

Tequesta:

Flagler's Undertakings in Miami in 1897

By NATHAN D. SHAPPEE

Activity in Miami in 1897 was one of manifold expression, various degrees of attainment and rapid advancement in all directions. An estimated 2,000 people lived in the new railroad town but half of them were Flagler employees working on the various local projects of the city's patron.

The transformation of Mrs. Tuttle's fabulous square mile north of the Miami River into the early City of Miami was done rapidly and on a large scale. In the exchange of 1895 between Mrs. Tuttle for the extension of the railroad to Miami and Mr. Flagler for land for terminals, streets, dock facilities and hotels, the magnate had secured more than half of her section but the enabling device had been pledged and Mrs. Tuttle had imposed a general completion date on some of the construction projects. It was due to this time element that Flagler threw such a large labor force into the small city. Miami's rapid commercial and civic development came from this extensive construction. Into the area of early Miami Flagler poured both money and man power.

The year 1896 had witnessed the completion of the Florida East Coast Railroad and the arrival of the first train on April 15. A month later to the day the *Miami Metropolis* started publication. The first newspaper was a Flagler sponsored enterprise and had been named by him. Its first editor was Dr. Walter S. Graham of Titusville, a physician who did not practice, who was a licensed attorney and had been active in purchasing right of way for the railroad. The *Miami Metropolis* was owned by the East Coast Publishing Company, a corporation which had three directors,—Graham, C. C. Chillingworth, Graham's partner and later a judge in Palm Beach County, and Wesley M. Featherly, a printer from Michigan who had brought his printing plant to Miami by boat.

Dr. Graham was a good writer and edited a lively paper. Featherly, as local editor, recorded the minutiae of the booming city on the entire front page under the trick heading of "Miami Minceat, Many Minor Miscellaneous Miami Matters Modestly Mentioned." Graham was confidant to Flagler's plans for Miami through the key men who carried on the undertakings here. Principal of these were James E. Ingraham, president of the Fort Dallas Land Company; John B. McDonald, Flagler's chief contractor, and John B. Reilly, chief bookkeeper and also Miami's first mayor. John Sewell, who later became a mayor, was the construction boss of street construction and also a trusted member of this inner circle.

The personal time which Mr. Flagler could spend in Miami in 1897 was limited to some degree by the complications of his second wife's insanity and his distraction over the affair but he did come here when major plans and decisions had to be made. However, the Flagler lieutenants stayed in Miami; they had large projects to complete and others to start; so there was no noticable break in the speed of the Flagler undertakings here during any part of the year. These superintendents were capable and efficient and commonly disciplined to complete work when Flagler wanted it. He was not niggardly about giving them enough workmen to complete jobs on time. This dispatch impressed the local residents and outsiders alike. Dr. Graham, a Flagler man through and through, waxed effusive in interpreting his benefactor. In an editorial in June, 1897, paying tribute to his patron as a builder of fine hotels, he called him a "poet . . . the stamp of purest gold. We could wish that Florida had a hundred like him." Later in the year on the occasion of the launching of the S.S. *Miami*, Graham again praised the millionaire in good frontier-style journalism:

There is a magic touch behind the affair; it is the same hand that opened a roadway for the iron horse to Biscayne Bay and made it possible for a full fledged city to spring into existence, with a population of 2,000, on July 28th, only ten months after the shriek of the locomotive sounded o'er the waters of Bay Biscayne and startled the alligators on the banks of the Miami for the first time.

This "magic touch" actually came from conference and correspondence between Flagler and his local top brass. Projects and their progress were reviewed and time deliveries were set. Local people later learned of these conferences through the columns of the *Miami Metropolis* where they seemed both cryptic and olympian. Such a *fiat* was reported in December:

We are informed that the work of grading and paving Avenue D from the railroad to Second Street and from Second Street over

to the Boulevard will be commenced at once. This is done by instructions from Mr. Flagler. A hard sidewalk will be laid on Avenue C from Tenth Street to the school house.

Flagler and his superintendents operated from a yearly budget of projects with major undertakings being commenced after the tourist season had ended. The schedule for 1897 reflects his eagerness to complete the public facilities for Miami and also to commence the construction of additional facilities related to his railroad. The program for this year appeared in the *Miami Metropolis* on April 23:

1. Extension of the railroad by a spur to the bay and out into the bay for 1,000 to 1,500 feet by a dock.
2. Hauling fill to the shore and thus extend the shoreline from 50 to 200 feet out into the bay.
3. Bring in an immense harbor dredge to deepen the dock area and the mouth of the Miami River to a 12 foot depth.
4. Build up the shoreline with rock fill southward from the wharf to the city limits.
5. Design the wharf area to serve as a docking terminal for the Nassau and Key West steamers.
6. Order the construction of a new steamer for the Nassau trade.
7. Survey the bay to get an estimate of the work needed and mark out a deep water channel to Norris Cut.
8. Build a strong bridge across the Miami River to the Southside.
9. Widen Biscayne Boulevard to 100 feet.
10. Lay out a park from Biscayne Boulevard to the bay.

