

Early Pioneers of South Florida

By HENRY J. WAGNER

Miami of today is not different from what most of the Old Settlers pictured it to be in days to come, in their minds. Some of them had never seen a large city and none of them a building more than three stories high but every one of them would tell you that there would be a large city and a seaport some day. And I don't mean the so-called pioneers that rode in on the first train that came in to Miami when they could go to a hotel and order a beef steak or other fancy food and call themselves pioneers. I am writing of the people who came here from 1840 to 1880, who lived on sow belly and grits when they could get it, and off the land and water otherwise. For the first settler there was no alternative. They either made comty starch and traded it at the local store after 1870 (before that shipped it to Key West where it was sold at auction at a price of from 1½ cents a pound to sometimes 5 cents a pound). A hard working man on a hand mill could make probably 75 lbs. in two days. In the years from 1870 to the 80's a two pound can of corned beef cost you sixty cents and everything else in proportion. Flour had dropped from \$50.00 a barrel in 1866 to \$8.00 a barrel in the seventies but that was Key West price; the local store charged more. By this you can see that it was not exactly what you would call a picnic living anywhere on Biscayne Bay in those days. If you depended on getting your groceries from Key West you had to buy in quantities to last you at least a month, to be sure. The boat running to Key West was supposed to make a round trip every two weeks, but I have known it to take three and even four weeks to make a round trip. Some of the settlers raised a few vegetables, the water from the comty making the ground very rich and one could raise more than you could use with very little effort. The first fruit trees were started around these comty mills. These fruits at first were oranges—three kinds—sweet, sour, and bitter sweet. Avocado pears, mangoes, momie apple, sapodilla, sugar apples, soursop, grapefruit, citron and bananas. The start of these fruits coming from the Bahama Islands and Cuba, coming by way of Key West to Miami. Two places had the greatest variety, over north of the river, and Snapper Creek south of Coconut Grove. At Snapper Creek mangoes seemed to take the lead. They were the turpentine variety but the

forerunner of the present fine quality that was later brought to Snapper Creek section by James L. Nugent and Charles F. Siebold. Nugent made several trips to British Honduras, collecting tropical fruits and plants that were planted on his property adjoining Seibold's place and now known as the Fairchild Gardens and the original Sausage Tree property now owned by Mrs. Maud Black, the widow of Charles F. Siebold. As a matter of fact, all the fine mangoes now grown in the Red Land district hinges around the old turpentine fathers planted by squatters at Snapper Creek. The old Oxer place had the greatest variety of tropical fruits of any on the bay. Other places got their seeds and plants from there.

On the old Wagner place was the largest grove of sweet oranges then on the bay. This was about two acres. These were all seedlings planted from seed of oranges grown on the old Barnes place at the mouth of the river. There were a few bananas raised on some places, also a very little sugar cane.

In those early days the settlers did not take to raising much of anything in the vegetable line. Most of them planted only sweet potatoes and pumpkins, both of which only need be planted but once and would continue to grow year after year. The Indians in those days raised sweet potatoes, pumpkins and field corn which could be bought very reasonably from them. Wagners, during the Civil War raised vegetables of all kinds for their own use and at one time the squatters at Snapper Creek raised quite a lot of produce but as there was no one who would buy it most of it was wasted. The first vegetables raised for market were tomatoes, raised by A. C. Richards on the old Wagner place. He tried it as an experiment, shipping them to New York. The experiment proved that it could be done if you had the nerve to take a chance, the chance being to get the tomatoes from Miami to New York before they rotted on the way. These tomatoes were shipped from Miami to Key West by sail boat, the captain of which cared little about how quick he made the trip to Key West. You will understand that a great deal depended on the speed of these boats from Miami to Key West. They left Miami on Monday and the steamers for New York left Key West on Friday once a week; so if the Miami boat did not reach Key West in time your tomatoes stayed in Key West for a week. Of course the tomatoes were picked and packed green, for the very best time that could be made from Miami to New York was eight days. Charles H. Lum followed Richards raising tomatoes. He raised them on what is now Miami Beach, later moving on the Miami River. Richards moved near Snapper Creek and continued to

