

CHAPTER NINETEEN

FROM the jolt of the Seminole Beach sale early in August to the \$33,000,000 sale of the Shoreland Company September 3, 1925, the Florida boom was at its very crest and thereafter soon turned as cold as dead love. The binder boys found they could not ride the boom down as they had ridden it up, and departed, chattering and angry, like a vast flock of starlings disturbed at their nesting.

Seminole Beach was a piece of sand and underbrush comprising 115 acres along the ocean, just north of Golden Beach and the Broward county line. Wade Harley had owned it for several years but late in July, 1925, he sold it to N. B. T. Roney and James M. Cox of Ohio for \$3,000,000.

After the purchase, the word went quietly forth that Seminole Beach would be subdivided and developed, and a portion of it put on the market. Not a line of advertising—just a few telephone calls from the sales manager, George T. Browne. Seminole Beach was to have a hotel, casino, stores, and all the other trappings of a seaside resort.

Two days later the crush in front of the Roney offices resembled a mob scene as frantic buyers demanded lots in Seminole Beach. In six and a half hours, Seminole Beach was sold out for \$7,645,000, and within a week it had been resold again for \$12,000,000. M. G. O'Neil and his associates bit off a \$4,500,000 chunk of the first sale. All of it was held by a 10 per cent deposit, the remainder of 15 per cent making up the first payment being due in 30 days.

Unhappily, before the 30 days had elapsed, the boom teetered, gave out a frightened squawk and began a retreat. Seminole Beach today is back in the hands of the former owner, Wade Harley, and has been returned to acreage except for the location of Club Boheme. Every purchaser has been washed out and it is ready for the next boom.

Commodore J. Perry Stoltz, who built the Fleetwood Hotel where the binder boys clustered at Miami Beach, was in town recently. He is a national representative of the Goball Sales Corporation, from Ashville, Ohio. He recalled that the binder boys of Miami Beach were pretty sick within a week of the Seminole Beach sale. They had all loaded up heavily, intending to make a killing. But while they were casting about for the most succulent prospects, someone absent-mindedly tossed a few odds and ends near the Seminole Beach tract on the market at 25 per cent less than they had paid for the same kind of sand—and they couldn't unload their binders at any kind of profit. Naturally they had no intention of making the first payments, either, and the resulting confusion, he says, was quite touching.

But a few binder boys more or less on Miami Beach made no

difference at that time. We didn't even miss those who were caught flat-footed by the tightening of sales restrictions in the Fisher properties, whose sales manager began to exercise his right to reject prospective purchasers not conforming to his idea of sound investors. It didn't do a binder boy much good to take over a kited binder if the actual sale was rejected. But there were so many whole subdivisions being gobbled up elsewhere by the other binder boys and the regular buyers, that this small purge passed almost unnoticed at the time.

Tatum Brothers and their far-flung organization by August had completed \$40,000,000 in real estate sales since the first of the year. A. D. H. Fossey, Miami's present mayor, had made \$1,111,550 in sales in the comparatively quiet sector of Buena Vista during July. The Curtiss-Bright developments were just getting started with \$2,826,000 in sales in one month through Bridges & Sinn. The effervescent promoters of Atlantic Shores, near Hollywood, took solemn oath that their Dixie section had been sold out completely in 40 minutes for \$4,000,000.

Belle Mead was a new subdivision which opened in August on the bay east of Little River, and was half sold out in six hours for \$2,729,500. This was the same tract which set a record of \$15,000 an acre when it was sold in January to Walter S. Morrow, developer of Federal Way, for \$1,500,000. It comprised the former Ullendorf and Garrett holdings and had been bought from W. H. Garrett and the Biscayne Trust Company by Webb Jay and others for \$500,000. Subdivision of these areas began to open the way for the later establishment of Biscayne boulevard.

