

From Animal Menagerie to World-Class Zoo: The Evolution of the Memphis Zoo

The idea for the Memphis Zoo began as early as 1904, when Col. Robert Galloway started lobbying for funds to build a home for a Southern black bear named Natch. The bear, who was the mascot of the Memphis Turtles baseball team, was being kept chained to a tree in Overton Park.

Natch was soon joined by several other abandoned wild animals, and Galloway presented the city with a plan to form a zoo to house them. After several unsuccessful attempts to begin a zoo, the Memphis Park Commission finally allocated \$1,200 to establish the Memphis Zoo in 1906. Galloway was still using his own personal funds to care for the animals at the time, but he promised the commission that money for an animal building and the purchase of large animals would be obtained through citizen support.

The Memphis Zoo Association (incorporated in 1910 as the Memphis Zoological Society) was formed to generate the funds. The group held its first fund-raising event, a baseball game, in August 1906 and raised \$3,628. Combined with city funds, the money was used to build 23 simple cages and a row of concrete bear dens. Support continued, and in 1907 the first building at the Zoo, Galloway Hall, was built. In 1909 the Carnivora Building was built to house the big cats. The original elephant house, now part of the education complex, was also built in 1909.