Although there were changes in this program as the year progressed and the bridge to the Southside was not erected in 1897, the Flagler schedule for the year kept Miami fascinated, excited and noisy all year long.

COMPLETION OF PROJECTS OF 1896

In addition to the program outlined above, projects started in 1896 were completed or advanced. One of the most important of these was the completion of the waterworks. In 1896 a four mile pipeline from wells in the Everglades had been laid into Miami to a location north and two blocks west of the station, "at the edge of the prairie". Here a wooden storage tank, 125 feet high, was erected. Nearby was a two-story pump house which contained sleeping quarters for the employees. This water tank supplied the railroad, all of Miami and the Royal Palm Hotel. Main lines were laid on Miami Avenue and Flagler Street. Each of these supply lines were more

than a half mile long. When the supply lines were completed, the city installed fire plugs and later in the year purchased two reel carts and 1,000 feet of fire hose. The *Miami Metropolis* launched a drive then to secure a volunteer fire company but none was organized in 1897. Even when Graham suggested that the volunteers be paid one dollar for answering false alarms and two dollars for responding to real fires, there were no takers.

Street clearing, grading and paving continued at a rapid pace and furnished constant din and dust throughout the year. Grading the streets was preceded by blasting the surface rock to a depth of 18 inches below the intended level for the streets. After the blasting crews had loosened the rock, then a huge stone crusher followed. The noisy monster crushed daily from 70 to 100 tons of rock into three different sizes which were raked and rolled into the excavation. Miami streets were built in the manner of the ancient Roman roads, large stones on the bottom; smaller sized pieces toward the top and the surface brushed with very fine rock, wetted and rolled down. Miami in its early days had the finest paved streets in the state. In the bright sunlight they gave off a glare that almost blinded the residents. Sidewalks for these early streets were elevated strips of the rock which had been chiseled and graded into a smooth surface.

In 1897, Biscayne Boulevard was paved for a mile and plans at that time called for additional construction later to make it seven miles long. Flagler Street was paved from the railroad to the Boulevard, a distance of 3,300 feet. Miami Avenue was completed northward to the city limits. South Second Street, adjacent to the river bank, was also paved.

The main lines of the sewer system were also completed in 1897 with a total of 3,900 feet laid. These lines emptied into the Miami River and into Biscayne Bay.

In April the road gangs grubbed out the two blocks south of Flagler Street, between East First and Second Avenues. The purpose of this work, not on the schedule for 1897, became apparent later when it was announced that Mr. Flagler intended to build renting cottages here and at other locations in Miami. The general dimensions of these would be 22 by 30 feet, two stories high with a six foot porch across the entire front. These were six room houses, three to a floor. Cottages without baths rented for \$15 per month, while those which had baths cost \$17. A few ten-room houses rented for \$22 per month. Persons could also buy these houses at prices from \$1,800 to \$3,000.

The magnitude of the undertakings in Miami did not augur well for the older settlements along the bay. The Lemon City correspondent for the *Miami Metropolis* in May reported that five new buildings were going up there and with both hope and resentment declared that "Lemon City will soon recover from the black eye given to her by the starting of Miami a year ago".

COMPLETION OF THE ROYAL PALM HOTEL

Of a more personal interest to Flagler in the development of his southern metropolis was the completion of the Royal Palm Hotel in the early part of the year and the undertaking of a vast amount of additional work to the hostelry before the season opened in December. The first season of the Royal Palm had lasted only from January 16 to March 25. Construction work was continued in the hotel after guests arrived and workmen were lined up to resume work after the last guests had departed.

Although there were four other hotels in the area, Peacock's Inn in Coconut Grove; Lemon City Hotel; Courley House in Buena Vista and Julia D. Tuttle's Hotel Miami and two floating hotels. The Royal Palm outshone all the others and Flagler spared no money and effort to make it the lure to bring visitors here.