raise tomatoes until the homesteaders came in and they began raising tomatoes and peppers. Transportation had by this time improved a little by larger and faster boats. Soon after the homesteaders came there were two schooners put on between Miami and Jacksonville that helped a great deal. Up to the time the homesteaders came there was little change in the population on the bay. The old timers were waiting and hoping for something to start, always sure it was coming. Pretty near every year there would be a little spurt. Someone would come in and tell what he was going to do but a few days would be the end of it. At last Lemon City started up a bit and then stayed about the same. Coconut Grove had grown a little and when the homesteaders came that gave Coconut Grove quite a burst, as they were all on the south side of the river. Then the old timers were sure that the time had come, but still there was no railroad in sight or anything better than sail boat transportation. A man by the name of Harrington tried a little steamer between Lemon City and Key West but couldn't make a go of it. When the homesteaders came that put an end to comty starch making and farming took its place. Grapefruit and orange groves were planted and while transportation did not improve much, prospects were very much better. There now were three general stores on the Bay, one at Lemon City, Brickell's store at Miami, and two at Coconut Grove, Peacock's and Shone's. This was the way things were on the Bay when Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle came to Miami and took over the land on the North side of the river. She was there a little more than a year when things began to move with the result of what you can see now in 1942. But I do not see that the people that arrived on the railroad were the pioneers as the stage was all set for them.

1848

Ferguson and wife and his partner Adams started building a water power mill to make comty starch at the headwater of the Miami River. Both got the gold fever in '49 and left for California. Later years Ferguson returned to Key West.

1855

Wm. Wagner and St. Clare came to Miami to supply food for soldiers then stationed at Ft. Dallas, as the last Indian war was then going on. They built a mill to make comty starch. This mill was about 1½ miles from the entrance to Miami River on the shores of a small creek that later became known as Wagner Creek. St. Clare left in '59 when war seemed to be a certainty. Wagner stayed on. At that time there were two schooners running between Charleston, S. C., and Miami making one stop at Indian River. Mrs.

Wagner came to Miami with her two children, William and Rose. On the day after their arrival peace was declared with the Indians. And soon after the soldiers left Ft. Dallas and the boats between Miami and Charleston were discontinued. At this time '58-'59 there was a man by name of Lewis living on the shore of the river about two miles from the mouth of the river. He made quite a clearing and built a dwelling house on the high land and on the bank of the river had a dock and store. He had slaves to do his work. He left suddenly just before war was declared between the North and South. The buildings were burnt down by the U. S. forces. About 1857 there came two brothers named Adams, John and Nicolas. They settled about a mile from the head of the river. They were almost direct from Germany and known to be strong Southern sympathizers. Nicolas left just as war was declared and was never heard from again by his brother or any one. John stayed and managed to dodge the U. S. forces, made a living by beach combing and later making compty starch until he committed suicide in 1883, having lived at the same place all this time and not acquiring any property to speak of or any real estate at all. In 1858 there was a family living on the south side of the Miami River by the name of Fletcher, Mr. and Mrs., and two daughters Manda and Roseln. Later they moved to Key West. From the time the Fletchers left until after the war I do not know who lived there until Dr. Harris came. Then a Dr. Harris lived there for a while. He was a Minister and U. S. Commissioner. He also moved to Key West. Then a family by name of Barnes, Charley, his mother and sister. Barnes ran a schooner between Miami and Key West and on one of his trips to Key West caught yellow fever and died soon after reaching home. Soon after his death his mother and sister returned to New York, their original home. Barnes, according to the Dade Co. Tax Book, owned the property and a Mrs. Gilbert bought it next for a winter home and owned it until the Flagler interests took over.

Now go back to the beginning of the war. The Wagners lived on the river, also John Adams. At Ft. Dallas I do not know that any one was living at that time. But soon after the war began the U. S. Government sent three families of refugees to live in the old officers quarters. Their names were Dotreys, Yomens and Halls. Also about the time the war began a man by the name of Mical Zair (in Dade Co. Tax Book as Mical Sears) (locally known as French Mike), his son George, and daughter Caroline. They settled between what became known as Buena Vista and Lemon City. He ran a store during the war when he could get anything to sell. He lived there

until he died. His son went up on Indian River and his daughter went to live with a family in Key West by the name of Currey. After peace was established an ex-Union soldier drifted in by name of Mical Oxer (locally known as Dutch Mike). He later homesteaded on the bay front, married, and had 4 children. Also about this time Andrew Barr came here from Massachusetts and homesteaded on the Miami River.

