

CHAPTER TEN

BIG news studded the Miami firmament in March, 1925, with congress approving the Miami deep water harbor bill, the bandit murder of Police Sergeant Laurie L. Wever, the burning of the old Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, absorption of the E. B. Douglas store by Burdine's, and the start of the new Dade county courthouse.

The Miami ship channel and turning basin was 18 feet deep at that time, the federal government having spent \$1,000,000 and Miami \$200,000 on dredging and the stone jetties. The first channel across the bay had stretched from the foot of Fifth street to Cape Florida with a depth of 10 feet to accommodate the SS. City of Key West for the Florida East Coast railroad. For many years no competing line could come into Miami because the F. E. C. owned all the bayfront available for dockage.

The rivers and harbors act of 1925 allocated \$1,605,000 to deepening the Miami ship channel to 25 feet and to widen it to 500 feet from deep water to the jetties, 300 feet through the jetties and 200 feet up to the turning basin at the north end of where the city's dredging for Bayfront park had created a yacht anchorage. Brought about by the untiring efforts of E. G. Sewell and other civic leaders, the new harbor fund was hailed as a promise that Miami soon would be one of the largest ports of the South.

The Esther Weems of the Baltimore and Carolina Line began the first regular passenger service between Miami and a Northern point, in August, 1923, running from Philadelphia to Miami. The Merchants and Miners Line followed with a Philadelphia service. The Clyde Line had acquired the Van Steamship Line from Jack Crosland several years before and operated boats from Miami to Jacksonville. It started a regular New York service in November, 1924, and the Dimon Line soon was running to New York also with the Cuba.

But companies with much bigger vessels were impatient to get in, not only with freight but with the ever increasing crowds eager to buy tickets to Miami. Commodore J. Perry Stoltz had been compelled to send his cruiser out to the Gulf Stream late in December to take Leon Rosebrook's orchestra off the Mallory liner San Jacinta, which was unable to enter the Miami channel. "Your orchestra is out here; come and get it," the San Jacinta's captain wirelessly Commodore Stoltz, who wanted the musicians for the opening of his new Fleetwood Hotel. More than 100 other passengers on board wanted to get off at Miami, too, but had to wait for the first regular port.

At this time a spirited argument was in progress between Miami and Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce over harbor development. Carl G. Fisher announced that he would spend \$2,500,000 to create docks and turning basin at the Peninsular Terminal island south of the ship channel, marked today by several

gasoline storage tanks. A 26-foot channel already was dredged around the edge of the island. There was no question that Miami Beach had a deep water harbor, if some connection could be established between docks and mainland.

The idea of building a high level bridge over the ship channel finally was regretfully discarded, but even today men still consider a causeway from Virginia key to the mainland at about Point View, and connecting Virginia key with Terminal island. The best they could do then was to haul freight and passengers over to the causeway docks on lighters. Sewell strenuously opposed the filling of 400 acres of bay bottom west and north of Virginia key by its new owners, ostensibly because it would spoil the Miami view of the ocean, but actually to check this threat to the future of Miami harbor.

In exclusive Palm Beach, a crippled woman's electric hair curler helped swell the tide toward Miami. A short circuit started the fire which consumed the giant wooden Breakers Hotel and the newer Palm Beach Hotel, all on a windy March day. Nearly \$2,000,000 worth of property rolled skyward in vast billowing clouds of black smoke. Although Henry E. Bemis, vice president of the Florida East Coast Hotel Company, quickly announced a new Breakers would rise on the site of the old, a blight was cast on Palm Beach the remainder of that season and the next which sent thousands of the wealthy to Miami and Miami Beach.

Big possums walk late, as the wise huntsman knows. The big 'possums of the 1925 boom already were out in March. Charles and James Deering sold 6,000 acres along Cocoplum Beach, down to Chapman Field, to the Coral Gables development. It was to become the Miami Riviera and rounded out 10,000 acres which George Merrick had bit off. Farther south, 1,120 acres along the white sand beach of Cape Sable were bought from the Waddell holdings by R. R. Bailey, the Tatums and others, for a new town-site. E. A. Waddell and his brother had owned Cape Sable for 40 years, and it was then accessible chiefly by boat.

