pole-barns on the property leased from Fellsmere Farms/Sun Ag, LLC. Each pole-barn had twenty 225,000-gallon tanks that contained 500,000 shrimp. Therefore, each pole-barn had the capability to produce 10 million shrimp per year. The 230 foot long, 30 foot wide, and five-foot-high tanks made out of sandbags within the pole barns were filled with saltwater brine from a 2,300 foot well.<sup>399</sup>

The first pole-barn was completed in the spring of 2014 and the Grand Opening-Ribbon Cutting Ceremony was held on May 7, 2014.<sup>400</sup> At the time of its opening, it was billed as “*the nations’ largest closed-water shrimp production facility.*”<sup>401</sup> Construction of the second pole-barn was begun in April 2015.<sup>402</sup>

In 2014, the former home of William and Zena Dreier at 98 North Cypress Street was converted into the Iglesia De Dios Pentecostal (Pentecostal Church of God). William Dreier was the former sales director for the Fellsmere Sales Company and Zena Dreier was the

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<sup>396</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Elephant Center Leaving Fla.”, August 20, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>397</sup> *Vero News* [Vero Beach, FL], “Colossal Shrimp Farm In Fellsmere, FL Breaks Ground On Facility”, May 1, 2013; and *Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers* [Stuart, FL], “Firms Ride Wave of Aquaculture Shrimp Boom”, May 25, 2014, p. 12A.

<sup>398</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Aquatic Farming Firm to Break Ground”, March 30, 2013, 1A.

<sup>399</sup> Information provided by Leandro Castro, Florida Organic Aquaculture Production Biologist to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on October 27, 2015.

<sup>400</sup> Florida Organic Aquaculture Ribbon Cutting Celebration program brochure, May 7, 2014.

<sup>401</sup> *Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers* [Stuart, FL], “Firms Ride Wave of Aquaculture Shrimp Boom”, May 25, 2014, p. 12A.

<sup>402</sup> *Your Newsweekly* [Vero Beach, FL], “Florida Organic Aquaculture, LLC Shrimp Farm Expansion Begins”, April 15, 2015, p. 3.



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first woman to vote in a Fellsmere municipal election in 1915 as well as the first woman in Florida and south of the Mason-Dixon Line to vote in a municipal election.<sup>403</sup>

On October 2, 2014, the Fellsmere City Council approved annexation of 8,845 acres (13.83 square miles) of the Corrigan family agricultural property southeast of Fellsmere.<sup>404</sup> On December 2, 2014, Lincoln Park Subdivision (northeast of Fellsmere and north of the Hall, Carter, and James Subdivision) was annexed into the City of Fellsmere. Combined with previous annexations, the annexation of the Corrigan family property and Lincoln Park Subdivision, increased the original one square mile of the City of Fellsmere in 1911 to 57.63 square miles in 2014.<sup>405</sup>

In 2015, Fellsmere received a Niche Ranking that rated Fellsmere the 4<sup>th</sup> best town in Florida to raise a family. Niche ranks towns under 100,000 in population in the United States based on school ratings, crime rates, age demographics, and access to affordable housing and childcare. A high ranking indicates that a town attracts young families with good schools and a safe community.<sup>406</sup>

On August 22, 2015, Florida Organic Aquaculture opened its “Fellsmere Fresh Farmer’s Market” retail store and “Florida Aquaculture Foundation’s Blue Cypress Treasures Antiques and Collectibles Boutique” at 32 N. Broadway Street, the former Fellsmere Grange building immediately south of the Fellsmere Estates Corporation building (Marsh Landing Restaurant).<sup>407</sup> The Grand Opening Celebration was held on October 16, 2015.<sup>408</sup>

On January 11, 2016, Anthony Tiarks, CEO of Parabel LTD, unveiled plans for a new growing and processing plant just off County Road 512, not far from Florida Organic Aquaculture’s shrimp farm. The new \$10 million aquaculture facility was to grow and manufacture “Lentein”, a plant based protein, and employ as many as 170 people. Lentein was to be packaged into 40-pound sacks and shipped to manufacturers around the world for use in healthy snacks, beverages, and other food items.<sup>409</sup> The aqua farm was to start with 100 acres of leased land on its 450 acre site, and include open air ponds filled with

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<sup>403</sup> Florida Master Site File No. IR00922 and *The Fellsmere Tribune* [Fellsmere, FL], “Women and Corporations Vote at Fellsmere Town”, July 3, 1915, p. 1, and Director Dreier Arrives”, January 23, 1913, p. 1; and Historical Marker for Woman’s Suffrage in Fellsmere sponsored by the National Organization for Women, Indian River, and the Florida Department of State, 2004

<sup>404</sup> *Treasure Coast Newspapers* [Vero Beach, FL], “Land Annexation Heads to a Final Vote”, Sept. 14, 2014, p. 1A.

