

FELLSMERE FIRSTS

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The City of Fellsmere was first to do many things before any other municipality within what is now known as Indian River County and in one case the State of Florida as well as all of the states below the Mason- Dixon Line. To enumerate, notable firsts that Fellsmere achieved early in its infancy were as follows:

1. **FIRST Municipal Government in Indian River County**
2. **FIRST Master Planned Community in Indian River County**
3. **FIRST City in Florida and in all the states below the Mason-Dixon Line to Allow Women the Right to Vote in Municipal Elections Prior to the 19th Amendment**
4. **FIRST Library in Indian River County**
5. **FIRST Bank in Indian River County**
6. **FIRST Masonry Public School Building in Indian River County**
7. **FIRST Public Water System in Indian River County**
8. **FIRST Community Power Plant and Ice House in Indian River County**
9. **FIRST Telephone System in Indian River County**
10. **FIRST Concrete Paved Streets in Indian River County**
11. **FIRST Concrete Sidewalks**
12. **FIRST Bi-weekly Newspaper in Indian River County**
13. **FIRST Boy Scout Troop in Indian River County**
14. **FIRST Municipal Brass Band in Indian River County**
15. **FIRST Operatic Society in Indian River County**
16. **FIRST to Show Silent Movies in the County**
17. **FIRST Swimming Pool in Indian River County**
18. **FIRST Tennis Club in Indian River County**
19. **FIRST Air Strip in Indian River County**
20. **FIRST Race Track in Indian River County**
21. **FIRST 9 Hole Golf Course in Indian River County**
22. **FIRST Package Sugar "Florida Crystals" offered in Florida**

1. Fellsmere was the FIRST municipal government in what is now known as Indian River County. When Fellsmere was incorporated as a city by the Florida State Assembly ratifying its charter on April 29, 1915 (Fl. Historical Quarterly Summer 1997), it was located in St. Lucie County which was established in 1905. Sebastian did not become incorporated until Dec. 6, 1924 and chartered on May 11, 1925. Vero Beach was not incorporated until 1925 when Indian River County was created from the northernmost 23 miles of St. Lucie County.

2. Fellsmere was the FIRST Master Planned Community in what is now known as Indian River County. It was one square mile (640 acres). Its streets (named after trees) were laid out north to south and avenues (named after states) were laid out east to west. The plat of the Town of Fellsmere was recorded in the public records of St. Lucie County,

(now Indian River County) on April 5, 1911 and filed with the Clerk of the Circuit Court of St. Lucie on July 31, 1911. Construction of Fellsmere began on Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1911. One million dollars was appropriated by the Fellsmere Farms Company to construct the drainage system on 115,000 acres surrounding

Fellsmere out of the 118,000 acres purchased by E. Nelson and Anne for Fell in March 1910 for \$155,000. This was when the average wage was 22 cents an hour and the average worker made between \$200 and \$400 per year. 3,000 acres purchased was on both sides of the Sebastian-Cinncinnatus Railroad that was also purchased but not included in the drainage plans prepared by the engineering firm of J.G. White Company in New York City.

The Town of Fellsmere had approximately 4,730 platted lots, and three parks. The largest park was Washington Park that measured 600 feet by 680 feet (9.37 acres). It was equidistantly located between Cypress Street and Maple Street north of Pennsylvania Avenue (now County Road 512) and south of New York Avenue. It is now the present site of the Fellsmere Elementary School.

The other two parks were named "Tallahassee Park and Osceola Park. Tallahassee Park was a linear median approximately 30 feet wide and 590 feet long in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue (CR 510) between Elm Street and Lime Street. Osceola Park was 680 feet long and approximately 30 feet wide between Virginia Avenue and Alabama Avenue in the southwest quadrant of the Town of Fellsmere. None of the three parks mentioned above are in existence today.

3. Fellsmere was the FIRST City in Florida and in all the states below the Mason-Dixon Line to allow women the right to vote in municipal elections prior to the 19th Amendment. An historical marker stands today on the west side of Broadway, the main north-south thoroughfare in the heart of Fellsmere, approximately 275 feet south of South Carolina Avenue where the Dixie Theatre once stood, that is entitled "BIRTHPLACE FOR EQUAL SUFFRAGE FOR WOMEN IN FLORIDA". The marker was sponsored by the National Organization of Women (NOW) of Indian River County and the Florida Dept. of State. The marker commemorates the first woman to vote in a municipal election in Fellsmere and in the South. It reads as follows: "The population of Fellsmere is of a high type of intelligence with lofty ideals and wise execution. Progressive in all things, perhaps no better indication of the fact may be given than the unanimous vote of the the town granting unrestricted suffrage to women. Fellsmere Tribune, March 8, 1916. At a February 1915 meeting at the Dixie Theatre, Fellsmere citizens accepted the articles of incorporation unanimously. The charter included a unique proposal that women be granted full and equal privilege for suffrage in municipal elections. Local bills seldom received close scrutiny from legislators, and the equal privilege for suffrage provision went unnoticed. In signing the act that created the Town of Fellsmere, Governor Park Trammell, in effect, gave

