

A History of the:

FELLSMERE DRAINAGE DISTRICT

(NOW)

FELLSMERE WATER CONTROL DISTRICT

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PROLOGUE

While FELLSMERE DRAINAGE DISTRICT was created under the General Drainage Laws of the State of Florida in 1919, it had its actual beginnings much earlier than that. It goes back to 1910 when a group of men began plans to develop the area for settlement.

According to Victor H. Power of the Manufacturers Record from an article in the Fellsmere Farmer dated April 18, 1912 (page 4):

"In the early eighties (this area) was the 'happy hunting ground' for all kinds of game and the special home of the cattle ranger. It remained unoccupied until Mr. Russell of the firm of Russell and Morgan, of Cincinnati, purchased it.

It was during his ownership that a standard gauge railroad was built from Sebastian to the eastern edge of the property. . .

It is very likely Mr. Russell had in mind a development of broad scope, but before his plans could be carried out he died and the proposed development was abandoned.

In January, 1910, the property was offered to Mr. E. Nelson Fell and Mr. Oscar T. Crosby, and purchased by them."

It was here that a drainage system was conceived that would become FELLSMERE DRAINAGE DISTRICT in 1919 and FELLSMERE WATER CONTROL DISTRICT in 1978.

According to the Fellsmere Farmer (same article) Mr. Fell, for whom Fellsmere would be named was:

"A mining engineer of wide experience, a native of London, England, and who came to the United States 30 years ago.

He has been familiar with Florida conditions for 25 years and has practically been a part

of it, with the exception of the few years when he was engaged in the active management of mines in Alabama, British Columbia, South Africa, Siberia and elsewhere."

His associate, Mr. Oscar T. Crosby, (according to the same article) was:

"born in Louisiana, then removed to Mississippi. At age 17 or 18 went to West Point, where he graduated. He is well known in the electrical traction industry (Street-cars and trolleys) of the United States and other countries, a traveller of extensive experience, and analyst of commercial and industrial problems. He is president of the Wilmington & Philadelphia Traction Co., and president of the Trenton & Mercer County Traction Corp. of New Jersey."

These two men were the actual moving force that began what would become FELLSMERE WATER CONTROL DISTRICT today.

On March 10, 1910 Courthouse records show that:

John J. Heard gave a warranty deed to E. Nelson Fell (DB 6 Pg 499, St. Lucie County, March 16, 1910) conveying:

All of Twps 31-36, 32-36, 31-37, and 32-37, excluding school Section 16 in each case.

And that, on June 20, 1910:

E. Nelson Fell gave a special warranty deed to Fellsmere Farms Company (DB 10 Pg 78, St. Lucie County, June 20, 1910) conveying:

Same as deed above.

CHAPTER 1

The property was now acquired, the organization to develop it was in place. But this part of Florida in 1910 was not at all as it is today. It was pristine prairie, marsh, and woodlands, stretching for unbroken miles in all directions.

Blue Cypress Marsh was broad, uninhabited. Water levels rose and fell with the seasons. There was no natural outlet to the sea. The "Sand Ridge" meandering north and southeast of the Fellsmere

area held all elevations other than overflow during extreme high water at a few places.

A. B. Michael, Wabasso pioneer said there were times when he could cross the marsh on horseback. On the other hand Mrs. Jesse (Maude) Hearndon (Fellsmere pioneer) said they once pitched their tent just south of where the Fellsmere Community Church is now; it was the only dry spot around.

Engineer of the District H. C. "Bill" Watts, one of the early surveyors said that with no real outlet to the east then, the miles of periodic sheet marsh would spread unbroken south, north, and east from Blue Cypress Lake (also called Lake Wilmington at one time).

This was the territory Mr. Fell and his associates set out to convert to farm land, for a very rich muck soil (a product of the marsh) covered a great many acres of the property.

The centerpiece of the plan was a drainage system. Really the drainage system was the plan. Nothing else was of any consequence without it.

The higher elevation east half of Twp 31-37 began to be settled first with the City of Fellsmere (Town of Fellsmere then) as the center of things.

The soil showed the fertility and versatility as evidenced on the large Demonstration Farm of the Company.

Settlers came in by the trainload on the standard gauge Fellsmere Railroad (later to become the Trans Florida Central) connecting with the Florida East Coast at Sebastian.

The original Main Outlet Canal was in place. Control gates held up water levels for the floating dipper dredges cutting the north/south laterals.

Park Lateral was not in the original plan. All lands east of Lateral U drained into it.

Sub-laterals were small, many dug by "Buckeye" excavators that cut a relatively small V-shaped ditch in a continuous movement simultaneously depositing the spoil to one side.

There was no question of public interest in the project. Though dredges and excavators were operating around the clock, at times they could not keep ahead of new settlers wanting to move in and build on land not yet adequately drained.

This made for a temporary "frontier" experience, a welcome difficulty stemming from success. But that aside, other difficulties began that hinted at inadequacies in the plan. One

item was drainage in general. It ranged from fair to poor and periods of water standing were frequent.

It quickly became apparent that alterations must be made.

The early small "Buckeye" sub-laterals were soon determined too small and steps begun to enlarge some of them beginning with those serving the most heavily settled sections.

Lateral U made too long a distance to drain the easternmost tracts. A shorter run-off was needed and Park Lateral was planned for the purpose.

The original plan provided for no perimeter levees. The southern portions of Twps 32-36 and 32-37 were intended to become an extension southward of the initial project and platted accordingly with sub-laterals and with the north/south laterals extending through them.

In addition, early plans were to bring in an area west of Lateral M as Phase 2 of the present project. Hence, perhaps the reasoning for no perimeter levees.

Further, no perimeter levee was in the project for the east line. While the Sand Ridge was virtually at the NE end of 31-37 it meandered southeasterly and left a progressively widening area of low ground toward the east of the property southward.

The Indians hunting and trapping in the Marsh (Indians used to come in to Ft. Pierce to buy supplies) warned the engineers that Blue Cypress was bigger than they thought it was and they were undertaking to drain all of it.

Symptoms of these potential trouble sources began to reveal themselves:

1. While the average rainfall pattern had not changed the system was often overloaded with long periods of standing water the result. It was becoming evident the Indians were right. Rainfall from far and wide was coming into the project for handling.
2. The Town of Fellsmere suffered heavily from water in the streets. Its paved streets, some constructed with the new fangled (at that time) poured concrete method complete with molded curbs and gutters, made miniature Venetian Canals through town for small boats.
3. The Main Canal was proving to be small for the job, and was rendered further limited at one spot by a rock formation across the bottom that had not been properly blasted out.

CHAPTER 2

Let's make some of this "ancient" history now come to life by going back in time and joining the folks that were there. Following are excerpts from the Minute Book of the Fellsmere Farms Company:

1. The prophecy of the Indians.

Page 54 November 1, 1910.

"Mr. Fell gave a brief summary of the damage done by the recent storm and rains in Florida . . . the water rose from 3 to 4 ft. above the summer level on the Company's lands, and when at that height had apparently found an outlet over the height of land, flowing eastward from the eastern side of Twp 32-37."

Page 55 December 6, 1910.

"A preliminary study of the flood water run-off. . . seemed to show an outlet for flood waters across the height of the land, running in a southeasterly direction from the southern border of the tract."

2. Our folks were glad to learn uninhabited Blue Cypress marsh posed no threat on the north boundary of the project. They evidently were not aware the marsh elevation drops sharply to the north and could hardly ever create a threat from that quarter.

Page 55 December 6, 1910.

"The maximum altitude reached by Lake Helen Blazes during the flood following the October storm was 19 ft. apparently proving that there was no danger of water backing up on the property from below."

3. Not recognizing yet the warning of the Indians, notice in the minute record below that the control gates were being opened ". . . to relieve the entire marsh."

