Number LVIII

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THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA

is published annually by the Historical Association of
Southern Florida. Communications should be addressed
to the Managing Editor of Tequesta, Historical Museum
of Southern Florida, 101 W. Flagler Street, Miami, Florida
33130. Telephone: (305) 375-1492. The Association does not assume responsibility
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On the Cover: Cuban immigrants in Miami. HASF 1995-277-2916
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This issue of Tequesta offers articles addressing three distinctive eras of Miami history. Francis Sicius, Ph.D., a professor of history at St. Thomas University, has spent more than a decade studying and researching the story of Cubans in Miami before Fidel Castro assumed power in Cuba in 1959, an event that led to the influx of nearly 800,000 Cuban refugees to Miami-Dade County. Miami’s sizable pre-Castro Cuban exile community is often overlooked in the rush to chronicle the story of those who fled Cuba for Miami after 1959. Knowledge of these earlier refugees and the larger community’s reaction to their presence in Miami is, however, essential to our understanding of those who came later and whose presence has helped transform a Deep South community into today’s robust international city. Readers of the Sicius essay, entitled “The Miami-Havana Connection: The First Seventy-Five years,” may also find surprising the author’s account of the strong ties, commercially and otherwise, that existed between Miami and Havana since the beginnings of modern Miami in 1896.

A frequent contributor to Tequesta, William M. Straight, M.D., offers readers, with “Life In A Pioneer Settlement: Miami’s Medical Community 1843-1874,” a wonderful window into the Miami of yesterday. Straight’s research provides an exemplary example of how the effective utilization of scant, scattered primary source material can, with plenty of tender-loving-care, bring to life the story of a tiny, isolated riverine settlement and its medical “community.” Dr. Straight has enhanced our awareness of the area’s medical history for more than four decades, and I believe that this article is one of his best efforts to date.

Historians researching the early decades of modern Miami history have, until recently, benefited from the fact that pioneers could still be found in the Magic City. The inexorable passage of time and the resultant attrition have changed that picture, however, as the number of remaining pioneers has declined precipitously. We are fortunate, therefore, to publish an essay by Aretta Semes, entitiled, “From Rising Sun To Daunting Storm: Miami in Boom and Bust, A Reminiscence.” Presently a resident of California, Mrs. Semes arrived in Miami in 1923 with her family after a long automotive journey from New Jersey. The city and the entire state were, at the
time, on the cusp of a great real estate boom, and its bright future prospects were what brought her family here. In this essay, Mrs. Semes has provided a first-person account of the excitement of boomtime Miami, along with the heartbreak that came with the bust, the killer hurricane of 1926, and the ensuing economic depression.

We know that you will enjoy reading this issue of *Tequesta*, and we invite you to avail yourself of the other fine publications, exhibits, and events provided by the Historical Association of Southern Florida for the people of South Florida and beyond. We stand ready to assist you in probing the rich history and culture of Miami and the region surrounding it.

Paul S. George
Editor, *Tequesta*
Those who have written about Cubans in Miami have always placed the story in the context of the last third of this century. However, this perspective denies geographic and cultural links that go far beyond the last few decades of history. Although Miami is only a little more than one hundred years old, its relation to Cuba goes back millennia.

Archaeologists have shown that native people from the island of Cuba traded with their cousins living on the banks of the Miami River for centuries. In 1507, when Europeans printed the first map of the new world, they recorded only two major pieces of land that are still recognizable today, South Florida and Cuba. Even these earliest of European explorers recognized the indisputable fact of the geographic relationship between these two places. During the Spanish era of exploration, the conquistadors of Florida, Ponce (on his second excursion), Narvaez, DeSoto, and de Luna all launched their expeditions from Cuba.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Cuban fishermen pitched tents along the banks of South Florida from Key West to Biscayne Bay, where they would spend months catching fish and drying them for sale in Havana. And one of the first pieces of South Florida property that was titled bore the name of Juan Salas, a soldier from Cuba who owned the entire island of Key West in 1815.

History oscillates over time, but geography and its influence is constant. Although the stories of the ancient pirates and conquista-
dors had retreated into legend by 1896, the influence of Cuba remained. And when a group of optimistic Americans voted to incorporate this tented train terminus as a city in 1896, Cuba and Cubans continued to be a factor in its development. Among the 700 to 800 hardy residents of Miami in 1896 was a small group of Cubans. This fact is hardly surprising, since in 1890 Cubans represented then as now the largest foreign born community in the state. Although the Cuban population centered around the cigar industries in Tampa and Key West, word of the new city of Miami captured the imagination of Cubans as well as people from Florida and other states. Some of these early Cuban pioneers distinguished themselves by introducing the industry of their homeland to Miami. On May 15, 1896, the *Miami Metropolis*, in its inaugural edition, reported that Luis Gonzalez, a Cuban born but long time American, had opened a cigar “factory” in Miami. Gonzalez was the first, but within a month two more “factories” had opened. Among the early Cuban cigar makers was Jose Sanchez. In 1896, Sanchez moved to Miami and became a foreman in a small cigar factory. In 1907, he married an American woman and raised a family here. Sanchez may have worked for the Ximenes Brothers of St. Augustine, who operated a small cigar factory in downtown Miami next door to what would become the first Burdines.

Within a year, the *Metropolis*, ever concerned with the promotion of Miami, asked residents to consider what could be done to induce cigar factories to locate in Miami. And on March 4, 1898, The *Miami Metropolis* encouraged local farmers to grow tobacco plants and send them to the agricultural experimental station at the University of Florida in Lake City. “Any one who sends these specimens,” the paper claimed, “will be rendering a great assistance to furthering the industry in which we are all interested.” Not content to just produce cigars, some Miamians apparently hoped to make Miami a tobacco producing region also.

At one point near the end of the first decade of the new century there was a great flurry of activity and excitement over the possibility that Miami would become a cigar producing city. In 1910 the *Herald* reported that the Sanchez Haya Company of Tampa had signed a lease for the second floor of the opera house block on
Eleventh Street. The company planned to bring in over 150 workers from Havana, Key West and Tampa in order to start up a major cigar enterprise in the town. Over the next few months, a number of Cuban workers arrived, and the factory went into production at 325 Eleventh Street. A *Herald* reporter wrote that he saw:

men and women stripping tobacco, others sorting it, the cigar makers rolling it into fine cigars, others sorting the finished products according to color, girls putting on factory bands and others putting them into boxes. Then the Uncle Sam stamp was placed on the box and they were placed in large packing cases to be shipped to the uttermost parts of the earth.\(^8\)

Although this factory began with great enthusiasm it did not last long. Within two years the factory had disappeared. The cigar industry never exerted the same economic influence in Miami that it did in Key West and Tampa, but its presence at Miami’s beginning is a reminder of the early links that the Cuban people have had with this city.

While Miami was struggling to fulfill the dream of Julia Tuttle, one of its founders, of becoming a grand city, the island of Cuba was entering the final phase of its long quest to become an independent nation. As the war in Cuba escalated, Cuban patriots began to look north to the exile communities in Florida and New York for support. During the first half of the 1890s, the Florida cigar makers of Tampa and Key West sponsored a number of visits by Jose Marti to the Cuban communities of Florida. So enthused was Marti at the support he received from exiles here, that in 1895 he chose the city of Key West to publicly declare the birth of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. He called Tampa and Key West the “civilian camps of the revolution.”\(^9\) Between these two hotbeds of Cuban revolutionary fervor lay the new city of Miami.

Although revolution was brewing only a few hundred miles to the south, most Miamians were preoccupied with the business of building a city, and those that were not included tourists, wintering at railroad baron Henry M. Flagler’s posh Royal Palm Hotel, “the finest and biggest hotel on the East Coast.” Located on what is now a
parking lot in downtown Miami, the Royal Palm Hotel became the focal point of Miami’s social and economic life in its early years. Like one of Flagler’s locomotives, the hotel pulled the Miami economy in the early years and many of the fine cigars smoked on the verandah of that grand hotel probably came from the hands of Luis Gonzalez, Jose Sanchez, and their fellow Cuban cigar workers.

The space the early editions of the *Miami Metropolis* that was not given over to enthusiastic boosterism was taken up with advertising for land and construction. One of the early contractors, was Edgar David, an Ohioan, who lived with his Cuban born wife Isabel and three children in Cocoanut Grove. Isabel, literate in English, probably read with great interest the fictional tale which appeared in the *Miami Metropolis* about the fate of a young Key West Cuban boy and girl, Emmanuel and Margarita. She may have even read the story aloud to her three young children as they sat on the back porch of their Cocoanut Grove home far away from the tumult in her home country. The article, written for the *Metropolis* by Walter Scot, could not have found a better audience than the few Cuban-American families living in Miami.

Margarita is the central figure of the story. She is the daughter of a wealthy Cuban who had been exiled to Key West by the Spanish for revolutionary activity. Her deceased mother was an “American girl from the South.” Scot described Margarita as having an attractive Anglo-Spanish blend of rather dark features “which in a blond would have been rendered insipid.” Margarita’s “American characteristics,” he wrote, “had softened the harsher lines of her Spanish beauty.” Margarita falls in love with Emmanuel Morales, another Key West exile. Her father realizes she is in love, but he has his objections. This young man should be fighting for a “Cuba Libre,” he declared, “not wasting his life in idle courting.” He demanded that she tell her suitor that if he were to win her love, “he must do it with rifle and machete — and at once.”

He waited for his daughter to counter assault “with a wild outbreak of feminine expostulation in defense of her lover...” But she did not. Rather she wept in her father’s arms and sobbed in silent agreement with him. “God bless your heart, girl,” the father sighed, “the true blood runs in your veins.” He promised her that although the decision may seem harsh, in the end “she will love Emmanuel better for it.”
Margarita convinces Emmanuel to go off to war and, of course, he dies. In Key West, Margarita receives word of the tragedy. Running to the sea, she looks up at the bright stars which illuminate the cool clear night. The evening breeze causes her to tremble and makes her think how cold Emmanuel must be too as he lies alone in his unmarked grave. As Isabel David finished telling the story to her children she surely reminded them of their own roots in the sad island to the south.

Stories about the Cuban revolution must also have sparked the imagination of her husband, David. What intrigued him and his fellow workers, however, were not romantic tragedies, but rather stories of espionage and adventure on the high seas. After a busy day's work of turning campsites into homes, Miami men would retire at night to play billiards or drink beer smuggled into their "dry" town from places such as Woods and Company, located just north of the city limits, in a honky-tonk community called North Miami. Of course, there were always stories to tell, and in the summer of 1896 one story told with great frequency centered on filibusters to Cuba. Two names that came up most often were "Dynamite" Johnny O'Brien and Napoleon Bonaparte Broward. With their coastal transport ship, the Three Friends, these men completed the final link of a supply line of ammunition, weapons and men that began in New York and wound its way into South Florida. News of these exploits came to Miami either by word of mouth or telegraph dispatches posted outside the Metropolis. Every day men would run down to the large board outside the weekly newspaper's office to hear of the latest filibuster.

One excursion that received considerable attention that summer was the failed rendezvous between Broward and Captain Harry Tuttle's boat, City of Key West. Tuttle had been making regular runs between Key West and Miami for months, and in early July, while Tuttle's boat was docked at Garrison Bight in Key West, a group of Cubans, in an attempt to elude Federal agents patrolling the waters off the coast, bought one way tickets for Miami on his boat. They planned to meet Broward's boat, the Three Friends on the high sea and double back to Cuba with their cache of arms and ammunition.
Tuttle loaded his boat with weapons and revolutionaries, and left a number of passengers stranded on the Key West dock. The complaints of these abandoned passengers, including a *Metropolis* reporter, caught the attention of Key West customs agents. The suspicion of the agents was also aroused by noisy exuberant Cubans. When they realized the revolutionaries had cleared the harbor, the Cubans began dancing and celebrating on the boat and on the dock. With suspicions raised, the Coast Guard sent a boat to trail Tuttle back to Miami. Just south of Biscayne Bay, they were rewarded for their diligence. For in the light of early dawn they watched the transfer of Cuban revolutionaries and weapons from Tuttle's boat to Broward's vessel. Upon seizing Tuttle, Broward and their boats, the agents discovered "thirteen Cuban passengers as well as a very large freight which appeared to be ammunition." On Broward's boat they discovered more ammunition, cargo he apparently had taken on at New River, in Fort Lauderdale. The Coast Guard took Broward, Tuttle and their seized ships back to Key West, the site of a Federal District court.

The story of this event was spread by word of mouth throughout Miami. Particularly nervous and distressed over the capture were A.W. Barrs, a salesman from Jacksonville, and another man that the aforementioned reporter described as a "swarthy looking Cuban of short stature who had checked into the Hotel Miami the day before." The *Metropolis* reported that Barrs had been engaged in a number of filibustering expeditions to Cuba in the past and that he probably had something to do with the present one. Around the gathering spots and watering holes in and just outside Miami a consensus of opinion developed. "If the *City of Key West* had left at its scheduled hour, and the exultant Cubans had been able to restrain themselves, the affair could have succeeded unnoticed."13

Even from its earliest days, the city of Miami involved itself in the political turmoil of its Cuban neighbors. Broward soon became a hero to the independent minded pioneers of South Florida, and they began to embrace the cause of Cuba as their own. Some Miamians also realized that a profit could be made in helping their southern neighbors win independence. Soon all the dynamite that the new phosphorous plants around Bartow in Central Florida could produce
was being shipped on Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway south to Miami instead of to the industrial north. From Miami it was being sold illegally and transferred to contraband boats headed for Cuba. Even the local newspaper knew about the shipments and reported them (withholding names, of course) when bragging about the quantity of cargo that was leaving and entering the new port of Miami. A few months later, the same paper indignantly reported that international agents hired by the Spanish government had seized a munitions ship leaving Miami. These weapons, the Metropolis reported, were headed south to help “downtrodden Cubans” in their struggle for freedom. The Metropolis pointed out that Miamians wanted to help their neighbors living on “the fair isle just beyond the range of our vision,” and the editors warned Spain to leave South Florida alone. “She does not own us as she used to” they wrote, “and Florida is a very recreant child.” With foreign agents off its coast, contraband in its harbors, refugees on its streets and arms merchants checking into its hotels, Miami, in its first year of existence, had already realized the significance of its emotional and geographic proximity to Cuba. The words “Cuba Libre,” which resonated from Cuba, Key West and Tampa, also reverberated through the streets of Miami.14

Soon the United States went to war against Spain for reasons of honor and of course a “Cuba Libre.” On April 9, 1898, in response to the explosion of an American ship in Havana harbor and an insulting letter sent by the Spanish consulate in Washington to his government in Madrid, President McKinley declared war on Spain. Miamians, who had already made profits from the illegal shipment of arms to the south, began to dream of the windfall profits that would be realized now that the operations would be legalized. The Miami Metropolis printed accounts of some of those dreams, and enumerated the advantages that Miami would have as the principle point of embarkation for Cuba. The newspaper reasoned that since Miami had a safe landlocked harbor, a direct rail line to the coal fields of Alabama and was the American city closest to the theater of war, it should be the obvious choice for the center of military operations.15

Despite the newspaper’s arguments, Tampa was chosen over Miami. Perhaps U.S. military intelligence understood what the
Spanish conquistadors had figured out four centuries before, that the sea route between Tampa and Cuba is longer but much safer than the treacherous route around the Keys and over the Straits. Despite this rejection, Miamians caught the war fever as intensely as the most patriotic of cities. When rumors spread that the great Spanish Armada was sailing across the Atlantic, Miamians were certain it was headed straight for them. Many feared the damage that a well placed gunboat could do to the new city. Sitting safely off the coast, the journal pointed out, a warship could destroy the newly constructed pride of the city, the Royal Palm Hotel, or worse, it could explode the new water tower near the Miami River, a great symbol of city pride and promise. Miamians also feared the damage that foraging Spanish soldiers might do to their fledgling dry goods and food stores. It was with an inflated sense of self-importance that Miamians believed that the Spaniards even knew of their existence. Nevertheless, the War Department relented and constructed battery works with two ten-inch and two eight-inch guns on the bay about a mile and a half south of downtown. Judge Ashton organized a militia force of sixty four men to represent Miami in the war against Spain, and when he presented his men to the Governor, he discovered that enthusiasm for the Cuban war had spread throughout the entire state. Twenty companies had reported to Governor William Bloxham, although the state quota had been set at twelve. Late in June the government fulfilled Miami’s demand for protection from Spain when more than 7,000 troops arrived in the city. Despite careful preparation by the Florida East Coast Railway, the city could not support such a rapid influx of people. The railroad had dug a temporary sanitation system, but it quickly became overloaded and the men resorted to digging latrines which the soldiers (not understanding the nature of the Florida aquifer) placed dangerously close to their drinking water wells. Having found water so close to the surface, the men abandoned their artesian well project and despite warnings, the men continued to dig and use shallow water wells with dire consequences. Sickness and inactivity demoralized the men. Then came the hot mosquito filled months of July and August. Given a choice between hell and Miami, one man, probably echoing the sentiments of many others, said he would choose the former without hesitation. Tempers flared, and the
soldiers created far more disorder than order in the city they were sent to protect. One night shots rang out from a group of soldiers and a bullet pierced the tent of two railroad workers sleeping a few blocks away on Twelfth Street. One of the two, James T. Williams received a deep flesh wound and his roommate E.W. Ramage was hit in the wrist, which shattered the bone and made amputation necessary. Even Julia Tuttle was not immune from the disruptive presence of thousands of armed men in her new city. One morning she awoke to find that one of the soldiers, overcome with depression, had the temerity to shoot himself right in her back yard garden by the river.\textsuperscript{17}

When the troops finally pulled out in August 1898, a collective sigh of relief emanated from the small city, though retailers profited handsomely from the soldiers, who cleaned out their inventories. The military excursion was ill-fated to the end. The day they were leaving a late summer storm battered the soldiers on the train platform. Many of the young men rushed to Fred Rutter’s place just south of the platform to escape the rain or get a cold soft drink from the ice barrel. At that moment a bolt of lightening struck the shack killing two young soldiers. One of them, Charles Gill of Louisiana, was buried in the city cemetery with military honors. His grave remains the one last physical link that Miami has to Cuba’s war against Spain.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite the problems connected to the soldiers presence in Miami, the United States entry into the war in proved an important lesson for Miami regarding the city’s relationship with its neighbor to the south. Miamians discovered that their close proximity to the Island made Miami a natural commercial partner with Cuba; they also learned that they could not be indifferent to political or social upheaval on the island. Finally, they realized their strategic significance in terms of foreign relations with Cuba. Although it would take the federal government a few more years to learn these lessons, Miami already knew that for better or worse its future was tied to Cuba’s and that a part of its population would always claim the heritage of “Cuban-American.”

America’s defeat of the Spanish In 1898 marked the beginning of a new era of leadership in the Caribbean. The termination of four hundred years of history, however, did not end without conse-
quence, and for the first quarter of the twentieth century, political and economic convulsions erupted throughout the Caribbean causing the United States to send troops into the area over twenty times. This show of military strength was accompanied by investments of over a billion and a half dollars. Finally, by the end of the 1920s, the Caribbean was relatively peaceful and through an extraordinary display of guns and money the United States had established hege-
mony over the area.

Being so close to the United States, Cuba felt this new force most directly. During the early years of independence, Cuba experienced American military or political intervention on at least five different occasions. It also received about eighteen percent of the total dollars invested in the region. As the Cuban poet and patriot Martinez Villena wrote:

Our Cuba knows well
when the hunt for nations begins
And how the threat
from the north continues
even when ambition lies dormant
Florida is the finger
that points to Cuba

The significance of this new area of exploitation was not lost on Miamians. Immediately after the Cuban war for independence, a group of Miamians joined other pioneers in an attempt to settle and annex the Isle of Pines off the coast of Cuba. For twenty years this island remained an American settlement until the Supreme Court, in 1920, decided that it belonged to Cuba.

Large amounts of American money flowed into Cuba in the 1920s, and Miamians hoped to channel at least some of it through their city. In January 1930, Curtiss Wright announced his plans for the inauguration of flights to Havana which, the Herald reported, “spurred further speculation” of financial gain to be made in Cuba. The paper also cited the great success that Miami Airplane and Supply Company had after placing just one ad in a Havana newspaper.
Reporting on the increasing investments and the relative stability which seemed to be developing in the Caribbean, the Miami Herald predicted (correctly, as it turned out) that when air service was eventually established, Miami would become the gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America. Hence, the Miami Herald concluded, "although peaceful progress of Latin America concerns all the United States, it concerns Miamians in particular." Ever since 1925 when Gerardo Machado became president, Americans had been bullish on Cuba. When Machado took office he did so on a great wave of good will both at home and abroad. His promise of judicial, economic and educational reforms along with his denunciations of the ever intrusive Platt amendment gave optimistic Cubans hope that democracy would finally flourish on their island. The United States was equally enthusiastic over the Machado presidency. While visiting New York, Machado promised that after five years of his government, "the capacity of Cubans to govern themselves would be assured." At a banquet in his honor given by Charles E. Mitchell, president of New York's National City Bank, he promised that in his administration "there would be absolute guarantees for all businesses." Thomas Lamont of the House of Morgan said he hoped the Cubans would find a way to keep Machado in power indefinitely.

