

CHAPTER NINE

THE OLD FOLKS sat and rocked as usual on the long porches of the Royal Palm Hotel during January of 1925, but elsewhere in Miami the winter tourist program was swallowed up in the rush of opening subdivisions, drowned out by the day-and-night staccato of riveting hammers on a rising forest of steel frames.

Miami was beginning a building program which was to reach \$60,026,260 when 12 months had passed, while Miami Beach was adding \$17,702,532 in new construction. All the preceding fall there had been preparation, laying out of subdivisions, announcements of great hotels, bait held out temptingly to Northern investors. Lots were the real commodity, of course, but even the poorest subdivision had to have some kind of building on it as a sort of nest-egg.

Here was the land of sunshine where the evidences of Republican prosperity could be invested in perpetual comfort, said thousands of booklets and advertisements broadcast by E. G. Sewell and the Miami Chamber of Commerce. Some of the finest publicity Miami ever got was put out that year by Louise S. May of the chamber of commerce, while Steve Hannagan at Miami Beach was beginning his swift rise as a master publicist. Thriving and lavish offices were maintained by the big developers, Fisher, Young, Merrick, D. P. Davis of Tampa, Addison Mizner of Boca Raton, in New York, Chicago, Atlanta and other key cities. They brought people in by the thousands on their own bus lines, by chartered train and steamship. The names "Miami" and "Coral Gables" particularly became synonymous in the lexicons of the shivering North with bare-legged bathing girls, warm days in January, even warmer speculative opportunities.

Fred Rand began pulling attention away from Flagler street with his spectacular announcement that he owned 25 corners in N. E. Second avenue between First and Fourteenth streets, already had 14 buildings ready to start. He announced a two-year program designed to convert Second avenue into the main business artery of the city. His activities ranged from the Huntington building to the ill-fated Roosevelt Hotel, and before 1925 was three-fourths gone it looked indeed as though the center of Miami business life soon would be where the present traffic circle on Thirteenth street is adding its bit to vehicular confusion. The Miami Daily News Tower and the big Burdine & Quarterman building are the principal reminders today of that opinion. Fred Rand was killed in an automobile accident last year as he was preparing to make a come-back in Miami realty.

The New Year brought Sol Meyer from Indianapolis to take over the financing of the 15-story building in N. E. First street planned by Jerry Galatis and J. E. Highleyman. This \$800,000

venture was only one of many the Meyer interests handled, but it was most intimately identified with him. It later housed the Meyer-Kiser bank, but was so badly twisted in the 1926 hurricane that it had to be torn down to its present six stories.

The site of old Fort Dallas was sold by the Tuttle heirs to the Miami Holding Company for \$500,000 and the Robert Clay Hotel was put there the following year. The aged rock fort which once commanded the mouth of the Miami river was given a permanent resting place in Lummus park, farther up the river, and taken under the protecting wing of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Alhambra and the Cortez Hotels were finished at this time. Nathan Neufeld was completing the \$250,000 Ritz Hotel on Flagler street.

The two-story Flagler Arcade was opened for business by E. W. Bebinger and J. P. Simmons, operating as South Florida Properties, Inc. George Langford finished the 11-story Dallas Park apartments and started on the 10-story addition to the McAllister Hotel. The Gesu Catholic Church, formerly the Church of the Holy Name, dedicated its new \$400,000 place of worship, marking a long step from the modest mission in Wagner's grove above the present N. W. Eleventh street and Ninth avenue, where the first Miami Catholics gathered.

January saw the start of such imposing buildings as the Everglades apartment hotel, the Cromer-Cassell department store building and the Fritz Hotel, the latter still an orphan of the boom. The Fred F. French Company had looked on Miami and found it good. They bought the Houston Wyeth homesite at N. Bayshore drive, now Biscayne boulevard, and Third street, for \$315,000 and announced that the public would be allowed to participate in shares for the 11-story Everglades, to cost \$1,750,000. Joachim Fritz had made money out of the Melrose dairy and other ventures in Allapattah and beyond, and some of this he began to spend on the 200-room hotel which stands where his former home was. It was to cost \$750,000, and he may yet come back and finish it.

Property began moving briskly right after the holidays. Lon Worth Crow was president of the Miami Realty Board, while Mrs. Crow headed the Miami Woman's club. The beautiful estate, El Jardin, down near Bryan's place, was bought from the Bindly interests for subdividing. Davenport & Rich opened Seville, 14 blocks south of Flagler. The 80-acre Freeman estate in Little River was bought by Orville W. Ewing of Derry, N. H., for \$500,000. The Fernie McVeigh estate, 26 acres between El Portal and Little River, was sold to D. C. Clarke of Louisville for \$5,000 an acre and became Sherwood Forest in two weeks. Hess & Slager moved their jewelry business to Flagler street from Jacksonville.

