CONTENTS

Editor's Foreword .............................................................................................. 3
by Dr. Paul S. George

The Peonage Controversy and the Florida East Coast Railway ....................... 5
by Dr. Joe Knetsch

Black Education in Miami, 1921-1940 ........................................................... 30
by Doug Andrews, M.A.

Miami's Land Gambling Fever of 1925 ............................................................ 52
by Bénédicte Sisto, M.A.

Historical Association of Southern Florida Members ................................... 74

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Editor’s Foreword

As we near the end of the century and the millennium, the discipline of history continues to grow in demand and cachet. Historians are being called on to help prepare lists of the century’s top one hundred stories, events, athletes, personalities, and whatever other topics creative minds can come up with. Books and articles focusing on the end of the last millennium and the beginning of the present one are also plentiful. This issue of Tequesta brings to our readers a more measured approach to history, since we’ve been in the “history business” for almost sixty years. Yet we also have an anniversary to “celebrate”: the fall of 1999 marks one hundred years since the city of Miami was stricken by a yellow fever epidemic that brought wide scale suffering, loss of life, and closed it for three months to the outside world.

In this issue of Tequesta, Joe Knetsch, a prolific, voluble historian with a Ph.D. from the Florida State University, has provided, with “The Peonage Controversy and the Florida East Coast Railway,” a detailed study of a controversy that dogged the Flagler organization during its construction of the Overseas Railroad to Key West. Dr. Knetsch, Historian with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, has plumbed the William J. Krome collection of newspaper clippings and other important source material in this work. Doug Andrews, a faculty member at Miami-Dade Community College’s Wolfson Campus, has given us, in “Black Education in Greater Miami, 1921-1940,” a sobering look at the disparities in funding, facilities, and teachers’ salaries in the area’s racially segregated school system. Professor Andrews has made impressive use of the Minutes of the Dade County School Board in explaining these inequities in an era that witnessed boom and bust, a lingering economic depression, and the early stirrings of a civil rights movement that led to significant change in public schools and in many other areas of American life. Andrews, a native Miamian, is Professor of Distant Education and Social Science Education, Miami-Dade Community College, Wolfson.

Benedicte Sisto, a young historian living in Samur, France, offers with “Miami’s Land Gambling Fever of 1925,” a look at one of the seminal events in the city and the area’s history. Historian Sisto’s
article is timely since we are on the cusp of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the boom’s peak year, 1925. Ms. Sisto’s article is also important for its source material, since it employs a spate of articles from several periodicals seldom used before in accounts of the boom. Sisto is a Teaching Assistant in American Civilization at the University of Tours, France. She is completing her Ph. D. in History at the same institution. A frequent visitor to the United States, she taught French at the University of California, Berkeley.

We know that you will enjoy and learn from these scholarly offerings. Let us hear from you if you have questions, comments, or prospective articles for Tequesta. Thank you.

Paul S. George
Editor, Tequesta
The Peonage Controversy and the Florida East Coast Railway

by Dr. Joe Knetsch

Imprisonment for debt had long been outlawed in the United States when the controversy over a new form of enshacklement arose. The "new" system was called peonage, or holding someone against his will until a debt was paid off in full. An 1867 statute, outlawing debt servitude in New Mexico was thought, by some in power in Washington, to have been adequate for the nation; however, this relatively obscure law was ignored in practice nearly everywhere in the country. From the timber mills of the Pacific Northwest, in the company towns, like Gary, Indiana, or in the turpentine stills of the rural South, some form of peonage existed nationwide in the nineteenth century. Yet, southern peonage practices caught the eye of reformers and brought out the scorn of progressives. "Owing in the South," historian Pete Daniel has written, "often led to imprisonment, beating, or even death." It was the southern form of peonage that drew the nation's attention to the problem, especially in Florida where both turpentine and railroads were widely accused of its worst practices.

One of the principle reasons for this attention to the southern form of peonage was its dependency upon the importation of out-of-state workers. The workers, mostly immigrants from the larger cities in the Northeast, would sign contracts with agents for the companies who planned to utilize. These contracts would guarantee certain wages, conditions and charges for passage to the area and outline the terms of repayment. In many cases, the contract would also state that board or other necessities would not be paid for by the company, but were the responsibility of the worker. Almost always charges would soon leave the worker in debt to the company, or its minions. It was not uncommon in these cases to find the wages stated were actually lower than
those contracted for, the working conditions much more severe than expected and the charges for board and other necessities exorbitant. The workers, hailing from elsewhere, or recent immigrants, were soon exposed to the worse elements and trapped in out-of-the-way work stations where no outside help could be expected. "Defrauded of their wages," Daniel notes, "and deprived of mobility either by threats that they could not legally move until their debts were paid or by actual force, they lived in the vortex of peonage." In the worse cases, this "vortex of peonage" would suck the life from its victims and cast it upon the heap to fertilize the sterile earth. And in such a melodramatic style it was often reported in the press of the day.

The problem arose for two reasons. First labor was scarce in many of the areas where peonage was reported. Labor shortages were chronic in places like Florida and Alabama where the indigenous population was relatively small and widely scattered. A second cause was the lack of employment opportunities in the crowded cities of the northeast, which were experiencing rapid immigration. Opportunities appeared to these immigrants to be less than optimal and they were searching for better paying, more constant employment. At this stage, the labor agent entered the scene and seemed to provide a service that met the expectations of the new laboring class of immigrants. For a small charge, he would provide the contact with the employer, who often gave him a flat fee (usually two or three dollars per recruit), and the two sides would then enter a contract allegedly spelling out the conditions of employment and the transportation and board charges, or other details. One of the agents charged with peonage, E. J. Triay, who was employed by the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC), outlined the contract system in a Brooklyn Eagle report in January of 1906.

The statement made by the two Brooklyn boys that we agreed to give them $1.75 per day is contradicted by the contract they signed. Mr. Triay then handed the Eagle reporter a printed contract worded as follows, which he said all laborers signed before leaving New York. "Due Florida East Coast Railroad $12 for value received, And I hereby authorize said railway company, should said railway company at any time to become indebted to me at any time before payment hereof to apply hereon any amount or amounts for part or parts thereof so due
me as same may become due and payable. The said Railway company to pay $1.25 per day without board. Mr. Triay said that the company furnishes transportation free from Jacksonville to Miami, but that the fare from New York to Jacksonville, $12, must be paid by the men and that this is not only implied by the contract, which is short and plainly printed, but it is also explained in a circular printed in English on one side and Italian on the other. ... He says, moreover that the men are housed free by the company in comfortable quarters. They buy their own food, sold at the commissary department at reasonable prices, and can live well on $2.50 per week. The twelve dollar charge was supposed to have been worked off in about three months, given the normal expenditures of the workers, however, this charge, plus the inflated prices allegedly demanded by the commissary agents, led to a situation where, isolated on the Florida Keys, where they were working on the railroad's extension to Key West, without a personal mode of transportation to the mainland, a worker was at the mercy of the company and its supervisors. This exposed position of the worker was one ripe for the charges of peonage.

In some cases, the immigrants were attracted to the United States by offers of secured employment through the "padrone" system, which worked within the Italian and Greek communities. According to George E. Pozzetta, a pioneering historian in Florida immigration studies: "The search for workers often took railroad employers into the urban centers of the northeast where thousands of recently-arrived immigrants resided. To secure these laborers, the railroad frequently relied upon the services of an important immigrant institution - the padrone, or labor boss." The system became so national scandalous, that Congress undertook an investigation and filed an extensive report, which resulted in certain laws being passed to curb its worse abuses. In its reports on the "padrone system" and other evils, the Immigration Commission, directed by Congress to investigate charges of slavery and peonage in 1908, concluded:

The operations carried on by the padrones are confined to the direct importation of aliens, either to employ them in their own various business enterprises, such as bootblacking, fruit vending,
or candy making, or to hire them in groups to contractors or other employers. Relative to the padrone system, the Commissioner-General of Immigration, in his report for 1907, pages 70-71, says: “The most distressing branch of the alien contract-labor law violations is that which involves the use of what is commonly called the ‘padrone system’: for by this means not only is foreign labor introduced under contract or agreement, but often the laborers are mere boys and are practically enslaved by the padrones who effect their importation. This system is applied principally to youths of the Italian and Greek races, the boys being placed at hard labor, with long hours, under conditions wholly unsuited to their age, and subjected to a wage arrangement which amounts practically to a method of blackmailing; in other words, they are in effect owned by the men who advance the money and procure their immigration from Greece and Italy.\(^5\)

The report of the Immigration Commission went on to note that: “Nevertheless, it may be said that such ‘contracts or offers or promises of employment’ are usually so vague, contingent, and indefinite that an acceptance thereof would not constitute a contract. Neither can adult aliens imported by padrones designate the particular job or employment for which their labor is desired. Therefore this class of operations is probably not prohibited by the contract-labor laws.”\(^6\) In certain cases, in addition to lining up the labor, the padroni were allowed to run the commissary stores, thus exploiting the labor in all phases, however, Pozzetta notes specifically in his study that the Florida East Coast Railway was an exception to this rule, even where it did use such contract labor.\(^7\)

The problem for the Florida East Coast Railway became more intense when Henry Flagler and his board of directors chose to construct the railroad across the Florida Keys to Key West. This decision was reached on April 19, 1893, just prior to the onset of the national depression later that year.\(^8\) The national depression was the major cause for the delay in constructing the railroad through Miami to the Keys. The cash flow problems involved in this economic downturn forced Flagler to hold back on his ambitious plan at that time. Flagler’s delay was beneficial for Miami as the entrepreneur
became personally involved with its development. Not until 1905 did Flagler procure the right of way for the railroad from the Florida Legislature. Aside from the immense engineering problems presented by this enterprise, the largest concern for the railroad was the procuring of labor.

The peonage that can be imputed to the railroad, in the cases where it employed such labor, was indirect. The agents through which it worked were alleged to be responsible for any such peonage at this stage. The railroad did, in the 1890s and around the turn of the century, employ a number of Italians and Greeks on the line, including the extension. The arrivals of such employees were announced in the Miami Metropolis with great frequency, often with statements such as: “A car load of Italians from the north is expected here daily for works on the keys on the railroad extension;” or “A large number of Greeks arrived here yesterday and proceeded to Homestead where they will work on the extension;” or, finally, “GREEK LABORERS ARRIVE: Another bunch of Greeks, about twelve in number, for the extension operations, arrived in the city last night from the north and will be taken to the keys this afternoon. It is the intention of the F.E.C. Railway Company to secure and work as many of these men as possible and other and larger numbers of them will arrive in a few days.” Interestingly, the Immigration Commission, in its discussion of the investigations into the operations and peonage charges against the F.E.C. does not relate the railroad with peonage and the padrone system of contract labor. This may, in part, be due to the adverse criticism of the system by the muckraking press of the day and the growth of immigrant protective societies in the nation’s larger cities. Also, the growing awareness by the immigrants themselves of working conditions on the railroads and elsewhere made them better informed of which jobs they might be interested in taking. It may be deduced, therefore, that although the padrone system was important for the railroad in obtaining scarce labor, it was not a highly significant factor in the charges of peonage against the line.
If the padrone system was not the origins of the peonage charges, what element was? Labor agents must be looked to as the main source of the charges against the railroad and its hierarchy. Edward J. Triay, as noted, was one of the chief agents for the railroad; however, he worked through many others, most importantly of whom was Francisco Sabbia. In one of the first of the spectacular expose’s of peonage in Florida, the fate of nineteen year old Harry Hermanson, allegedly recruited by Sabbia’s “German-Italian Exchange” in New York, was told in very dramatic terms. “At Jacksonville, the declaration alleges, that the said Harry Hermanson was placed under an armed guard and brought to Miami at which place he was compelled to go aboard a steamboat and was taken to the extension camp No. 4, and there forced to enter a tent and sleep upon rocks and in the dirt with scarcely any food to eat or water to drink, and was made to do the work of a man; that he was ill treated in various other ways by the agents of said defendant corporation, all of which injured the health of said Harry Hermanson; ...” Hermanson somehow got word to his mother about his condition and she allegedly sent money to the foreman to secure her son’s release, however, the foreman supposedly stole the money. According to Daniel, the boy was not allowed to leave the Florida Keys until December 1906, when he was returned to New York with his mother. In the lawsuit asking damages for $10,000, was the allegation that young Hermanson, nineteen years of age, became intoxicated and, in such a state, signed the contract with Sabbia, who immediately abducted the boy and placed him on a train to Jacksonville. His mother, Amanda C. Hermanson, in her allegations against the company, specifically named J. C. Meredith, Flagler’s engineer and director, as the person who refused to send her son home after she had sent the money to get his release. The daring and desperate mother then, according to her attorney, went to Miami to pay Meredith and retrieve her son, but, upon arrival, was refused and threatened with arrest. She immediately hired a launch and went directly to the camp where her son was being detained and, after being refused permission to land until the eleven dollar debt was paid, she was able to procure his release and returned to New York. The Hermansons were not compensated for their travail as the court found the F.E.C. innocent of the charges of peonage. As one newspaper reported: “The prosecution failed to sustain the claim that the Hermanson boy was brought from
New York against his will or that he had in any other way been made a victim of the practices of what is known as ‘peonage’.

