

Tequesta:

Miami: 1896 to 1900

By RUBY LEACH CARSON

While the founding of the city of Miami in the year 1896 was the ultimate result of several national trends, the one connected directly with the development of the Florida east coast southward to Miami was the tourist rush of the eighties.

Florida in the eighties was rediscovered.

While many "unreconstructed" Floridians of the decade referred to this influx of northerners as "the second Yankee invasion", (the Union Army invasion of the sixties having been the first), they nevertheless rejoiced in the recognition which the state's warm winter climate was receiving. Not only invalids, but vacationists and wealthy pleasure-seekers were coming in increasing numbers.

This trend brought the Standard Oil millionaire, Henry M. Flagler, on a honeymoon trip with his second wife during the winter of 1883-84. Most of their time was spent in St. Augustine, where Flagler was planning to make his home. Although he was only fifty-three at the time, he was thinking of retiring from activity with the Standard Oil Company.

Flagler's biographer, Sidney Walter Martin, wrote that on this trip Flagler was impressed by the Florida East coast's need of a benefactor; but that the capitalist's only plan at the time was to return to St. Augustine the following year and begin building the luxurious Ponce de Leon Hotel.

Work on this project in 1885 showed the need of better transportation, hence Flagler purchased and improved the narrow gauge railroad which ran between Jacksonville and St. Augustine. Thus began the development of the Flagler's railroad and resort hotels down the east coast of the Florida peninsula. Although in 1892 he obtained a charter to extend his railroad as far south as Miami, his reaction upon occasions when pressed to do this would

indicate that he had no real plan. It remained for Miami's Julia Tuttle, with the aid of the three Big Freezes in 1894-95, to influence him to do this.

Neither Flagler nor the State of Florida would have been ready for this Florida east coast development in the seventies. Nor would Miami's co-founder, Mrs. Tuttle, have had title to the city's future site, with the land-bait of alternate sections all ready for the entrapment of a railroad man who would make possible a city. These three—Florida, Flagler and Julia Tuttle, were not yet ready in the seventies to merge their interests.

The trend in the north which produced capitalists like Rockefeller and Flagler was a part of the great national economic expansion that had followed the War Between the States. While Flagler was busy in the seventies developing the Standard Oil Company and amassing his great fortune, the State of Florida was first writhing under the heel of Carpetbag Rule, and later emerging from the economic, social and political miseries which the War had brought upon her.

While this was going on, Mrs. Julia Tuttle's father, Ephriam T. Sturtevant, in a small way was following the land-grabbing trend of the times and was homesteading land on Biscayne Bay, in the Lemon City area. He had come from Cleveland, Ohio, with William B. Brickell, who began homesteading land south of the mouth of the Miami River.

Early Dade County courthouse records show that Sturtevant was active in local politics. He is shown in 1872 to have been a Judge of the County Court of Dade County that year, as well as one of the Board of Inspectors in the November, 1872, election, and also a successful (by two votes!) candidate for the State Senate from the Dade-Brevard district.

Although Julia Tuttle visited her father in the seventies, the illness of her husband, Frederick Leonard Tuttle, in Cleveland had kept her there, managing his business interests. This business experience was to be used in Miami's behalf later. Through her father's inside information concerning the economic plight of the State of Florida during the years he was state senator (1872-73 and 74), Mrs. Tuttle watched developments with a trained eye. After the death of both husband and father, by 1886, she remained alert for the proper time to push a development around Biscayne Bay, near the Miami River.

By 1881 the State of Florida was in a position to offer inducements to railroads badly needed for the opening up and developing of central and southern Florida. This improved economic condition resulted from the sale of State-owned lands to Hamilton Disston for enough money to lift the lien

against all state-owned lands designated for internal improvements. Florida could now make grants of alternate sections of lands to railroads, along the line the roads followed. Henry B. Plant took advantage of this gift of land and by 1884 had extended the South Florida Railroad from Sanford, through Orlando, Kissimmee and Lakeland to Tampa.