Page 255 July 10, 1913.

"The control gates . . . be immediately opened to their full capacity in order to protect the drained land and to relieve the

entire marsh. Operation of all dredges temporarily suspended until effect of opening the control gates upon the stage of water in the canals has been sufficiently observed and studied. The stopping of dredging work . . . not injure sale of Company's lands during next 3 -4 months."

4. The high water situation in July prompted that Lateral U be considered as location of a protective levee on the West. Other than the Town of Broadmoor the concentration of settlement was to the east of it:

Page 268 August 8, 1913.

" . . . question of condition of west bank of Lateral U for levee purposes . . . discussed . . . Spoil in proper condition . . . exception weak spots which could be quickly and easily strengthened."

5. Nonetheless, long range plans seemed to go right ahead for lands west of the proposed Lateral U levee:

Page 381 December 4, 1914.

" . . . negotiations concluded for purchase of 2 lots in Broadmoor for purpose of erecting a bank. 50% discount proviso of discounted purchase price of building for bank constructed before January 1, 1916.

6. Then more plans to expand west of Broadmoor!

Page 384/385 December 14, 1914.

" . . . improving conditions of land North of Ditch 28, South of Main Canal, and East of Lateral M"

This would include what is known today as the Stick Marsh and further included south of Zig Zag Canal (which was not there then) between Lateral Q and the Lake. NOTE: The east shore of the Lake had been platted for lakeside cottages.

7. And yet more expansion planned:

Page 435 April 20, 1915.

A. " . . . equalizing ditch and levee . . . sub-lateral 32 and 34, thus adding approximately 3,000 acres"

B. . . . as soon as drainage . . . provided .
. . . lands lying West of Lateral M and North
of Lake Wilmington shall be improved. . ."

CHAPTER 3

Then came 1915. It would be a year of crisis. The nagging drainage problems were beginning to make themselves felt. Land sales were dropping off. Collections against land sold were slowing down. Cash reserves were drying up.

At a special Board Meeting March 18, 1915 (Page 414), Bond Holders were offered land against principal up to 15% of their holdings in an attempt to reduce outstanding debt somewhat.

Another special Board Meeting. June 3, 1915 (Page 442):

*". . . a special committee . . . be appointed
. . . to carefully study and consider all
matters affecting the interest and welfare of
the company."*

* * * * *

The year began with a wet and rainy January; 7.18 inches for the month, with half of that in one day! That was Monday, the 11th. However, the rest of the winter was fine as was early spring:

February	2.57 inches
March	1.21 inches
April	1.29 inches

Then the pattern began to change. Summer rains started early that year. May brought eleven rainy days, pretty well scattered out until Memorial Day. The Holiday Eve began with a slow drizzle during the night; then, overcast the next morning with a slow dreary rain off and on all day and into the night. By noon the next day, Tuesday, the 1st of June, when it cleared and the sun came out, 4.64 inches had covered the entire area.

June brought also eleven rainy days for a total of 14.46 inches of rain for the two months.

The floating dredges were not affected and continued work, but the excavators on sub-laterals were badly hampered. Runoff waters were roaring through the control gates with the boards low-set but the water levels would not go down.

Early July brought the usual mix of clear days, showers,

ordinary summer fare. That is, until the 22nd. Then came nine days of scattered showers in a row. Here is the record.

Thursday,	July 22	Trace
Friday,	July 23	.13
Saturday,	July 24	.25
Sunday,	July 25	.10
Monday,	July 26	1.00
Tuesday,	July 27	1.34
Wednesday,	July 28	.30
Thursday,	July 29	.22
Friday,	July 30	.03

Then came Saturday. When the rain Came!

CHAPTER 4

Saturday, July 31, 1915 began with a few scattered showers that ended around noon. But it didn't clear up. A drab overcast hung on throughout the day. In early evening a light rain began to fall off and on. During the night it became a steady downpour.

Sunday morning, the 1st of August still rain, ceaseless rain. By the time it would end Monday, the 2nd, 8.80 inches of rain would have fallen over this weekend on already water logged land.

This was no isolated "local" event but a low pressure trough that reached across the State of Florida that weekend. The weekly newspaper in Ft. Pierce reported the following items, its issue Friday, August 6, 1915:

ITEM: "The heaviest rainfall in years was distributed over South Florida Saturday night, Sunday, and Monday. Railroad traffic was tied up in many places and considerable property damage was done by the high water."

ITEM: "Property damage amounting to many thousands of dollars was done at St. Petersburg Sunday night and Monday morning by the heaviest rainfall ever recorded there. During a period of 18 hours, 13 inches of rain fell."

*NEWS ITEM Quay: (now Winter Beach)
". . . Water, water. everywhere!"*

ITEM: "Trains on the Florida East Coast Railroad were three to seven hours late Sunday and Monday owing to washouts. One place between Jupiter and Palm Beach was badly damaged . . ."

NEWS ITEM Jensen: ". . . had a hard rain Saturday that extended into Sunday morning . . . "

NEWS ITEM Village of Eden: "Yes, thank you it rained here too . . ."

NEWS ITEM Walton: ". . . the people that thought their home impervious to storms found out on Saturday and Sunday . . . very few cottages stood the terrible storm without leaking. . . . The heavy rain falling so ceaselessly for nearly 48 hours made much trouble . . . undermining the beginning of the long wharf . . . connected to the highway."

NEWS ITEM White City: "The unprecedented storm here covered the earth with water."

CHAPTER 5

It was a terrible event, the great storm of August 1, 1915. At the Fellsmere project the uncompleted and "found wanting" drainage system was overwhelmed. The 29.39 inches of rain fallen since May 1 had spread over the huge Blue Cypress Marsh/Prairie to its widest reaches.

Broadmoor was flooded, its people rescued by boats and railroad. Flooded streets in the Town of Fellsmere. Water logged land and standing water in low lying areas for months.

Suddenly two vital matters demanded close and undivided attention; the immediate day to day operations, and the future of the entire project.

So again let us go back in time and join the folks who were there. Following are excerpts from the Minute Book of the Fellsmere Farms Company:

The Special Committee appointed on June 3 presented its report:

Page 449 August 13, 1915 (Special Board Meeting)

*To the Board of Directors,
Fellsmere Farms Company.*

Gentlemen:

Your special committee, having investigated the

affairs of your company, begs to report as follows.

(1) Land sales have practically ceased, thus eliminating the one source of additional income.

(2) Lapses on existing land contracts have increased beyond all reported estimates.

(3) A large proportion of the contracts still carried are in arrears and subject to lapse.

(4) Collections are diminishing, having decreased from something over \$22,000 in January to approximately \$15,800 in July.

(5) Completion of drainage and protection program for the "restricted area" is estimated to cost more than the proceeds from bonds now sold.

(6) The organization of the company remains substantially the same as when active selling was possible. We regard the overhead cost under present conditions as entirely too great.

(7) The crisis brought on by recent heavy rains presents new problems heretofore not anticipated.

In view of the situation as above set forth, your committee recommends the adoption of the following program:

(1) Consolidation of the Farms Company and the Sales Company, reducing the single organization to an absolute minimum operating basis.

(2) Appointment of an experienced accountant as Secretary and Treasurer.

(3) Discontinuance of any sales program for the present.

(4) Energetic and economical completion of present construction program to insure drainage and safety of restricted area.

(5) Immediate study of possible supplemental construction.

Respectfully submitted,

The Board responded to the report by authorizing the Executive Committee to proceed to procure a professional engineering overview of the project without delay. The Committee

met that same afternoon and an excerpt of the minutes of the meeting follows (Page 455):

"The Committee immediately entered into conference with Mr. A. S. Crane, Hydraulic Engineer of J. G. White Engineering Corporation, who had been requested to meet with the Committee, respecting questions of drainage, construction work and other matters incident thereto, which had been raised because of recent continued and excessive rainfall at Fellsmere and in general throughout the State of Florida.