L. T. Cooper, S. P. Robineau and Neil Conrad were doing well with the subdivision of El Portal, from a part of which land the later development of Miami Shores was to come. Joined in a company known as Florida Enterprises, these three and their associates at one time clicked off sales in El Portal at the rate of \$1,000,000 a day and gave the principal outline to the northern part of Miami.

Mr. Robineau had wintered at the Royal Palm Hotel in 1915, when he was invalidated home from the French army. He returned to France with the American army in 1917, and after the armistice came back to Miami to stay.

He and Mr. Cooper and others were responsible for Bay View Estates, Naranja Nook, Del Rio, and in and around the town of Pompano, the subdivisions of Sunylan, Ocean Drive Estates and Hillsborough Beach. They dealt extensively in acreage all over Florida, in addition to their Miami activities.

Vernon Price-Williams paid \$250,000 for the Point View mansion of William H. Luden, cough drop manufacturer. It was built by Locke T. Highleyman, developer of the exclusive Point View section, and sold to Luden in 1920 when Highleyman began the improvement of Palm Island. The E. C. McGraw mansion on Point View was bought for \$175,000 by J. K. Dorn, one of the leading real estate men of the times. His former home at Thirty-sixth street and the bay went to L. T. Cooper for \$125,000. B. B. Tatum moved out to his Grove Park subdivision, and Guy Stoms of the J. A. McDonald Company bought the Tatum house in N. E. First street for \$110,000.

E. B. Douglas at this time was faced with the alternative of expanding his department store on what now contains the east half of the Venetian arcade in Flagler street—or selling. He sold, the property extending 100 feet in Flagler and 200 in S. E. First street and including the Paramount building on the First street corner which he had added to his holdings. The buyers were John C. Knight, later a Miami city commissioner; S. J. Thorp and R. A. McCord. The price was \$2,000,000.

Drygoods of the E. B. Douglas Company was sold to W. M. Burdine's Sons Company for \$200,000 and consolidated with the latter establishment. Mr. Douglas retired after 27 years in Miami's business life to devote his time to the charities he loved, and to the Jackson Memorial hospital whose board he headed. The sale moved Burdine's into a commanding position in the mercantile life of Miami.

Sergeant Laurie L. Wever of the Miami Police Department was patrolling the downtown section late one night in March, 1925. Petty robberies had been frequent and orders had gone out to keep a tight check on suspicious characters.

A speeding motor car passed Wever and he gave chase, catching up with it near the Savoy Hotel and motioning the driver to the curb. As the vehicles slowed down, however, a pistol was pushed out of the car window and two shots sent the policeman to the pavement, mortally wounded. The car went on.

Wever was easily the most popular member of the force and the manhunt which began that night was the greatest in Miami's history. He died the next day, March 16. Two days later, just before dawn, Chief of Police H. Leslie Quigg pushed his way into a shack west of Fulford and arrested two youths before they could grab sticks of dynamite placed near their coats, or draw pistols from beneath their pillows. They gave the names of William W. Fox and John Naugle, finally confessed to the shooting of Wever and were spirited away to Jacksonville for safekeeping.

Information on which the arrest was made was furnished by Bernard Henry of Versailles, Ohio, into whose tent at Little River the two had stumbled after abandoning their Essex coach the morning of the shooting. Fox soon admitted his real name was Walter

C. Valiton of Toledo, Ohio, and not even the legal magic of Moman Pruiett could save him from a life sentence at Raiford state prison. Naugle got five years as an accomplice. Although there never was any lynching threat during the trial, public indignation against them was at fever heat, especially after publication of a picture in Miami Life showing Valiton and a young girl companion, in complete undress, taken before the murder when the boys were conducting a series of petty robbery raids to get money to live and entertain women.