By 1891 Mrs. Tuttle had envisioned a city at the mouth of the Miami River, where the Fort Dallas buildings were standing, and was buying the land. Her first bid for a railroad was revealed by James E. Ingraham, who was at that time the president of Henry B. Plant's railroad in Florida. It was upon Mrs. Tuttle's return to Cleveland to prepare to move to Florida, that she invited the Ingrahams to her home for dinner. She then told him about her land and expressed the belief that someday a railroad would be built to the Miami River. She hoped the railroad would be his; but to whatever railroad came, she said, she would give enough land for a town site. Ingraham was sufficiently interested later to make a survey, but he found that plan impractical.

In the early nineties, Mrs. Tuttle made this offer of land for a town site to Mr. Flagler—not once, but frequently. The Brickells joined her, offering some of their land also for a town. There came a time, of course, when the offer was gladly accepted.

The "Big Freezes" of December 24 and 28, 1894, and February 6, 1895, had by their combined disastrous effects upon the citrus and vegetable industry brought ruin and suffering at every turn. The desolation about him and the sight of settlers deserting their homes and returning north, drove the unhappy Flagler to action.

Of course Mrs. Tuttle took advantage of this situation to send word to him that these freezing temperatures had not touched the Miami River area. Flagler sent her old friend, James E. Ingraham, who was now his land commissioner, to investigate. The famous bouquet of orange blossoms which Mr. Ingraham took back to Flagler at St. Augustine—a bouquet which Ingraham and Mrs. Tuttle had picked, was all the added inducement Flagler needed. Here was proof, beautiful and fragrant, that there had been no freeze in the Biscayne Bay area. So he would extend his railroad south from Palm Beach, where it had terminated in 1894.

The marker which the Historical Association of Southern Florida dedicated to Mrs. Tuttle at S. E. First Avenue and Third Street, Miami, on July 25, 1952, tells the story briefly:

"Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle of Cleveland, O., acquired 644 acres on the north bank of the Miami River in 1891. She resided in the remodelled officers' quarters of old Fort Dallas 100 yards S. E. of this spot until her death Sept. 14, 1898.

"With rare 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 acres in alternate city blocks (more than half her land), thus earning her fame as 'The Mother of Miami'."

U. S. Senator Scott M. Loftin, in dedicating the marker, said that such astute and far-sighted business men as John Egan, Richard Fitzpatrick, William F. English, Dr. J. V. Harris and members of the Biscayne Bay Company had purchased one after another the property on which Miami now stands, yet failed to realize that they held the site of a future city in their hands.

"It remained," said the senator, "for a wise and remarkable woman to envision its possibilities."

The railroad had reached as far south as the site of Fort Lauderdale when on March 3, 1896, Flagler sent John Sewell with a crew of twelve Negroes to Miami "to start the city," as Sewell describes his assignment in his book "Memoirs and History of Miami, Florida". Sewell came on one of the two boats which were running at that time from Fort Lauderdale into Miami through the canal which had just been completed into Biscayne Bay. He had brought along his younger brother, E. G. Sewell, "to start a store in the new settlement."

With his letter of introduction to Mrs. Tuttle, John presented himself to the "Mother of Miami" and began consulting with her about the proposed Royal Palm Hotel site and its boundaries, and the city boundaries.

"I found Miami all woods," he wrote. The Sewell brothers were unable to get immediate lodging at the Miami Hotel, which Mrs. Tuttle was erecting on Miami Avenue near the River. Fortunately, there was a floating hotel, the steamboat Rockledge, operated by one Captain Vail, so they stayed there until they could move to the Miami Hotel. This boat had been following the Flagler construction work.

Miami had begun to experience growing pains from the moment Flagler's first crews of engineers and surveyors arrived. They were housed in tents. John Sewell found that Mrs. Tuttle had opened up Miami Avenue from the river north to 14th Street and that on this clearing were several shacks and tents.

One month before, on February 6, Isidor Cohen had arrived with merchandise for a store. Under the date of February 8, 1896, in his published diary, Cohen wrote: "A bank is about to be opened. Dr. Graham is planning to publish a newspaper which will be named the Metropolis. Buildings are springing up in every direction as if by magic." Cohen opened his store on the south side of the River on February 12.

On March 26, 23 days after their arrival, the Sewell brothers opened a shoe store, the first store to be located north of the Miami River. Eight hours later, J. E. Lummus opened a general store. Then came the Townley Brothers Drug store and the F. T. Budge Hardware store. Dr. James M. Jackson was invited to come from Bronson, Fla., to start a Miami practice, an invitation which the doctor accepted.

