

The West Palm Beach that I Remember

By Gordon L. Williams*

We arrived in West Palm Beach on the evening train from Key West on September 23, 1918, sixty-one years ago. We were met by Mr. Steen, a realtor, who took us in his big Studebaker to the Dixie Inn, a remodeled residence on the west side of the Dixie Highway, facing the Palm Beach County Courthouse and only two or three blocks from the railroad station. During the previous several days we had ridden the Cuba Central Railroad the length of that island, spent a couple of nights in a Havana hotel, crossed the Florida Straits on the deck of the railroad-car ferry, spent a night in Key West, and ridden Flagler's famous Oversea Railroad to West Palm Beach.

We were a family of seven. Our parents, Mr. and Mrs. N.K. Williams, had met in Nebraska shortly after the Spanish American War, were married in Cuba and continued to live there. Five of us children were born there: Elizabeth, Gordon, Vera, Kenneth and Robert, and in 1918 we ranged in age from ten years to one year. By the time I finished high school nine years later there were four more children: John, Mary, Richard and Esther. In returning to the States to live, my father chose Florida, to have a climate as much like Cuba's as possible, and West Palm Beach because it had been recommended by Mr. and Mrs. Hose, whom we knew in LaGloria, Cuba. West Palm Beach was truly a nice place to live and rear a family. The Hoses, who later returned to West Palm Beach, had put my father in contact with Mr. Steen. Later Mr. Steen's son, Probert, was a schoolmate of mine at both West Palm Beach and Gainesville. The daughter, Mittie Steen, was a few years older.

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Mr. Steen had a furnished house awaiting us at 424 Fern Street, midway between Poinsettia (Dixie Highway) and the FEC tracks. That part of West Palm Beach had been settled in the 1890s when the railroad came. The house was not new but it had lights, running water and inside facilities and seemed very modern to us. Few landlords today would rent a furnished house to so large a family for a month-at-a-time.

Our first day there we contacted Dr. Freeman, an osteopath, for my mother whose back trouble was the principal reason for leaving Cuba. He was on Olive Street, near Evernia Street, a short walk from our home. We also bought a few groceries at Dwight A. Allen's store, on the corner of Fern and Poinsettia.

Our third day, September 26, and Kenneth's fourth birthday, little Robert died of diphtheria. Everything had gone wrong. The first doctor incorrectly diagnosed the case; Dr. Freeman said it was out of his field and by the time we got to the doctor he recommended, Dr. Ernest Van Landingham, it was too late. The serum had to be ordered from Jacksonville and it took a whole day for it to arrive by train. We were promptly quarantined for ten days and could not accompany little Robert to the cemetery where he has lain for three scores of years. Sometimes I visit the grave where the stone reads "Our Darling Baby." Dr. Van Landingham inoculated all of us with a newly-developed toxin-antitoxin and the house had to be fumigated.

We knew nobody in town and did not even have a phone. However, our neighbors were helpful and Mr. Allen sent over groceries as we needed them. We children played in the sand, which looked white but was far from clean, and braided palm leaves for those ten days. By the time we were out of quarantine the influenza epidemic of World War I had hit West Palm Beach and schools and theaters were closed and public gatherings discouraged. Fortunately the epidemic did not hit West Palm Beach very hard.

One day our father took us for a walk around town. We went down by the new city dock on the shore of Lake Worth near the end of Datura Street, where farm produce and fish were being unloaded. At that time the lake and its connecting East Coast Canal constituted a major artery of commerce. While we were walking around galking, I volunteered to guide us home, but soon became lost. Elizabeth, who would be in the 6th grade when school reopened, was interested in reading the well-marked street signs – a new phenomenon to us. When we crossed Fern Street she knew the way home, embarrassing this unobservant volunteer guide.

In time, we discovered what a well-named system of streets West Palm Beach had – sub-tropical plants in alphabetical order, as follows:

East and West (working South)

A – Althea
 B – Banyan
 C – Clematis
 D – Datura
 E – Evernia
 F – Fern
 G – Gardenia
 H – Hibiscus
 I – Iris
 J – Jessamine
 K – Okeechobee Road

Diagonals by the park

L – Lemon
 M – Myrtle
 North and South (working west)
 N – Narcissus
 O – Olive
 P – Poinsettia (Dixie Highway)
 Q – Railroad – No Name
 R – Rosemary
 S – Sapodilla
 T – Tamarin

North of Althea came the Avenues, 1st. Ave., 2nd. Ave., 3rd. Ave., etc.

