



DUG FROM THE BACKYARD

Unearthing Key Moments in Melbourne's History

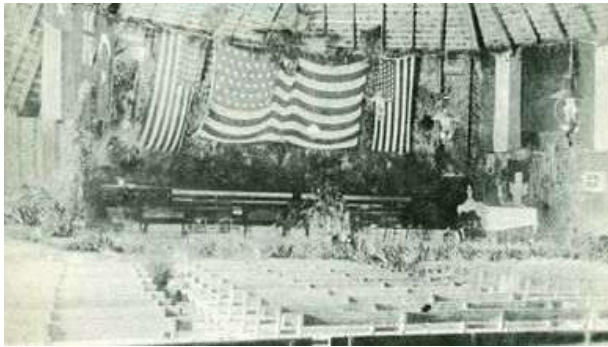
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“WELL, WELL, WELL, MR. WELLS.

I am sure everyone will love the new auditorium.”

As the small, young town it was, Melbourne sought to build things to attract tourists and



The original Melbourne Auditorium constructed by the Wells.

Greengables.org

homesteaders. As luck would have it, the Wells would bring what Melbourne desired. As previously mentioned in Volume One, Issue Eight of *Dug from the Backyard*, the Wells were a wealthy family from Crown Island, New York. After Nora Stanford Wells was diagnosed with pneumonia, the Wells purchased about 150 acres along the Indian River and north of Crane Creek. After constructing their large winter house, they began helping Melbourne

become a more well-known destination in Florida. In New York, there was the Chautauqua Institution, which still exists as an education source to promote lifelong learning and self-improvement.^[1] With the Wells' assistance, the Chautauqua of the Tropics and Melbourne was formed with Mr. William Wells being the organization's vice president.^[2] The auditorium constructed was a large, wooden dome-shaped structure with plenty of seating to accommodate large crowds of guests.

The auditorium most likely hosted other events for Melbourne residents. The auditorium was a short-lived structure, probably being demolished by the mid-1910s. In 1927, the Wells donated 30 acres of land (including the portion of land where the auditorium sat) to the City of Melbourne to maintain it as a park. In 1964, a new, larger auditorium was constructed, relatively close to where the original one was located.^[3] In 1987, President Reagan visited Melbourne and gave a speech at the auditorium.^[4] Today, the Melbourne Auditorium boasts over 20,000 square feet of entertainment space, including a main hall, two wing halls, a stage, and a large lobby area.^[5] The auditorium is used for a variety of events, from performances to expos to even fruit tree sales on the south lawn.



President Reagan at the Melbourne Auditorium.

reaganlibrary.gov

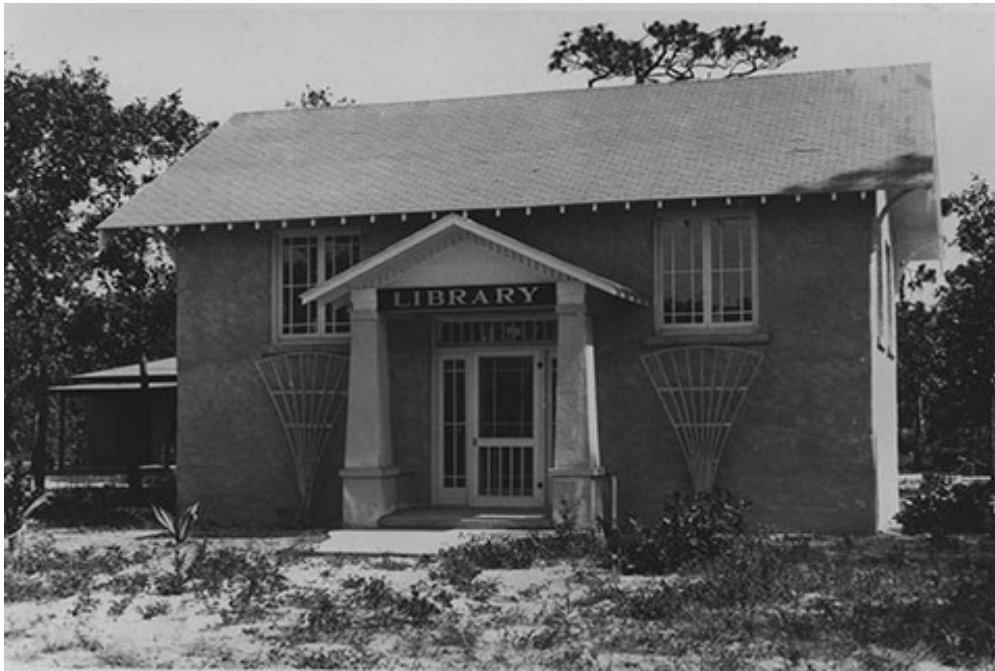
“WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME SOMEONE CHECKED OUT THIS BOOK?”

“Well look at that! This book has not been checked out in 18 years!”*

The original
Melbourne
Library
located
near the
modern
City Hall.

1924-
~1950's

*brevardfl.
gov*



Another notable contribution of the Wells was the Melbourne/Fee Avenue Public Library. (If you want a third contribution, you are probably standing in it, AKA, Melbourne High School.) Coming from a well-educated family, Nora Stanford Wells enjoyed reading. The Trunk Room at Green

Gables featured shelves where Nora Wells kept her books. She would invite her friends upstairs and they could check out a book from her lending library and they could sit out on the octagonal porch and enjoy the works of notable authors like Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Mann. Later, Mrs. Cambell of Melbourne opened a library in her store, The Bazaar, in 1918. As Mrs. Cambell collected more books, her library



The mid-century modern library building located at 540 East Fee Avenue.

1954-1986

*brevardfl.
gov*

outgrew its space. Between 1918 and 1924, Mrs. Cambell's library occupied other buildings such as one

The new
Melbourne
Public
Library
building.

1989-
Current

*brevardfl.
gov*



on the corner of New Haven Avenue and Vernon Place, Ford Motor Company's display room, Dr. I. K. Hicks' office (1922), and later a feed store on Melbourne Court. In 1924, Mrs. Cambell and Nora Wells opened the first official library in Melbourne. This building was located at the corner of Palmetto and Waverly and had 3,000 books in its collection.^[6] The

library membership was \$1 per year, or visitors could pay one cent per day to rent books.^[7] In 1954, a new

library building was constructed on the Wells' donated lot.^[6] The building cost \$30,000 and later formed a support group in 1956.^[7] The library was expanded in



The blue outlined plot is the approximate location of the original library. To the left is Trinity Towers East, and to the right is the Melbourne City Hall building.

Bcpao.us

1959 and 1974 before being demolished in 1986.^[6] While the new facility was being built, the library temporarily rented a space. In September of 1989, the current Melbourne Public Library building was dedicated. The new building was constructed at the cost of \$1 million and has over 25,000 square feet of usable space for book storage and meeting rooms.^{[6][7]}

*True story: In the Media Center, a book was found published by Dr. Brown while he was principal at Melbourne High. The book was last checked out in 2006, which predates the new Gym and Building 7 (which was dedicated in Dr. Brown's name).