The President of the Company, Mr. Fell, stated to Mr. Crane the past and existing conditions, the causes therefor and the lines on which the Company had been working, and after a general and detailed discussion on the subject as a whole, Mr. Crane was requested to study the entire matter carefully from an engineering viewpoint and to submit an opinion on drainage and construction program and the advisability or necessity of enlarging that program in order to insure proper and sufficient drainage under all ordinary and normal conditions; also, to submit his views as to the desirability of his visiting the property for further investigation."

Because of the urgency of the situation the meeting was adjourned until August 17 (four days later)

CHAPTER 6

At this point in our history we come to the first reference to what would become the Fellsmere Drainage District.

Time: 10:00 A.M. Tuesday, August 17, 1915.

Place: 37 Wall St. New York City

Occasion: Executive Committee Meeting

Purpose: Special Engineering Report

The Report (Fellsmere Farms Company Minute Book Pages 456-57):

New York, August 17, 1915

*Mr. E. Nelson Fell, President
Fellsmere Farms Company
Fellsmere, Fla.*

Dear Sir:

At your request we have carefully examined the plans

and data relating to the Fellsmere tract with a view to putting as much of the tract as is practicable into a condition which will be unquestionably safe against such high-water conditions as have obtained during the last few weeks.

The total area tributary to the present outlet canal is about 465 square miles. All of this area now discharges its water into the present outlet canal which obviously is too small to take care of these flood waters within a reasonable length of time.

By restricting the area to about 80 square miles, as your plans contemplated, we find that the outlet canal, as now designed, is of ample capacity to take off the water from the area. We would recommend that the outlet canal be considered primarily to drain the 80 square miles in question, and secondarily to lower the level of Lake Wilmington at such time as the full capacity of the canal is not required for draining the smaller area.

In order to accomplish this purpose, we would propose to continue and complete levees of substantial dimensions around the whole tract of the 80 square miles. In the levee, located on Lateral "M" near Lake Wilmington, we would propose to construct head gates which would permit the shutting off of the water from Lake Wilmington entirely. The general course of the levee now to be constructed would be along the north side of the main outlet canal as far as Lateral "M", then along the west side of Lateral "M" to the head-gates, thence around the easterly shore of Lake Wilmington as far as sublateral 34, thence along sublateral 34 easterly to the eastern boundary and thence along the east boundary until high ground is reached.

These levees should have their tops well above the extreme high water level of Lake Wilmington.

With such levees and gates constructed and with the total capacity of the main outlet canal available for the small tract, we believe that it is perfectly feasible to well drain the tract and also to entirely prevent the flooding of the land, except for short intervals during extremely heavy downpours.

Very truly yours,

The J. G. WHITE ENGINEERING CORP.
Albert S. Crane,
Hydraulic Engineer.

At the same meeting Mr. Fell announced to the Committee
(Minutes-Page 457-458)

". . . I have decided that it is my duty and to the interest of the Company that I should go to Fellsmere without delay and live there and devote my whole time and energy to overcome the now-existing difficulties. . . . as to salary . . . I am indifferent."

The flooding rain resulted in cases of actual hardships and efforts were made by the Company:

Page 464 September 10, 1915:

". . . to extend to the sufferers such assistance as may be in its powers, having regard to its practical inability to furnish monetary help, and to consider the various claims that the sufferers present in the premises."

The President of the Company, Mr. Fell is now resident on the property to handle the situation.

Work on land improvement West of Lateral M. is discontinued. The Executive Committee sends the following telegram to Mr. Fell at Fellsmere:

Page 464 September 10, 1915:

"Defer for present survey West of M except along railroad line West to high land. Stop. Take soundings between Q and Lake and soundings around east side Lake. Writing."

Page 466 September 27, 1915:

W. H. Tallis is appointed Secretary and Treasurer to be the "experienced accountant" recommended by the Special Committee (Meeting August 13, 1915).

The general location is named for a western levee:

Page 466 September 27, 1915:

". . . leave to company officers at Fellsmere the exact location of (western levee). . . provided at least as far west as western bank Lateral Q . . . and . . . west (to) depth of muck not more than 8 feet."

Page 469 October 9, 1915:

As part of austerity measures Fellsmere Sales Company (heretofore a separate company and operation) is merged in Fellsmere Farms Company.

* * * * *

Note: Inserts of general historical interest appearing in St. Lucie County Tribune (Fellsmere was in St. Lucie County at that time):

News Item: September 17, 1915.

"There are 370 automobiles in St. Lucie County.
107 Fords
20 Overlands
8 Maxwells
3 Packards
. . .several Cadillacs, a Buick, a Hupmobile,
and nearly every other make represented."

News Item: December 8, 1915

"Census:	<u>Ft. Pierce</u>	<u>Fellsmere</u>	<u>Okeechobee</u>
1905	700	-0-	-0-
1910	1,333	150	-0-
1915	1,960	898	982

CHAPTER 7

Work continued on building the drainage system. An item "Drainage Progress on Fellsmere Farms" appeared regularly in the weekly Fellsmere Tribune. The issue for Saturday July 1, 1916 reported:

"The dredge BROWARD . . . working southward on Lateral M (note) Levee 400 feet south of SL 15.

The dredge FELLSMERE . . . north of SL 23 on the East Boundary (note) Levee.

The dredge ST. LUCIE building up low places in Lateral Q (again note) Levee north of 34.

The GADE excavator south of SL 15 . . . working north of Park Lateral (note now under construction).

Hand forces (remember this is 1916) are at present working on Sub Laterals PL-9 and U-20."

The settlement at Broadmoor became abandoned after the flood of 1915. A good many of its people resettled in Fellsmere which was becoming a well rounded and self-sufficient community in the northwest of what was then St. Lucie County.

However, the enterprise that conceived and started it was coming on hard days. In spite of all efforts at redesign, re-organization, and the economic health of the community it had created, the end was to come two years later.

In January, 1918 its creditors brought foreclosure. All the assets of the Fellsmere Farms Company were sold to the mortgage bond holders who founded a corporation to take title to the assets.

A special Master of the Court gave a Masters deed (Deed Book 32, Page 521, St. Lucie County, March 27, 1918) conveying the assets of Fellsmere Farms Company to Fellsmere Company.

The new Company picked up the project where the previous ownership had left off. With the recommendation of the J. G. White Engineering Corporation as a guide it proceeded without delay in that direction.

In 1919 the FELLSMERE DRAINAGE DISTRICT would be born.

CHAPTER 8

It was in February, 1919 that the first of many legal steps were taken that would create the "Drainage District."

The following is from the Fellsmere Tribune of February 22, 1919:

"Fellsmere is to have a drainage district. We could give you no news of more importance to you as owners of Fellsmere land than this.

The petition asking that the 50,000 acres of land within the Fellsmere leveed area be declared a drainage district was filed with the clerk of the circuit court at Fort Pierce Monday morning February 17th.

In all probability the decree will be issued in April . . . the first annual meeting of land owners . . . scheduled to be held the early

part of May.

We have every reason to believe that no time will be lost in taking the legal steps which the law calls for and that by next fall the district will be thoroughly organized and equipped for digging operations.

It is not possible at this time to outline the engineering plans, but the drainage laws provide that the fullest publicity be given to them.

The plan will, in the main, consist of enlarging the principal canals of the existing drainage system where considered necessary and providing a complete system of sublaterals.

The signatures to the petition are representative of the best thought in the community and Fellsmere Drainage District is launched with the confident good wishes of land owners, both large and small.