In the time from the 60's to 80's names of places on the bay were different from what they are now. North of the Miami River was known as Little River, later becoming Lemon City. North of that was Arch Creek. And still farther was Snake Creek. At the head of Biscayne Bay there was another small sheet of water known as Dumbfoundling Bay. On the beach side of the bay was Bakers Haulover. South of that was Indian Creek. In the late 70's the government built the house of refuge there. Still farther south was a landing called Bremon landing. Just north of this landing was a small island called Bull Island, in reality not an island as there was no dry land on it. A mile south of Bremon landing was Narrows Cut, the inlet separating Virginia Key from the main beach. Next was Bear Cut separating Virginia Key from Key Biscayne and Cape Florida. South of the Miami River was Little Hunting grounds, later known as Coconut Grove. And farther south was Big Hunting grounds later known as Cutler. This was on the Perrine grant. Between Little and Big Hunting grounds were Enfinger and Snapper Creeks.

In 1871 W. B. Brickell came to Miami with his family and located on the south side of the mouth of the Miami River and opened a saloon and general store. Later discontinuing the saloon, he ran the store until the railroad reached Miami. His oldest girl, Alice, became postmaster in Miami, until after Miami was incorporated as a city. She replaced J. W. Ewan who was postmaster and the office was shifted from the north side to the south side of the river. Alice Brickell was also school teacher in Lemon City for a term. About 1871 Hunt and Gleason came to Miami and located for a while at Ft. Dallas, later moving to the head of the Bay. I do not know if the Biscayne Bay Co. owned the grant on the north side of the river at this time or not. Anyway, soon after they moved the Biscayne Bay Co. put a man by name of Sharp in charge of the place. He didn't stay very long and was replaced by a man named Luvlice (Lovelace?). He was replaced by J. W. Ewan who held the position until Mrs. Tuttle took possession of the property.

During the seventies there settled at the head of the Bay Mr. Sturtevant and his wife, the father and mother of Mrs. Tuttle. At Little River settled the Potter brothers, R. B. and George. . Also a young man, William Mathare, settled at Little River. He came to Miami with Hunt and Gleason. He was Sheriff of Dade County for a number of years. Also with Hunt and Gleason came a colored man who was made a Justice of the Peace by the Hunt and Gleason party. This colored man was captain of the mail boat between Miami and Key West. A lazier, slower person I never met and he could not write his own name. During the years from 1870 to 1880 there was a number of drifters come in but did not stay long. Some few of them put up hand mills and made comty starch, the only thing anyone could do to make a living. Others just bummed on the settlers. To get to Miami in those days one either had to walk the beach from Lake Worth or come by boat from Key West. Daniel Clark came here in the early 70's and settled on the bay front north of the river. He had a bunch of horses, also hogs that ran wild through the woods until he died and they were rounded up and sold. A family named Fogg lived at Snake Creek for a while and returned to their native state. There were others that lived all over the bay shore. These were Jake Enfinger, who was found dead on the beach near Lake Worth, supposed to have been bitten by a rattle snake. Another was William Albury, Joe Ginkens (Jenkins), the sniper, and Tom Thorp. They all drifted away after a while. T. W. Falkner made comty on a hand mill and was County Judge of Dade County. He died here. A. F. Quimby stayed here and at Lake Worth. He was County Clerk for a long time and died at Lake Worth. At Little Hunting grounds, now Coconut Grove, lived the Frow families, John and Joe; the Pents, John, Ed and dad. John, the only one who had a family, and Joe Frow, sons of their families, are still living in the Grove. Samuel Rhodes was another of the early settlers at the Grove. He had a son who died when 10 or 12 years old. He was a widower. Charles Peacock came to Miami in '75, lived at first in the Barnes place on the south side of the river, later moving across to Ft. Dallas. He also had a compty mill a ways up the river where he made his living until he moved to Little Hunting grounds and built the first hotel on Biscayne Bay. As there were no boarders he still made compty for a living for several years. At that time there were no tourists coming to Miami. The real beginning of the first winter visitors coming to Biscayne Bay was the winter of 1881 when Ralph M. Munroe came to try and save the life of his wife and her sister. They lived in tents on the Ft. Dallas grounds. Mrs. Munroe died. The sister, a Miss