The funeral of Laurie Wever was a memorable one. The \$1,400 mortgage on the Wever home was paid off by the salesmen in Tatum Brothers real estate office. The Miami Herald opened a subscription fund for the education of the two children which reached \$11,000 in 10 days, and it was all cash, not paper. Mrs. Wever later became the Miami police matron. From that day on Miami policemen rode in pairs while on night patrol and the unusual zeal which Miami police today exhibit in running vagrants out of town had its beginning in the Wever murder.

While all this was filling the public eye, the Dade county commissioners engaged A. Ten Eyck Brown, Atlanta architect, to submit plans for the present lofty city-county building, to cost an estimated \$2,000,000. The city of Miami tentatively agreed to pay \$40,000 yearly rental for such space as the city departments might require, but after the city got installed in the new building, it was years before the county could get any satisfaction about the rent.

The new courthouse was started around the old two-story building so part of the new might be available before the old was finally demolished. In the meantime, a 40-foot square room was added to the old building to give the beleaguered clerks a little more space for the real estate papers that poured in for filing.

Everywhere in Miami and its environs, big changes were in the air that March. Except for the annual regatta featuring the races of the new Biscayne Babies, the winter season was almost ignored and Miamians began to reach the conclusion that Ev Sewell's dream had come true and Miami was finally a year-round city. They didn't like it so well when the vanguard of the binder boys began pushing the old residents off the sidewalks, but that was only a minor irritation among the birthpains of a city.

Henry H. Filer, chairman of the school board, announced that \$6,000,000 in bonds for new buildings would be issued, including \$1,000,000 for the new senior high school which was to replace the outgrown building in N. W. Second street. The Miami Woman's club broke ground on their bayfront tract for a \$256,000 club house and Flagler Memorial library. The library at that time was contained in Fort Dallas and because of the Woman's club interest in the century-old fort, the club initiated a movement to buy it from Dr. R. C. Hoge of Norfolk, Va., who was to build the Robert Clay Hotel there. The D. A. R. later became permanent custodians of the transplanted relic.

Mrs. C. H. Watson, operator of the Strand in Miami and the

Watson House at Niagara Falls, began that March to plan the 15-story Watson Hotel, now the Miami Colonial. Located on the bay-front, building and lot cost \$1,500,000. Construction was started on the \$550,000 Exchange building by Palmer-Laramore, Inc. Contract was let for the 15-story First Trust building as an appendage to the First National Bank.

The cornerstone of the \$260,000 Trinity Episcopal Church was laid with the blessings of the beloved Rev. Robert T. Phillips and of Senior Warden Frank B. Stoneman, then as now the editor of The Herald. The ground was being cleared for the future Meyer-Kiser building and the Olympia Theater. They had a great ground-breaking for the Miami Biltmore Hotel. The first tree was planted in Bayfront park.

Far out on the Miami canal, 50,000 acres of Everglades land was bought from the Tatums for \$1,500,000 by a syndicate headed by C. Bascom Slep, former secretary to President Coolidge, and including Harold W. Nichols of Cincinnati, James B. Westcott of Chicago, Frank B. Shutts and Capt. F. W. Symmes. This was the last of 200,000 acres in that area bought by the Tatums from the state.

More than 200 men were as busy as beavers on the ridge south of the James Deering estate, making Silver Bluff Estates into a subdivision. The third and last part of Golden Beach, up near the Broward county line on Miami Beach, was offered successfully by H. G. and R. W. Ralston. Cary A. Hardee of Live Oak, who had quit the governor's office in January, put \$37,500 into two lots in the La Gorce section of Miami Beach, although he rejected the advice given him by his successor as they rode together to the inauguration that he capitalize on his friendship with state officers and jump into the Miami land game.

