

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE great railway freight embargo which was finally to stretch its paralyzing influence over every part of Florida began August 17, 1925, when the Florida East Coast railroad found itself unable to handle the volume of freight coming down the East Coast into Miami.

It was taking six days to get a boxcar from Jacksonville to Miami, and when it arrived it couldn't be unloaded. With 820 loaded cars waiting in the Miami yards, and 1,300 more strung north as far as Lemon City, the railroad stopped taking any cars from other railroads, and shut off incoming shipments on everything but fuel, livestock and perishables. The officials didn't think the shutdown would last longer than 10 days. But before the embargo was broken the boom had broken with it, while more than seven thousand southbound freight cars waited helplessly outside of Jacksonville as fall reached on into the winter of 1925.

Work soon stopped on the Rand buildings after the embargo became effective, although most contractors in south Florida reported enough supplies on hand to last two weeks. Ernest Cotton, acting city manager for Miami, began at once to use city trucks in unloading cars, and warehouses kept open all day Sunday as business men rallied to claim their freight.

But many found they had no place to store their freight, and finally some were arrested by the city before they would take freight out of the railroad warehouses or off "spotted" cars. An acute labor shortage had developed also, and that, combined with

lack of warehouse space, was the principal contributing cause of the congestion. Soon there was so much confusion that shippers willing to get their consignments were unable to locate them among the hundreds of cars jammed into every inch of available trackage around Miami.

While building slowed down, Miami was faced with a new menace—lack of ice. The city began importing 250 tons a day from Sanford, and before long ice was being rationed out at 25 pounds to the family, like sugar in war days. Dr. A. W. Ziebold, city health officer, ordered the ice companies here to quit selling to fountains and cold drink



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stands. Those were the days, you may recall, before mechanical refrigeration was common in house or store.

But although builders faced the immediate future with trepidation, not so the subdivisionists. Foremost among the new developments was Golden Isles, the last of the tracts along the upper beach except the Isle of Normandy and the Miami Shores island to get into the boom.

Golden Isles comprised 826 acres of partly submerged land stretching along the East Coast canal from the Hallandale road to the head of Dumfoundling bay, lying just west of Golden Beach and Seminole Beach. It was bought for \$1,200,000, and comprised a part of the extensive holdings of Olaf Zetterland, the former engineer who sold Atlantic Shores its site.

S. A. Kagey was president; C. M. Van Tassell, vice president, and Vance W. Helm, sales agent for Golden Beach, was secretary-treasurer. Other directors in the enterprise were Frank H. Wharton, Miami city manager; Arthur G. Keene, W. M. Williamson and E. E. Rorem. All were prominent in other land developments at the time.

The idea was to fill in 10 islands and make of Golden Isles a modern Venice, with nearly every home on its own palm-bordered water front. By the middle of September \$5,000,000 worth of lots had been sold as dredges moved in to make the islands. Just across the way was Golden Beach and the blue Atlantic, forming a view that would have opened the purses of untold investors, had not the boom collapsed before even a house could be built to shelter the viewers.

Late in August, George E. Merrick rounded out his new Biltmore section by paying \$2,500,000 for the famous Le Jeune grove of 160 acres in the eastern part of Coral Gables. Charles Le Jeune, a Belgian, bought the land in 1900 from Dr. Charles Jackson and made it into a very popular citrus grove. His home stood across the street from the San Sebastian Hotel, and his name today dignifies one of the important streets of Coral Gables. When this new Merrick section was put on the market, \$5,555,850 in sales were recorded in 24 hours.

The little town of Davie was having quite a boom as the "Gem of the Everglades." The somewhat notorious subdivision of Del Verde near Charlotte Harbor was selling 18,000 lots at \$99 each on the promise by John L. Rossel, the president, that 40 per cent of the proceeds was to be held in trust to build the actual townsite. The price later went up to \$149 a lot, before Miami buyers got surfeited with it. Even Poinciana, far down on the western shore of the Gulf of Mexico and accessible only by boat, could be advertised as "the coming Miami on the Gulf" without a discernible blush from the promoters. Fellsmere Estates was reported oversold in five minutes by Louis Gold.

