

SPOTLIGHT ON HISTORY

Snowbird's love of nature no flight of fancy

BY WEONA CLEVELAND
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

When Erna Nixon, a winter resident of Melbourne Village, came from Chicago in 1951, she was introduced by Melbourne High School teacher Gerald Einem to a hammock. That area is now Erna Nixon Park.

There are two sections of the hammock: one portion in the village; the other in the county-owned park.

Nixon was born in Wisconsin, educated in four states, and did class and field work at the Morton Arboretum in Illinois. She also acquired a graduate degree in piano from the Illinois School of Music.

She and husband Frederick Nixon were sent by the Mission Board of the Society of Friends (Quakers) to Jamaica, where they spent five years. For 60 years she held ministerial credits in the Society of Friends. She taught biology in Chicago schools for many years.



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Loved nature. Erna Nixon's hard work to save a hammock ended in the creation of Erna Nixon Park.

"I don't know how I've lived so many lives," Nixon once commented.

When she first saw the hammock in the village, she said it left

her cold. "The floor of the forest was covered with fallen palm fronds, and there was little green in evidence," she remembered.

She began to explore, make paths and teach biology classes at the village Town Hall on Saturdays.

For many years she conducted tours of the hammock, her enthusiasm spilling over to infect those who went with her to learn and enjoy the primeval forest.

Although she was not alone in her efforts to save the land that is her namesake park, it was her kinship to that land and knowledge of the various ecosystems that helped to educate others and make the county aware of its importance.

Erna Nixon died in 1985 at age 93, but her park lives on. ■

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