

CHAPTER II

Old Fort Dallas—The Biscayne Bay Country—Before the Day of Sub-Divisions—The Man Who Started the Real Estate Business in Miami—Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle, Woman of Vision—A Long Sleep and a Slow Awakening.

Miami was born on a summer day, and it has been summer in Miami ever since. The city sprang into existence in 1896 with the building of the Royal Palm Hotel, a link in the Florida East Coast Railroad's chain of resort hotels. The place would probably be today an obscure, unknown quantity had it not been for the coming of the railroad. Of the little group that made up the provincial community

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at that time, Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle alone visualized the possible future greatness and coming importance of the embryonic city.

The small settlement was then known as Fort Dallas, the name of a military post established there by the United States government in 1836 during the Seminole Indian war. Prior to that time the section was known only as the Biscayne Bay Country. Wrapped in the solitude of the centuries and bathed in the sunshine of the tropics, the vast summerland of which Miami is now the center lay enveloped in a long Rip Van Winkle sleep, "unknown and unloved." It was a land primeval. Its unromantic history was made by the few wanderers who came and went. These strangers generally took one good look at the wild jungle of hammock and pine lands and went their way rejoicing. They wanted none of it. That was before the day of sub-divisions.

John Egan may be said to have started the real

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estate business in Miami, though in justice to John it should be stated that he could not possibly have known what he was starting. On February 27, 1808, the Spanish government, which at that time owned Florida, granted to Egan one hundred acres of land situated on the Miami river, where the City of Miami is now located. History does not tell us what became of John, but after Florida was ceded to the United States, James Egan, a son of John, had a claim for six hundred and forty acres confirmed by the United States commissioners. James Egan later conveyed his donation to Richard Fitzpatric, who had also become the owner of the John Egan grant. These two tracts were afterward sold to William F. English, who imported a large number of slaves and undertook extensive farming operations. English is thought to have been the first man to undertake farming in South Florida. The measure of his success is unknown. He probably died in the attempt. After his death his Florida farm became the property of his

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mother and brother. The mother sold her interest to Dr. J. V. Harris, of Key West. A former governor of Florida thought he had a claim to some of this property, but the courts thought otherwise. About this time a company known as the Biscayne Bay Company was organized, and they purchased the interests of Dr. Harris and the claims of the former governor, which settled the controversy over the titles to these lands. Later Joseph Day, of the Biscayne Bay Company, purchased the interests of his associates in that company and sold the property to Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle, who also purchased the half interest inherited by the heirs of John English, the brother of William F. English, the ambitious farmer. These transactions perfected the chain of titles to these properties from the original grant and was the beginning of the real estate business in Miami, from which has developed the phenomenal activity of the past two decades.

With the coming of the Biscayne Bay Company,

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efforts were made to let the world know of the place, but so far as bringing in settlers the story fell on deaf ears. The few who came went their way singing the praises of the wonderful climate, but there was no general movement toward development. Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle came to Fort Dallas from Cleveland, Ohio, with her father, Ephriam T. Sturtevant, in 1871. They, with William B. Brickell, located at the mouth of the Miami river, at what is now called Brickell's Point. Notwithstanding the fact that both her husband and her father returned to Cleveland, Mrs. Tuttle after their deaths decided to make Fort Dallas her permanent home. Her purchase from the Biscayne Bay Company consisted of a tract of six hundred and forty acres on the north bank of the Miami river, and upon this tract is now built all of the main portion of the City of Miami.

The world was singing the praises of Henry M. Flagler, who had completed his Florida East Coast Railroad to Palm Beach. Mrs. Tuttle, believing that

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the only thing needed to bring the country before the public was to induce Mr. Flagler to extend his railroad to Fort Dallas, offered to divide her large real estate holdings there with him if he would do this. She wrote numerous letters to Mr. Flagler in this connection and finally made the trip to St. Augustine and in person repeated her offer. Her efforts were of no avail at that time. But Providence favored Mrs. Tuttle. The great freeze of 1894-1895 devastated the old orange belt of central and northern Florida, destroying valuable groves and wiping out fortunes over night. Mr. Flagler then recalled Mrs. Tuttle's story of the tropical Biscayne Bay Country. He wondered if the hand of misfortune had fallen as heavily there as throughout the old orange belt. He instructed one of his lieutenants to make the trip there and investigate conditions. It was found that the frost king had not reached that section, and as an evidence of this a bouquet of flowers and foliage was gathered and sent to Mr. Flagler. The order was

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then given to extend the Florida East Coast Railroad to that point.

The receipt of this report was the community's first awakening from its long sleep. Men began to arrive. Those who were out of work throughout the old orange belt flocked to the new town, and in a short time shacks and tents appeared. The bay swarmed with sail boats. On February 15, 1896, Joseph A. McDonald, John B. Reilly, John Sewell and E. G. Sewell, the vanguard of the Flagler forces, arrived, and the work of building the Royal Palm Hotel was commenced. The long Rip Van Winkle sleep had been broken. It was the dawn of a new day for the Biscayne Bay Country. A new city was in the offing.