The lands petitioned for inclusion in the district do not embrace any of the lands outside of the Fellsmere dykes. The Fellsmere Company has voluntarily cut off from drainage benefits under this scheme 50,000 acres of their own holdings in order that the swift progress of the work inside the dykes may not be interfered with.

It will be remembered that when the Fellsmere Company purchased its large holdings in Fellsmere in the early part of last year, it announced its policy in the matter of drainage in a letter to land owners in the course of which it said:

'It is recognized that the maintenance of the drainage system is of prime importance to land holders and the Company authorizes the statement that in co-operation with them it will take the necessary steps to organize a drainage district under the laws of the state of Florida, to the end that the maintenance of the canal system may be adequately provided for and such additional undertaken. The company is prepared to turn over to the drainage district its existing system of canals and ditches.'

We are now informed by Walter W. Tallis, president of Fellsmere Company, that the Company is ready to fulfill its promise to turn over its drainage

canals to the district whenever the district is prepared to take jurisdiction over them."

Many "legal steps" were required. These would take longer than the news article hopefully estimated. For following the initial petition, there must be filed:

Decree Incorporating the District
Plat of Drainage District
Notice of first Landowners Meeting
Plan of Reclamation
Appointment of Commissioners
Report of Board of Commissioners
Approval of Commissioners Report

Then in between must be provided the various documents of checks and proofs to insure that all has been properly done. There would be 26 of such documents; the final one would be filed on Sept. 16, 1920.

It would take a full year longer than the news article hopefully predicted.

FDD was incorporated on April 8, 1919 (St. Lucie Cty CO Bk 1 - Pg 673). Its "stockholders", the landowners, within its boundaries, held their first meeting May 3, 1919 to elect their first Board of Supervisors "Directors" (FDD Minute Bk Pg 1).

The Spervisors met immediately after (MB-Pg. 4) to elect their officers. The fledgling enterprise was in business: to construct, operate and maintain a water control system for its "Stockholders".

Fellsmere Company became Standard Agricultural Chemical Corporation (DB 53, Pg. 235, St. Lucie Cty Dec. 19, 1923) which later became Ammoniate Products Corporation (CR 3, Pg. 163, St. Lucie Cty May 20, 1925). Out of this came an enterprise to process the rich muck into the "filler" used in the organic fertilizers of that day as the bulk foundation in which to carry the chemical ingredients.

The "Fertilizer Plant", as it came to be known, was built between Laterals S and Q north of the railroad where this unique soil was deep and pure. Pulverized, heated and dried, it was shipped in lined boxcars in bulk to commercial fertilizer mixing plants in the north.

CHAPTER 9

It was the time known as the Florida Boom. As part of it, Fort Pierce became "The Sunrise City", Vero became "Vero Beach --- where the tropics begin", and Quay became "Winter Beach ---where Summer spends the Winter".

But the Florida Boom was not fertilizer plants (industry) or citrus/vegetables (agriculture). It was real estate. Selling undeveloped land; in Fellsmere, even as elsewhere in Florida.

Fellsmere Estates Corporation, under the leadership of "Louie" Gold of Miami, was the moving force. It did a big business. The large Administration Building on Broadway, directly across from the Methodist Church, was the nerve center of town.

The Company had its own bus to bring in prospective buyers. An observation tower behind the Administration Building provided an excellent overview. Company cars provided tours over the properties themselves.

It came with some surprise that the muck soil on drained lands subsided more rapidly than had been thought (MB-15, 8/15/19). This would, in time, have the effect of making drainage ditches shallower as the surface elevation of the land dropped and render the system less adequate accordingly.

Sale of a Bond Issue of \$815,000 was authorized by summer of 1925 (MB-88, 8/10/25); maturity of principal July 1, 1931-July 1, 1950.

An annual "installment" tax was authorized beginning for the year 1925 (MB-91, 9/5/25) to provide for start-up costs, construction and debt service on the issue.

CHAPTER 10

1926 came. The Florida Boom was beginning to unravel. It had lacked substance. Missing was actual development, construction, new business and people moving in that would describe Florida growth in later decades.

The report of the supervisors at the Annual Landowners' Meeting (MB-130, 5/24/26) said it all: ". . . years of hectic buying and selling in Florida for purely speculative reasons . . ."

Further testimony concerning the Florida Boom: (MB-139, 8/6/26) ". . . J. J. Bustin, Treasurer, reported . . . the Bank of

Sebastian had closed . . .".

That summer brought the 1926 Miami hurricane. It was a "wet" storm. That, along with the rains of a second storm which followed in September, brought to 70 inches rainfall for the year, 20 inches above the average.

This gave the new drainage system a practical test and showed up two areas of concern. The supervisor's report at the subsequent Annual Landowners Meeting tells about them (MB-166, 5/25/27):

No. 1 The Levee:

"The high water of last summer brought us face to face with the fact that parts of the levee in the muck area were developing indications of weakness which made it essential . . . they be strengthened.

It was . . . decided to dig an additional canal on the outside of the present levee at the weak part and lift the material over it, filling up the inside canal and strengthening the levee itself, thus taking away the danger of head pressure on the outside . . ."

No. 2 The Main Canal:

"As originally planned, the Main Outlet was to be deepened and widened. When the sale of the bonds was consummated, the purchasers sent down their own engineer and his report called for a considerable further enlargement of the Main Canal or the building of a new Parallel Canal to handle the drainage of the lands west of Lateral S . . . sale of bonds contingent upon (this) . . ."

Action on both items of concern was already underway at the time of the report just quoted. This was merely a summary after the fact given at the end of the year.

Work on the levee weak spots was well in progress (also MB-166, 5/25/27).

As to the Main Canal, the direction chosen had been the 2nd Parallel Canal (MB-151, 1/14/27). An amended Plan of Reclamation was being developed.

In the meantime, construction of the general drainage system was continuing. Canal Construction Co. had the usual critics, but all in all, it was doing its job well.

As the original sub-laterals progressively were made larger, general drainage began to improve, noticed especially by individual landowners, as the Canal Construction excavators enlarged those sub-laterals serving their immediate area.

A familiar sight working on the sub-laterals those days was the walking platform design "Monhegan" dragline. It rested on a squat circular base and moved by means of two flat shoes on either side suspended from rotating eccentrics. It looked awkward but appeared to be more stable when operating on rough terrain than the crawler machines. Its squat, round base brought it the nickname of "Old Washtub".

As construction moved along, more attention began to be turned to operation, and maintenance of the drainage system. To this end, the District acquired (MB-147) a 3/8 yd. Speeder Dragline for upkeep of sub-laterals. Its boxy design and black color brought it the nickname of the "Black Satchel" by the workmen.

CHAPTER 11

The rich muck soil was a basic cause of many problems for the Drainage System in extreme wet weather, as we have seen. In like manner, in extreme dry weather - a fire hazard (MB-164, 5/25/27):

"The fire hazard on the muck lands, ditches and levees . . . was discussed at length . . . work out some plan for a fire protection patrol".

Levees that contain muck are vulnerable to fire in two ways. On the surface, by destruction directly. However, in dry weather, muck can burn underground. A muck fire (practically flameless) will follow a "vein" of muck underground, leaving a levee weakened by burning out sections within.

There was another problem - cattle. This was in the time of open range, before any fencing laws. This problem too was on the agenda (MB-164, 5/25/27) when ". . . the damage to the ditches and canals of the District by cattle was discussed . . ."

Meat products from these local range cattle were referred to as "Western Beef - west of Park Lateral".

There was still another problem about this time. The Florida Boom continued to fade and negative effects began to be felt. The fertilizer plant closed. Default on land payments and outright abandonment of purchase contracts multiplied by the score. The "Daily Record of Sales" of Fellsmere Estates Corporation was

becoming a negative report of "tracts returned" and "contracts cancelled."