<sup>405</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere Continues to Grow-Lincoln Park enclave to be annexed, November 21, 2014, and confirmation from Mark Mathes, Fellsmere City Manager on June 22, 2022.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., “3 Indian River County Communities Rank in Top of Best Towns to Raise Family in Florida”, May 28, 2015, and <https://www.niche.com/places-to-live/rankings>.

<sup>407</sup> Florida Organic Aquaculture “ShrimpFest 2016” flyer, and *Vero News/Sebastian River News* [Vero Beach, FL], “First—ever ShrimpFest Succeeds on a Huge Scale”, March 4, 2016, p.B8.

<sup>408</sup> Fellsmere’s Fresh Farmer’s Market& Blue Cypress Treasures flyer, 2015.

<sup>409</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Aquaculture Plant Could Bring 170 Jobs”, January 12, 2016, p.2A.

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water about one foot deep. Water lentils (duckweed) were to be grown in the ponds and be harvested daily. A processing plant on the site would dry and process the crop into a fine green powder-“Lentein”.The company had hoped to sell 4,000 tons of its product annually.<sup>410</sup> In 2020, Parabel changed its name to Lemnature AquaFarms. On September 12, 2023, Lemnature filed a voluntary petition for bankruptcy and a court ordered bankruptcy sale was ordered on December 12, 2023, featuring assets from production and research and development plants in Vero Beach and Fellsmere.<sup>411</sup>

The Florida Organic Aquaculture held the first ever “ShrimpFest” on February 27 and 28, 2016, on the grounds of City Hall at 22 South Orange Street. Six top area restaurants participated in a competition to see which shrimp dish was a hit with the crowd.<sup>412</sup> It was so successful that a second festival entitled “Shrimpfest & Craft Beer Hullabaloo” was held on February 25 and 26, 2017, and it was another big success.<sup>413</sup>

In April 2017, only two months after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual ShrimpFest, Florida Organic Aquaculture unexpectedly filed for bankruptcy; the cash-strapped company was forced to put the company in Chapter 11.<sup>414</sup> That brought the end to the shrimp festivals in the City of Fellsmere. River Days (previously the “ShrimpFest”) & Craft Brew Hullabaloo is now held annually in March in Sebastian, Florida, ten miles east of Fellsmere.<sup>415</sup>

The old Fellsmere Railroad Section Foremen’s duplex (originally located northeast of the Broadway and South Carolina intersection since 1910) remained as the last surviving railroad building. Even after all of the other railroad buildings had been demolished, it continued to function as a private single family residence until November 2013, after the last family moved out.<sup>416</sup> The Section Foremen’s house was purchased by the City of Fellsmere on March 10, 2016, and moved approximately 1600 feet west on July 3, 2016, to its present location. The City of Fellsmere had it completely restored and had it painted the standard colors of the Fellsmere Farms Company - white with green trim and a red

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<sup>410</sup> *Treasure Coast Progress & Innovation* [Stuart, FL], “Newest Protein Entry is also Fellsmere’s Newest Employer”, May 23, 2016, p. 37.

<sup>411</sup> AFN (American Framers Network), “Lemna/duckweed Processor Lemnature AquaFarms files for bankruptcy, asset sale set for Dec. 12, 2023.

<sup>412</sup> *Vero News/Sebastian River News* [Vero Beach, FL], “ First-ever ShrimpFest Succeeds on a Huge Scale”, March 4, 2016, p. B8.

<sup>413</sup> *Sebastian Daily* [ Sebastian, FL], “ShrimpFest in Fellsmere Offers Craft Beer Hullabaloo”, February 22, 2017; and *Your Newsweekly* [ Vero Beach, FL], “Second Annual Shrimp Festival Another Giant Win for Fellsmere”, March 8, 2017, p. 14.

<sup>414</sup> 32963 [Vero Beach, FL], “Highly Touted Shrimp Farm Now Bankrupt”, August 31, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>415</sup> Sebastian Area Chamber of Commerce website.

<sup>416</sup> Conversation between Kirby Cruce, Evelleen Yates, and Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on Nov. 3, 2013.

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roof.<sup>417</sup> The house is now located 630 feet east of County Road 507 (138<sup>th</sup> Avenue) and 180 feet north of South Carolina Avenue directly opposite the end of North Maple Street. Its address at the new location is 380 South Carolina Avenue.

On December 8, 2018, the U.S. Navy Armed Guard/Merchant Marine Museum opened in the former Grange Hall building just south of Marsh Landing Restaurant (the old Fellsmere Estates Corporation building). Clarence F. “Korky” Korker had held U.S. Navy Armed Guard meetings in Fellsmere since 2002. Korky, a Fellsmere resident since 1991, was the official photographer for the U.S. Navy Armed Guard in Brooklyn, New York, during World War II. One member in the group thought it would be a good idea to establish a museum in Fellsmere honoring the U.S. Navy Armed Guard and the Merchant Marine, so a year was spent planning the museum. Unfortunately, after the museum was established, it wasn’t able to secure grants or enough other financial contributions to sustain itself, and it closed about seven months later. All of the displays, exhibits, and artifacts were eventually donated to the Museum of Military History in Kissimmee, Florida.