The case was tried in Jacksonville, the home of E. J. Triay, where the F.E.C. had considerable interests. However, it can not be assumed, as some have, that the corporation was guilty. There is the question of why a nineteen year old, in an age were many were working full time by their fourteenth birthday, was so easily misled and whether or not the conditions described by him were factual. There is also the problem of how this could be done unobserved by the dozens of reporters, important visitors, and others who visited the extension sites nearly everyday. Finally, there is the question as to how these stories could be true in the light of the hundreds of laborers who left the extension work on a regular basis and reported conditions to be satisfactory for that kind of work. Jumping to the conclusion that because the railroad was investigated by Congress and reports appeared in various newspapers, the F.E.C. is automatically guilty of the charge goes too far. This is especially true when faced with the fact that the railroad was exonerated by the Immigration Commission, which stated in its report: “Neither the governor of Florida, the Commission, nor the Department of Justice has been able to find anything in the nature of legal proof that peonage ever existed upon any of this work of the Florida East Coast Railway.”

It is always interesting reading the reports of men “somehow” escaping the alleged peonage and making their way back north to report to their local newspapers. The sensationalism caused by these reports may be one of the major reasons for the continued interest in the peonage charges.

With a labor force often numbering over 4,000 men, the F.E.C. had a difficult time providing these men with accommodations. The actual supply problem was one that worried F.E.C. officials daily. Fresh water, usually hauled from Homestead, for example, had to be transported by boats to the extension workers while large storage facilities were actually constructed at Manatee Creek and, later, on Indian Key. Mattresses, which most reports have not mentioned or denied were given or sold to the workers, were ordered as early as May 1906, when the F.E.C. ordered “several hundred special sponge mattresses for their quarter, or sleeping boats, engaged in the extension work,” from the Miami Sponge Mattress and Pillow Company.
Using simple mathematics, it quickly becomes apparent that several hundred mattresses will not sleep 4,000 workers, and this led to the reports of no mattresses being provided. In some instances, the company provided wooden slat-bunks, which were the norm in many camps. These slat-bunks were often not provided with legs and the men had to improvise to get them off the bare earth.¹⁹

One area where the F.E.C. was far in advance of other employers of the day was in its provision of hospital and health care facilities. A two story railroad hospital was located in Miami near Biscayne Bay and north of downtown. The facility contained an operating room, attending physician’s room, dispensary, surgical dressing room, a dining room and kitchen, and its own laundry. On the first floor, it had three wards for white workers and one for “colored” employees. The upstairs held two wards for acute patients, five private rooms, a house physician’s bed, apartments for the matron and nurses and storage areas for supplies. Drs. J. M. Jackson and J. A. Heitlinger attended patients along with Ms. M. Hamilton, who, like Dr. Heitlinger, had much experience at New York’s Bellevue Hospital. The hospital was free to any employee injured on the job or who became ill while employed. Dr. Jackson made frequent visits to the Florida Keys dispensaries located in some of the larger camps.²⁰ Indeed, as the extension reached farther south through the Keys, another hospital was constructed on Long Key.²¹ Yet, despite the advantages offered by employment with the F.E.C., the peonage charges continued.

The newspapers in the north continued publishing stories from men allegedly trapped on one of the Florida Keys by the railroad and its overseers. In one story, dated early 1906, one Thomas O’Byrne received a letter from six Brooklynites who declared: “They have shanghaied us to a little island in the ocean about ninety miles off Florida. We are surrounded by rattlesnakes and dangerous animals. For God’s sake, send us some money and food. Twenty dollars will enable us to escape and save our lives.” The same report also said that, “Negroes stand over us with guns.” It was a sensational story, which was followed by another entitled, “Brooklyn Lads Lured South and Into Chain Gang.” Here, Winfred Rowland, a twenty year old, along with five others, was attracted by an advertisement and other promises of good working conditions and possible advancement working for the railroad in Florida. Supposedly, one hundred such
young men left Jersey City, New Jersey, and began their journey southward. The tale told by Rowland was similar to that related by Hermanson. Once on the train, the situation soon deteriorated into crowded passages, locked doors and shipment to the Keys. The escape story is, again, similar to others reported during the day, including the collusion of a local sheriff with the railroad, charging those captured with vagrancy and putting those unable to pay the fine on the local chain gang. This same story line was soon picked up by some of the more radical press of the day, including the Socialist Appeal to Reason, a leading radical journal.

Not to be outdone by the socialist paper and its counterparts in New York, the Boston World published its own expose' in March 1906. The story began with the headline, “Fugitive Who Escapes Bondage Tells of the Suffering Endured Working for Florida East Coast Railroad,” John B. Harles, the detainee, told of the “hardships and misuse of 4000 men,” at the hands of the Flagler rail line. Harles was forced to work ten hours a day in the broiling hot Florida sun with a pick and shovel for a wage of $1.25 a day. He claimed that the original wage promised him was for four or five dollars per day, but this soon dwindled to $7.50 per week. Harles claimed that he was forced to purchase a blanket to sleep in at the inflated price of $2.00 (when it was not worth fifty cents) and then was charged $4.50 for an old pair of shoes and $1.50 for overalls. Harles realized that the only way out of this entanglement was to escape. Again, like the other stories, Harles and his helpless companions were captured by armed guards and forced back into the trenches, in knee deep water. Finally, with luck and good fate, he escaped from the camp and made his way to Miami and then overland, twenty-four miles, to Punta Gorda (called Pontafora in the account). From there, he fled via Arcadia and finally reached Sanford, where he hopped a train to Jacksonville, which took him the final 300 miles. Harles claimed he arrived in Boston aboard a Jacksonville based schooner upon which he had worked for his berth. The victimized Harles appealed to the Federal government to put a halt to such practices, especially those of the employment agencies which had lured him in with their outlandish promises. Like others’ stories of imprisonment on the Keys, Harles’ told of low pay, armed guards, poor food and housing and harrowing escapes.

Articles in the Appeal to Reason featured an “inside” plant who
was sent to investigate the charges and found them worse than expected. In his clandestine reports to his editors, the nameless victim described the pitch, the transport, the final destination and the conditions of work. According to his reports, he was offered employment by one of the agents of the “Flagler interests in Florida.” From here he promised his readers a, “truthful portrayal of industrial conditions as they actually exist in the slave camps here in Florida, and the first situation that I shall deal with will be the East Coast Florida Extension Railway.” He described his trip to Jacksonville aboard a “tramp steamer,” after hearing stories of the agents about working, “lightly but a few hours every day, there were no swamps, no malaria and no mosquitoes.” He also was told, once upon the steamer, that the passage fare was twenty-five dollars, and not the twelve dollars the first agent had promised. Forced to sign a new ledger book with this compelling debt, he knew he was in for a difficult time. Upon arriving in Jacksonville, he was immediately herded upon a box car and he was soon on his way south through Florida. In this account, the reporter noted: “The car in which I was placed was crowded with a miscellaneous assortment of unkempt humanity, and I felt miserably out of sorts. All day we traveled, through a strange country of wild woods and swamps and dejected little rice and cotton farms. Negroes grinned and showed their teeth as we wound in and out from one turpentine camp to another — grinned in a knowing way, and winked to one another as we slowly sped on our course.”

The next installment by the intrepid reporter noted that he was under virtual round-the-clock guard and he had to, “At great risk and some expense,” employ a young man who was strong enough to take his dispatch out through the swamps and make it to Key West without detection from his isolated and unnamed Florida Key. He, of course, did not attach any name to his dispatches for fear that should his young message carrier fall into the wrong hands, he would face a horrid retribution. Again, he worked all day long in the broiling sun. He daily faced, “... the hardest manual labor ever inflicted upon the race. And we do this in fear of the impending lash. Waste deep in water nearly all the time, we shoulder the great logs and place them in position for the pile driver; and should any of us shirk, or ‘soldier,’ we are forcibly seized and beaten unmercifully.” In one of his more gruesome observations, the correspondent noted: “Yesterday a mere
lad, weak and hardly able to be on his feet, sank beneath the load he was trying to carry, when two burly bosses, both of whom are negroes, stripped him to the waist, laid him across a log and applied a black-snake whip to his bare back until he was unconscious.\(^2\) This undercover reporter continued to send dispatches from Florida for nearly another year; and some of them included descriptions of the infamous turpentine camps of northwestern Florida.

All of the common elements of the stories quoted earlier are contained in the dispatches from the author of *Appeal to Reason*. Severe labor, poor conditions, working in deep water all day, the hot, broiling Florida sun, evil, “burley” Negro bosses (a direct appeal to the racism of their white readers), blood-chilling escapes and threats of violence. That many of these reports are pure fiction cannot be denied. How many rice and cotton fields could one see going south from Jacksonville to Miami in the early 1900s? Did Florida trains wander from turpentine camp to turpentine camp dropping off northern laborers? Given the well documented racism of Mr. Flagler, which was typical of his age, how many whites were put to labor under Afro-American overseers? Was it really three-hundred miles from Sanford to Jacksonville by train? The veracity of these stories is to be strictly doubted in light of such obvious falsehoods. However, because of the shear volume of such reports, there may be some truth to some statements after winnowing carefully through the chaff.

The first actual investigation of the peonage charges in Florida did
not begin with the F.E.C., but in the phosphate mines and turpentine camps of Northern Florida. The leader in these investigations was a pugnacious woman reformer and attorney, Mary Grace Quackenbos, of New York City. Her passion for the workers came from daily observations of the plight of immigrants on the docks of New York. To combat some of the abuses she observed, Ms. Quackenbos organized the “People’s Law Firm” in Manhattan to aid the newcomers in their adjustment period. Ms. Quackenbos, at the time, was a “middle class reformer whose legal training and personal economic independence,” enabled her to carry on the fight against injustice. The letters and reports, some of those cited earlier, were the spurs to her actions in Florida, which included obtaining a $300 grant from publisher S. S. McClure, to work as an undercover in Florida in search of labor abuses. Her shock over what she found in Florida and Alabama led Quackenbos to contact United States Attorney John M. Cheney, working out of Orlando. She joined forces with Agent Eugene V. McAdams and Emma Stirling, of Lake Thonotosassa, Florida, in gathering evidence of peonage.26 Her first, and main, target was the employment agent, S. S. Schwartz, of New York City, and others. By October 1906, Schwartz had been arrested and indicted on peonage charges in Washington D. C. Three days later, Schwartz’s prosecution was undertaken by Assistant Attorney General Charles W. Russell.27

Ms. Quackenbos did not stop with the indictment of Schwartz. Next she began an investigation of the turpentine and lumber industry in Florida. The State reacted sharply to her investigations and those of Special Agent Hoyt, who assisted Ms. Quackenbos in Florida. U. S. Representative Frank Clark led the charge to investigate investigations and challenged the Attorney General’s office to produce results. Clark’s campaign was barely underway when Cosmopolitan Magazine edition for March 1907, appeared containin a muckraking article on peonage, entitled “Slavery in the South To-day.” Author, Richard Barry’s sensationalism included his charge that: “In a new and sinister guise, however, slavery has again reared its hideous head, a monster suddenly emerging from the slime morbid depths of an inferno peopled by brutes and taskmasters in human semblance.” The magazine ran a photograph of Flagler, with the caption: “Henry M. Flagler, of the Standard Oil clique, whose Florida East Coast Railway is largely responsible for slavery conditions in Florida.”28 The combination of
the Quackenbos investigation and the magazine attacks made peonage a headline throughout the nation. The *Florida Times-Union*, immediately jumped to the defense of the railroad and Florida in general. The newspaper provided its readers with the definition of debt peonage and noticed the new laws enacted to curb abuse of such a system and the immigration act which, according to the Attorney General, shut states out from making labor contracts for immigrants, a system that some states had engaged in with some abuses. The press also raised the spectre of sectionalism in the passage of such acts and asked: "Why? Investigation after investigation has shown the long continuance of the wrongs charged in the Pennsylvania mines and mills; the evidence taken at Homestead is still in print. Why insist that only in the south do these crimes find foothold?" To some extent, this question was valid. As historian David Potter has noted: "The prevalence of the 'savage ideal' (really the tribal ideal) in the South gave credibility to the Northern image of the South as a land of grotesque decadence and sadism; while the psychological needs of the North made this image functionally so essential to Northern liberal self-esteem that it would perhaps have had to be invented if it had not existed in reality." Psychological reasons notwithstanding, the investigations spurred reaction by Congressman Frank Clark, himself a former assistant district attorney for the Southern District of Florida.