Actually Flagler's East Coast Hotel System had a second hotel in Miami. This was Joseph A. McDonald's Hotel Biscayne on the southeast corner of Flagler Street and Miami Avenue which he leased to the hotel chain. This hotel was constructed of brick; had stores on the ground floor and 55 rooms and other departments of the hotel on the floors above. The building was lighted by manufacturer's gas and had hot and cold water in each sleeping room. Hotel Biscayne remained open during the summer months and accommodated convention and touring groups which came here by the East Coast Railroad. Improvements were made to the property in the summer. A cement sidewalk was laid in the front of the building. A veranda was extended the whole length of the second floor and the grounds on the east side were enclosed and landscaped. Hotel Biscayne opened the season on December 14. An entertainment for the guests and townspeople was held in the evening. Vocal selections were given by Mrs. John B. Reilly, the mayor's wife, and Mr. Charles H. Garthside, cashier of the Bank of Bay Biscayne.

The Royal Palm Hotel, even in its partially completed condition for the short season of 1897, had been built on a scale to lure the wealthy who could

come by the railroad, in their own private Pullmans or by their own boats. It was a vast structure, 680 feet long, 267 feet wide and six stories high. It was built in the shape of an F. The central part of the structure had a rotunda which was encircled by an observation walk, six stories above the ground. The eastern half of the building had a 16 foot veranda which afforded a covered promenade 800 feet long.

The Royal Palm was luxurious even for the present time and completely fantastic for Miami in 1897 when tents still lined the eastern blocks of Flagler Street. It contained 450 rooms with hot and cold water and had 100 private baths. It had its own ice plant, laundry, electric plant and elevators. Sixty miles of piping and tubing supplied its conveniences. All the features of fancy resort hotels were installed in the building. It contained a grand ballroom, magnificent dining rooms, a casino and added a swimming pool in 1897. An orchestra played each evening in the rotunda and on Sunday nights gave a concert of sacred music for guests and townspeople alike. Not the least impressive of the luxury touches was the stationery, printed in brown ink for general correspondence and in green ink for the ladies' correspondence. The paper was embossed with a picture of a royal palm tree surrounded by a wreath and bore the imprint, "Royal Palm Hotel, Miami, Biscayne Bay, Florida". . . .

Construction of the swimming pool started in January and was completed late the next month. Its dimensions were over-size even by today's standards, — 140 feet long and 50 feet wide, with a graded depth from 3½ to 6½ feet. The pool held 300,000 gallons of water, pumped in from the bay and heated to a constant temperature of 78 degrees. Bordering the pool were 100 dressing rooms. A popular feature of the pool were two sliding boards, one of 25 feet and the other 75 feet in length. These were flushed by streams of water for better sliding. Popularity of the slides was reported by the paper which stated, "It is a sport indulged in by both ladies and gentlemen and produces great merriment". In the evenings, when the guests of the hotel were dining, dancing and promenading, the pool was opened to the townspeople for a 25 cent admission.

As soon as the Royal Palm closed in March, extensive landscaping on the grounds was started. Hundreds of coconut palms were planted on the grounds and in the early form of present Bayfront Park. Some of these trees were brought from the grounds of the Royal Poinciana Hotel at Palm Beach. About 2,000 trees were purchased from Dr. Sweeting of Elliott's Key. This

landscaping crew consisted of 120 men who planted trees at the rate of 60 per day.

The largest of these landscaping projects was the construction of a "rockery" of octagonal shape, 70 by 120 feet, and elevated to a height of 8 feet at one point. This was fitted with curving paths, grottoes and fountains filled with fish. Between the rockery and the west end of the hotel a flower conservatory was constructed. This was a large structure, 100 feet long. West of the newly planted palm park were playing fields for baseball, golf, tennis and croquet. A stone pier was built on the bay side for the boats of guests who cruised during the season.

Anticipating a larger season in 1898, the Miami Transfer Company bought new carriages and landaus for renting out and also purchased two horse-drawn omnibuses, costing \$3,000, which accommodated 40 passengers each.

The second season of the Royal Palm opened on January 12, 1898.

HARBOR IMPROVEMENTS

The opulent Royal Palm was but one link in the Flagler chain down the length of Florida. Of related importance were improvements and innovations on the Florida East Coast Railroad which made travel to Miami faster and more attractive and more popular. The railway had completed plans for fast trains before the season of 1897 started. In February the New York and Florida Limited started service between Jacksonville and Miami daily. This trip took only 12 hours for an average of 31 miles per hour. Sometimes this train had six passenger cars on it. The railroad also put into service a Palm Beach-Miami run during the season.