Carl Fisher and Glen Curtiss, two prominent Miami businessmen and developers, also hoped that Havana would provide a ready
market for their automobile, which they planned to mass produce in Opa Locka. They sent Machado a prototype of the car, and for his part Machado sent an enthusiastic endorsement letter which promised that the car would be well received in Havana. This was one more example, Machado pointed out, of Miami’s “very special relationship with Cuba.”

In 1930 Machado authorized a massive promotion of Cuba in Miami. The focal point of this campaign was a weekly five page special section of the Miami Herald which reported on life in Cuba. Not surprisingly, the paper showed nothing of the political turmoil beginning to brew on the island. It presented Cuba as a tropical paradise with unlimited economic opportunity. It contained articles on the best hotels in Havana, information on how to obtain Cuban citizenship, as well as articles on the most profitable goods for the import-export business. The special section also contained articles designed to convince Miamians of Havana’s friendly pro American environment. As an example of this good will, they reported on the establishment of English language schools within four of Havana’s high schools. This development arose when “the government realized the urgent necessity for Cuban youth to learn English.”

This promotional activity was not without benefit. During the Machado regime, investments in Cuba skyrocketed to over $1.5 billion, an amount equal to the entire American investment in all of the rest of the Caribbean and South America at the time. In the 1920s, the United States was still officially “dry” but Cuban rum flowed freely in the speakeasies and hotels of Miami. Greater Miami’s vast waterways provided the port of entry for these extra-legal products.

Acknowledging the growing economic bond between Havana and Miami, Juan Tripp’s newly formed Pan American Airlines inaugurated regularly scheduled flights between the two cities on January 1, 1931. The promise of a flourishing economic alliance with Cuba caused a number of developers in Miami, led by real estate magnate Clifford Reeder, to begin the promotion of an idea which would become known as “Interama,” a permanent Caribbean Trade Fair, although the dream was never realized, it remained a significant symbol of the aspirations of many Miami promoters from 1929 when it was first conceived until the 1970s. Fragments of the dream still
remain along Northeast 163 Street where a few street signs still carry the name Interama Boulevard. This unrealized vision underscored two dominant characteristics of Miami: the incessant boosterism of many of its citizens and the undeniable influence of its proximity to the Caribbean. In the 1930s the burgeoning relationship with Cuba gave substance to this disposition.

In 1933, Miami’s economic ties with Cuba drew it into the turbulence of the island’s politics. In the 1930s Cubans were growing increasingly disillusioned with Machado and his failure to realize most of his promises of economic prosperity. As a result of economic depression in the United States and the collapse of international trade everywhere, sugar prices in Cuba dropped drastically and the economy of the island was on the brink of destruction. In order to bring some discipline to the economy, Machado in 1931 began an expansion of his power, which culminated in his announcement that there would be no elections held at the end of his six year term. He had decided to extend his term of office indefinitely. When two former political rivals, Carlos Mendietta and Mario Menocal joined forces in an unsuccessful coup, it became clear that the days of the Machado regime were numbered. The question on everybody’s mind was when the U.S. Army would arrive to restore order with a new government. There was even a revolutionary party in Cuba [ABC] whose avowed purpose was to create so much chaos that the Americans would have to enter the country to restore order. But the troops did not arrive.

In the 1930s, under Franklin Roosevelt, U.S. policy toward
the Caribbean had begun to change. One event which had tempered U.S. aggressiveness in Latin America was the Nicaraguan intervention of 1926. Americans had expected to enter the small county and restore order, but what they encountered was a full scale guerrilla war led by the folk hero General Augustino Sandino. The significance of the event was not lost on the State Department, and they determined to develop a policy of influence in the region that did not include as a first step the introduction of armed troops. The opportunity for experimentation with the new policy occurred when Machado lost his mandate to rule in Cuba. The new American policy utilized economic and diplomatic pressure against the government in power, coupled with financial support for exiled leaders who had demonstrated enough support to create a new regime. Given the changing American policy, exiled leaders spent a lot of energy convincing U.S. State Department officials that they had popular support. It was during this period that Miami became the center of Cuban exile activity in the United States. Three factors caused this geographic shift in exile power away from New York and Tampa. The first was the inauguration of Pan Am flights which placed Miami a mere two hours from Havana. The second was the decision of the millionaire ex president of Cuba, Mario Menocal, to settle in Miami and third was the arrival of a powerful revolutionary group of students and young people in Miami.

After the failed coup attempt Menocal, following a brief stint in prison, was exiled to Germany. But he quickly returned to the Americas and rented a large stone mansion with a tiled roof on Collins Avenue at Lincoln Road. This was one of five houses Menocal would live in with his extended family while he was exiled from Cuba. Menocal brought with him to Miami a large group of followers who formed a colony of elite exiles on Miami Beach. Throughout the early thirties, newspaper men kept a vigil outside Menocal’s mansion noting the arrival and departure of Cuban foreign ministers and political leaders. Menocal’s contributions to the sugar economy of Cuba, his wealth, and his prestige as a former president and revolutionary leader caused those seeking power to gravitate toward him.

A second exile group living at the other end of the economic
and political spectrum also arrived in Miami in the early thirties. Under the leadership of Carlos Prio Soccaras, this group, which called itself the DEU (Directory of University Students), fled to Miami in 1932. Manuel Varona Loredo and Rubio Padilla, who represented the new generation of leadership, came with them. Thus, by 1932, the most significant exile leadership of both the older and the new generations was located in Miami. Active exile groups continued to exist in Tampa and in New York, Menocal’s old allies were receiving funds and encouragement from the U.S. Government, but the heart and soul of the revolution remained in Miami.

The radical group DEU has been described as the “purest and most cohesive of all revolutionary groups” in Cuba at that time. It formed a cell in Miami which had broken away from a similar group in New York. The issue of controversy was U.S. intervention. The traditional view of Cuban revolutionaries was to demonstrate for U.S. interventions and help in changing the government. The DEU in Miami opposed this. Dependency on American intervention, they believed, had been the fatal flaw of every Cuban leader since Independence. These separatists who became known as the “Miami Cell” throughout the American exile community, opposed American intervention. They published a “Four Point Plan” from Miami which circulated throughout the United States and Cuba. The plan advocated the overthrow of Machado and the development of a true democracy completely free from American influence. To accept American mediation, they protested, “was to accept the participation of a government that is responsible for oppressing us as a people.”

The radical views of the DEU kept it outside the mainstream
exile community. They did not receive large donations and actually became a financial burden to the city of Miami. They were hardly part of the distinguished wealthy exile community exemplified by the Miami Beach group. Rather, they lived as poor refugees. They arrived in leaky boats and gathered in army camp barracks near the center of town, or they crowded into cheap apartments such as the one at 138 Northeast 11th Terrace, just north of downtown. In 1932, there had been only a few hundred Cubans living in Miami, but by the following spring there were over a thousand exiles huddled within a few blocks of downtown Miami. Powerless as individuals, as a group they gave strength to the exile leadership. This group could be depended on to provide hundreds of demonstrators whenever an important leader showed up at Menocal’s mansion, or whenever disturbing news arrived from Cuba. The refugees in downtown Miami were mostly poor, radical and excitable, but they soon became the allies of their more genteel neighbors across the bay. Despite their differences, these disparate groups shared the philosophic point that the U.S. should not intervene in the creation of a new government for Cuba. As president of Cuba, and even in his early exile period, Menocal had supported the idea of U.S. intervention, but he had changed his point of view while in Miami. Just as the radicals living in Miami had suffered for this point of view so had Menocal. Although Menocal was probably the richest and the most politically powerful Cuban exile living in the United States, and despite a great deal of popular support he enjoyed both in and outside of Cuba, he was excluded from the junta that was being put together under Carlos Mendietta with U.S. support. It may be difficult to imagine an alliance between a ragtag group of student revolutionaries and the distinguished and wealthy ex-president of the country, but as Justo Carillo points out in his history of the 1933 revolution, Menocal and the DEU represented “opposite poles of force which were attracted to each other.” They also represented a new political point of view for Cuba, which had developed in Miami, uninfluenced by the older established exile communities in Key West, Tampa and New York. Clearly when one looks for the roots of the current Miami-Havana political connection, the revolution of 1933 cannot be ignored.
The alliance of the two groups was mutually beneficial. The radicals provided Menocal with spontaneous demonstrations of support, and in return Menocal helped provide financial support for the refugees. Unable because of his political position to obtain money from the federal government, he used his influence to raise funds for the DEU from private foundations and donors. For example, he joined with the Pan American League of Miami to put on a benefit for the refugees at the Biltmore Hotel. The Pan American League was one of numerous groups created as a result of Miami's new infatuation with the Caribbean. Founded by Mrs. Clark Stearns, and supported by such notables as Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, the League stated as its goal "the promotion of peace and understanding among the America's." It held luncheons, seminars and supported a speakers' bureau and artists' series. But probably the league's most significant contribution was the support it provided foreign students studying at the University of Miami. It was this connection that motivated the group to hold a major fund raising dinner in support of the Cuban radicals living in Miami. Important Miamians such as Judge Frank B. Stoneman and Hugh Matheson attended the affair, but those who declined invitations were also noteworthy. Miami Beach Mayor Frank Katzentine protested to the League when his name was placed on the list of guests attending the affair. He pointed out that the refugees were political enemies of the legitimate government of Cuba, and since the United States still recognized that government, he felt that his name should not be used to encourage political strife between factions in any other countries.41

If he had been asked, Katzentine might also have expressed dismay over the fact that one of the most powerful of Cuba's exiles was holding court in a mansion on Miami Beach. The Mayor's uneasiness was probably shared by many of Miami's entrepreneurs and boosters. They probably feared that the good will being generated between the two cities would be destroyed if Miami became identified as the center of intrigue against the legitimate government. Machado was by no means out of power, and he was responsible for stimulating the new economic activity between Miami and Cuba. If he survived the crisis in his government, and in February 1933, there was no indication that he would not, Miami entrepreneurs wanted to be sure
that he remained well disposed toward their city.

The *Miami Herald* shared this apprehension. Although *Herald* editor Frank Stoneman attended the benefit, his paper never noted the presence of the refugees until it was clear that Machado would fall. During the exciting months from the inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in March 1933, until the fall of Machado in August, Miami was a hotbed of Cuban political activity. Exile leaders met until the early morning hours at Menocal’s mansion, demonstrations broke out spontaneously at various sites, including the Menocal house, the Pan American Airways terminal in Coconut Grove, and Downtown Miami’s Florida East Coast Railway Station. There was even evidence that the revolutionaries had broken into the National Guard armory, stole weapons and smuggled them into Cuba, but none of this news ever appeared in the *Herald*. Its absence from the paper invites speculation. On at least fifteen occasions during the months prior to Machado’s fall in August, the *New York Times* reported revolutionary events occurring in the Cuban exile community of Miami that the *Herald* ignored.\(^4\)

Perhaps economics can explain the *Herald*’s indifference to the exile community. For example every Sunday during this unstable period, the *Herald* published five full pages of advertising paid for by the Cuban government. It even printed an announcement by the government stating that during the current crisis, Cuba intended to keep her tourists from being bothered by “internal problems.” The *Herald* maintained this tolerant attitude toward the Machado regime even after the Cuban President had expelled the American publisher John T. Wofford and closed down his newspaper, the *Havana-American*, for making unfavorable comments about the government.\(^4\) Additionally, the *Herald* represented the business community of Miami, not the exile community, and businessmen did not want to endanger the city’s cordial relations with Cuba’s legitimate government. It was best, they felt, for Miami to remain neutral in the struggle. Unlike the generation of 1898, there would be no cry of “Cuba Libre” in 1933. As the struggle wore on, however, neutrality and indifference became a difficult task, especially during the hot days of mid-August when Machado’s government finally fell, and tempers exceeded the temperatures on the hot streets of downtown Miami.
In the middle of the night of August 13, the Machado regime ended. After leaving instructions to his wife to meet him in New York, Machado gathered up his five closest friends and advisers for a flight from Cuba. Still in their pajamas, they flew together in an amphibian Sikorsky to Nassau with five revolvers and seven bags of gold. It was up to the highest ranking official remaining, Secretary of State Orestes Ferrara, on the following day, to bring the government of Machado to a close.

Legalistic to the end and perhaps to make an important symbolic point that the government was surrendering to the American government not the Cuban people, Ferrara submitted his resignation to Sumner Wells, the U.S. Ambassador and chief negotiator during the crisis. During his trip to the U.S. Embassy, Ferrara smelled blood in the streets and feared for his life. He asked Wells for protection and safe conduct for him and his wife but the ambassador declined. Ferrara opened the window to Wells’ office and asked him to listen to the sound of guns being fired in the street. Wells insisted that it was simply the excitement and celebration of the departure of Machado and that Ferrara would be safe to leave the country without harm. Ferrara and his wife left in an open car and when the “jubilant” crowd recognized him, it quickly became an angry mob. Guns were drawn and bullets flew over the heads of the former secretary of state and his wife. The car arrived at Havana harbor just ahead of the crowd. Ferrara and his wife ran from the car and onto the Pan Am clipper ship waiting at the dock. The pilot Leo Tertleskey had the engines idling and when he heard the mob, he taxied out into the harbor; as gunshots ripped through the fuselage, he took off leaving fourteen Miami bound passengers’ baggage and the mail at the terminal. Gunshots ripped into the plane but no vital parts were damaged and two and a half hours later the bullet riddled plane taxied safely into Dinner Key harbor.44

There at the Pan American Airway terminal another angry crowd awaited Ferrara. When he stepped off the plane into the hot muggy afternoon sun the crowd moved closer. As he walked through the canopied passage into the terminal the crowds called after him. Most of the shouting was in Spanish but interspersed in English the words “murderer,” “butcher” and “assassin” could be heard. When a
reporter asked for a translation of what the crowd was saying a young man simply said, “Just imagine the worst words you know in English.” Shaken but indignant, Ferrara faced the crowd from the second story balcony of the new air terminal. As he left the building someone shouted after him in English, “I wish I had a sword. I would fight a duel with you! In fact I will fight you with anything, you bum!”

Ferrara, who was no stranger to the art of dueling, ran to answer the challenge, but he was restrained by the police. Then under heavy guard the ex-secretary of state and his wife were taken to the train station in Hollywood where they boarded a Pullman for New York.

The following day, Miami’s Cuban refugees greeted Mrs. Machado similarly. This time, however, the crowd was less controllable. Mrs. Machado arrived in Miami drained both physically and emotionally. After watching her husband flee for his life the day before, she had taken the family’s armored yacht to Key West. From there, she along with her daughters and their husbands, boarded the Flagler train. By the time she arrived at the Miami station at 7:30 in the evening, a crowd had gathered and it began taunting her and her family. When police threatened to disperse the crowd with clubs, it resisted by forming itself into a tight ring. Police reacted angrily with their billy clubs and they arrested about ten men considered to be the leaders. About fifty members of the crowd followed the police and demonstrated outside the jail demanding the release of their friends. Among those arrested was Manuel Mencia, nephew of Miguel Gomez, the popular former mayor of Havana who had joined Menocal in the aborted coup of 1931. When questioned by police the effervescent Gomez replied that there must have been a misunderstanding, for his nephew was a gentleman, and, therefore, he would never insult Mrs. Machado or any lady.

These last demonstrations by the exiles finally exploded the tranquil facade that many Miamians had tried to maintain during the crisis. Police Captain L.O. Scarboro told reporters that the patience of the entire force had finally been stretched to the breaking point. “No more demonstrations will be tolerated,” he announced. “If they want to fight and raise hell,” he declared, “Let them go back to Cuba!” He explained to reporters that for the past five months the city had been quietly putting up with the demonstrators and hundreds of exile
incidents. “But they have been pampered for too long,” he exclaimed. “From here on out they will have to take their place as law abiding residents in the area. We don’t believe that any group in Miami should be permitted to submit everybody else in the city to conduct as has been exhibited here. This situation has been embarrassing the police for some time,” and he vowed to bring an end to it.

During his angry diatribe, Scarboro let out information that probably should have been kept quiet. For example, he told reporters “we have definite knowledge that thefts of machine guns and pistols from U.S. armories (across the nation) have been traced to Miami, undoubtedly through the activity of some of these exiles (and) the army has been sent here to investigate.” When the story broke in the Herald there was an immediate attempt to quiet Scarboro. Menocal met with Police inspector Frank Mitchell and they issued a joint statement that he, Menocal, would be personally responsible for the conduct of the exiles from now on. Meanwhile, members of the Board of Trade met with Scarboro and tried to urge him to retract his statements from the previous day. But Scarboro remained adamant. “The statement I published yesterday was correct,” he insisted, “I have nothing to retract.” Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and there were no more incidents involving the exiles and the police. The ten young men arrested the day before at the train station were released from jail and the new Cuba government, apparently as eager to maintain good relations with Miami as Miamians were, announced that it was sending a ship immediately to collect all of its citizens who wished to return to the island.

In reaction to news of the refugees departure, the Miami Herald, in an editorial, bid farewell to the refugees. With the “sudden retirement” of Machado, the editorial began, “Miami has begun to lose her Cuban residents who are fleeing back to their homeland.” Ignoring the more tawdry events of the recent months the Herald stated that Miami had been glad to extend her hospitality to the exiles and “was sad to lose them.” The editorial concluded on an ironic yet prophetic note, “Miami’s gates will always be open to Cubans, should the time ever come again when they need a refuge. In the meantime,” the article concluded, “our mutual interests will continue to grow.”

The thirties witnessed an important turning point in the
Miami-Havana relationship. With the advent of the airplane, travel to Miami became safer and easier than the traditional journey to Tampa or New York, and competitive Miami entrepreneurs pursued this advantage aggressively in order to ensure a long lasting commercial relationship with Cuba. It seemed that the two areas were finally realizing the commercial and cultural destiny that geography and history had established for then. Although Cuba was subject to political turmoil, Miami business leaders were prepared to remain flexible, sending cars and invitations to dictator Machado one day and bidding bon voyage to exile revolutionaries and best wishes to a new government the next. Miamians remained impervious to the political convolutions on the island. The benefits of the commercial possibilities seemed to far outweigh the ephemeral game of politics.

After Machado fell, a number of his supporters left Cuba for Miami and from that time on there would always be a large Cuban exile community living in Miami. America’s most famous Cuban entertainer, Desi Arnaz, came to Miami at this time. Arnaz was born on March 2, 1917 and named after his father, Desiderio Arnaz, a dentist in Santiago, who was also involved in politics. During the Machado regime he served as the mayor of Santiago and during the revolution, like so many other Machado supporters, he had to run for his life. The story of the Arnaz family is a familiar one for Cubans living in exile here. Arnaz and his son arrived in Miami in 1933 as poor refugees. Pooling what little money he had with a friend, the senior Arnaz started the “Pan American Export Company” in a small warehouse on S.E. Third Street. They imported bananas, which arrived rotten, and tiles that arrived broken. The partner quit in disgust, but Arnaz’ father remained undaunted by his bad luck. He
and his son piled the broken tiles into the back of their tired old pick up truck and went to a construction site on Miami Beach where Arnaz told the contractor that broken tile was the latest design in Cuba. The contractor bought all the tile at a higher price than whole tile.\(^{50}\)

In order to save money to bring the rest of the family from Cuba, Desi Arnaz and his father lived in their warehouse. Soon his mother arrived and they moved into a small two bedroom house at 809 Northeast First Avenue.\(^{51}\) Arnaz went to St. Patrick’s School on Miami Beach. During this time Dezi Arnaz got his first job as a performer. He played the guitar with a back up band to Buddy Rogers at the Roney Plaza, where he was discovered by Xavier Cougat who took him to New York. A year later he returned to Miami with his own band. It was here that Desi Arnaz introduced the “Conga Line” to America.\(^{52}\) There were many Cuban neighbors here with the Arnaz family in the 1930s. The former President of the Senate, Alberto Barreras, occupied a mansion at 2040 North Bayshore Drive on Biscayne Bay. Jorge Sanchez, the Cuban sugar king, lived on Miami Beach at Thirty-Seven Star Island. The Mendoza Brothers had a cigar factory, and there were three Cuban Public Markets, one at 116 Northwest Third Avenue, another at 1501 Northwest Fifth Avenue, and a third at 439 Northwest Seventeenth Avenue. During this period, two ex-Cuban presidents, Geraldo Machado and Mario Menocal, also called Miami home. A *Miami Daily News* article in 1939 reported that 25 to 30 Cuban families lived here permanently while another 3,000 lived here on a temporary basis.\(^{53}\)

Experiences during the Machado revolution greatly modified Americans foreign policy in the Caribbean. The formula included economic pressure, followed by support of an exile government with a legitimate claim to popular support coupled with the threat of military intervention. Miami had a major role as this new policy played out in tumultuous political life of Cuba in the forties and fifties. There were numerous changes in the Cuban government from 1933-1959, and with each change the Cuban population in Miami increased to a substantial minority. The provisional government established after the fall of Machado was replaced by a military coup led by Fulgencio Batista. Batista directed the formation of a constitutional government and was elected president in 1940. Ralston Grau San Martin followed
in 1944, and he was succeeded by Carlos Prio in 1948. Each change in government brought a new group of political exiles to Miami and the tide never receded. As soon as one group returned to Cuba, another arrived to plot their own accession to power. As the Herald reported in 1947, “More than 10,000 political and military ‘refugees’ from Cuba have turned Miami today into a new kind of haven from storm and unfriendly weather. “Flagler Street has acquired,” the Herald concluded, “a distinct Cuban flavor.”

