

# Growing Up, Sort Of, in Miami 1909-1915

By Will Davenport\*

The house my family found soon after we arrived from central Florida was on the river where the bridge lifted 12th Street (today Flagler) across into pine and scrub palmetto country.

On our very first morning in this house I ran over to check out the bridge for fishing, spitting into the river, crawling around underneath, climbing the trusses.

\*Will Davenport lived with his family in Miami from 1909 to 1915 storing up memories of the city, his school friends, and his involvement in many social and recreational activities. He attended Miami High School which was then a part of Central School in downtown Miami. He is well and favorably remembered by some of his classmates of the Class of 1914.

After serving in World War I, Davenport entered a career of magazine publishing as a writer of promotion for *Vanity Fair* in New York. He juggled a variety of interests – writing, art, skiing – wrote the first major article on skiing to appear in a national magazine – *Vogue*, 1935. He married a skier, Emily Hall.

In 1936 Davenport moved to London as advertising manager and American director of British *Vogue* and the Conde Nast Publications in Europe. During World War II he was chief of Combat Intelligence for combined Naval and Air Force operations from the Aleutian Islands against Japanese installations in the Kuriles, rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1952 came a shift in career – following graduation from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston he devoted himself to art and exhibited his paintings in many juried shows in the United States. In 1979 he received the L.E. Sissman Award for “successfully combining a career of advertising with excellence in the arts.”

Will Davenport and his wife, Emily, live in Weston, Massachusetts, where he continues to write and to paint.

Miami River, warm and red as tea, was laced with snakes and alligators, ornamented by blue herons. At the river's vague beginnings in the Everglades lived Seminole Indians of the tribes that had terrorized coastal settlements through years of massacre, burnings, robbery, ambush-cade until the peace of 1855.

The year was 1909. Fat, genial Mr. Taft was in the White House, lean and pugnacious Kaiser Wilhelm II was in Berlin, but that was far away and had nothing to do with us tucked away in our secret paradise on the ravelled edge of nowhere.

It was summertime, Miami was twelve years old and so was I. That morning, coming down the river, standing up in the stern of a dug-out canoe, was an Indian. He poled along slowly, recovered with grace, kept an exquisite balance in his fire- and hand-sculpted cypress log, proportioned like a pencil and with scarcely eight inches of freeboard.

Pinned to the bridge rail I watched him secure his canoe under bushes and climb the river bank, a tall man, dark red in color with a heavy fall of black hair cut the way of Japanese children. He wore a cotton blouse, tight at the wrists and a kilt-like skirt to his knees. Basically white, these garments showed bright-colored horizontal stripings and were stiff with narrow pleats. Above wide bare feet his calf muscles were formidable.

Lots of Miami kids never saw an Indian; I was lucky because the river was their only approach to the coast and 12th Street was the shortest way uptown. My family had moved to Miami from a remote village in Volusia County where the streets were of pine needles and our schoolhouse, although not painted red, had but one room. In that region men rode horses with Mexican saddles, wore pistols and on occasion shot each other. Among the young I was a bluebellied Yankee and forced to defend myself with rudimentary fisticuffs, brief by mutual consent. Frontier atmosphere was familiar to me. But Indians, wild Indians!

Eyes fixed on his path, foot tracking foot, my Indian moved along the weedy edge of the street, never glancing at the sprinkle of houses along the way. This walking style, a tribal invariable, was said to avoid the venomous cotton-mouth moccasins, rattlers and coral snakes plus a dozen harmless types that we all knew from chilling encounters in our own backyards. But perhaps the true reason the Indians never looked our way was because they disdained us and all our works. Their austerity was complete. We never spoke to them, hooted at them or approached them.

Children's curiosity is intense but fleeting. Everything is a marvel but not for long. So with the Indians; I failed to ask questions about them,

never looked them up in books. They came and silently went, aliens in their own country, while at the eastern end of 12th Street on Biscayne Bay a different astonishment presented itself with the advent each winter of northern people at the resplendant Royal Palm Hotel.

Our sidewalks in the few blocks of business buildings were hooded over against sun and rain partly by second-story balconies and partly by sheets of corrugated iron. Winter afternoons, along these shaded loggias, guests of the hotel would appear; tall, big-eyed, white-skinned ladies sheathed in eyelet-embroidered summer dresses in pale creamy colors. One season they befuddled us with hobble-skirts, decreed, our mothers assured us, by Mr. Paul Poiret of Paris, France.