Huett, died on the way back to New York, in fact, going up New York harbor. Mr. Munroe had brought a boat with him, and he and his brother-in-law did a good deal of fishing. The following winter he came back again and made his headquarters at Ft. Dallas, returning to Staten Island, New York, in the spring. And during this summer is when Peacock moved to Little Hunting grounds and built his hotel calling it the Peacock Inn. That fall when Munroe came he made his stay at Little Hunting grounds, living on his yacht as each year he had a new one. After the first winter they were large enough to live on. This third winter he bought land from Joe Frow and built a two story boat house on the shore using the lower floor for a workshop and the upper for living quarters. Each year he brought friends with him and interested others. A Mr. De Headville bought a lot adjoining Munroe; a Mr. Walter Brown next to De Headville, and Kirk Munroe next to Brown. In the meantime a Post Office was established and the name changed to Coconut Grove, Mr. Peacock being Post Master. Through Munroe's friends as a starter, winter visitors began coming to Peacock Inn, most of them staying all winter. Others came in yachts and made Coconut Grove their headquarters. Also, in the meantime, there were several families moved there from Key West. Transportation at this time, in fact as it always had been, was very uncertain and quite often people found themselves short of a can of something and they would go to Mr. Peacock, who usually had a fair supply on hand for his own use, and get what they needed. Knowing that the neighbors were coming to him for things they needed he put in a larger supply. Pretty soon the little room that he used for the Post Office got too small and he built a regular store on the shore. By this time Little River began to grow and a store and Post Office was opened there and the name changed to Lemon City. Also at this time transportation was much improved between Miami and Key West by L. W. Pierce who had moved to Lemon City from Key West. He put on a large schooner that made regular trips on time. But before Pierce put his schooner on the run, a Mr. Harrington, living at Lemon City, put a little steamer on the Miami-Key West run but she did not last long for some reason nor did Harrington stay very long.

In 1892 or '93 a schooner began running freight from Jacksonville to Coconut Grove and Lemon City. Later another was put on the run as the stores could buy in Jacksonville to better advantage than they could either in Key West or New York. Brickell was the only store that did not change. He bought all his goods in New York, having them shipped to Key West by

steamer on the Benner line schooners and using his own boat from Key West. One of the schooners running from Jacksonville continued running until after the railroad reached Miami and she was wrecked on her way to Miami.

Now to get back to the settlers on the bay at Big Hunting grounds, John Addison had settled in the early seventies. Also Charles F. Seibold who came in a small schooner but disposed of her and made his home with the Addisons. For years they were the only three people living there. Then in the early eighties Dr. Cutler made a third and last attempt to make a settlement on the Perrine grant. I think there were twelve or fifteen people all together who landed there. They had a steam launch to run about the bay and to the P. O. at Miami as there was no other on the bay at that time. But they did not last long. While they were there they made compty starch, having brought a steam mill with them for the purpose. In fact it was the only way anyone could make a living in those days. But they all left, the only one sticking was Harry Fozzard. But while they were there they got a Post Office and changed the name to Cutler. Fozzard married a Key West girl and stayed there until the railroad reached Miami when he moved there. The Post Office was discontinued and there was no one left at Cutler but the Addisons. Charles F. Seibold had bought property at Snapper Creek and moved there. In 1884 James L. Nugent came to Miami and located at first at Snapper Creek. He bought land from one end of the bay to the other. That is, he owned land at Snake Creek, the head of Biscayne Bay, at Snapper Creek and south of Cutler. One never knew where to find him. About this time two men came to Miami. One man was Eley and the other Burkhardt. Burkhardt took up a homestead south of Coconut Grove and Eley homesteaded later at what is now Miami Shores. Eley died on his property. Burkhardt, after proving up on his homestead, was mail carrier between Lake Worth and Miami. When the railroad reached Lake Worth he worked there until it started to Miami and worked until the hotel was completed and so far as I know left the state. He never was well liked anywhere he went. In 1884 F. S. Moore came to Miami during the winter from Boston, Massachusetts for his health, boarding at Brickell's. After his second winter he made his home in Miami and entered the real estate business. At this time Dennis O'Neal came to Miami in a schooner. There was another man with him. They stayed until spring and returned north. While here O'Neil met Mr. Morse and they arranged to meet in New York as Morse had decided to buy a small yacht and sail it to Miami. This time O'Neil stayed, taking up a homestead on the shore of Miami River. He was a County Commissioner