El Retiro on Belle Isle was sold by Warren B. Ferris to a group of Chicago capitalists for \$1,250,000, one of the largest individual sales on the beach. The group planned to put a hotel on the six acres, but it proved to be one of those late blooming developments that never got off the blueprints.

In Miami the big talk then was of annexation and the election to be held in September. The biggest crowd ever gathered here met in Royal Palm park on the night of August 7 to applaud D. J. Heffernan as he presented speakers urging annexation. The general opinion expressed there was that within 10 years, Miami would be the largest city in the South.

George A. Rubin was becoming so exclusive with his property that he called for sealed bids on 125 lots. W. J. McCarthy, known as the "Smiling Cop," was promoted to the auto theft bureau. Dean Anson Marston was brought from Iowa State Teachers College to study the sewage problem presented by Miami suddenly doubling in population and sprouting a thicket of skyscrapers to pour their raw waste into the bay.

Harry J. Moyer bought the Cortez Hotel for \$800,000, and it later turned up among the \$5,000,000 worth of property owned by S. M. Goldberg of New York. The Morris Plan Bank opened in Miami with F. A. Clawson as president. Dr. David E. Sheehan,

pioneer Miami dentist, sold his Alhambra Hotel to a Syracuse syndicate for \$750,000. A 50-foot lot just east of it on Second street was sold to Mrs. Vera Wirick for \$115,000, and the fact that a seven-room house adorned it seemed to make no difference in its value.

Gov. John W. Martin returned from speaking on Florida in Chicago and Poland Springs and decided to call a special session of the legislature in the fall to re-enact a measure forming a Monroe county water district to finance the laying of a water pipeline from the mainland to Key West. The bill was improperly passed at the regular session in the spring. More than 10 years of litigation was started by a decision delivered by the late Federal Judge Rhydon M. Call when he ruled on the provision in the will of Richard Croker, former Tammany leader, to vest his Palm Beach homestead and other property in J. B. McDonald and Palm Beach Estates. The squabble between the widow, Bula Croker, and the children of Croker by a former marriage was only settled in favor of the widow last year.

Nine large ships were tied up in Miami harbor trying desperately to unload, with a labor shortage developing faster and faster. Congestion in the Jacksonville railroad yards forced the Seaboard to start a new freight yard at Yulee. Miami's port had become the largest in Florida, jumping from 206,000 tons in 1922 to 1,105,000 in the first half of 1925. All the makings for the paralyzing embargo and harbor blockage soon to follow were there, but we were too busy to take notice—or to do anything about it.

When real estate values on Flagler street reached \$50,000 a front foot in the middle of August, 1925, people began to think perhaps they were a little steep, but they were to go still higher within two weeks.

At 221-223 E. Flagler, now occupied by the Holsum Cafeteria, Cromer & Cassell had bought a three-story building in July on a valuation of \$20,000 a front foot, which seemed out of all reason at that time. They actually let a contract for a 20-story building there, to cost \$1,250,000, but changed their minds before the work started. Instead, on August 15, they announced a two-year lease to P. J. Davis of Golf Park on a \$50,000 front-foot valuation, the site to be used for real estate offices in the ambitious development whose principal reminder today is a great deserted clubhouse northeast of the municipal airport.

This same lease was split up September 1 to give H. H. Fisher of Fisher Brothers 21 feet of the front and all of the rear of the ground floor on a valuation of \$70,000 a front foot. Golf Park retained the other 22 feet of the front for their offices. So far as we can tell, this was the highest valuation established during the 1925 boom, with the possible exception of the one-year lease taken on 13 feet of the Vail Arcade on Flagler street by Magid,

Gordon & Murray at a rental of \$60,000. All of these firms, it goes without saying, dealt in real estate.