Clark's reaction was to label all of the charges false and unfounded and simply the work of "muckraking yellow journalism." He demanded, along with others, that the Hearst newspapers, especially the *New York Evening Journal*, should be brought to task for such libel
and slander. In what the Florida Times-Union called a “Scathing Showing Up” of the Hearst’s papers and Cosmopolitan Magazine, Clark declared:

In submitting to this House and to the American people the few remarks I shall make upon the subject of “peonage” in Florida, as treated in a recent article in the Cosmopolitan magazine for March 1907, and partly copied in the New York Evening Journal of February 25, 1907, I know that I shall bring down on my humble self the resentful fury of the owner of these publications who happens to be a member of this body, but I do not believe has occupied his seat for ten full days during the entire life of the Fifty-ninth congress, but be that as it may I would be unworthy of the high and honorable position I hold if I should silently sit here and permint a member of this body, either from his place on this floor, or through the columns of his publications to slander and malign my people.32

Clark repeated his call for an investigation into the purposes of the investigations.

The newspaper stories from around the nation, however, continued to surface and damage the reputation of Florida and the F.E.C. In addition to the New York Evening Journal and the Brooklyn Eagle, the Boston World also printed an expose’ concerning, “White Slavery in the Florida Keys.” Papers in Philadelphia and Chicago picked up on the stories and found other “victims” of the enslaving railroad or turpentine camps. All of this broke just after the devastating hurricane of 1906, which killed many workers on the railroad, some of whom were housed in houseboats or traveling on vessels, like the St. Lucie and House-boat No. 4, where many victims were simply swept out to sea without any further trace. The exact number of deaths caused by this storm is unknown. Fear of the armed bosses may not have been the only motive for some to want to “escape” from the Keys.

The Florida press responded by printing any number of interviews with important people who had visited the Keys and witnessed, first hand, the conditions of the men living there. A representative of the Philadelphia Inquirer came to Florida and made an “independent” investigation of the railroad and reported the following in the Florida Times-Union, on March 26, 1908: “If the applicant did not wish to eat in the mess tent,” said J. C. Meredith to this reporter, “he could board himself out of the commissary. A large percentage signed these
contract cards [the labor contract] and sold them to some of the undesirable forty per cent that we turned down. Men who were looking for anything but work and wanted a free ride into a warm climate for the winter. When they were aboard the train our Mr. Cotton, Mr. Triay's assistant, went through the cars and put off about ten per cent of these.” The Philadelphia press man then noted that many of the men, faced with being sent back North or finding work in Miami, chose to dig ditches for the water department, harder work, in standing water, than they would have had working out the contract. And there was a definite difference in the work certain groups were required to perform: “On the Keys we employ negro labor to cut the right of way where the men build the grade. They have to clear the brush and work in water. You will not find a white man in our employ, outside of the anchor men on the dredges, who has to get his feet wet.” He also reported seeing not a single foreman or crew boss with a weapon. The men were “treated right” according to an interview with worker Martin Haley, which was corroborated by Thomas Galagher, both from Philadelphia. The only men seen with guns were the paymaster and his assistant. On the subject of health, the Inquirer’s man noted the general good condition of the men and that the hospital tents were empty, although some typhoid fever was reported in some of the camps. The tone of the entire interview followed the same pattern. It summed up the visitation by stating: “Through the whole investigation I have been unable to learn of one instance where a man is forcibly detained, worked under armed guard, except in the case of Walking Boss Good, of Camp 9, on Indian Key, who was discharged for going around armed and threatening with a gun the men who would not work.”

Out-of-state papers and magazines also published many investigatory pieces which praised the railroad's treatment of the workers. The Beverley, Massachusetts Evening Times for March 27, 1906, published a report from Florida Keys visitor Mr. Walter L. Stickney, who observed the only armed men in the camps guarded the water tanks because water had to be transported in at a cost of 10 to 15 cents per gallon, and the men were not allowed to use it for bathing purposes. Stickney also stated: "The laborers are paid $1.25 a day and charged
40 cents a day for board or they can look after themselves and the day wage is paid them. The meals are very good. The men get hot biscuit at every meal, fried bacon, corned beef and cabbage, potatoes, hominy, oatmeal, with condensed milk and other side dishes, such as stewed evaporated apples and prunes.” Fine coffee, the reported declared, was served with every meal and Sundays saw rice or bread pudding added to the regular menu. “Any man, who is square with the company,” he announced, “can leave and at any time.” The “loafers” who built up a debt are not allowed to simply skip off and are required to work off their passage. These are the type who complained about “intolerable conditions”, according to Mr. Stickney. Archie H. Law, writing for the LaCross, *Wisconsin Leader Press*, dated April 3, 1906, also noted the false nature of the charges made by members of the Eastern press. He boldly stated in his “Investigating Party” that reports of armed guards, poor food and chain gangs of force laborers were pure “falsehoods.” The wages, he insisted, were fair, the food good and the care of the men in the hands of trained nurses, a fine hospital staff and a “fully equiped hospital” in Miami, available free to all workers. Reports, like these, are found in numerous magazines, newspapers and any other print media of the day. The Flagler system’s propaganda machine, which included ownership of at least four Florida newspapers and heavy stock holdings in the *Florida Times-Union* was very active in joining Congressman Clark in the
defense of the state against the charges of peonage.\textsuperscript{35}

With all the propaganda from both sides hitting the press on a frequent basis, it is easy to lose sight of the trial of Francisco Sabbia and Edward J. Triay, the agents in New York who were most responsible for recruiting foreign labor for the line. The legal action against Sabbia began in March of 1907, with the charges consisting of misrepresentation, abuse, mistreatment, and fraud. The ultimate charge of slavery, not peonage, was thrust upon the case because of the conditions alleged in the complaints and the supposed applicability of an 1866 statute. Triay was also indicted at the time and both had to wait a considerable time before the legal wars ended. In the meantime, the press continued to attack or defend the railroad’s agents depending on the particular slant of the various papers. \textit{The New York Mercantile and Financial Times}, defended Sabbia declaring: “In justice to Mr. Sabbia, however, it may be stated that he has always conducted a model exchange and employment office, and has never as yet intentionally broken the laws of this country. Nor has he ever had a single complaint against his mode of doing business.”\textsuperscript{36} \textit{The New York
Globe ran the headlines: “Thousands Lured to White Slavery on Florida Keys: Arrest and Indictment of Two New York Labor Agents Results in New Exposure of Horrors.” This account of the actions of the railroad, through its agents, even had the men lining up at gunpoint to force a consent to work and obey orders. “Thereafter,” the article reads, “always in debt and guarded day and night, with no escape ... Men, it is said, were shot down like beasts when, exhausted, they refused to work any longer.” Thus did the press wars go on until, in November of 1908, the charges were dismissed.

The dismissal of the case was not unexpected. U. S. Attorney for New York, Henry L. Stimson, had early misgivings about the case and expressed his opinion to the Attorney General of the United States. The statute under which the case was tried, he believed, was too vague and he doubted the ability of the Government to prove its case under such language. He also expressed concerns about Grace Quackenbos’ ability to investigate the case impartially. He believed “her judgment as a lawyer on both the facts and the law are entirely untrustworthy.”

The railroad hired the capable defense attorney, John B. Stanchfield to defend the prisoners. Stanchfield’s defense consisted of arguing that, “peonage,- meaning held in involuntary servitude in payment for debt - could not be proved because slavery was charged in the indictment.”

Judge Charles M. Hough did not agree with the government attorneys that peonage was the same as slavery, but agreed with defense in its argument that there were no applicable Federal statutes against it, as defined in the indictments. Regardless of the truth or falseness of the charges, Quackenbos and her co-counsel, Charles W. Russell, were over-matched. Their case was vague, witnesses unreliable, charges excessive and methods of obtaining evidence questionable.

Some of the charges leveled against the railroad by one historian include the “damning description of the sleeping quarters” which were made of pine framing and slatting, three feet by six and a half feet. The company, he believes, did not sell mattresses because of the vermin problem in the Keys. Unfortunately, this goes against the company’s publicized order for “several hundred special sponge mattresses” ordered from the Miami Sponge Mattress Company. Additionally, the assumption that the size and make of the bed frame and slatting was cruel or unusual also is invalid, when one considers the average military bedding of the day. That the men often did not
have, or more likely use, the legs provided by the company is not a negative reflection on the conditions of the men. As anyone who has camped in the Florida Keys knows, one often has to make adjustments in the sand to get a more comfortable and level surface. Legs sometimes hinder this ability to achieve such comfort. It is interesting, moreover, that the only stories that discuss holding the men at gun point are those “discovered” by Quackenbos and Russell. A simple reading of the newspapers cited above, e.g. the Brooklyn Eagle, would give one all the ammunition needed, if it were reliable. Finally, the oft repeated story of armed black guards holding watch flies into the face of the record. Mr. Flagler and his engineers kept the work forces strictly segregated. Any reading of the weekly work reports from the alleged years of the investigation will demonstrate that whites, immigrant or not, were segregated from black workers. Only one crew during this period was known to have been totally integrated. White crew chiefs may have watched over black laborers, but the reverse was highly unlikely.40

The indictments did not stop with Sabbia and Triay. Project engineers J. C. Meredith and William J. Krome were also indicted for peonage and asked to appear in U. S. District Court in Jacksonville. The arguments and charges were roughly the same as those against Triay and Sabbia in New York. The results were the same too. On June 21, 1909, the charges were dismissed by Judge James W. Locke.41 In no case were any of those charged with peonage actually convicted of it or of slavery. This does not mean that debt peonage did not exist relative to the Florida East Coast Railway.

It is clear from the evidence that men were held against their will until the debt to the railroad was paid off in full. This was admitted in court and in some of the evidence cited above. But, the claim that the railroad held 3,000 men in debt peonage in 1905, as was argued during the opening remarks of the Sabbia case is absurd and is easily dismissed by the record. One of the most frequently published reports in the Miami newspapers of the day was the number of men coming into and leaving the employment of the railroad company. The Krome Collection is filled with these reports. Additionally, the weekly reports, found in the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum Archive in Palm Beach, sum up each week’s activity on the construction of the extension, and contain paragraphs like: “Men continued to leave in consid –
erable numbers during the week, the labor report showing a loss of 200 from the end of the preceding week.”

These kinds of reports, both public and private, do not indicate a wide spread conspiracy to hold thousands in peonage.

With the world wide attention that the construction of the Florida East Coast Railway’s overseas extension brought, including thousands of visitors of all classes, it is remarkable that outsiders did not witness the alleged brutal conditions and threatening behavior of the crew bosses. Is it likely that a system that instituted, by all accounts, one of the first medical insurance plans, maintained a well-staffed and constructed hospital, gave raises to skilled workers in a tight labor market, built houses on the Keys for its work crews and purchased mosquito netting for its workers, actively engaged in constant peonage practices, such as those described by its detractors? Almost all of the actual evidence in the case appears to side with the railroad and against the reformers and muckrakers. It is truly time a more objective view of the matter is taken. Despite their shortcomings, Henry M. Flagler and his system, on closer investigation, deserve a much better evaluation than some chroniclers have been willing to allot them. It is to be hoped that this essay has contributed to the process.
Endnotes

2. Ibid. 19.
3. Jerry Wilkinson, compiler. *Building the Overseas Railroad: Newspaper Clippings October 1905 to December 1906, Preserved by William J. Krome and the Krome Family*. Tavernier: Jerry Wilkinson, 1995. Article entitled: “Condition on the Keys Told by Mr. Triay.” 11. The author is deeply indebted to the compiler, Jerry Wilkinson, for providing a copy of these clippings. William Krome, one of Mr. Flagler’s chief engineers, finished the work Joseph Meredith started, namely the final construction of the overseas railway. Krome kept numerous files of clippings from all over the country, especially the local Miami press. Probably because Mr. Krome, himself, was indicted on peonage charges, he kept a very large number of the articles concerning this problem. He was careful to include all sides of the story in these clippings, especially the socialist newspaper, *Appeal to Reason*, which castigated the railroad for its treatment of workers. This unusually large collection of articles will be frequently cited in this article and will, therefore, be referred to simply as “Krome Collection: Years of the volume (as they are unnumbered at this date), date of the article, if known, and the source, if known.” As can be readily seen, Mr. Krome’s collection was made without due regard for our historian’s compulsion for accurate dating and referencing. Also, the Triay article was sent to J. P. Beckwith, of the FEC, who passed it on to Mr. Flagler. The article was dated January 5, 1906, and is attached to some of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* stationary and can be seen at the St. Augustine Historical Society, “Florida East Coast Railroad” files, Mc 13, Box 1, Folder 20, St. Augustine, Florida. The author would like to thank the Society’s Library staff for their assistance in making these valuable files available.
6. Ibid.
7. Pozzetta. 76. Footnote Number 7.
8. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Florida East Coast Railway. April 19, 1893. St. Augustine Historical Society, Florida East Coast Railway files. St. Augustine, Florida. The author would like to thank Taryn Rodriguez-Boette and her staff for their generous assistance in researching this aspect of the FEC. Also, the author would like to acknowledge the assistance of the late Page Edwards for his encouragement and help in all aspects of the research for this paper.
10. Krome Collection. Volume 1905-06. See July 16, 1906. pg. 105; August 11, 1906. pg. 115; and August 15, 1906. pg. 118. All are presumed to be from the Miami Metropolis.
11. See Pozzetta. 77-78. I have followed Pozzetta’s conclusions regarding the decline of the padrone system, relative to the F.E.C, although the newspapers cited in endnote 8 indicate that the railroad probably used the system longer than is implied in his article. But this is a minor point and is not meant as a criticism of Pozzetta’s sound work.
19. Daniel. Shadow of Slavery. 99. One can write, as Daniel does, that this was the worst case scenario, however, without reporting on the conditions of other railroad camps in the nation, the charge is greatly weakened.
24. Krome Collection. November 1906 (no specific date attached to this clipping). Appeal to Reason. Volume December 1906 - June 1907. 10 A & B.
25. Ibid.
26. Jerrell H. Shofner. "Mary Grace Quackenbos, A Visitor Florida Did Not Want," The Florida Historical Quarterly. LVIII (January 1980), 273-90. Shofner's account of the peonage cases is quite interesting and highly readable. He goes into great detail about these cases, especially those involving the turpentine interests.
27. New York Times, October 18, and 21, 1906. The former article gives Sigmund S. Schwartz' address as 113 and 115 First Street. Schwartz had originally been arrested on July 27, 1906, but was released on a $3,000 bail bond.
28. Richard Barry, "Slavery in the South To-day." Cosmopolitan Magazine, XLII, (March 1907) 5. This magazine is in the Krome Files and available at a number of University Libraries throughout Florida.
29. Florida Times-Union, March 7, 1907. 4. Also see the same paper for March 8, 1907, page 1, concerning the immigration act.
31. Florida Times-Union, August 12, 1894. Clark was appointed to this post by the District Attorney for the Southern District, O. J. H. Summers. It was at this time that he moved to Jacksonville from Bartow.
32. Florida Times-Union, March 5, 1907. 1. The paper was quoting Clark's speech on the floor of the House of Representatives for March 4, 1907.
33. Florida Times-Union, March 26, 1907. Krome Collection. October 1905-December 1906. The author believes that this piece is
is misdated in the collection.