At the opposite end of 12th Street, decreed by tribal custom of even more insistent authority, Seminole women trapesing along behind their men flaunted a bit of chic no less bizarre; around their necks, piled from shoulders to ears hung pounds and pounds of bead necklaces, making a truncated cone that held immobile their small top-knotted heads with bangs of fiercely black hair.

The shops of 12th Street offered no great attractions for our exotics from the North. No matter, in and out tripped and twittered these creatures to us suspended in the unknown. And from their passing a tinge of strangeness survived in the air, twitching our brown noses, nibbling away at our simplicity. Only Edith Wharton could have explained them to us.

Miami had its peculiarities of situation; at its back door a jungle with serpents, saurians and aborigines while its front door swung open on the Royal Palm's pageant of cosmopolitan civility. But undeterred by either of these disparate poles the little town's dauntless people heedless of heat, mosquitoes, hurricanes and cultural vacuum went on about their business of making real the American Dream. In 1909 there was little hint of grandiose destiny. House lots and acreage were cheap; Tatum Brothers took space in the High School Annual as late as 1914 to offer, "... a ten acre farm or a city lot for \$10 cash, balance monthly."

Our rented house on the river needed paint but it was a good big one. had screen doors and windows to say nothing of sporting proper fittings for slinging mosquito nets over the beds. Also it had been in place long enough to be blessed with bearing fruit trees.

Spang in the front yard rose an unusually tall avocado tree with smooth pears the size of small grapefruit; a dozen of them crammed my Irish Mail cart and each brought a nickel from the grocer up town, who then retailed them at ten cents. Lime, orange and grapefruit trees were out in back and to one side a thick grove of guava bushes six feet tall. Their

wide leaves made a canopy that turned pale gold in autumn and when sunlight blazed through and reflected from the gold leaves on the ground the intervening air was yellow, an effect of Arabian Nights splendor.

The guava itself, a fist-sized yellow thing, is edible skin and all, once you learn to tolerate its peculiar smell. My mother and elder half-sister converted them into a thick concentrate called guava butter as well as into that queen of all such confections, guava jelly, the dark-colored rubbery kind.

In some yards banana trees unfurled their startling blossoms. They did not prove commercially successful in southern Florida but pineapples did; Miami's legendary French Count, Jean d'Hedouville, an early settler, grew acres of them. There were odd fig trees, sapodillas and the totally ridiculous mammy-apple. Papayas grew almost wild but few bothered to eat them. New strains of mangos were being developed by the celebrated David Fairchild but most of our local trees produced a disappointingly fibrous fruit. The perfected mango of today is memorable eating but the place to eat one is over the kitchen sink. We had plenty of fruit and mostly for the picking.

A few fractionally seaworthy launches berthed near the Avenue D bridge made up our fishing fleet that brought us the elegant yellow shape of pompano, sometimes Spanish crawfish (clawless lobsters) which my mother made into salad. There were kingfish and Spanish mackerel. Shrimp we boiled in quantity, then put the pot on the table for each to shell his own. Red snapper captured both eye and taste buds. Marcellus Boyd, whose father owned one of the boats, introduced me to the excellence of a common panfish, the yellowtail, at its most delicious; brought up from three fathoms of transparent salt water, scaled, gutted and fried right there in the boat on a kerosene stove.

Owning and operating the fishing craft were the earliest south-Florida men, men who had been there before anyone else except the Indians, the permanently sun-dyed whose lives began in boats as had their fathers'. They were lean men who had ranged the Keys and the Florida Straits during the wrecking years, the Indian War years, hereditary practitioners of independence who conned the sea into yielding them a living. It was my luck to be friends with some of their sons and to go with them in the boats on some fairly ticklish occasions of men against the sea.

At sea and ashore the winds were part of our lives. At certain seasons on west winds mosquitoes swarmed among us but the trade winds prevailing from the northeast chased them back into the Everglades, there to resume feeding on the Indians. No wind, however,

prevailed against cockroaches which, as big as mice, drove our mothers to distraction.

