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A BRIEF HISTORY
COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED HIGHLIGHTS
AS TOLD BY
C. W. CHASE, JR.
AT THE
ANNUAL SOUTHERN DINNER
THE SURF CLUB, MIAMI BEACH
MARCH 16, 1948

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED.

As told by C. W. Chase, Jr.

At the Annual Southern Dinner, March 16, 1948.

Back around the 1870's the Brickell family established a little trading post at the mouth of the Miami River. It wasn't, however, until Henry Flagler pushed his railroad through to that point, that Miami really came into being. Old John Collins pushed his boat down Indian Creek, and cleared a little patch of land where he started his vegetable and fruit farm, on the only piece of natural soil there was here, at the site where the Sheridan Theatre now stands on 41st Street, but it was not until Carl Fisher commenced pouring his millions into clearing the mangroves, pumping in and filling the swamps and lowlands, laying out the streets, sidewalks, golf courses, polo fields, building homes, apartments and hotels and the making of what is now Miami Beach, that this city really came into being.

And while a group of men, under the name of the Committee of One Hundred, did meet in Jim Allison's Star Island home in the Fall of 1926 to help defeat a couple of undesirable politicians running for public office, it was not until several months later that the real Committee of One Hundred came into being, one Winter's evening, in the large Bayfront home of Carl G. Fisher.

This first so-called "Committee of One Hundred" did not comprise 100 men. They hoped they would obtain 100 citizens to back their views. As soon as the election was over the group dissolved and held no further meetings.

Several months later Carl Fisher said to me ---"Pete, we are now a growing little community. We have a lot of mighty fine men down here - men who have been successful in their business or profession up North. These men have been busy men and they have left a lot of friends in their Northern home towns. They have come here and either built or bought homes, and after acquiring these homes, unless they either fish or play golf all day, they have practically nothing to do. So they sit in those homes and they are lonely. They know practically no one. Now, what we need here is some kind of an organization that will bring these lonesome fellows together, where they can meet in congenial surroundings and where they can become acquainted with one another. An organization of this kind can do a lot of good for Miami Beach, and the man to head that organization is Clayton Cooper.

"Now, Pete, you called together that group at Jim Allison's home, so I wish you would get together another group, including some of the local men, but mostly we want to have these lonely Northern boys there. I'll get Galloway (his colored butler and quite a well known figure in the early days here) to serve some refreshments and I'll see if I can get Jack LaGorce and Charlie Kettering to be there to give a couple of little talks, so now you get busy."

In looking over the list of those who are here tonight, I notice the names of several of those who were at Carl Fisher's that night. I see here the names of Cal Bentley, Gus Geiger, Bob Gifford, Walter Hammons, Judge Vernon Hawthorne, Willie Heins, Frank Katzentine, Charlie Kettering, Jack LaGorce, Hugh Larrick, Chris Lindback, Dick Mead, J. P. Simmons, Fred Snite, Charlie Sorensen, Julien Southerland, Lowry Wall, Harold Weismann, Bill Welbon and Gar Wood. I may have skipped a man or two but those are the ones that I recall. You here tonight, and who were at Carl Fisher's that night, will probably remember that meeting in Mr. Fisher's grand living room that seemed almost a block long, with its huge fireplaces, its grand staircase, its oversized, extra large chairs, its wealth of Oriental rugs and other features that were so peculiar to Carl Fisher.

Well, the meeting didn't start out so enthusiastically. The men were mostly all strangers to each other and the whole party seemed to be rather cold. The meeting might have ended and no permanent Committee of One Hundred would have been formed except for two speeches. Jack LaGorce made one of those lovely, wholesome, delightful, impromptu talks of his, and this was followed by "Ket" making one of his inimitable, logical and forceful talks for which he is famous - a talk that was mixed with plenty of humor, and the first thing we knew the group were laughing and the meeting was a success.

Clayton Cooper was that night made President, and it was decided to permanently call ourselves the Committee of One Hundred, hoping that as time went on we would have 100 members. Clayton Cooper had come to Miami Beach along about 1923 or '24. He was an author, world traveler, gifted speaker and a man who possessed that wonderful ability to make people like him. He not only made people like him, but he also had the ability to get others to like everyone around him. He oozed friendship. He enjoyed seeing other people enjoy themselves. He disliked lonesomeness and disliked others being lonely. His creed was "Friendship". His slogan - "Strike Hands!" He was an ideal man to head an organization that was so badly needed just at that time. You see there was no Bath Club, Surf Club or Indian Creek Club back in those days, and there was no focal point where gentlemen could gather together in nice surroundings and form acquaintanceships and friendships that such congenial get-togethers can so wonderfully form.

