

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE shimmying shoulders of Gilda Gray, shaking over the glass dance floor of the Hollywood Golf and Country club, were the sensation of south Florida as the boom got under way—sort of a fumigated mixture of Minsky's and the French Casino in a day when a fan dancer would have been locked up in jail.

Night life and entertainment was much simpler in the winter in 1924-25, with fewer people to please and less money than now to lure. The shimmy queen, born Maria Michalski, even then was beginning to show the despoiling effects of time, but she packed them in that winter. Much of the charm of the Hollywood resort was derived from the graceful ballroom dance team of Grace Kay White and Ralph Wonders.

"Hot spots" were limited and gambling was under strict control. John Olive was the first big gambler of Dade county, and for many years his Seminole club in the old officers' quarters of Fort Dallas catered as discreetly to the patrons of the Royal Palm Hotel as Bradley's does to the wealthy visitors of Palm Beach. Local people were not permitted to gamble, and Olive was known and respected as a gentleman as well as a gambler.

Shortly before the boom got under way, John Olive built what has become the Palm Island club in collaboration with Locke T. Highleyman, and there also gambling was confined to visitors who wanted excellent food and plenty of chips. At about the same time, Ed Ballard of French Lick Springs fame opened the old Tee House Plantation, present home of the American Legion, as a gambling resort. Later he took over the Palm Island club through the heated period of the boom.

On near-by Hibiscus Island, the Club Lido, branch of the same name in New York, opened its more modest \$20,000 place—built in 20 days—as the new year of 1925 got under way.

"Oklahoma Bob" Albright publicized himself by singing in luncheon clubs that fall, then opened the Roundup at Sixty-first street and the bay. Remember his "Follow the Swallow Back Home?" Evelyn Nesbit Thaw sought a cabaret site in downtown Miami, but was refused. Some thought it would hurt the community to let her operate within sight of that monument to the dead Stanford White, the Halcyon Hotel, whose general outline the noted architect had sketched for the builder. She was later to find a refuge at the Silver Slipper in the northwest section of Miami, where the once-famous Fritzi Scheff sang that winter.

The Coral Gables Country club was a favorite with dancers, as Jan Garber and his orchestra made the moon over Coral Gables immortal. Tina and Ghirardy were a colorful dance team on the palm-fringed dance patio of the club that winter. Over at the Venetian pool was the younger Henry Coppinger wrestling an al-

ligator. We do not know that it was the same 'gator he wrestles today, however.

Ben Bernie and his "lads" played at the Wofford Hotel, whose owner, Mrs. Tatem Wofford, boasted she had opened the first hotel in Miami Beach in 1916. The great rambling Royal Palm Hotel began its twenty-ninth season New Year's day with a ball described as "brilliant," but which we might consider somewhat stodgy. The Urmev Hotel, another aristocrat, started its season in December. Don Lanning was a hit at the Park Theater. Jimmie Hodges initiated his \$75,000 "Follies" supper club in Hialeah, with Lew Hampton as the featured singer. Kid Canfield, the reformed gambler, delivered a well attended lecture on the evils of games of chance.

Much other amusement was available in Hialeah. By the middle of January the new \$750,000 racing oval of the Miami Jockey club was ready to open. In the stables were such horses as Wise Counsellor, who had defeated the French marvel Epinard, and In Memoriam, who had bowed to Zev. A crowd estimated at 17,000 packed the new clubhouse and grandstand for the opening January 15.

The Miami Jockey club was created out of local capital, for the most part. Joseph E. Smoot of Buffalo had been in Miami the year before, thrilled to the prospects, interested his friend, Norman E. Mack of Buffalo, the Democratic national committeeman, in helping to finance a race track. Miami men of importance joined, with A. J. Cleary as the first president of the corporation. Now the steward for the state racing commission, Cleary was succeeded in the Miami Jockey club presidency by Smoot and in turn took over the post of vice president and secretary. James H. Bright of the Hialeah Curtiss-Bright interests became treasurer. Horse racing began with pari mutuel betting and ran for three years until the Florida Supreme court ruled such wagering illegal.

The fourth greyhound season opened in Hialeah that winter with Joe Blitz the reigning favorite. The first night racing was started in January, 1925, by O. P. Smith of the Miami Kennel club, inventor of the mechanical rabbit. Previously, all dog races were run in the afternoon at the Hialeah track. Many today will recall the time before they put muzzles on the racers and it was not uncommon to see a fight start between leaders somewhere along the track, allowing a rank outsider to sneak home with victory.