35. See Henry M. Flagler’s “Private Letterbook, August 15th 1899 to November 24, 1899.” Letters of November 13, 1899 [Flagler to Joseph Parrott], 407; November 18, 1899 [Flagler to Parrott], 452; November 20, 1899 [Flagler to Parrott], 459. These letters discuss the purchase of the *Miami Metropolis*, the “Key West newspaper” and the St. Augustine Publishing Company, publisher of the *St. Augustine Record*, respectively. One method Flagler used to force newspapers to be more favorable was to withdraw advertising and the publication of the railroad schedules from the newspapers, which, operating close to the margin in this era, usually was enough to make them become more responsive. [Box 14-H, Book 7] Letter of May 7, 1894, Parrott to Flagler. All found at the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum Archive (White Hall), Palm Beach, Florida.


39. Daniel. *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969*. 95-109. Although the discussion of the case is more or less accurate, it is obvious that Daniel totally believes that the affidavits are believable. From many years of experience as an expert witness and investigator, this a very naive position.

40. Daniel. op. cit. See *Miami Metropolis*, for May 21, 1906, for the mattress order. For the work reports, see the Weekly Reports, 1905 or 1906. Henry Morrison Museum Archive, Palm Beach, Florida. The Photographic collection at the Historical Museum of South Florida also is a good source of information concerning the construction of the Overseas Railroad. The photographs on file there indicate the complete segregation of the work crews.


Black Education in Miami, 1921-1940

by Doug Andrews

Michael W. Homel in his essay “Two Worlds of Race? Urban Blacks and the Public Schools, North and South, 1865-1940,” reports that in both systems blacks were disadvantaged by lower curriculum offerings, overcrowding, poor facilities and inferior materials, and lower salaries for teachers. Additionally, both systems experienced high levels of segregation though the legal system did not require such in the north. Differences also existed among blacks concerning integration versus segregation; northern blacks tended to be slightly less favorably disposed toward integration. Even though these differences are known, Homel states that much research on black urban education remains undiscovered. Thus he identifies four areas that historians might consider when researching urban black schooling: (1) funding differentials, (2) differences in the physical accommodations, (3) the relationship between the schooling provided and the efforts of whites to keep blacks at the bottom of the job ladder, and (4) the process used to deny blacks a meaningful voice in the governing of public education.

What is specifically missing according to Homel is a detailed analysis of individual school systems to demonstrate the scope and depth of the inequality. This article begins to address these issues for Dade County, Florida, by examining the way blacks were treated with regard to the issues Homel identified for the years 1921-1944 in Miami, Florida. To accomplish this end this essay will focus primarily on one black school, Goulds Colored School, and use other schools, black and white for comparison. For this paper the Goulds Colored School will be be referred to by its current name, Mays Middle School except when cited otherwise in source material.
Prior to examining the main issues studied here, a brief early history of the Dade County Public Schools and Mays Middle School is in order. Asterie Baker Provenzo and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., in their *Education On the Forgotten Frontier: A Centennial History of the Founding of the Dade County Public Schools*, wrote that the statutory basis for the public schools were the federal regulations which created the territorial government for Florida and the Florida school law of 1849, which "... designated that the Registrar of the Land Office was to act as State Superintendent of schools and the county probate judges as county superintendents."\(^5\) The law also provided for Trustees to be elected by the taxpayers of each of the school districts in the counties. The Provenzos also observed that under the Presidential Plan of Reconstruction (1866-1868) a separate State System of Common Schools for Freedmen was established. In 1873, the Florida Legislature passed a Civil Rights Law which held that, "... [t]hat no citizen of this state shall, by reason of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, be excepted or excluded from full enjoyment of any accommodation, facility, or privilege ... supported by moneys derived from general taxation or authorized by law ...."\(^6\) The establishment of schools in sparsely populated Dade County took place in 1885\(^7\); at that time, the county was already forty-nine years of age. It appears that the first school for black children in today's Miami-Dade County was established 1896 in Coconut Grove.\(^8\)

The original school in Goulds was organized by Arthur and Polly Mays along with D.D. Cail in 1916 as part of the Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, which they had founded in 1914.\(^9\) Mays was motivated to provide a school for the black children of his community by his own lack of an education; he "... had only six weeks of schooling ... [while] ... his wife Polly [had] completed fourth grade. They knew the value of education and helped each other learn by reading from the Bible and working out mathematics problems."\(^10\) The first teacher, who taught reading, writing, arithmetic and geography, part-time, was Missionary B.F. James. Talmadge Roux and his family moved to Goulds in 1918 and found eighty-two children attending the school with one teacher. Roux joined forces with the Mays and D.D. Cail in an effort to persuade the Dade County School Board to provide another teacher. When the School Board agreed to this request in 1920, the men turned to the newly built New Bethel A.M.E. Church...
for a second classroom. Lidia Walker, the local historian of Goulds, reported that "Miss Maude Roux . . . took over Grades 4, 5 and 6. Miss Mattie Parrish taught Grades 1, 2 and 3." "Grades one through three were taught at Mt. Pleasant; grades four through six attended New Bethel."

**Funding Differentials**

Funding problems for urban black education began shortly after the Civil War. Philip N. Racine, in his essay "Public Education in the New South: A School System for Atlanta, 1868-1879," traces the establishment of Atlanta's public education system and the struggle to support that system with adequate funding. The issue of funding for the schools was a result of the disagreement between the school board and the city council, over how much money should be allocated for public education. This issue also surfaced in Memphis, Tennessee and was partially centered around the question of free education for the black population, and a "mixed" school system. The reason the issue of public funding surfaced only after the Civil War was due to the fact that education was illegal for the black majority of the Southern antebellum population.

Due to the loss of records, it is still not possible to state the early source for funding of the original Goulds school created through Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church. Based upon Dade County School Board records, it appears that the school prior to 1923, was receiving money from a source other than the public educational system since the men who referred to themselves as "the committee of the public school of Goulds Florida" offered to turn over schools funds to the Dade County School Board.

"The following communication was received from the colored people of Goulds:

"To the Bord [sic] of Public Instruction Miami Florida

"We the committee of the public school of Goulds Florida wish to render this as our statement we have on hand one hundred and eighty seven $187.00 which we will turn over to the school board at any specific time,"
"and we will clear and scarify [sic] the land,

"and we have investigated the matter of concerning the two lots which was mentioned before the board and owner of said agreed to exchange two lots and sell tow[sic] or three which ever the board decide. the same will be explained on land map by the committee."

(signed) A. Mays
D.D. Cail
Talmage Roux"16

One can speculate on at least three potential sources of support: the local citizens, the Church, and/or some third party, e.g., a national foundation. Jean Taylor, who authored a history of South Dade recorded verbal reports of local donations and fund raising activities among the black citizens living in the Goulds area.17 Taylor’s history is cited as the authority in other sources that discuss black education in Goulds. As regards national foundations, the School Board Minutes reflect two such national foundations that supported black education, which were operating in Dade County, the Julius Rosenwald Fund and the Slaten Fund; the extent of their involvement in black education in Dade County does not appear to be recorded in local sources.
James D. Anderson in *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860 - 1935*, describes “a crusade for black education in the rural South. This crusade, known by contemporary observers and historians as the Rosenwald school building program, was launched officially in 1914, the same year the migration started in full force.”

Anderson is of course referring to the movement of black laborers from the farms of the rural South to the southern cities and eventually to the North prior to and during World War I. Julius Rosenwald was a Chicago philanthropist and president of Sears, Roebuck, and Company, who became involved in assisting rural black communities in developing an educational system. The first reference to the Rosenwald Fund appears in 1929 when

Mr. John L. Butts, Vocational Supervisor for the County, and James U. H. Simms, colored teacher of agriculture were present and discussed the matter of establishing a canning school at Goulds colored school. The matter will be held in abeyance until it is known to what extent the State Agent for the Rosenwald and Slaten funds will aid.

The Rosenwald Fund support required blacks and the local school system to contribute money and/or labor. It appears from the following quotation that the School Board members and the Superintendent did not fully understand the process used by the Rosenwald Fund for contributing money to black education.

Mr. Dan Roberts and Mr. J. L. Holferty, Trustees of Tax School District No. 7 appeared before the Board and requested that, if possible, transportation be given to the colored children from Naranja and Princeston to the Goulds school. Mr. Holferty stated that a good many children have to walk along the highway and that some walk almost five miles; that there are eighteen children coming from Naranja now and should be quite a few more but they do not come on account of being unable to walk; that the Julius Rosenwald Fund has offered to pay the cost of transportation up to $500 for the first year, one-third of said transportation cost the second year, and one-fourth the third year, after which time the Board will have to take care of it alone.
James U. H. Simms, Principal of Goulds Agriculture School, advised that practically all the Rosenwald Funds are a matter of promotion, and that if the matter of transportation is carried on for a period of three years by that time its value will become established in the minds of the authorities and they will carry it on; that nothing is stipulated about going ahead after the third year.

"On motion duly made and carried, action in the foregoing request was deferred for two weeks."\(^{20}\)

James Anderson wrote that the funds for the second black common school movement were generally allocated according to a formula: "the Julius Rosenwald Fund gave 15.36 percent, rural black people contributed 16.64 percent, whites donated 4.27 percent, and 63.73 percent was appropriated from public tax funds, collected largely, if not wholly, from black taxpayers."\(^{21}\)

The final part of the above quote reflects a belief that blacks were not only cheated by denial of a free public education but that they were cheated out of something they in fact were paying for through their tax dollars. Indeed, there are several examples of black citizens being given what appears to be less than they deserve from the tax dollars they paid, either directly on property they owned or indirectly through rent when they leased. At Mays Middle School, the School Board denied assistance for the purchase of a "Rosenwald Library." According to School Board Minutes, "The Board declined to aid in the purchase of a Rosenwald Library for the Goulds colored school."\(^{22}\)

Later, during the period covered by this study, the Board did contribute one-third of the $120.00 cost of a "Rosenwald Library." The citizens of Goulds and the Rosenwald Fund each contributed one-third.

On motion duly made, seconded and carried the Board voted an appropriation of forty dollars towards the purchase of a Rosenwald library for the Goulds Colored School. It is understood that the library is worth $120.00 and is to be paid for as follows $40.00 from the Board, $40.00 from the community and $40.00 from the Rosenwald Fund. The forty dollars from the community has already been raised and turned into the Finance Department of the Board.\(^{23}\)
Other examples include the Board’s rejection of funding request for improvements, as well as offering blacks less funds in response to request for reimbursements.

Mr. James U. H. Simms, colored teacher of agriculture, requested reimbursement of $129.27 for the expenses of the car furnished him. The Board agreed to pay $70.00 of the amount asked and set his allowance for the future at $20.00 per month.\textsuperscript{24}

D. F. Goodman offered to furnish transportation for five colored pupils from Hialeah to Booker T. Washington colored school for $21.00 per month, $14.00 to be paid by the Board and $7.00 to be paid by the pupils. Franklin Stirrups, Jr., offered to transport eight colored pupils from the Coconut Grove colored school to Booker T. Washington colored school for $20.00 per month to be paid by the Board [sic] and $10.00 per month to be paid by the pupils. The Board decided to offer each bidder $10.00 per month for its share of the transportation.\textsuperscript{25}

The above quote offered no justification for the decisions to provide only partial reimbursement or funding but demonstrates a consistent pattern of under funding services for blacks. In addition, the record reflects a consistent pattern of spending less on the education of black citizens. For example, on January 18, 1930, the principal of Perrine Colored School appeared before the Board to request funds to match a
Rosenwald grant for the transportation of children to that school. "The
should set a precedent for the transportation of colored children."