Alton Port was started by Jerome Cherbino as a passenger ship terminal at Miami Beach on a former Allison tract and reach-

ing from the end of the causeway through the Gulf Refining Company property almost to the government cut. As it appeared that Carl Fisher would not be able to bridge the channel and get access to Terminal island, Cherbino bought 400 feet along the water's edge for \$1,000,000, 30 times what James A. Allison paid for it six years before. A ship channel 20 feet deep was assured, for the convenience of ocean liners desiring to unload passengers on Miami Beach.

Elser Pier and the 30-year-old 124th Infantry national guard armory on the new Miami bayfront fill finally were being torn down, after Blue Steele and his New Orleans Nite Hawks had completed an engagement in the Japanese ballroom of the pier. The Tallman hospital was started as a \$1,000,000 piece of construction in Coral Gables. The First Church of Christ, Scientist, opened its \$250,000 place of worship on N. E. Nineteenth street. The \$800,000 Alcazar Hotel on the bayfront added its part to Miami's skyline.

The new Venetian causeway was reluctantly offered to the county for \$2,000,000 by J. F. Chaille and F. C. B. LeGro, but it was discovered that the county had reached its bonding limit, and couldn't buy, so the causeway continued on a toll basis.

As September, 1925, opened, the voters of Miami marched to the polls and approved the expansion of the city limits to include the adjoining towns of Silver Bluff, Coconut Grove, Little River, Lemon City, Allapattah and Buena Vista, after an extensive campaign in which the town councils of Coconut Grove and Silver Bluff seemed the only opposition. The Committee of 400 was given credit for the victory, with A. J. Cleary as its chairman, but the size of the majority—2,908 to 308—indicated the well established public demand for a larger Miami. The new area was 50 square miles instead of 13.

Gov. John W. Martin had arrived in Miami with Treasurer John C. Luning and Attorney General Rivers Buford, to be feted and dined by the city's leading men for the success of his drive to start road-building and the changes made in state laws which encouraged business and capital.

While here he got first tidings of the celebrated Marco island dispute, in which a number of angry and armed squatters defied Barron G. Collier to take possession of the island which he had bought and intended to develop.

Later, after extensive hearings in Tallahassee, the Marco island case was settled abruptly by a brief note from President Coolidge, advising that the land never had been opened to homestead by the United States government and therefore couldn't be claimed by the squatters, many of whom had lived there nearly 20 years.

With checks and cash being carried away in barrels, the Shoreland Company put on a \$33,000,000 sale September 3 that temporarily reassured the doubtful, and at least took the minds of Miami-

ans from their troubles with rent gougers, the railroad embargo and the anvil chorus in other states. Only the fact that the dirigible Shenandoah broke in two and was demolished in a storm over the hills of Caldwell, Ohio, that same day prevented the sales news from getting a better spread.

The Shoreland Company put the 400-acre Arch Creek section of Miami Shores on the market before the sand pumped in on it had well settled. The doors of the Flagler street offices opened at 8:30 o'clock on the morning of the sale and closed at 11 o'clock when no more property was left. There, and in the field offices, the rioting customers literally threw \$33,734,350 in money and checks at the sales force, 75 per cent of the buyers leaving it to the company to pick their lots. The Shoreland Company offices remained closed for five days to catch up with their bookkeeping and found that the offering had been oversubscribed more than \$11,000,000.

But while all was joy and happiness in the great subdivision, confusion and congestion and cursing marked Miami harbor, as shipping lines joined the railroad in declaring an embargo on freight into Miami. Dockmen struck for more wages than the 45 cents an hour they got, pointing to a wage of 60 cents in New York. Eighteen vessels tried vainly to edge up into the small docking space Miami then afforded, while long lines of trucks waited all day in the hot sun and far into the night to get their goods out of the holds.

E. R. McKenna of the Piggly Wiggly shipping department said merchants laid the blame for the deadlock on the steamship lines for not having enough labor to empty the ships quickly, while the officials of the lines cried in unison for more terminal facilities, more docks, more of anything to which an ocean steamer might be tied while unloading.

A milk shortage was next to develop, and cows of south Florida dairies once faced starvation because ships loaded with cow feed from abroad couldn't get in to deliver it to the dairies. The further fact that shipments of new bottles were locked up by the embargo prevented some dairies from making deliveries even when they had plenty of milk.

All steamship lines running to Miami from New York, Baltimore or Philadelphia were enforcing an embargo on furniture, machinery and building materials by September 12, and about the only shipments that had a free track were food and newsprint. Mason L. Weems Williams of the Baltimore and Carolina line was the last to join the shipping embargo. His line the month before had added six ships to the seven already running into Miami and he hated to think of them gathering rust.

