

Boynton pays tribute to man who helped start the city's first church

By [Attiya Anthony](#)
Sun Sentinel

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The city of [Boynton Beach](#) on Saturday will honor one of its lesser-known founders — Robert E. Wells.

Wells in 1890 traveled from the Bahamas to what would become [Boynton Beach](#) to farm pineapples. He became active in the community and helped start St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church — the city's oldest church and Boynton Colored School, now known as Poinciana Elementary.

For close to a year, Minister Bernard Wright, Wells' grandson, and Warren Adams, the city's historic preservation planner, worked to help pay respects to Wells' legacy and also unearth some of the city's African-American history.

Last month, Mayor Jerry Taylor proclaimed Feb. 7 as Robert E. Wells Day and thanked Wells for all he did for [Boynton Beach](#).

Robert Wells was "an original signatory of the documents to incorporate Boynton as a town," Taylor said. "The Wells family name is well-known and respected throughout the Bahamas, and we're happy to have it associated with our city."

Wright said, "We don't have a true history of [Boynton Beach](#)....We need to provide a culture center that would include the totality of [Boynton Beach](#), including African-Americans."

Wells was civic-minded, but banned from attending City Commission meetings because of his skin color. So, he became the first elected leader of the Boynton Negro Civic League — Boynton Colored Town's council. The board was disbanded in 1963 due to desegregation.

Wells also was a developer. In 1925, Wells platted the land where the city's Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is in the historic Heart of Boynton. It was originally called Wells Avenue.

"This was the original African-American downtown area during segregation," said Adams, the city's historic preservation planner. "There were stores, nightclubs and residences."

Adams said a lot of info about the area has been gathered, but there is still more work to do. He asks that anybody with documents or pictures provide such information to the city.

"We are continuing research," Adams said. "We hear that a lot of musical greats played here at the Continental Club ... but we do not have conclusive proof."

Victor Norfus, president of the Heart of [Boynton Beach](#) Neighborhood Association and lifelong resident, said that it's important that the city remembers African American's like Wells.

"Wells lived here and did a lot for the community," he said.

He called the city's proclamation "a huge step forward."

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by Ron Hurtibise

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by Miriam Valverde

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by Scott Travis

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by Roy Wallack

Back when I first went skiing in college, taking a lesson seemed unnecessary. Just channel Jean-Claude Killy, the Olympic champion who was on TV all the time when I was a kid. That worked out fine for the 20 times I've skied since — until last weekend, when I heard Ho Ming Lu, 48, of...

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