As I said, Clayton Cooper was made President, and for sticking my neck out in calling the meeting, I was made Secretary-Treasurer -- without pay; -- in fact, no one received pay during the early part of the Committee of One Hundred when its dues were \$10.00 a year and its headquarters were in the lower right hand drawer of my office desk.

About a month after the meeting in Carl Fisher's home another meeting was held in the home of one of the members, and for two or three years thereafter the Committee met four or five times each Winter in the large Bayfront, Oceanfront and Indian Creek front homes of the members. I can particularly recall the meetings that we held in the homes of Harvey Firestone, Frank Gannett, Chris Lindback, Fred Snite, Bill Taradash, Irving Reuter and Gar Wood. I think we met in Cal Bentley's home a couple of times. These meetings

were truly delightful. Our hosts would decorate their homes and grounds with lights, and it would be like stepping into fairyland. Each one provided a delightful buffet and our speakers were mostly members of the Committee of One Hundred itself. We learned a lot about each other. Many of those talks gave us an insight into the early starts and hardships of some of our members, and of their later successes. I can always remember how Gar Wood told us he was a poor young man walking down the street in Minneapolis when he saw two men straining at some hand winches, pushing up the front end of a coal truck, in order to let the coal run out at the rear end, and there and then he conceived the idea of why shouldn't this be done automatically by switching some gears into the running motor, and how this idea culminated into a great huge business. I could go on and on telling about these very interesting talks of our own members.

As time went on Clayton Cooper added other features to the enjoyment of the Committee, such as the Annual Southern Outing, when we went by boats to old Cocolobo Cay Club. Also he added the Annual Southern Dinner here at The Surf Club. And then he struck upon the idea of having different ones of our members invite the entire Committee to meet in the early Fall in their homes in the North. Those of you who were early members of the Committee can doubtless still recall with much pleasure our Northern meetings in the home of Mr. Widener in Philadelphia - a veritable palace of a place, Frank Gannett's in Rochester, Mark Honeywell's in Wabash, Gar Wood's in Detroit, Leslie Buswell's in Gloucester and the time Harvey Firestone entertained us in his place of exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair after the gates were closed for the evening.

Then, too, there was that time when we had the Governor of the State of Maine here at our Annual Southern Dinner. Maybe it was because of his enthusiasm over the Committee of One Hundred, or his generosity, or his sagacious business ability, or it may have been because of Walter Hammons' very tasty and generous cocktails here, that caused the Governor to arise at this table and invite the entire Committee of One Hundred to be the guests of the State of Maine.

We accepted the invitation before the Governor could get back to his native state, and what a wonderful time we all had going from place to place, under police escort, with a caravan of automobiles, stopping night after night in some of the most famous Maine resorts, and all as the guests of the good old State of Maine. On that trip Walter Hammons had us as his luncheon guests at his beautiful estate in Portland, where his home stood at the top of a hill overlooking a lovely valley, and with one of the most beautiful lawns I have ever seen. He served us a magnificent lunch, then took us through his private dairy, where he produced his own milk that cost him about two dollars a quart F.O.B. on the hoof. Those annual get-togethers were really magnificent, and Oh! how well we all did become acquainted.

As the Committee grew larger, it also grew away from the lower right hand drawer of my desk, and it was found necessary that Clayton Cooper devote most of his time to the organization, and this meant we would have to have an office of our own. The office was made available to us by Lowry Wall, on the second floor of a building

that is no longer in existence. It was on Lincoln Road where Lowry's bank now has a large auto parking lot for his customers.

When its headquarters was taken away from my desk, -- I was fired as Secretary-Treasurer (without pay) and Bob Gifford was induced to give up some of his time winning tennis cups, and was made Secretary. Wanting a man of more financial stability than myself, inasmuch as the Committee was now charging dues of around \$50.00 a year, Lowry Wall was made Treasurer. Well, anyhow-- if I did lose those jobs I notice it has taken two men to hold them down ever since, -- and I also notice that neither one of those boys has ever gotten a dollar's raise over my old salary.

From the small group of that first meeting, the Committee of One Hundred, under Clayton Cooper's magnificent guidance, grew and grew into an organization of around 300 members. The membership finally became too large to be accommodated for the meetings in the homes of our members, and it was then Clayton Cooper conceived the idea that we should have a Club House of our own.

