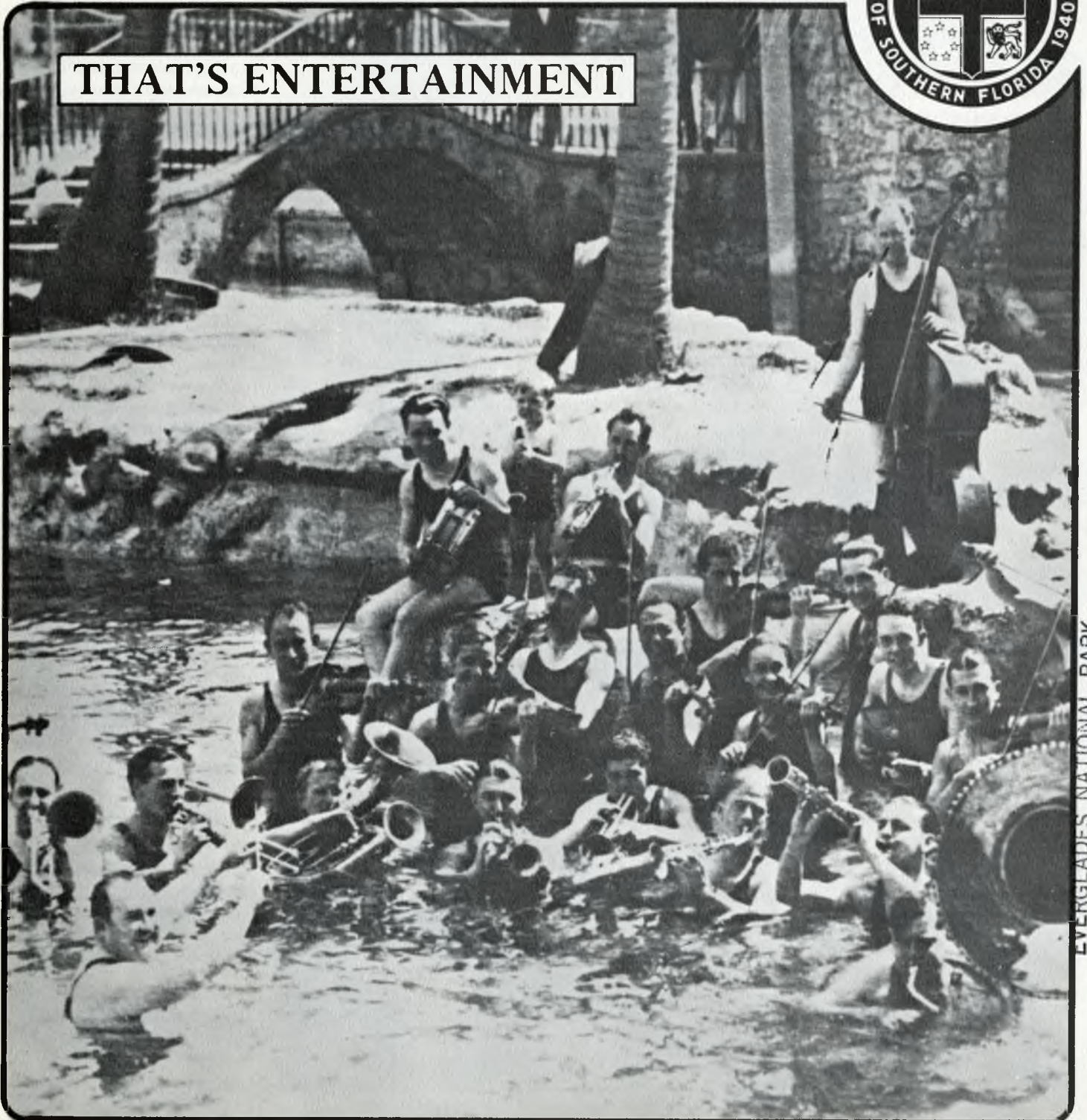


# Update



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT



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Cover: Paul Whiteman and his orchestra clown for the camera as they play in "The World's Most Beautiful Swimming Hole." —*Photo courtesy of Coral Gables City Hall*

## UPDATE

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## DIRECTOR'S DESK

Your Director represented HASF at the American Association for State and Local History's Annual Meeting held in Austin, Texas, at the end of September. Attending such meetings always brings two reactions. You talk to about half the people and come away from the conversation saying to yourself, "Well, at least we are doing better than that outfit". But then the other half of the people you talk to make you feel like we've got a long way to go in some other area! Reviewing your organization in the harsh light of other associations' accomplishments and failures can be very revealing. One truth that keeps popping up in case after case is it is not so much the size of the historical society (20 members or 2,000), its wealth (operating budgets of \$200 to \$200,000), or the particular area it serves that dictates its success or failure. The most important ingredient seems to be *people*. Dedicated and hard-working people, individually and in groups, make the difference between excellence and mediocrity. The key is people with well-thought-out and imaginative plans that result in action instead of just talk and hullabaloo. Those historical organizations that can attract the hard workers are going to suc-

## NEW MEMBERS

Alice L. Bowen  
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M/M John E. Junkin, III  
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### Disclaimer

*UPDATE*, its editors or the Historical Association of Southern Florida are not responsible for the statements of fact or opinion made by its contributors. We welcome documented evidence of error.

ceed in their effort to serve their communities.

HASF has a good record as an organization with many hard workers. But if we are going to do as well as we have in the past and live up to the potential of service that we should be providing our community, we are going to have to find more workers and members. There is not one program we undertake that could not benefit by more member and volunteer participation. Our lecture series got off to an excellent start with Frank Laumer's talk on the Dade Massacre followed by the unveiling of Ken Hughs' painting on the same subject. While we enjoyed a sizable crowd, it was a shame so many missed the opportunity. We need volunteers to help in the library. Our educational program needs people to be trained as tour guides and to make presentations in the schools. We are seriously in need of people interested in research in local and State history. The articles in this publication are the result of individuals spending many hours in research. Our oral history program needs typists for the transcription of tapes. I could go on but I believe I have made my point.

You know HASF is going to be precisely what we make it.

## WANTED

Can you contribute a power tool that's not doing anything for your home workshop? We could make good use of any or all of these for our Museum preparation room.  
Ten-inch bench saw  
Jointer/planer  
Router

## FLORIDA HISTORY

Florida history classes will begin January 7 at the Downtown Campus, Miami-Dade Community College, Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and will also be available through Life Lab. Call Julio Avello at MDJC, 577-6766, or Sue Goldman at 577-6768.

## EDUCATION

Museum programs are designed to stimulate interest in South Florida history and to increase community awareness in the museum as a teaching tool.

Traveling exhibits are available from the museum to classrooms to supplement Florida history study units. Teachers are encouraged to contact the museum for details.