As the years have gone by, politicians have shown great progress by changing some of these names. Politicians throughout the world do this – witness Istanbul, Stalingrad, Dominican Republic, Mt. McKinley, Hoover Dam, Cape Kennedy, etc. In this case, one of the early changes was to clean up Banyan Street, which had become quite a red-light district, by merely eliminating it from the map – great progress. Banyan now became 1st. Street, Althea became 2nd. Street, and all of the numbered streets to the north had their identifying numbers increased by two. Other street names have had similar alterations. So, while West Palm Beach had an orderly street-name system at the turn of the century, by 1979 its growth and changes give it a hodgepodge system that's beyond me.

Another change in name was West Palm Beach, itself. It was originally called Lake Worth, which would be a logical name for the settlement that sprang up where the railroad reached Lake Worth. The railroad then terminated across the lake at Palm Beach, which got its name from the many coconut palms that the early settlers had planted there. After a lively advertising boost by Flagler, the name Palm Beach spread everywhere – Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, South Palm Beach (at Southern Boulevard), North Palm Beach (before reaching Riviera, in those days), Palm Beach High School, Palm Beach Bank, Palm Beach Mercantile (The Big Store), Palm Beach Clothing Co., Palm Beach suits, Palm Beach Dry Goods (later called Hatch's) *Palm Beach Post*, *Palm Beach Times*, *Palm Beach Independent*, etc. Most all of these names referred to places or businesses on the West Palm Beach side of Lake Worth. There were likely others on both sides of the Lake.

Probably our earliest purchase, aside from groceries, was a bicycle. Our father bought a Columbia woman's bicycle for \$20, from Cummings'

Bicycle Shop on Clematis. That was the going price for a good used bicycle. A new one was a bit more than twice that. He chose a woman's bicycle because any of us could ride it, and the females of our family certainly could not ride a man's bicycle. The next step was to learn to ride it. Elizabeth and I, aged 10 and 8, knew a lot about riding horses, but nothing about bicycles, even though we were older than neighborhood children who rode everywhere. When we did learn, we spent all day every day taking turns on that bicycle. We even asked to be called early in the mornings so we had more time to ride.

At that time, West Palm Beach claimed the distinction of being the "bicyclingest town in the U.S.A.," and well it might have been. It had paved streets, flat terrain, and perfect year 'round climate for such riding. There was one hill, up at Sapodilla Street. We delighted in coasting down that hill, either on Fern or Gardenia, right across Rosemary. The danger of hitting a car at those crossings didn't occur to anybody. I presume the cars were so few, so noisy, and so slow that the danger was minimal. Our father's first job was at the town of Lake Worth. He thought nothing of riding a bicycle to work six miles twice a day.

Almost everybody had a bicycle. Sunday afternoon family outings frequently meant a bicycle ride. If there were insufficient bicycles to go around, one could easily be borrowed. Groceries, papers, telegrams, mail, etc. were delivered by bicycle. There were bicycle racks everywhere. For example, Clematis Avenue had one-lane traffic in each direction, with space between the lanes to park cars and bicycles. There were about three or four racks per block, and each rack would hold thirty or forty bicycles—or wheels, as they were commonly called. Residences often had racks for three or four wheels in the front yard or up on the front porch, where they were sheltered overnight. Business houses also had such racks, and school grounds abounded with them. Bicycles were almost never locked; neither were houses or cars. Thievery was no problem.

A common form of transportation was walking. Distances were generally less than a mile, and concrete sidewalks were almost always available. Even during the Florida Boom, new subdivisions started by building curbs and sidewalks (many got no further than that). Bicycles were not allowed on sidewalks, but perambulators and wheeled toys were. These were similar to our present models except that they had less durable rubber tires, or none at all.

Some of the older people, especially women, rode tricycles which were much like the tricycles of today. Two or three older men had wheelchairs propelled by working two levers forward and backward. Some chairs not only had these two hand levers but two foot pedals

allowing all four of the occupant's limbs to propel the chair. I once got into trouble by playing with two of these vehicles that were on the porch of an older couple who did not answer their doorbell. I was there on an errand for my mother and when no one answered the bell I assumed they were not at home. They were! Anyway, I learned how the vehicles worked.