The Board also declined to establish high school classes at Homestead
Colored School and the Goulds Agricultural School when petitioned
by citizens. In the case of the Goulds community “[t]he Board replied
that it had no funds with which to provide the necessary teacher.”

Salary differentials for white and black teachers represent another
example of how black citizens were given less. In 1926 salaries for
white teachers ranged from $125 to $180, while salaries for black
teachers ranged from $90 to $130. The typical reason given for the
disparity was that blacks teachers had less formal education or a
substandard education. While this may have been the case, the Board
also employed white teachers with less than a bachelor’s degree, as
seen from the minutes of April 1, 1936, when the 1936-37 white
teachers salary scale includes a notice that all teachers will be required
to have a bachelor’s degree by the summer of 1940. Nonetheless, the
1933-1934 salary scales reflect a fifty percent difference in pay for
blacks, even if they held a bachelor’s degree, which continued through
the period covered by this study:

“The New Single Salary Scale adopted for the year 1933-34 is below-
compared with the old Elementary Scale”

Old Elementary Scale:

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
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<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
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<td>$1110</td>
<td>$1140</td>
<td>$1170</td>
<td>$1200</td>
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<th>4th yr</th>
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<th>6th yr</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
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<td>$960</td>
<td>$1020</td>
<td>$1080</td>
<td>$1140</td>
<td>$1200</td>
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Old High School Scale:

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<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>$1080</td>
<td>$1140</td>
<td>$1200</td>
<td>$1260</td>
<td>$1320</td>
<td>$1400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Revised Salaries of High School Teachers:

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<th>2nd yr</th>
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<th>5th yr</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>$1140</td>
<td>$1200</td>
<td>$1260</td>
<td>$1290</td>
<td>$1290</td>
<td>$1290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Salary Schedule for colored Teachers 1933-34

1st Class:
Bachelor Degree from a University, College or Normal Training School. Graduate State or Special Certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st class</td>
<td>$504</td>
<td>$528</td>
<td>$552</td>
<td>$576</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2nd Class:
L.I. Degree from Two-Year college or Normal Training School. First Grade Certificate or Primary Certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd class</td>
<td>$456</td>
<td>$480</td>
<td>$504</td>
<td>$528</td>
<td>$552</td>
<td>$576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3rd Class:
Less than two years of college training but with First Grade or Primary Certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd class</td>
<td>$420</td>
<td>$444</td>
<td>$468</td>
<td>$492</td>
<td>$516</td>
<td>$540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above scale and differential represents a greater disparity for black teachers in 1933-34 than the year before when the above pay rates were approximately $125 less than comparable white salary pay rates for each of the categories below:

Colored Teacher Salary Scale 1932-33

1st Class
Bachelor Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st class</td>
<td>$648</td>
<td>$672</td>
<td>$696</td>
<td>$720</td>
<td>$744</td>
<td>$768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2nd Class
Normal graduate or two years of college with first grade or primary certificate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd class</td>
<td>$576</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$624</td>
<td>$648</td>
<td>$672</td>
<td>$696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3rd Class
Less than two years training with first grade certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st yr</th>
<th>2nd yr</th>
<th>3rd yr</th>
<th>4th yr</th>
<th>5th yr</th>
<th>6th yr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd class</td>
<td>$528</td>
<td>$552</td>
<td>$576</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It appears from the above two scales that black teachers actually took a pay cut that was not as great as the pay cut experienced by white teachers. Also, it is worth noting that School Board members were paid $100 per month for their service.

**Differences in Physical Accommodations**

Marcia E. Turner in her essay “Black School Politics in Atlanta, Georgia, 1869-1943,” identifies adequate facilities as one of the three issues that blacks worked for in Atlanta. Differences in the physical accommodations provided for blacks and whites are easily demonstrated in the case of Mays Middle School. Following the 1923 request for a school building, the Board directed Mr. S. E. Livingston, one of the three School Board members, to meet with citizens requesting the school for Goulds.

A delegation of colored citizens from Goulds came before the Board, asking aid for the erection of a colored school building at that place. This matter was referred to Mr. S. E. Livingston with power to act. Mr. Livingston set the following Friday for these men to meet with the Redland Trustees and himself at his office in Homestead to arrange final details.

Following the request of the citizens of Goulds and their meeting with the trustees, the Board received the following in a letter from William Anderson, S. J. Davis and W. H. Cast:

The local Trustees of district No. 7 recommend that the County School Board erect a Colored School building of two rooms 20X36 and 20X20 not to exceed in cost to County School Board of $1250.00

“(signed) Wm. Anderson, Sec.”
A bond election was scheduled for March 2, 1926 for District 7 which included, "... [f]or construction and furnishing of a colored school building at Goulds, ... 33" What is not clear from the available record is why it took almost three years (June 1923 to January 1926) to move from the decision to provide a school to the decision to ask voters for the funds to build said school. Mr. J. F. Umphrey was awarded the right to build a "... new colored school at Goulds, Florida ... for the amount of his bid $13,754.00." 34 This figure when compared with the $22,442 for the Redland High School addition and repairs seems equitable until one realizes that the bond election was for $130,000 and that a similar pattern of spending differential existed in other school districts. For example, in Larkins (South Miami) the Board accepted bids for an addition to the white school in the amount of $16,497 and for the construction of a black school in the amount of $3,855. 35

The Board Minutes do not explain exactly why the Goulds school building was still in the discussion stage in 1930, but Ms. Lidia Walker's history of Goulds School may offer some insight: "Mrs. Johnnie Mae Everett Mitchell recalls the Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church was destroyed by the 1926 hurricane. Classes and church were held in a tent and in New Bethel A.M.E. Church." 36 Two years later New Bethel was destroyed by the 1928 hurricane and Mt. Pleasant Church hosted the school and the New Bethel congregation. This information along with the discussions of repairs to school buildings and the economic depression during the late twenties and early thirties may account for the delay in starting the permanent building.
Mr. W. H. Mobley, Trustee for District No. 7, was present and asked if the Board could have temporary buildings moved to the colored school site at Goulds. He also asked if that the school might be open in August. The Board asked that the negro church continue to be used as a school house, and said that the school might open in August if the patrons so desired. 37

What is difficult to understand is the 1930 discussion of the cost of building a school after the 1926 awarding of a contract to Mr. J. F. Umphrey.

The Superintendent reported that upon looking at the Goulds Colored school plans provided by the Rosenwald Fund the cost would be $40,000-50,000. “He recommended that this plan be dropped indefinitely and that the Board use certain plans and specifications prepared for this purpose some years ago or employ an architect to provide new plans and specifications, provided the Board wished to proceed with the project. On motion of Mr. Pardon, it was voted that Mr. Fisher be authorized to take the matter up with the Rosenwald Fund and ascertain whether if the School Board erects a building costing approximately $12,000.00 which will meet the local needs, they will aid one-third of that amount and, if not that plans previously drawn be looked over to see whether they
meet the present need; also that the Board determine whether it is advisable to construct the building at all at the present time.\(^3\)

In August of 1929 James U. H. Simms, principal of Goulds colored school, stated the need of additional facilities for the accommodation of increased attendance. The Board responded by first authorizing an additional teacher and then two weeks later authorizing the Superintendent to move a portable to the Goulds school sight. Seven years later the Board authorized the building of "... four toilets, two at Perrine Colored School and two at the Goulds Colored School, the cost not to exceed Two Hundred Dollars ($200.00)\(^3\). One must assume from this that those attending the Goulds School were using outhouses. The following November the minutes note that a $2,088 bid was awarded for the installation of a complete plumbing system and septic tank. One suspects that Redland school, consisting of grades one through twelve, located in the same special tax district did not rely on outside toilets.

Another example of difference in facilities was reflected in the provision of cafeterias: A list of building projects was developed for a period of six years. Goulds Colored School was on the list to receive eight rooms at a cost of $12,000 and a cafeteria at a cost of $4,000. The white school cafeterias ranged in cost from $12,000 to $24,000 with $15,000 being the modal cost.\(^4\)

A major practice in the education of black children in the United States has been the use of churches as schools. Marcia E. Turner in her essay “Black School Politics in Atlanta, Georgia, 1869-1943,” discussed this trend which usually involved leasing the church for a nominal amount.\(^4\) This practice started after the Civil War when large numbers of black freemen sought an education. The following quote suggests that the practice was also necessitated by the lack of options for black communities:

A letter was written from Daniel Iverson, under the date of October 13 one paragraph of which stated that ‘The Negro Ministerial Alliance has heartily approved the use of their churches and six have been obtained for six teachers.’ In order to relieve the overcrowded condition in the Negro schools, Mr. Filer moved and Mrs. Walker seconded the motion that the proposition be accepted and that Superintendent Fisher
be instructed to employ six teachers for the colored churches mentioned in Rev. Iverson's letter. They are to begin work Monday, October 19. Unanimously adopted.42

It should not be assumed that people were indifferent or unaware of the differences between the education provided for blacks:

Mrs. J. Avery Guyton protested against the inadequate facilities of the Negro schools and requested the Board to include enough money in next year's budget to properly house the indefinite number of children who are not now in school. She also protested against the unsanitary conditions existing in the colored schools and requested a fairer distribution of salaries for colored teachers. Mrs. Walker thanked her for her interest in their schools and assured her that the Board would do all in its power to relieve their situation next year.43

As we will see in the next section the differences in the facilities provided for blacks was only part of a "catch 22," which prevented them from advancing.

**Education and Economic Disadvantages**

Blacks were also limited by the quality of schooling provided. Homel suggests that there was a relationship between the schooling provided and the efforts of whites to keep blacks at the bottom of the job ladder. There is ample evidence of this reflected in the Board minutes in numerous places. For example, the Board authorized the purchased of maps at a cost of $1,727.78 for junior and senior high schools and a few elementary schools, but there was no mention of

![THE CLASS OF '29 - BTW'S 2nd GRADUATING CLASS](image-url)
"colored schools" on the list.\textsuperscript{44} Compared with "[u]pon recommendation of Superintendent Wilson and Mr. Conroy, it was moved and seconded that $1000.00 be appropriated for library books for the three negro senior high schools. Unanimously adopted.\textsuperscript{45}" Or, "[i]t was moved and seconded that Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00) be allocated for the purchase of equipment for science laboratories in the Negro high schools.\textsuperscript{46}"

In addition to instructional material differences, school operating hours [differed] for black children:

Upon recommendation of the Trustees of District No. 9, Mrs. Walker moved and Mr. Banton seconded the motion that Superintendent Wilson be authorized to set the time for the opening and closing of the Homestead Colored School so that their three month vacation comes during the harvest season, which would be approximately January through April and that the school operate during the summer months.\textsuperscript{47}

In 1939, the calendar was changed back only to be changed again in 1943.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent and the Supervisor of Negro Education that changes be made in the opening hours of some the colored schools, both to facilitate transportation and to make it possible for the pupils to have a longer afternoon so that they may have time to work in the harvest season after school hours, it was moved and seconded that the following schools be open at 8:30 and dismissed at 3:00 o’clock p.m.: Homestead, Goulds Perrine, South Miami, Hialeah.\textsuperscript{48}

While the last example might be viewed as an attempt to adjust to a wartime shortage of workers, the offering of a substantially different curriculum best supports Homel’s charge that blacks were given an inferior education in order to keep them in a lower position on the economic ladder:

Superintendent Wilson then presented the curriculum for
Booker T. Washington High School which gives pupils four years of home economics or four years of trade study instead of the regular high school subjects, pointing out this would necessitate the revamping of our whole teaching set up at that school and the building at a cost of $6,000, in order to equip the classrooms, but it would save the cost of four teacher at from $800 to $900 a year each.

Mrs. Walker moved the adoption of a resolution to appropriate $6,000.00 to equip the Booker T. Washington High School for a vocational school rather than a college preparation school. Unanimously adopted.49

A vocational course of study would limit the future employment possibilities for the students of the black school and thus reduce any competition for white citizens in employment. In other words, whites would have an advantage and find it easier to accept the fact that blacks were not qualified for employment in the professional fields.
Denial of a Meaning Voice in Governance

The process used to deny blacks a meaningful voice in the governing of public education in much of the South was disenfranchisement. The poll tax, the grandfather clause and literacy test are well documented devices employed for this purpose. The Dade County School Board minutes also demonstrate other tactics such as the establishment of "an auxiliary board for the colored schools," claiming to have no money for requests, and deflecting requests by offering less expensive options.