This would have an adverse effect on future District tax collections. Nevertheless, certain commitments made in better days were in the pipeline and could not be reversed. Acquisition of the right of way for the Parallel Main Canal and adopting the amended Plan of Reclamation (MB-171, 5/25/27) were two such.

All this was a matter of grave concern and was made a part of the report of the Supervisors at the Annual Meeting of the Landowners (MB-165, 5/25/27):

"It has been particularly hard of late for those living at a distance to correctly gauge the conditions in the State of Florida. They hear of Bank failures and losses; they read of storms and high water; they run across this or that person who has "dropped his wad" and they are forever meeting men muttering that they have been "stung". They are warned and advised and cautioned until their confidence is seriously shaken and they find themselves wondering whether the whole State is a hive of swindlers and four flushers and whether there is in fact any good thing left in Florida but climate.

It has taken and is taking patient work to make these men who are doubting the wisdom of their own investments in Florida, realize that Fellsmere is "on the square"; that it has real land that will produce real crops; that is putting in an honest to goodness Drainage System, and that Fellsmere is a community in which it is good to live and that it has a marvelous health giving climate.

We know of nothing more important than the correct posting of non-resident landowners and we know of no better way to accomplish this and so restore their confidence, then through these bulletins and the correspondence which follows. We shall therefore continue to send them out from time to time through the coming year".

At the end of that year (1927), the District would borrow against the Installment Tax levy to pay Bond interest due January 1, 1928. Here was the first sign of coming financial difficulties (MB-191, 12/27/27).

Early in 1928 (MB-193, 2/1/28), planned work on the original Plan of Reclamation was finished east of Lateral S. Remaining

funds were used to begin excavation on the Parallel Main Canal to better protect the area east of Lateral S and also meet the conditions set down by the Bond purchasers that this be done. Funds for the amended Plan of Reclamation were not yet forthcoming (MB-194, 2/1/28).

At this time began a matter with what then was the U.S. War Department (MB-205, 6/20/28). It was regarding a settling basin where the main canal emptied into the north fork of the Sebastian River. This would be a recurring item on the agenda for years to come. It is not clear what resolved it (the low elevation weir in the canal at the outlet, C-54), or whether it has ever been resolved.

In the meantime, preparation went ahead toward getting the amended Plan of Reclamation (MB-171, 6/14/27) underway. Tax Book No. 2, assessing benefits among the landowners, was adopted (MB-207, 7/6/28).

As the Florida Boom faded, the negative effects of it became more evident.

Salaries of District employees were slashed; that of the Chief Engineer by 50% (MB-194, 2/1/28).

Again, funds were borrowed to meet Bond interest due January 1, 1929 (MB-217, 12/27/28).

Collections on 1929 Maintenance taxes were only \$.18 on the dollar (MB-257, 5/29/30).

Further borrowing not possible, the District defaulted on Bond interest payment due July 1, 1930 (MB-275, 5/29/31).

Dragline maintenance operation was halted due to lack of funds (MB-296, 5/13/32).

Then there was the weather:

1928: Two hurricanes. TWO. Scarcely a month apart: Tuesday, Aug. 7 and Sunday, Sept. 16. The Fort Pierce News Tribune stated the Aug. 7th one:

" . . . the worst storm ever . . . Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin counties receiving brunt of storm on the east coast . . . tangerine/orange crop 10-20% loss; grapefruit 75-90% with much leaves stripped off . . . both wet storms. . . September 16th one, . . . torrents of rain. . . "

1929: No storm, but exceedingly wet year. The Supervisors

reported (MB-252, 5/28/30):

"The year 1929. . . another year. . . unusually heavy rainfall - a total of 76.58 inches . . . 22.86 inches in excess . . . average.

Although the canal system serving the cultivated portion of the District handled the water in a satisfactory manner. . . heavy rains. . . convincing proof. . . parallel outlet canal. . . essential. . ."

CHAPTER 12

Then came the Sugar Company.

Frank W. Heiser, who came to Fellsmere from Indiana in 1913, a successful citrus grower and business man, had been an active part of the Fellsmere project since nearly its beginning.

After the flood, the bankruptcy, the end of the Florida Boom, the insolvency of the fledgling Drainage District, and the near abandonment of hope, he determined to try to do something about it.

Following endless trips to New York (Mrs. Heiser once said he lived in three places - Fellsmere, New York and on the train), he succeeded in interesting a group that knew the sugar business in Cuba to do some sugar cane experiments on the Fellsmere soil. Trial plantings on the earlier Fellsmere Farms Company demonstration farm had shown great promise.

The current experiments were evidencing the same to the point where the Supervisors would report to the landowners for the year 1930 that (MB-275, 5/29/31):

". . . the sugar cane experiments continue . . . and those who know the sugar business maintain their interest and confidence in Fellsmere in spite of the difficulties that beset any effort to finance a new enterprises".

The group that would overcome these difficulties were:

1. William C. Douglas of the Pittsburgh Industrial Commission and conversant with the sugar business in Cuba.
2. Maurice J. Leonard, Vice President of Punta Alegre

Sugar Company, Havana Office.

3. J. O. Roberts, President of Athey Truss Wheel Company.
4. E. V. R. Thayer, President of Stutz Motor Company that made the famous Stutz Bearcat and ex-president of Chase National Bank.

And out of this was born Fellsmere Sugar Company.

Land preparation for the first commercial planting got underway in 1931 and construction of the mill in 1932.

If ever an enterprise began on a shoestring, this one did. Old and tired farm equipment brought from Cuba did the field work. When additional was necessary, tractors and mules were rented locally.

Mules and tractors both rented for \$.10 an hour; tractor drivers, \$.25; common labor, \$.10 (FSC Payroll Record May 27, 1932).

This may sound like so little today, but this was a different time and the community appreciated the newcomers who brought jobs. In fact, the surrounding towns evidently did too, for workers came from all around to work. It was a different time in another sense; a new Chevrolet 4-door sedan with wire wheels and the new fangled free wheeling cost \$900.00, and Postal Savings paid 2% interest. A penny postcard was just that.

The mill was constructed from two more pieces of the shoe string:

Piece No. 1 The parts of an old sugar mill shipped from Louisiana that was still powered with early model Whitney and Corliss steam engines. One had a huge 18 ft. flywheel that was a delight to the hundreds of visitors that would come over the years to see "the sugar mill".

Piece No. 2 The usable parts from the old closed fertilizer plant 6 miles away. Everything usable in some fashion was salvaged, down to the bricks - literally: entry (FSC PR record 5/27/32) ". . . bricks cleaned: \$1.50 per day . . ."

The District received early benefits from the new enterprise, along with the community. With all District ditch maintenance halted for lack of funds (MB-296, 5/13/32), the Sugar Company stepped in and offered to do its own on company lands, and pay rental besides when the District Speeder was used on private Sugar Company work (MB-296, 5/13/32).

CHAPTER 13

Revenues continued to drop as the calendar moved into 1931. Unpaid maintenance and installment taxes were mounting. A payment of \$19,091 due Canal Construction Company for current work done could not be met. The regular interest payment due on sold bonds had gone into default the summer before (MB-275, 5/29/31). Bonds of the District plummeted in value on the financial markets and the sale of any further bonds came to a standstill. A Bondholders Committee was formed, the Bondholders assuring the Supervisors no action would be taken that might disturb the fledgling sugar enterprise just getting started (MB-275, 5/29/31). To make matters worse, the first bonds would be maturing on July 1 in the amount of \$22,000. These would default along with the July interest due the same time. By July 1, 1933, past due maturities on bonds and earned interest would stand at:

Bonds	\$ 70,000	
Coupons	<u>147,000</u>	
	\$217,000	(MB-311, 4/30/33)

The Fellsmere District was not alone in this situation. Hard times were laying heavily on other drainage districts in the State. Addressing this problem, on June 4, 1931, the Legislature authorized Chapter 14719 of the laws of Florida, permitting payment of drainage taxes by unpaid bonds and coupons. The District put this arrangement into effect (MB-304, 10/22/32). Early results, meager as they were, were a start. The above \$217,000 liability would show a dent of \$9,090 to offset it (MB-311, 4/30/33).