There were no riding horses or buggies in West Palm Beach. There were some wagons, especially for ice delivery. There were horses and mules outside of town that were used for farming and road work.

There were some automobiles and a few motorcycles, of the types now seen in museums. There were far, far less than one such vehicle per family. Perhaps there was one to a block. I presume one-third of them were Fords (Model T), the rest being of many makes. We had a Brisco that my parents bought one rainy Saturday night for \$300.00 at a used car lot in Miami. They rode the bus to Miami after work, Saturday noon, and managed to get back home a few hours before Sunday School. They took the job mechanic and Dad Felton, who was an experienced motorist, along to help select the car and to teach my forty-year-old father to drive on the way home. I think the only other Brisco I ever saw was in a museum near Rapid City, South Dakota some thirty-five years later. That made two too many.

Cars were licensed, as a form of taxation, but drivers were not. There was no compulsory insurance, gasoline tax, parking meters, inspection or sales tax. About the only rule of the road was to be on the right side of it when meeting another car. Sometimes, this meant running the right wheels off of the pavement. There was no stripe down the middle. Many drivers became "road hogs," by crowding bicycle riders off the road. The speed limits were twenty-five mph in the country, eighteen in town, and twelve in the business district. Motorists had to guess at their speed or take the word of a policeman, as most cars, especially Fords, had no speedometers. The speedometers that did exist, rarely worked. Forty miles per hour was the top speed of most cars.

In 1918, there were two or three electric Broughams in West Palm Beach. These cars were quite plush, glassed-in, and silent, complete with window shades and flower vases. They were steered by a tiller bar, and propelled by batteries. They were usually driven by dowager club women.

A time or two, I saw a couple bring their children to school, the children riding on a home-made frame that was mounted transversely between their two bicycles. I suspect that contraption became antiquated in short order!

During Christmas of 1919, our fourth grade teacher, Miss Tillie Hooker, delegated four boys to get a tree for the class Christmas. We cut

one down from an undeveloped tract a couple of blocks north of the Court House, that was a bit too tall for our ten-foot ceiling. We carried it about a mile through the heart of town along Poinsettia Street, which had only one lane in each direction, mounted across two bicycles, that we had to walk and push. As I recall, it gave no traffic problem. We even passed the city hall at the corner of Datura Street without arousing any policemen.

There were only a few trucks in town. All but the very lightest had solid rubber tires. I recall one Autocar that had two cylinders, with the motor under the seat. Another, was the Nash Quad, that was both pulled and steered with all four wheels. Of course, they had to be cranked, and the driver was not sheltered from the weather any more than he would be in a wagon.

About 1926, Palm Beach Creamery bought a fleet of electric trucks to deliver milk. A silent milk truck surely had appeal, but they were so heavy that they would frequently get stuck in the sand, and were expensive to operate. The electric milk trucks soon disappeared from the streets.

There was also a vehicle known as the Red Bug, a two-passenger, five-wheeled little vehicle painted red. Its wheels were smaller than bicycle wheels, four of which carried the vehicle while the fifth, mounted in the center rear, contained the motor which propelled the vehicle. Two bucket seats were mounted on a wooden platform only about a foot above the ground. The controls consisted of a steering wheel linked to the front wheels, a brake pedal connected to the rear wheels, and a lever in the middle that would raise the drive wheel, allowing it to spin in the air, thus serving as a clutch. It surely burned lots of rubber when this motor wheel was lowered to start the forward motion. Mr. Halsey, the co-founder of Halsey and Griffith, used to drive one of these Red Bugs to church with Mrs. Halsey and their two school-aged children, Dorothy and Earl. Another was used by a bee-keeper, west of Lake Worth, to deliver honey around West Palm Beach. A third one was bought second-hand for twenty-five dollars by a couple of about twelve-year-old boys, Carlton Weir and Fox Bird. These motor wheels were also used to push bicycles and to carry the rear end of a little scooter. I surely wanted one of these scooters.

Tourists liked to ride in bicycle-driven wheel chairs, especially near the park and other tourist centers. They provided a quiet and comfortable ride on a sunny winter day. These vehicles had a wicker double seat between the two front wheels and were propelled by a bicycle-type rear wheel. They were sometimes called Afro-mobiles because they had colored operators who were often very jolly and conversant guides.