"The subject of appointing a committee of colored citizens to act in the capacity of an auxiliary board for the colored schools of Dade County was brought up by Dr. Holmes and discussed. On recommendation of prominent and influential citizens of both races the Board appointed the following negroes; D.A. Dorsey, Dr. W.A. Chapman, and Dr. John P. Scott. This committee has no power under the law but is created by the School Board as a go-between to facilitate the proper supervision and regulation of the colored schools of the entire community.\(^{50}\) (emphasis added)

While the above quote is from 1921, later minutes from the thirties indicate some willingness to take suggestions from the members of the auxiliary board. D. A. Dorsey went before the Board in 1934 to request funds for transporting children to Booker T. Washington High School and was told to secure bids for such services and present them at a special meeting. When Dorsey appeared a month later to present the bids, he was referred to a special budget meeting and the Supervisor of Teachers, Mr. I. T. Pearson was instructed to work out some plan in order that the colored students could attend school in their respective communities and avoid being transported to the Washington School. Pearson recommended the construction of portables at a number of schools as a way of relieving congestion in the black schools. This solution might appear to have merit unless one stops to consider that a high school plant generally requires a more complex building than an elementary or junior high school plant; the original request was for transportation to B.T. Washington High School\(^{51}\). Additionally, this example demonstrates that the efforts of black leaders or citizens were deflected or limited, i.e., they were denied a meaningful voice in the governing of public education.

The Board’s claims of lack of funds when presented with requests
from black citizens do not hold up to a careful reading of the Minutes. It was not uncommon to read that funds were lacking when requested for the needs of blacks, and while money was usually available for the needs of whites:

Canary Robinson, Principal for Goulds Colored School, presented the following petition signed by the patrons:

We the patrons of Goulds and Homestead are sending you this petition asking you to please establish a senior high school at the Goulds Agriculture School. We do hereby promise our cooperation in sending our children to school. Goulds is the central place in this section of the county and we are not able to send our children away from home, yet it is our desire to have them continue their education. The establishment of a senior high school will necessitate the assignment of another teacher, so please give us some consideration. (no signatures recorded

The Board stated that it had no funds with which to provide an additional teacher.52

One week later the Minutes show the Board agreeing to pay $100 a month for an additional bus to carry white children from Hialeah to Miami Edison High School due to overcrowding on the existing bus.53 In addition, the records reflect the payment of $50 a month to several administrators for car allowance.

That blacks received a substantially lower education in the South is an accepted fact in United States history. This essay has attempted to show four ways that this end was accomplished in one mid-sized Southern city. In the Dade County school system blacks were disadvantaged through funding differentials, differences in physical
accommodations, the level of education provided, and denial of a meaningful voice in the governing of public education. The School Board Minutes for the period 1921-1940, were used to demonstrate the process used to provide blacks with a substandard education. Other questions remain: Did this process continue in the period beyond this years of this study? And, if so, for how long? What was the extent of the work by the Rosenwald Fund in Dade County? What was the source of the early funding and land for the school in Goulds? Hopefully, additional scholarship will be forthcoming on this important topic.
Endnotes


2. Ibid., p. 146.

3. The period examined for this study is the interwar period, an exciting time of boom, bust and boom for the black and white population of Dade County. There were references to Goulds Colored School in an index to the Board Minutes for the following dates: “August 1, 1916 - Patrons petition referred to Trustees (page 549);” “November 4, 1919 - Colored school to remain at Goulds (page 894);” “November 26, 1919 - Proposal that school be moved to Black Point (page 834),” “January 6, 1920 - Patrons petition for establishment of school (page 843),” “February 3, 1920 - Site and building donation by patrons (page 865),” “August 3, 1920 - Site donated (page 938).”

4. The Goulds Colored School has gone by various names during the years: Goulds Agricultural School, Goulds Junior High School, Arthur and Polly Mays Junior and senior High School, and Mays Middle School.


6. Ibid., p. 22.


8. Ibid., p. 44.


10. Jean Taylor, Villages of South Dade, St. Petersburg, Fla.: Byron Kennedy, [1985?]. p. 139


Schools: Public Education in the Urban South, edited by David N. Plank and Rick Ginsberg. p. 32.


16. Dade County School Board Minutes (SBM) 6/19/23 p. 1557 (special meeting) It appears from the minutes that three members of the Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist School Board, Mays, Cail and Roux, appeared before the Dade County School Board on June 12, 1923 to request a building and then returned to the Dade County School Board on June.

17. Jean Taylor, Villages of South Dade. p. 139.


22. SBM 3/7/30, p. 3004.

23. SBM 11/1/33, p. 4092.

24. SBM 2/20/29, p. 2648.

25. SBM 9/26/28, p. 2611.

26. SBM 1/18/30, p. 2910.

27. SBM 9/21/32, p. 3748.


30. Turner, p. 163.

31. SBM 6/12/23, p. 1554 (special meeting). The county was divided into 10 Special Tax School Districts with each district having three elected Trustees who served for two-year terms. These Trustees oversaw the operations of the schools in their district, making recommendations on hiring, rehiring teachers and other personnel, and seeing that the schools were maintained properly. The Recording Secretary Office of the School Board has some deteriorating notes from Trustees’ Meetings which are illegible in addition to incoherent; other than this meager collection nothing exists to describe these bodies.
32. SBM 6/19/23, p. 1554 (special meeting).
33. SBM 1/26/26, p. 2114.
34. SBM 6/1/26, p. 2274.
35. SBM 7/14/24, p. 1762.
36. Walker p.4
37. SBM 7/25/28, p. 2589.
39. SBM 12/30/36, p. 5526.
40. SBM 10/12/36, p. 5482.
41. Turner. p. 163.
42. SBM 10/14/36, p. 5484.
43. SBM 3/10/37, p. 5597.
44. SBM 4/14/37, p. 5660.
45. SBM 9/3/41, p. 6842.
46. SBM 10/22/41, p. 6872.
47. SBM 5/19/37, p. 5822.
48. SBM 9/1/43, p. 7206.
49. SBM 8/4/37, p. 5951.
50. SBM 1/19/21, p. 1003.
51. SBM 7/18/34, p. 4462. “Mr. I.T. Pearson, Supervisor of Teachers, recommended by letter the construction of additional portable buildings at the following schools with the number of building required set opposite the name of the school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hialeah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty City</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconut Grove</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Miami</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allapattah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Franjo Frams 1

“Mr. Pearson further advised that if the facilities are provided as enumerated above, the need for transporting of colored children to Booker T. Washington High School in Miami would be obviated.”

52. SBM 9/21/32, p. 3748.
Miami’s Land Gambling Fever of 1925

by Bénédicte Sisto, M.A.

In the Parisian newspaper Le Gaulois of January 9, 1926, Jean Forestier, Park Commissioner of Paris, wrote an interesting account of his visit to Miami the previous year:

Miami is not strictly speaking the residence of these tourists. It is the center of their real estate affairs. It is surrounded by all the new subdivisions which grow in a few months as if by magic on the low, flat and humid soil. Miami offers to the newcomer, as he descends from the train into that exciting atmosphere, a most unexpected sight. The fever of construction, the incessant movement in the streets, often too narrow for the crowds of men and women and for the circulation of the many automobiles, one at least to each inhabitant; shops – agencies for the sale of real estate; banks, beauty parlors; restaurants. All are open on the street. One enters a shop and is offered a visit in an automobile bus to a new subdivision that is being constructed on the outskirts. [...] Just how much time has all this growth taken? It has required, one might say, about four years. It has arrived, this year, at a high point which saviors of a miracle.¹

What exactly is the miracle identified in this French view of Miami? The following essay will attempt to determine some of the main characteristics of Miami’s land gambling fever of 1925, focusing on the various factors that led to this national phenomenon and on the role of the Magic City as the place where the boom reached its zenith.
Miami, A City Upon the Tropics

In 1896, the year when Miami was incorporated, a journalist from the *Miami Metropolis* stated: “It is only a question of time when this locality will be the most noted winter resort in the United States.” With the likes of such visitors as the Rockefellers, Astors, Carnegies and Vanderbilts, Miami quickly became the famed resort prophesied here. Miami launched its first national advertising campaign during World War I, with the result that many of the new visitors were middle class. What Palm Beach was to the wealthy few, Miami was now determined to be to the middle-class. In an early 1920s brochure published by the Miami Chamber of Commerce, one could read:

If casual tourist, your visit will be a perpetual delight.
If home-seeker, there is an ideal environment here for all that the word ‘home’ means, yet distinctly different.
If investor, here opportunity is blazing manifold for those who seek her.
Come to Miami, easily reached and easily enjoyed, the city of a thousand enchantments, where the glorious sunshine, the balmy sea-breezes and God’s smiling outdoors await you.³

Miami’s three greatest assets, its unique sub-tropical climate and ambiance, the proximity of the place, and its sensational demographic growth, were used as the key components of the campaign to promote the beach resort. If Southern California had already gained much popularity due to her climate – it was said to be “Perpetual Spring” in Los Angeles – Miami proclaimed her superiority as the place “Where Winter [Was] Turned to Summer.”⁴ As journalist Kenneth L. Roberts humorously pointed out in 1922, “The sun is larger and warmer than in other parts of America; and the sky – unless the Florida authorities are mistaken in their observations – is higher and bluer than elsewhere.”⁵ Likewise, a newspaper correspondent observed that the climate was Miami’s “own champagne.”⁶ At a time when two-thirds of the American population lived in the northeast, the strategy also consisted in stressing the fact that California was seventy-two hours from Chicago, Miami a day and two nights.⁷ Finally, the remarkable growth of Miami was apparent in Federal Census from 1920, which showed “The Wonder City of America” to be growing faster than any
other city in the country, a gain of 440% over the population figures for 1900. Dade County, of which Miami was the county seat, led all counties with a 258 percent\(^8\) growth rate. In 1920, Miami was the fourth largest city in Florida with 29,571 inhabitants and was anxious to have the public to recognize her greatness as a resort. Carl Fisher, who had transformed a mangrove swamp into the paradisiacal Miami Beach, was very active in the promotion of Miami Beach as the new winter playground of the nation.\(^9\) For instance, in 1922, he managed to negotiate an illuminated sign in New York City, at the corner of 42\(^{nd}\) Street and Fifth Avenue. On this sign, one could see an attractive sunset and coconut trees with the legend, “It’s Always June in Miami.” When discussing the sign with the Miami and Miami Beach Chambers of Commerce, Fisher wrote: “I believe that this sign constantly standing out on rainy and stormy nights during the winter season would be of great value, as no doubt, more people pass this corner than any other in the United States, and particularly the very highest class people in automobiles go up and down the avenue, and people from all over the world are up and down this street every day.”\(^10\)

The impact of Miami’s dynamic advertising campaign was beyond all expectations, with sun worshippers suddenly flocking to Florida in greater numbers than ever. In a letter addressed to a Miss Whitney in April 1924, Fisher remarked: “The present season has been the best season we have ever had; but it will not compare with next season. In our estimation, it is entirely unnecessary to spend money advertising Miami in Northern papers. The time has passed when we need advertise for the city. [...] Miami’s population is gaining over Palm Beach three or four to one, also their wealth is about the same proportion, and yet, for twenty years, Palm Beach has had probably twenty times as much advertising as Miami has had.

The best advertising Miami had in the North is from the visitors who are here. One visitor singing the praises of Miami in the North is worth more to Miami than a half-page in the largest newspaper in the country, even if the ad is run every day. We believe in advertising, but all good advertisers agree that there is no advertising equal to satisfied customers.

Miami and Miami Beach receive annually hundreds of thousands of dollars of free publicity from the people who
have been here. There are as many people west of the Mississippi River who know as much about Miami and Miami Beach as we have people in the same district who know anything about Paris or London.\textsuperscript{11}

During the first half of the twenties, the population of Miami almost doubled during the winter months; also, it was estimated that more than 300,000 visitors stopped in the sub-tropical city every twelve months.\textsuperscript{12} This influx gave impetus to the demand for more hotels, houses, roads, and public utilities. Consequently, construction work of all kinds increased enormously. Hundreds of hotels, apartment houses and homes were built,\textsuperscript{13} with a wide selection to meet every demand. For example, Miami proposed "moderate hotels at a modest tariff or palatial hotels with extensive subtropical gardens where tea dances [were] held amid palms and a riot of colorful foliage."\textsuperscript{14} Examining this intense building activity in 1922, a reporter from The Saturday Evening Post identified the emergence of real estate speculation: "The publisher of the leading Miami paper declares that in some sections of the city, the soil is so fertile that if a shingle is planted in it before sunup, it will grow into a fully equipped bungalow by nightfall.

Miami surges ahead so rapidly that none of its citizens dares to stand still for a moment in order to watch it grow, for fear that he'll be left so far behind that he'll never catch up. If he makes a prediction, he makes a running prediction; never a standing prediction. If he sells a piece of land — and it's as natural for a Miami citizen to sell a piece of land as it is for him to have coffee for breakfast — he is very likely to name a price that the land will reach tomorrow instead of the price that it has reached today. He is always moving ahead of the city. [...]