A clearer picture of Cuban influence in the city presented itself in the new Spanish language newspaper Diario de las Americas, which began publishing from its office at 4349 NW 36th Street in the early 1950s. The Diario revealed a Latin life in Miami far richer than that alluded to by the Herald. According to the Diario, there were 80,000 Latins living in Miami in 1955. They drank Bustelo and Pilon coffee and every Saturday many of them listened to Susy Merino who hosted a show in Spanish entitled, “Ondas del Caribe,” from 7:15 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on WIOD. In 1955, the Diario pointed out that although there were thousands of Cubans living in Miami, few were aware of the fact that a shrine to the patroness of Cuba, La Virgin de la Cobre, had been constructed at St. Michael’s Church on Flagler at 29th Avenue. The statue was built from a donation made by Hilda Negretti who was the wife of a popular Cuban attorney in Miami, Gino Negretti.

It was also during the early fifties that Miami established its first bilingual school. According to Las Diarios, teachers at Miami’s Buena Vista Elementary School at 3001 Northwest Second Avenue began to offer classes in Spanish, making it the first bilingual school in the county. Although there were at the time 129 schools in the county, only Buena Vista had a significantly large number of Spanish speaking students. Of the total of 609 students, 239 spoke Spanish as their first language. Although the majority of the Spanish speaking students were Puerto Rican, the second greatest number were Cuban. Another indication of the growing Cuban community was the establishment of the Circulo Cubano, a Cuban Social Club in 1955. Located at 420 Southwest Eighth street, Circulo Cubano was a social club which sponsored weekly dances for adults and teenagers. In addition to a club, radio station and a Church they could call their
own, the Cuban community ate at Cuban restaurants (The Garden Restaurant, 2235 Southwest Eighth Street, Club Latino, Thirty-Eight Northwest Fifty-Fourth Street, and El Florida Restaurant, 2322 Northwest Seventh Street) and bought Cuban pastries (Miramar 611 Northwest Twenty-Ninth Avenue and 314 Southwest Eighth Street, and Palermo Bakery and Panaderia 681 Northwest Seventh Street). They also went to the movies in Spanish, seeing films such as “Esta Estrana Pasion” at the Roosevelt Theater.61

The rapid rise in Cuban culture in Miami was propelled by the protean nature of politics in the homeland. During these periods of political upheaval, Miami opened its gates to ex-Cuban officials with money regardless of their political beliefs. Not atypical of these times was Grau San Martin’s friend and minister of education, Jose Manuel Aleman, who arrived in Miami in October, 1948 with $20,000,000 in his suitcase.62 Scenes such as this symbolized both the corruption that plagued Cuban government and the strong economic ties that Miami and Havana continued to establish as they moved closer together in the decades of the forties and fifties. There were two very significant symbols of Cuban presence in Miami in the 1940s. The first was the Miami baseball stadium, a superb facility, built by Aleman. The second was the Pan American Airways. Juan Tripp, after moving his airline here in 1928, proceeded to build a beautiful art deco airport terminal at the old Dinner Key naval air station site. Tripp’s modern airport became the take off spot for all vacationers headed to Cuba and South America. After the war the airline moved out to the airport at Northwest Thirty-Sixth Street, but Pan American Airways continued to be the principle name in travel to the Caribbean and Europe, and Miami was its headquarters.

In the 1940s and 1950s, organized crime provided another economic link between Miami and Havana. Most of Havana’s entertainment operations, which included hotels, gambling and prostitution, were administered in Miami, a safe but proximate distance from the volatile republic. As a result of this new relationship with Cuba and the underworld, Miami became an important link in the commercial empire of organized crime. For example, heroin that flowed from France to Havana to New York had passed through Miami. And when dishonest Cuban politicians arrived in Miami with
suitcases full of money, the various mafia run businesses in Miami provided investment opportunities that did not scrutinize sources of income. By the mid-fifties, the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that investment by Cuba citizens in the United States had reached $400,000,000, and most of this money went through Miami. Cuban exiles provided a financial waterfall to capital starved Miami.63

The world of sport was also greatly influenced by the increased Cuban presence in Miami. The Miami Jai Alai Fronton and the race tracks of Hialeah, Tropical Park and Gulfstream welcomed Cuban jockeys and players. The flurry of financial activity between Miami and Havana both legal and illegal solidified their economic relationship. It also changed the city of Miami radically as people such as Meyer Lansky and other underworld figures began to play a major role in determining the city’s future. But these changes, as great as they were, pale in comparison to the influences the island would have on the Magic City in the following decades.64

In 1952, Fulgencio Batista, the young sergeant who had given the Cubans democracy in 1940, took it away from them with a coup de etat against Carlos Prio, and once again Miami was swept into the whirl of Cuba political upheaval. After the 1952 coup, Prio moved to Miami where he lived with the honor of being the last legitimately elected president of Cuba. For those with longer memories, he was also remembered as the idealistic leader of the DEU, the exile student group that had opposed Machado in 1933. With these credentials most Cubans were willing to forgive his indiscretions as president and recognized him as their leader in exile. Throughout the fifties, the plots of Prio and his compatriots to overthrow Batista again threw Miami into the world of Cuban politics. In September 1956, for example, a former Cuban legislator, Dr. Oscar Alverado, was arrested at Miami International Airport by the FBI. He was accused of buying weapons for use in Cuba for the overthrow of Batista. The newspapers announced that David Walters, the personal attorney of Carlos Prio would defend Alverado.65 Six months later, on the morning of May 15, 1957, a group of seventeen supporters of Prio crept out of Biscayne Bay on their way to Cuba to begin the revolution against Batista. This small group of soldiers under Calixto Sanchez arrived
on the coast of Oriente where they were captured and summarily shot by the lieutenant of police of the tiny village of Mayari. These relatively insignificant events marked the end of Prio's claim to leadership. Increasingly, support began to fall on the "hero" of Sierra Madre, Fidel Castro, and his followers. By December 1958, Castro had taken control of the country, and early in the morning of January 1, 1959 the first Castro refugees began to arrive in Miami.

At first, Miamians accepted the appearance of refugees on the evening news as rather normal and routine. Most of the earliest arrivals had financial or familial connections and represented little burden to the city, in fact they proved to be the opposite, providing, as they did, a boost to an economy weakened by the recession. Small businesses, especially used car dealers, appliance and furniture dealers and real estate agents began to enjoy a boom in their businesses. But very rapidly the hundreds of relatively well off exiles turned into thousands of desperate and penniless refugees. At first the Cuba community was determined to handle the problem themselves. This illusion did not last long, for in a very brief period, as Monsignor Bryan Walsh has pointed out, there were as many as nineteen families living in a single family residence. Of course, this was the extreme, but even the average Cuba family in Miami during this period of early migration was sharing a two room dwelling with at least two additional adults. When the pressure on the Cuba families became unbearable, they sought help from private charity, and, since it was a familiar institution, the first place they turned to was the Catholic Church. In response, the new Diocese of Miami (only a year old at the time) opened a refugee center at 130 Northeast Second Avenue, in a portion of the Gesu School building.

The Catholic Church also put refugee children into their schools, which inflated the average classroom size to over sixty students. In addition they established health care for refugees free of charge at Mercy Hospital. One of the biggest problems the church handled in these early days was the relocation of thousands of children who had been sent to Miami alone by their parents from Cuba. Through the assistance of the National Catholic Welfare Council, thousands of young children were placed in foster homes in forty-seven dioceses in thirty different states. The monumental task of
placing these children and keeping track of them was a human miracle and this event alone deserves a full chapter when the complete story of Cuban migration is told. In the first months of 1959, the Catholic Church spent in excess of $200,000 on processing the refugees and providing direct financial support. This sum did not include hospital and educational costs. The following year this amount increased to $561,000.71

Catholics of Miami quickly became aware of the refugee problem in their churches on Sunday when financially pressed pastors began to take up special collections for the refugees. The rest of Miami also began to realize the dimension of the problem as the exiles that appeared nightly on television began to look less like wealthy Latin visitors on a weekend holiday and more like the desperate refugees they had previously only seen coming out of East Berlin: bedraggled, confused, hungry and poor.

Upon arrival at Miami’s Airport, the new immigrant was questioned by an immigration officer then given a quick physical inspection. The lucky ones were approved, photographed, fingerprinted and released. The less fortunate were sent to Opa Locka airport for further questioning. Having survived this ordeal the immigrant, with no family or friends to help him, turned to the Catholic Relief Center where he received a meal and possibly a few dollars with which to begin a new life.72

Although shabby in appearance, and penniless, these refugees were quite different than the group of poor workers and students who had wandered the streets during the Machado revolution. These new arrivals were, as later statistics verified, decidedly middle class. Typical of the new immigrant was a man described by then Mayor Robert King High. “My law office recently required testimony from someone with a background in Cuban law,” High testified before a Senate Committee. “We were able to reach a former judge, an appellate judge in Cuba who had served some 30 years. He came to Miami in mid-1960. It was brought out in testimony as to what his present position was and he stated that he delivers groceries on a part time basis for $18 a week.”73 These poorly dressed, mentally depressed, uncomely wanderers were not the Cubans that Miamians had become accustomed to in the decades of the forties and fifties. Many
Miamians quickly grew impatient with their new guests from Cuba. News commentator Wayne Fariss echoed the opinions of a large number when he said:

Miamians view the Cubans as house guests who have worn out their welcome, who feel it is now time for them to move on... (The Cubans) are a threat to our business and tourist economy. It would appear that the hand that holds Miami’s torch of friendship has been over extended.74

Rejected in Cuba, poor and abandoned by all but the Catholic Church in Miami, and ridiculed by many, the first refugees from Castro’s Cuba suffered a sad plight. Had word of this filtered back to Cuba, possibly the great flow of humanity would have ceased, perhaps the great energy expended in migration might have been expended against the Castro regime. But before the earliest unhappy experiences of Miami became established practice, and before the terrible experience of Miami filtered back to Cuba, an amazing event occurred which would change the character of Miami forever. The Federal Government intervened. Suddenly the refugee problem was not seen as a local issue but rather a matter of national security.

In the fifties and early sixties, as refugees poured out of Eastern Europe, Americans interpreted the phenomenon as proof of the failure of communism. When the federal government noticed similar numbers coming out of Cuba they instituted policies which would encourage continued migration and prove a similar point in the Caribbean. Miami soon became the latest battle front in the cold war, the “Berlin of the Caribbean,” and refugees were no longer abandoned waifs but heroes.

Much of this ideological transformation is documented in United States Senate hearings held in Miami in 1961. Senator Philip Hart from Michigan set the tone for the hearings when he stated that if the United States was going to undertake a major refugee assistance program it must be done in a way “that reflects a conscious understanding that our action in this area bears directly on our foreign policy.”75 Local leaders, sensitive to the Washington sentiment and eager to obtain funds for their beleaguered community, also picked up
the Cold War theme. Congressman Dante Fascell, in soliciting funds for education, added that in every classroom time must be taken out for an indoctrination program. Mayor Robert King High testified that, "We can no longer treat the matter of Cubans as a welfare problem. These people," High continued, "who gave up their homes and in some instances their families because of their refusal to knuckle under to communist tyranny should be allowed to taste the fruits of freedom."77

Dr. H. Franklin Williams of the University of Miami, seeking funds for refugee programs at his school, testified, "(The refugee problem is) something larger than a community problem. We see Miami as the battlefront of the Cold War... For the first time," he pointed out, "the United States was a country of first asylum, and the way we handle these people who have chosen to leave a Communist area was important to the Cold War."78 Of course, Williams as well as others who testified in Miami were seeking federal dollars for the community. But the immediate gratification of large amounts of federal money inhibited reflection on the long term implications for the future of the city. The great influx of federal money, along with the millions of Cuban dollars lying dormant in Miami since the 1940s, combined with the migration of a vigorous Cuba middle class to the area, set off an explosion of entrepreneurial activity that had never been seen in Miami, or for that matter, in few other places. Almost overnight, businesses sprang up throughout Miami. There were at least a dozen Cuban newspapers of varying quality printed in 1960 in Miami, and they all recorded the swift Cuba economic development. On December 30, 1960 the first Cuban movie theater opened at 313 West Flagler. It was called Theatro Flagler and its first show was the French film, "Este Cuerpo Tan Deseado" (literally, "This Body So Desired"). A Cuban employment agency opened at 223 Northwest Third Avenue and in December, 1960, on Miami Beach in the Raleigh Hotel, Mr. Abraham, the former owner of the Dulceria Mignon del Vedado in Havana opened a Cuban restaurant. "We have Cuban Food," Abraham announced, "and we speak Spanish." At Seventeenth Street and Biscayne Boulevard, where the revolutionary headquarters would eventually be established, there was a man selling liberty bonds.79
More significant than these first openings, however, was the dramatic transformation of Southwest Eighth Street. Since the thirties there had always been a Cuban presence on Eighth Street, but within two years (1961-63), according to information found in the Miami City Directory, twenty-eight stores on Eighth Street, lying between Southwest Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth Avenue, changed ownership from American to Cuban. An Italian shopkeeper on Eighth Street, Sylvan Paterno, put these statistics into human terms. After 28 years of running a shop on Eighth Street he had to close down and sell out in 1962. "(Cuba migration) is knocking the hell out of my business," he said, "the Cubans trade with their own people and we merchants have to take a loss or sell out cheaply to the Cubans. It's unbelievable how the Cubans could push out Americans in four years time."

On the other hand, in the late 1950s, the area taken over by Cubans in Miami had been in very poor economic condition. The city had the highest rate Veterans Association and the Federal Housing Administration foreclosures in the country, and Southwest Eighth had become a shabby row of poor businesses trying to survive in a deteriorating neighborhood. Also, many small merchants in Miami benefited from the Cuba migration. As Antonio Jorge and Raul Moncarz have pointed out, the influx of money and economic activity had a multiplier effect, which overflowed from the Cuban community into the general economy of the area. Small businessmen selling appliances, furniture, clothing, used cars, and other necessities of middle class life in the early 1960s shared in the new prosperity.

The major source of the new economic stimulus for this activity came from the Federal Government. In 1960, the fiscally
conservative Republicans contributed four million dollars in benefits to the refugees, but by 1961, under the Kennedy administration, expenditures on Cuban refugees increased to $2.4 million a month. By 1976 the Cuban Refugee Fund had pumped $1.6 billion dollars into Miami’s Cuban Community. Additionally, traditional government disbursement sources, such as the Small Business Association targeted Cubans as recipients of benefits. As Professor Raymond Mohl has pointed out, of the $100 million dollars distributed by the Small Business Association in the early 1970s over half went to Hispanics, a great majority of whom were Cuban.

Overshadowing all government expenditure in the 1960s, however, were the investments made by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Through front organizations such as the “Zenith Group” at the University of Miami, and fighting groups practicing in the Everglades, the CIA pumped over $100 million dollars into the Cuban community in the early sixties. After the failed Bay of Pigs operation in April 1961, the CIA also introduced a new dimension to the Miami economy as weapons production and sales became an important industry in the area. Miami also provided a ready army for CIA operations throughout the world. At first, this militia activity was localized. For example, the counterrevolutionaries bombed Paula’s restaurant at 435 North First Avenue, which was known as a hangout for Castro sympathizers. Any time a Cuban official came to Miami or passed though the city on the way to New York or Washington, these guerrillas would attempt an attack on them, claiming they were fighting the communists. The Government-funded anti-communist guerrilla group grew to such a point that eventually CIA agents could come to Miami and recruit an army of from one to two hundred Cubans simply by saying they needed their help in an anti communist operation. Although this was kept a secret, the implications became known to everyone, as events related to the Watergate break-in revealed that Miami Cubans had played an integral part in that operation.

This massive influx of federal money from various sources dwarfed normal public spending for the period. For example, the 1959 budget for the City of Miami totaled $19 million. In 1960, the Federal government contributed $4 million, or an amount that represented more than twenty percent of the entire city budget, to the
Cuban refugees. By 1961, Federal contributions equaled the 1959 budget. In the early 1960s, the federal government created the largest refugee relief program in its history. As a result of the federal commitment to Cuban refugees, Miami was transformed economically, demographically and politically.88

In 1995, thirty-five years after the Cuba policy was first put into place, the Clinton administration began a process which will end the special status of Cuba immigrants. With an era coming to an end, historians can now reflect on its impact. If the purpose of the program was, as local Miamians believed, to help stimulate the local economy, the Cuba refugee policy was an unparalleled success. Dreams of economic expansion into Latin America and the Caribbean which had began with the first Pan American flights in the 1930s became a reality in the 1960s and thereafter. Exiled Cuba businessmen, building on old connections in the Caribbean, made Miami the new financial and trading center of the Caribbean. Around the foreign policy tables of Washington, however, Miami’s economic prosperity was secondary or merely a byproduct of the real goal, which was a diplomatic victory over the Castro regime, a goal still unachieved. In fact the diplomatic and economic assault designed to break Castro’s hold on Cuba actually strengthened him. For the Miami refugee policy created a safety valve for the revolution. Castro purged his most powerful enemies, the middle class, by allowing them to flee to Miami, ensuring that the most essential segment of the population necessary for a bourgeois democracy had been removed from Cuba. With only true believers and those indebted to the revolution left, Communism became the only destiny for the former island republic. This policy also created a source of economic strength for the island. From a purely demographic point of view the policy expanded Cuban influence into the United States and these new colonists, although they were forced here, have done what colonists have always done. They have provided wealth for the mother country, in this case Cuba. Cuban refugees in Miami, through concern for loved ones on the island, have provided money, medicine, clothing and food to the island that it otherwise would not have had.89

Why did the United States embark on such a futile policy? In part, the answer is that it was just one segment of a larger cold war chess game fought on many fronts against communism. But
Miamians were not simply the passive recipients of this policy, they were active in its formation. In two previous revolutions, against Spain in 1898 and Machado in 1933, a small group composed of wealthy exiles and desperate radicals used Miami as a base for successful revolutionary operations. There was no reason to believe that the 1960s would be any different. Local government and businessmen lobbied heavily for government aid which would transform their city because it meant added income for the city. It was also a policy that had been pursued successfully in the past during other eras of political upheaval in Cuba.

What local politicians and businessmen did not fully grasp in 1960, however, was that the diplomatic playing field had changed drastically. The refugees were not just the extremely rich and the extremely poor. They were decidedly middle class. And as statistics for the first years of the revolution show the main goal of the majority of immigrants was not to ferment revolution in Cuba but to reestablish for themselves and their families the comfortable life they had known in Cuba. The United States Senate Hearings on the refugee problems held in Miami in 1961 reveal a large amount of money being spent to retrain accountants, physicians, teachers and lawyers so that they might pursue productive lives in the United States.