G. L. Miller of Atlanta was in the midst of pouring money into Miami building. His companies had financed the Henrietta Towers, the Granada apartments, the Cortez Hotel and the Julia Tuttle apartments, and he then was beginning the Venetian Hotel at the Miami end of the causeway. During March the Trust Company of Florida grew out of the G. L. Miller Bond and Mortgage Company to lend a better local flavor to his work.

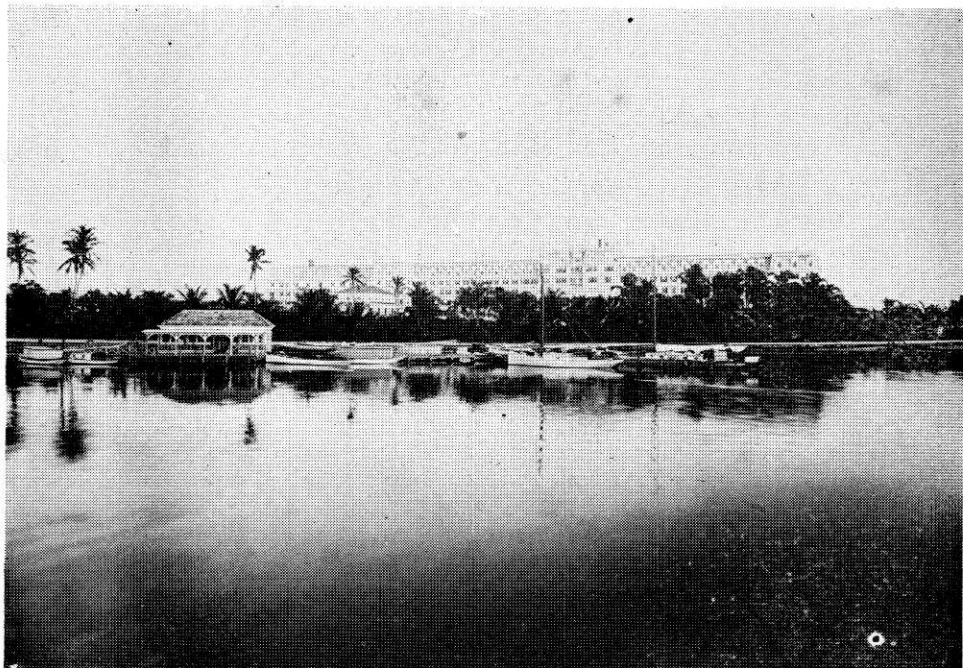
In West Palm Beach 150 state leaders met with Gov. John W. Martin in an all-Florida development conference late in March, and decided that what the state needed was a \$200,000 advertising fund to be spent by a board of citizens. Subsequent failure of the legislature to provide the money was laid at Martin's door and started the bitter enmity which led Herman A. Dann, president of the Florida Development Board, and others to help pillory Martin's political ambitions on the cross of Everglades drainage. It would have been a great thing for any board of exploiters at that time to have directed the spending of \$200,000 for advertising.

The big developers were much in the public eye. George E. Merrick was quoted in four columns of The New York Times on the wonders of Florida and Coral Gables. G. Frank Croissant and

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L. T. Cooper were rivals in acquiring racing stables to carry their colors at the Miami Jockey club track, the former buying Moe Shapoff's stable and Kentucky stud farm. J. W. Young announced his \$15,000,000 harbor at Hollywood, Glenn H. Curtiss was host to 12 army fliers who finally made it to Curtiss Field at Hialeah in two days from Selfridge Field, Michigan. M. C. Tebbetts opened radio station WGBU at Fulford and began plans for a \$3,000,000 hotel of 18 stories.

Out at Kelly Field, two army student fliers crashed in midair and saved themselves by taking to their parachutes, the first time in the history of aviation that such lifesaving had been recorded, the papers said. One of the cadets was C. D. McAllister. The other was Charles A. Lindbergh, who years later blazed the Caribbean trail for Pan American Airways.



. . . fading outline of the great wooden Royal Palm hotel in Miami, the building which started the Miami vogue at the birth of the century.