Back issues of *UPDATE*, the bimonthly publication of the Historical Association, have been placed in school libraries.

At the museum, guided tours are conducted by specially trained Docents.

Coordinating the tours, the presentations and the special programs is Dorothy Fields, a Dade County teacher on special assignment to the Historical Museum. Mrs. Fields earned a B.A. in Art History from Spelman College and holds an M.A. in Curriculum from the University of Northern Colorado. She is also a certified librarian.

## FROM THE EDITOR

We are now well into our second year of publication. Thanks are owed to all connected with *UPDATE*, particularly the editorial board, our consultants, the staff members, the many fine writers we have enjoyed working with, and the printers. To all of these and to all of our readers we extend best wishes for the holiday season.

For 1975 we are thinking far, far ahead, developing themes for each of our six issues. Greater coherence will result and better planning will be possible if we aim as far into the future as possible.

This is an appeal to each of you to examine your mental and physical assets. Check over your artifacts: what visions do they conjure up? Draw a check upon your memory bank, then determine how best you can contribute. As our director notes else-



where in this issue, additional volunteer assistance is imperative if we are to develop our full potential.

Here are the topics and the months in which we hope to develop them, subject always to unforeseen contingencies.

February, Prohibition and Rum Running in the Twenties. Does anyone here recall Izzy Einstein? How about the Fort Lauderdale execution?

April, Grand Openings. First-day and first-night celebrations, ribbon cuttings, new race tracks, airports, department stores, theatres, bridges, and anything else.

June, Marine matters. Boat-yards, marinas, Navy and Coast Guard, yachts, docks, and harbors. The Intracoastal Waterway. Notable nearby marine disasters.

August, Hurricanes, naturally. We already have a commitment for an article from one of the foremost hurricane reporters of our era. I'll contribute an article or two, but we have plenty of room for two or three more. We especially want reminiscences of your own or your parents that can be expanded into articles of 500 to 1000 words. There is a gold mine here that we can work for years.

October, The Spanish-American War, World War I, and World War II and Florida's contributions in training troops, antisubmarine warfare, R&R resorts, and many others.

December, Coconut Grove, its origins, early families, traditions, how it became a part of Miami.

Again we urge you to volunteer your special knowledge, your research capabilities, and your writing skills.

**LETTER**

We acknowledge with thanks a letter from Mr. Carlton J. Corliss, of Tallahassee. We'd like more mail from our readers.

**PICTURING OUR PAST** by S. J. Boldrick



A popular dance hall of the middle and late 1920s was the Cinderella Ball Room located at 35 NW 2nd Street. This view shows the dance floor and orchestra stand.



Arnold Johnson's orchestra (above) and Eddie Payton's Dixie Dandies both played the Cinderella during 1926. Changing taste and economic conditions made the Cinderella the scene of prize fights by 1931.

-All Photos: Romer Collection, Miami-Dade Public Library



## LADIES, KINDLY REMOVE YOUR HATS OR MIAMI'S PRE-BOOM THEATRES

by Thelma Peters

Leila Thigpin Zeller, Miami pioneer, who grew up playing in Miami's quiet streets, remembers attending a magic lantern show in a shack near present Flagler and N.E. First Avenue. The seats were kitchen chairs, the pictures were stills and the piano player quite lively. Admission: 5 cents.

But *moving* pictures came to Miami soon after that, and when you saw pictures that *moved*, however jerkily, for the same price it was goodbye magic lantern. *Moving* pictures were an interesting novelty about on a par with a juggling act or a somersaulting bear. But were they here to stay?

No one was certain enough about that to invest much money in a special theater. The first theaters therefore were converted stores.

Mrs. Zeller says there was little entertainment in Miami in the early days. But she wasn't bored either. She and her friends enjoyed a good revival or a walk along Miami's board sidewalks for an icecream at John Seybold's. But the coming of movies — that added a whole new dimension to their lives. The Thigpin family (Mrs. Thigpin ran a boarding house on Avenue D) and their neighbors and friends (which included practically everybody in Miami in 1906) really took to the movies.

Kelly's Theater, 1906, was first according to Isador Cohen's book, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami, Florida*.

The Kelly Theater was on the south side of Twelfth Street (Flagler) not far from Burdine's.

The following year Kelly got a competitor across the street — the Alcazar. It barely muddled along until taken over by two local partners who diagnosed the trouble — the place was too hot. No one but "moles and ground-

hogs" would think of sitting in it, Cohen said.

Of course not. It was a long, windowless store with the movie screen blocking up one end and the cashier's booth the other. It needed air conditioning — a concept whose time had not yet come.

But the two partners were resourceful. One, Charles F. Richardson, reputedly Florida's first movie projectionist, the other, W. F. Miller, already known as an inventor, came up with this idea: elevate the floor, bore it full of holes, put a ton of ice underneath and let a powerful electric fan circulate the cold air. They did it: and thus, according to Cohen, "by a slow-freezing process of the limbs of the audience, succeeded in rendering the victims unconscious of the upper strata of heated air enveloping their heads and bodies. And inasmuch as the crude pictures of that period did not impel undivided attention, the audience passed their time enjoying the pleasing sensation of placing warm hands upon ice-cold limbs."

The audience Mr. Kelly lost to the Alcazar's "air conditioning" he got back by including some live vaudeville for a nickel ticket.

Both theaters soon gave way to others — the Elite, the Kine-drome, the Marco, the Arcade — all forgotten names today. And these in turn gave way to others, somewhat better. Early movie houses had level floors with benches for seats. Newer theaters had sloping floors and individual armrests along the benches. But even with sloping floors there was a problem from women's millinery of the time — elaborate and very perchy creations impossible to see over, under, around, or through. Along with the ads of local merchants which opened every program was a slide which reminded women to kindly remove their hats.

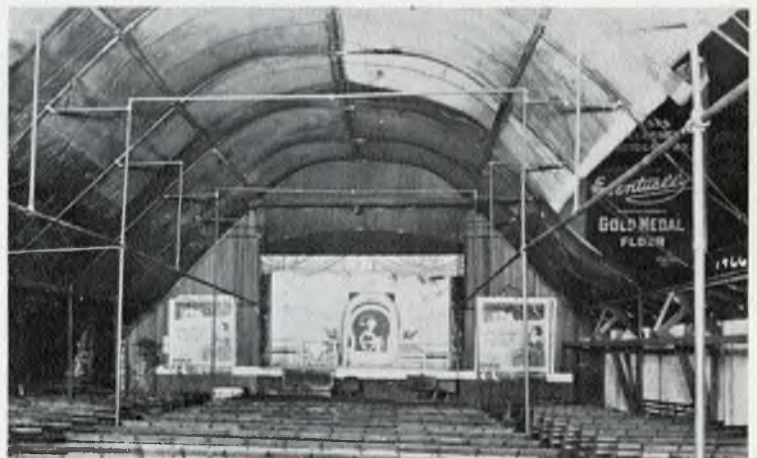
There was also another reminder to be flashed on as need-



The Hippodrome moved about 1917 to the lot on East Flagler Street formerly occupied by the home of Dr. James M. Jackson. Dr. Jackson's new office was over the theater entrance. This downtown building remains today much as it was in this photo except there is no longer a theater. —HASF Photo



The Airdome Theater on the site now occupied by Gusman Hall, about 1920. —HASF Photo



Inside the Airdome Theater on the site of the later Olympia Theater. Curtains over the roof rolled down to show the heavens and the stars. Later Olympia had artificial heavens and stars. —HASF Photo

*Dr. Peters is an editorial consultant and frequent contributor to UPDATE.*



ed: "Please read the titles to yourself, loud reading annoys your neighbor."