Miami's acceptance as an outpost of the civilized world came with the Royal Palm Hotel, built for the purpose by the grand Henry Flagler the minute his Florida East Coast Railway made its way to the settlement in 1896. The hotel, an imposing six stories of wood, painted Flagler yellow, sported a 700 foot porch (covered of course since tanning was not in fashion) that provided, across tropical gardens, the dazzling blue of Biscayne Bay as well as a view of the river's mouth. It was the town's Taj Majal, its Waldorf-Astoria below the frost line.

To me it was a window. As a child I had lived in New York and seen its wonders but the Royal Palm was a jewel in a proper setting, a noble structure of its kind in a place that staged it superbly. Exposure to this monument and the other pleasure and business domes decreed by the imperial Flagler enriched our young lives and no doubt influenced our futures, too.

One of our pastimes was to meet the late afternoon train from the north and check out the day-coach passengers for pretty girls and for stocky youths who might beef up our school football team. Also noted was the dress and luggage of the Pullman rich bound for the Royal Palm. The ritual was exciting and it gave us a voice at supper.

Even more fascinating was the freight yard with its strings of cabalistically marked box-cars from remote and romantic states. Compulsively I memorized the railway lines the initials stood for and sang them over to myself, long before Thomas Wolfe did. And ages before Bing Crosby entranced us with his crooning of "... the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe" during the War II. The song soothed me daily during eighteen months on the island of Adak, one of the Aleutian chain far out in the North Pacific.

Best of all was the Terminal Dock designed to handle ship-borne commerce from Cuba, Mexico, South America – the Flagler dream ranged far. The traffic did not materialize and the Dock became an aquatic playground for the young, a diving board, swimming hole and place to watch ponderous manatees graze along the bottom of the bay.

Soon after the railway reached Key West, last convulsion of Flagler's fierce genius, our Miami High School basketball team made the trip for a game with Ruth Hargrove Institute, an old and stylish landmark whose team gave us plenty of trouble. Afterward our hosts laid on a veritable ball, gleaming with intensely feminine dark-eyed girls with Hispanic names; the Delgado's five daughters were each named for a South

American nation – Colombia, Venezuela and others I have forgotten except the daughter by whom I was stricken dumb with adoration, the ravishing Argentina Republic Delgado.

Hurricanes finally destroyed the Overseas Railway as they did other great works of man along that coast – and would continue so to do. In those days they killed, drowned and blew your house away with no advance warning except for certain natural wonders about which Miami developed a measure of canniness. Days of heavy heat and a queer stillness brought the paradox of enormous surf on the ocean side, a pounding that could be heard at night across the width of Biscayne Bay. These were our sensors. In our house the kerosene tank on the stove got itself topped off and the lamps filled after which I was sent up town for a reserve gallon of kerosene. Padding home with this burden, a potato struck over the can's spout, gave me a feeling of importance. All ripe fruit was brought in and the window shutters checked for closure and latching. During these chores I would dart out into the street, study the sky and report my views – to which no one paid any attention. The waiting was nervous while the signals accumulated; blackening sky, little flicks of wind, a disquiet on the bay and then a great whelm of rain. When the hurricane struck we began to breathe again.

These storms were experiences private to each household; neighbor's houses were invisible, words were useless, communication was by glance and grimace, ducked heads, humped shoulders. When it was over the first move was to go outside and exclaim over the wreckage, an almost hysterical relief. After a couple of hurricanes, knowing it would be bad but knowing it would end, we learned a stance of resignation. In Miami's fecund climate, trees and shrubs recovered quickly, damage was cleared away, boats refloated and the town resumed its gentle simmer.

When we arrived in town, the area along the bay and a few blocks inland, was pretty solidly built-up with pleasant, closely set houses, tree-shaded, banked by hibiscus, jasmin, lantana, oleander, allamanda. Bermuda grass struggled to match the green lawns of richer soils. Bougainvillea would not arrive until later on, the Hispanic surge to delight all eyes, solve all landscaping problems. West of Avenue D and the railroad track houses dwindled to a sprinkling and west of the river almost entirely petered out. The grand sections of town were Fort Dallas Park and Brickell Point.

One of the town's special qualities was its implacable flatness. Another was its freedom from noise. Automobiles were not common in

Miami. Also lacking were industries, crowds, sirens, radios. This blissful situation enabled small, benign sounds such as bird noises to be heard. Another, unique to the tropics and unforgettable to me, was a faint dry rattle randomly induced in coconut palms by the trade winds, a sort of murmured exchange between the two, one in place the other in flight, a secret converse that those who listen with care may still hear, perhaps with a shiver, as long as wind and coconut fronds lean against each other. Like the sound of surf it is one of earth's purest sounds.

