



DUG FROM THE BACKYARD

Unearthing Key Moments in Melbourne's History

VOLUME: THREE

ISSUE: TWO

BY THE RIVER AND RAILROAD INSTEAD

Melbourne Just Loved their Wooden Schoolhouses

Melbourne High School started in 1894
First Graduation 1898

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Melbourne High School flyer from 1894.

Melbourne High Archives

Back in our very first *Dug from the Backyard* issue, we discussed the founding of Melbourne High School. One thing about historians is that each and every day, we learn something new. Give us another two years, and there will be another article explaining how there was a Crane Creek High School. Originally, we had mentioned that Melbourne High School was “unofficially” founded in 1919 and “officially” became a high school in 1926. *Stepping Stone 1986* mentions that Melbourne High was originally established in 1894, as a one-room schoolhouse serving grades 1-12, similar to the Little Red Schoolhouse (mentioned in Issue 2, Volume 1). The teacher for the school was Professor Winters from Stetson University, who admitted any Melbourne High graduate without requiring any placement exams.

This school had one key difference compared to the Little Red Schoolhouse: It was a Wells product. Aside from the Melbourne Auditorium, Melbourne Library, and even US-1, the Wells had also established a high school. Despite completing their winter home in 1896, it is believed that the Wells wanted to establish a high school so that when their children stayed in Melbourne, they could receive an education. New York had everything:

electricity, indoor bathrooms, and most likely, a high school. Naturally, if there were things to do and have in Lake George, why not bring them to Melbourne?

At the same time, there is a possibility that this high school was not a direct product of the Wells. There is not anything that suggests against this, other than the fact that information on a 1897 building from Wells descendants exists, but nothing for a 1894 building. This is not valid reasoning; however, the Wells could have provided money to expand Melbourne High, as they often put money into Melbourne to improve its current facilities, like moving Holy Trinity Episcopal Church.



Melbourne High School in 1897.

Dalypreservation.com

In 1897, the Wells constructed a larger school building that had an occupancy limit of 200 people. This building was located by the railroad tracks and was also occupied by the First Methodist Church of Melbourne. This building also featured a similar Widow's Walk railing like Green Gables had. A source claims the school was closed by 1899; however, this is hard to believe, as education was something the Wells valued.

By 1917, Cocoa High School was the first officially established (by the school board) high school in Brevard. Melbourne High followed in 1919, Eau Gallie in 1923, and Titusville in 1927. As previously mentioned, Melbourne High was "officially" established in 1926. What this means is that Brevard Public Schools formed a 7-12 high school in its own building, where the previous iterations of Melbourne High School only occupied part of the building or at a certain time. When Central (1961) and Hoover (~1965) Middle Schools opened is when Melbourne High became a high school by today's standards.

Now, the majority of what had been written in the first issue still stands: Melbourne High opens as a high school in 1926, the school outgrows the building, two more buildings are constructed, and the

Melbourne School Complex was formed. By 1940, "shacks" (or what we call portables today) were added to the complex as Melbourne High's enrollment increased. We stated that the current Babcock lot was purchased by 1950; however, the reason why a new location was proposed was far from just needing more room.

Melbourne School Complex in 1955. MHS is the building all the way to the left (eastern building, image was taken from the south).

Melbourne High Archives



As with any building, years of use can take its toll. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, the wooden floors of the high school building had become so worn, sweeping had become a hassle. The windows would rattle during windy days or when a door was closed in a neighboring classroom. Other problems, like chipping paint and electrical problems, made it clear the school would not be a good long-term investment. A new school campus had been designed, and Melbourne High School would be the first school to leave the Melbourne School Complex.

The 1956-1957 school year was the first school year at the new campus. As mentioned, this campus had a similar design to Palm Bay High School (originally Southwest Middle School) and Westshore Jr/Sr High School (originally Central Middle School). The school featured multiple rectangular classroom buildings, a gymnasium, and an auditorium. A cafeteria and library were originally part of the original buildings, but later became their own buildings in the early to mid-1960s.

As much as this campus was loved, from its landmarks such as the Liberty Bell, Bulldog Tower, and the fountain, the campus began to degrade. The roofs would leak, the foundations would begin to give, plumbing would decide whether or not class would meet in the Library, and of course, the electrical system couldn't keep up with all the new electric typewriters and computers. The problem was that it wasn't just Melbourne High suffering. From Palm Bay High to Jupiter Elementary, many schools had problems and wanted money to fix them.

Palm Bay High School's problems most likely were similar to Melbourne High's, although less severe due to the school buildings being 10 to 15 years newer. The hardest decision at the time was which school to save. Melbourne High School could not continue in its state, and neither could Palm Bay High. The original idea was to rebuild Melbourne High completely, whether at the same location or relocate somewhere new. This project would have cost well over \$20 million, and the school board only had around \$56.6 million to spend on 14 schools, which needed renovations and had construction projects. Additionally, Melbourne High alumni disliked the idea of leaving the site, as one of the major projects was renaming part of Sheridan Road to Bulldog Boulevard and changing the school's site number to 74 (for the class of 1974).

By 1993, new blueprints had emerged. The plan would originally save only Buildings 2 (Auditorium), 3 (Media Center), 4 (Band), 5 (formerly Home Economics), 6 (Cafeteria), 15 (formerly the Science Wing), and 17 (formerly the ROTC Building). Building 8 would have connected to Building 1, an amphitheater-like structure would have been placed



Melbourne High School in the 1970s.

Stepping Stone



outside the Cafeteria, and a new gym and custodial building would have been constructed where Building 9 sits today. As the campus shows today, not all these came out of the sandbox, mainly because of money.

As time went on, however, the campus continued its reconstruction outside of the main 1994-



One of the Mid-Century Modern classroom building being demolished in 1994.



Melbourne High Archives

1998 period. In 2000, Building 10 was completed. Building 18 (the gymnasium) was completed in 2008, and Building 7 followed shortly after in 2009. Other renovations, like the Cafeteria renovation and Media Center makeover, occurred well after the school took down its "Construction Zone" signage and big brown portables. Palm Bay High got its renovations and new buildings as well, however, not to the same magnitude.

One last note, as mentioned, if other schools that featured similar designs like Central Middle School (relocated in 1994) and Palm Bay High School had problems in the 1990s, where are those problems today? Westshore is its own being as a choice school; however, Palm Bay High has Heritage and Bayside High Schools to take some of the south expansion pressure. The 2,500+ home development across the street will put immense strain on the school. The reason why Palm Bay High still survives today, while its sister campus could only last 38 years, is most likely due to the continued renovations and proactive maintenance that Melbourne High might have never received due to the fast-growing nature of the school.

In the end, Melbourne High had endured a lot. From fallout drills at both campuses to multiple fires in 1971, Melbourne High School has always been a symbol of resilience. While both the campus location and look of buildings have changed, its dedication to education and role in the community have remained the same for over 130 years.



School construction, late 1995, early 1996.

1994-1998 photo album