The radical change in the relationship between Cuba and the United States also played an important role in Miami’s transformation. Cuban-American relations were no longer played out in the context of American hegemony in the Caribbean, but rather as part of the global Cold War. As President John Kennedy stated shortly after entering office, “Our objection isn’t to the Cuba Revolution, it is to the fact that Castro has turned it over to the Communists.” Miami and Havana became pawns in the Cold War and their destiny was no longer in their own hands. At one time these two important geographic centers were on a course of economic cooperation and development, as long ago as the 1930s, for instance, they provided a model for Anglo-Spanish cooperation in the new era of trade being stimulated by the airlines. But due to events over which neither had control, these two cities have scorned their natural destiny and have become enemies. The destruction of this relationship remains one of the great casualties of the Cold War.
Endnotes


2. The 1900 Dade County census suggests a small colony of about fifteen Cubans living here. Among the names in the census are George Villar, his wife Marie and two children, Mateo Encinosa, his wife Nora and four children, Nora Gonzalez and Frana Vamora both single women. At least one Cuban-American living here in 1900 was born in Florida. According to the 1900 census, Edward Gonzalez, son of Luis mentioned above, was born in Florida in 1872. Luis Gonzalez, who married an American woman, probably traveled to Miami from Key West either directly or via Tampa. Dade County Census, 1900.


5. Dade County Census, 1900.


10. Dade County Census, 1900.


20. Translation from spanish.
25. Thomas, 572.
29. Ibid.
30. For example, the Herald reported on January 1, 1930 that a thirty-four foot sloop with a full cargo of rum had been seized In a Coral Gables canal. “Liquor Seized on Boat in Canal,” Miami Herald, 1 January, 1930, p.1.
32. Hugh Thomas, Cuba: La Lucha Por La Libertad 1762-1979, Tomo 2: La Republica Independiente 1909-1958, Barcelona:
The Miami-Havana Connection 41


33. Ibid, 778-779.

34. Interview by author Mario Menocal, grandson of the ex-president, 20 September 1996, Miami Florida.


36. Carillo Cuba, 178

37. Ibid. 51.

38. The New York Times reported on February 1 that, “Fifteen Cuban youths who described themselves as political refugees ... Were taken into custody by the United States immigration officials...when they landed in Tavenier. They were paroled in custody of the leaders of the Cuban exile colony here (Miami)” New York Times 1, February, 1933; Miami City Directory, 1933. Cuban Youths Seized on Florida Coast,” New York Times, 1 February, 1933, p.1.


44. The New York Times, 13 August 1933.

45. Miami Herald, 13 August, 1933.
51. Arnaz, p.37; Also *Miami City Directory*, 1933.
52. Arnaz, In his biography, Arnaz explains how he improvised this “native Cuban-Miami ritual out of necessity.” see *My Life.*
55. Although it could not document the exact number, the *Herald* estimated that more than 10,000 Cubans have turned Miami into a haven from the political storms on their island. “10,000 Cuban Refugees Bask in City,” *Miami Herald*, 7 December, 1947 sec VI p.14.
57. From Advertisements in *Diario de las Americas*, 1955. Ironically, WIOD has now (1998) become one of the last bastions of talk radio in English in Miami.
64. University of Miami economist, Reinhold Wolff points out that in the 1940s the older local underworld leaders in Miami were driven out by a more aggressive group from the Northeastern United States; According to Arguelles and MacEoin this group was financed by the New York Crime syndicate headed by Meyer Lansky. See: Arguelles and MacEoin, "El Miami Cubano," 5.


68. According to Economia, the Castro inspired exile movement came in distinct waves from 1958 to 1962. Throughout the year 1958 there were approximately 3,000 refugees most of whom were connected to the Batista government. It was only after 1958 that the first wave of non-government refugees began arriving in large numbers. In 1959 there were 7,000, by 1961, 40,000, and in 1962, when the first suspension of flights occurred, there were 150,000 Cuban immigrants in Miami. Economia was a twenty page mimeographed paper put together monthly by former Cuban government officials, professors and economists living in Miami. Their principle purpose was to document the economic failure of the Castro regime in its early years. The point they were trying to make with their immigration statistics was a correct one (i.e. Cuba was losing the most productive part of its population) See also: Thomas, Pursuit of Freedom, 950; and "Testimony of James Hennessy, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service," Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected With Refugees and Escapes. Committee of the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty Seventh Congress, Second Session, part 2. December 2,3&4, 1962, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963) 210. (Hereafter: "Senate Hearings.)


70. 7 Dias del Diario de la Marina, 26 November, 1960.


73. "Robert King High, Mayor of Miami, Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 333 Some of the earliest immigrant statistics come from *the 7 Dias Del Diario De La Marina*, an exile newspaper. Citing figures from the International Rescue Committee established by President Eisenhower, *7 Dias* provide the following analysis of immigrants as of November, 1960: Professionals thirty percent, Middle Class sixteen percent, Public Employees ten percent, Workers forty percent. Despite the separate category of "Middle Class" it seems more appropriate to put all these people in the category of "Middle Class" since they all had certainly rejected the "anti middle class" that had taken hold of their homeland. It is also fair to put these statistics in context of the article in *7 Dias*, the editors were attempting to point out that the exiles were not simply political exiles but rather they represented the average Cuban citizen.

74. Wayne Farris, *Crisis Amigo "WCKT Channel 7 Special Report"* (December 5, 1961, 8:30-9:00 p.m.)


78. "H. Franklin Williams Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 82.


84. *Senate Hearings*, 4; Jorge and Moncarz, "International Factor Movement..." 30.

85. Raymond Mohl, "Race, Ethnicity and Urban Politics in the Miami Metropolitan Area," *Florida Environmental and Urban Issues,*
9 (April, 1982) 24.
87. City of Miami Budget 1959-1960, (Miami: City of Miami, 1959)
89. Without information from Cuba it is difficult to ascertain the actual value of economic support from the “Miami Colony.” However, in 1979 when Cubans were permitted to visit the island as tourists, they spent over $100,000,000 there. Juan Clark, Jose Lasaga, Rose Regue, 1980 Mariel Exodus: An Assessment and Prospect, 3.
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On Saturday, August 8, 1874, George W. Parsons, a twenty-four year old visitor from New York City, then resident in the house that Dr. Robert Fletcher built on the south bank of the Miami River, wrote in his diary:

Ole Dr. Fletcher is here to keep me company for a while & cook. He first arrived in these places [the Miami River community] after it was divided residing here some 30 years ago... Is a queer character — rather profane man though very honorable & very entertaining at times in his description of this country & K. West in former times.... [he] is known all over K. West & has quite a reputation in his way.¹

According to the family Bible, Robert Richard Fletcher was born in Prince George County, Virginia, February 24, 1801. This researcher has found no information on his early life and education. He was a physician according to the statement of his daughter, Rosalie, and according to the 1860 Census of Dade County. A canvass of the current medical schools that existed in early 1800s has failed to show his enrollment. He may have apprenticed himself to a practicing physician and thus earned his title. Although Fletcher signed a number of legal documents which are extant he never signed “Dr.” or “M.D.,” and I have found no record of him practicing medicine either in Key West or in the Miami River community.²

Fletcher came to Florida in June 1830 and lived in bustling Key West 1830-1843.³ He was active in city politics (City Marshall, 1832) and Monroe County politics (Sheriff, 1832; Auctioneer and
Justice of the Peace, 1841-1842; Clerk of the Monroe County Court, 1842-1843).

On January 14, 1833, Fletcher married Mary Margaretta Mabry (August 1, 1806 - January 18, 1892) in Key West. They had four children, born in Key West: Robert Francis (February 2, 1835 - September 25, 1863); Mary Amanda (July 18, 1837 - May 22, 1889); James Whalton (February 28, 1839 - December 7, 1850); and Barbara Rosalie (September 14, 1841 - May 2, 1927). On the Monroe County Census, 1870, a Robert Charles Fletcher (1866 - March 1, 1912), age 4, is noted as part of Fletcher’s household. There is no indication of his relation to the family given, but he is listed as “son” on the 1880 census. On the Monroe County Census of 1880, as part of the Fletcher household, is listed Frances G. (March 8, 1873 - May 11, 1963), age 7, a granddaughter. In the Probate file of Barbara Rosalie Fletcher, Frances is listed as Barbara Rosalie’s daughter and only heir, although it is thought Barbara Rosalie never married.

In an effort to combat Indian hostilities by luring armed settlers to the frontiers, Congress passed The Armed Occupation Act
on August 4, 1842. This Act offered 160 acres of free land to single young men or heads of families, eighteen years of age or older and capable of bearing arms. In return, they were to live on the land five consecutive years, build a “fit habitation” and clear and fence five acres. Fletcher applied for such a grant at the Indian Hunting Grounds — the most attractive piece of real estate in the area — near the present day Charles Deering Estate. His grant was approved on June 26, 1843, pursuant to his meeting the prescribed conditions, ie,
“proving it up.” However, his grant was later annulled, possibly for non-compliance.

The Fletchers moved to the Miami River area in 1843. Fletcher was not the first person to live on the River in that era, nor the first physician to visit there, but he was the first civilian physician of record to live in the Miami River area. Indeed, according to application papers for homesteads under the Armed Occupation Act, when Fletcher came, there were at least seven and possibly eleven who were living in this area.

The long, tedious Second Seminole War (1835-1842) ended by Army decree, August 14, 1843, although there were thought to be about three hundred Indians remaining in the Everglades. Settlers who had been waiting out the war in the Keys began filtering back to the Miami River area. William F. English, who had bought all of the privately held land on the southeast Florida mainland from his uncle, Richard Fitzpatrick, re-established his uncle’s plantation on both sides of the Miami River with slave labor. At the same time he platted a town on the south bank and sold lots in “The Village of Miami.” As Clerk of the Monroe County Court, Dr. Fletcher was keenly aware of these developments, for it was he who recorded the deed in the sale of Fitzpatrick’s land to English on August 7, 1843. Furthermore, the office of Clerk of the Dade County Court at Miami was open and, with his experience as Clerk of the Monroe County Court and his political connections, he might get that position when the seat of Dade County was moved to the Miami River community.

Fletcher may have visited the Biscayne Bay / Miami River country on fishing or hunting trips prior to 1843 and thus was familiar with the area. Visitors from Key West to the Miami River sailed up Hawke Channel, outside the Keys but inside the reef, hugging the curve of the Florida Keys, and into Biscayne Bay by way of the Cape Florida Channel. This channel runs along the south and southwestern shore of Key Biscayne into the bay. Once in the bay, by careful navigation a vessel sailed to within a half mile of the Miami River. Here, anchored in seven feet of water, the visitors got into a skiff and rowed across a bar into the river’s mouth.

In 1843 a visitor entering the river, saw on the south bank a white sand beach and the “very comfortable house” of Reason.
Duke, a onetime keeper of the Cape Florida Lighthouse. Southwest of the clearing in which Duke’s house sat, were fields, once cleared but now overgrown. On the north bank the tropical hammock that fringed the river and bay had been thinned to permit a parade ground, and several frame buildings that constituted Fort Dallas, an army fort active in the Second Seminole War. In the foreground a burial mound 25 feet high and 75 feet wide and extending 100 feet in a northern direction jutted from the hammock. Winding in a north westerly direction the river passed between a tangled fringe of mangroves lining both banks. Through interruptions in these borders appeared, here and there smaller hammocks, the English plantation fields and buildings and beyond them pine barrens. In the fields north of the river, about one and a half miles from the river’s mouth, was a mill operated by Colonel English. This may have been a mill for grinding sugar cane, coontie root or both. Sugar was a major crop on the English plantation and coontie grew lushly in the pineland. Parsons notes pulling from the river a big cogwheel “... that was said to belong to English’s sugar mill.”

As the skiff glided up the river, raucous Green Backed Herons, Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets, Great and Little Blue Herons and clucking Moorhens took wing. Further away in the pine barrens the rapid staccato of the Red-bellied Woodpecker and slower thumping cadence of the Pileated Woodpecker pierced the scene. From the river banks sunning alligators slipped quietly into the stream. Through crystal clear water the river’s bottom shown as:

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great basins as white as marble in which fish are sporting now and then darting into or out of dark grottos. The coral bottom in many places is shaped into caves and cliffs, to which are attached a profusion of aquatic plants of beautiful forms and colors, which wave in the rushing current like banners in the wind.
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Indeed, the only distraction in this peaceful scene was the hordes of mosquitoes and blue flies whose bites drew blood.

About two and one-half miles from the river’s mouth (approximately half way between today’s Northwest Seventeenth and Twenty-Second Avenues) the river forked. On the south fork the
brothers, George and Thomas Marshall, had lived since 1828. They were engaged in subsistence farming and growing lush bananas for the Key West market. The north fork, the larger of the two streams, led to the headwaters of navigation, the “Upper Falls.”

At the Upper Falls, three and three quarters miles from the river’s mouth, (a short distance above today’s Northwest Twenty-Seventh Avenue bridge) water spilled over the rocky rim of the Everglades into the riverbed. The “falls” were also a “rapids” where the river bed descended about six feet over a distance of 450 feet. Here the visitor got into the shallow water and pulled his skiff to the crest of the rapids. Once atop the rim, “As far as the eye reached, nothing but a sea of grass was visible sprinkled here & there with small hammocks or islands of a slight elevation with timber & bushes.”

On a stream which emptied into the river from the north just below the rapids, the brothers, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington Ferguson, operated both a sawmill and a coontie mill. These brothers became the most successful producers of coontie flour, “arrowroot,” in south Florida, grossing about $25,000 in one year in the late 1840s.

When Doc Fletcher and his family arrived at the River, their first priority was finding lodging. Immediately available were the buildings of Fort Dallas. These had been recently vacated by the soldiers and returned to their owner, Colonel William F. English. Although English was in residence at that time he would allow newcomers to lodge in the empty barracks buildings until they could build their own shelter. Thus the Fletchers likely stayed at the fort until they could arrange other lodging.

On September 15, 1844, Fletcher bought ten acres of land from Colonel English in the name of Mary M. Fletcher. On today’s map, this tract began at a point about 0.2 miles from the mouth of the Miami River on its south bank. It was bounded, more or less:

On the north by the Miami River; on the south by SE 8th Street; on the west by South Miami Avenue; and on the east by a line parallel with and 417 feet, more or less, east of Miami Avenue.

On this land, a short distance from the river’s edge, Fletcher constructed a two story frame house mounted five feet above the ground on pine pilings for it was then thought:
in that climate it is necessary to have a clear space between the ground and lower floor of the dwelling house, in order to escape the fevers that emanate from the damp ground below the habitations.  

Another reason for building dwellings on pilings was to avoid flooding. Before Everglades drainage began in 1908, much of the Miami River community flooded when heavy rains filled the Everglades to overflowing. For example, in the late spring and early summer of 1866, water stood waist-deep around William Wagner’s house, an eighth of a mile from the river at today’s Northwest Eighth Avenue near Eleventh Street.

The frame structure was likely hewn from pine trees in the nearby woods. Milled lumber may have been available in the community, but if not, it was shipped by sailing vessel from Key West to provide siding, flooring, shingles, sashes, etc. The doors and windows were closed by solid shutters. “Gauze blinds” in the openings and mosquito nets over the beds kept the mosquitoes and other flying insects at bay. An outhouse in the nearby woods served as toilet facilities.

The upper story of this house served as living quarters. The lower story served as a store where Fletcher traded with his neighbors and the Indians. On the side facing the river a covered porch provided a gathering place and a sleeping place when the weather was good and the mosquitoes few. At the river’s edge was a dock, and a storage shed. This house became the first Dade County Courthouse about March 9, 1844, when Miami became the county seat.

On April, 1874, George Parsons, who lived in the Fletcher house, described the view from the front steps of the Fletcher house:

as I write here on the front stoop things look quite charming & the prospect is rather enchanting. Several boats hauled up for fear of being stolen under the cocoanut trees & bananas, the yacht I have charge of at the dock and small boat along side, orange trees and C [etc.] the situation of the house almost on the water, and the beautiful sky and water every day all combine to make a picture that is nice charming and interesting.
According to a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey map made by F.H. Gerdes in January-February 1849, Fletcher also had a "Mill" at the river's edge. Whether this was a sawmill or coontie mill is not noted, but the latter seems more likely. However on another map by Gerdes, (1849-1851) of the same area there is no mention of a mill on Fletcher's property. Another map of the river community as it appeared in September 1849, drawn from memory in 1854 by J.M. Robertson, shows Fletcher's mill on the south branch at the fork of the river. In the letter accompanying the map, Robertson states this mill was, "Building in 1852."

As the river was brackish for the first mile upstream and well water was heavily impregnated with lime salts, these sources provided water for bathing and washing clothes. Freshwater for drinking and cooking was found by going more than a mile upstream or from numerous springs, such as the Punch Bowl, in Brickell Hammock or from freshwater boils in the bay. These sources of freshwater were often not very ample during the "dry season." A cistern was used at the Cape Florida Lighthouse as early as 1861, and cisterns were likely used on the mainland as well.

Cooking was done outside on an open fire or in a palmetto-thatched cook shack. Fire being the scourge of the pioneers, they went to great lengths to keep it away from the living quarters.

The early settlers relied heavily on the ocean, bay and forest for their food. They obtained staples such as coffee, salt, rice and corn in Key West. The abundant coontie root furnished flour for bread and confections, thickening stews, and for other purposes.

When the Fletchers arrived they brought with them a supply of staple foods. Fruits and vegetables could be purchased from the English plantation and the subsistence farmers along the river. As soon as the family got settled they planted their own kitchen garden. The acreage Fletcher bought, once a thick sub-tropical hammock, had been cleared first by the slaves of Richard Fitzpatrick, a prominent South Carolinian living in Key West, who bought the land in the early 1830's and established a sugar cane plantation. During the Second Seminole War, the land lay fallow, but after the war it was cleared again by the slaves of Colonel English. The soil, built up over the
centuries by hammock humus, was rich, and vegetables such as potatoes and cabbage grew lushly.\textsuperscript{31}

In his claim for reparations for the U. S. Army occupation of his plantation during the Second Seminole War, Richard Fitzpatrick, listed his farm products in 1836 as: corn, flint corn, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, plantain, bananas, Bermuda arrowroot, limes, coconuts, sugar cane, sugar apple, guava, ducks, fowl, turkey and guinea fowl.\textsuperscript{32}

The Fletchers likely grew some of the foods mentioned above in their kitchen garden. Dr. Fletcher became locally noted for his agricultural skills, and Rose Wagner Richards, whose family homestead northwest of Fletcher’s home, credited him with introducing both mangoes and dates to the area.\textsuperscript{33} Ethan V. Blackman, a chronicler of early Miami wrote that Fletcher also grew sapodilla, avocado and orange trees.\textsuperscript{34}

Fletcher’s daughter, Rosalie, recalled that her father raised “... 400 head of hogs, hundreds of chickens and also raised many turkeys.”\textsuperscript{35} Indians frequently brought venison, raccoon, possum and other game to trade. Alligator tail was favored by a few of the early settlers, but alligators were chiefly sought for their hides. Turtles and turtle eggs were a chief source of fresh protein during the summer months, and occasionally the settlers ate manatee. Conch meat and

chowder and oyster stew were common favorites from the sea. Some of the settlers found cormorant tasty, and quite a few relished curlew (a local name for the White Ibis). Parsons mentions once eating a woodcock (Pileated Woodpecker) and once panther, "... it tasted well, very like veal. With a cast net, a boatload of edible fish, such as Spanish mackerel and mullet, could be had from Biscayne Bay in an hour or so. Butter was a rare delicacy and iced beverages were almost nonexistent. Although on one occasion, March 1855, the medical officer at Fort Dallas complained that vegetables were difficult to get, food was rarely a problem for the settlers, except during the Civil War when the Union blockade virtually stopped the supply of staples.

When Fletcher arrived at the river, except for the land cleared by Fitzpatrick and English for their plantations, and that cleared by the U. S. Army at Fort Dallas, the area around the mouth of the Miami River was covered with dense tropical hammock and a thick pine barren. The surface of the ground was pocked with jagged holes in the rock containing small caches of sand and humus. Walking on this surface wreaked havoc with footwear. The commander at Fort Dallas complained that, "... a pair of new shoes will not last a man over ten days."

A footpath/horse trail, long used by the Seminole and Tequesta Indians before them, was the super highway in South Dade County at that time. This trail led from the river's mouth south through the Brickell Hammock and along the bluff, roughly corresponding with today's Brickell Avenue and Bayshore Drive. The trail continued along the bay front, through Coconut Grove, on today's map roughly corresponding to Main Highway, and down Douglas Road to the mouth of the Coral Gables Waterway, which at that time was a shallow, easily fordable creek. From there a trail led to the top of the ridge and went south along today's Old Cutler Road through the Hunting Grounds toward Cutler and beyond.

There were similar Indian trails along both banks of the Miami River and from the river going north and northwest through the Allapattah prairie to the Everglades. Another footpath/horse trail was in use June 20, 1874, when one Miami settler walked 17 miles to get mail from the post office at William H. Hunt's house at
Footpaths also ran from farms to neighboring farms as needs dictated.

