

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

**T**HEY even rang the king of Greece in on the Florida boom in January, 1926, in an effort to inject some life into a situation that had been allowed to take a nap over the holidays and then refused to awaken.

You may recall the Floranada club, north of Fort Lauderdale. The actual promoter of the elaborately conceived settlement was James H. R. Cromwell, son of Mrs. Edward T. Stotesbury of Palm Beach, and destined later to marry Doris Duke, the world's richest girl. The names that headed the list of active sponsors were those of Mrs. Stotesbury, known the world over for her social position; the Countess of Lauderdale, of England; Mrs. Horace E. Dodge, Samuel M. Vauclain, president of the Baldwin Locomotive Works; John S. Pillsbury, of flour fame; and the king of Greece.

But those who poured their money and prestige into post-boom developments like Floranada were no less deluded than 90 per cent of those in Miami, at the heart of the movement. Here, plans were afoot for the dedication of the University of Miami, to which George E. Merrick had given 160 acres in Coral Gables and the promise of \$5,000,000 for the endowment if a like sum were to be raised among the other regents and friends of the university.

James Cash Penney, soon to be identified with the City National Bank in Miami, started off the pledges with \$200,000. Victor Hope, a Coral Gables financier, who shared honors with J. K. Williams as an "acreage king," came in with a \$1,000,000 pledge. Others pledged \$100,000 each, to bring the endowment within working range, and the university cornerstone was laid February 3 before a great audience ranging through the pine woods south of the Miami Biltmore golf course.

The reinforced concrete frame of the first unit was up before the cold truth about the boom finally began to sink into the minds and pocketbooks of the people, and that was as far as the original idea for a university campus got. The University of Miami itself was born in a large V-shaped hotel not far from the center of Coral Gables, and there it is today while efforts are made to get cash or credit from government or private sources to carry the first structure to completion.

In Miami the Halcyon Hotel was the site of considerable real estate broker activity around what they called the Big Board, where listings were pooled for the benefit of the group. It was estimated rather generally in January that real estate to a value of \$1,750,000 had been sold in Dade county alone during the preceding year, but this figure becomes rather far-fetched if we add up the real estate transfers. Five new bridges across the Miami river were planned, and footings were already started for the S. E. Second avenue bridge near Dallas Park.

The site for the present Miami Senior High school was bought

from the Knickerbocker Realty Corporation for \$275,000. It was not 10 years before a better location in front of the high school building could have been had for the taxes—and no takers. Jesse L. Billingsley, one of the foremost south Florida lawyers, died in a Washington hospital. The Urmev Hotel was sold to the Rand interests by W. N. Urmev for \$1,250,000, a hotel he had opened in 1917, and which he later recovered.

Counting up at the first of the year showed that Coral Gables led all the other developments in 1925 sales, having disposed of \$94,000,000 in property and extended itself over 10,000 acres. Merrick and "Jack" Bowman then were engrossed in plans for spending \$250,000,000 along the edge of Biscayne bay as far south as Chapman Field, a section which began with more than \$6,000,000 in one day's sales late in December. This was helped by the glamorous opening of the Miami Biltmore Hotel and Country club in January.

Miami Shores was not far behind with \$75,000,000, and the developers of that city were busy then with plans for Miami Plaza and the building of Biscayne boulevard. Addison Mizner's Boca Raton was off to a late start but in the last six months of 1925 sold \$27,000,000 worth of lots.

The gorgeous fantasy of Fountania opened in the beautiful Theater Fountania in Miami Shores that season, with 350 people in the cast. Arthur Voegtlin was employed by the Shoreland Company to stage the production along lines of the shows he had produced for years in the New York Hippodrome. The Theater Fountania was a victim of the 1926 hurricane.

Hollywood and the various companies of Joseph W. Young were showing perhaps as much speed as any big south Florida promotion in the early months of 1926. They even had two marimba bands instead of one to please the patrons. Elsie Janis, the sweetheart of the A. E. F., was featured at the Hollywood Golf and Country club.

Gene Tunney entered the real estate business in January while he was waiting for a chance to catch Jack Dempsey, the heavy-weight champion, in a squared ring. Tunney was pictured rather extensively in the advertisements of those days, advocating suburban life. Especially suburban life such as might be found at P. L. Bergoff's Hollywood pines Estates, for which Tunney became sales manager.

The first pilings were driven for the five proposed Venetian isles north of the present set in February, as sales of lots admittedly under water went ahead. Carl Fisher's companies opened their new radio station WIOD on Collins island, opposite the Nautilus Hotel. Joseph Elsener's Club Deauville, today catering to the seekers of health under the Barnarr Macfadden regimen, was opened to the public on Miami Beach.

