

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE captains and the kings had by no means departed in February, 1926, but on the contrary were arriving in great numbers to make an unusual tourist season, comparable only to those of today.

As a matter of fact, while we know in looking back that the speculative boom then was at least moribund, every sign pointed to its revival in March just as the speculative spree had picked up in March, 1925. Miami by now was famous, and the facilities for entertaining those drawn by her fame were greatly increased over the years when it simply was a small Florida town revolving around its bright yellow Florida East Coast depot.

Although it no longer was considered proper to print the daily amounts of property transferred, as someone might begin to make odious comparisons, Tatum Brothers reported that their sales of \$1,800,000 for the first six weeks of 1926 were well ahead of the same period of 1925. Alfred H. Wagg, who was a successful real estate operator in Palm Beach and West Palm Beach, moved to Miami and opened an office to sell Riviera Gardens, west of Coral Gables.

Having set a world's record of 42,500,000 lines of advertising in 1925, 12,000,000 lines more than any newspaper ever had carried in a year's time, The Miami Herald had the biggest advertising month of its life in January, 1926, while February was not far behind. The boys may have been going down, but they were going down fighting, still putting the long green on the counter.

As in bygone years, such institutions as the Royal Palm Hotel had opened with discreet whoopee, and the season began on schedule about the middle of January. Great names flooded the news, and music and good times in south Florida were never better. Flo Ziegfeld with his "Palm Beach Nights" was giving that older winter group the glorified American girl in competition with Arthur Voegtlin's "Fountania" at Miami Shores, and promising to stage a special show for Miami.

Feador Chaliapin, the great Russian basso, sang in the Biltmore that winter, while Galli Curci filled the White Temple to overflowing with her gifted voice. Paderewski also packed the White Temple. Paul Whiteman brought his famous orchestra to the Coral Gables Country club to give Jan Garber a little rest.

A large athletic stadium had been rushed to completion in Coral Gables in time for Red Grange and his Chicago Bears' professional football team to meet Tim Callahan's Coral Gables Collegians, a game which the famous Grange won with 7 points. Peter de Paola defeated a high-class field in the first 300-mile automobile race in the great wooden racing bowl at Fulford. Tex Rickard, then owner of the new Madison Square Garden in New York, an-

nounced that he and Paul R. Scott of the new N. E. Third avenue development were going to build a sports stadium in Miami Plaza to cost \$1,000,000. Those were still great days for dreams.

The principal reason that most of them refused to believe the boom was over in February was because one could see before his very eyes the evidence to contradict such heresies. Miami on the skids, when the new Roney Plaza Hotel at Miami Beach opened with a full house? Merrick slipping, with the great Miami Biltmore and Country club actually there, and the brilliant opening of Tahiti Beach to point the way to future glories? Of course not, one said, and reflected that January was always a funny month anyway.

Everywhere one went, a building boom was under way. Tractors were snorting through the pine woods in the lower part of Coral Gables getting ready for the University of Miami. Raymond and Margaret Burlingame were constructing the little island bearing their name at the mouth of the Miami river. Construction in 48 Florida cities in 1925 amounted to \$307,324,887, and as much more was planned for 1926.

With only 954 votes cast, the citizens of Miami approved new bonds in the amount of \$11,250,000 for city improvements, including the debated item of \$1,500,000 for advancing money to the federal government for the harbor. E. G. Sewell and George A. Waldeck organized the Voters and Taxpayers Protective League and made a hard fight against that item, claiming the city needn't bond itself for a temporary loan, but the issue passed in the name of civic progress. Miami Beach voted \$2,654,000 in new bonds for its needed expansion.

Skeptics saw Miami starting the tallest courthouse in the South, constructing the new building like a shell around the old courthouse, to avoid disrupting work. They saw the new home of the Miami Woman's club nearing completion on the bayfront. The new Venetian causeway was opened with fitting ceremonies, as the memory of John S. Collins and the old wooden bridge the causeway replaced were revived. The Club Deauville began doing business on upper Miami Beach. The new Olympia Theater was opened in downtown Miami, when Ed Romfh made a speech and the stars in the roof began twinkling and Harry A. Leach took up his duties as resident manager.

The new Columbus Hotel on the bayfront was completed and opened in February. So, also, were the Everglades, the Alcazar Hotel, the Woman's club building and the First Trust building in Miami, the Floridian Hotel at Miami Beach, the Venetian Hotel, the great new Alba Hotel at Palm Beach, and the Hollywood Hotel at Joe Young's place. The City National Bank of Miami began with the greatly respected S. M. Tatum as chairman of the board, and Clark B. Davis as president. There were no augurs then to predict the end of that institution, with J. C. Penney, the chain store prince, driven from his Belle Isle estate and his stores barred from this county by the force of public disapproval, all because he

promised more in support of that bank than most of its depositors believe he really delivered in the dark days of 1930.