Horses were used in the Miami River area as early as the late eighteenth century and likely during the Second Seminole War. Their use during the Third Seminole War is well documented. In December 1851, George Ferguson mentions a sorrel mare “that was formerly owned by R. R. Fletcher.”

The first “road” built in the southern end of Dade County, which stretched for more than 100 miles in a north-south direction, was the military road between Fort Dallas and Fort Lauderdale, which was completed in early 1857. In the 1860s Rose Wagner Richards mentions a wagon road from Fort Dallas to her father’s farm, near Wagner Creek, a portion of which is today’s Seybold Canal, at Northwest Eighth Avenue and the river.

Travel of any distance was by water. Most families had a skiff, or a Seminole dugout, often rigged with a sail. Several settlers, including Fletcher, had one or more sloops or schooners. Most of these were under 50 feet in length and some were only 10 to 12 feet. Often they were shallow draft vessels equipped with a centerboard and might draw 2 to 3 feet with the centerboard up and 5 to 6 feet with the board down. Most of those that went outside into the ocean were decked and had a small cabin but there are accounts of sailing from Miami to Jupiter Inlet in open vessels of 12 feet length. Cooking and sanitary facilities were not provided on these small vessels other than, perhaps, a night jar.

Steamboats visited Biscayne Bay as early as the 1830s. These shoal draft, flat bottom, side-wheelers were particularly maneuverable in shallow water. Commonly their engines were wood burning. Colonel English made reparation claims for many cords of wood taken off his plantation to fuel U.S. Navy steamers during the Second Seminole War. Later coal burning engines became popular and a coaling station was maintained at Key West. Larger vessels traveling at sea often had both steam and sail as captains, who had grown up with sail, were loath to trust steam alone.

Vessels drawing 10 feet could enter the bay by way of the Cape Florida channel and travel up to within one-half mile of the river’s mouth. There was a frequently mentioned bar at the mouth of
the river, which Gerdes states could carry 7 feet at high tide.\textsuperscript{44} Another observer states this bar could carry only 4 feet at high tide. Once past the bar and into the first part of the river depths up to 16 feet could be had at high tide.\textsuperscript{45}

Traveling about Biscayne Bay, other than the route mentioned above, was chiefly limited to smaller sailing craft or skiffs because of many shallow areas. There are many accounts of these craft being stuck on mud banks while sailing to Jack’s Bight [today’s Coconut Grove], to the Hunting Grounds [Cutler], to Lemon City or to Biscayne [Miami Shores] up the bay. The trip to Key West could be made “inside” the Keys but it was shallow and treacherous thus usually Hawke Channel, between the Keys and outer reef, was preferred by smaller craft; larger vessels traveled beyond the outer reef.

Residents and visitors agreed that flying insects, mainly mosquitoes and sand flies, made life miserable, especially between May and October each year. When mosquitoes were bad, whenever possible, Fletcher and his neighbors scheduled outdoor activities from well after sunrise to well before sunset. To minimize harboring the pests, they cleared the undergrowth widely around their living and working quarters. They endured heavy clothes tied tightly at the neck, wrists and ankles, even in the dead of summer, regardless of the sweat bath these produced. In addition to these measures their chief reliance was on smudges (often made by burning coconut husks), mosquito nets and gauze covering of doorways and windows. Even the hardy Seminole Indians slept under mosquito bars when they could acquire them.

John Dubose, the first lighthouse keeper at Cape Florida, wrote to his superior in 1830:

\begin{quote}
\textit{it is impossible that any family can reside here from 1 May to 1 October on this Coast, everywhere the Mosquito are very thick and bothersome, but now you can neither eat, drink, or sleep in any peace...Mosquitoes kill the fowls and chickens and they soon kill young pigs [it is impossible] to eat a meal without having a pot of smoke under the table to keep them off.}\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}
In those days, mosquito repellents were unknown — even the burning of pyrethrum powders and the use of oil of citronella were years in the future. When the weather permitted, those who had vessels often sailed out and anchored on the reef, where a strong southeast breeze provided respite.

In the months of April and May two other vicious insects wreaked havoc, as described by Brevet Lieutenant Colonel George F. Thompson, who made an inspection tour of South Florida for the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865-1866:

a blue head and a gray fly about the size of a honey bee which attack cattle and horses with great violence and drives them mad. We were told of several cases where horses had been attacked by a swarm of these insects and killed within three hours.  

In late 1843, when Dr. Fletcher moved to the Miami River community, Dade County extended from the St. Lucie River on the north to Indian Key on the south. Less than 100 people lived in the southern end of the county. Most of these were young adults and, except for accidents, not likely to need a physician. Therefore, Fletcher had no illusions of sustaining his family from a medical practice. Seeking ways to earn money, he opened a store in his home. The earliest mention of this store is by Rose Richards who states that when she arrived, March 15, 1858, there were two stores, “... one a sutler [at Fort Dallas], owned by Captain Sinclair and one on the south side [of the Miami River] owned by Dr. Fletcher.” Fletcher had a schooner and made trips to Key West to get stock for his store and may have been paid by his neighbors to transport items for them.

As previously mentioned, Fletcher, like most of the early settlers, may have had a coontie mill at his house near the river’s mouth as early as 1849. This was clearly the case on the east bank of the south fork of the river, which was, “Building in 1852.” Later, about 1858, Fletcher and George Lewis, who lived on the south bank of the Miami River just west of today’s Northwest Twelveth Avenue, built a coontie mill on the Natural Bridge over Arch Creek, in today’s North Miami. That mill operated a year or more but was not sufficiently profitable and was abandoned at the onset of the Civil War.
Possibly because of his political connections and his experience as Clerk of the Monroe County Court (1842-1843), Fletcher was appointed Clerk of the Dade County Court in 1844 and served a two year term. Other Dade County political offices that he held were: Justice of the Peace, 1844-1845; Dade County Coroner, 1846; Representative from Dade County to the Florida General Assembly, 1846-1847; Dade County Auctioneer and Notary Public, 1847; Postmaster at Miami, 1850 and again in 1860; and Representative from Dade County to the Florida Constitutional Convention, October 25, 1865.

These offices were all elective, supplied some income and are a testament to the respect that Fletcher's neighbors held for him. He was also elected Dade County Revenue Assessor on July 26, 1845, but declined to serve.

The years 1843-1849 were relatively uneventful for the tiny river settlement. The Indians were friendly and traded with the settlers around the Miami River. The settlers were occupied with everyday problems: tending their farms, setting out fruit groves and supplying their tables with fish and game. With slave labor, Colonel English steadily improved his plantation. In May 1846, George McKay completed a township survey of the public lands making possible, for the first time, legal description of grants, claims and privately owned lands.

On April 30, 1847, the Cape Florida Lighthouse was re-lighted with Reason Duke as Lighthouse Keeper. It had been destroyed by Indian attack, July 23, 1836, at the outset of the Second Seminole War and completely rebuilt from the ground up (1846-1847).

In 1849 English brought skilled artisan slaves from Charleston, S.C., and began building two stone buildings. One of these, intended for slave quarters, and used during the Third Seminole War as troop quarters and a storehouse, was moved to Lummus Park (404 Northwest Third Street) in 1925 and is preserved as the last remnant of Fort Dallas.

All was well until July 12, 1849, when four Indians attacked a settlement on the Indian River, killing Mr. Barker, the brother-in-law of the Inspector of Customs there. Several days later the same four
Indians attacked a trading post on Payne’s Creek near Charlotte Harbor, killing two men. False news of a general Indian uprising rapidly reached the Miami community, prompting its settlers to flock to the lighthouse seeking protection and transportation to Key West. Soon after July 30, all those living in the Miami River community, now abandoned their homes and went to Key West, except for the keeper of the Cape Florida Lighthouse, Reason Duke.

There was no general uprising and, after several months, the Indians themselves killed one of the four renegades and delivered the other three to the federal authorities. But settlers throughout the state, always apprehensive about the Indians and eager to have them totally removed, raised such a hue and cry before the miscreants could be apprehended that the federal government felt it necessary to reactivate several army posts. Fort Dallas was one of those occupied - perhaps in response to an urgent letter from Colonel English to Lieutenant D. N. Conch, commanding in Key West. This time the fort was occupied from September 9, 1849, until December 24, 1850.

This, the fourth occupation of Fort Dallas, was relatively uneventful. The returning troops found the “old log houses” and the walls of the two stone buildings which they promptly put in livable condition and to which they added, “two houses on the beach near the mound,” for officers quarters. The troops were occupied in routine patrols and station keeping. The Seminoles, for their part, successfully avoided the soldiers and made no attacks on the settlers. Soon most of the settlers returned to the river to find their houses and farms curiously unmolested.

The troops at Fort Dallas were remarkably healthy during the sixteen months of this occupation. There were only two cases of fever, an event so uncommon that the surgeon describes one in detail in his Quarterly Report, September 30, 1850. Only one death occurred; that death was attributed to phthisis pulmonalis (pulmonary tuberculosis). One remarkable medical event did happen, — possibly the first use of inhalant anesthesia in Florida.

Dr. Fletcher and family were among those who left, and they probably did not return to the river until after early December 1850. He and his family appear on the Key West census of August 13, 1850; he is listed as a “druggist,” perhaps his source of income while
he was away from the river. While the family were on the island they lost their 12 year old son, James Whalton, “from eating berries of the island.”

In the summer of 1851, Dr. Charles S. Baron, a practitioner of Knoxville, Tennessee, bought, in his wife’s name, 613 acres, encompassing the Punch Bowl. He established a coontie mill and cleared and began the cultivation of three acres. A letter in the author’s possession, from E. Gwynn, his factor in Key West (June 4, 1853), mentions selling for Dr. Baron: limes, tomatoes, turnips, leeks and coontie. A land official who visited Baron in 1855, adds to this list: potatoes, cabbage, lemons and bananas as produce from his farm. This land official describes Baron as, “a grand looking man, though his face is somewhat disfigured by his beard.” He describes Mrs. Baron, “... who I found to be a German lady of some beauty, grace and dignity.” Later he expresses sympathy for Mrs. Baron, forced to a life of seclusion living with the doctor, “... who is a hypochondriac, a misanthrope and very whimsical — at least I think so.”

Dr. Fletcher was appointed Keeper of the Lighthouse at Cape Florida on Key Biscayne, June 24, 1853, at a salary of $600 per annum. With this position went a well-built, brick keeper’s cottage and ample subsistence delivered quarterly. Fletcher had served as Lighthouse Keeper at Garden Key, Dry Tortugas, prior to 1836 until sometime after 1838. He performed well during that tenure and this likely assured his appointment in 1853. But in 1836 he was thirty-five years of age while in 1853 he was fifty-two years old; perhaps these seventeen years had something to do with his subsequent replacement on May 21, 1855.

Fletcher’s days were now structured and demanding. The seventeen lamps with reflectors had to be lighted punctually at sunset and extinguished at sunrise. The Argand-type concentric wicks required trimming every four hours or more often, if necessary. In this procedure special care must be taken to cut the tops of the wicks exactly even, to produce a flame of uniform shape and free of smoky points. Immediately after extinguishing the lamps at sunrise, each lamp was carefully removed from the chandelier, the lamp glasses cleaned, the silvered copper reflectors carefully polished with rouge
and whiting and the copper and brass work cleaned with Tripoli powder. Each lamp required refilling with whale oil. Both the inside and outside of the glass panes in the lantern were kept spotless. The walls, floors and balcony of the light room were scoured and the tower’s cast iron stairs, passageways, windows, and doors cleaned from the lightroom to the oil cellar at the base of the tower.

Light-keepers kept regular four-hour watches throughout the night. The first watch began at sunset. No light-keeper was exempted from watch except in case of sickness, and the light-keeper on duty must not leave the light-room, on any pretext except to call his relief.

The principal light-keeper kept a daily journal detailing such things as the amount of oil burned, the weather, the amount of ships passing the light during the day, shipwrecks (in as much detail as possible) and the precise hours of lighting and extinguishing the lamps in the lantern.66

The Cape Florida Light was supposed to be staffed by a Keeper and one Assistant Keeper. However, the extant records do not name an Assistant Keeper when Fletcher took over from Temple Pent (June 24th, 1853), until Fletcher’s son, Robert Francis, was appointed, August 26, 1853, at an annual salary of $350.67

The Lighthouse Service regularly inspected stations and at the first inspection (September 26, 1853) after the appointment of Fletcher, the inspector reported the lighthouse, “in bad condition.”68

On January 17, 1854, James Guthrie, Secretary of the Treasury, recommended Fletcher’s dismissal. Nominations for a successor were received but no action taken and recorded in the Letterbook Index until after April 6, 1855, when M. C. Watkins, Inspector of the Cape Florida Lighthouse, reported, “... Keeper unable to attend to duties.” On May 8, 1855, John P. Baldwin, Superintendent of Lights for the Seventh District, sent the Lighthouse Board a letter detailing complaints against the Keeper (this letter is no longer extant).69 On May 21, 1855, Fletcher was “removed” as Keeper of the Cape Florida Light.70 No reason is recorded.

Dr. Charles S. Baron was appointed Keeper, May 21, 1855, to succeed Fletcher. It was during Baron’s term, 1855-1859, that the light underwent its last major reconstruction. Masons raised the brick work of the tower twenty feet and it was capped with an iron
watch-room and lantern such that the focal plane of the light was 100' above sea level. A new “illuminating apparatus,” consisting of a second-order Fresnel lens and a five concentric wick Argand lamp, was installed.

After the Second Seminole War ended in 1842 the Seminoles received a two and one-half million acre “temporary hunting and planting” reserve situated west and south of Lake Istokpoga and west of a line running from the mouth of the Kissimmee River through the Everglades to Shark River and thence along the coastline to the Peace River. Although the Miami River community was not included within the boundaries of this reserve, the Indians continued their time honored visits to the Hunting Grounds and coontie fields in this area. At first they had little contact with the settlers but as time passed friendly relations developed, and there are no mentions of Indian depredations committed in the area — even during the Indian scare of 1849-1850.

In central and southwest Florida, however, settlers, covetous of the land reserved for the Indians, set up a loud clamor for their complete removal or extermination. Some Indians, ignoring the cooler heads of their tribes, provided some justification for this clamor by stealing and the occasional murder of settlers beyond the reserve limits. Attempts to solve the problems by peaceful negotiations with the heads of the Indian bands made little progress. The situation changed radically when President Franklin Pierce transferred supervision of the eastern Seminoles from the Department of the Interior to the War Department. Now they came under the supervision of Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War. He took a less conciliatory attitude and ordered the Army to prepare for the use of force if necessary. As part of the preparations, Fort Dallas was reoccupied, January 3, 1855. Finally, the Third Seminole War began December 20, 1855, when Indians attacked a small reconnaissance party near the Big Cypress Swamp.

This, the final occupation of Fort Dallas, which lasted until June 10, 1858, brought jobs, money and an average complement of 140 men and six to eight officers. Some of them, enlisted men as well as officers, brought their wives, children and servants. The troops engaged in station keeping activities and frequent patrols along the
coast and into the Everglades. Although the soldiers rarely encountered Indians, they often found signs that Indians were in the area. Once during a social event on the parade ground a woman saw an Indian peering from the nearby hammock but a search turned up nothing.

About three p.m. on January 7, 1856, John Mount arrived at Fort Dallas and reported Indians had attacked Peter Johnson’s coontie mill on Biscayne Bay about six miles below the fort, (in today’s Coconut Grove) and killed Johnson and a helper, Edward Farrell. Captain B. H. Hill, commanding at the fort, immediately dispatched three barges to round up all the families and detached settlers living in the community to bring them into the fort. He sent a twenty-man detachment to Johnson’s mill, which ultimately found the bodies of Johnson and Farrell and buried them. They found one of the two houses vandalized but the other untouched. An attempt to track the Indians was unsuccessful.

On August 12, 1856, Indians robbed and vandalized the home of George Ferguson (on the south bank of the river just west of today’s twelfth avenue), and George Marshall (on the south fork of the Miami River, half way between today’s Northwest Seventeenth and Twenty-Second Avenues) Two detachments, totaling ninety men, found fresh trails and camp sites littered with some of Ferguson’s possessions but no Indians.

The troop’s most useful accomplishment during this occupation was the construction of a road from Fort Dallas to Fort Lauderdale beginning about mid-December 1856. The segment, stretching from Fort Dallas to Arch Creek was built under the command of Captain John M. Brannan, and that of Arch Creek to Fort Lauderdale, under the command of Captain Abner Doubleday, the legendary inventor of baseball. Construction continued through the month of January and into February 1857.

This occupation also brought a boom in the social life of the Miami River folks. Walter S. Graham, Editor of Miami’s first newspaper, the Miami Metropolis, interviewed old settlers at Key West who recalled delightful times at Fort Dallas:

... others told us of the pleasant picnics, boating parties and dances which occurred at Fort Dallas, particularly in 1855.
Hostilities gradually ceased, and the Third Seminole War came to an end by Army decree on May 8, 1858. Rose Richards, who arrived shortly before the war’s termination, recalled:

I came to Miami when I was six. It was March 15, 1858, and the Indians who had been fighting the government troops at Old Fort Dallas had run up a peace flag that day about a quarter of a mile from the fort — ending the Indian Wars hereabouts. I was standing on the deck of a two mast schooner with my mother and one of my three brothers when we sighted Miami. There were a few huts here, the rude wooden homes of two families, the huts and shacks of the bachelors who made up the bulk of the population, Fort Dallas, two stores and a post office.

When Mrs. Richards arrived in Miami, she recalled, only three other white families lived in or near the settlement: The Fletchers [Robert Richard Fletcher], George Ferguson’s family and the Joe Farrells.

When asked if Indians ever caused her family trouble, she said, “Only over friendliness - they became very chummy.”

One chilly day I had wrapped the children in coats and blankets and put them on a large bunk inside the house to keep warm. I was tucking the last one in when I was startled by a movement by my side. A Seminole warrior, completely imperturbed was crawling into the bed by the children. My amazement must have provoked an answer because the Indian, apparently surprised that an explanation was required, grumbled, “Pickaninny cold, me cold too,” and burrowed under the covers. I let him stay.

Whiskey caused much discord and occasional tragedy in the Miami River community. One such event occurred on the evening of February 14, 1861. George Marshall, in a drunken rage, shot and killed William Wagner’s ten year old son in front of George Lewis’ store (on the South bank of the river just west of Twelveth Avenue). The settlers sent for the sheriff, but he was in Key West. On February
23, and before the sheriff arrived, Marshall sold his 160 acres to Dr.
Fletcher for $300 and left the country. He was never heard from
again.\(^{80}\)

Hardly noticed by the residents around the river, war clouds
gathered on the national scene. On January 10, 1861, Florida’s
secession convention met in Tallahassee and voted sixty-two to seven
to withdraw from the Union making Florida the third state to join the
Confederacy. On April 12th, Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor was
fired upon and the Civil War had begun.

Southeast Florida, far from the battlefields of the Civil War,
none-the-less, felt the winds of war. At midnight, August 21, three
Confederate sympathizers gained access to the Cape Florida Light-
house, smashed its lens, and carried off three lamps and burners. The
light was not re-lighted until April 15, 1866.\(^{81}\)

The monthly mail boat from Key West ceased to sail. The
schooners \textit{William and John} and \textit{Julia Gorden}, owned by Captain
Sinclair and used to bring household goods, clothing and staple foods
to the community, were seized for debt. Food and necessities became
scarce. Settlers who had vessels had to get permission from both
Lieutenant Commander Earl English, in command of the Gunboat
\textit{Sagamore} blockading the lower coast of Florida and Captain Malloy,
the Union Commander in Key West, to travel to the Island City for supplies. They were then permitted to bring back with them only the amount of supplies deemed necessary for one family for a limited period of time. In response, the settlers planted more vegetables: corn, beans, peas, and pumpkins, and cultivated more tropical fruits. Hogs and chickens were in demand. Fish, turtle and wild game made up a large portion of the diet. Flour, when it could be had, sold for $17 a barrel and pickled pork for $50 a barrel. Ordinary cotton homespun cost one dollar a yard.

Pine woods gophers (tortoises) were a luxury to be indulged in only on Sundays. Bread was made from yellow coontie and slap jacks or johnnycake from cornmeal ground at George Lewis’ mill on the river. Many times the only thing on the table was a dish of coontie scalded in clear water, sometimes even without salt, Rose Richards wrote.