Miami's status as a sub-tropical town was clearly marked by the profusion of coconut trees whose nuts first floated in from the Bahamas and took root along the coast. Multiplied in the 1880's by commercial plantings they became a permanent glory. Miami adopted the tree for its own from the very first. Biscayne Drive was bordered, the Royal Palm Hotel was surrounded, they swarmed in the parks and every front yard had one. Their sweetly curved trunks with crowns tumbling in the breeze proclaimed tropical country loud and clear.

To footloose grammar-school kids these aesthetics were obscured by the practical delights of the nuts themselves, their heavy clusters always available to our pocket knives. We drank the tasteless liquid of the green ones, slurped the jellied lining of the half-ripe ones and chomped the brittle white meat in the ripe nut. Especially prized was the rich milk in the ripe ones, believed by us to have all sorts of strength-building properties.

It is sad to think that some sort of law probably prohibits such fun today.

In spite of its cozy small-town appearance with "everybody knows everybody else" connotations, Miami in its adolescent days under the coconut trees, was largely a collection of strangers, strangers to the town and to each other. We had all come from somewhere else. The first ten names in the list of Miami High School graduates, class of '16 turns up this assortment of birthplaces: Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Missouri, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Georgia, Kansas – and so on throughout. They and their families "knew everybody" where they came from but in this formless new town all stood pretty much alone.

People who, after careful deliberation, had decided to pull up stakes and move south found that it took all their energies to cope with surprising, sometimes hostile, surroundings. In such a place where much remained to be decided, history still to be scribbled, conventions established there was not much time for social life. And, except for the

churches, of which a great number and variety had been set up, there existed practically no machinery for communication between families.

Miami had skipped the horse and buggy era but automobiles were still a luxury; urban transport thus devolved on the bicycle. But, given the climate, one's mother was not likely to hop on a bike and pedal across town to a tea party or afternoon of bridge – had such amenities been offered. Fathers biked to their occupations, knew their associates, but as families, the townspeople of those days were slow to become widely acquainted. On the other hand, children enjoyed in their schools a meeting place and a social scene ready made. Social cohesion was born at that level.

Effortless social creatures that we were, mingling day after day it was natural for us to develop our own hedonistic society, accepting the sun, salt water, luscious fruit, the general flux as devised especially to frame our comings and goings. With ease we established an accord and an atmosphere of good will that made us a genuine civilizing force all by ourselves.

As meeting places the churches did their part as well. I attached myself to the First Presbyterian for Sunday School, and later for Christian Endeavor with its Wednesday night meetings in the beautiful basilica surrounded by Australian pines, the Casuarinas that became for Florida what the Eucalyptus was for California. The Wednesday night rallies lured me since I was sure to see one or another of the girls who had me on leash. Moreover the church's fine organ and acoustics made the hymns genuinely uplifting. Occasional stints at the organ pump did me no harm either and I think orthodoxy took its grip on me at this church.

At school our education was helped along by frequent arrivals from elsewhere of students whose families had come for the winter or to stay. Welcomed and accepted at once, these newcomers delighted us with their prep-school poise, wit, athletic skills, the tone they imparted. They helped shape in our fortuitous conflux not so much a sub-culture but a separate one of considerable validity. Disparities among us were either ignored or celebrated; each moved freely to his own drummer in the general peelage. Athletes and grinds were equally respected, Northerners stood as tall as native Southerners. No one was asked where he had come from, nor his father's occupation. It seems to me quite possible that civic hegemony first began to form and function as our high school athletic teams brought the citizenry together for the games, while school dramatics, debates and glee-clubs equally contributed by gathering their town-wide audiences year after year.





William Ayer Davenport as shown in *Miami*, the Miami High School Yearbook, 1914.

Since all of us at school were more or less new to each other and with differing birthplaces, backgrounds, previous schooling, each of us offered a strain of mystery and many were magnetic. David McClure, for one, remained elusive throughout. He showed up for our sophomore year in high school and immediately aroused interest. He had something most of us lacked, reserve. Our corridor confabs leaned to bombast and badinage but in the midst of jabber Dave's style was to listen, his smile curved to one side, his pale blue eyes averted. He walked with a slightly mannered swing of shoulders, played a terrific game of baseball and water-polo, captained several of the teams, including basketball, and was class president in his senior year. A sufficient number of girls were much taken by him and his lively response was given an edge by a faintly sardonic note. He and I were particular friends but I was always a little awed by his confident presence. A sort of appointment in Samarra doom was tragically to overtake him in the excellence of his youth.