S. E. First street was being cut through Royal Palm park from the Huntington building to the future Biscayne boulevard. Arthur Pryor was conferring with city heads on plans for the new bandshell on the fill. Burdine's department store dedicated its new addition. Frederick A. Clawson lifted a ceremonial shovelful of dirt in Dallas Park for the first of five 21-story Florida Motor Marts, to handle the parking situation.

There still were a few big sales in the downtown part of Miami, but none of them means anything today. Most important news of February was the lifting of the freight embargo on Florida railroads, an embargo that had gripped the state since September. The dismayed Prins Valdemar finally was floated after 42 days in the mouth of the Miami ship channel, and everything began to look all right again.

With Lon Worth Crow as its new president, the Miami Chamber of Commerce staged a membership drive in February that brought more than 7,000 names on the rolls, making Miami's chamber second in size only to that of Los Angeles, which city Miami lusted to overtake. The first air mail contract was awarded to Florida Airways, Inc., a Ford subsidiary with Reed M. Chambers as president. Service was expected to start April 1 between Miami, Tampa and Jacksonville, joining Atlanta and Chicago soon after. Tom C. Hammond at a Tampa dinner proposed that Gov. John W. Martin be a candidate to replace United States Senator Park Trammell in 1928, a proposal that found prompt favor throughout the boom area.

Only the burning of the McDonald Lumber Company warehouse back of The Herald building cast a blot on the February record. The brilliance of the tourist season took the sting out of the obvious fact that people no longer clapped their hands and ran temperatures when a new subdivision opened.

Just when everything seemed about to boom again in a gentler sort of way at Miami, the stock market, in March, 1926, took its worst tumble since 1920, skidding abruptly downward when the interstate commerce commission refused to approve the Van Sweringens' Nickle Plate railroad merger.

The market decline served notice on many that New York would not pour money that spring into south Florida to restore real estate which was admittedly "inert." It even cast such a chill over the purses of the wealthy that Billy Gibson, manager of Light Heavyweight Champion Gene Tunney, called off a proposed Miami fight with Young Stribling on the night before the date of the bout because no one could be found to guarantee Tunney's \$50,000 share of the purse. Jesse Baugh and his fellow promoters were left to fight with the sheriff and the creditors over a big pile of lumber nailed into the form of a fight arena at Hialeah.

Instead of sales, the lot salesmen then were holding auctions of property, which meant that most of them were taking what they

could get from the public which still clung to the remnants of the boom. A slick promoter incorporated the town of Miami Shores north of the famous development of that name, but it was too late to get either cash or glory from the trick, and few remember today where it was. South Miami took form around the old store of W. A. Larkins and the people elected W. A. Foster its first mayor.

On the other end of Miami, the Cincinnati capitalists who comprised the Donnelly Realty Company were having fair success with North Miami, the bulk of which is included in the present town of that name, along with Irons Manor. Arthur Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates near-by has since been split up between the town of Biscayne Park, and North Miami.

Aladdin City was the most pugnacious of the postboom subdivisions, holding out the suggestion in daily advertisements that some previously unrevealed magic would bring fortune to Aladdin lot owners, regardless of what was taking place elsewhere. It was laid out on the West Dixie highway about eight miles south of Coral Gables by O. E. Sovereign of Bay City, Mich., but the lamp of Aladdin refused to shine for him, even with the indorsement of Senator Duncan U. Fletcher.

Western Miami was opened by Lummus & Young north of the townsite of Sweetwater and west of the Milam dairy. J. Leroy Farmer started Tamiami Townsites 18 miles west of Coral Gables on the Trail with lots as low as \$47.50. Pinecrest was the Chevelier Corporation's bid for city population on its far-flung Everglades lands, more than 40 miles straight west of Miami. The southern loop of the new Tamiami Trail was routed through Pinecrest by Fons A. Hathaway of the state road department, principally because that was Monroe county's only opportunity to get a state highway.

Cocoplum Gardens, near the Biscayne bay section of Coral Gables, sprang up under the hand of Irving J. Thomas, whose 14 years in Coconut Grove real estate made him outstanding in that section during the boom.

The new viaducts on the county causeway still were not fully opened by the first of March, and of course traffic between Miami and Miami Beach was badly congested despite the dedication of the new Venetian causeway. Miami Beach hinted darkly that "interests" must be conspiring to delay the completion of the viaducts. The largest piece of steel to enter Florida—72 feet long—was brought on two flat cars for the new Miami Coliseum at Coral Gables.

As plans for cutting up old Royal Palm park went on, the Model Land Company announced it would build the 12-story Ingraham building on part of its land fronting on S. E. Second avenue, next to the corner where Tatum brothers built their office on the site of the original home of the Miami Woman's club.

People had time for other interests than real estate in March. An entire week of grand opera found as many as 3,500 music lovers filling a large tent in Coral Gables, where Mary Garden and the

Chicago Civic Opera Company brought stars of the singing world to south Florida. Great circus tents on the new bayfront fill held exhibits of the Dade County fair that were viewed daily by 10,000 people.