New faces were seen daily: Confederate sympathizers fleeing Key West to join the Army of the Confederate States, refugees trying to avoid the conflict, deserters of one army or the other and renegades. Some of these occupied the empty quarters of Fort Dallas, but many set up camps far out in the pine woods to avoid people and to engage in the making of pine tar which they sold to blockade runners. Alternately, bands of Union or Confederate soldiers swept through the community looking for deserters, contraband [escaped slaves] and blockade runners. Richards recalled that, fortunately, bands from the two armies never met in the Miami River community.

The sentiment of most of the Miami River settlers was with the South, but not blatantly so, particularly in the presence of strangers or known Unionists. Dr. Fletcher was one of the more outspoken locals and, indeed, his son, Robert Francis, enlisted in the Confederate service (April 25, 1862) as a hospital steward. Left in the hospital to tend Confederate wounded at the battle of Stone’s River, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, he was captured and imprisoned at Camp Butler, Illinois, where he died September 25, 1863.

The most outspoken rebels of the Miami River community were George Lewis and John Adams. Both of these men ran the Union blockade from Nassau to the Peace Creek, on the lower west coast, or to the Tampa Bay area. Their vessels were shallow draft,
centerboard sailboats that could sail into shallow waters and thus evade the blockading gunboats. They carried cargo such as food, whiskey, tobacco, medicines, cloth and other items for local consumption but rarely guns, powder or lead. Ultimately, both Lewis and Adams were captured, and sent to Union prisons, (Adams to Governors Island, New York and Lewis to Fort Taylor in Key West); both survived the war. Lewis went to Cozumel on the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico and never returned to South Florida. Adams returned to his land on the south fork of the Miami River where he died in January 1883.

Early in the war the Union established a blockade of southern ports. The U.S. Gunboat Sagamore, with Lieutenant Commander Earl English in command, was on patrol from Indian River to Key West for nine months during 1862 and 1863. Periodically, she made stops in Biscayne Bay and sent cutters to Miami and up the Miami River looking for Lewis, Adams and others. The sailors often bought fruit, vegetables, chickens or hogs from the settlers when a supply was available.

Richards records that on one of these sweeps:

Captain English with a number of sailors from the blockade steamer, came to Miami, calling first on Dr. Fletcher and asking him to take the oath of allegiance [to the Union]. Upon his refusal to do so he was told to make up his mind by the time they returned from up the river, where they had some business to attend to. They passed by our house not saying a word to any of us, never having done so before. Soon afterward a big black smoke was seen to arise from where Mr. Lewis’ factory had been standing and which could be seen by ourselves and also by the people in Miami. Fear was pictured on our faces, we thinking the time had come when we would be left homeless. Thank goodness we were not disturbed by this party. They returned to Miami and did not have to ask Mr. Fletcher the second time to comply to the request made of him a few hours before by Captain English.

This event is also recorded in less detail in the diary of the surgeon aboard the Sagamore.
There were also outspoken Unionists among the Miami community during the Civil War - Theodore Bissell and Isiah Hall, for example. Bissell had a homestead on the Miami River above the falls but lived in Key West where he held the position of Deputy Inspector of Customs, which required trips to Miami. Hall served as pilot for the Sagamore. Because of anti-Union sentiment, Hall moved his family to Fort Lauderdale and later to Jupiter Inlet, Fort Dallas, and Key West. After the War the Halls lived for several years just south of today's Matheson Hammock on what was once called Hall's Creek.

Lee surrendered at Appomattox, April 12, 1865, but for the Miami River community the war was not quite over. Richards wrote that rumors soon reached the community that President and Mrs. Jefferson Davis were trying to escape through south Florida. Suddenly, "... the pine woods were full of Yankees looking for the President." Union soldiers captured Davis near Irwinsville, Georgia, May 10, but the Confederate Secretary of War, John Cabell Breckinridge, and party managed to reach Fort Dallas (June 9) in a small sloop. They were met by a villainous group of deserters and renegades whom they managed to deceive as to their identity, and with gold coins, purchase water, food and rum. There followed a harrowing escape as the fugitives were pursued by the renegades down Biscayne Bay, over Featherbed Banks, out through Caesar's Creek and finally to Cardenas, Cuba.

With the ending of the war many of the refugees and others living around the river departed for their previous homes and elsewhere.

On October 25, 1865, a federally mandated constitutional convention was convened in Tallahassee to alter the state's Constitution of 1861 and bring it in line with the national constitution. Florida was under martial law, and a federally acceptable constitution was a condition for return to statehood.

Dr. Fletcher was elected to represent Dade County but apparently did not attend the sessions despite free transportation to Tallahassee being furnished by the Union. This convention, "...annulled the secession ordinance, abolished slavery, declared the inhabitants free without distinction of color, and permitted Negroes to testify
in court cases involving their own race.\textsuperscript{95} It did not give the Negro the vote. This constitution satisfied few Republicans in Congress and Florida was denied admission to the Union.

Soon afterwards Dade County politics began a great metamorphosis with the arrival of two sophisticated Yankees, William Henry Gleason and William Henry Hunt, who were “no common people.” Historian Arva Moore Parks has given a complete account of the machinations of these men.\textsuperscript{96} In brief, claiming they had a lease from the U. S. Government, they moved into the Fort Dallas buildings. Gleason soon became the self-appointed political boss of South Dade County. He had little opposition until Dr. Jeptha Vining Harris bought the Fort Dallas property from Harriet English, its longtime owner.

Harris was “no common person”
either. He enlisted in the Mississippi and Alabama Cavalry a month after graduation in medicine at the University of Louisiana (March 20, 1861) and found himself at the Battle of Shiloh, Tennessee (April 6-7, 1862). Considering the number of troops engaged and the casualties on both sides, this battle has been rated the bloodiest of the Civil War. In support of a pension claim many years later, Dr. Harris wrote:

I had the pleasure of fighting at the Battle of Shiloh and I never spent a happier day in all my [life]. I actually, as a sharpshooter, killed seventy-six Yankees, all single shots, and amputated legs and arms, at Shiloh Church, all the next day... 

Harris was not one to be deceived or intimidated by the likes of Gleason. Having paid $1,450 to English for the 610 acres known as the Fort Dallas tract, he came to Fort Dallas in January 1870, to find Gleason and Hunt in residence. He had some difficulty evicting them but finally gained full possession in March 1870. Gleason and Hunt, however, were slow to remove their possessions and nearly a year later, Harris notified Mrs. Hunt that the possessions would be put out on his wharf where they would be exposed to the elements and where she could get them, if she wished. Relations between Harris and the two Yankees continued to fester until Harris challenged Hunt to a duel and threatened to shoot him on sight if he stepped on the Fort Dallas property. Neither Hunt nor Gleason took up the challenge. In April 1874, when Harris happened to meet Gleason on a Key West street, he gave him a sound thrashing with a cowhide strap.

Gleason, always eager to win by fair means or foul, attempted to take advantage of an honest error in the Fort Dallas deed to wrest the land from Harris. Although Harris prevailed, Gleason managed to cloud the deed for several years.

Meanwhile, Dr. Fletcher was plagued with ill health which, "... required medical attention that could not be had in Miami." On April 14, 1870, he sold his ten acres near the mouth of the Miami River to Charles F. Barager (a.k.a. Barrager) for $300 and moved to Key West. Curiously, this same year he bought 40 acres adjoining the George Marshall tract from the estate of William H. Wall, his recently
deceased brother-in-law. Perhaps this was to help his sister or it may have been just a wise investment as at that time he owned the Marshall tract.

Dr. Fletcher lived out the remainder of his life in Key West. He visited the Miami River community twice for short periods of time. He was a guest of the William Wagner family during the summer of 1873. From August 8, 1874, to October 13, 1874, he visited George Parsons. Fletcher died in Key West sometime between 1874 and 1880. Upon Ole Doc Fletcher’s departure, the Miami River community was left with just one physician, Dr. Jeptha Vining Harris.

In the summer of 1870, a severe epidemic of yellow fever broke out in Key West, causing the citizens to flee to the Biscayne Bay area. Mr. James M. Dancy, one of a survey party in Miami at that time, wrote, “...the shore here was lined with craft of all sorts and sizes trying to escape from the epidemic...” They brought the epidemic with them and infected a number of residents (the total census of Dade County in July 1870 was eighty-five). There were no deaths but the chief of the survey party was gravely ill. Dancy believed he protected himself by drinking daily quantities of coconut milk.

An event occurred October 21 of that year that nearly resulted in Dr. Harris’ death and caused Harris and twenty other male residents of the Miami River community to be brought before the District Court, Southern District of the United States, in Key West, charged with unlawful salvage. This represented over half of the young adult males in the community.

Although Harris had served as wreck master and thus in charge of the salvage, he apparently avoided incarceration or a fine whereas three of the other participants were not so fortunate, languishing two months in the Key West jail on grits, black strap molasses and dirty water called coffee, and paying a fine.

Harris, according to Agnew Welsh, a newspaperman and historian of Miami, was a man, "...of great courage. During his residence here he had occasion in 1872 to visit Enterprise [on the east coast - 200 miles north of Miami] and having no other means of travel made the round trip on foot, his food supply consisting of a quantity of parched corn and some salt."

Harris was also "an obliging neighbor," Rose Richards recalled, and this inadvertently resulted in an unpleasant incident. In 1872, Harris, was acting as agent for Anna Beasley, who was then living in Key West. She was the widow of Edmund D. Beasley who had settled on the Coconut Grove in the 1830s, and had applied for a homestead of 160 acres along a mile and a half of the current waterfront. Harris leased the Beasley land to a Union veteran, Dr. Horace P. Porter, who arrived in the community in 1872. Porter discovered the homestead was not proved up and attempted to "jump" Beasley's claim by representing the claim as abandoned. This effort was defeated but aroused animosity among the long-time residents who sided with the Beasley's widow. "All was not bad, however. Porter applied for a post office under the name Cocoanut Grove which was granted and opened January 6, 1873. Porter was the postmaster, and when he left it closed. On August 24, 1884, when Commodore Ralph M. Munroe sought to reestablish a post office in Cocoanut Grove, he reopened the previous one and thus established the current name of this community, later spelled Coconut Grove.

Porter was disappointed at his inability to claim Beasley's improved land and was not willing to undertake the labor to prove up an 80 acre homestead adjacent to Beasley's, which he had applied for and received. Furthermore, his wife and daughters did not find life on the frontier to their liking and returned to New England. Finally, on January 19, 1874, Porter left Cocoanut Grove for good.

While Porter was still in South Florida, he played a role in the second incursion of yellow fever into the community. In the fall of
1873, the bark *Yausberghaus* put in at Key West with yellow fever aboard. Charles F. Barnes of Miami and Dr. Harris, each in his own vessel, were in Key West at the time and not knowing of the yellow fever, visited the *Yausberghaus*. The disease did not spread to the city, but infected Barnes and Harris. Barnes returned to Miami on September 18 and died the following day. In September troops from Key West arrived at Miami hoping to escape the epidemic. They established Camp Dallas on the site of Fort Dallas. The troops escaped the disease but it spread to the community and in the subsequent days Barnes’ mother took sick and died. Dr. Harris and his three children, and William Wagner, Jr., Andrew Barr and Charles F. Seibold all contracted the disease, but survived. Captain R. S. Vickery, surgeon with the troops, took care of Dr. Harris and his children, as well as Wagner and Barr. Dr. Porter cared for Seibold.

Possibly debilitated by his recent bout with yellow fever and discouraged by the poor results of his farming, Harris decided to sell out and move to Key West. Richards wrote, “... Harris was a good physician, and an obliging neighbor, but unfortunately he was no farmer...” Harris sold the Fort Dallas Tract to the Biscayne Bay Company for $6,000 and moved to Key West on December 3, 1873.

Yellow jack visited Miami for a third time in the summer of 1874. Fearing yellow fever, which was present in Havana that summer, the troops at Key West were sent aboard the schooner *Matchless* to Miami. They arrived June 16th, and the Fort Dallas property not being available, they set up Camp W. D. Whiting fronting on the bay, south of William Brickell’s house and store. On August 8th, yellow fever broke out on the U.S.S. *Ticonderoga* at Key West. On September 5th, on orders from the Admiral at Key West, several yellow fever victims were put ashore at the Camp Whiting hospital from a troop ship traveling north. This unusual action was taken possibly because, at that time, Camp Whiting’s medical officer was Dr. Joseph Yates Porter, who was a noted authority on yellow fever. Fortunately yellow fever did not spread to the community from these cases.

January 1874 saw the arrival of Dr. Richard Buleckley Potter, the fifth physician in the Miami River community. He was the first physician who charged and received a monetary fee for his services.
He left a practice of medicine he had just begun in Cincinnati to bring his brother, George, a severe asthmatic, to a gentler climate. He staked out a claim for eighty acres at Biscayne and built a cabin (on today’s map at 8500 Northeast Tenth Avenue). During his sojourn in the community, 1874-1882, he was the only physician in the area. Although Dr. Potter did practice medicine when he was needed and sometimes collected a fee for it he, like others before him, had to supplement his income. He farmed, made cootie starch, served as Customs Inspector, Deputy U. S. Marshall and Clerk of the County Court, and even dawdled in salvaging shipwrecks to make ends meet. The population was steadily growing, in the Miami River/Biscayne Bay area, but more slowly than up around Lake Worth. George Potter moved first to the area in 1881, and established a 160 acre homestead just south of the heart of present day Palm Beach. Richard remained in the Miami River community hoping to sell his homestead, but when no buyers came forth, he followed his brother to the shores of Lake Worth in May 1882. He bought property on the western shore of the lake, in today’s West Palm Beach, and practiced medicine there until his death, July 13, 1909.

Ole Doc Fletcher’s colleagues and neighbors seldom had to combat serious disease, at least in part due to their small number, isolation and vigorous youth. Undoubtedly accidents occurred, although few are recorded in the extant records. These records tell of children being born in the community, but do not mention midwives or physicians in attendance until Dr. Potter delivered Mary Brickell of her daughter, Maude, April 4, 1874. The first mention of surgery by a civilian physician is that of Dr. Harris’ operation on a Seminole warrior for an arrow wound in the groin. Medical care by civilian physicians is documented in several instances, and we must presume there

Dr. Richard B. Potter — 1845-1909 —
Courtesy of Mrs. Ben Crowell Stewart.
were others, but clearly the time when a doctor could support himself with the practice of medicine had not yet come. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the earliest physicians played important, and sometimes exciting, roles in the Miami River community that a century later has become the Miami-Dade megalopolis.

During the four decades, 1843 to 1883, the population of the Miami River community grew very slowly. Fletcher, his colleagues and his neighbors struggled to survive by farming, fishing, hunting, beach combing, making coontie starch, trading with the Indians, shipping produce to markets in Key West, tending the lighthouse at Cape Florida and performing the few paid government jobs such as Clerk of the Court, Deputy U. S. Marshall and Postmaster. During those years they witnessed two extended occupations of Fort Dallas, the privations of the Union blockade during the Civil War, a self-appointed carpetbag dictator and three incursions of yellow fever into the community. theirs was a mostly peaceful, sometimes stressful but not uneventful life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The author is deeply indebted to Mrs. Arva Moore Parks McCabe who suggested the project to him, gave access to extensive archives of Dade County which she has assembled at her own expense, time and effort, and reviewed the manuscript. She has graciously given helpful suggestions and encouragement along the way. Others to whom the author is especially indebted are: Mr. Sam Boldrick, Floridana Librarian of the Miami-Dade Public Library; Mr. Tom Hambright, Floridiana Librarian of the Monroe County Library at Key West; Mrs. Linda Carter, curator of the Betty Bruce private collection in Key West; Mr. Blair D. Conner, P. L. S., retired Chief Surveyor, Dade County Public Works Department; Miss Rebecca Smith, Curator of Research Materials at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida; and Captain Vining Sherman, USN (retired), Mr. Fred Kirtland and Mrs. Gladys Baldwin Wallace, descendants of Dr. J.V. Harris, who furnished material and photographs of Dr. Harris.
Endnotes

1. Diary of George W. Parsons (1873-1875). A typescript of a microfilm copy in the P. K. Yonge Library, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, which was obtained by Arva Moore Parks: 102. (Here in after cited: “Parsons’ Diary.”)


5. Oby J. Bonawit, Miami Florida Early Families and Records. (Miami privately printed, 1980): 11. (Hereinafter cited: “Bonawit.”); The Key West Citizen, 2 May, 1927, citing Rosalie Fletcher’s death, states she was the widow of a Mr. Carroll, but no other source verifies this and it seems unlikely.

6. A more precise date of arrival has not been found. In testimony (Monroe County Deed Book I, page 211), Fletcher states he, “...moved there [the Miami River] in 1843.” This was likely in the fall of 1843, for Fletcher is noted as the Clerk of the Monroe County Court in August 1843, (See: “Exhibit H. History of the Title of the Egan Grant,” Arva Moore Parks archives.)


9. This appeared in The News, St. Augustine, December 30, 1843. (Agnew Welsh Scrapbook Miami # 17: page 19. Special Collection, Miami-Dade Public Library, 101 West Flagler Street.) When the settlement was first called “Miami” is not certain. The earliest appearance of this name in published print, thus far found, is in The Acts of the Legislative Council, the General Assembly and the Legislature of the Territory of Florida, 1844, page 17. This Act, passed March 9, 1844, established the county seat of Dade County, “... at Miami, on the South side of [the] Miami River, where it empties into Biscaino Bay.” (See: Hudson, F.M., “Beginnings in Dade County,” Tequesta, I [July 1943], 13.) (Hereinafter cited: “Hudson:
The name "Miami" was likely in conversational use well before it appeared in print.


11. Dr. Thomas Skaggs Gowin, born in today’s downtown Miami in 1911, told the author he swam in crystal clear water from a beach of fine white sand on the south bank of the Miami River near its mouth, when he was a child.


13. The first buildings of Fort Dallas, “three blockhouses,” were erected in February and March 1838. It is likely that during subsequent occupations more frame buildings were added, but the stone buildings, one of which is preserved in Lummus Park as Fort Dallas, were likely started in late 1848 or early 1849, as they are noted on the Gerdes map of early 1849. See: Walter S. Graham, “Some Historical Data,” the Miami Metropolis, 20 November, 1896, 7-8. (Hereinafter cited: “Graham: Historical Data.”)

14. The notation “English Mill” appears on a topographical map prepared by F.H. Gerdes, Assistant Surveyor, U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, February 1849. Official and Private Correspondence of F.H. Gerdes, 1849, NA, Washington, D.C., RG. 23. (Hereinafter cited: “Gerdes, Corres.”) On another map of this same area, at the same time and location is the notation, “Coonty Mill.” English produced both sugar and Bermuda arrowroot (coontie), according to his claim for reparations in 1858.

15. Parsons’ Diary, July 18, 1874, 95.


18. Coontie, coonty, koontie, compty, comptee or compte, as it is variously spelled, is a cycad of the genus Zamia that grew plentifully throughout the pinelands of Dade County at that time. Its bulbous root when pulverized, soaked in water and dried gave forth a starchy powder, often spoken of as arrowroot. It was used to make bread and
various confections, and in the nineteenth century, was the chief ingredient of Seminole sofki. (Gearhart, Ernest G. “South Florida’s First Industry,” *Tequesta* 12 [1952], 55-57 and Burkhardt, Mrs. Henry J., “Starch Making: A Pioneer Florida Industry,” *Tequesta* 12 [1952], 47-53.)

19. Blair D. Conner, P.L.S., retired Chief Surveyor of the Dade County Public Works Department. At the author’s request, Mr. Conner extensively researched the location of the Fletcher place in the deed and plat books of Dade County. This location is principally based on a description found in Deed Book A, page 51, and verified by a deed in Deed Book 12, page 461, that gives as reference “The Fletcher Place.”


23. Unable to find a detailed description of Fletcher’s house, the author has relied on descriptions of similar construction at Fort Dallas at that time and from the narrative in Parsons’ Diary. Parsons lived in the house that Fletcher built from November 1873 to May 1875.

24. Parsons’ Diary, January 19, 1874, 22.

25. This is the date the Legislative Council of the Florida Territory passed an act, “That the County Site for the county of Dade shall hereafter be at Miami, on the South side of [the] Miami River, where it empties into Bescaino Bay.” (Hudson: Beginnings, 14.). Presumably, shortly thereafter the actual transfer took place and Fletcher’s house became the Dade County Courthouse. From 1836 until 1843, the seat of Dade County was located at Indian Key.

26. Parsons’ Diary, April 1, 1874, 60.


28. Robertson to Haines, April 18, 1854.

29. Also known as the “Devil’s Punchbowl.” (See: *Notes on the
Coast of the United States by A.D. Bache, Superintendent, U.S.
Coastal Survey, No. 45, NA, Washington DC, August 1861.)