The Spanish game of jai alai also drew good crowds in Hialeah, in the old fronton that was wrecked in 1926. Movies were being made in the Hialeah studios, leased to Pathe Exchange for the filming of "Black Caesar's Clan." They even had a balloon ascension and parachute drop in Holleman Park as part of the winter amusement.

Night golf with phosphorescent balls was being tried at Hollywood, where Gene Sarazen had taken up the duties of professional after losing the national pro title. The fourth miniature

golf course in the United States was built in Hollywood to lead the spread of the craze which bloomed so suddenly and died so completely.

Gene Tunney came to Miami Beach early in 1925 after outpointing Jeff Smith in New Orleans, to further his plans to meet Jack Dempsey for the heavyweight championship of the world. Still a frequent Miami visitor, Gentleman Gene then was light heavyweight champion and developing fast.

It may not come directly under the head of amusement, but William Jennings Bryan started in January to deliver his celebrated sales lectures on the glories of Coral Gables. George Merrick contracted to pay him \$100,000 yearly, half cash and half property, for his services. Speaking from a runway built over the waters of the Venetian pool, the Great Commoner and master orator cast an added spell on Miami's Master Suburb that any other promoter would have parted with an eye to get. Bryan then had been a Miami resident for nearly 15 years and that winter he and Mrs. Bryan celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary.

Miami Beach decided it should protect its birds and accordingly enacted an ordinance requiring all cats to wear bells. We do not recall that it was actively enforced, as shortly there were too many other things to occupy the official minds. Miss Ruth Woodall won the Miami bathing beauty contest that winter to represent Miami at Atlantic City. The Miami Anglers club on N. Bayshore drive was a haven for fishermen, with the late beloved Edward Seiffert in the secretary's chair.

Arthur Wynne of Mountain Lake, N. J., was credited with inventing the cross-word puzzle to amuse his children. Carl Holmer of the county judge's office announced at the turn of the year that he had married 1,800 couples in Miami since 1918 as his contribution to the expansion of the city.

The name of Biscayne Boulevard was not original with the present magnificent north-and-south thoroughfare in Miami, but was first bestowed upon Thirty-sixth street late in 1924. Hamilton Michelsen and the Thirty-sixth Street Improvement Association were ambitiously planning a 100-foot roadway from Hialeah to the ocean, with a causeway across the bay, the whole to be known as Biscayne Boulevard.

Mr. Michelsen had a paternal interest in Thirty-sixth street. He was responsible for its building about 1912, to reach his home in the Everglades, then the first house this side of Lake Okeechobee. He was under some fire in the early days for having the longest "one-man" road in Florida stretching to his door. Later, when James H. Bright developed his sheep and cattle ranch on the banks of the Miami canal, the foundations of Hialeah were laid and Thirty-sixth street became its principal motor link with Miami.

The Thirty-sixth Street Association was very active at one time in getting deeds from property owners for the new width. A com-

mittee composed of G. S. Fletcher, A. M. Willets and George A. Gillam made advances to the county to do the paving in the event all property owners signed up to provide the new width. But the plans were a little too rich for the blood of that section, even in the boom, and the plan gradually faded from mind.

Clifton Downs was another development that thirsted to connect Hialeah with the ocean. Far out at Douglas road and 109th street, Clifton Downs was selling lots even in 1924 at \$750 each on the strength of the dream road and causeway. The new causeway finally was built at Seventy-ninth street, at the insistence of T. A. Winfield, who once owned what became Shore Crest.

We think we have congestion in Miami streets during the peak of our winter seasons, but the sudden descent upon Miami in the winter of 1924 strained its facilities to the breaking point. Conditions at the Flagler street crossing of the Florida East Coast railroad were described as "intolerable." To dispose of the freight hauled in by mile-long trains, the F. E. C. had to switch back and forth almost constantly across that street. It was common all through the day and night for Flagler street to be packed with several hundred motor cars for as long as 15 or 20 minutes, their profane drivers, red-faced and impatient, heaping enough curses upon the unhappy railroad to curl the rails. More roads, more bridges, more waterways were the framework on which the boom was draped, and the urge for their building was very compelling.