Meager, yes, but a start was made. And unpayable past due obligations of the District were being removed by means of uncollectible overdue receivables.

Of interest to the Bondholders was that there was an actual market for their bonds. Pitifully discounted to be sure, just a fraction of worth, but not a complete loss.

In October, the Supervisors broadened the arrangement to pay out future unlevied installment taxes in advance with bonds and coupons (MB-316, 10/16/33). This caught the real interest of landowners. The "installment" tax meant just that. It was a pre-set assessment that would run until the year 1957 (MB-510, 6/5/57). When the District was created, each individual parcel of land was assessed its pro-rated share of the total cost in keeping with its particular share in the eventual benefits. This would be a fixed lien on the parcel until 1957, when paid in full.

The Government Alphabet Programs started about this time.

There was NRA (National Recovery Act), CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) and WPA (Work Projects Administration). They were public welfare, but not in today's definition. Rather than a dole, they were an exchange; work in exchange for subsistence funds.

Of course, some of the workers were not exactly enthusiastic employees. A popular joke at the time went:

Question: How do you tell a tree and a WPA worker apart on a windy day?

Answer: The tree moves.

All in all, however, much was accomplished in exchange for this public welfare that could not be avoided in any case. Parks, roads, bridges were built. Beautifying and cleaning up of public areas. The shady oak trees lining Fellsmere city streets today were a WPA project. Some of the Public buildings around the country still in use date back to that time. Above all, it helped keep self-respect and hope alive in a vast army of people in those desperate times.

NOTE:

A passing comment of an unusual point of interest while going through the Minute Book records.

A prophecy made over 50 years ago that is speaking to our time today from the Annual Report of the Board of Supervisors to the Landowners' Meeting of May 28, 1935 (MB-340):

"Whether or not the 'New Deal' continues to dominate the country, it must in all fairness be said that at the time it came into being it did, without doubt, actually save a situation which threatened all kinds of disaster and for it we feel we should all be duly thankful. Time alone will show whether or not it is desirable to continue under its guiding hand.

It seems to us a healthy sign to note the restlessness in many quarters to be freed from excessive governmental direction and the desire to again develop individual freedom of action . . . to note the growing appreciation of the dangers incident to THE CONTINUAL SUPPORT OF SO MANY PEOPLE WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDS, THE TENDENCY OF WHICH SEEMS TO BE THE DEMORALIZATION OF EFFORTS AND THE PRODUCTION OF LAZINESS . . ."

CHAPTER 14

The District was virtually without resources. All ditch cleanout had stopped. Landowners with groves or other improvements in desperation began doing what they could on their own, the District making modest reimbursements for a while (MB-318-19, 11/28/33).

The Sugar Company contributed office space and office personnel. There were two so called "paid" employees: the secretary and the treasurer of the District. They were not paid in actual cash but in IOU's called "Time Warrants" (MB-319, 11/28/33).

The Amended Plan of Reclamation for the parallel 2nd Main Canal was repealed and rescinded (MB-321, 12/17/33). The tiny initial digging near the North Road (Hwy 507) would become a pleasant swimming hole and picnic spot in the years to follow.

In the meantime the Sugar Company was having problems of its own. The short first grinding season (1932-33), harvesting only 640 acres, was no more than a shakedown trial run for the mill, and an accepted loss. 1800 acres were available for the 1933-34 season, but the hurricane of 1933 heavily damaged it (MB-326, 5/29/34).

An early freeze of December 1934 that blanketed much of Florida did its part on 1934-35 production. The official recording equipment of the U.S. Weather Bureau recorded 19 degrees at the company office in town. At an emergency meeting of the owners, one wryly commented, "If we've got a bitch pup, we'd better know it now".

But one more try was to be made. Build a refinery. The present arrangement of shipping the raw sugar product by rail to Philadelphia could not compete with offshore raw by boat. A cooperative was formed for a broader investment base. Fellsmere Sugar Company became Fellsmere Sugar Producers Association. With a modest loan from RFC (Reconstruction Finance Corporation) and everyone mortgaged to the hilt, a white sugar refinery was put in in record time.

Under the registered trade mark of "FLORIDA CRYSTALS", the new product entered the Florida market. The freight differential benefit now tilted in the opposite direction! The broker used to say he had no difficulty selling Fellsmere sugar. The northern refiners simply waited till this seasonal production was gone, rather than price compete.

CHAPTER 15

It was found that for some reason the elevation of south marsh was running higher than the west marsh. To help equalize the pressure here, a control gate was placed at the south end of Park Lateral. This would draw off considerable water from the outside and also flush out weeds and growth in Park. It would be closed at all times of heavy rains so not to interfere with landowners using it in any way (MB-353, 5/26/36).

Ed Hughes had died. Ed Hughes, the angel who on several occasions had advanced emergency cash to the District for IOU notes in return. These amounted to \$53,000 at the time of his death and now passed on to his daughter, Dora Roberts. Settlement would be made years later by way of 2,000 acres in the NW corner of the District. These became known as the Dora Roberts Tract, today as the Stick Marsh.

There appeared at this time the first glimmering of a Water Management Plan for the Upper St. Johns. It was 1936 at a Supervisor's meeting on August 22 (MB-360). The beginning developments out into the marsh northward were impeding natural water flow. This was creating higher marsh water elevations from year to year. It was requiring higher and higher levees in various districts from Fort Pierce to Melbourne.

These districts were without authority to undertake any correction of this. A resolution was passed to join with the other districts in contacting their congressmen requesting a survey of the marsh water situation by the U.S. War Department (now the Army Corps of Engineers).

The delinquent tax situation was becoming quite bad. By 1936 (MB-355, 5/26/36), uncollected taxes stood at \$509,000. On the other side of the ledger, past due bonds and coupons had raised to \$391,000. Now on the books it would appear there were ample tax receivables to pay all past due bonds indebtedness and leave a surplus. But the taxes went on being unpaid year after year.

Besides, future bonds were maturing on fixed schedule and more coupons coming due. This would be adding an additional \$683,000 to the present debt. The District tried foreclosure suits, but these proved too costly in relation to benefits. It was a bleak picture.

But the District was not alone. A great deal of Florida was going through a similar experience. Around 1937, the legislature met the problem head on. Under what would come to be known as the Murphy Act, the State, through the TIIF (Trustees of Internal Improvement Fund), took title to such delinquent lands on the county tax rolls. It then put them up for public sale to get them back on the active tax roll.

It was a turning point for the State. Large areas of dead tax land began to come to life again on the tax rolls. For the District, though, it was making but a token difference. Any State sales made were mainly to owners of improved property who were picking up parcels near or adjoining their own holdings.

There was a reason for this: the huge amount of delinquent and future installment taxes of the District. The arrangement to pay these off with bonds had worked wonders for the District Balance Sheet, up to a point; on improved property. But it brought no settlements, of course, on the abandoned undeveloped boomtime lands. These made up the bulk of acreage within District boundaries, and, the bulk of the Murphy Act lands up for sale. Due to the nature of this District lien, the Murphy Act legislation could not remove it. So no matter how attractive the sale price by the State might be, prospective buyers could hardly be expected to launch into some new venture with this financial millstone already in place upon taking title.