The real estate operations in Miami are on a scale that will provide building lots enough to go around. The exact number of real estate dealers in Miami is not known. Practically everyone over eighteen years of age dabbles in real estate at one time or another. Almost everyone owns a lot somewhere that he is anxious to get rid of, although it is unanimously admitted by the owners that every lot in Miami will double in value in a year's time. Almost every other doorway along Miami's crowded streets shelters a real estate firm.\textsuperscript{15}
Miami Wonder Stories

During the following months, a myriad of stories of amazing profits made in Florida land speculation spread throughout the United States. In *The New Republic* of March 26, 1924, one could read that Mrs. X had just sold her home for $100,000; she had purchased it three years before for $18,000, but the business district had marched down upon her and devoured her hearthside at the compensation stipulated. Mr. Y had bought in Inglenook-by-the-Sea for $2,500 in 1921, and had refused $25,000 a few years later; he was holding out for $50,000. Mr. Q’s orange ranch lay along the route of a new boulevard and his net profit on four years’ ownership was $15,000 a year, of which $900 was from the oranges. Miami wonder stories were manifold:

In 1917, F. B. Miller purchased eight and a half acres on the bay front, between the Causeway and Collins Bridge, for $85,000. The same season, he sold the tract at a net profit of $60,000. Now single lots on the bay front in this tract are priced at around $85,000 and lots back from the bay at from $40,000 to $60,000. Acreage on Flagler Street at Twenty-second Avenue was sold about fifteen ago for thirty dollars an acre. It is now worth $75,000 an acre, according to lot prices. [...]”

J. W. Rice, known among polo players as Jimmy Rice, two years ago purchased lots in the Sunset Lake section of Miami Beach for $18,000. He has just sold the lots for $70,000. [...]”

Back in 1911, after many winters spent in Miami, Mr. Higheyman, whose former home was in St Louis, purchased twenty-three acres of swamp land from Mrs. William Brickell, to which he added five acres by filling in from the bay, making twenty-eight acres in all, the addition being the first filled ground in Miami. During his residence there, he had heard Mrs. Brickell say on several occasions that she intended doing something with the swamp land. One day, he conceived the idea of purchasing this land and developing it himself, which he did, paying $80,000 for the twenty-three acres. It is now worth more than $2,000,000.
These stories about soaring land values fed the Miami fever and encouraged increasing numbers of Americans to pour their retirement savings into Florida real estate. Parallel to the land speculation, the news spread that Miami visitors spent sleepless nights dancing and drinking in the various clubs of the Magic City. In 1924, after four years of National Prohibition, one could read in the national press that the Volstead Act seemed to be a failure in Florida where people did not obey what they considered a bad law. A classic description of the site included the fact that Miami was a hotbed for bootlegging and smuggling due to her proximity to wet Bimini, Nassau, and Havana. Recalling his trip to boom-time Florida, one reporter explained: “Never, along any beach I ever traversed, in any part of the world, did I find so many empty whisky bottles as I have found along Miami Beach. These bottles all bore Scotch labels, and were especially numerous in the vicinity of the palatial hotels.” Another observer pointed out that this industry was so elaborate, part of it was carried on under the thin pretense of the fishing business: “Any visitor may see the cheering spectacle of twenty huge limousines waiting in line at the entrance to a ‘fish wharf,’ their owners supposedly so overcome by the craving for piscatorial delicacies that they insist on driving home with the fish, wrapped in square packages.” Tales that the law worked badly, therefore allowing one to live a rebellious lifestyle in Edenic Southern Florida, was another substantial factor that fueled the migration.

In 1925, Miami became the most talked about place in America with sky-high building permits, real estate transfers and bank deposits. A land speculation of extraordinary dimensions was taking place on the Florida peninsula, and Miami appeared to be the center of this fascinating moment in financial history. The summer of 1925 was the first time ever the normal lull of low season did not occur in Miami: “People from the four corners of the land poured into Florida by tens of thousands.”
Lyman Delano, vice-president of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, would later recall. “They come, in droves, flocks, herds,” according to one account in The New Republic. Richard E. Edmonds, editor of Manufacturers’ Record, related in The American Review of Reviews: “The highways running from the North and the South have for months been black with automobiles Florida-bound. [...] For months, the railroads leading to Florida have been crowded, likewise the steamship lines; and arrangements on both are being made from four weeks to two months or more in advance.”

As tourists overran the State seeking fortune, it was observed that those who made up the rush to Miami were “a veritable cross-section of American life: the butcher, the baker, from the big cities, from Main Street, and from the country behind Main Street, they come. The greater part have deliberately come to buy; others coming for winter months on a vacation have caught the fever and become property owners. [...] The bulk of the purchasers, it would seem, are hard-working, middle-class, small town folks.”

These newcomers crowded into the sixty-mile stretch going all the way from Palm Beach to Miami along the shore faster than hotels could be raised to hold them. As they went along the American Riviera, making it the country’s biggest tourist draw, they drove through a huge checkerboard of real estate lots, some large tracts of land being taken up to be subdivided into small farms, and others turned into individual lots – it was estimated that there were more than 500,000 home-site lots for sale in this Southern region served by a single railroad and one through highway. As one drew closer to Miami, everything seemed to move faster and faster:

Miami is but a few hours by train from Palm Beach, through orange groves and acres of palmettos, and we may add, countless real estate developments, for Florida is in the throes of the most tremendous real estate boom known in history. Everywhere one goes one sees nothing but real estate developments. Everyone talks, eats, and drinks real estate, and the center of activity is Miami.

One witness vividly recalled Downtown Miami simmering with excitement at the height of the boom:
It was 1925 and I shall never forget Flagler Street. It used to have shops, I imagine, just like any main street, but when we got there, there wasn’t any business but real estate offices. You couldn’t even buy a Coca Cola on the whole street! You couldn’t even walk down the sidewalks, it was so crowded! You had to walk out on the street if you wanted to get anywhere.\(^{30}\)

Quite a number of contemporary observers told of how the traffic was even worse than in Manhattan.\(^{31}\) "All day long and half the night, the cars shot through the main artery of the town, old broken-down flivvers with tents and bundles tied grotesquely to the sides, limousines of more aristocratic lineage, cars from Kentucky, Idaho, California, New Jersey, Illinois, from everywhere."\(^{32}\) The lack of parking lots for this herd of automobiles is indicated by aerial shots of 1925 Miami showing hundreds of automobiles parked on the City’s waterfront property.

As mentioned earlier, the whirlpool of activity was centered in the Miami region where everything was seemingly for sale. Examining this active social scene, a newspaper correspondent wrote: "Whoever remains longer than a week and does not buy a lot must be an incorrigible iconoclast, or blind, deaf and paralyzed. There is no other subject of conversation but buying and its potentialities."\(^{33}\) Similarly, in the *Miami Daily News* ‘“monster edition”\(^{34}\) of July 26, 1925, a contemporary observer named Jule King pointed out that there were more real estate salesmen than any other profession in Miami:

> The only people who don’t sell real estate in Miami are those who don’t have a window to put a sign on. Real estate in Miami is just as necessary as politics in Washington. Everybody comes to it sooner or later. It doesn’t make much of a difference whether you are on the buying or selling end as long as you have your finger somewhere in the pie so you can discuss it at dinner parties and after church. Why? If you didn’t know anything about real estate down here, you wouldn’t be able to talk to two thirds of the population because that’s the only kind of language they speak.\(^{35}\)

Indeed, everybody seemed to join the ranks of those selling land as if the contagion was irresistible. Young men just out of high school joined “Binder Boys,” “professional” speculators who swept into Miami and
southeast Florida in 1925 from the Northeast to make a killing in this high stakes land lottery. Houses and lots, acreage and apartments passed from owner to owner “in almost kaleidoscopic succession. Prices that even make the most visionary Floridians shake their heads are paid, and the properties immediately resold for still higher figures.”

Miami was immersed in land speculation, and everyone seeking fortune without work was constantly reminded that ten minutes was ancient history in Florida real estate.

At the peak of the boom, an estimated 25,000 real estate agents said to be “capable of selling refrigerating machines to inhabitants of the Arctic Pole” were attached to one or more of the 2,000 real estate offices in the city — including almost 200 offices in downtown Miami. A poem by Grace McKinstry describes what it was like to see it first-hand:

The realtors across the street,
White-knickered, smiling, watch and wait:
Their maps are blue, their desks are neat,
Their signs say brightly, “Real Estate.”
Their offices of modest size
May shelter half a dozen firms,
Their blackboards give the day’s Best Buys,
“Third cash and very easy terms”

All just alike, door after door,
All selling acreage or lots,
Close in – For Business – North Shore,
The Southland’s Choicest Beauty Spots.
And men who buy can soon resell
And double on their cash – perhaps;
Friends hasten in to do as well –
More contracts, abstracts, listings, maps.
Invest, resell, and so it goes
All through the block that faces me.
Just deals and profits.

People were accosted repeatedly on Miami streets and offered free dinners and bus trips by high-pressure salesmen encouraging them to ‘invest’ - the verb ‘speculate’ being excluded from people’s vocabul —
ary. All Florida was good ("Buy anywhere, you can’t lose"); people could not go wrong since what they were buying was not the land but the Florida climate. Journalist Bruce Bliven relates how tides of realtors pushed the temperature still higher:

“Every day, their bus loads of sheepish, fascinated tourists go out to “the property” accompanied by wolf-eyed salesmen, incredibly dapper and slick, flirting discreetly with daughter Susie as they sell lots to Paw and Maw. […]

“The day’s ingredients are a lecture by a spellbinder, under a circus tent, a bad free lunch, and highly intensive work by the salesmen, each of whom cuts out his little group of victims from the general flock and herds them off in a corner among the white-painted lot stakes, waving a crumpled blue-print as he expounds the glories of the future city which is to arise dreamlike upon this desolate plain. […]

“To be sure, he omits a few things. He fails to mention that much land securely high and solid during the midwinter dry season is flooded when it rains. He skips lightly over the fact that the water at present furnished to Miami and most of its suburbs is undrinkable, the whole population consuming bottled stuff. He omits to note that lots have been laid out for a city of at least two million, and that the collapse of the boom and a deflation of values is therefore inevitable, no matter how rapidly Miami grows, nor to what ultimate size.”

To the thousands of “boomers” too much in a hurry to “bother their brains with the location,” the salesmen would simply show a vague map of the area and tempt them with honeyed words and references to extraordinary values. In most case, the victims would buy at a torrid pace, instantly selecting their lots from this meaningless blueprint and signing a contract either in the street or in a real estate office “replete with huge and gaily printed maps of their properties and fascinating bird’s-eye models showing the future city bustling with life and activity.” Each map was invariably labeled: “Construction to be started immediately.”
An Over-Priced Market

Real estate transactions proceeded extremely fast since a mere deposit of generally no more than 10% of the total price allied to a single signature on a “binder” was enough to close the deal. “You didn’t have to have witnesses, things did not have to be attested by a notary public, so it was exceedingly easy to get contracts put on record,” recalled Adam G. Adams. This deposit system turned out to be the basis of millions of dollars made during the boom since the nominal sum was legally sufficient to close a land deal, and the first installment (usually 25% of the purchase price) could not be demanded until the title to the property had been cleared. In the summer of 1925, the congestion in law offices was such that it extended the deadline that determined the first installment. People now having to wait from four to six weeks to have their property transactions recorded, ‘binder boys,’ professional depositors, dominated the scene, encouraging extremely fast re-sales and boosting the increase in land prices up to insane proportions. By the end of the year 1925, land on Florida was worth more than New York City property. To the newcomers who argued that values were extremely high by comparison with prices for land in and about the town up North, realtors replied that people in the North were quite unable to appreciate the Florida situation because prices elsewhere “were not a proper standard of comparison.”

Jack Bell, a journalist for the Miami Herald at the time of the boom, remembers that the binder boys came from everywhere. “They wore fancy shirts, plus-four golf knickers and argyle knee-length sox. Every binder boy had a plat of his corporation’s land, a fast sales chatter and a little binder book wherein you signed on the dotted line. [... ] You often thought, when you signed with a binder boy, that you had bought a piece of property. Perish forbid. The instant he got your signature, especially on your check, he became your agent. ‘You’ve bought a steal,’ he’d say. ‘I’ll sell your equity in this lot before sundown or I’m a dirty dog. And we’ll split a neat profit!’ The strange part of this was that often he was right. Parcels of land, often under water (except on the realty plat) sold three, six, nine times, always at a profit.”

Hundreds of gullible speculators had become the owners of lots that were still under water or in subdivisions having been created far inland, “on flat and arid plains or among scrubby forests of the native pine.” Also, with the Florida East Coast Railway embargo on
building material imposed in late summer 1925, defective and inappropriate building materials were used by dishonest constructors. After the hurricane of September 18, 1926 destroyed hundreds of homes in the Miami region, a reporter returning from an investigation through the State remarked that many unskilled persons anxious to make money quickly had turned to the manufacture of cement blocks:

“They occasionally used about a handful of cement to a barrel of sand and made so-called cement blocks from the resulting mixture.

“Since houses were being rushed to sell during the boom period, these blocks were frequently built into the walls of houses before they had set, and the houses were built without any thought of wind pressure. The people who built them had heard of hurricanes in a vague way, but probably thought of them – if at all – as something used by novelists to further the action of their stories.