The following month, on April 15, 1896, the first train arrived in Miami. The event is described by J. N. Lummus in his book, "The Miracle of Miami Beach". J. N. (brother of J. E.), had come here from Bronson, Fla., and "remained in Miami until after the first train of the Florida East Coast Railway puffed its way into the village over wobbly tracks," and he added that "the old wood burning engine, with its big bell top, was spouting smoke and the whistle and the bell were going full tilt."

Beside the locomotive, that first train into Miami consisted of a mail coach, baggage car, day coaches (first and second class) and a chair car. Cohen's diary shows that Miami's railroad station was first located on its present site, then moved to the bay near N. E. 6th Street.

It was logical that with a train to bring printing equipment, a newspaper would be the next big event in the new town; but the Miami Metropolis did not get out its first issue until exactly a month later, on May 15. It was as Cohen wrote, "a Flagler paper", and its publishers were Dr. Walter S. Graham, an attorney, listed as editor; and Wesley M. Featherly, listed as local editor. This paper was the forerunner of the Miami Daily News. The early issues, available for reading on microfilm, along with the memoirs of several pioneers, provide local historians with plentiful and rich source material for reconstructing the pioneer days.

The Bank of Bay Biscayne had opened up May 3, in time to get good press notices in the paper's first issue. The president was William Mark Brown and Julia Tuttle was one of the directors. The editor's "plug" for Mrs. Tuttle is a measure of the respect which the publishers held for her business ability.

The restrictions which Mrs. Tuttle demanded in connection with the sale of lots were mentioned by several writers of the day as the cause of some grumbling. No liquor could be sold within the city limits. There was a fire clause, a provision for residences to be placed at least 25 feet back from the street line and a clause for the confining of factories and colored people in certain areas. Her daughter, Miss Fannie Tuttle, and her son, Harry, were of great assistance to Mrs. Tuttle in her various projects. A. E. Kingsley was her general agent.

The stage was now set for the incorporation of the city. The Metropolis reminded its readers that there was need of a strong municipal government as soon as possible. It stated that there would be 1,500 people there before the first of July (1896). On July 28, the community's 343 voters met and elected Flagler's architect, Joseph A. McDonald, as chairman. The voters then elected McDonald's son-in-law, John B. Reilly, as mayor and established boundary lines and approved an official seal.

The above election had not been conducted without some preliminary plotting and scheming between the town's two factions—the Flagler, or “corporation” crowd, and the anti-corporationists. Cohen, belonging to the anti, complained: “The railroad crowd is certainly taking control of politics in this neck of the woods.” The Metropolis was a Flagler paper until 1905, when it was purchased by S. Bobo Dean. In 1923 Dean sold it to James M. Cox, and its name was changed to the News.

Katherine and Alfred Jackson Hanna gleaned some delightful angles of those times for their book “Florida's Golden Sands.” Since the railroad owned the public utilities, interesting complaints were received because of poor service. “The generative plant often gave out and plunged the city in darkness,” wrote the Hannas. “The boiler plant of the utility, using pine wood and coal for fuel, gave forth gasses and soot.”

“Probably,” continued these writers, “no other town along the Flagler line of march kicked more strenuously against its benefactor; at least there is no evidence of so much critical agitation in other communities which owed their growth to the same source.”

Cohen listed the leaders of the anti-corporation faction as being John M. and Thomas L. Townley, Sam Fitts, John Frohock, Guy Metcalf of West Palm Beach, and, of course—himself. Although Cohen added promptly, he “entertained the highest respect for Henry M. Flagler personally”. Cohen looked forward to a promised people's newspaper. “Then,” he concluded, “watch the fur fly.”

Besides the Flagler water and light systems, the city by the end of 1896 had a city hall, a jail and a volunteer fire department. Miami Avenue was lined on both sides with stores and Julia Tuttle had started the first laundry, the first bakery and the first dairy. John Seybold, later of bakery fame, was then a restaurant proprietor. Dr. P. T. Skaggs had started a medical practice. Attorneys mentioned in the first issue of the *Metropolis* were those in the firm of Robbins, Graham & Chillingworth of Juno, which was the seat of Dade County. This firm set up a Miami branch office. Also in Miami in the early days were Attorneys G. A. Worley, Robert R. Taylor, Redmond B. Gautier, Judge H. F. Atkinson, Mitchel D. Price, Judge J. T. Sanders and perhaps others.