women the right to vote in municipal elections. In the June 19, 1915 city election, Mrs. Zena Dreier was the first woman to cast a ballot in Fellsmere, in all of Florida, and south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The town residents took much pride in this unique woman's right and urged neighboring municipalities to follow the Fellsmere Way to equal suffrage. In 1920, a U.S Constitutional amendment granted suffrage to women. But history will note that Fellsmere led the way. Note that Zena Drier was the wife of William Dreier who was the Sales Director for the Fellsmere Farms Company, and the U.S. Constitutional Amendment 19 "Woman Suffrage" was ratified on August 18, 1920.

4. Fellsmere had the FIRST library in Indian River County. The library known as the "Marian Fell Library" opened its doors on May 1, 1915 at 63 North Cypress Street. Marian, who was the oldest daughter of Edward Nelson Fell, the mining engineer who founded Fellsmere in 1911, recognized the town's need for a library and raised funds for its construction by donating the royalties she received for her English translations of the short stories and plays written by the renowned Russian author and playwright, Anton Chekhov. The Marian Fell Library served as a popular site for lectures, readings, recitals, public meetings, and a variety of functions hosted by the Library Association. *The library has remained open and in continuous use ever since its doors were opened to the public. (The Marian Fell Library was transferred from the Indian River County Historical Society to the City of Fellsmere on October 20, 2009.)
5. Fellsmere had the FIRST Bank in Indian River County. Known as the State Bank of Fellsmere, it was organized in 1913 by Charles Piffard. Charles Piffard, who had served as an assistant to Nelson Fell in Narcoosee, Florida, and in Siberia, had used his profits from the Russian enterprise to establish a banking career in New York City. However, Nelson Fell persuaded Charles Piffard to establish a much needed bank in Fellsmere. Investors purchased capital stock in the State Bank of Fellsmere worth \$25,000. A lot at the northwest corner of Broadway and Colorado Avenue was deeded to Charles Piffard for construction of the bank building. The 27 foot by 48 foot building was constructed of cream colored Shawnee brick with red tile and a marble floor at a cost of \$6,000. The bank was open on July 1, 1913. It had a large vault and safe deposit boxes. E. Nelson Fell served as one of the bank's directors. Unfortunately, the State Bank of Fellsmere failed in March 1922. (Source: The Florida Historical Quarterly Summer 1997 pgs 7& 10, and Spring 1997 p.414) The building still stands there today and once served as Fellsmere City Hall but now serves as the Fellsmere Community Center.
6. The FIRST Masonry Public School Building in Indian River County was constructed in Fellsmere at 22 South Orange Street, one block west of Broadway and immediately south of Pennsylvania Avenue (now known as County Road 512). The two story school with a basement was designed by Frederick H. Trimble, a prominent Orlando architect who began his career in the United States in Fellsmere having served as a Methodist missionary in Fuzhow, China.

The school's cornerstone was laid on January 31, 1916. The school was built by Fellsmere contractor Arthur Sanders at a cost of \$40,000. The school was completed and opened its doors to 136 students on October 2, 1916. Instruction was provided for all grades from 1st Grade to 12th Grade. It is the oldest historic public school standing in Indian River County, and remained active as a school until 1964 when it was closed. It was later used as Fellsmere City Hall and Police Station. On October 19, 2010 the restoration of the school was completed for \$3,060,000 and the doors were re-opened to the public. The school now serves as City Hall and a Boys and Girls Club. (Source- Florida's History Through Its Places –MyFlorida.com, Division of Historical Resources; The Fellsmere Farmer; Fellsmere City Manager Jason Nunemaker)

7. The FIRST Public Water System in Indian River County consisted of seven (7) artesian wells (deep, free flowing wells) that provided water through galvanized pipes throughout the City. The wells produced a pressure of approximately 11 psi which was enough to have running water and a shower in the homes. (source-Rodney Tillman, Fellsmere Drainage District Superintendent). The well drilling machines were bought from Couch and Jorgenson in Grant, Florida and shipped to Fellsmere by rail. (source - Fellsmere Farmer 7/11/1912 Edition). Some of the original wells still exist today.
8. The FIRST Community Power Plant in Indian River County was constructed in 1913 north of the Fellsmere Railroad on the east side of Community Road (134th Court) just west of Broadway. On Sunday, June 15, 1913, the power was turned on soon after dark for about 500 lights. Nearly every building in Fellsmere had been wired for electric lights. In December of 1913, the ice plant began operating. The ice was shipped by rail to Sebastian for use in the fish houses along the Indian River (source-Marsh Landing). Ice in town was delivered by a mule driven wagon. (Note: In the Sebastian Area Chronology, Page 4 of 6, it states that in 1896, an ice plant and barrel factory was built by A.M. and Harry Sample from Hopwell, N.C.)