Scarcely less impressive was the valuation on the former Burdine & Quarterman corner at Flagler and S. E. First avenue now occupied by Liggett's, which J. W. Young's Hollywood companies leased for two and a half years for a valuation of \$2,000,000 or \$40,000 a front foot. The three-year-old Roberts Hotel, west of Miami avenue on Flagler, was sold by J. C. Roberts to David Afremow and a syndicate for more than \$1,000,000. Soon after, Crocker's Cafeteria on the ground floor of the Roberts was leased for one year to F. E. Sweeting of Angler's Park on Key Largo at a valuation of \$25,000 a front foot. J. Harrison McCready took half of it for his Miami office of Chateau Park.

Other flights into the upper reaches of realty were being made in the few unsubdivided pieces of acreage near Miami. James Donn of the Exotic Gardens received \$375,000 for 15 acres bordering on Grapeland boulevard at Thirty-sixth street from the Long Beach Company. The plot was quickly converted into a subdivision. James Macfadyean, who made the sale, claims that for a record in Allapattah acreage.

L. C. Richmond finally parted with 10 acres at N. W. Seventeenth avenue and Thirty-third street for \$218,000, bought by W. W. Fentress. He got it 20 years before for \$105. But that was small potatoes compared to what happened soon after, on the Tamiami Trail between S. W. Twenty-third court and Twenty-third avenue, when R. V. Tays bought five acres at \$60,000 an acre from George M. Okell and Frank W. Hughson.

Faced with a shortage of 4,000 gallons of milk daily in the Miami area, 10 men banded together in August to get a new source of milk to replace the dairies being driven out of business by rocketing realty values. A syndicate was formed to finance a \$1,000,000 dairy, fruit and truck farm, on 3,200 acres to be bought from the Pennsylvania Sugar Company west of Hialeah. Those joining the enterprise were Marcus A. Milam, James Gilman, E. B. Douglas, Ernest R. Graham, E. P. Fripp, Edward Anderson, John J. Quinn, Dr. John R. Pearson, James Donn and Fred Cason.

Graham, who was manager of the Pennsylvania Sugar Company, had been preaching for some time the necessity of making pasture for dairy cows on the muck lands of the Everglades. The embargo cutting off the precious imported dairy feed was to lend added weight to his argument a month later, but the cause of imported cow feed still is being upheld, 11 years later, by state price fixing of milk. The dairy project got off to a late start, but the idea was roundly applauded everywhere at the time.

Over on Collins island near the Nautilus Hotel, the Fisher interests were poking the giant towers of radio station WIOD into the heavens. Rex Beach, the author, was a guest at Coral Gables and was preparing a book on the glories of Florida, for which he was paid \$18,000 and whose chief merit was the artistry

of its cover. James Francis Gordon, later known as J. Fritz, resigned from the Commercial Bank and Trust Company to enter the legal profession.

Although congress had authorized \$1,660,000 for Miami harbor work, the money would be a long time coming, and the city was trying hard to find enough cash to lend the government and get the work started. Carl G. Fisher wired in from Indianapolis that he would put up \$200,000 of it, and at first it was hailed as a noble gesture until E. G. Sewell painted the Fisher offering as a lure to hook Miami up with his Peninsular Terminal harbor, isolated in the bay.

The SS. Mar Blanco put in at this time with 200,000 of the Spanish tiles that Cyrus F. Wicker had been buying from the gullible dons of old Spain, and Coral Gables shortly bossomed with red roofs. The Miami Herald began its new four-story wing to house new presses and machinery, bumping right into the teeth of the embargo.