Another arrival, in this case from some military school in the north, brought a vivid slang and a fund of anecdotes that all found engrossing. His tall, brown-eyed person and uninhibited manner struck a resonant note with the girls, half a dozen of whom he fell in love with. His name was Seth Clarkson but Seth sounded to us old fashioned, so we called him Clark. He flatly refused to come out for any of the athletic teams, ignored cultural school activities, indeed jeered at the entire academic circus. Clark was romantic, his mind already set on journalism and after World War I during which he saw harsh combat in the Marine Corps his raffish figure was to become known among rueful newspaper editors as far north as the Carolinas. He wrote extremely well but it was said that meeting deadlines was alien to his mystique.

After I left Miami and before we both went to war the few letters I received from Clark first revealed to me that colorful writing was an art open to ordinary individuals, even high school pals, and not merely to authors. I remember him as my dearest friend of those days.

A leggy dandy named Raleigh Daugherty drifted in one year and by his own immediate choice took up a comic stance. Wherever you met him his approach was invariably the earnest query, "Are you legal?" This caught on instantly. He became known as R.U. Legal and everyone in School adopted the phrase to excess. Mouthing it across a classroom did great harm to decorum. In anonymous notes to girls it created hysteria.

Immensely endearing to us all, Forrest Gordon, our establishment fat boy, was a formidable guard on the football team. In school when he approached, his rosy face twinkling, his yellow hair in damp curls,

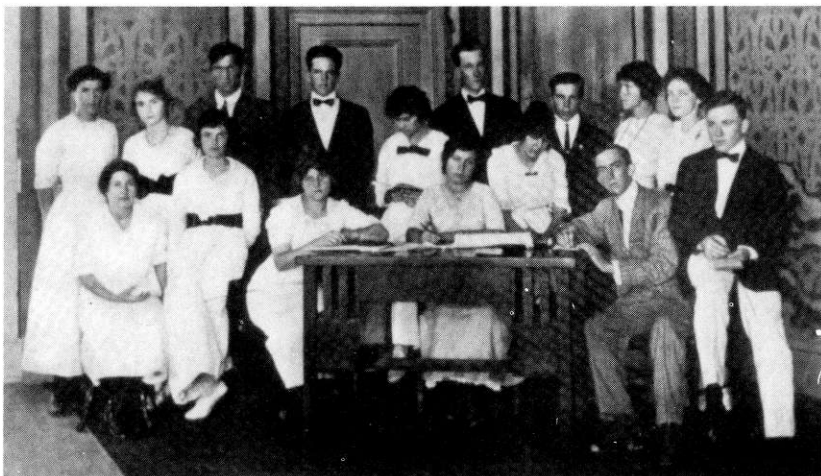


Miami High Baseball Team, 1914. *Left to right:* Jean Andrews, Wallace Green, Leon Rooney, William Schneidman, William Davenport, Edwin Shaw, William Green, Thomas F. Davis, John Mathers, David McClure.

everyone felt happier at once. His greeting was always “‘Lo fellers.”

Landon Carney, whose father helped establish Coconut Grove before the invention of Miami, had a rare quality, dignity. He also had available a stalwart Hudson touring car and kept it loaded with friends, a substantial enrichment of our lives. A good athlete, generally admired and loved.

Joy Heck lived out in the country somewhere. Gentle in manner, soft in speech, he was a demon on the basketball court. Vernon Weaver, a witty and electric personality with whom I did a lot of skiff sailing and swimming. Charles Pfeiffer, athlete and jolly companion. Edwin Shaw whose manic humors endeared him to students and faculty alike. Harold Barker, very tall, elegant and a grand basso in the Glee Club and in musical extravaganzas. Quietly urbane Van Huff, athlete and cavalier, a youth of great charm and to us the very glass of fashion. Memory hoards them all and dozens of others with whom I grew up, sort of, during a time when all we had, really, was each other.