30. A. D. Bache, “Notes on the Coast of the United States...” (See endnote above)


32. Report of the Court of Claims, No. 175, 35th Congress, 1st Session, Richard Fitzpatrick vs. The United States, May 14, 1858, 3.

33. Mrs. A.C. [Rose Wagner] Richards, “Reminiscences of the Early Days of Miami,” The Miami News, a series of articles beginning October 1, 1903. Richards came to the Miami River community as a six year old child on March 15, 1858, and is undoubtedly the single most reliable source for the history of this area in that era. (Hereinafter cited: “Richard’s Reminiscences,” with page numbering referring to a typescript made available by Arva Moore Parks.)

34. E.V. Blackman, Miami and Dade Florida, Its Settlement, Progress and Achievement, (Washington, Victor Rainbolt, 1921), 16.

35. Marie L. Cappick, “Recollections of Early Days in Miami and Dade County,” Key West Citizen, 1 September, 1924. (Hereinafter cited: Cappick: “Recollections.”)

36. Parsons’ Diary, February 29, 1874, 166.

37. PA. Quinan, Quarterly Sick & Wounded Report, Fort Dallas, March 31, 1855, RG 94, Records of the Adjutant Generals Office, 1780s to 1917, National Archives.

38. J.C. Dimick to F.N. Page, September 15, 1857, NA, RG 393.

39. This route is pieced together from interviews with Charles A. Richards in July 1968. Richards was born on the Miami River in 1887 and lived on today’s Sunset Drive and, after 1891, on Cutler Road. Interviews with other early residents of Coconut Grove corroborate this route.

40. Parsons’ Diary, February 24, 1875, 184.

41. Parsons’ Diary, June 20, 1874, 86. The Miami post office had been in one of the stone buildings of Fort Dallas until June 10, 1870, with W.H. Hunt as postmaster. Dr. J.V. Harris bought the Fort Dallas property, November 30, 1869, and Hunt moved to his homestead, in Biscayne today’s, Miami Shores, taking the Miami post office with
him and changing the name to the Biscayne post office — Miami had no post office until September 22, 1874, when it was reopened in Fort Dallas as the "Maama" post office. (See: Bradbury, A.G. and E. S. Hallock. A Chronology of Florida Post Offices Handbook #2, Florida Federation of Stamp Clubs, 1962, 53.)


43. Richards' Reminiscences, 67-68.
44. Gerdes, Corres., January 30, 1849.
45. Robertson to Haines, April 18, 1854.
49. Robertson to Haines, April 18, 1854.
52. Fletcher arrived at this session nine days late but took an active part by serving on committees, introducing three bills (two relating to Dade County) and voting on measures before the House. (See: A Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Second General Assembly of the State of Florida, at its First Session Begun and Held in the City of Tallahassee, on Monday, 23d November, 1846. [Tallahassee: "Southern Journal" Office, 1846]) The author is indebted to Dr. Joe Knetsch, who researched this matter at the author's request.
53. H.M. Pickett, K. L. Rice and Henry M. Spelman, III, Florida Postal History and Postal Markings During the Stampless Period, Florida Federation of Stamp Clubs, Handbook #1, Palm Beach
Stamp Club, 1957, 28. Also see: Bradbury & Hallock, endnote #41 above. Pickett, et al in the first reference above states Robert [R] Fletcher was postmaster in 1950, but Agnew Welsh states George W. Ferguson was Postmaster at that time and that the post office was at his store on the River just west of today’s NW 12th Avenue. (See: Welsh Scrapbook, Miami, # 17, pages 14 & 15.)


55. Graham: Historical Data, 7-8. Graham gives 1849 as the date English began the stone buildings, but see endnote 13, above.


58. Robertson to Haines, April 18, 1854.


61. Records of Betty Bruce, Key West Historian, in possession of her daughter, Linda Carter, Key West, FL.

62. Charles Samuel Swartout Baron (a.k.a. Charles F Barron) was probably born in Virginia in 1803. He married Mary Wilhelmina Ziglar (1809-1875), April 22, 1830; they had no children. Prior to coming to the Miami River community he practiced in Knoxville, Tennessee. He lived at the Punch Bowl property much of the time between 1851 and 1861. After leaving the river, he practiced medicine many years in Key West. He was an active member of the Key West Medical Society, its President (1878), and an “honorary” member of the Florida Medical Association (1875-1888). He served as Surgeon at the U.S. Naval Hospital (1872-1875) and U.S. Commissioner. He was appointed Judge of the Probate Court of Monroe County in February 1871 and served until his death, November 8, 1888. He was an active member of the Dade Lodge No. 14 of the Free and Accepted Masons (1873-1888).

64. “Registers of Lighthouse Keepers, 1845-1912, Microfilm Publication, M 1373, Roll 3, NA, Washington, D.C.


67. Robert Francis Fletcher served as Assistant Keeper at the Cape Florida light under his father and for a time, his father’s successor, Dr. Baron, until he resigned after 1855. On March 31, 1859, he was appointed Assistant Keeper under his grandmother, who was Keeper of the Key West Lighthouse at Whitehead spit. Apparently he served there until shortly before he enlisted in the Confederate States Army.

68. Card Index to Lighthouse Correspondence, RG. 26, NA, Washington. This Index to letters received and sent by the lighthouse service is briefly annotated for each bit of correspondence. In 1921, a fire in the Department of the Treasury destroyed almost all of the indexed Letterbooks for the period under study, but the index survived. (Hereinafter cited: “Index to Lighthouse Correspondence.”)

69. Index to Lighthouse Correspondence, April 6, and May 8, 1855.

70. On the “ Registers of Lighthouse Keepers, 1845-1912,” (see endnote # 63 for full reference), p. 117, there is a notation by Fletcher’s name, “removed January 17, 1855.” However, on all other lists of Keepers the date of removal is May 21, 1855, which is the date of his successor’s appointment.


72. Covington: Billy Bowlegs War, 26-27.

73. Covington: Billy Bowlegs War, 2.

74. Capt. B.H. Hill to Lieut. S.M. Vincent, January 8, 1856. Washington, HA, R.G. 393, Florida, 1850-1858. Johnson’s mill was likely near the bay, east of Douglas Road and just below the intersection of Main Highway and Douglas Road in Coconut Grove.

75. Memoirs of Reconnaissance. Compiled by Major Francis N. Page. Washington, NA, Department of Florida, War Department,
R.G. 393, Records of the United States Army Continental Com-
mands, 1821-1920.

76. Parks, Miami, 36-37; U.S. Army Post Returns for Fort Dallas,
Florida, The Months of December 1856 and January and February
1857.

77. “Old Settlers of Key West,” The Miami Metropolis, March 19,
1897.

78. “Oldest Resident Gives Saga of Early History of Miami,” The
Miami Daily News, ca. March 1933. (Hereinafter cited: Saga, Miami
Daily News, March 1933.)


80. Richards, Reminiscences, 39.

81. Dorothy Dodd, “Volunteers Report Destruction of Lighthouse”
Tequesta XIV (1954), 67-70.

82. “Civil War Diary of Robert Watson,” Transcript in the posses-
sion of the Chickamauga Chattanooga National Military Park, Fort
Oglethorpe, Georgia, Entry dated, November 27, 1861.

83. Robert F. Fletcher’s Confederate Service Record, Co. Regiment
Florida Infantry, NA, Washington, D.C.

84. Staubach, Colonel James C., “Miami the Civil War,

85. Richard’s, Reminiscences, 43, 4647.

86. George E. Buker, Blockaders, Refugees & Contrabands, Civil
War on Florida’s Gulf Coast, 1861-1865, (Tuscaloosa, University of

87. Richards’ Reminiscences, 46-47.

88. The Sagamore was a wooden hull, screw gunboat, 158' over
all, 28' beam and 12' depth in the hold. She had one stack and two
schooner-rigged masts. She was coal fired and armed with one 20
pdr., two 24 pdrs. and one 12 pdr. Total complement, 114. [Dictio-
nary of American Naval Fighting Ships, Vol. VI, (Washington, GPO,
1976), 227.]

89. Illustrated is the U.S. Gunboat Marblehead, sistership of the
Sagamore, with a cutter alongside.

90. Cutters were ship’s boats with square sterns, 24-32 feet in
length, propelled by 814 oars and, when appropriate, a sail.

91. Richard’s Reminiscences, 47.

92. Walter Keeler Scofield Papers, #437, July 18, 1863. The
original is in the Manuscripts and Archives Collection of Yale University. Copies of the pages used in this paper are in the Florida Collection of the Miami-Dade Public Library.


94. Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention of Florida Begun and Held at the Capital of the State at Tallahassee, Wednesday, October 25, 1865, Tallahassee, (Office of the Floridian. Printed by Dyke and Sparhawk, (1865). Fletcher’s name appears in the list of duly elected county representatives but not in the lists of those sworn in, those signing the Constitution, or elsewhere in the document.


97. Harris was born in the Abbeville District of South Carolina, May 28, 1839. At age seven, he moved with his parents to Columbus, Mississippi. He graduated from the University of Mississippi with high honors in 1859 and he earned his medical degree from the University of Louisiana on March 20, 1861. He enlisted in the Confederate States Army as a private in April 1861. After the battle of Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862, he was commissioned Assistant Surgeon. On January 7, 1864, he transferred to the Confederate States Navy and was stationed at Mobile, Alabama, and attached to the Confederate States steamer Nashville until the end of the Civil War. He resumed with his wife, Mary Perkins Harris, to Columbus where he managed a cotton plantation and begot two sons, J. Vining (1865-1936) and Lewis A. (1869- ). Later, in 1873, Harris and his wife had a daughter, Martha Watkins (1873-1955).

Seeking a healthier climate, he bought the Fort Dallas Tract (November 30, 1869) and took up residence (March 1870). He farmed about ten acres with subsistence crops and sisal hemp, built a road from the river to the bay, and operated a small store at Fort Dallas. He became a favorite of the Seminoles when he successfully treated three for typhoid fever and on another occasion successfully operated on a warrior with an accidental arrow wound in the groin.
They made him an honorary member of the tribe. When the false alarm of an Indian uprising was carried to the Miami River community in the summer of 1873, the settlers scurried to Fort Dallas, believing Harris could protect them.

After returning to Key West (December 1873), he entered into the practice of medicine and surgery. He continued his practice until 1909 except for a period (October 1889-February 1891) when he was living on his sisal plantation near Fort Myers. A note signed by Betty Bruce, Key West historian, in the Harris file of the Monroe County Library at Key West states that he was the first doctor to operate for appendicitis in Key West and that the patients of his first three such operations survived. In 1875 he served as Health Officer at Key West. He was an active member of the Key West Medical Society and a member of the Florida Medical Association (1892-1911). He was a staunch Democrat and served in the State House in 1877. Appalled at the custom, then in practice, of the “good old boys” selecting candidates for the State Senate and House seats, he succeeded in getting a Constitutional amendment requiring Primary Elections, thus allowing all voters to decide the slates. He served as Superintendent of Public Instruction (1877), Chairman of the School Board (for many years) and Collector of Customs at Key West (1885-1889).

Until his death, Harris was an active member of the United Confederate Veterans and received a pension from the State of Florida, $100 per annum, beginning October 16, 1907. He died of uremia, November 21, 1914, aged 75 years and is buried in the Key West Cemetery. The Harris High School bears his name in honor of the years of service as Chairman of the Monroe County School Board. A bronze bust of his likeness is in the Key West Historic Memorial Sculpture Garden in Mallory Square recognizing his many contributions to the development of Key West.

98. J.V. Harris to A. A. Croom, Comptroller, Tallahassee, FL. Quoted from a letter in support of Harris’ Civil War Pension Claim. It is not dated but his claim was submitted July 15, 1907.


101. Parsons’ Diary, May 3, 1874, 72.
102. Cappick “Recollections.”
103. An exhaustive search by Tom Hambright, Floridiana Librarian of the Monroe County Public Library, has failed to disclose death or cemetery records on Dr. Fletcher, although it is believed he died and was buried in Key West. His name appears on the Key West census of 1870 but not on that of 1880. No probate records have been found.
106. Agnew Welsh, “First a Tent, Then a Cabin, Now Miami the Magic City,” *Miami Daily News*, 1925. See a clipping in the Agnew Welsh Scrapbook Miami #17, 10,11,12. This appears to be based on interviews of Adam C. Richards by Welsh.
107. On today’s map (According to Arva Moore Parks, “Ned Beasley and Coconut Grove,” *Update*, June 1977, 8), on the north, the Beasley homestead extended west along Grand Avenue from Southwest Twenty-Seventh Avenue to McDonald Street, then south to St. Gauden’s Court and was bounded on the southeast by Biscayne Bay.
108. Horace Philo Porter was born in Ellington, Connecticut, February 6, 1838. He attended the National Medical College, Washington, D.C., 1858-1859. He “... took his last year...” at Yale College of Medicine, graduating in July 1861, according to “The Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University Deceased during the year ending June 1, 1911.” He married Smith Blakeslee and had three daughters. On September 17, 1861, he enlisted as Assistant Surgeon in the 7th Regiment of the Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. He served honorably at several posts and, on the request of the Governor of Connecticut was promoted to Surgeon of the 10th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, May 1, 1864. After serving as Surgeon-in-Charge of several Union hospitals he received an honorable discharge on November 5, 1864. After the war, his widow seeking a pension, stated he lived in Connecticut, Ohio, Michigan, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Texas. She makes no mention of Florida. Before coming to south Florida he practiced medicine in Ohio and Michigan and after leaving Florida, he practiced for varying periods in Kansas and Texas. In 1888, while living in Kansas, he applied for an army service pension. The examining
physician, Samuel Murdock MD, after describing typical physical findings of alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver stated:

...he says (and I believe truthfully) there is a marked susceptibility to the influences of alcoholic stimulants [and] ... that prolonged malarial poisoning [and] sunstroke ... and the vicissitudes of camp life over three years, during the late war, stand preeminently in a causative relation to his present ailments. [See an affidavit of Dr. Samuel Murdock about Porter’s health, May 8, 1888, in the files of Mrs. Arva Moore Parks]

Dr. Porter was granted $17 per month for the following disabilities: chronic diarrhea, sunstroke and slight paraplegia. Later, in an application to increase his pension, claiming service connected “chronic diarrhea and hemorrhoids,” he stated:

There is a marked inability to make those physical, mental and social adjustments that a professional man must make to succeed and which necessarily requires a frequent change of location to enable him to make a living [in] practice.

Porter died at his home in Butler, Missouri on December 12, 1912.


111. Richards, Reminiscences, 89.

112. Parsons Diary, December 3, 1873, 11.


114. Parsons Diary, September 5, 1874, 109.


116. Parsons’ Diary, April 4, 1874.
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From Rising Sun To Daunting Storm: Miami in Boom and Bust, A Reminiscence

by Aretta L. Semes

In 1923 we left our home in Palmyra, New Jersey, to strike out for a new land. My parents, little sister and I were part of a vast caravan from many parts of the nation coming to Miami, the “New El Dorado,” in quest of opportunity and even weather. Very little of the area was known by my folks or others heading for the “Gold Coast,” except that they had heard of the wonderful opportunities that lie ahead. We headed into we knew not what, yet with courage and hope we would find this newly developed land where life would be beautiful and there would be opportunities galore, a new home and chances to pioneer.

OUR DESTINATION REACHED 1923

After a grueling, tiring trip down the East Coast of the United States, traveling through storms that left muddy, rutted roads through
jungle-like territory, we finally reached it: our destination — Miami, Florida! We had become part of a “caravan” that preceded us en route to the new city being developed in the southernmost state of our country, a city and region destined to become a glorious fast growing area in a beautiful subtropical climate. It was in the Fall of 1923 when we arrived in what would be our future home state. Here opportunities to “grow” with a new city were most exciting. We, too, had a dream!

On our first day in the “Magic City,” (the moniker Miami has borne since its beginnings), our hearts were full of gratitude for a safe car trip through hazardous conditions and thanks for the privilege of being there!

The growth of the twenty-seventh state had been rapid since the late nineteenth century. Nowhere was this growth more pronounced than in the southeast sector of the state. Miami was a wilderness area until Henry M. Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway entered the settlement in 1896. Incorporated as a city in that year, Miami grew quickly, counting 30,000 residents by 1920.

Miami by now was on its way to becoming a well-developed city, and stories were heard everywhere about the difficult work and planning that had taken place in order to build this “Garden of Eden.” The history of this great city is most fascinating! People who have seen southeast Florida only as a developed, beautiful area find it difficult to visualize or even realize the conditions under which the early development was accomplished. The area had been a wilderness where rattlesnakes and wild animals were in command of the land, and alligators made their home in the swampy regions and rivers, coming ashore to lie in the warm sun. Now the dream of Flagler, the “Father of Modern Miami,” was materializing, and the city he envisioned was on its way to becoming one of the beautiful cities of the world. My folks were very thankful they had brought their family to this interesting, fascinating city — still with “growing pains,” but promises of better things to come.

ARRIVAL IN MIAMI

We had been expected at the Brawn home, an attractive two-story Victorian structure on Northeast Second Avenue near Flagler
Street. It was late when we met Mr. and Mrs. Brawn the evening of our arrival and could prepare to “settle in” after a tiring trip. “We’re in Miami - we made it!” But before we could settle in for the night we had to see what all the colored lights were a block away — we needed to stretch our legs, too, so we decided to walk to this colorful spot.

Well, it was really lovely! It was the “Band Shell” in Royal Palm Park, a most popular gathering place situated in front of Flagler’s Royal Palm Hotel where people were enjoying the music of a popular orchestra. Many small colored lights, rather like Christmas tree lights, were strung from palm tree to palm tree that were spaced between many rows of green painted benches arranged rather in an amphitheater style under the stars. The “Shell” was the stage for the band. As time went on we were to hear outstanding bands and orchestras performing here — including Caesar La Monica and many other great conductors.

We wanted to see as much as we could, so the first thing the next morning we walked into the center of town. To our left we saw the beautifully landscaped Royal Palm Hotel located on the north bank of the Miami River. It was a tall frame structure, nestled in a tropical setting of palms and flowers. It was designed with a verandah across the front elevation and from side to side. We were to learn that
never a day passed that guests weren’t enjoying the Bay breezes and the lovely garden atmosphere, rocking back and forth in the comfortable rocking chairs that dominated the verandah.

Of course, in the days that followed while we were at Mother Brawn’s, we became acquainted with the surrounding area. About a block north was situated the lovely White Temple Methodist Church.

On East Flagler Street and Northeast Second Avenue stood the Halcyon Hotel, a unique building built of limestone and designed with towers topped with terra-cotta tile roofs. It looked rather like a French chateau. Across from the Halcyon Hotel was the Airdome Theater. By 1923-24, the streets in the center of town were lined with one and two-story buildings housing different businesses with real estate offices occupying many structures. With the growth taking place the real estate business was fantastic! Another outstanding building of unique architecture was the Bank of Bay Biscayne. This building was on the northwest corner of the intersection of Miami Avenue and Flagler Street. It was built by the Ft. Dallas National Bank, which collapsed with the panic of 1907. Later, the Bank of Bay Biscayne occupied it till it folded in the Great Depression.

By the early 1920s the area that was drawing adventurous people from all over the United States was a thriving city of 30,000 people. It was now an encouraging realization of Henry Flagler’s dream. The city he envisioned was “on the map.” This was the “Magic City” we entered in September 1923.

What excitement to come to such a bustling area from our small home town of Palmyra! The rhythm of life here was so different. I was eleven years old - and yet this new city and all that made it exciting to me. I entered Riverside Elementary School for sixth grade and the following year I attended the newly constructed Shenandoah Junior High. Many schools were being built. The county could not keep up with the school age population with the recent influx of families arriving to find the “future of their dreams!”

Many of the stores built in the early 1900s were still in business in 1923. Frank T. Budge Hardware, the Red Cross Drug Store, and Burdines Department store were the three earliest business firms that now were very busy stores. They were located on Flagler Street, the main artery.
Architects had designed buildings with arcades that stretched from street to street with small businesses on either side. The Seybold Arcade was one of the first constructed. I remember the large ice cream emporium on the Southeast corner of the Seybold Arcade. It was open the full length of the store. The Red Cross Drug Store stood along the side of the arcade, and there was a long soda fountain along the wall side. Victorian-style ice cream tables with marble tops and Victorian “ice cream style” chairs adorned the space, and seldom was there a vacant one! In addition to the table seating, there was the long soda fountain seating, where in later years I loved to stop and sip a coke or enjoy a milkshake.