for a while. Later he was keeper of the House of Refuge at New River and lived there until he went north for the first time since coming to Florida and disappeared completely. He was never heard from. About 1888 or '89 W. C. Valentine came to Miami, staying at Brickell's for a while before locating on New River about where Ft. Lauderdale now is. He was a civil engineer and did much of the surveying in and around Miami. He was drowned in New River. About this time Henry T. Prest came as County Clerk. He was from Lake Worth. He took up a Homestead on the south fork of the Miami River. In 1883 E. T. Field, Osborn and Lum came to Miami. They were going to plant a coconut grove on the beach between Narrow Cut and Indian Creek. With them was Richard Carney and another young man. I do not remember his name, and Mr. Lum's son Charles. They had a small shack built at Bremon's Landing to live in. They had a load of coconuts come on a schooner and were planted and most of them would have become trees but for the rabbits who are very fond of coconut buds. However a few survived and are now part of those growing on Miami Beach. Field or Osborn did not live on the beach after the coconuts were planted. Charley Lum stayed for several years. He went north and got married and brought his bride back, built a home on the beach where they stayed for some time trying to make a living raising tomatoes but could not do much, the land not being suitable. So he moved to a piece of property his father owned adjoining the Wagner land, or, that is, he moved in a house belonging to A. C. Richards but on the Wagner property. But we could see at once that he would never succeed in getting a mill built to make starch. While willing to work he was a farmer and nothing else. So I proposed to my grandfather Wagner that we offer to take him in with us on shares, which he accepted. He stayed a summer and winter and went back to New Jersey where he was from, mainly because his wife was homesick and they never came back again except for a winter visit some years later. Dick Carney who came with Field, Osborn, and the Lums, stayed with Charley Lum on the beach for a while then went with R. M. Munroe at Coconut Grove, played around with Munroe for some time then drifted over to Peacock's and helped Alfred Peacock in the store, at no time doing any hard work. At that time he was made school trustee, a position he held for years. Later he was captain of a yacht for a number of years. When he died the write-up in the papers said that he was at one time Sheriff of the County, but he never was; nor did he change the babies of the ladies that came to the

dances that we used to have in those days for the very good reason that they did not bring the babies to the dances.

The same thing is true in the write-up for R. M. Munroe. It claimed that Munroe came here as an agent for the Merritt & Chapman Derrick and Wrecking Co., of Stapelton, L. I. As I stated before, he came here solely for his wife's health.

There always had been a rivalry between Lake Worth and Miami as to which was going to be the leading community, Lake Worth claiming it would be the place for one reason or another, Miami claiming it would be because of the deep water entrance to the bay and the few miles nearer South America. Anyway Lake Worth claimed they ought to have the county seat and managed to have an election and won the deciding vote and the County seat was moved to Juno at the north end of Lake Worth. Three men carried the books on their backs from Baker's Haulover to the south end of the Lake. This, of course, was before Lemon City was started, as the homesteaders came in later. When the homesteaders came in it changed the looks of things over night. There were some homesteaders here before the crowd came. They were A. C. Richards, Burkhardt, Trop and Son and son-in-law, John Swanson. These homesteads were all adjoining. Ed and Erving Potter and a Mr. Pratt had homesteads in what we called the Devil's Den. These were all ahead of the rush about two years. In the rush was Will Hardee, John Henton, John Rogers, Kingley, Rice, Dr. Jackson, Sam Kelly, Scales, McAllister, Charley Perry, Charley Cristin and MacDonald. They all came on the same boat. Later there were others that came. Rev. Blackburn was one. Tom Hardee was another. Rev. Mereck (Merrick?) was another and White, who put in the first grove. Most of the others raised tomatoes. Some did nothing. One or two of them did carpenter work as there was a little carpentering going on at that time. About this time Coconut Grove had increased in population a little. The Simons, Dr. and Captain, the first real doctor on the bay. They settled on the Ewan place. Robert Thompson was one of Coconut Grove's oldest settlers having moved there when keeper of the light house. Others were George Roberts, William Albury, Nubold, Kemp and James Carey. Most of these families came from Key West. The Shones came to the Grove in the early nineties and opened a general store. From then on to the arrival of the railroad there was little change in Coconut Grove. At Miami there was nothing except Mrs. Tuttle taking over the Biscayne Bay Co. property. Lemon City had grown some, mainly by Key Westers moving there. Some of the old settlers I knew very well. There