An innovation of 1897 was the start of excursions to Miami from points within the state. These were advertised with steamship connections to Nassau and Key West. The first of these occurred on July 29 when 250 excursionists from Jacksonville came to Miami for the day. Of this number 75 went on to Key West. The remainder of the visitors were entertained by the people of Miami who, under the direction of the Seminole Amusement Club, arranged a full day. Athletic contests, shooting matches and bicycle races afforded inter-city rivalry. In the evening a bicycle parade and a ball at the casino of Hotel Miami concluded the festivities. Although local men won the swimming race across the Miami River and the pigeon shoot, a Jacksonville racer swept all the bicycle events and won a total of \$14. During the

day the women of the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches served lunch and ice cream and cake to the hungry crowd. An excursion in October from Fort Pierce and intermediate points brought 750 people to Miami.

The greatest improvement to the railroad facilities in Miami was the construction of harbor accommodations on the bay. This was a large, noisy job which employed 250 men and 50 teams for several months. The project cost \$100,000 and brought a monthly payroll of \$12,000 into Miami. A spur track, 2,300 feet long, was built from the mainline to the waterfront. Here a dock area, 700 feet long on the bay front and extending out into the water for 400 feet was constructed. When completed this area covered seven acres. It was strongly built with tongue and groove iron pilings pounded down to firm footing. At the end of this large area a circular basin 500 feet in diameter and 12 feet deep was dredged out to accommodate vessels of that draft. Within the boundaries of the wharf, 200,000 cubic yards of rock and dirt fill were poured. Crossbeams for the framework inside the bulkhead were 12 by 12 beams.

For the dredging, a huge suction type machine was brought from New Orleans. It was mounted on a lighter and had an hourly capacity of 1,000 cubic yards. The mud and rock was forced up into a 14 inch iron pipe which had a movable nozzle which moved the muck to locations some distance from the dredge. Pipes supported on pontoons carried unneeded fill far out into the bay. In addition to the dredging at the wharf, the machine, presently joined by a second dredge, deepened the channel at the mouth of the Miami River and also cut a deep water channel to the Cape Florida channel. This work went on night and day with 50 men managing the dredging.

After the main work of the new dock had been finished the passenger station was moved from its present location to the new improvements on the bay. This building, weighing an estimated 35 tons, was moved a mile without cracking one slate shingle or opening a single joint. In its new location a 40 foot addition was built; a baggage and freight platform, 900 feet long was constructed and adjacent areas were landscaped.

This bayside project was to be completed by January 10, 1898, when Flagler expected to inaugurate his passenger and mail service to Nassau in his own steamer, the S.S. *Miami*.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE S.S. MIAMI

The construction of the S.S. *Miami* stirred a great amount of local interest in this last major undertaking of 1897. Although the *Miami* did not

arrive until 1898, the *Miami Metropolis* kept residents informed on the progress of building the new steamship.

Mr. Flagler, by the time the railroad had reached Miami, had made up his mind to establish steamship connections with Nassau and Key West as additional inducements for tourists to come to Miami. The cost of this additional service he hoped to offset through a mail and freight subsidy contract with the Bahama government. At the time of the arrival of the railroad in 1896, the principal freighter coming to Miami was the S.S. *Biscayne* out of Jacksonville. This ship was wrecked in a gale off Indian River Inlet on January 30, 1897, with the loss of two crewmen.

Operating out of Miami southward was the *City of Key West* which made two trips a week to its namesake town. Between trips it was used for moonlight cruises down the bay. However, this vessel was taken out of service in April and taken to Baltimore for new boilers and other repairs which cost \$25,000. By the time of the tourist season in 1897, these repairs had been completed and the ship returned to Miami, Captain Bravo commanding. The *City of Key West* was chartered by Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway and Steamship Company. In January this company chartered a ship of British registry, the *City of Monticello*, for the Nassau run. This vessel made the trips between Miami and Nassau twice a week during the season while Flagler was planning the construction of his own S.S. *Miami*.

The *City of Monticello* served very well in 1897. Passengers were chiefly guests of the Royal Palm who were taken to the Royal Victoria Hotel in Nassau. Thirty-two round trips to the Bahamas were made after the run opened on January 19. The fare was set at \$13.50 one way with round trips costing \$22. When this service started, Flagler's railroad advertised that New York was only 48 hours away from Nassau. Trip fares from Jacksonville to Nassau and return were placed at \$41. For the Nassau regatta in April, the ship ran an excursion for \$17.50 for round trip, meals and stateroom. The *City of Monticello* was described as "an elegant sidewheeler" when it first came to Miami. It contained 28 double staterooms and made the run in 12 hours. For this first season it averaged from 40 to 50 passengers per trip. When it returned to Miami on January 22 on its first run, it ran aground on the mud and sand bar at the mouth of the Miami River.