In a bold and ingenious stroke, the Supervisors proceeded to acquire the bulk of this acreage from the State (MB-404, 5/28/41), and (DB-32-417 IRC records). They then offered for re-sale these undeveloped areas at cost for cash and the equivalent in bonds and coupons for settlement of all installment taxes delinquent and future on the lands.

The response was immediate; for large parcels within East Boundary to Lateral U and Main Canal to 34 to put into cattle ranching, smaller parcels for various other endeavors.

This made a formidable reduction in the bond/coupon indebtedness hanging over the District. Only the vast acreage west of Lateral U remained and that situation would suddenly change in 1943. Early that year, a group in the sugar business in Puerto Rico acquired Fellsmere Sugar Producers Association. Under the leadership of J. Adalberto Roig of Humacao, immediate plans got underway for large expansion of the Fellsmere operation.

Fellsmere Development Corporation, a leasing and holding company, was formed to acquire and provide members of the Cooperative with the additional acres needed.

Virtually all the Murphy Act land the District still held from Lateral U westward was purchased. In keeping with terms of the District as heretofore, sales were by cash for costs and balance in bonds/coupons for settlement of the installment tax liens. The crushing debt on the District was coming down.

At the Annual Meeting on June 5, 1957 (MB-510), the treasurer would report that:

... remaining outstanding bonds and coupons,

together with accrued interest to date, exceeded cash on hand in the Sinking Fund by approximately \$9,000.00".

A special one-time levy of \$.20 per acre was added to the tax roll that year to fund this remainder. On July 25, 1961 (MB-529, 8/16/62), the District deposited with the Hanover Bank of New York City the sum of \$40,540.06, with instructions ". . . to pay any bonds and coupons presented, together with interest after maturity."

When no bonds or coupons had been presented by June 22 of the following year, when they became barred by the Statute of Limitations, Hanover Bank returned the entire deposit intact.

At the Supervisors meeting of August 16, 1962 (MB-529), the Sinking Fund was held inactive, formally closed and the balance placed in a Contingency Reserve.

The long nightmare was over.

The District was again solvent.

CHAPTER 16

Unusual weather came in 1947. First, a late winter killing freeze the first week in February. The Supervisors reported at the Annual Meeting (MB-463, 5/27/47):

"All has, in truth, gone well through the year, except the weather over which we have no control. The weather chose to do a flip from a beautiful, early winter to a diabolical late one, bringing one of the severest cold waves on record and doing great damage to the cane crop of the Sugar Company".

Then, a wet hurricane that summer, on which the Supervisors reported at the following Annual Meeting (MB-467, 5/14/48):

"This past year floods, high water and winds caused great damage to the cane crop and there was real anxiety. The Engineering Departments of the Drainage District and the Sugar Company deserve a vote of appreciation for having "saved the day" - the margin between safety and a major disaster, as the water lapped the tops of the levees, was only a small one".

The flooding caused by this hurricane was a South Florida

disaster. It drew National Government attention. U.S. Engineers came and made a complete inspection of the situation. This included a trip to Fellsmere with an on ground visit to the Marsh and the outer levees by airboat.

Formation of the (CSFFCD) Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District came out of this natural near disaster. Work on a flood control and water conservation project began first in densely populated South Florida. It would not begin in the Fellsmere area until the late Sixties as part of an Upper St. Johns River Basin project. Not in time to be there on October 15, 1956.

October 15, 1956!

October 15, 1956. When over 14 inches of rain would fall on the Fellsmere area in a little over a day. the Fort Pierce News Tribune (October 14-16) described it as a freak autumn storm with heavy rains and lightning that drifted northward up the east coast just inland:

Okeechobee: ". . . heaviest rain since big flood of 1948"

Ft. Pierce: "3.67 inches rain. 30 mile winds and the brand new Tree Sweet Plant just to be opened set afire by lightning".

Orlando: "4.84 inches in 24 hours. . . more than normally for the entire month of October".

Jacksonville: "Schools closed by heavy rains.

But by far the heaviest rain fell in an area between Fort Pierce and Orlando where for a day apparently the storm stalled just west of Fellsmere. For Fellsmere, St. Cloud, Kissimmee and Taft (south of Orlando) were named in an Associated Press release as the hardest hit.

The report given at the Supervisors meeting of Dec. 5, 1956 (MB-506) described the situation at Fellsmere:

"The Chairman reported that an equinoxial storm on October 15 dropped in excess of 14" of rain on lands in the District in a little more than twenty-four hours. So rapid a fall had not been experienced since September 1929. While heavy rain fell throughout the State, this record fall was confined to a narrow belt from Fellsmere northwest through St. Cloud and Kissimmee. This was perhaps the record for rapid rainfall at Fellsmere; the bulk of it fell from

noon Monday, October 15 to midnight. Water covered the floor of the District office to a depth of 4" in the Administration Building on Broadway. However, this was all gone in one day. The lowest paved streets in town were dry Friday morning, four days after the record fall. The canals and sub-laterals did an adequate job, considering the sudden volume of water to be moved off.

Fellsmere Sugar Producers Association suffered heavy planting losses, especially in the low fields west of Lateral S, but in general no one else experienced any permanent damage; the water did not remain long enough. A sizeable amount of bridge and road damage resulted. The south and west levees of the District held; the east levee suffered a serious break at 14 and another at 16. These have been repaired.

CHAPTER 17

A consolidated back tax was approved (MB-496, 4/19/54). In prior years, by law, each year necessitated a separate book, resulting in 26 separate volumes in the County Tax Collector's records at the present time. Special permission from the State Legislature had been obtained to make this time and space saving change.

After many years of faithful service, the "Black Satchel", the first District dragline, now practically obsolete, was sold.

Hyacinths were spreading in Park Lateral and the Main Canal. As control from the banks was inadequate to reach all the growth, a trial program by boat was inaugurated (MB-505, 7/18/56).

Discussion began for a secondary levee at Lateral Q. A second line of defense was needed as backup for the Lateral M levee. It simply could not be considered 100% adequate (MB-507, 5/1/57).

A trial program of Chemical Spray Ditch Maintenance was showing promise, in maintenance cost reduction and in maintenance results (MB-510, 6/5/57).

In 1959, the District and Fellsmere Development Corporation made a mutually beneficial land exchange (MB-514, 2/24/59). To the District it brought some needed additional right of way width for better levee maintenance; to the Development Corporation, a reduction in "outs" within its lands leased for sugar cane

growing.

At the end of that year, Fellsmere Sugar Producers Association was acquired by businessmen who had been in the sugar business in Cuba before Castro and presently had a sugar mill in the Glades. It became a part of Okeelanta Sugar Refinery. The new ownership took up the helpful cooperation and assistance that had been so outstanding in its predecessors.

The position of Superintendent of Operations was established in 1960 to take care of expanding maintenance and drainage matters (MB-521, 9/26/60).

Ernest H. Every stepped down as a Supervisor at this time (MB-521, 10/25/60). Mr. Every was a "pioneer". He had already been a part of the Fellsmere Farms Co. operation in the early years. He had been a Supervisor and Secretary of the District for over 40 years. His era of service (1919-1960) coincided with that of Frank W. Heiser (referred to in Chapter 12) who served as a Supervisor and President for nearly 35 years (1924-1958).

Of the many persons who have served the District over the years and have served well, and there have been many, Ernest H. Every and Frank W. Heiser must be held up for special recognition. These two pioneers in the Fellsmere enterprise, begun by Nelson E. Fell, helped guide the Fellsmere Drainage District through some difficult and trying times.

CHAPTER 18

The Nation was becoming soil/water conscious at this time. Public Law 566 of the 83rd Congress was passed, creating the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act for assistance in planning and carrying out works of improvements. Application by the District was made through the proper channels (MB-522, 10/27/60). Response was interested and went on for several years, but it never went anywhere in the end.