Having sold out Altos Del Mar Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 on upper Miami Beach, Tatum Brothers threw No. 4 to a palpitant public. Among the mobs of newcomers they capitalized on long residence with their slogan, "If the Tatums say so, it's so."

Val C. Cleary contributed the outstanding news bit of Jan-

uary. He sold for \$150,000 cash the southeast corner of Collins and Fifth street at Miami Beach, where his modest bungalow had stood since 1920. Later to become mayor of that city, he had acquired the lot in 1914 for \$800 when he first came to Miami as a player with the Pickert Stock Company. E. R. Dumont of New York bought it for a hotel location, but only small shops finally were built.

Hardie's Casino, one of two on south beach, was sold to Bert Schreiber of Chicago for \$500,000. Joseph Elsener, who today is engaged in putting the Croker estate at Palm Beach on the market, paid \$2,000,000 for 1,855 feet of ocean front north of the Allison island bridge, buying from the Fisher interests and planning to construct Deauville casino there. The Fleetwood Hotel and new radio station WMBF were opened with oratory from William Jennings Bryan, Banker Edward Coleman Romfh and Mayor Louis F. Snedigar. Arrivals on the steamship Cuba from New York were prepared for anything in this new land of magic by seeing Carl Fisher's pet elephants, Rosie and Nero, haul their baggage from the Meteor dock.

John W. Martin headed the list of new officials who took hold at this time. He was inaugurated governor in a colorful ceremony in Tallahassee, which a few weeks before had celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the state capital there. Tallahassee looked with tolerant scorn, therefore, upon the fevered antics of the south Florida real estate buyers who traveled the long dirt road from Jacksonville to buy state land. With him as secretary was Dr. Fons A. Hathaway, former Duval county school superintendent and an able administrator, who had made the political mistake of telling parents to mind their own business. Sam Barco and Roy C. Wright were made lieutenant colonels on Martin's staff.

Henry Chase became the new sheriff, succeeding Louis A. Allen, who retired to the comparative magnificence of his new Druid Court apartments on S. W. Sixth street to deal in real estate. Bob Simpson succeeded R. B. McLendon as county tax collector and James Flood replaced J. Bert Hawkins as clerk of the Criminal court.

As part of its expansion program, the Seaboard Air Line railroad completed its cross-state route from West Lake Wales to West Palm Beach in January, having spent \$7,000,000 in seven months to get there. President S. Davies Warfield headed the triumphal parade from West to East Coast, cutting a day from the time required to go by rail from Miami to Tampa. The Merchants and Miners Line started service from Philadelphia to Miami with the SS. Berkshire, paralleling the Clyde Line, which already was well established here.

The city of Miami had decided to spend \$6,000,000 for public works in 1925, and accordingly asked the voters for the first approval. By a vote of 58 to 7, the citizens of Miami authorized \$1,450,000 for incinerator, public market, street widening, sewers,

docks, parks and hospital. Credit as well as cash was as easy to get in those days as falling off a dock.

“That’s nothing—I parlayed two quarts of synthetic gin into \$75,000 in eight months.”

So declared an unnamed hero of a Liberty Magazine story dealing with Florida which appeared early in February, 1925. There was a great deal more in this and other publications to the same general effect that men and women were getting rich in Florida on little or no actual capital. The “gold rush” was on.

Although the new Polk directory of that year listed 102,582 permanent residents of Greater Miami, there is no way to determine how many more had come in and were arriving daily to stake out claims in this new bonanza. We didn’t call it a boom then. Anyone willing to be quoted would express the opinion that Miami would have no fewer than 1,000,000 permanent residents within 10 years or less.

The congestion on the Florida East Coast railroad was so great that H. N. Rodenbaugh, vice president and general manager, appeared before the Miami Chamber of Commerce to promise that his railroad would lay 219 miles of double track between Miami and Jacksonville by 1926. Trains were late in leaving Miami, he explained, because cars needed to make them up were just as late in arriving from the North. Between 50 and 75 pullmans arrived every day, packed to the guards.

To get an outlet to the bay and a possible beach, Coral Gables bought the Mills and Hafleigh estates on the bay front and assured the development of the complete control of the Coral Gables canal. It was planned to dredge this shallow drainage ditch out to a 15-foot depth and 100-foot width, provide a yacht basin and dockage back of the Miami Biltmore Hotel and then join the canal to the Tamiami canal, thus completing a loop waterway which included the Miami river. To make the picture more alluring, a \$2,500,000 Monte Carlo and country club were to be built where the canal emptied into the bay. Announcing sales for one month as \$2,882,000, George Merrick stepped up the Coral Gables monthly sales quota to \$5,000,000.