Finally the city of Miami took more direct action when it appeared that the situation at the water front was getting badly out of hand. Sixty men were transferred from the parks division and joined with a squad of 25 prisoners who marched to the docks and

in one day unloaded the Clyde liner Chippewa, which had actually been in Miami harbor 21 days, waiting for a chance to get up to a pier.

Meantime the Fred F. French Company chartered the steamship Glendola to transport materials badly needed for the new Everglades Hotel and various buildings they had part way up. Other builders were not long in joining this movement to charter vessels, and before many weeks, every ancient steamer and wind-jammer on both sides of the United States was being hauled out of the mud and put in shape for a run to Miami with lumber and hardware and steel. About the only material present in abundance was cement, thanks to the arrival of three ships from Sweden with 200,000 sacks.

The American Express Company finally declared an embargo on shipments of more than 200 pounds, and later had to begin issuing permits to prevent shippers from evading the rule by dividing larger orders into 200-pound lots. While the city was threatening arrest of shippers who refused to claim freight, the newspapers were publishing long lists of names of consignees. The railroad proposed to begin selling shipments not promptly claimed, as the city of Miami hurriedly threw up temporary shelters on its own land into which freight could be moved.

As a result of these and other activities of civic and business organizations, there was some promise of the embargo lifting by the latter part of September. Things were rosy-hued indeed one day when 109 empty cars were turned back north, and only 92 loaded ones arrived. The chamber of commerce resumed its drive against rent gougers, and a Better Business Bureau got pledges of \$25,000 to whip an organization into shape to weed the wolves from the sheep along Flagler street.

Flagler Heights was offered by John A. Campbell out along Red road, and \$2,000,000 in lots were "snapped up" the first day. A. D. H. Fossey sold the northwest corner of North Miami avenue and Thirty-sixth street for \$200,000, the same vacant corner which today offers occasional sanctuary for itinerant carrousel.

A 50-foot lot opposite the El Comodoro Hotel on S. W. Second avenue and First street changed hands three times in two days, the last price being \$165,000. C. C. Katleman of Omaha bought the Dennis apartments on the southeast corner of North Miami avenue and Fifth street for \$500,000, from the United Cigar Stores subsidiary. The opposite corner across the avenue was sold to the Vaughan Investment Company for \$675,000.

The big wedding of September in Miami was that of Herbert O. Vance of the McDonald Lumber Company to Emily Murray, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Murray, which was followed by a honeymoon trip through Europe. James E. Calkins, long-time leader in the state senate from Fernandina, resigned as counsel for the state railroad commission and came to Miami to form a new law firm with John P. Stokes. Senator Calkins was succeeded on the railroad commission staff by Fred H. Davis, then a struggling

young lawyer of Tallahassee, who rose in the subsequent 10 years to be chief justice of the Florida Supreme court.

Dan Chappell called a meeting in Hialeah which resulted in the incorporation of that community September 10. G. Carl Adams of the Hialeah Civic club, which was formed to promote incorporation, was in the presiding chair. Paul Latham resigned as deputy sheriff to be the first chief of police in Hialeah, and Chappell was made the first city attorney.

Joy R. Cark had become slightly weary of promoting Atlantic Shores and was made president of Tampa Beach, Inc., during the summer. He returned to Miami only briefly in September to dazzle his former associates with the magnitude of his new undertaking, 4,000 acres in Hillsborough bay on which he proposed to spend \$100,000,000. Such Ohio figures as Gruen, the watch manufacturer, Patterson of National Cash Register, and Mannington of the famous Harding front porch campaign were putting up the money.

It may seem ridiculous now, but the statement was very calmly received that Tampa Beach as a beach would be made on a proposed chain of islands to be dredged out of the bay. This was not out of line with his policy, however, in announcing several months before that he had paid \$750,000 for Cat Cay, principally to get 30,000 coconut trees to beautify Atlantic Shores.

Anyway, a reported cash price of \$4,500,000 was paid for the land in and along East Hillsborough bay. Under the direction of Adolph Goodwin, full page advertisements were run in nearly every state paper, and a 45-page special edition was printed in The Tampa Tribune on the momentous day when the long bridge and causeway connecting the development to Tampa was opened with an impressive civic ceremony. The bridge and a night club occupying the former administration building are the only evidence that the naked eye can pick up today to identify Tampa Beach.