Flagler had his sights set for larger things than excursion service to Nassau when he leased the *City of Monticello*. In March, the *Miami Metropolis* reported that Flagler had brought 27 members of the Bahama legislature

to the Royal Palm Hotel where he had entertained them and showed them around Miami. Earlier he had gone to Nassau for the opening of the legislature. Later the local paper revealed what his plans were. He proposed to buy the Royal Victoria Hotel in Nassau and enlarge it and renovate it into a modern tourist attraction. He offered regular mail service and freight conveniences in return for an annual subsidy of £5,200 per year. These services had been costing the Bahama government from £3,700 to £6,000 annually for even irregular performance. The *Nassau Guardian* promoted the contract which Flagler sought. The colonial governor favored it and the legislature passed favorably on it but delay in the British Colonial Office prevented consummation of the plan in 1897.

While Flagler was dickering for the Bahama contract, he went ahead with his plans for the S.S. *Miami*. This vessel was completely built and tried in the last six months of 1897. Flagler commonly imposed almost impossible delivery dates for his projects and the construction of the new ship was no exception. The Cramp Shipyards of Philadelphia signed a contract for the ship on June 28. The first keel plates were laid on July 3 and the ship was launched on October 23. The vessel was built in 112 days. The *Miami* was 240 feet long, had a 40 foot beam and a hull 23 feet deep. It had a displacement of 1,150 tons and an eight foot draft. The ship's engines produced 1,800 horsepower to maintain a speed of 16 knots. It was a five deck ship which carried 120 passengers. Each stateroom had running water, electric lights and a fan.

The *Miami Metropolis* played up the news of the ship as construction advanced. For the launching, the local paper secured the services of Walter Scot, a winter visitor from Philadelphia to cover the event. A special supplement with a picture of the new ship was printed by the local paper.

The *Miami Metropolis* and leading citizens here became increasingly proud of this latest Flagler venture after its name was announced. Conferences among the Flagler men and local civic leaders and merchants crystallized into a desire to present some commemorative gift to the ship when it arrived. The interested parties finally decided to take up a subscription for a silver service for the proud new ship. The plans also called for a dinner and a ball at the Royal Palm as part of the welcoming festivities.

Dr. Graham related these plans to Mr. Flagler by a letter on September 16. The magnate was appreciative of the intention but counter-proposed by suggesting that all money Miami chose to raise for the event should be put

into a fund for the construction of a hospital. Flagler offered land and promised to match local contributions for the project. Local leaders immediately acquiesced to this alternate plan. A local committee of twenty became the steering group for welcoming the S.S. *Miami* and conducting the hospital fund campaign. Plans for the dinner and dance at the Royal Palm were retained. A tour of the new ship with an admission fee was added as another money making device. The festivities at the hotel would cost \$5 for a gentleman and lady and \$2 for each extra lady. During the month of December the *Miami Metropolis* plugged for the sale of tickets.

In the paper issued on the last day of the year, Dr. Graham pulled out all the stops in promoting the dinner and dance for the hospital:

All we would have to do would be to buy one, or as many tickets as we felt disposed to, or could afford to buy, and the money paid for the tickets would be simply a contribution on our part to a most worthy cause, to an institution in which someday we, ourselves, might be won back to life after a serious accident, or might be carried through the stages of some malignant disease safely; when perhaps, but for its sheltering care we might die neglected, or, at least, improperly cared for. Who knows what his end may be? Who that today is surrounded by a loving family circle and tender friends has the assurance that he may not outlive them all, and buffeted by the waves of adverse fortune become an object of charity? Such histories are not rare in the lives of men. A thought of the possibilities Fate may have in store, a moment's reflection when you are out among the song birds, close to nature, or when you are ill for a day or so, undistracted by the hurly burly of business demands, and not intoxicated with social gayeties, by the dance and the vanities of life, and you will realize how possible it may be that when you give your mite to the building of a hospital, you may be casting your bread upon the waters and that it may return to soothe your fevered brow, or bind up your broken limbs and bruised body after many days. Or, if not for you, that it is certain to do so for the human beings who are your brothers and sisters.

Thus closed the year 1897 in Miami. Citizens and patron alike were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the S.S. *Miami* into the harbor. Townspeople and Mr. Flagler were working close together with no discord. Flagler was proud of his new resort town and its residents were proud of him.

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