were John Saunders, William Pent, William Smith and Gery Neals. A family named Connely came to Lemon City and built a hotel a couple of years before the railroad reached Miami but gave it up when Miami started and moved there. I have already mentioned the County seat being moved from Miami to Lake Worth and of the rivalry between the two places. As a matter of fact this rivalry extended all the way from Jacksonville. When Flagler built his road from Jacksonville to St. Augustine, St. Augustine said that was the end but soon found that they were wrong. And it was the same story all the way down the coast until the road reached Lake Worth, now called Palm Beach. When the hotel was finished and the railroad, Palm Beach was sure Flagler would go no farther with his road. But the Miamians, and especially Mrs. Tuttle, had other ideas and the road started for Miami. Then Palm Beach decided they would have the largest town again. Disappointment came as Miami jumped past Palm Beach over night, and to rub it in, got the County seat back almost at once. Miami had several set-backs but it slowly grew until the boom when it ran away with itself. I have heard that there was talk of changing the name of Miami, but I do not think it was very seriously thought of as I was at all the meetings to arrange for the incorporation of the city and don't remember ever hearing it mentioned. There are very few of the people living today that voted at the election to incorporate the City of Miami. From then on the city history is better known by others.

All the names I have mentioned in this article I was personally acquainted with except one.

My people came here. My grandfather, Wm. Wagner, in 1855, my grandmother, mother and uncle a few months later, expecting to return to Charleston, S. C., where they came from, but they tarried too long and were caught here by the war between the North and South. After the end of the war they decided they might just as well stay. My father came to Miami in 1870, left again soon after I was born, headed for South America, and was never heard from again after leaving Key West. A. C. Richard and two other men, Wall and Snider by name, came in 1875 from South America where they had gone from New York on a promise of work that did not come true. They were broke so had to walk from where they landed to another port where an American Consul was stationed who got them passage on a U. S. Man of War to Key West. At Key West they were told they could go north by taking passage on the boat running to Miami. At Miami, of course, they found out that they could not go farther north unless they walked or

went back to Key West and took a steamer. Richard said darned if he was going back to go ahead, and stayed in Miami. The other two stayed and made comty until they made enough money to pay their way out. Richard met and married my mother and spent the rest of his life in Miami. He was the first Tax Collector and Assessor in Dade County and Census Taker and at one time U. S. Marshal. The first church built on Biscayne Bay was built on my grandfather's place in 1876, a Catholic Church. This church was built for the purpose of converting the Indians but of course never did. The only Catholics on the Bay were the Wagner family and John Adams, a single man living up the river. The Bishop of Florida came to Miami and stayed at grandfather's and made the arrangements to have the church built but never came back again. The Priest stationed at Key West made a visit once a year for a while; Father Hugan, then Father Focard, and later Father Spandonare. After that there was no Priest who came to Miami for years, until about two years before the railroad reached here Father Wedman made two visits here. On his second visit he continued around to the west coast on Mr. De Headville's yacht. I was along. Father Fontan was the next one to visit us. He also continued around to the west coast, De Headville and myself taking him. Fontan was then stationed in Miami and built the second Catholic Church in Miami. I myself was born in what used to be called Highland Park in the City of Miami in 1871 and I am at the present time the oldest person born in the City of Miami and Dade County.

Yours for continued prosperity of Miami.

HENRY J. WAGNER.