As no early movie house owned more than one projector (the Fotosho got a second in 1915 — a great step forward) there was always a wait of a minute or two as reels were changed — time pleasantly spent in chitchat or popcorn.

By 1908, the year *Romeo and Juliet* was filmed for the first time, movies were developing story lines and experimenting with drama as well as comedy. Printed titles which interrupted the action from time to time were considered a necessary crutch for following the story. Titles were sometimes narrative, sometimes dialogue, often so poorly timed as to convert the gravest moments into hilarity. Movie titles had a byproduct — they acted as an incentive for children to learn to read.

The first true sound picture was *The Jazz Singer* in 1928, but sound had come to the theaters long before that. It is safe to say that by 1915 there was not a theater anywhere without a piano player, and most of them had



The Fotosho, built about 1915, was on the north side of Flagler Street just west of N.E. First Avenue. John Seybold's Ice Cream Parlor was just down the street. —HASF Photo

small orchestras. Good musicians made the music fit the mood of the picture, thus enhancing the dramatic impact of the picture. This called for music improvisation and led to music composed especially for movies.

Miami had several open-air theaters which were pleasant when the weather was good. To sit under the stars in a balmy Miami evening was indeed delightful. Unfortunately, sometimes rain, cold or mosquitoes cut down the fun. Matinees were not possible in these because of the light.

The best known of the open-air theaters was the Airdome. In 1914 it was situated on the south side of Flagler Street near the site of the original Kelly Theater. Later, after the original Hippodrome vacated the corner and moved across Flagler to Dr. Jackson's corner, the Airdome took the old Hippodrome site, later the site of the Olympia, today Gusman Hall.

After the move the Airdome had an elaborate system of weather curtains which were rolled down in good weather to expose the heavens and the stars. Miami pioneer Elroy Cormack, who about 1920 was usher or ticket-taker at the Airdome, often had to run and roll up the curtains if a storm came up.

"The curtains didn't overlap very well," he said recently. "People who sat underneath a crack had either to move or get dripped on."

It may have been the Airdome stars above which inspired the builders of the Olympia to create a starry ceiling and wisps of moving clouds so much admired when the Olympia opened in 1926.

In 1915 Miami's theaters included the Fotosho, Hippodrome, Wigwam and Strand. The black community got its second movie house that year (the first was the Lyric) with the opening of the New Broadway Theater on Northwest Third Avenue between 9th and 10th Streets. The New Broadway cost \$3,000, was

fireproof, seated 1,000 and had a stage for vaudeville. It opened with a six-reel program including a movie called *The Honeymooners*.

By 1915 programs were changed daily and offered a mixed bag, including short subjects, live vaudeville, giveaways or contests, serials and the main feature. Serials like *Perils of Pauline* went on week after week, always stopping with the heroine tied to the railroad track or hanging from her fingernails over the shark moat.

Prices were up by 1915. Instead of a straight nickel for everyone adults now paid a dime in the afternoon, fifteen cents at night. For that, in 1915 at the Fotosho you could have gotten Mary Pickford, the world's cine-

ma sweetheart for twenty-three years, starring in *Caprice* or Charlie Chaplin in *Diamond in the Sky*.

Or at the Hippodrome, how about Theda Bara, "dark archangel of destiny," in the "stirring, startling, satanic" *The Galley Slave*? With it came an episode of a thrilling serial, *The Broken Coin*. Continuous performances from 2 P.M. to 11 P.M.

Miami pre-Boom days were glorious for moviegoers and that included everybody. Families flocked to the movies night after night. There were no film ratings and no psychological studies of the effects of moviegoing. People just had fun.

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS by Peppy Fields

I have heard it often, and you probably have, too, all about the plush gambling casinos, the elegant supper clubs, and the carriage trade that used to frequent these establishments in the "good old days" of Miami and Miami Beach.

Jack Sewell, a 73-year-old native Miamian, tells of his uncle, Mayor E. G. Sewell, who commented thusly about open gambling: "I don't mind the gambling, as long as it's 'honest' gambling, without hoodlums and gangsters."

When the military took over many hotels for military training for the duration of the war, Jack was project manager and expeditor of the takeover. After the war, our Miami Beach took up where it left off and again became a swinging town and winter resort, with bookmaking establishments everywhere. You could find a bookie at the sundry shops or on the beaches (we had beaches then), and no one seemed to mind.

Then Senator Kefauver came

*Peppy Fields, a local show-business personality, is heard Saturday mornings from 8 to 9 on WBUS-FM (94 on your dial).*

onto the scene, and he did mind. The picnic was over and the bookies were sent back wherever they came from. The hotels were still all very crowded, and "this year's hotel" was the talk of the town. Night clubs like the Copa, the Beachcomber, and Lou Walters' Latin Club all flourished, presenting fabulous shows. I remember Sophie Tucker, Ted Lewis and Harry Richman on the same bill.

Little by little the glamour of the night club was transferred to the luxury hotels. Even today, some of the hotels are trying to keep this going, despite the lack of tourist trade. The Americana Hotel for thirteen years has been presenting the Barry Ashton French Revue, very lavish and costly, but they no longer can depend solely upon their guests or conventioners.

Today there are very few authentic night clubs. The Place Pigalle, now in its nineteenth year, is about the only one to present a lengthy show. Impresario Harry Ridge says that the flow of tourism is not enough to keep this large overhead going; group booking is necessary. Perhaps show business on Miami Beach, if it survives, will do so along entirely different lines.



## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF TELEVISION PIONEERING By G. S. Nyne

In March 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty was adopted, "Axis Sally" was convicted of treason and the United States fired its first rocket. It was nearly 21 years after the advent of the first all-talking motion picture and about the same time since radio had become the center of family entertainment.

That same year, television was introduced to Florida. On March 21, eight years after commercial television premiered in New York, Florida's first station, WTVJ, began broadcasting from Miami's old Capitol Theatre, serving at first less than a quarter of a million people with only 1500 receivers. As the expression goes, in 25 years WTVJ's "come a long way, baby!"