John Sewell's invaluable memoirs list the real estate agents in the order of their coming: F. S. Morse, E. A. Waddell, A. E. Kingsley, John B. Reilly and Robbins & Graham. He said that Morse was agent for the railroad lands and that Reilly handled Flagler lots on both the Brickell and Tuttle sides of the River. Flagler was to get one-half of all the city lots, Mrs. Tuttle one-fourth and the Brickells one-fourth.

The Brickell family, which donated to the city as much land on the south side of the river as Mrs. Tuttle gave on the north side, was an important factor in the history of Dade County. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. William B. Brickell and three sons—Charles, Clinton and Wm. B., Jr.; and four daughters—Edith M., Belle B., Maude E. and Alice. They owned an unbroken tract of hammock land from the Miami River southward for three miles, almost to Coconut Grove. Alice Brickell was postmistress, and her father operated a trading post.

Lack of space prevents mention in this brief sketch of all of the pioneers who helped develop the city. Lemon City was enjoying growth and a winter colony in the Coconut Grove area had been thriving since the late eighties. Social life there centered about the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club, of which Commodore Ralph M. Munroe was president and the noted author, Kirk Munroe, was secretary. The Peacock Inn was popular with the bay's winter visitors before Miami was incorporated.

Thus the city of Miami, a planned city with tourism its expected destiny, ended its first year and began its second year in 1897 with the mid-January formal opening of Flagler's hotel, the Royal Palm. This picturesque hotel on the bay north of the mouth of the Miami River immediately made Miami a resort of national importance. Visitors with yachts could bring them right

up to the Royal Palm Hotel docks through the channel which Flagler had cut across the bay.

In 1897 three more physicians were available in the area, Dr. R. H. Huddleston, Dr. Edwin W. Pugh and Dr. Eleanor Gault Simmons. Dr. John Gordon DuPuis began practicing in Lemon City in 1898.

An issue of the *Metropolis* dated May 15, 1897 said that Tom Peters (who during the boom was to buy the Halcyon Hotel) had made \$2,350 on a tomato crop he had planted in the fall of 1896. He shipped 1,175 crates at \$2.00 each.

The *Metropolis* gave the 1897 Miami population figures as two thousand, with an expectation of an extra thousand during the next tourist season. It boasted that Miami was the only city on the east coast south of St. Augustine with a sewerage system; it had the most paved streets and a good waterworks system, an ice factory, four good hotels, a bank and six church organizations. Moreover, said the paper, "Miami is a moral city. There are no saloons in the place." On February 3, 1898, a Board of Trade was organized.

An unplanned destiny for the new city of Miami, but one which was foreseen by Mrs. Tuttle, made its appearance before Miami was two years of age. This was its projection into inter-American affairs as a result of its proximity to the Caribbean countries. Although the Cuban insurrection had touched the Florida coastline through filibustering activities, the United States did not intervene in Cuba's behalf until Congress declared war against Spain on April 25, 1898.

Many Americans, such as Florida's United States Senator Wilkinson Call, had been articulate in a desire for American intervention during the Cleveland administration. Historians of the period state that Cleveland side-stepped the issue in protest against the trend of imperialism which had swept the nation. Shortly after the battleship *Maine* was sunk by the Spanish on February 15, McKinley, who was then president, asked Congress to declare war.

Local writers of the period say that Miamians feared an attack from the Spaniards, although no warship could get into the shallow channel. It was common knowledge, however, that some of the filibustering ships which carried supplies to Cuba were loaded at New River, the site of Fort Lauderdale. The *Metropolis* of May 21, 1897, had mentioned one such trip by the *Dauntless* and had hinted at others.

From the time the insurrection had flared up in Cuba in 1895, the Cuban refugees had organized juntas in Key West, Tampa and Jacksonville.

Floridians cooperated with these refugees in providing arms, ammunition and men and sending them to Cuba for defense against Spanish oppression and to help secure Cuban independence. Most famous of the filibustering ships was *The Three Friends*, operated by Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, who would later be governor of Florida.