During the peak of the season, in Palm Beach, there was one

horse-drawn rail car that operated between the Poinciana and Breakers Hotels. We heard that the Breakers had no formal dining room, however, except for adult workers and boy caddies, we year-around residents of West Palm Beach had no way of knowing for sure about conditions in that lavish vicinity.

In 1918, there was no toll-free transportation link between Palm Beach and West Palm Beach. The North Bridge, owned and operated by the FEC Railway, serviced the northern portion of Palm Beach and the Flagler hotels. The toll for this bridge was five cents for a car and driver and two cents for passengers, pedestrians, or cyclists. The South Bridge charged about half that toll, but it was away from the preferred traffic pattern, and had a grade to climb, because it was high enough at the channel for some boats to clear. There was also a ferry, from the City Park to the Palm Beach Shopping Center, that did quite a business, especially during rush hours (a term I never heard in those easy-going times). It operated every twenty minutes, ten minutes each way, and carried people for five cents, with no charge for a wheel. My mother thought it well worth the extra three cents to not have to pedal her bicycle across the bridge. Thus, Palm Beach was both exclusive and somewhat isolated.

During the one month that we lived at 424 Fern Street we survived the quarantine with no ill effect; our father got an engineering job with the Lake Worth Drainage District in the town of Lake Worth; we received our goods from Cuba, enrolled the three older children in school, bought a house at 609 Fern Street for \$2,500 and moved in. Our mother was receiving regular treatments from Dr. Freeman and was feeling better. Things were looking up!

Our new house, like the one we had rented, was made of wood. Nearly all Florida structures at that time were of wood, including the great Poinciana and Breakers Hotels. Our house had one-and-a-half stories and one-and-a-half baths. We soon hung out a printed sign that said "ROOMS FOR LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING" which was a very common practice during the winter season. It was a long time, however, before I could see the connection between offering rooms for rent and keeping a lighthouse.

Frame houses, made of Florida pine, were quite satisfactory. They were much better for cooling off at night than present-day masonry houses. They also stood up fairly well in hurricanes – compared to the non-reinforced concrete-block buildings that were beginning to appear in the mid-twenties. They were also easily moved. It was not uncommon to see a house being pulled along some street by a horse and windlass with men carrying the round pole rollers from behind the house to place them in front. They usually traveled five or six blocks per day.

The big hazard to houses was fire. Our house at 609 Fern Street burned a few years after we sold it. About 1920, a large portion of Colored Town, about Banyan and Rosemary Streets, burned down.

One day, about that time, I was in the Ross Grocery store, on the 600 block of Okeechobee Road, being waited on by one of their teenage twin daughters, Stella or Della, when somebody rushed in shouting that the Fulce house, that was located next door, was on fire. It surely went up fast, being completely gone by the time the hand-cranked fire truck arrived from Datura and Poinsettia Streets. At that time, we lived in a big house just a block away, at 623 Jessamine Street, and our father invited the Fulces to stay with us for a while. Their children were in our classes in both school and Sunday School. Neighbors were neighborly in those days, and insurance was not common. The Carpenters Union, of which Mr. Fulce was a member, rebuilt their house in one day.

One night at about that time, the Dade Lumber Co., located between Althea, Banyan, Olive, and Poinsettia Streets went up in flames. It was a very hot fire that scorched several near-by buildings which the firemen managed to save. The fire whistle sounded many times that night.

The big fire, though, was the burning of the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, early in 1925. At that time we lived on a dairy at Monet, about ten miles north of town and one quarter mile east of the FEC tracks. The first we knew of the fire was at supper that night when our milkman casually mentioned it. Even then, the glow was plainly visible in the evening sky.

Incidentally, I doubt if the Breakers was made of Florida lumber. Few mills in Florida could turn out lumber of that luxurious quality. Lumber for the Poinciana Hotel, only a few years earlier, was brought in



The Williams' Jessamine Street House, 1920. Note bicycle rack.

from Jupiter to Juno over the Celestial Railway and then barged to Palm Beach. This was before the FEC Railway reached Palm Beach. I presume it came into Jupiter by schooner and that lumber for the Breakers came from a similar source, but via the East Coast Canal or the FEC Railway.