Florida's first station entered broadcasting under somewhat different circumstances from those of most other early stations; most of those had been spawned by radio operations, which looked upon television as radio with pictures, or by print ownerships, with visions of a talking newspaper. WTVJ's owner, Wometco Enterprises, had 24 successful years in motion pictures before branching out.

During the first months WTVJ aired shows only from seven to nine p.m. (except Tuesday was dark). This required only 21 employees, some of whom are still responsible for operations, including Vice President and News Director Ralph Renick, Program Manager Lee Waller, Technical Operations Director Joe Kline, his assistant Spears Mallis and Chief Engineer Bob Bower.

They grew up with WTVJ when the new medium was crying for innovation to facilitate its upward spiral. They met the challenge, producing numerous

TV firsts, such as the world's first live telecast of a hurricane and television's first jai-alai game, both in 1949.

It was on Florida's pioneer station that Florida's first daily TV news report was broadcast by Renick in July 1950. That makes it the longest continuous-running news report in the nation! Renick himself is probably no lower than third in news-department seniority with any one station or any one network in the country.

WTVJ's emphasis on remote and studio telecasts overtaxed available equipment from the start, demanding specialized modifications of cameras and control facilities. To meet the station's technical needs, its engineers designed and constructed other important TV firsts.

For example, when outsized telephoto lenses impaired the flexibility of remote cameras, Channel 4 invented a prismatic folded 40-inch lens optically ground locally. With this lens, the station gave Miamians their first birdseye view of the city from the Goodyear blimp, their first televised coverage of an eclipse and, later, some of the early Cape Canaveral rocket shots. WTVJ also designed and built in 1955 its own vidicon cameras to improve quality and flexibility.

WTVJ's growth was reflected by its burgeoning audience. By the end of 1951, Miami's TV-set count was up to 34,000, and the station's staff had increased five-fold. In just two years Channel 4's news department had earned a national reputation by winning a Distinguished Achievement Award from the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA).

Then, in 1952, twenty thousand Miamians wore buttons announcing "The Cable's A-Comin'!" and record sales of TV sets were made. The cause for the excitement was the coaxial cable that joined WTVJ to network



Where Florida's first TV station, WTVJ, began in 1949 – from a corner of the old Capitol Theatre in Miami. In its first months, the station telecast shows between the hours of seven and nine every night except "dark" Tuesday, and there were only about 1500 TV sets – mostly in bars and appliance stores – for viewers to watch.



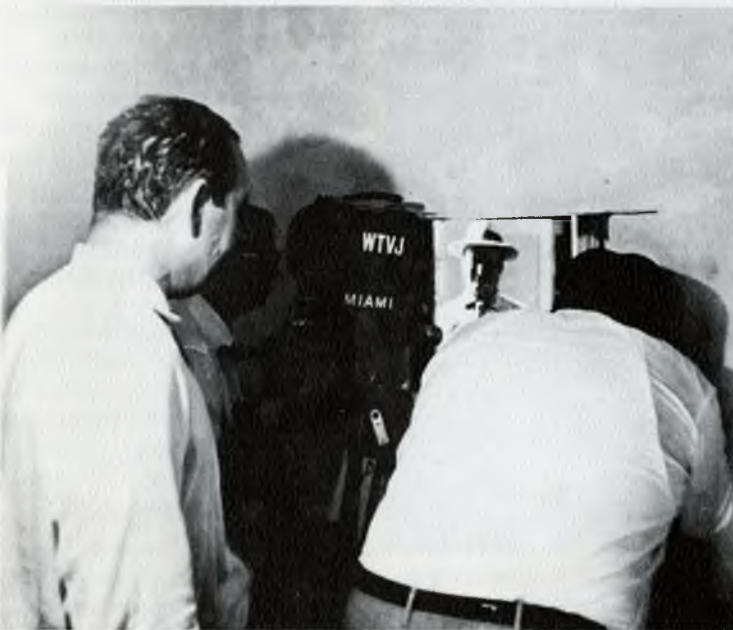
These were WTVJ's first "stars" – the on-air personalities whose faces filled the showcase window outside the station and brought Florida's first locally produced news and entertainment programs into Miami homes shortly after Channel 4 went on the air in 1949. You may recognize Ralph Renick (upper right corner), who has been reporting the news on WTVJ since 1950, and Bob Weaver (lower left corner), who is best known today as Weaver the Weatherman.

*G. S. Nyne is the nom de plume of a local free-lance writer and show-business hanger on. The article is based in part upon material supplied by Lynn Patrick, press information manager at WTVJ.*





In 1952, the famous Capitol Theatre was converted into a TV station – WTVJ. The largest studio in the South and one of the most complete in the nation at that time, Studio A was built within the framework of the old theatre, which was next door to the original station. Here a younger Ralph Renick poses in front of the building.



In 1955, the WTVJ News Department brought home the top national award of the Headliners Club as a result of a newfilm shot through the one-way mirror pictured above. The film caught an alleged pay-off by a secret agent posing as a bookie to two Miami detectives.

service in July, just in time for the political conventions. “CBS Summer Theatre” was the first network program to be fed WTVJ down the coaxial cable. The Miami station broadcast a half hour of the King Orange Parade to the rest of the nation as Florida’s first network origination.

Growth leads to more growth, and so WTVJ expanded its facilities to increase its power. The construction of Florida’s first 1000-foot tower and a big increase to 100,000 watts pushed Channel 4’s signal out to many new families in 16 South Florida counties in 1954. This development enabled WTVJ to help a sister station to grow in the business, too. Its “beginner” transmitter and antenna were given to educational TV station Channel 2, WTHS-TV.

Also in 1954, WTVJ joined the CBS Television Network as an affiliate. The result was that January 1955 was highlighted by 26 hours of network programs.

Florida saw its first local live-color TV program over Channel 4 in 1956. Local programs made news in other ways, too. Renick arranged a debate between blacks and whites in Delray Beach to settle a racial conflict, for one, and the station set up a debate between Estes Kefauver and Adlai Stevenson, for another, the latter carried nationwide. That year, too, WTVJ originated the “Arthur Godfrey Show” from Miami for CBS.

Children and parents alike will remember 1956 as a landmark for children’s TV programming. That’s when “Skipper Chuck” Zink first brightened the television screen with his “Popeye Playhouse.” His is one of the few successful local children’s shows in the country, and since its premiere it has continuously attracted over 90 percent of the available children’s audience. Now called the “Skipper Chuck Show,” it daily plays to a studio audience of some 7000 children a year.

Renick started a national trend when he broadcast the first

daily television editorial in the country in 1957. A year later he was elected president of the RTNDA, and his daily editorials won a third gold trophy for the station.

When the Cuban government was overthrown in 1959, Channel 4 newsmen were the first on the scene to report, and the station produced a documentary, “Cuban Revolution,” that 12 other stations asked to telecast.