Madame Louise Homer carried on the musical series at the White Temple. Fox hunting became a popular sport at the Miami Biltmore Hotel. Beach scenes at Tahiti were almost as inspiring as on the ocean. Sarah Jane Heliker became Miss Miami of 1926 in a spirited bathing beauty contest in the Hialeah fronton.

As Miami was first to contract "boomitis," so it was first to lose the fever. In many other parts of Florida, the boom was not over so quickly. Many a smaller center of population was issuing bonds and staking out lots and putting in public improvements long after the sucker list had been exhausted in Miami. If we have not dealt with these other boom spots, it is not through lack of interest. But the story of each was only another version of what took place in Dade county.

The boom really extended into every part of Florida, for the name of the state itself was the magic needed to convince potential buyers. At Key West, Garrison Park closed the boom on one end of the keys, while Anglers Park and Key Largo City ended it on the other. Dozens of empty subdivisions lined the roads from the keys to Miami. North from Miami it was the same story. Only the little town of Dania, stuck in between Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood and at one time annexed by the latter, seems to have come through the boom without perceptible change.

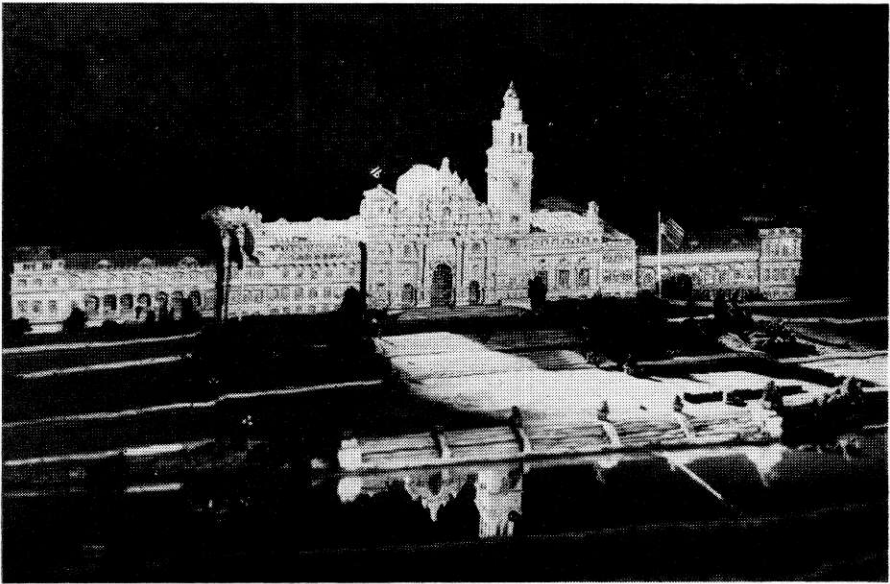
J. P. Newell's Fort Pierce Beach and its \$50,000 bathing casino was one of the best boom hopes of that section. West Palm Beach, Stuart, Melbourne, Fort Pierce, Vero Beach, Cocoa and Cocoa Beach, the Merritt Island development of Canaveral Harbor and the various subdivisions centering around Daytona Beach and St. Augustine made the East Coast hum. Notable developments such as Snell Isle at St. Petersburg, Ringling Isles at Sarasota, Homosassa, "The Miracle City," Clearwater, New Port Richey and many others contributed to similar expansion on Florida's West Coast.

Though the central part of Florida suffered in a promotional way by lack of beaches, it offset this to some extent with lakes. Orlando needed no boom to be a beautiful city, but it gained much headway at that time. Sanford was pushed into an abnormal growth by its mayor and leading banker, Forrest Lake, who narrowly escaped a prison sentence for his fiscal activities during the boom. Lakeland and many smaller cities along the Ridge of Florida, like Sebring, Avon Park, Frostproof, Haines City, Lake Wales and Winter Haven, blossomed out into much larger cities during this period, although the bonded debt they incurred in the optimism of those days has hung on like the weakening aftermath of the influenza ever since.

Each of these places has a boom history of intense interest to its people, just as nearly every person who was touched by the real

estate speculation has a story of his own that lives, ever green, in memory. But the covers of no book could contain them, and the writer's only hope is that individuals, reading this report of the boom, can find places in it that bring the reaction: "That also happened to me."

When Miami horse racing ended in March, 1926, the tourist season vanished as completely and almost as fast as it used to do in the years before speculation ruled. But building went busily on that spring and summer. The Seaboard Air Line railroad opened its new spurs into Miami on the East Coast and Naples on the West Coast. The federal government began digging a deeper Miami harbor. The clatter of the riveter and the noise of the carpenter sounded almost as loudly that spring as ever. By April, Miamians had even reconciled themselves to the feeling that "Thank God, we won't have another summer like the last one. This is the beginning of a steady growth that will see Miami a city of a million permanent population in 10 years."



. . . only this clay model and a weed-screened frame show what the University of Miami might have been.