The building was 50 feet by 50 feet with a boiler room 25 feet by 50 feet. It was equipped with a 90 kw dynamo which furnished enough power to operate 1500 lights. The ice plant could produce 20 tons per day. The electric rate was 12 cents per kw. Street lights were installed on Broadway down to New York Avenue by Nov. 1913.

At first, privately owned, both the power plant and icehouse were taken over by the Town of Fellsmere. However, when a franchise was granted to Florida Power and Light Company, the ice factory was moved to Sebastian.(source- Mary S. McCluer). Electricity was provided to those fortunate residents who could afford it in the early evenings. However, nearing 10:30 p.m., the lights would blink twice in warning and the power went off precisely at that time. (Source - The 1910's p. 15 of 47) Vero Beach's first power plant was constructed in 1918 (source-Vero Beach.com)

9. The FIRST Telephone System in Indian River County was installed in Fellsmere in 1910. Telephone lines were installed in Fellsmere, so that the main office of the Fellsmere Farms Company could be in “touch with every part of the work” that was ongoing at the time in constructing the drainage canals and ditches. Telephone lines were run to the three colossal dredges- the Broward, the Fellsmere, and the St. Lucie which were excavating the Outlet and Main drainage canals. In an article on the front page of the October 30, 1913 edition of the Fellsmere Farmer, it was reported that the Brevard Telephone Company would install a central exchange and install a first class telephone system. The Company would absorb the two party lines owned and operated by the Fellsmere Farms Company. It is probable that the exchange will be in operation shortly after the first of the year. The central station will be located near the intersection of Broadway and New York Avenue.”
10. The FIRST concrete paved streets in Indian River County were in the Town of Fellsmere. The Town bonded to have two streets paved with concrete: Broadway St from Pennsylvania Ave (now CR 512) to the railroad depot just north of South Carolina Ave, South Carolina Ave from the alley west of Broadway to the alley east of Broadway; and New York Avenue from Oak Street to the west City limit. They were paved during 1917 by means of a \$50,000 bond issue along with seven other roads that would be paved with marl (source Fellsmere Farmer 1917). According to Mary S. McCluer, a resident of Fellsmere, it was nice to have the streets paved but the bonded indebtedness hung like a dark cloud over the city for many years.
11. The FIRST Concrete Sidewalks in Indian River County were 5 feet wide in residential districts and 10 feet wide on Broadway, the “meridional and business street of the town. (source-Page 31 of 47 The 1910’s Fellsmere, FL (City of Roses -1916). There were 6 miles of concrete sidewalks according to the August 31, 1913 Edition of Fellsmere Farmer.
12. The FIRST bi-weekly newspaper published in Indian River County was the Fellsmere Farmer whose first edition was Volume 1, No.1 on February 21, 1912. The editor was Fred W. Kettle, who had 20 years experience in journalism, agriculture, and horticulture in Florida. The Fellsmere Farmer was issued every two weeks on a Saturday and the initial subscription price was \$1.00 per year. Fred Kettle’s “Salutatory” in the initial edition appeared on page two of the paper. The Fellsmere Farmer was published between February 21,1912 (Vol. 1, No.1) through October 30, 1913 (Vol.2, No.19). On November 8, 1913, Vol.1, No.1 of the Fellsmere Tribune was published and the Fellsmere Farmer ceased to exist. The Fellsmere Tribune was published on a weekly basis every Saturday. A one year subscription cost \$1.50. The last edition of the Fellsmere Tribune was Vol. 7, No. 5 published on November 12, 1921.

The Fellsmere Farmer was not the first newspaper circulated in Indian River County although it was the **first bi-weekly** to be published in what is now known as Indian

River County. In 1925, the northern part of St. Lucie County became Indian River County. The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997 Edition, page 8, quoted the Indian River Advocate, June 14, 1895 edition. This would have been 17 years prior to the Fellsmere Farmer and 16 years prior to breaking ground to construct the Town of Fellsmere. However, the Indian River Advocate was published in Titusville, Florida. The earliest newspaper in St. Lucie County was the St. Lucie County Tribune in 1905 and the Fort Pierce News in 1902. The Vero Press (later known as the Press Journal) wasn't established until March 1919 by Paul Nisle and Tom Campbell (source- Vero Beach. Com).