Commodore J. Perry Stoltz was proposing four other Fleetwood hotels to join the parent on Miami Beach. The one on Jump Off Mountain, in Asheville, N. C., got farther along than most. The

one at Daytona Shores, a \$60,000,000 development near Daytona Beach, progressed no farther than the first spadeful of dirt, turned in an elaborate ceremony which included the governor of the state and most of his staff.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers gave the greatest exhibition of reckless spending of the entire boom when they turned more than \$10,000,000 loose to create the city of Venice on the lower West Coast. The land was bought from Dr. Fred L. Albee of near-by Nokomis, probably the foremost bone specialist in the United States. The exploitation of the high-powered promoters left Venice with acres of unused sewer pipe, miles of unwanted streets, scores of apartments and dwellings for which there were no tenants, and the curse of wrecking the Brotherhood bank in Cleveland.

But Venice, like many other boom products, is finding itself. Dr. Albee took hold again, performing the same miracles there that he has done with the human frame. The Kentucky Military Institute leased two big hotels for their winter headquarters. The Florida Medical Center has been established and will some day be a great asset to Florida, despite the efforts of certain envious Jacksonville and St. Petersburg medics to discredit Dr. Albee professionally. Bailey Hall, an exclusive boys' school from New York, has leased the Treasure island property and is in its second year at Venice. It may interest some to know that one vote against the continued spending of money for the cross-state canal was that of Senator Royal S. Copeland of New York, who looks upon Venice as his favorite place in the South.

The criticism of Florida in the press of the nation had rather generally died down by January. Floridians thought the rest of the nation finally had got some sense; we know now that they only refrained from speaking ill of the dead. The embargo still was hopelessly clamped upon the state, and there were predictions it might last two or three years.

The tourist season itself was not so bad. The Miami Jockey club opened winter racing with 31,000 passing the turnstiles, and Joe Smoot was looking abroad for other racing worlds to conquer. Music and gaiety filled the night air, although the smiles of the salesmen were becoming a trifle strained, and free sandwiches for the prospects were not plentiful enough any more for an energetic man actually to live by making a daily round of the subdivisions. The hope that springs eternal was on the job in Florida—but it began to lose some of its zip as February brought the truth closer home.

The abrupt fall of the Miami boom was cushioned in the first part of 1926 by the conception of Biscayne boulevard, which Hugh M. Anderson and Roy C. Wright started to carry out, in conjunction with the development of the Charles Deering estate in north-east Miami.

We say "cushioned," because this was the only major undertaking of private capital during early 1926 which was continued

in the better traditions of the boom itself. Biscayne boulevard created new values in a city where every other value was receding, and it contributed no little to the amazing fact that building in Miami during 1926 was more than half as much as during 1925, when the principal elements of the Miami skyline were started.

Anderson and Wright had planned and even plotted the course of the boulevard a year before their purchase of the Deering property and its conversion into Miami Plaza. But they could carry out the ambitious boulevard program only by getting control of the Deering tract. On December 5, 1925, they announced that Charles Deering had sold his place, from N. E. Second avenue to the bay and stretching nine city blocks north from Forty-first street. It was only a few days thereafter, on December 15, that the Harrison Construction Company moved in to begin clearing the path for the new 100-foot boulevard.

Like some giant mowing machine trundling through a field of standing grain, the forces set in motion by the Shoreland Company founders cut a broad swath out N. E. Third avenue, starting with the destruction of Temple Israel synagogue standing two blocks north of the Thirteenth street traffic circle, cleaving through the blind alleys and labyrinths of the older part of the city, on through the matted tropical jungle which formed the Deering estate, to Fifty-fifth street, where the Federal highway was to pick up the new boulevard and carry it north through Miami Shores into Hollywood.

Here was a piece of work that disregarded seemingly insuperable difficulties to bring a wholly new civic existence to the eastern side of Miami. This plan was to evolve into a motorway reaching from the Royal Palm site to Hollywood that has become one of the famous drives of the world. Having left the Jewish place of worship flat, the wrecking crews rolled on to destroy 85 other buildings, including 12 apartment houses and two hotels. Front porches were sliced off, 12 houses were moved intact to other sites, and the irresistible momentum of millions destroyed with the thoroughness of a Kansas cyclone everything else that blocked the progress of the new boulevard.

Anderson and Wright and their associates had bought up most of the property needed for the right of way by the first of December, before their plans became known. In the first instance, they put land which had cost them \$3,610,000 into the venture, and then went on to acquire the remainder, while the city of Miami lent its power of condemnation and \$1,800,000 in paving bonds to the program. This gives only a meager idea of the final cost, because we already have seen that the last eight miles of Biscayne boulevard were achieved for \$1,000,000 a mile.