The Cuban revolt had resulted in an influx of Spanish population into Miami. To keep the new TV viewers informed, Channel 4 developed the first Spanish-language news program in Florida, “News en Espanol.” In addition, public affairs programs were rebroadcast in Spanish, and a significant WTVJ social documentary about a Cuban refugee’s adjustment to Miami life, “The Plight of Pepito”, was aired by seven other stations and by the United States Information Agency throughout Latin America.

News was accented by growth in other ways as well in the 60s. WTVJ added a 15-minute “Six O’Clock News” program and a half-hour “News at Noon” show that covered every area from sports to women’s features. Broward County news entered the scene from a studio in the Yankee Clipper Hotel in Fort Lauderdale, with the Atlantic Ocean as a backdrop. Live cut-ins from Broward appeared daily on both news programs. Time and again, the quality of Channel 4’s news operation was reflected in awards by such national groups as RTNDA, the National Headliners Club and the National Press Photographers Association.

An eye-pleasing addition to the world of television was introduced by WTVJ in 1964 – the scenic station break. From 10 to 60 seconds in length, the breaks, still being used, feature picturesque scenes of South Florida, backed by pleasant music.

Color made its appearance on Channel 4 on a regular basis in 1966, and Richard Milhous

*(continued on page 8)*



(continued from page 7)

Nixon became the first guest to be interviewed in color for the station's weekend news show.

WTVJ's investigative news reports made headlines that year, when Renick led a campaign composed of 85 consecutive editorials, surveillance by hidden cameras, on-air interviews with racket figures, documentaries, and speeches to organizations that helped clean up Miami government. The award-winning campaign was called "the Price of Corruption."

A new seven-ton antenna in 1967 improved both picture quality and color, making it possible for all South Floridians to pick up WTVJ on their sets. News scored another first: "The Ralph Renick Report" became the first news program to be honored with a TV-Radio Mirror Award for outstanding programming.

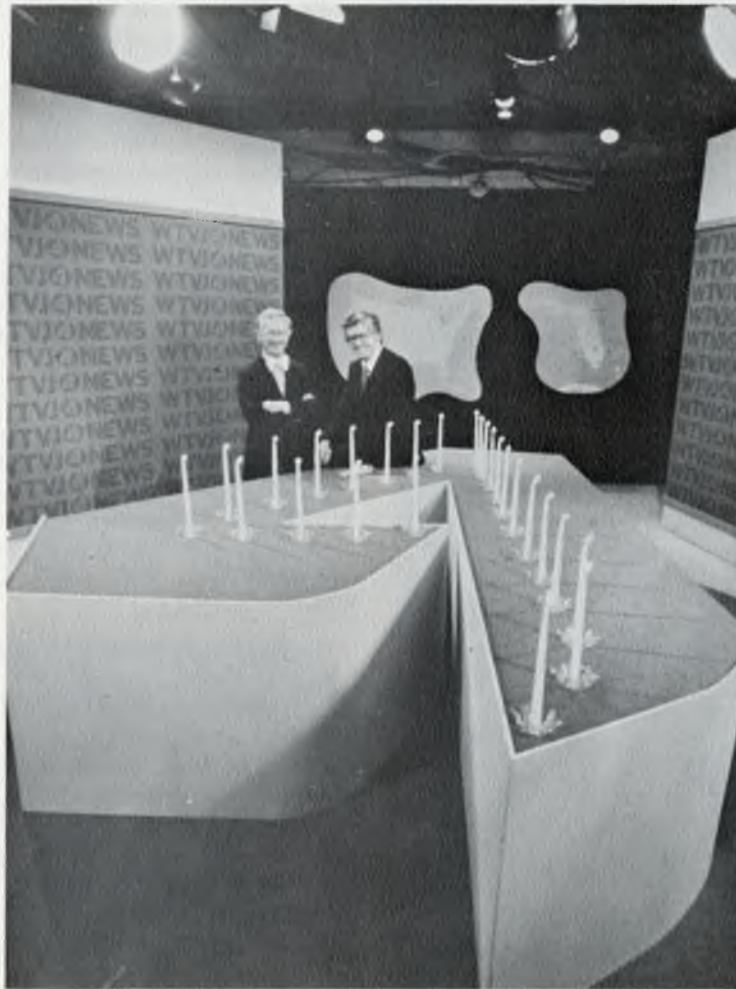
The 1960s ended in a blaze of recognition for WTVJ when in 1969 it celebrated its 20th anniversary. For the occasion, the late Metro Mayor Chuck Hall declared March 16-21 WTVJ Week in Dade County.

The station had aged like good vintage wine, establishing itself as a leader from the beginning (actually there was no competition until Channel 7 opened in 1956). Its top position has been maintained through hard work and a public sense of responsibility. Surveys show that WTVJ is still Florida's number one television station, although some of that undoubtedly accrues from its association with Columbia Broadcasting System, which consistently leads the country with most-watched network shows. Still, there's a readiness to spend money for local programming that certainly has helped to keep Channel 4 where it is.

One long-running series no longer on the air, "F. Y. I." (For Your Information), carried station newsmen as far as Israel and South America in the last decade. It also concentrated on subjects closer to home: in 1969 and



"Skipper Chuck" Zink has hosted one of the country's most successful local children's programs on Channel 4 since 1956. In the beginning it was known as "Popeye Playhouse" (pictured) and more recently as "The Skipper Chuck Show." Over 7,000 youngsters annually fill its live audience, and daily more than a 90 percent share of the available children in South Florida's home TV audiences watch the show. Pictured in the photo are the former Ellen Kimball (Center) and Glumbo the Clown, portrayed by Dick McMurray.



It's WTVJ, Channel 4's 25th birthday this year. The station — Florida's first — went on the air for the first time on March 21, 1949. Innovations and outstanding achievements have marked every year of its life. Vice President/General Manager William Brazzil (Left) and Vice President/News Director Ralph Renick are celebrating in the Channel 4 news set in Studio A, and the news desk holding the 25 symbolic candles is an innovation in itself — introduced in 1973.

1970 it won the RTNDA Edward R. Murrow Documentary Awards for programs on unwed mothers and the pollution problem.

Other national awards went to documentaries "World of Crime" and "A Seed of Hope." The former dealt with Europe's swift justice and the latter, an Emmy finalist, focused on a Fort Lauderdale drug abuse program.

Early in the 70s Channel 4 began production of an hour-long series, "Great Adventure", now syndicated nationally. Weather reporting took a giant step forward when Channel 4 became the first in the country to employ NOAA's satellite motion-picture loop. Virtually in real time, this cloud-top movie assists the TV watcher in grasping the nature and type of cloud movements.

A special three-month-long news series in 1973 exposing deplorable restaurant conditions resulted in passage of a tough county sanitation law. The Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services awarded the station a commendation for the series, "Not on the Menu."