On June 26, 2019, Jason Nunemaker resigned his position as Fellsmere City Manager after serving the city for 14 years.<sup>418</sup> On August 1, 2019, the Interim City Manager and Fellsmere Community Development Director Mark Mathes was appointed City Manager by the Fellsmere City Council.<sup>419</sup>

In November 2019, the Boys & Girls Club moved out of Fellsmere City Hall following the completion of a new 8,000 square foot building built northwest of the old school building. Vero Beach residents Larry and Karen Mulder and volunteers for the Boys & Girls Club pledged \$1 million towards construction of the building, enabling it to be built much sooner than expected.<sup>420</sup> The Grand Opening for the new Boys & Girls Club building was held on November 21, 2019.<sup>421</sup>

In 2018, the Florida Department of Transportation built a pedestrian bridge over Interstate 95 where the former Trans Florida Central Railroad right-of-way crossed the interstate.<sup>422</sup> The bridge was designed to give the appearance of an old railroad bridge because the

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<sup>417</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “News, Notes, and Personals”, January 9, 1913, p. 3.

<sup>418</sup> Information provided by Fellsmere City Clerk Maria Suarez-Sanchez to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on June 11, 2024.

<sup>419</sup> *Vero News* [Vero Beach, FL], “Mark Mathes Chosen as Fellsmere City Manager”, August 2, 2019.

<sup>420</sup> Personal Observation by Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on November 21, 2019.

<sup>421</sup> Attendance of Grand Opening by Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on November 21, 2019.

<sup>422</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “I-95 Pedestrian Overpass to Honor Old Railroad”, May 16, 2017, p. 1; and Trans Florida Central Railroad Greenway Pedestrian Overpass Dedication Ceremony, November 17, 2018, program.

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railroad right-of-way was converted in a rails-to-trails corridor. The rails-to-trails corridor stopped at the St. Johns River Buffer Preserve on the west side of Interstate 95; however, there are plans to continue the rails-to trails corridor west to the north side of Fellsmere.<sup>423</sup> The City of Fellsmere hopes to re-create a “historic railroad village” north of the city with possibly a small narrow gauge tourist railroad to establish it as a “tourist destination city”. It has already made some progress towards achieving that goal by having several railroad buildings designed based on 1921 sketches and vintage photos. The present plan is to build a replica of the Fellsmere Railroad depot in 2025 at the north end of Broadway.<sup>424</sup>

The year 2023 marked the last time that Fellsmere Day was held. Fellsmere Day was an event that was held every year beginning in 1980. It was the brainchild of City Councilwoman Luella Cosner whose intent was to bring local residents together in harmony. Fellsmere Day usually started with the Lion’s Club pancake breakfast followed by a parade down Broadway. On the grounds of the old Fellsmere Public School, there were vendor booths that displayed arts, crafts, clothing, jewelry, plants, and other items; various types of entertainment; food trucks; and a Little Miss and Mr. Fellsmere contest.<sup>425</sup> Danny Emmons, Fellsmere’s master machinist, usually displayed the fully operational old 1917 engine that came from Fellsmere’s electric light and ice plant. In 2020, when the Covid19 pandemic shut down public gatherings in Florida, Fellsmere Day was cancelled. Parades after 2020 were cancelled, and except for a DJ (disk jockey) in 2023, there was no more musical entertainment. There was no Fellsmere Day in 2024 but it may possibly be revived in the future.

In 2024, additional annexations made since 2014, have increased the area of the City of Fellsmere to 57.79 square miles. Fellsmere is now the largest municipality in area among all of the municipalities in Indian River County, more than Sebastian, Vero Beach, Indian River Shores, and the Town of Orchid combined.<sup>426</sup>

Fellsmere’s population has almost increased tenfold from 503 people on January 1, 1913, to the most recent U.S. census.<sup>427</sup> The 2022 U. S. census showed the population of Fellsmere was 4,834 people of which 3,910 (80%) were Hispanic or Latino.<sup>428</sup> Fellsmere continues to grow in size and population, and has come a long way since the one square mile Town of Fellsmere was founded by E. Nelson and Anne Fell back in 1911.

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<sup>423</sup> *Newsweekly* [Vero Beach, FL], “Railroad Trail to Extend 1.4 Miles”, September 15, 2021, p. 1, and “2 Mile Stretch of Trail Opens”, November 15, 2012, p. 1A.

<sup>424</sup> Information provided by Fellsmere City Manager Mark Mathes to Fellsmere Historian Richard B. Votapka on June 7, 2024.

<sup>425</sup> *Vero Beach Press Journal* [Vero Beach, FL], “Fellsmere Day Celebrated History”, March 8, 1993, p. 21.

<sup>426</sup> City of Fellsmere, Florida, website, 2024.

<sup>427</sup> *The Fellsmere Farmer* [Fellsmere, FL], “The Population of Fellsmere is 503”, January 23, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>428</sup> U.S. Population Census for Fellsmere, 2020.