Besides fires, there were other accidents, some of which were tragic. About 1922, two airplanes crashed in West Palm Beach. One was a seaplane from the hangar just north of the west end of the North Bridge. The pilot had announced his intention of disproving the belief that a seaplane could not loop-the-loop. He hit a sidewalk a couple of blocks south of where the Good Samaritan Hospital now stands, and was killed instantly.

The other plane belonged to a young couple on their honeymoon. They came down just a couple of blocks from our house, just west of the west end of Jessamine Street. The pilot saw some of the early survey flags for the location of the Seaboard Railway and thought they indicated a landing field, so he came down in what turned out to be freshly cleared soft muck. The plane nosed over, only breaking its propeller. In a couple of days he had a new propeller installed and offered to take one of us boys up on his test flight for five dollars. Somehow, none of us showed a bit of interest in that offer. Soon, he and his bride were winging their way on toward Miami.

Other accidents involved children and automobiles. Kathleen Thompson, of my grade in school, lost several weeks of school due to such an accident. About February, 1923, my sister, Vera, was helping me deliver my *Palm Beach Times* route, out on Okeechobee Road near the Military Trail, which was way out of town in those days, and was hit by a car as she ran across the road. She was one of the early patients in the Good Samaritan Hospital which was less than a year old at that time. As I recall, Dr. Peek kept her there about six weeks for a broken leg. My father paid most of that bill without benefit of any insurance. Mr. Lang, the driver of the Dodge touring car that hit her, and the Girl Scouts paid for one week each.

One Sunday that year, Jim McLaren, a boy of thirteen from near old Juno, stalled his father's old National car on the FEC tracks at Gardenia Street. He was taking his sisters, Clara and Velma, about 15 and 11, to the Baptist Church, that was located a block away. As a train came backing toward them, the girls jumped and ran, but Jim tried to save the car. Fortunately, he was not hurt, but the car was demolished. They walked on to church as if such experiences were common.

About that time, Mrs. Carr, the mother of Nelda and Donald Carr, who were about my age and had been our neighbors on Jessamine Street,

was killed by a car on Broadway Street, in the new subdivision of Northwood. My father happened along immediately after the accident, and helped take her to the hospital. I never learned the fate of her children.

A few years later, Carlos Wilson, a teenager from near Juno, got his leg crushed when his motorcycle was struck by a gasoline truck. The leg was permanently damaged, but he received enough compensation to start an auto-repair garage in Riviera. That venture has been successful over the years.

I presume a lot of the above car accidents, and many more, can be laid at the door of poor brakes. Prior to about 1927, no cars had more than 2-wheel brakes and many were in bad repair. I shudder to think of the brakes on the home-made school bus that I drove in 1926-27. The public buses were no better. I recall drivers having to use both hand and foot-brakes for every routine passenger stop! Quicker stops were impossible.

Probably the worst tragedy of that time occurred early in 1923 when three Boy Scouts were killed and several others were injured by a dynamite explosion. About eight Scouts from the Military Trail Troop were on an over-night hike into the woods west of the Military Trail. In hiking toward their campsite, they had found a sack with several sticks of dynamite left by a settler who had been blasting stumps. The boys were all familiar with this process, and having no fear of the dynamite, took it along with them. To be sure nobody would stumble over the dynamite during the night, they hung it in a tree, overhead. The next morning, to awaken his sleeping companions, one of the boys fired his .22 cal. revolver into the air! Only one boy was able to go for help, and he had to crawl. The 3 boys were buried near the southwest corner of the city's Woodlawn Cemetery, over whose gate was the inscription, "That which is so universal as death must be a blessing." School was dismissed early that afternoon so we could all attend the funeral. The only boy of the three that I knew was Robert Lincoln. We had been particularly close to his step-mother and her children, Bertha and Earl Humphrey, for some years prior to her marriage to Mr. Lincoln.

