

Colorful characters populated early Melbourne Village

Mel Manthey's stories of early Melbourne Village were endless.

He recorded many of them in his self-published book "Round and About Melbourne Village." It was published in 1985.

Manthey had been a colorful resident of the village from 1949 until his death, although he occasionally departed to join the Peace Corps. Here are some more tales from the book.

"The Cuban squash seed that Wayne Taylor brought from Cuba raised many squash in this area. Marian Van Atta distributed seeds of this squash all over the globe through articles in her 'Living Off the Land.'

"Two families in the village had monkeys. The Van Attas had a tiny squirrel monkey. It liked insects; those big juice grasshoppers were its favorite. It also liked roaches. The Stry's had three monkeys that lived with them for some time. One day, one got out. It was last seen heading north. It may have been a snowbird, anxious to get back."

Manthey and Isaac Mitchell, an African-American from Melbourne, worked side-by-side clearing the land in the village. "Because swinging axes and piling logs and branches was a sweaty job," wrote Manthey, "we would be forever thirsty. All Isaac



Weona Cleveland

Sand in Our Shoes

and I had to drink was sulphur water. Those I worked with from South Melbourne called it 'dry water' because it did not quench one's thirst."

Since Melbourne Village was founded on the premise of living off the land, Manthey listed many of the projects undertaken by the villagers.

■ Frank Rothery planted a grove of persimmons that thrived and produced beautiful crops. He later sold his land and someone cut down all but four of the trees.

■ George Tippie had a hydroponic garden, raising tomatoes. He later turned to carnations, a big project.

■ Ed Wood lived almost exclusively on sweet potatoes, fixed 100 different ways.

■ Virginia Wood and Elizabeth Nutting (two of the founders of the village) raised beans and alfalfa sprouts for food and earthworms for plant food fertilizer.

■ Harriett Ness had a cow. But one day it ate Mr. Nixon's pants.

"So they hunted for the one-legged sock monster. When they thought they had found him, they would run away, shrieking."

Mel Manthey, author

Fortunately, Nixon was not in them. Manthey's illustration for this episode had some catchy lines: "Best pants I ever ate," said the heifer. Manthey noted that the heifer bellowed for three days.

One sketch in the book shows Therese Hudson walking in the village. Her goal: to walk 25,000 miles, the distance around the earth at the equator. Manthey wrote: "she has just 300 miles to go."

Of course, Erna Nixon, the village's most famous resident, is featured in Manthey's book. He sketched her kneeling in the hammock, calling out to others what she has found. "It's a living fossil," she tells them.

The kindness to animals award went to Scott Taylor, wrote Man-



FLORIDA TODAY file

Melbourne Village pioneer. Over decades, Therese Hudson's daily walks around Melbourne Village added up to the circumference of the Earth. Here, she relaxes at Village Oaks in 2004.

they. A raccoon had gotten its head stuck in a glass jar. Taylor broke the jar with a hammer, leaving just the glass collar on the raccoon. Taylor climbed a tree in an effort to get the collar off, but the raccoon managed to get it off by itself.

"It seems whenever Krissie, Karen and Clarice Kjeruff and Wenda and Tina Ness did their laundry, there was always a sock missing," wrote Manthey. "So they hunted for the one-legged

sock monster. When they thought they had found him, they would run away, shrieking."

There are many snake stories in the book but this may be the best one: "On April 9, 1985, in Melbourne Village a snake was killed, then identified as a good snake. So one of the female residents of the village said, 'you bury it and I'll pray as you bury it.'" ■
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