In 1965, there came up a matter never imagined by the original builders of the Main Canal in their wildest dreams back in 1910; a vision of a four-laned, high-speed, limited access, through highway from the southern tip of Florida straight through to Maine, to California, to Washington, and all points in between. At a meeting on September 3 (MB-539), the Chairman reported the Federal Government had asked for a right of way across the Main Canal for Interstate Highway 95.

At the same time, another new item in relation to the 55-year old Main Canal was in the making. This regarded the proposed water reservoir and related facilities that had grown out of the

flood problems of 1947 (Chapter 16) that led to the creation of (CSFFCD) Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District (Chapter 16).

The first segment of the construction would be Canal C-54, a relief canal planned as an emergency safety valve for the reservoir. It would parallel the Main Canal on the north and was designed to occupy the never used District right of way for the never constructed second main canal in the Amended Plan of Reclamation (Chapter 10). Negotiations for this and other matters were completed early the next year and the Agreement between the CSFFCD and the District was signed March 18, 1966 (MB-541, 4/21/66).

After the big sale of Murphy Act acreage to the District by the State in 1941 (Chapter 15), there still remained a large block of such State owned lots in the City of Fellsmere. Now, 25 years later, they were still dead items on the District tax rolls, and non-productive as tax exempt on the City and County rolls.

In a joint agreement, the City of Fellsmere acquired the lots to sell and get back on the active tax roll. Proceeds were to be distributed in thirds to the City, TIIF (the State), and the District. The portion to the District was in exchange for cancelling any outstanding District taxes on the parcels sold (MB-543, 6/14/66).

It proved beneficial to the District: (1) a certain reduction in old back taxes on the roll, (2) a certain increase in current tax revenue.

In 1964, South Puerto Rico Sugar Company purchased Fellsmere from Okeelanta and assumed the "mantle of responsibility" for the community. SPRS, with headquarters in New York City, owned and operated "Romana" in the Dominican Republic, one of the world's largest sugar mills at the time. Okeelanta operated as a corporate entity until 1966, when it was merged into the parent corporation by dissolution.

In 1967, Gulf & Western Industries, Inc., a large conglomerate of Houston and New York City, acquired SPRS and assumed the mantle in turn.

CHAPTER 19

At this time, it was learned (MB-555, 2/15/68) a local bill was underway for State Legislation empowering the County to form a countywide water control authority; a bill on which none of the officials or representatives of the District had been approached. It evidently died right where it had been planted. Nothing

further came of it.

Beginning with the 1969 tax year, the County would include tax preparation and collection of District taxes through County facilities (MB-559, 5/22/68). It would be lower in cost and more efficient in method for District and County alike. This would include provision for tax certificates at the Annual County Tax Sale.

Delinquent District taxes now on a number of Back Books on file with the County Tax Collector would be combined into one District Back Tax Book through the year 1968 (MB-567, 7/2/71).

NOTE: A comment here on the above. This action, along with the removal of all bond liens (MB-529, 8/16/62), at long last set Fellsmere land titles free from the stigma of Abstractors' notes that had been hanging over this area these many years. (A standard question raised by Abstractors on District taxes had been inserted on all abstracts issued up to this time).

Lateral Q levee suffered a break early fall of 1971 (MB-568, 10/27/71). This was nothing new. It had always been weak and needed constant upkeep. What was new, it happened at a non-flood stage of the marsh. It was not overflow but subsidence and collapse that was ailing it now. It was time to come to grips with this never-ending situation.

A project in the planning stage for some time was pushed forward. However, one item had been an obstacle in this plan, or any others, over the years - insufficient material at the spot to any longer, repair breaks or build up the levee as it now existed. It was here that the land exchange with FDC (Chapter 16) was a help now. With a new 340 ft. additional right of way on the east side, it was now possible to build virtually a new and better levee east of the original one with ample material for proper keying.

The critical section was determined to be from SL 26 to 34, with a certain extension eastward on 34. The District did not have equipment large enough to handle such a job and would have to contract. But the cost proved prohibitive beyond all further consideration in this direction.

Gulf & Western, as its predecessors had done before it, came and offered a helping hand. It had the needed equipment for a special project of its own at the present time. It was in need of a smaller machine such as the District had. It suggested a joint venture, making mutual use of personnel and facilities of each party on both projects (MB-574, 9/19/72). It was a tremendous financial benefit to the District and accomplished the project.

Curtailment of budget and growing problems with the new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had brought the CSFFCD Upper

St. Johns Project to a stop. Fortunately, Canal C-54 was completed enough to function as the marsh flood water safety valve for which it was intended. Unfortunately, stopping the project at this point was leaving the District vulnerable on its southern and western flanks. It was this that made the Lateral Q levee rebuilding immediately so urgent.

In 1973 (MB-576, 5/9/73) Fellsmere Drainage District became Fellsmere Water Management District; this to meet requirements of State Legislature that all existing local drainage districts use this form of name title. However, this name designation began to confuse the local districts with the 5 State Water Management Districts. Five years later, the name of old Fellsmere Drainage District would become FELLSMERE WATER CONTROL DISTRICT.

Also, in 1973 (MB-576, 5/9/73), the fiscal year ending was changed from April 1 to October 31 to synchronize revenue, budget and disbursements to a "tax" year period. This too would change a second time. Two months later (MB-578, 7/3/73) by Act of the 1973 Legislature the fiscal year ending was moved to September 30.

Also, again in 1973 (MB-579, 10/25/73) the county built a new bridge, a modern concrete structure, to replace the very old wood pilings/cross timbers one to carry Highway 507 (the North Road) traffic over the Main Canal.

In 1974 (MB-583, 7/24/74), by virtue of the Water Resources Act of 1972, creating water management districts in the state, the District would now come under the jurisdiction of the newly formed St. Johns River Water Management District.

CHAPTER 20

The Presidents serving the District since its beginning have been:

No.	1	W. H. Tallis	1919-1923
	2	George F. Maddock	1924
	3	Frank W. Heiser	1925-1946
	4	H. C. (Bill) Watts	1947-1962
	5	Gilbert E. (Cy) Smith	1963-1976
	6	Raymond E. (Buddy) Johns	1977-

This story has covered 58 years of the District and ends with the Organizational Meeting of the Supervisors following the Annual Landowners Meeting on May 31, 1977 (MB2-31). 42 years of its 100-years charter remain to be added.

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SOURCES

Minute Books:

Fellsmere Farms Company
The District

Newspaper Files:

Fellsmere Farmer
Fellsmere Tribune
Ft. Pierce News Tribune

Secretary of State Office: Tallahassee

Courthouse Records

St. Lucie County
Indian River County

Fellsmere Cooperative Observer Reports kept for
U. S. Weather Bureau

Payroll Records:

Fellsmere Sugar Company

Personal recollections of writer

And: Invaluable input gratefully received from others

* * * * *

About the Writer:

Born: 1912
Family moved to Fellsmere from Richmond, Virginia, 1914.
Went through Grade and High School at the Fellsmere
School: 1919-1929
Began with Fellsmere Sugar Company May 1932. 45 years
continuous through successors to retirement Gulf &
Western, December 1977

Resided:

Fellsmere:
1914-29, Farm south of town at SL 21. Tract 2154,
31-37 (Willow Street).

Jacksonville:
1929-30

Fellsmere:
1930-37, Back to the Farm
1937-48, In Town, Elm Street at New York Ave.
Lots 29-34, Blk 42
1948-60, North Road (507), Tract 931, 31-37.

Clewiston:
1960-68

Fort Pierce:
1968-

Was Treasurer of the District:
1941-1980

Walter A. Siewert
4039 Greenwood Drive
Ft. Pierce, FL 34982
October 22, 1988