After 25 years WTVJ, clearly a thriving business, has become a part of the community; names like Weaver the Weatherman and Skipper Chuck have become household words. Venerable News Director Renick, along with many other executives, is involved deeply in community affairs. Ralph is a board member at the Museum of Science and Planetarium and a former board member at HASF. Ed Thompson, another Wometco employee, is Photo Editor of *UPDATE*.

Viewers? The numbers continue to grow as our population increases. Ratings show that the greatest number still choose Channel 4. In fact, on an average day more people watch WTVJ than any other TV station in the entire South.



## MIAMI NIGHT LIFE 1944-1950, End of an Era

George Bourke, A Reminiscence with Leslie Turner

(George Bourke reported the entertainment scene in Miami for the Herald from 1944 to 1969. The postwar years, 1944 - 1950, are the subject of this recollection.)

**Interviewer:**

Let's set the scene for a visitor to Miami in 1944.

**George Bourke:**

Well, it was a period of growth. There was a lot of growth following the war. Hotels were going up. Hotels that the Army had taken over were being turned off. The skyline was changing regularly. A different hotel opened each year, becoming the hotel of the year, often with a big opening. In sequence that would have been the Sans Souci, followed by the Saxony and the Fontainebleau. Each one has a story.

In 1944, however, there was an ordinance which prohibited the hotels from providing entertainment on the premises other than string music, which could not last later than midnight. The reason for that was, of course, that other guests might have been trying to sleep and the noise nuisance was a consideration.

**Interviewer:**

That was before air conditioning?

**George Bourke:**

Yes. I always say that Florida owes its present and its future to jet air travel, insecticides, and air conditioning. In 1944 one would have had trouble getting down on the train and would have found insects. For the visitor who arrived after May 1, there would have been only a few isolated lounges with entertainment open. The nightclub season was only ten or eleven weeks long,

*Leslie Turner is employed at the Downtown Campus of Miami-Dade Community College. He has taught literature there and has reviewed books for the Herald.*



The City of Miami Beach owned the Servicemen's Pier on 8th Street during the 1940s. Servicemen and women lived in the Beach hotels from 1942 to 1945 and came here for recreation. -Photo from HASF collection

beginning at Christmas. Most of the clubs, because of the ordinance, were in Miami, away from the hotels. There was The Esquire, later The Clover Club, the Bali was down here on Biscayne Boulevard, and so on. From there one had to go all the way out to Hialeah. Some of the places had sneak gambling, courtesy of the sheriff or the authorities. No one bothered them very much. They'd be raided only occasionally.

Mother Kelly's and Don Lanning's, he was married to Roberta Sherwood, were on the Beach on Dade Boulevard and 78th Street respectively. But, as I said, the hotels were bringing people down here and weren't being allowed to entertain them. The soldiers were, of course, also very much in evidence. There was a dance hall primarily for them on 8th Street. Air Corps and submarine people were there most of the time. There was always a concert in the park. And in back of the band shell a visitor to Miami in the 40s would have found the Royal Palm Club. It was quite a snazzy place, very exclusive.

**Interviewer:**

It is interesting to note that there was gambling in the 40s, even if not legalized. It's such a current issue.

**George Bourke:**

The Royal Palm had casino gambling then. But it's a troubled situation now. I think it will be voted in, but it won't be of great importance. Las Vegas is not so much a place as a way of life. We can't create another one.

At any rate, it wasn't until the Army pulled out that the real entertainment explosion took place in 1945 or 1946. They say that half a million men passed through Dade County before that, though. The Army had even built an outdoor theater on 41st Street. It was called the Flamingo. All the acts that came to town played there.

**Interviewer:**

So the entertainment scene really picked up in 1945 and 1946?

**George Bourke:**

The big money came down in 1945. Clubs were built and the big acts followed. Sophie Tucker, Harry Richman, Joe E. Lewis, and Xavier Cugat come to mind. There were many more. At that time, incidentally, a star's salary might have been five or six thousand and up. Al Jolsen had a home here, but I don't think he ever worked the clubs.

**Interviewer:**

What would the price of an evening out have been at that time?

**George Bourke:**

Not really too much. Not in the 40s. You could get by for \$20 for two people. At no time in the 40s were you barred from a nightclub because you intended to spend, maybe, only \$15 a head, and that would include tips.

**Interviewer:**

What would one have found in Coconut Grove?

**George Bourke:**

The Grove was a country village in those days. There was a movie house where the Coconut Grove Theatre is. There were no clubs. There were some interesting bars where the artists would be found. Tennessee Williams might have popped in, but no big clubs were over that way.

**Interviewer:**

How about Key Biscayne?

**George Bourke:**

The first time I went to Key Biscayne I had to get up at 6:00 AM to take the boat at 6:30. That was in 1944. The causeway was under construction during the war, but they couldn't spare the steel. There was nothing on the Key except the Matheson mansion and rattlesnakes. It was used for movie locations. One film shot there was John Ford's "They Were Expendable". Several Esther Williams films come to mind, too. Restaurants were built a bit later. I think the Jamaica Inn was one of the first. But there wasn't much more than a dinner show in the way of entertainment.

**Interviewer:**

You had mentioned different eras in respect to the Miami entertainment scene?

**George Bourke:**

As I said the clubs flourished from 1945 to 1950, but there was a milestone that occurred during that period. When I first

*(continued on page 10)*



(continued from page 9)

came here in 1944 the Black acts performed only in Central City. To give you an indication of the situation, there was one time that Ted Lewis, who did the "Me and My Shadow" act, was playing the Royal Palm here; and there was a problem. The young man who played the Shadow was Black; and before they could go on, they had to put cork makeup over his blackness. This turned him into a genuine imitation Negro!

**Interviewer:**

**The audience were segregated?**

**George Bourke:**

There just weren't mixed audiences. But to get back to the rather significant point, there was a night when a beautiful benefit was being held over on Palm Island at the Latin Quarter. It was a place that had been built for gambling. They had the rooms for it, but they couldn't reach the right people. At this benefit Bojangles (Bill Robinson) was in the audience, and he was asked to get up and entertain. It was the first time I ever saw a Negro on stage there. That was in 1946 or 1947. In 1948 a place called the Monte Carlo was open for a short time. Tony Lopez ran it and featured Black acts. Tony booked Bojangles, Ella Fitzgerald, The Mills Brothers, and Ethel Waters among others; but he wasn't able to make a go of it. On the strength of Tony's courage, though, a new era began. It was a sort of coming of age.

A beautiful club, The Copacabana, opened in 1948 or 1949; but it only had one good year. Chevalier played Miami at \$20,000 a week, being one of the first to command that kind of money. Sammy Davis came down, but by 1950 the clubs were in trouble. The ordinance prohibiting the hotels from providing entertainment had been repealed. The Fontainebleau opened to be followed by the Eden Roc and then the Deauville. Entertainment was entrenched in the hotels. Several of the clubs are Food Fairs today. An era had ended.

