

A note about the pool Thomas Edison built in 1910

By TOM HALL
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Keith EDMIER: Edison Impluvium opens at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on Saturday, December 5. For the exhibition, Edmier is converting the inside of the gallery into the interior of Thomas Edison's concrete swimming pool – without the water, of course.

Edison hired a local company to build the pool. At the time, locals speculated that the inventor was motivated to build the pool because his family spent so much time at Tootie McGregor's Royal Palm Hotel, which had the only swimming pool in the region. Locals speculated that the pool was made of bamboo, but the local contractor that Edison hired, W.R. Wallace and Company, made the pool of much sturdier materials: three parts shell, cinders and broken stone, two parts sand, and one part Edison brand Portland cement, for which Thomas held 40 patents dealing with its development and production.



Galvanized iron bars reinforced the cement and helped it to endure to today. "The ... floor and walls ... [were] re-enforced throughout with woven wires or expanded metal, corners for 10 feet reinforced with ½ inch twisted iron bar, and the side and bottom made continuous by interweaving of the metal," states the placard on the grounds outside the pool. The final cost for the project was about \$1,000.

Initially, the pool included stone steps leading to the pool, a plank walk around the interior of the pool, a board fence, and dressing rooms located on the southeast corner. It was surrounded with decorative foliage, which Edison produced from his experiments as a botanist. The pool was fed from an artesian well, which meant that the water was often too cold for more than just a quick dip as evidenced by a letter Mina wrote in 1920 to her mother reporting, "had our first dip in [the] pool. Water like ice so it was veritably a dip."

The swimming pool underwent major changes in 1928 to meet more modern needs. The remodeling plan was designed by local architect Nat Gaillard Walker, who would go on to design the United States Post Office building known today as the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center. Walker added concrete walks around the pool, pipe framing for the railing fence and pavilion, a tea house, fountain and a bath house with showers. All features were attached to make one combined entertainment area.

The pool complex remained a favorite spot for the Edison family as Madeleine relates in a letter to her mother March 10, 1947. "We did enjoy the lazy days at Fort Myers—I couldn't have borne it not to see the place again it always was—and I'm glad it was warm enough for a farewell swim in the pool!"

Edison himself was never much of a swimmer, preferring to "exercise his brain" instead. So what will Edmier's archaeological version of Thomas Edison's pool look like? Come see for yourself. *Keith EDMIER: Edison Impluvium* will run through February 6, 2016 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery on the Lee campus of Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW). ■