Describing the effect on Miamians of this war, Helga H. Eason in her article, "Sand in Their Shoes" which appeared in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, wrote:

"The Spanish-American War was hard on the new city. A near panic existed when the cream of Miami's young men marched off to train in Tampa, and the citizens expected fully that Spanish warships would fire on the city. But it was not the Spanish that wreaked havoc, but the American Army, for seven thousand soldiers were sent in to protect the 1,500 civilians. It was the citizens who had to protect themselves against the soldiers, for they molested wives, broke into homes, shot coconuts off trees, shot and slashed whites and Negroes alike. The encamped army profited business men and doctors, but women were not safe on the street after dark."

Cohen wrote that the soldiers "kept things extremely lively for several months", and Sewell's memoirs carry an account of the organizing and drilling of Minute Men. Any male Miamian from the age of 16 up was eligible to take part in these nightly drills.

Sewell wrote that the first prize ship captured from Spain during the Spanish-American War was brought to the Miami dock. It was the *Cocoa*, and had been purchased by Flagler. According to Sewell, the first Spanish prisoners brought to American soil were landed here and that the whole city went to the dock to see the Spanish general and his soldiers transferred from boat to train. "The Spaniards did quite a business selling their money, trinkets and even the buttons on their uniforms to Miami citizens for souvenirs," he wrote.

Miamians were saddened during this trying time by the sudden death of the city's co-founder, Mrs. Julia Tuttle. Her death on September 14 followed an illness of only a few hours.

Tragedy struck the city in 1899 in the form of a yellow fever epidemic. On October 22 of that year, the State Health Officer, Dr. Joseph Y. Porter, quarantined Miami. His public proclamation and some of his reports of the epidemic to the State Board of Health have been made available by Dr. John G. DuPuis in his book "History of Early Medicine in Dade County".

Dr. Porter's quarantine statement, with its suggestion for depopulation, is worth reading today. "Five distinct cases of yellow fever have been seen," Dr. Porter stated, "and from clinical histories submitted there are doubtless several others. The infection is distributed over the town, mild in character, but unmistakable in recognition. To limit the spread of and destroy the infection as rapidly as possible, a depopulation of Miami is recommended."

Dr. Porter presented his plan for this.

"If fifty or more persons will leave for Hendersonville, N. C., which place will admit yellow fever refugees from this section," he said, "a special through train will be provided by the East Coast Railway System. A less number than fifty will not be taken by connecting lines at Jacksonville. As soon as possible a detention camp for refugees will be provided, at a convenient point, for those who cannot go as far as Hendersonville, N. C. The quarantine of Miami and the surveillance of this section as far north as New River (Fort Lauderdale), will be maintained as rigidly as human agency can effect it."

The quarantine station, according to Dr. DuPuis, was set up at Fulford, around 166th street north, and all who wanted to leave Miami to go north were required to stay there for two weeks. If no symptoms developed within that time, they were permitted to leave.

Dr. James M. Jackson as local health officer for the State Board of Health, set up a sanitary watch over the town and supervised the house-to-house inspections. According to Dr. Jackson's testimony, the disease was introduced into Miami by the cattle steamer *Laura*, a wooden vessel from Neuvitas, Cuba.

As the first victim of the disease had been staying at the Miami Hotel, everyone who had had any communication with him was quarantined on the steamer *Santa Lucia*, a floating detention camp. From the Miami Hotel, according to the record, the disease spread across the street to a boarding house. Not long afterward, the Miami Hotel burned to the ground. The cause of the fire was never given.

Dr. DuPuis quotes a letter dated October 30, 1899, which showed that Flagler said he would provide funds for a hospital. He not only erected a hospital but brought experienced nurses from Key West and Jacksonville and paid all of their expenses. The state records show that Flagler in other ways contributed to the financial relief of the afflicted.

The quarantine was lifted on January 15, 1900, with a record of 220 cases, but only 14 deaths. One of these deaths was that of John G. Pope, who

had moved from Kissimmee to Miami to construct buildings for the Flagler interests. One of his five children, Youell Pope, now living in Miami, recalls how well the health officers guarded the city boundaries during the quarantine. The day the quarantine was put into effect, one of his schoolmates, John Graham, son of the Metropolis publisher, was not allowed to return home—outside the boundaries—without a permit.

In 1900 the four-year-old city of Miami could face the new century with a feeling of security—for its economy and its high enthusiasm had been tested by disasters, and had risen above them.

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