## OPERA IN THE SWIMMING POOL by Mary C. Dorsey



The Miami Grand Opera Company held its first performance on January 20, 1926, at the Venetian Pool and Casino. The audience was seated in the pit that had been drained of 900,000 gallons of water for the joint recital by Miss Elda Vettori and Mr. Antonio Marques.

—Photo from the HASF collection

The night of January 20, 1926, was to be a memorable one for Coral Gables. Impresario Guy Golterman chose the Venetian Pool and Casino as the setting for the first performance of his new Miami Grand Opera Company. To make more room for the anticipated crowd, 900,000 gallons of water were drained out of the pool and the audience was seated in the pit. As they sat under the stars, they looked around and saw people leaning over the balconies of the Spanish towers, perched in niches of the grotto, packed in the vine-covered loggias and huddled under the flowering shrubs. Those unable to get inside clung to the wrought-iron fence and peered through it.

The program was a joint recital by Italian soprano Miss Elda Vettori, well known in Europe, and Mr. Antonio Marques, a tenor who had become famous in Australia; piano accompaniment was by Miss Florence Kyte Robinson. Their beautiful voices rose from the grotto-stage into the night and the sound was so clear, it moved Miss Sara Hamilton of the Miami Herald to report "Mr. Acoustics, for once, was in such a jovial mood that his spirit must have been wandering about slapping its knees with satisfaction."

*Mrs. Dorsey is a member of HASF and Secretary of Dade Heritage Trust.*

One of the encores dramatically revealed the suitability of staging the opera in the Venetian Casino. "Miserere" from Verdi's "Il Trovatore" was given with Mr. Marques above in a cave of the grotto as if in prison singing to the lovely "Leonora" below.

The musical evening was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone, even the critics. They predicted a rosy future for both of the young singers and the Miami Grand Opera Company.

The Venetian Pool was also known as the Casino from the original meaning of the word — a pavilion by the water. It was quite a center of social activities in the 1920s. Many a fair maiden celebrated her "sweet sixteen" birthday party at a tea dance with music by the orchestras of Jan Garber or Paul Whiteman. Paul Whiteman reportedly was paid \$16,000 a week to play in Coral Gables. (See cover photo.) Mr. William Jennings Bryan with his white panama hat was a familiar figure as he extolled the virtues of living in Coral Gables to prospective buyers beside the pool. Here, Johnny Weismuller, Olympic gold medal swimming champion and star of the "Tarzan" movies, thrilled spectators.

Even today it is possible to rent the Venetian Pool and have it drained for the locale of a spectacular moonlight party.

"The World's Most Beautiful Swimming Hole" has come a long way from its humble beginning. It was a rockpit from which was quarried most of the limestone for building in Coral Gables. Soon it became an eyesore in the center of the growing city. Old timers recall that the idea to turn it into a swimming pool came from one of the Coral Gables Corporation salesmen. He was about to lose a sale because his clients objected to being close to that ugly place; he clinched the deal by telling them it would be turned into a swimming pool. His boss, Mr. George Merrick, was a man of honor and when he heard about this, Mr. Merrick thundered, "Well, if people have been told there will be a swimming pool here, then we must build it."

## MUNROE OVER MIAMI

Author Kirk Munroe's description of Miami in the late 1880s, from *The Romance of Miami and the Miami Section Where Sunshine Turns to Gold* begun in the Miami Herald on Jan. 24, 1925, by Edward Flannery:

"At the mouth of the Miami River was located the county seat . . . a place with a notable past and a brilliant future. At that time it (Miami) held but five buildings, two on the north side of the river and three on the opposite side. The first two were all that were left of old Fort Dallas . . . Across from the old fort stood the house of the Brickells and their store . . . The third building on the south side was the small frame house standing near the present site of Cook's dock . . . About a mile up from the mouth of the river, on the last bank, lived William Wagner and Adam Richards who came in 1875 and married the old man's daughter, Rosa Wagner. Half a mile further up the river on the same side dwelt a man named Priest and nearly opposite in a little palmetto shack . . . dwelt Andrew Barr, the Hermit of the Everglades."



## BLACK ENTERTAINMENT 1908-1919

by Dorothy Fields

This article is based on an interview with two members of the S. D. Johnson family, local black pioneers. The family, which totals seven children, came to Miami in December 1903.

Those interviewed were Dr. S. H. Johnson, a retired radiologist, and Mrs. Elaine J. Adderly, a retired teacher of home economics.

**COLORED TOWN.** The chief entertainment was dancing in various halls such as the Odd Fellow Temple. According to the *1907 Official Directory of the City of Miami*, this structure was located at 1st Street and Avenue G. Later directories listed it as the Odd Fellows Hall at the same location, 101-103 Avenue G.

Week nights, lodge groups such as the Guiding Star Lodge No. 47, St. Ann's Lodge No. 80, Atlantic Stream Lodge No. 90, East Light Lodge No. 5380, Household of Ruth No. 1363 and Household of Ruth No. 2416 held their meetings there.

On Saturday nights the piano players at the Odd Fellows Hall filled the air with music. The players, male ragtime players of color, did not read sheet music. Rather, they "tickled the ivory" through an innate understanding of music and a remarkable sense of rhythm. Such men as L. Newbold and Vernon Harris were classic piano players. Piano playing was an important avocation. Many players were regularly employed across the tracks in "sporting houses".

The most popular dance in town was the Cake Walk. It preceded the Charleston by a few years. A belle of that day, Mrs. Carrie Pitts, is remembered as a famous local dancer and Cake Walker. George Leon Johnson, affectionately called "Uncle Leon", is said to have also spent many a Saturday night thus occupied at the Odd Fellows Hall.

The first movie house Dr.

*Mrs. Fields is a third-generation member of the S. D. Johnson family.*

Johnson remembers was located on N.W. 2nd Avenue and 10th Street. It was a one-room wooden structure with "very hard benches".

Later another theatre was constructed on N.W. 2nd Avenue and 11th Street, at the head of 2nd Avenue. It housed vaudeville shows, silent movies and traveling Negro companies.

Still another, the New Broadway, opened in 1915.

In 1919, the Lyric opened as a legitimate theatre. It was considered "the most beautiful building in town". Mrs. Elaine Adderly still remembers it as "one of the best places in town". It featured an elevated stage, a good viewing screen, regular theatre seats with individual cushions, and nice rest rooms.

The music which accompanied the silent pictures was both appropriate and impressive. Piano players such as Rich Collins added splendor to the performances.