13. Fellsmere had the FIRST Boy Scout Troop in Indian River County. According to the January 1, 1916 edition of the Fellsmere Tribune, the Fellsmere local council of the Boy Scouts of America was granted its charter as stated in a (Dec. 27, 1915) telegram to John A. Sutherland. Frederick .H. Trimble, the architect who designed the first masonry school in Fellsmere and Indian River County, was one of two scoutmasters. Clayton Brown was the other scoutmaster and W.W. Baker was the local scout commissioner. The Fellsmere local council was given jurisdiction in the four Fellsmere townships of (then) St. Lucie County.
14. Fellsmere had the FIRST Municipal Brass Band in Indian River County which was organized on June 24, 1913 (see June 26, 1913 and July 24, 1913 Editions of the Fellsmere Farmer)
15. Fellsmere had the FIRST Operatic Society in Indian River County (source see the Fellsmere Farmer)
16. Fellsmere was FIRST to Show Silent Movies in Indian River County. They were shown three times a week (source- Mary McClure) at the Dixie Playhouse on Broadway. Oldtimers say that the silent movies at the Dixie Playhouse were simply referred to as "the picture show". (Source – The 1910's p.15 of 47) Known as the Hall and Saunders Dixie Playhouse, it was completed in late October 1913 and showed its first special movie "From the Manger to the Cross" on November 9, 1913. Regular show nights were Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The Playhouse could easily seat 500 people. (The Fellsmere Farmer Oct. 16 & 30, 1913 editions). The playhouse was also used for town meetings and for voting.
17. The FIRST Swimming Pool in Indian River County was constructed in Fellsmere in 1915. According to an article entitled "Public Swimming Pool Be Opened Here Soon" that appeared in the June 5, 1915 edition of the Fellsmere Tribune, "Dr. E.T. Moore is about to open to the public an additional attraction for Fellsmereans in the form of a fine swimming pool. The feature is located on ground just east of the Broadway Hotel on Broadway. The pool will be 30' x 60' and range from about two (2) feet deep in one end to six (6) feet deep in the other. The dressing rooms extend

along the entire west side of the pool and are very convenient. The whole outfit will be enclosed by a high fence when completed. It is expected that the pool will be ready for use in about a week." There was an article that appeared in the October 26, 2008 edition of the Press Journal, stating that there was a swimming pool in Fellsmere in 1915, and they were worried that it was against the law to swim on a Sunday.

18. Fellsmere had the FIRST Tennis Club in Indian River County. E. Nelson Fell, the Town's founding father, was an enthusiastic tennis player. He organized a lawn tennis club known as the Fellsmere Tennis Club, which he used during his visits to Fellsmere. The May 2, 1912 edition of the Fellsmere Farmer reported that "The Fellsmere Tennis Club has been organized (in April) with a good sized membership. Mr. J.G. Carter is president and treasurer and Judge C.H. Alcott, secretary. Two Bermuda grass courts of the club are on New York Avenue and roses and shrubbery are being set out to beautify the spot. Members of the club anticipate great sport after office hours, daily except Sunday." The two courts of Bermuda grass were located north of the Marian Fell Library. The June 13, 1912 edition of the Fellsmere Farmer (page 3) reported that "The Fellsmere tennis court has been carefully leveled and planted with Bermuda grass. As soon as the sod is made the court will be used by members of the Fellsmere Tennis Club. In July 1914, the Fellsmere Tennis Club thought it a "reasonable request to ask the Fellsmere Farms Company if it would pay for the cost of the tennis court's maintenance. The company's executive committee approved the request. (Source The Florida Historical Quarterly, Summer 1997 pgs 14 and 15)

19. The FIRST Air Strip in Indian River County was in Fellsmere. It was a grass strip north of the Fellsmere Railroad between Park Lateral and Lateral "U" near Sublateral 12 (LU12) (source- Rodney Tillman, Fellsmere Drainage District). The February 21, 1912 edition of the Fellsmere Farmer reported that Ernest H. Every, Manager of the Fellsmere Farms Company had returned from a flying visit to Jacksonville. The October 17, 1912 edition of the Fellsmere Farmer reported that Mr. D.M. Dominici, Assistant Sales Manager of the Fellsmere Farms Company, made a flying business trip to Chattanooga last week. The Jan. 23, 1913 edition of the Fellsmere Farmer reported that "Mr. P.A. Vans Agnew of Kissimmee paid a flying visit to Fellsmere on Monday of last week. He is expected to return here next week to attend to several business matters. Mr. Vans Agnew is the attorney for the Fellsmere Farms and Sales Companies." The Sugar Mill also had an airstrip (source- Rodney Tillman, Fellsmere Drainage District Supt.). Today, the Fellsmere Farms Company (Sun Ag) has an airplane, a hanger, and a grass air strip on the north side of the main road into the complex (westerly extension of CR 512) and at the NE corner of Railroad Avenue just west of the main administration building.