The principal public school of West Palm Beach was the County School at the west end of Hibiscus Street, on the hill just west of Sapodilla. It had three main buildings, each having two floors with a full basement that was just a few steps below ground level. The center building, and original one, had a tower that extended about three floors above its roof. Children were not allowed to climb this tower but it was a frequently broken rule, because the view from there was spectacular, extending clear to the Atlantic Ocean. After the hurricane of 1928, the tower was taken

down. Both this building and the one to the south were made of concrete blocks. While these stood the test of that hurricane, many did not. It was not the custom, at that time, to place reinforcing steel in such walls. Both this center building and the one to the south of it were in use in 1918. The north building was first put into use the 1923-24 school year, for only three high-school grades that year. My sister, Elizabeth, was in its first graduating class. It was built of hollow tile walls on, probably, a steel frame. That was common construction during the boom. It had a covered roof-garden above its second floor. All buildings had lots of natural ventilation and no heat—as was the South Florida custom at that time. In extreme cool spells, the school would be closed for 2 or 3 days—perhaps a time or two per year. The corner-stone of the north building—laid about 1922—contains the signatures of all the students present on that particular day.

The center building had an auditorium, but by the mid-20's the school had outgrown that, so we were marched down to the newly-built Church of Christ at the northwest corner of Hibiscus and Rosemary, even when only the basement of that church was usable. By 1927, my graduating class was permitted to use the new Methodist Church—diagonally across from the Church of Christ—for our graduation programs.

In the 1920's, when West Palm Beach was a bare generation old, few of us and still fewer of our teachers, claimed West Palm Beach to be home. For example, my 1927 class yearbook, *The Royal Palm*, lists 101 Seniors (born about 1909). Of that group, ten claimed West Palm Beach as home, and nine more were from elsewhere in Florida. One can hardly vouch for this as an actual record, since some claimed no home at all and John Nettleton claimed Colorado Springs, while his twin sister, Charlotte, claimed West Palm Beach! Of that 101, fifty-seven started high school elsewhere. This included the Class President, William A. McRae, Jr., who claimed Marianna as his home. He went on to study law at the University of Florida, and became, in time, a prominent federal judge in Florida. West Palm Beach was growing rapidly!

Of the teachers, a very few had come there with their parents—perhaps during the railroad construction days. This would include Miss Tilly Hooker, Miss Cook and Miss Gates. Miss Hooker had a sister who substituted for her when school reopened after the 1918 influenza epidemic. Miss Cook was very proud of being a Florida native and a graduate of Florida State College for Women. Since she finished before 1920, she was an early student there. The school is now Florida State University. She was thoroughly exasperated at how little Florida history I was learning—or have ever learned—and here I am now writing a wee bit of Florida history—including a bit about her! Miss Gates had the courage

to break away from a steady job, about 1920, and start a private school in Palm Beach. I suspect it is still in operation. Then, there was Mrs. Lyman. She was among the very early settlers in Palm Beach. She taught me the fundamentals of arithmetic^aequations that led to my becoming an engineer. Her husband ran a bicycle shop on Olive Street, just north of Clematis, and her son was the architect of several golf courses, including the one just north of Lake Park, built in 1923. I was the water boy during its construction. Another teacher to whom I'll ever be especially indebted was Mrs. McWilliams, who taught me Algebra and English. The former was basic to becoming an engineer and the latter helped for promotions in that profession. She hailed from the West, and was the mother of Denver and Mary Elizabeth McWilliams.

A disturbing factor in the school operation in those days was the inclusion of children who arrived several weeks after school started and returned back north before it closed. Their fathers would try to find work in the area during the winter months and send the children to the public schools. These families would travel down and back by automobile, frequently carrying tents, bedding, dishes, pots, etc., camping along the way. That was before the days of motels, or even the dollar-a-night tourist camps.

These "tin-can tourists" would winter in a tent camp provided by the City of West Palm Beach, that was located about where the Seaboard tracks are now, a block or two south of Okeechobee Road. The camp had tent-sites, running water, and out-houses furnished by the City. The winter of 1922-23, insurance agent Harold Bartlett (then aged eight) delivered the *Miami Herald* to these tents. Since these people paid no property tax, and it was before the days of sales tax, a gasoline tax was levied so they would help support the schools. Of course, many motorists objected to this tax for the schools, when such a tax might well go toward road-building, which would benefit all gasoline consumers.

Of course, many tourists would rent rooms, apartments, or even houses for the winter. A common practice was to rent an apartment located over a two-stall garage, or, better yet, rent the house while the owner moved to the apartment for the winter season.