Carl Fisher in the early development of Miami Beach felt we should have a private school here. He built a schoolhouse on the Northwest corner of Lincoln Road and Jefferson Avenue, on the site where Bonwit Teller had a store for many years. When Mr. Fisher built the seven-story building now standing on the Southeast corner of Lincoln Road and Jefferson Avenue and decided he was really going to make Lincoln Road into a high-class shopping street, he moved the school house around to Michigan Avenue, just North of Lincoln Road, and converted it into a residence.

Clayton Cooper had owned a little home directly on the ocean front, along about 38th Street. It was a small wooden house, and the 1926 hurricane just took that house apart and there was never a sign of any part of it when the storm was over. Cooper lost all of his personal effects, his very fine library, his furnishings; - everything that was in there. He had no home and Mr. Fisher wanted to help the Committee of One Hundred keep going, so he permitted Clayton and Mrs. Cooper to live in this schoolhouse that had been moved and changed over into a residence, -- that was the building Cooper felt should be the Committee's Club House. Carl Fisher had given this property to Mrs. Fisher, and, at a very fair price and on liberal terms, the Committee purchased it from her. That is our present Club House. At that time, however, it was only half its present size. Later we added the large assembly room, then added the large parking lot and then built the moving picture booth.

The Committee of One Hundred can also be quite proud of its civic accomplishments. When St. Francis Hospital was first organized they needed money very badly to have a hospital that would be a credit to Miami Beach. For several years the Committee of One Hundred put on what was then called - "The Annual Charity Ball", held each year at the Nautilus Hotel. Many thousands and thousands of dollars were raised by us each year from these Charity Balls and turned over to St. Francis Hospital. For several years the Committee was the driving force behind the Christmas decorating of hundreds of our beautiful homes here that were

so artistically lighted during the Yuletide. In conjunction with this we also put on, through the leadership and through the hard working genius of Leslie Buswell, the Annual Christmas Festival, wherein a great number of boats belonging to our members would be lighted and decorated in a manner pertaining to Christmas, and these boats would sail along the Miami Beach Bay Front, down Indian Creek, and thousands upon thousands of spectators would line up to view them. Between the illuminated and decorated boats and the Christmas lighting and decorating of the homes, this was a sight seen nowhere else in the world, and we were rapidly becoming famed for this Christmas effort. With the outbreak of the war this feature had to be given up, but now that boats are becoming a little more plentiful and now that electrical equipment is beginning to come back on the market, I hope the time will return when the Committee of One Hundred will sponsor this very beautiful event again.

The Committee has also on many occasions brought pressure to bear in a quiet manner for the betterment of conditions in our city. We have preferred not to blazen forth our efforts in many of these items, finding that we can accomplish much more through a quiet, effective pressure by many of our individual members.

Back in 1936 Clayton Cooper's health began to fail and he passed on. This was a very heavy blow to the Committee of One Hundred, and it was thought by many of our members that this organization was finished. Clayton Cooper had been the life of the Committee. Through his efforts we had been able to meet in many homes both here and in the North. Through his efforts the club had gained in membership and he had guided us through its formative and progressive stages. It really did look very dark for the Committee's future.

Finally we were able to induce Mark Honeywell to take over the reins as President and we persuaded Jack LaGorce to be our guiding light as Chairman of the Board. You who are here tonight do not have to be told what a marvelous job these two boys have done. They not only held the Committee together but continued it as a going and accomplishing organization.

For a time we did a bit of floundering about in not having the right Executive Secretary. One day Jimmie Bright came to my office and suggested the name of Charlie Beeching. I told Jimmie I had heard Beeching speak at a Rotary Club several years previously and that the impression he had made had been a very lasting one. Jimmie spoke to other members of the Board of Governors, and shortly thereafter we invited Charlie Beeching to become our Executive Secretary. What he has done needs no extolling on my part, as all of you know him and know the splendid job he is doing.

When the war broke out, our membership dropped considerably. This happened to practically all clubs in this country. However, we never went into debt and since the war has been over, the club has brought back its membership until now we are very close to our limited number of 300. During the past two years we have added 65 new members. The club has no indebtedness and it also has a very nice balance in Lowry Wall's bank.

I sometimes believe it was Divine providence that started the Committee of One Hundred just when it did. Miami Beach at that time was on the wavering point. We did not know just how we were going to progress or how we were going to attract and hold the right kind of families here. The Committee of One Hundred helped very materially in solving that problem. I sometimes believe Divine providence has kept this organization going so successfully all these years, and has given us such magnificent leaders as Mark Honeywell, Jack LaGorce, Ket Kettering, Cal Bentley, Walter Hammons, Chris Lindback, Fred Snite, Charlie Sorensen, George Foster, Lowry Wall, Gar Wood and others ----- all of them, mind you, at the same salary that I received, --- as Secretary and Treasurer.

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