At the Miami Beach end of the causeway, Jerome Cherbino, former Texas cattle rancher, headed a group which bought the site of the abandoned aquarium from James A. Allison for \$500,000 and started to build the \$1,000,000 Floridian Hotel. Fred Rand and Ben Shepard bought the 422-acre Virginia key, next in the chain south of Terminal island, from the trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund for \$126,000.

In Miami the First Baptist Church bought the Field apartments in N. E. Fifth street and decided to remain there and build a larger church. The Trinity M. E. Church already was embarked on a drive for a \$250,000 building fund.

The old New York department store in North Miami avenue

was doomed. Daniel Cromer and Irwin Cassell decided that the business which had begun there in 1913 demanded expansion and accordingly started a seven-story building on the site of the old store, to cost \$1,000,000. They had to pay \$125,000 for 25 feet they needed in N. E. First street. The building today houses the Mark Store, successor to Cromer-Cassell's. The Miami Chamber of Commerce began a hunt for a new building of its own. The Miami Anglers' club bought a home near the new bayfront fill in N. E. Fourth street. Drs. E. S. and T. E. Vail opened their new Vail Arcade.

In one of the many notable deals involving Roy C. Wright and Hugh M. Anderson of Miami Shores fame, the Knight brothers sold them the Hippodrome building at Flagler street and N. E. Second avenue for \$1,250,000. This site originally was owned by Dr. James M. Jackson, beloved physician of other days, who paid \$2,000 for it.

Wider streets in Miami were badly needed and developers began a ruthless campaign of destruction to get them. For several years thereafter N. E. Second avenue, Flagler street, S. W. First street and others were studded with houses and small stores whose doorways hung over the curbing of the street, their owners too stubborn or too poor to move them back from the new street line.

Ernest Cotton, director of Miami utilities, was improving what is now Moore park, where the city water reservoirs were located, north of Thirty-sixth street. This helped make Seventh avenue a major thoroughfare, but it was not hard to widen, because buildings were sparse out that way. R. C. Hall headed an association to widen Lawrence drive, lined with beautiful old pines whose wholesale uprooting provoked a storm of protest. But there was no other way to get a wider street except to take out the trees, and the present Twelfth avenue is the result.

"Oklahoma Bob" Albright moved out to the Moulin Rouge in Hialeah, and his Round-Up became the Club Alabam, built out over the bay. John E. Holland incorporated the Republican party in Dade county, also led Allapattah citizens in a demand for a city bridge over the Miami river at Seventeenth avenue. The Drake Lumber Company was selling 95 cars of building materials daily and announced a \$500,000 addition to the plant.

J. R. Anthony, whose string of banks contributed a dark chapter to later Florida history, was elected president of the Bank of Buena Vista and soon after became one of the best master minds in real estate. The Moorings, comprising two famous old estates in Coconut Grove south of Arthur Curtiss James, was broken up into small estates. Famous for 30 years as an avocado orchard, the Hardee grove near Coconut Grove became a subdivision with an unpronounceable name.

While the county commissioners frantically sought plans for a new courthouse, increasing demands for space were received from Clerk George F. Holly. He declared that 800 papers had been entered for filing in one day and he had no room for files, to say nothing of help.

The Ku Klux Klan asked for the job of policing Miami, claiming to have "driven the crooks out of St. Petersburg," but was finally refused this civic pleasure. The crime wave was about as usual. The worst flurry occurred in November, when all the punch boards in town were taken in after two slick strangers had cleaned up \$2,000 on them. Following that, City Manager Wharton sent a formal demand to Police Chief Quigg to stop all gambling.

At Tallahassee, Gov. John W. Martin had scarcely warmed the executive chair before he called the state road department chairman, Judge H. B. Philips, on the carpet and demanded a statement as to what, if anything, was being done to rebuild the Dixie highway and to open the Melbourne-Kissimmee cross-state road, then blocked by an ancient portage train over the Kissimmee river.

Judge Philips did the best he could, finally opening the Melbourne road and scrapping the ferry, in which it was hinted he had more than an academic interest. The 18-foot brick road from Jacksonville to St. Augustine had practically fallen apart and desperate efforts were made to patch it up.

At Martin's insistence the state road department decided in March to take over the building of the remaining 32 miles of the Tamiami Trail in Dade county, accepting \$125,000 from the county as a minor contribution in addition to the \$300,000 already spent there. But the road department, which was geared for the slow, leisurely days of the Catts and Hardee administrations, couldn't cope with this strange new horde of motorists, shouting from the detours, writing angry letters to newspapers, sending chambers of commerce to new highs of blood pressure.

Judge Philips knew his days were numbered and he fought desperately to prolong them. He was pitted, however, against a force he could neither measure nor understand—the urge of south Florida for more and better roads. Martin soon took steps to get a better understanding in Tallahassee of just what it was he promised when he was elected.