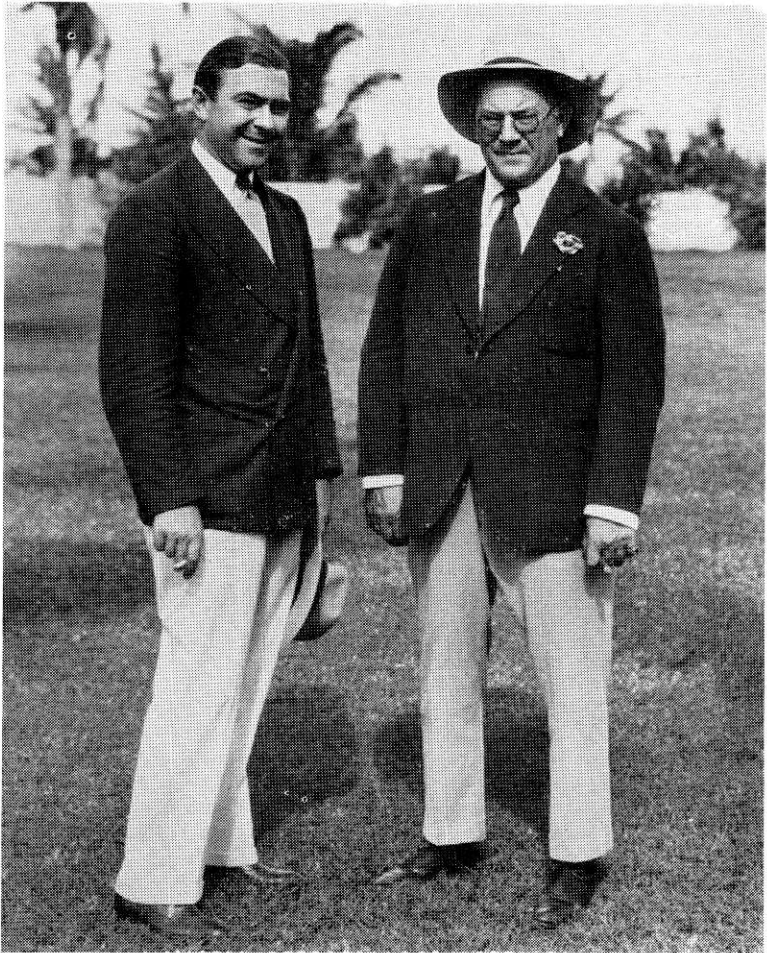
Work began in exclusive Palm Beach on the new Alba Hotel, whose \$7,000,000 worth of magnificence looks out over Lake Worth with the name of Ambassador Hotel today. It was put up by G. Maurice Heckscher, with 1,000 men working three eight-hour shifts a day. Southern Bell began the herculean task of building a \$1,500,000 new headquarters around its central telephone exchange without interrupting service. It finally accomplished it, but for the next three months the frenzied customers were more apt to get a wrong number or no number at all, than the correct one. Vernon Baird, the manager, wore his voice to a whisper explaining to organizations why they couldn't get more telephones or right numbers until the new building was finished.

Even staid Jacksonville finally succumbed to the boom and San Jose Estates went on the market with \$850,000 in sales the first 10 days. Not an impressive amount, judged by south Florida standards, but enough. Seven miles south of Jacksonville on the old Dixie highway, it is still the site of beautiful homes, with a military academy in the once flossy hotel on the banks of the St. Johns river.

Not a few of the late-blooming developments got started in August, only to be nipped by the financial frosts of the early autumn. There was Picture City, for example. Charles L. Apfel of Miami bought the entire town of Olympia, near Stuart in Martin county, and the Gomez grant of 8,000 acres to form this new town-site. As near as we can recall, they were going to make most of the movie films for the whole country there, as soon as the Humboldt current succeeded in freezing the studios out of California.

The townsite of Indrio, north of Fort Pierce, finally opened as "America's Most Beautiful Home Town," with John I. Beggs, Milwaukee traction magnate, at the head of the financiers, and Charles W. Murray, former director of public service and welfare in Miami, in charge of the development. Indrio was slow in get-

ting up its steam, having come out as early as the preceding January and advertised itself as a "lavishly endowed town." It had its first sale in September, but the fact that Beggs died soon after put a damper on the enthusiasm of its other promoters. W. D. Outman of St. Petersburg, one of the leading real estate spokesmen of today, was its sales manager.



. . . Carl G. Fisher, right, put Miami Beach literally on the map--Steve Hannagan put Miami Beach in the datelines of the nation's newspapers.