At this point it may be of interest to quote portions of a letter received a few days ago from Roy Wright, written from the headquarters of the works progress administration in Knoxville, Tenn., relating to Biscayne boulevard:

"We conceived this boulevard and had our engineers survey

it a year before we had ever heard of the J. S. Phipps estate. After we had bought the Charles Deering estate, we contacted the Phipps family and asked them for a \$7,000,000 loan to finance the purchase of the property for the boulevard. They made us the loan and in 11 weeks after we started buying, I had signed checks for \$11,000,000. Our contract with Phipps was that Hugh Anderson and I gave our notes for this money and put up stocks in various companies we had as collateral.

"We purchased 98 per cent of all the properties on both sides of the present boulevard from Thirteenth to Thirty-sixth streets, including homes, apartments and hotels, and we tore down a Jewish synagogue that cost us \$250,000. We also bought several homes that cost us over \$100,000 which were either torn completely down or partially destroyed for the right of way. Ed Romfh's house cost us \$100,000; Frank Wharton's, \$125,000; Ed Inglis, \$100,000 and several others.

"I sometimes think that Hugh Anderson and myself in a way rang up the curtain of the starting of the boom when we bought all properties on W. Flagler street from the bridge to Twelfth avenue in 1924 and deeded to the city the frontage required to widen W. Flagler and make a white way out of it. This created a lot of excitement and sales, and we really thought it had a lot to do with starting the boom. Then again we rang the curtain down on the boom, as we were still buying properties on the boulevard and just put on the Deering estate when the boom died on us. These were the last large transactions of the boom."

Today Biscayne boulevard starts at S. E. Second street, at the gateway to the former gardens of the old Royal Palm Hotel, and sweeps northward, 250 feet wide, in four lanes of traffic separated by parkways studded with palms; after passing the Thirteenth street traffic circle hazard, it enters a two-lane system 100 feet wide, which persists for three miles, except where it widens to 180 feet through a part of Miami Plaza. The federal government took over the building of the boulevard at Fifty-fifth street. Beyond the Miami city limits, the boulevard is split again into two one-way roads as far as the Hollywood city limits. It is a fitting terminus for the Dixie highway which Carl G. Fisher planned in 1914, when Florida sand first was sifting into his shoes.

It is difficult at this time to say which came first, the chicken or the egg, Miami Plaza or Biscayne boulevard. At any rate, they hit the public eye together, in the days when only the stout-hearted and the far-seeing were risking such dreams and hard cash in a Miami where the full flush of the speculative boom already had assumed the sickly cast of Roquefort cheese.

With Anderson and Wright in the Miami Plaza company were J. S. Phipps, principal heir to the Henry C. Phipps Estate of New York; Lester F. Alexander of New Orleans; David T. Layman, financial manager of the Phipps estate; and Paul R. Scott, then with the law firm of Twyman, Scott & McCarthy.

William I. Phillips represented the Charles Deering interests

in Miami. He got a lukewarm reception when he first proposed to Mr. Deering that his tropical paradise in northeast Miami be sold to Anderson and Wright. The initial offer to buy came in February, 1925, but it was not until months later when Phillips broached the proposition to Chauncey McCormick, son-in-law of Charles Deering, that a friendlier ear was turned to the idea. Finally Phillips took Anderson, Wright and Fred W. Cason to Deering's home in Chicago and there closed the deal.

Miami Plaza as a development was caught in the backwash of the boom and today is in the hands of the Deering heirs. But when the ebbing fortunes of Anderson and Wright forced them out of the picture in 1926, the Phipps estate took over the assets of the Anderson-Wright companies in order to protect the investment made by the Phipps family, formed the Biscayne Boulevard Company and completed the boulevard. Had it not been for this action on the part of the Phipps interests, the boulevard and the properties involved in widening N. E. Third avenue would have been left in such a chaotic state that it would have been necessary, finally, for the city of Miami to have spent many millions of dollars to carry out the Anderson-Wright plan.

The Biscayne Boulevard Company in its Florida operations has been directed by Paul Scott as president, and by Roy H. Hawkins as vice president and operations manager. Eighty-five per cent of all the property fronting on Biscayne boulevard from Thirteenth street to Fortieth street is owned and operated by the Biscayne Boulevard Company, and all the new commercial buildings along the way were built by this company.

This tale is concerned chiefly with the beginning and not the end of Biscayne boulevard. Its genesis in the 1925-26 boom was scant warning of what it would be, like so many other creations of that period. The splendid architecture of Robert L. Weed and Vladimir L. Virrick was to come later, along with the landscaping which makes the boulevard today distinctive in a region where beauty is the accepted rule.

Like the anesthesia which prepares our nerves for the shock of the surgeon's knife, the creation of Biscayne boulevard kept Miami going during the summer of 1926 despite the discovery that \$50,000 lots no longer could be sold for one-tenth of that amount or that the "summer tourist season" of 1925 was nothing but a delusion.

The boulevard, therefore, is something more than just a wide strip of asphalt to south Florida. It is an institution whose bright flowering of today gives no hint of the bitter disappointments on which its first roots fed.