The more affluent tourists would live in Palm Beach, and send their children to a private school (such as Miss Gates') or hire a private tutor. My aunt, Mrs. Harvey White, who was herself a tourist and teacher from Indiana, was such a tutor one year. She also taught one year in the public school, and one with Miss Gates. Many other Yankee teachers found jobs in Florida while it was cold at their homes. In those days, the history and the speech taught by the Yankees and by the Southerners were a bit

different: for example, I learned very fast, that I was not to say “What?” to Miss Cook! Ours was a cosmopolitan environment.

West Palm Beach had several annual community functions. Some activities centered around the school while others centered around the City Park. The school had athletic meets with other schools. May Day was quite an affair with food, games, a Maypole – that frequently involved entangled streamers – and the crowning of a queen. Both Mittie Steen and Maudie Pierce were May queens. Maudie’s younger brother, Harvey, was a classmate of mine throughout our school days and later became a well-known engineer.

The Fourth of July, Armistice Day, and Christmas festivities were always popular. These celebrations involved contests, fireworks, military drills (by the newly returned veterans) and Santa Claus. At Christmas, Joe Earman, editor of the *Palm Beach Post*, provided gifts for all the children – jackknives for the boys and dolls for the girls. At the 1917 Christmas party, ice formed in the City Park. Old timers talked about that cold spell for many years. There were also circuses, with parades; carnivals, with free passes for newsboys; and auto polo, played on a specially-prepared wooden floor.

The largest celebration of all was the Seminole Sun Dance. This event to observe the return of Spring lasted for three days in mid-March. (I rather suspect it was a gimmick to keep tourists present a few more days.) It was a carnival atmosphere with horns, bells, false faces, paper poppers, kazookas, whistles, and people running about making noises. The school had Seminole Indian costumes for all its students. These costumes got progressively dirtier year after year. We wore them in the big parade that was led by a high-school boy with a bass drum. On another day, there would be a float parade with prizes given by the City fathers. This parade had decorated bicycles, tricycles, wagons, pets, children, etc. In those days, the neighborhood mothers had time to dream-up and put on such displays for their collective children. Our neighborhood once won fifty cents for each child involved in an act – whether we pulled a vehicle or rode in it.

Saturday was washday at our house. We were fortunate to have an electric washing machine. It was a wooden-tub Maytag – before they made one with an aluminum tub. It was quite satisfactory, but the power-driven roller wringer was a definite hazard. Besides popping off buttons, it would wind up long hair, long sleeves, and once badly damaged a girl’s fingers. There were also other types of washing machines. The ones with electric motors were the most satisfactory, but many were operated by hand, and a few by little gasoline engines. The first chore on washday was

to cut up some wood, fill a laundry tub with water, set it on some bricks, and build a fire under it. Some houses had methods of heating running water for Saturday night baths, but not for laundry water. It was a continuing process to heat the water, carry it to the machine by bucket, wash the clothes, wring them from the machine into successive tubs for rinsing and hand-scrubbing the missed spots, hanging them on the line, and then bringing them in as they got dry, to make room for others. It took several hours for a large family, such as ours. My sister, Elizabeth, bless her heart, called the tune and set the pace. If we were lucky, we'd have the tubs emptied and the clothes brought in an hour or two before dark. Most people did their own washing — many on washboards. Some people hired a laundress to do the wash, either at the employer's home, or at the home of the laundress.

Most people cooked on a two or three burner kerosene stove. They also had a little portable kerosene heater for one room on cool days. Some people used wood stoves in cool weather, while a very few had water coils in that firebox to heat an un-insulated water tank that was connected to the house's hot water system. A few heated this system with wood-burning jacket stoves. Some houses had fireplaces that would take the chill off of the front room. School rooms had no heat other than, possibly, a kerosene heater. Manufactured city gas was piped to some houses in the heart of town. The mother of Allison Ballard, who lived in the 500 block of Iris Street, had a gas meter that metered out a quarter's worth of gas at a time. It had a slot for these coins, and she had to keep such coins handy if she didn't want the gas to expire at very inopportune times. I don't know what safety device it had to keep it from filling the kitchen with that very poisonous and explosive gas when she inserted a new quarter, forgetting that a burner was left on. Incidentally, that gas had enough hydrogen to buoy up toy balloons. It's a wonder we kids didn't get either poisoned or blown up, playing with it. Florida's open air ventilation was a wonderful thing.