Frank H. Wharton, Miami city manager, asked Santa Claus at the 1924 Christmas tree for two more bridges across the Miami river, in addition to a new city hall. Soon after, the Comer-Ebsary Foundation Company started to build the Fifth street bridge, to cost \$190,000, and was the successful bidder at \$540,000 for widening the two viaducts on the county causeway to their present two-lane dimensions.

The S. E. Second avenue river bridge was a final outgrowth of the formation at this time of the Fort Dallas Park Association, which inquired into the possibilities of cutting S. E. Second avenue through the grounds of the Royal Palm Hotel, and carrying it either over or under Miami river to connect with Brickell avenue on the south side. The street stopped then at the north line of the Royal Palm property, at the corner where the old home of John W. Watson recently was torn down to make a parking lot.

The Tamiami Trail in this county was a mere trail in fact in those days, sticking 40 miles westward into the Everglades. J. W. Carey, chairman of the county commission, announced that 35 men were put to work surfacing the Trail 15 miles west of the present city limits, partly as a relief project for needy citizens. Relief was a small matter then, Miss Elizabeth A. Cooley of the American Red Cross even going so far as to say that Florida was the only state in the South for two years that had not asked for assistance.

J. F. Jaudon and R. A. Coachman returned from a trip along the West Coast as far into Collier county as the Deep Lake railroad

to report Barron G. Collier's men were pushing the new Trail east toward Miami from the now abandoned corner of Carnestown, named for Collier's son. However, it was not until Gov. John W. Martin made a personal trip into that territory the following year that this pet project of The Miami Herald was jerked out of the ruts by the state and made into the present highway through the lower Everglades.

The fact that it took a tractor to travel 20 miles out of Miami on the Trail did not stop the land speculators in those days. As 1925 opened, Kincaid Harper was advertising the "last close-in acreage" along the Trail at \$3,000 an acre. The Irons Land and Development Company announced that all acreage near this route for 30 miles west of Miami was worth not less than \$200 an acre, even though the road that bordered it existed largely on paper. At 10 miles out, the price was \$2,000 an acre, with many bidders. The Everglades Land and Development Company temptingly offered a whole townsite of 6,000 acres, "close in" as the boys liked to call it.

Miami was having trouble also with her exit to the north. In a rare burst of frugality the voters had refused to approve a \$300,000 bond issue for rebuilding the Dixie highway northward along the line of the present N. E. Second avenue. Opposition developed from the Charles Deering estate and the Cooper interests, through whose land the Dixie was to run. After the bond election failure, the state road department decided to build the road anyway, with \$454,000 of state and federal funds.

The county paid Charles Deering \$39,000 for a right of way through his property for the new Dixie. The county later constructed the West Dixie highway out Seventh avenue about the time the new Biscayne boulevard was reaching toward Hollywood on the east.

The county commission granted a franchise in the fall of 1924 to the Biscayne Bay Improvement Association to start the present Venetian causeway over the Venetian islands, which were completed by Waldeck Deal in January, 1925. J. F. Chaille estimated then it would require 16 months to dredge in the causeway to replace the old Collins bridge, longest wooden bridge in the world when it was the only tie between Miami and Miami Beach.

South of Miami, the city of Key West was pleading valiantly for the federal government to build a motor highway across the keys. Speaking for the Oversea Highway Association of Key West, Mayor Frank A. Ladd expressed the opinion that the time was ripe to approach congress with a proposition that Uncle Sam should build the highway as a military measure. In February, 1925, Key West sent a motorcade of trucks and cars up the East Coast advertising a bond issue of \$2,650,000 to be devoted to carrying the road from the mainland out over some of the keys. Ten years later the Oversea highway was finding more ready support as a work relief project, a phase which ended so tragically with the hurricane of September, 1935.

The East Coast canal from the St. Johns river to Biscayne bay was a source of sorrow to all yachtsmen who tried to use it in 1925. It was started as a shallow waterway years before by the Coast Line Canal and Navigation Company in exchange for grants of thousands of acres of bordering land from the state. The company subsequently failed to complete the canal and refused to give up the land.

Late in 1924 Frank B. Shutts was sent by the Miami Chamber of Commerce to the meeting of the Deeper Waterways Association to seek help in improving the East Coast canal. As the result of interest generated at that time, the canal finally was taken in hand by the state legislature, the Florida Inland Navigation District was created, with Mr. Shutts as one of its first officers, and the old canal and additional rights of way were acquired. The federal government completed the present waterway down the East Coast on appropriations sponsored by Congressman Joe Sears.