“One of the peculiarities of a cement block is that it sucks up water like a sponge. Consequently, if the blocks are not wet down when they are being built into a wall, they suck all the water out of the mortar that is supposed to join them to adjacent blocks, and the mortar dries up into a sandy substance that has little or no strength. When a wall like this is given a brisk kick, it trembles violently; on receiving two or three more brisk kicks in the same place, it falls down.”

Adam G. Adams provides confirmation that the builders were imaginative people buying up all sorts of things to put in houses:

The first house we had out here was built by a man named Nichols from Atlanta who was financed by Lindsey Hopkins, and there was every sort of thing put into that building. They bought tile down from Chatanooga, and used them instead of blocks; they used pine woods that they’d keep up through all the State of Florida, and they used concrete blocks that had practically no cement in them. There was no cement mill anywhere near around. The closest cement mill was Richard City, Tennessee, near Chatanooga. So they did the best they could, but houses were anything but uniform in their material. [...] They couldn’t get any laths, so they just plastered inside right on the blocks, just as they do on the outside.
Miami, A New State of Mind

By the end of 1925, Miami went through the inevitable experiences that always accompany boom times wherever they may develop. In a few months, the extraordinary land values of the region deflated, and after the big fall, Miami entered a lengthy economic depression. On the positive side, however, the boom brought great development and maturation to Miami. It focused, as nothing else could, the attention of the whole country on one of America’s youngest urban areas. America was experiencing a great spending spree that was to mark the development of consumerism as a lifestyle. Contrary to the past when people often used the good times to save up for the bad, “saving for a rainy day” was no longer in fashion judging from the boom in Florida real estate. Land speculation, a sign of the high-flying economy of the 1920s, brought thousands of workers and accumulated capital from the North to the American Riviera and accelerated Miami’s development into a growing metropolis. After the boom, Florida and Miami were as firmly on the map as the Mediterranean shore or Southern California.

From a larger perspective, the great Florida real estate boom illustrates the significance in nineteen-twenties American life “of the mere fact that freedom of movement has been increased a hundred-fold.” Indeed, with the significant rise of the automobile industry (more than half the middle-class owned a car in 1925) and the development of assembly-lines leading to a decline in working hours, urban America discovered extreme mobility, the pleasures of travel and climatic change, and recreation as well as vacationing became a national passion. Within this context of significant social changes, the boom appeared to be a startling demonstration of an eager pursuit of pleasure contrasting with mainstream norms, values and codes of behavior. At a time of prosperity, Miami offered relaxation in the sub-tropics as well as financial opportunities for those willing to get rich quick in a newly developing region. Unquestionably, the feverish speculation which occurred in 1925 indicated a widespread desire of soft living having reached a point unsuspected until then, as evidenced by the following excerpt from the January 27, 1926 edition of The New Republic:
There was a time when the mere notion that hundreds of thousands of Americans would go to great expense and no small degree of trouble primarily to avoid the rigors of a winter in the North, would have been greeted with incredulous scorn. There is every evidence that this desire for soft living, whether or not it was latent in us in the past, has today become an important aspect of American civilization as a whole.

“We are all practitioners in greater or less degree of the new hedonism. We insist on living, if not for pleasure alone, at least a life in which comfort and ease are predominant aspects. […]”

The mere physical difficulties of life, particularly in our highly-mechanized, overcrowded cities, may be a factor in causing people to seek to escape, even though they reach in the end another community equally mechanized. Certainly, the America of today which finds its physical basis increasingly in hotel and apartment house life, with its incessant use of the automobile (of which there are now four for each five families), its never-ending search for outside stimulation, gratified through the radio, the motion picture, the floods of cheap fiction magazines, the dance craze, the bridge craze – such an America gives its population no opportunity to strike its roots very far in any soil. […]

“The Florida madness is itself sufficient proof that this civilization is still far from having found its equilibrium.”61
This new state of mind was crucial to the boom and what happened in Florida can be interpreted as a revelation of the underlying weaknesses of the 1920s. As the author Will Payne stated in June 1925, “Florida merely carries the modern idea of simplification one important step farther. In pursuit of the simplest, pleasantest mode of living, more people will go to Florida. The Florida idea may spread.”

To a large extent, Miami prepared the way for the major changes that were to take place during the following decades. Shortly before his death in 1913, Henry Flagler declared that he could have been the second richest man in the world if he had cared to remain in New York, but he had “seen an opportunity for opening up a vast territory to the good of humanity, by the creation of great pleasure and health resorts and limitless agricultural opportunities.” Similarly, when the boom declined, economist Roger B. Babson wrote that the real and permanent thing about Florida was not its real estate boom but rather its great future as the home of health and happiness: “In speculation, the tide comes in and the tide goes out. Profits wax and wane. But health and happiness are permanent interests. People will go to Florida for health and happiness long after every bubble has burst. The boom will ultimately die down, but Florida will live on.” Truly, Miami encouraged a cultural revolution in social habits. Since the end of the Second World War, the colorful, paradisiacal Magic City has been a health resort as well as a land of winter sports and recreation to millions of visitors eager to escape the restraints and constraints of society. Last but not least, Miami continues to offer unmatched climatic conditions and one of the most beautiful sights in Florida without highly materialistic guests being deprived of any of the conveniences of modern life.
To Miami's land gambling fever of 1925, advertising Southeast Florida's advantages and attractions throughout America, showed urban as well as rural workers that winter vacationing was a new necessity of life not reserved to wealthy entrepreneurs, and that an "exotic" scenery did not necessarily mean that the host area was "remote" or "threatening," it could also be a fascinating place where, as if by magic, one could bring to fruition his own idea of paradise. The trappings of the American dream had clearly gone upscale.
Endnotes
10. Correspondence between Carl Fisher and T. J. Pancoast, November 7, 1921, Carl Fisher Papers, Historical Association of Southern Florida.
11. Correspondence between Carl Fisher and a Miss A. Whitney, April 3, 1924, Carl Fisher Papers, Historical Association of Southern Florida.
13. In 1926, Miami contained 136 hotels, 665 apartment houses and more than 25,000 homes. “The first Thirty years of Miami and The Bank of Bay Biscayne – 896-1926,” Miami, Florida, Bank of
Biscayne Bay, 1926 promotional brochure, 24.
18. Some participants in the 1925 migration to Florida also learned about the boom by accident. S. M. Green remembers the unusual circumstances that led to his leaving for Florida: “My wife and I had just been married about a year, and we decided we wanted a new car, so the salesman came up to the house to sell us a car, and he said: ‘You don’t want to buy a car! If I were as young as you, folks, I’d go down to Florida! There’s a boom down there, and I wouldn’t go any place but Miami!’ And we did just that!” Sylvia Camp Interviews Mr. S. M. Green,” Pioneer Voices of the Junior League of Miami, 1970.
22. The monetary value of building construction in Miami totaled 4.5 million dollars in 1920; it exceeded 60 million dollars in 1925. 21,968 real estate transactions were recorded in 1920, and about 175,000 in 1925. Miami’s bank deposits amounted to approximately 17 million dollars in 1920; they reached more than 192 million dollars in 1925. One observer remarked in 1925: “During business hours, the banks in Miami actually resemble the New York subway in rush hours.” “Five Years Afterward, A Comprehensive Survey of the Economic Trend in Greater Miami,” Trust Company of Florida, 1930, p. 3; “The first Thirty Years of Miami and The Bank of Bay Biscayne – 1896-1926,” Bank of Biscayne Bay, 1926 promotional brochure, p. 24; “The Florida Dollar,” Literary Digest 87 (December 26, 1925), 46.
25. In the winter 1924-25, a purported forty-five Pullman trains to carry people into the State daily. (Richard H. Edmonds, “Meeting Transportation Needs in Florida,” American Review of Reviews 72, (November 1925) p. 484.)


28. J. Frederick Essary, “Have Faith in Florida!” New Republic 44, (October 14, 1925) p. 195. Essary added that there were 100,000 home-site lots in a single development: “If on every one of these lots a home should be built and a family installed, a total of not less than 3,000,000 people, or about as many as there are in Chicago, would live there along this one railroad and the one turnpike.” Additionally, a journalist at Barron’s Financial Weekly told of the waste of agricultural resources after a trip through this Palm Beach-Miami section: “I saw literally thousands of acres of beautiful orange groves being laid out in subdivisions to be sold for city lots with no city anywhere in sight, and none in prospect. Hundreds of orange and grapefruit trees loaded with golden fruit are today being dynamited to make way for streets in these visionary real estate promotions.” Willard A. Bartlett, “Opportunities and Dangers in Florida,” Barron’s, February 1926, 10.


31. It was estimated that about 15,000 cars moved along Downtown Miami streets in the summer of 1925 (“County Has 30 Per Cent More Cars This Year,” Miami Daily News, July 26, 1925). Quite a few car accidents were also reported during that period. If 1920s America was now on wheels, one could drive on Florida roads at a higher speed than was permitted by law in any other State: “Forty-five miles an hour is the legal limit on the open road, under the statute of 1925, and no municipality may impose a limit less than twenty-five miles. One walks in Florida at his own risk! [...] The principal motoring hazards in Florida arise not from dangerous grades but from the roving razor-
backs and range cattle and the fact that anybody may drive a car, no

driving license being required.” Frank Parker Stockbridge, “Shall We

Go to Florida?” The American Review of Reviews 72 (November

1925), 492.


Republic 45 (December 9, 1925), 84.


(March 26, 1924), 117.

34. The Miami Daily News and Metropolis, the city’s first newspaper,

published a 504-page edition of July 26, 1925, in observance of the

formal opening of its new plant on Biscayne Boulevard, and the 29th

anniversary of Miami’s incorporation as a city. Said to have been the

largest single edition of a newspaper anywhere, it was sent “to every

part of the civilized world” in order to meet “an insatiable demand for

facts about Miami and its marvelous growth.” This 504-Page Issue of


35. Jule King, “When in Miami, Buy or Sell Real Estate Like all

Miamians Do,” Miami Daily Metropolis, July 26, 1925.

36. J. Leroy Miller, “In The Land of the Realtor,” Outlook 142

(January 13, 1926), 69.

37. Ibid.


194 (April 29, 1922), 9.


Miami Board of Realtors : 1920-1980, E.A. Seemann Publishing Inc.,


40. “Nearly 200 Offices in 15 Blocks Sell Real Estate,” Miami Daily

News, July 26, 1925.

41. Grace McKinstry, “In Florida: Poem,” Literary Digest 87

(November 21, 1925), 34.

42. “If the faintest symptom of interest is shown, the prospect will be

taken out in an automobile to view the latest nearby “development,” or

given a ticket for a free ride clear across the State, to look at lots three

hundred miles away! At Daytona, he is invited to run across to

Tampa; at St Petersburg, he is offered a free trip to Miami; wherever

he may be and wherever the property is located, he can to see it

without any expense except for meals and lodgings, and sometimes

even those are provided!” Frank Parker Stockbridge wrote, in
"Shall We Go to Florida?" *The American Review of Reviews* 72 (November 1925) 495.


45. Bruce Bliven, "Where Ev'ry Prospect Pleases," *New Republic* 38 (March 26, 1924) p. 117.


47. "Thrills and Humors of the Florida 'Gold Rush',' *Literary Digest* 87 (June 20, 1925) 42.

48. Mr. Adams was thirty eight in 1925, and came from Nashville when he first arrived in Miami in 1925. He was president of *The Historical Association of Southern Florida* from 1951 to 1953 ("Interview with Mr. Adam Gillepsie Adams," Junior League of Miami, April 17, 1969).


50. Frank Parker Stockbridge, "Shall We Go to Florida?" *The American Review of Reviews* 72 (November 1925) p. 496.


53. The embargo resulted from a congestion due to the building boom and the last influx of Boomers to arrive. In the *New Republic* of October 14, 1925, one could read: "Congestion at terminals in the state is so tight and the effect upon business is so serious that bankers, land brokers, professional men and other soft-handed gentry were engaged at perhaps a hundred places in unloading cars to relieve the jam". George E. Merrick, owner of Coral Gables, "chartered four big schooners, each to have a carrying capacity of 1,000,000 feet of lumber, to supply the building materials needed at that point." (Richard H. Edmonds, "Meeting Transportation Needs in Florida," *American Review of Reviews*, November 1925, p. 483). However, this freight embargo was no less than a calamity for most of the building developments of Miami and the whole Southern peninsula, many developers being unable to afford alternative means of transportation.
for their building material.


59. People worked sixty hours a week after the Civil War, 48 hours in 1920 and 42 hours in 1930.

60. The Roaring Twenties corresponded to an era of intense urbanization, especially in the north-east. For the first time in the history of the United States, more than half the population (51 percent) was urban.


62. Will Payne, “Capturing the Simple Life; Or, The Boom in Florida,” Saturday Evening Post, (June 20, 1925) 189.


Historical Association of Southern Florida Membership List

Members of the Historical Association of Southern Florida enjoy a wide variety of benefits. These include free admission to the museum; subscriptions to three museum periodicals: Tequesta, South Florida History and Currents; invitations to special events; use of the Research Center; discounts on purchases at the museum store; and discounts on educational and recreational programs.

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