LOOKING BACK
When I first came to Miami the land was covered in places with palmettos, a plant that grew in clusters and contained dark green, pointed fronds. The underside of their broad fan-like fronds was a great hiding place for snakes. The stems of the fronds made fine sticks on which to roast marshmallows or hot dogs over a hot bed of coals. One would strip the stems smooth and make an arrow point on one end. Many times we used these at beach parties. Young people would
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gather to have a “weenie roast” on the golden sands of Miami Beach. It was one of the fun activities of high school friends — a dip in the surf then gather around the “pit,” singing songs and roasting some goodies to eat.

Those who had not gathered or prepared the palmetto sticks would dig a hole in the sand, perhaps five to ten inches deep, scooping it out with their hands. Then charcoal briquettes would be placed in it together with small slivers of wood. It didn’t take long for the “coals” to be just right.

Our favorite spot for our beach parties was about Forty-fourth Street, before Harvey Firestone’s home had been built there. Today the Fountainbleau Hotel occupies the north side of Forty-fourth Street at the ocean.

MIAMI BEACH

Miami Beach was a peninsula until a cut was made in the early 1920s at Bakers Haulover, which separated the waters of Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean in the northern region of Dade County. The island that was to become Miami Beach, one of the most beautiful islands in all the world, was developed out of a dense growth and mangrove swamp.

Carl Fisher and the Lummus Brothers, together with John Collins, were instrumental in turning it into a “Garden of Eden.” In the early years before development of the island, Miami pioneers had interest in the land east of Biscayne Bay. They often arrived there by rowboats through the heavy mangroves swamp that lined the shore. Turtles laid their eggs in the sand, and it was a great sport to collect these eggs.

Men toiled day after day in knee-deep mud with alligators abounding. Rattlesnakes were there as well as on the mainland, along with other wildlife. It was treacherous work endeavoring to conquer the almost impenetrable wilderness, but work went on and the dreams of the “Men of Vision” became a reality.

In 1923 Miami Beach, too, was a beautiful city, on the edge of the blue-green water of the Atlantic Ocean, bordered by golden sands and bathed by the breezes of the Gulf Stream.
1924

My parents purchased a home in “Shenandoah,” a lovely section of southwest Miami. The home was partially furnished and cost $11,000 — at that time a rather high price. However, less than one year later, during the great real estate boom, my folks were offered $50,000 for it by a stranger who simply knocked on the door to ask if it could be purchased. My father refused to sell. (It was in the back of his mind to hold the property a while in hopes of selling it for an even higher price).

The City was growing! So many people arriving; families with school children causing the schools to become over crowded. Tremendous building was taking place. Some homes were built too fast resulting in what was known later as “jerry built,” or poorly constructed, homes.

1925, THE FLORIDA REAL ESTATE BOOM

This was the year Miami was really booming. So many people had come to the City to get in on the “good times.” Flagler Street was “alive” day and night with music, salesmen and their sales pitches and people everywhere. The feeling was one of excitement, gaiety, glamour, and big business!

Storefronts had been converted into open-air type sales offices rather like patios, beautifully decorated. Some developers employed bands whose music filled the ears of prospective buyers and curious passersby. Music was everywhere — all the snappy and catchy popular tunes of the early '20s. I don’t remember how many developers maintained offices in the two block area along Flagler Street between East First and Third Avenues, but two outstanding showplaces (sales patios) that remain with me were the ones of Coral Gables and Miami Shores.

The salesmen in some of the “patios” were dressed in white trousers with red blazers and they sported straw hats with red ribbons as bands. It all presented a uniquely attractive picture — one very colorful. Brochures were given out with every salesman stepping into the crowd on the sidewalk endeavoring to lure as many people as possible to take the special company bus to see their development. At this point there would be a big tent where folks were often treated to a
dinner or buffet and entertained with spectacular shows. There was excitement, color, music and “barking” by salesmen.

I always enjoyed going with my folks to the center of town after dinner because at night each of the patio-style offices was aglow with twinkling lights and a decor meant to beckon the passerby. The overall look of Flagler Street was glamorous and brilliant. Activity seemed to continue ‘till late at night. Those who weren’t selling property or trying to were buying, and millions of dollars changed hands for papers called “binders;” property never really legally recorded until the last one to hold the papers. Sometimes, as soon as a parcel of land was purchased, it was resold only again on a “binder” at a profit. Much of Dade County land was tied up legally for years after.

Things were going along well for the sales forces and their promotional regalia. Nineteen twenty-five was outstanding and a year not to be forgotten by those in Miami at that time. Many people and their money were parted with interest in the “New Florida” before it was even realized, particularly in the Dade County area.

**FASHIONS**

Everyone dressed lovely, even to go shopping in downtown Miami. I don’t believe a lady would venture downtown or be seen on Flagler Street without a hat and gloves with her dressy outfit. Clothes cost a fortune, but folks were “in the money in 1925!” Even children dressed nicely, wearing the finest clothes.

It was truly a time of affluence. The general attitude of people was friendliness and happiness. This was the time our Chrysler Brougham sedan was purchased — and did we feel proud!

The population had increased so beyond the facilities provided in the schools that portable classrooms were erected on the grounds. Even in its opening year Shenandoah Jr. High needed portables. The city and county could not keep up with its growth. Folks poured into Dade County by the hundreds weekly!

**THE BUST**

It wasn’t long before the glamour of the real estate boom waned, and the hustle and bustle of promoting Miami came to a
standstill! The boom was dying by June and July. Rumors of fraudulent deals on land sales were appearing in newspapers throughout the U.S., and people who had made purchases were now refusing to make payments. Nothing was glamorous anymore! Speculators were leaving — action had been too fast and furious. Money was being withdrawn from banks, and they were closing. The “Boom” was over! Now the popular word was “The Bust.” This was the “Florida Depression,” which preceded the 1930 national depression. The “high” of the terrific business of 1925 and early 1926 for the area, like a balloon, finally burst! The Florida Depression had hit like a tornado!

**THE BIG BLOW, 1926**

Nineteen twenty-six was a year of “double trouble.” To add misery to the weakening Boom, South Florida was hit by the strongest hurricane in many years. On September 18, Miami and South Florida experienced the ravages of nature to the already saddened area. It was something I’ll never forget! Miami and all of South Florida — the new found land of blue skies that had held hope for so many folks had now become a land of devastation by a killer hurricane that turned those blue skies into black clouds.
The day had been lovely — the evening most enjoyable. What was to come was so unexpected! Mother, Daddy, Ruth and I had been invited to the home of friends, the Harts, in Coral Gables for the evening. In fact, our family was one of several who were guests. The adult conversation leaned, of course, to the financial conditions of things in Miami — the “Boom” that was now fading and the rapidly approaching “Bust.”

I do remember a man, a friend of the Harts, coming in about 11:00 p.m. with news that created a new subject of conversation. He had been to Miami and heard rumors of a devastating storm that was approaching our state, so he verified the rumors by going past the Federal Building at Northeast First Avenue and First Street, where the weather bureau was located, and saw a black and red flag waving in the breeze atop the roof. In those early years that was the only way weather news was transmitted to the public. This was a hurricane warning flag. He decided to hurry home, about ten miles away from downtown, and en route stop to tell friends in Coral Gables.

Everyone at the party thought he must be kidding — such a thing wasn’t possible! A hurricane? No way! The last major storm to hit the area arrived in 1906. Why Miami hadn’t been hit by one in many years! And the night was so beautiful! So folks, including us, took their time departing and when we did say our “good-byes” and stepped outside, no one could believe such a report, for it was in the minds of all that with the presence of a gorgeous full moon and clear sky that it was just impossible — no storm could be coming our way! The only other thing noticeable about the beautiful night was a large halo around the moon. The stars were brilliant and thousands upon thousands twinkled in the sky. There must be some mistake — nothing could be further from the truth, everyone kept saying.

We got into our Chrysler sedan and waved goodbye to the friends as others, too, were going to their cars. The night was just too beautiful to go straight home, Daddy said. In fact, it was without a doubt the brightest, prettiest night we had seen since our arrival in Florida three years past. So we rode the “long way home,” winding our way through the streets of Coral Gables. We rode past lovely homes, some still lighted. We drove on west where the moon was shining on the high red top grass that grew on the vacant property. We rode for some time before Daddy turned the car on an easterly course
and even though it was after midnight we were enjoying the ride immensely and were unaware of the hour. I realized now that we were heading back toward town and on our way home. The extra ride through this lovely sight would soon be over.

NOW WE KNEW

We had been asleep no longer than two hours when we were awakened by a fluttering sound of paper being blown around, and my folks and I nearly collided in the hallway hurrying out of our bedrooms to see what had awakened us. We knew the minute we entered the living room that because of the gorgeous night, we had left open the double French doors, off the balcony, at the front of the room. (In those days doors and windows were left open, since there was no crime as is present today, nor were there air conditioners; moreover, the screen doors kept mosquitoes or other tropical bugs out).

We had an upright piano in the living room and quite a lot of music and study books were always left out, so this was what was scattering everywhere in the living and dining rooms. The wind was strong, and it was rather difficult to close those double doors. Now we knew! The kindly person had been right - he had brought his friends a message so true - no rumors! Now this must be the warning of what was to come!

All the windows were eventually locked, and in no time the wind was extremely strong. The brilliance of the night was replaced by heavy dark clouds traveling fast across the sky. Mother, Daddy, Ruth and I sat up the rest of the night as the winds howled and gusts banged against our house.

My father braced the French doors with a two-by-four board fitted against a wood block he nailed to the floor. I guess we were shielded against the brunt of the storm, because our house faced north and the winds now were out of the east; later they would be out of the west, but still the houses on our side of the street were out of the way of the strongest winds. The gusts that smacked up against our home were terrific even at that, and we had to mop up water with towels at the east windows where the rain beat in around the frame. Besides tending to this there was nothing else to do but sit and wonder — never knowing if the next gust, or if the punishing winds and rain would take our home.
When daylight finally arrived and the storm finally weakened, we could see outside and the trees uprooted on our street. My father said we must go immediately to see how our friends, the Elliotts, who also were also our neighbors back in Palmyra, were, for surely their little cottage west of Coral Gables — way out in the country — could not have weathered such a storm!

THE LULL

Now the sun was shining! We ventured out early to see how Erwin B. Elliot, president of E.B. Elliot Advertising Company, and his wife, Rosalie were. There wasn’t too much apparent damage in our neighborhood with the exception of large trees down. We had no difficulty driving out Tamiami Trail west to Ponce de Leon Boulevard in Coral Gables then south to Coral Way. We did notice that trees were down and had fallen to the north side of the road so the road was free to travel. Few buildings marked our route out to the Elliotts until we were on Ponce de Leon, the main boulevard north and south in Coral Gables. Here was the business district, but I fail to recall seeing any great damage from the storm at this point except for a tremendous amount of water.

The Elliotts had been living in a small cabin in an area where there were several cabins, rather like other tourist courts in Florida. These, however, were occupied by folks on a more permanent basis. The Elliotts had only come recently to Miami and decided to stay here until they made a decision about their future. I believe the interest Daddy had shown about this growing area had rubbed off on them. They were an older couple and very nice people. They were located on Ludlum Road (Southwest Sixty-Seventh Avenue), really the westernmost drive past Coral Gables. It was considered “in the sticks” or “in the boondocks.” Other families were also living there, and they had made good friends.

Daddy, knowing the area, knew that the storm must have destroyed these cabins. After we left the city limits, we had to travel a dirt road on to Ludlum Road. We turned north and began seeing more water, as the land was undeveloped and very low-lying. What a terrific shock to encounter the place where the frame cottages had been and to see only rubble and water! The roadway was fairly dry,
but water to the sides of the road was perhaps two feet deep — no cottages — and deeper water further out! Nothing but water and debris! There stood a trunk, lid open, where Mr. and Mrs. Elliott’s cottage had been, in the deep water. Where could the folks have gone? Could we locate them? Someone was walking down the road now. Daddy asked the man if he knew the folks. He did, and he informed us that they had escaped with other families from the cabins to the two-story large blue concrete block house about a block and a half away. Thank goodness! We drove around there and found Mrs. Elliott, but her husband had attempted to wade through the water, waist deep, to see if he might salvage anything from the debris, so we missed him as we drove to the house. “Thank God,” everyone said, that they themselves were okay. They were alive — but their spirits, their minds, had been tortured. We were soon to hear their story but not before we had more experiences!

We got Mrs. Elliott into the car. Other folks at the blue house had relatives who were looking after them. We circled around, came back to Ludlum Road and saw Mr. Elliott. What a sight! A man whose face revealed heartache and sadness, whose clothes were wet and badly wrinkled, just about hanging on him! He had made it to the spot in the time we drove to the house for his wife. He could find nothing. The trunk we had seen in the water had held treasures they had brought with them from Palmyra, but now was empty. Mr. Elliott did not want to leave, but knew there was no use staying. His wife and my parents coaxed him to leave, so he finally headed toward the car. He had, of course, been standing in the deep murky water — chilled and in something of a trance.

Since hurricanes had been rare since the early 1900s, no one knew their nature. This was the main reason, I believe, that so many lives were lost.

**WHAT AN EXPERIENCE!**

We did not know, nor did anyone else, that the storm was not over! How could one expect it not to be? Since the minute we left our home some ten miles away, the air was crisp and clear. The sun had been shining, and it was really pretty after such a terrible blow.

Mr. Elliott finally came to the car. The rear door was opened
for him. He had his hand on the handle and without a sign or warning the wind broke loose again with such fury that Mr. Elliott was swept off his feet. Had he not clung to the car door handle I don’t know what would have happened to him! But he managed to regain his balance, and we in the rear seat tried to pull him into the car. I had a good hold on his arm and kept pulling him for it seemed an eternity. The dear man was exhausted but finally managed to get in the car with us.

We were taken by surprise by the return of the wind after a glorious sunshine sun-splashed morning, but we were too surprised by the immediate problem to even think about it.

We learned later that the period of beautiful sunshine was the “eye” of the hurricane, also called the “lull,” and hurricanes being circular form with an open center, produce winds from opposite direction after the “eye” passes. The storm travels at a speed of from 10 - 25 miles an hour (such as moving a doughnut across a plate) — the forward side is only half of the storm! The center or hole is the “eye” which contains no rain or wind. As the hurricane moves forward, when the center passes a given point, the other half of the circle approaches carrying winds from the opposite direction. This explains why we now, on our way home, found trees lying across the road we had just recently driven over. Daddy had to weave the car around fallen trees downed by the second winds.

The Chrysler had been tested when it was first purchased and we knew it was capable of speeds of up to 90 miles per hour. It was truly being tested for more than speed now. How we ever made it home was a mystery, except I knew God saw us through. The roads we were endeavoring to return on were now impassable. My father now had to drive into the undeveloped land around the trees that had fallen since the return of the wind. We were fortunate in one way that we were now on higher ground, and no water was beside the road. Also, no trees were falling now, because all had been blown over since the beginning of the second half of the storm.

Coral Gables had been named “The City Beautiful,” and that it was. At the intersections of the wide boulevards and Coral Way were large decorative walls and fountains of Spanish design, creating lovely entrances. These intersections were wide and as our car
approached each one, my father had to drive over to the north edge of the boulevard because the strong wind pushed our car back to the other side. We went sideways more than forward!

We made it to the intersection of Coral Way and Ponce de Leon Boulevard again, this after crossing about five of the wide boulevards under such terrifying conditions. Now my father turned the car north, facing right into the fury of the wind. Gusts were picking up and the rain was very heavy now. About a block and a half after our turn up Ponce, still moving nine miles per hour, concrete blocks crashed in front of the car. They were blown from the large square tower on the top of the Alcazar Drug Store. At this point we were all grateful we were traveling only nine miles per hour! My father swung the car out around them and proceeded on to Tamiami Trail, several blocks north.

It was a hard drive back home. Daddy had all he could do to keep the car on the road. All the while the winds were increasing and here we were driving in the violent winds of a hurricane! We traveled safely from Ponce de Leon Boulevard to the Trail because the boulevard was very wide, and I think by now we were the only car endeavoring to make it through this raging storm, for anyone else who might have ventured out during the “lull” was no doubt under shelter by now. We had gone ten miles out and now ten miles on the return home. From this point we would turn on to the Trail to head east to Southwest Eighteenth Avenue, then turn south to approach Southwest Eleventh Street, a distance of about 22 blocks. All along this distance on the trail I don’t recall seeing another car or any sign of life — nothing but heavy rain, making visibility only a few feet and gusts sending the car back as far as it had gone forward!

We turned down Eighteenth Avenue, and our hearts leaped out as we approached our street! All had been well with the homes and apartment house when we left, but now what a sight met our eyes!

The four-unit apartment building that was on the Northeast corner of Southwest Eighteenth Avenue and Eleventh Street was destroyed! The entire second floor was gone — nothing was there but the lower apartments, all stripped! We only hoped the folks living there had evacuated. Then, of course, the horrible thought hit all of us
as we wondered what might have happened further down the street with our home.

After we arrived in front of our home, Daddy drove through the carport on to the backyard. The only damage we could see was the garage doors had been blown off. My father finally stopped the car and instructed us each to dash for the avocado tree about ten feet away, one by one. We were to hold on to it to get our balance then dash for the back steps. The approach to the back entry was an open area about ten feet square, two steps up from the grassy lawn. My father would go first, making sure all was okay and open the door. We were to try to gauge the gusts of wind, which were a great deal stronger now than the sustained wind (perhaps hitting 130 miles per hour), and dash right after one of the gusts. I was the third or fourth one to make the break — an experience I shall never forget! We all needed courage; we had to leave the car, for no one knew how long it would stay there.

My feet seemed to never reach the ground yet I made it to the tree, and did that feel good to have something to hang on to! The trunk of this tree was about 12 inches in diameter and my arms were wrapped completely around it. I finally got my feet on the ground again. Then, as I was holding on for dear life, my feet were swept from under me and my body was almost parallel to the ground. Gaining my balance after that gust, I located the steps and the door and I made a run of about ten feet, finding great relief in the porch from the gales.

How grateful we were that our home was safe. The brunt of the hurricane lasted a few hours more, I think, but the homes in our area were of fine construction, so most were spared great damage. Of course, there was no electric power or water for several days. The destruction of the apartment on the corner haunted the neighborhood for some time. We were most fortunate, since many Miamians suffered great loses. My sister remembers the fury of the storm destroying the garage of a home across the street from us and blowing the car backwards, clear across the street to finally stop at the double French doors on the little balcony at the front of our house! Watching that car approaching our house was terrifying. Huge trees, especially Australian Pines, which have little root system, were blown over. They
landed on houses and cars, breaking roofs or crashing through windows. Much damage was brought about by small lawn articles, potted plants and trash cans, as things were not taken in or stored before the winds came. These and terra-cotta tiles from roofs were blown around, doing damage to windows, which in turn gave open paths for the wind to gust through the houses and buildings and creating damage inside.

So much poor construction had taken place during the "boom," because building codes were non-existent. Furthermore, buildings were not reinforced nor designed to withstand tropical storms. However, we felt quite secure in our homes during the storm. We did experience water damage, though it could have been worse had my father not drilled holes in the oak floor of the hallway near the back door entrance. We rolled up towels to place on sills, wringing them out every so often as they became water-logged. The wind and rain continued and the gusts against the house were terrific. We couldn't make out the houses across the street. This fury lasted for seven hours.

At night here and there a candle would be seen flickering in the darkness for power was not restored for some time. No cooking was done, as most homes were supplied with electric stoves. How-
ever, we were quite fortunate, again, because mother had a two-burner kerosene stove that Esie, our maid, used to boil the linens in.

So the good old kerosene stove became a treasure and served a great purpose during the need for a stove after the storm. Many of our neighbors came over to cook food, and coffee was made by collecting water from the gutter. (It appeared clean and so much water had fallen — and it was going to be boiled anyway. Eggs were added to the coffee water, too, so the coffee and hard boiled eggs were prepared together)! This was the only water available until regular water services resumed.

SUBSEQUENT YEARS

It was now 1930 and more banks were failing. People who had suffered from the effects of the devastating hurricane of '26 were now losing their savings. Like many other folks, my parents had been “sitting high.” However, when the Bank of Bay Biscayne closed its doors to depositors in 1930, my folks lost everything. As time went on, we also lost our home and the beautiful property Daddy had purchased just one block from the ocean on Golden Beach.

By 1930 our family had resided in Miami for nearly seven years. We had seen fast growth of a land covered with palmettos and heavy brush grow into a beautiful city — an area where northerners found comfort in the warm climate, starry nights and friendly folks. We saw a tragic change take place with the demise of the “boom” and the subsequent hurricane, resulting in a dramatically different life for Miamians by 1930. What the future held we did not know, but we believed that the “magic” of this place would ensure a return to better times. Within ten years that prophecy was fulfilled.
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