20. The FIRST Horse Race Track in Indian River County was located in Washington Park which is the site of the Fellsmere Elementary School today. Washington Park was located between Cypress St. and Maple St. and midway between Pennsylvania Ave (now CR 512) to the south and New York Avenue to the north. The distance was 400 feet from both avenues. Washington Park had an elliptical track feet wide. Its short radius was 200 feet and its long radius was 300 feet (refer to the 1916 edition of The Fellsmere Tribune).
21. Fellsmere had the FIRST Nine (9) Hole Golf Course in Indian River County. “The honorable James T. DuBois from Halstead, Pennsylvania, who had been the United States Minister to Columbia, had more than 10 acres adjoining his home which he converted into a sporty nine hole golf course with many hazards and lots of rough. It was a rare treat for the guests who were invited to play. His neighbor, Colonel Jamieson, was often his golfing pal. (source- Pioneer Chit-Chat by William C. Thompson –“Pioneer Fellsmere”)
22. Fellsmere had the distinction of having the FIRST packaged sugar “Florida Crystals” offered in Florida. Frank Heiser, an early resident of Fellsmere and an astute businessman, organized the Fellsmere Sugar Association which later became the Fellsmere Sugar Company. Under the leadership of Frank Heiser, a sugar mill was built in 1932 which produced a high grade raw sugar. The mill was constructed halfway between Lateral “U” and Lateral “S” on Lot 2485 approximately 1 mile west of County Road 512. The raw sugar, however, had to be shipped to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to be refined into granulated sugar.

In 1935, Frank Heiser a sugar refinery. Fellsmere Sugar Company as a cooperative known as the Fellsmere Sugar Producers Association and had a sugar refinery built later that year. It was the first granulated sugar refinery built in Florida.

The sugar was packaged in five, ten, 25, and 100 pound bags under the trademark “Florida Crystals”. In 1936, the refinery produce 5.5 million pounds of sugar and 6 million the following year. This translated into a daily output of between 125,000 and 150,000 pounds of refined sugar. The sugar industry in Fellsmere generated enough jobs for the local people of Fellsmere that sustained the community for more than 35 years. At one time, 225 people were employed by the sugar mill, 223 men and 3 women. The sugar mill was closed down in 1965. (source Raising Cane and Refining Sugar: Florida Crystals and the Fame of Fellsmere by Gordon Patterson).

According to "Fellsmere, Florida (City of Roses) 1916 (a marketing publication), other possible FELLSMERE FIRSTS may be the following:

1. A Baseball Team in 1912
2. A Choral Society
3. The Camp Fire Girls

The above items need to be researched further but they are referenced as being in existence in the Fellsmere Farmer which more than likely precedes any others in Vero Beach at the time.

Fellsmere Misconceptions as to being a "First" in Indian River County

1. Contrary to popular belief, Fellsmere did not have the "First" hotel in Indian River County. Although the Fellsmere Inn was built in 1911 by the Fellsmere Farms Company, the Ercildoune Hotel in Roseland was built in 1882 as a plantation house first (Source- Explore Local History by Pam Cooper October 26, 2008 in the Press Journal newspaper). Sebastian Area Chronology compiled by George Keyes states that in 1889 the Ercildoune Hotel was built by Larry Moore. President Grover Cleveland is said to have stayed there for a week or two to hunt and fish.
2. Fellsmere did not have the "First" railroad depot in Indian River County. The Florida East Coast Railroad came through Indian River County in 1893 and the stations (depots) were built around 1903 in Sebastian and Vero Beach. The 12' x 32' Fellsmere Railroad depot at the north end of Broadway Street on the north side of the drainage ditch parallel to South Carolina Avenue was started on January 6, 1913 and completed and opened for business on January 23, 1913. Mr. E. Nelson Fell purchased the first ticket and Earnest H. Every, Fellsmere Farms General Manager purchased the second ticket. (Source – Jan 23, 1913 Fellsmere Farmer and Indian River County Historical Society)