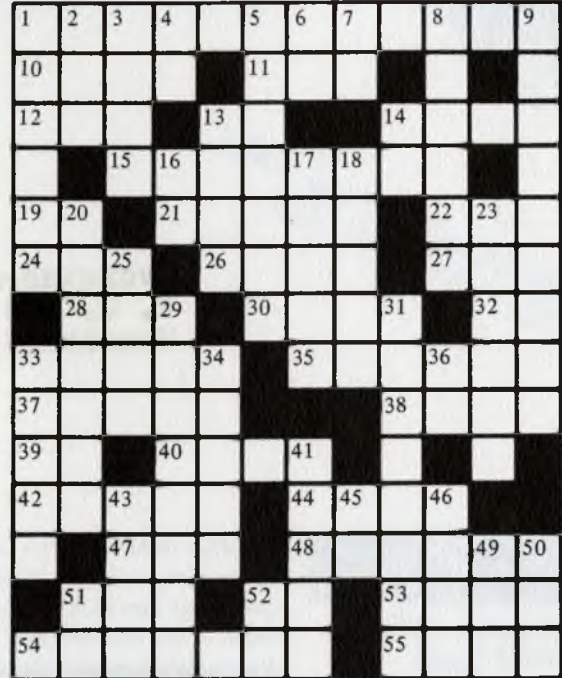
Located at 315 Avenue G, the Lyric Theatre was managed by Geder Walker.

## HISTORY'S NO LONGER A MYSTERY

Answers to Puzzle

ACROSS: 1 SEMINOLE CLUB (10) TWSOS (11) LOT (12) REO (13) TY (14) SCAN (15) NEW MOVIE (19) NA (21) HIPPO (22) UPS (24) DIM (26) NIET (27) MET (28) RUS (30) AREA (32) RA (33) A DIME (35) A DRAIN (37) CORAL (38) BALD (39) UM (40) RING (42) TENTS (44) RICE (47) ASE (48) OAKLEY (51) RYE (52) EV (53) LINE (54) RESTAGE (55) EASE  
DOWN: 1) STRAND (2) EWE (3) MOON (4) IS (5) OLYMPIA (6) LO (7) ET (8) LYCEUM (9) BANDSTAND (13) TWIN (14) IS (16) EH (17) OPERA (18) VOTED (20) AIRDOME (23) PERILS (25) MUIR (29) SMARTSET (31) ARBUCKLE (33) ACUTE (34) ELISE (36) AA (41) GROVE (43) NAYS (45) IA (46) ELIA (49) ENS (50) YEE (51) RE (52) EG

## HISTORY'S A MYSTERY by Thelma Peters



ACROSS

DOWN

- |    |                                       |    |  |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|--|
| 1  | What Julia Tuttle's home became       | 1  | Early Miami theater                    |
| 10 | Couples                               | 2  | Ram's opposite                         |
| 11 | Fate                                  | 3  | "_____ over Miami"                     |
| 12 | Early auto                            | 4  | In its present state                   |
| 13 | Famous ball player                    | 5  | It became Gusman Hall                  |
| 14 | Scrutinize                            | 6  | _____ and behold!                      |
| 15 | Marquee listing (2 words)             | 7  | "And" in ancient Rome                  |
| 19 | Sometimes on strike                   | 8  | Early theater bldg, W. Flagler         |
| 21 | Big one at the zoo                    | 9  | Where Scotch Highlanders played        |
| 22 | Increases                             | 13 | Some theaters are                      |
| 24 | Faded                                 | 14 | Yes on Channel 23                      |
| 26 | "No" in 28 across                     | 16 | "What was that?"                       |
| 27 | Stages 17 down                        | 17 | Popular Miami musical production       |
| 28 | Country (ab.)                         | 18 | A good citizen did                     |
| 30 | Region                                | 20 | First theater at Gusman Hall site      |
| 32 | Sun god                               | 23 | "_____ of Pauline", early chiller      |
| 33 | Price of early movie ticket (2 words) | 25 | Author of <i>Miami U.S.A.</i>          |
| 35 | Needed in a flood (2 words)           | 29 | Jet set of the '20s                    |
| 37 | Theater in the Gables                 | 31 | Early movie comedian                   |
| 38 | Bare                                  | 33 | One angle                              |
| 39 | Where 40 across is located            | 34 | Girl's name                            |
| 40 | Famous on-campus theater              | 36 | Alcoholic Anonymous                    |
| 42 | Housing for early Miami opera         | 41 | Famous local playhouse                 |
| 44 | Throw it or eat it                    | 43 | Negatives                              |
| 47 | Mother of Peer Gynt                   | 45 | Corn state (Abbr.)                     |
| 48 | Annie of "Get Your Gun"               | 46 | He was a Lamb                          |
| 51 | For drinking or coming through        | 49 | Printer's measurements                 |
| 52 | E. G. Sewell to his friends           | 50 | _____ haw Junction, Florida crossroads |
| 53 | "What's my _____?"                    | 51 | In reference to                        |
| 54 | A theater replay                      | 52 | For example                            |
| 55 | Lessen                                |    |  |

(Answers page 11, col. 2)





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**MARKING TIME**

A continuing series on the HASF Marker Program by: Wayne E. Withers

The third marker to be dedicated by the HASF honored Julia D. Tuttle, "The Mother of Miami". Dedicated in 1952, it was originally placed in the park in front of the old Tuttle Hotel at S. E. First Avenue and Third Street and was captioned "Tuttle Homesite". At the ceremony the marker was unveiled by Beverly Ann and Harry H. Tuttle, great-grand children of Mrs. Tuttle.

Julia Tuttle gained the title of

"Mother of Miami" due to gifts of property to Henry Flagler to encourage him in the development of the area and also for her



The Historical Association of Southern Florida unveiled the "Tuttle Homesite" marker on July 25, 1952. Originally placed in front of the old Tuttle Hotel, the marker, honoring "The Mother of Miami" will be re-dedicated following downtown construction development.  
 -Photo from HASF

concern with zoning in the dawn of Miami's history. Her efforts were also directed toward proper laying out of downtown Miami because of her far-sighted ideas that Miami at one time would become a large city. In this instance, many times her recommendations fell on deaf ears.

The text of the marker reads as follows:

**TUTTLE HOMESITE**

*Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle, of Cleveland, acquired 644 acres on the north bank of the Miami River in 1891. She resided in the remodeled officer's quarters of old Fort Dallas 100 yards southeast of the spot until her death Sept. 14, 1896.*

*With care, foresight and energy, she persuaded Henry M. Flagler to extend his railroad to Miami in 1896.*

*As inducement, Mrs. Tuttle gave him 100 acres for a railroad terminal and hotel and 263 in alternate city blocks (more than half her land), thus earning her fame as "the Mother of Miami".*

*Historical Association of Southern Florida – 1952*

At the present time the marker is in storage because of downtown construction. It will be re-dedicated when conditions permit.

More on the marker program in the next issue of *UPDATE*.

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