There was no such thing as air conditioning, or even electric refrigeration. Some stores, offices and churches had electric fans, but most houses did not. In hot weather, we would order ice for the kitchen icebox. A card in the front window told the iceman how much to leave. As he carried it to the door, he'd yell to the mules to "Get-up." They knew where to "Whoa." Children ran behind the wagon for hand-outs of ice chips. There's nothing new about children running behind a Good Humor truck.

There's also nothing new about solar heating in Florida. During the boom, many new houses had a system for the solar heating of water. The water was warm enough for a bath, but not hot enough for washing dishes.

About 1920, my mother bought her first vacuum cleaner. The Hoover cleaner advertised that it “Beats as it Sweeps as it Cleans.” Ours only sucked. Our house had screw-in type outlets for such connections. One time I blew a fuse and damaged a spatula blade when I poked it into the socket. We used to run similar tests with our fingers to see if the electricity was turned on. We led charmed lives! Anyway, most people did not have vacuum cleaners, and little need for them. Such rugs as they had could be hung across the clothes line and beat with a broom stick. The floors were plain pine and got an occasional soap-and-water treatment. Varnish would not last on such soft wood and tracked-in sand. Incidentally, they were high enough above ground for ventilation to prevent ground rot.

Electric toasters were not common. About 1921, one of my milk customers (we sold some milk from our family cow) proudly showed me the last word in toasters. He’d just bought one that automatically turned over the bread slices when the side doors were opened and closed. It was really amazing!

Electric irons were very common. They had no thermostat, so often scorched clothes, and sometimes, when forgotten, started fires. One manufacturer discovered that more heat was needed at the point of the iron, so he put an extra heating element there. He called it the “Hotpoint” iron. My, how that name has spread!

Then there were plagues. Pharaoh’s Egypt had nothing on us. There were sand crabs and millions of little frogs all over the sidewalks. There were swarms of mosquitoes kept in check by window and door screens, but the little sand flies went right through the screen. These insects were especially bad on hot still nights. They could not fly in a breeze, so people fortunate enough to have an electric fan could keep them off one person, but not a whole family. The burning of “Bee Brand Insect Powder” helped some, but it was expensive and lasted for only a short time. We mostly just endured them. In houses horse flies the size of honey bees could be controlled by screens, but outdoors they gave our cow fits. We made her dresses of empty feed sacks to help some, but we found that clothing a cow is really not practical. In the evenings, before dark, we’d sometimes put the cow in the chicken yard. The chickens made short work of the flies, but that was no help in the day time, when she had to graze. Yes, the modern ecologists just don’t know what all the Florida ecology includes.

Our amusement was simple. Prior to about 1928, the movies were silent and radios did not exist. The World Series was received telegraphically and followed on a charted ball diamond at the City Park. Newspaper extras told about special events such as prize fights. I once sold the *Miami Daily Metropolis* on the streets. It came up from Miami by bus. We also

amused ourselves by making and coasting in soap-box autos, making and flying kites, or whittling and racing rubber-band-powered toy boats. Our toys were inexpensive, and we became pretty adept at spinning tops, shooting marbles, or cracking whips. Girls enjoyed paper dolls, real dolls, and jack stones. Every child had plenty of playmates in every neighborhood and there was no concern about perverted criminals of any kind.

Several of the churches had youth activities that were well attended. We enjoyed frequent evening beach parties and holiday picnics, and made some visitations to such places as the County Poor Farm that was located out of town toward Riviera about a quarter mile west of the FEC tracks. Probably the Baptists' B.Y.P.U. was the most active group. My sister Elizabeth was a leader there. I was a Methodist, but occasionally went along with them to drive. We would attend meetings with other Baptist churches as far up and down the coast as Lemon City (now part of Miami) and Stetson College in Deland. Going such distances in cars of that vintage and returning long after dark was not without mishaps. I had a few close calls that I shouldn't have had. Elizabeth was once in McLaren's big old National (before its encounter with a train) when a rear wheel came off the axle on a lonely stretch of the Dixie Highway. The boys found the necessary parts strewn along the highway and brought their load – yes, a very precious load – safely home. Our generation was resourceful.

In 1928, I went away to college, and in 1932, I went to Boulder City, Nevada, to start a career of dam-building that took me to all parts of the world. From all of this travel, I can truly tell you that it was good to be a boy in the West Palm Beach that I remember.