*Miami Staff, 1914. Standing:* Candace Puffer, Gretchen Hand, Ralph Adams, Van Huff, Lucille Atkisson, Earl Hoag, Joaddie Harper, Dwight McCluney, Mamie Mizelle, Norma Duggan. *Sitting:* Kitty Karr, Bessie Sandlin, Dorothy Davies, Jessie Pratt, Julius Blackman, Edward F. O'Brien, Jr.

Miami was truly a frontier town but it got along without “West of the Pecos” violence although I suppose every family owned shotgun, rifle, or revolver—or all three. In our Avenue D saloon, its front wide open in the Cuban manner, its interior a dark cave spilling out a delicious whiff of beer—in there a man was shot. Perhaps there were knifings in our small black segregation.

Only one real bang-up murder trial took place during my time. The crime itself was commonplace but made front page headlines because of the baroque style of “Judge” Worley, a bigger-than-life lawyer and burr under the civic saddle. Whether defending or prosecuting, winning or losing, the case in hand was always a victory for Worley himself. His invocations could make a *cause celebre* of unpremeditated bicycle theft.

Burglary must have been rare. Robbery erupted only in 1915 when the Ashley Gang began to commandeer the stock-in-trade of banks at the points of repeating shotguns. Elusive as wolves the Ashley brothers were finally hunted down by the redoubtable Sheriff of Dade County, Dan Hardie.

Once a shocking accident overtook an automobile load of large ladies from our miniscule Red Light District on the weedy outskirts of town. Out for an afternoon airing their car was struck by a speeding

locomotive at a grade crossing. Moral overtones kept this gory affair alive for weeks while our mothers shuddered at its unmistakable revelation of the Wages of Sin.

It was Sheriff Hardie who put together and trained the juvenile troop of Zouaves that became famous along the coast. We were recruited during our grammar school years and it was quite a thing to belong and sport our red bolero jackets, yellow pantaloons, white leggings, red sashes topped off with yellow tasseled red fez. Equally dazzling was our manual of arms and the marching maneuvers that the Sheriff pounded into us during night drills in front of the 12th St. Fire House. We appeared at odd parades, dedications, corner-stone layings and I remember travelling north to march in a meagre procession in celebration of the incorporation of Fort Lauderdale, then hardly more than a string of shacks. In the Zouaves we learned to stand up straight, the sting of command, instant response and the satisfaction inherent in concerted action. It was all to prove helpful. For me, a few years later, it yielded quick Corporal's stripes in an infantry regiment of the Regular Army into which I had edged myself at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia and which landed me in France within a couple of months.

In World War I David McClure was a fighter pilot—“pilot de chasse” as the French had it in their touching convention that air warfare would consist entirely of French pilots pursuing wildly fleeing Germans.

Dave was shot down behind the German lines, dragged out of the wreckage and thanks to excellent German surgeons, survived. In the '20s he and I enjoyed a reunion in Manhattan; we reminisced about our Miami days and he told me of his good life as a stockbroker in Los Angeles. Not long afterward, back in L. A., he and a girl friend drove down to one of the Pacific beaches where he took off from the swimming pool's high board in one of his beautiful dives and was pulled from the pool dead, it was ascertained before striking the water. A strange coincidence; evaded in warfare, death in the air had waited for its rendezvous with Dave on a sunny Saturday afternoon in peacetime California.

Biscayne Bay, our watering place, generally ignored by the citizenry was lushly praised by visitors from the north; its range of colors and textures, its gayety in sunshine, tantrums in storm. Moody at twilight, blissful at dawn it was undeniably magic when plated with tropic moonlight. And all the while, a couple of miles eastward, sparring with the Atlantic, on good terms with the Gulf Stream, reclined a narrow strip of sand, coconut trees, sea grapes and mangrove, uninhabited Miami Beach.

The beauty of our great bay went hand in hand with its navigational

bafflements, tidal channels that came and went, fugitive sand bars, impossible to buoy or stake. Nevertheless skippers wise to the hazards could nuzzle out the port. Once in a while an unkempt schooner from the Bahamas would tie up in our river with a few bunches of bananas, some conch shells and a few blacks who would jump ship and enliven our labor force with their velvet dialect.

We kids flapped around in skiffs, the fishermen threaded in and out but Miami, breathing salt air, lapped by an ocean, could not have been called a salty town. Mostly the people came from inland, did not have salt water in their blood and, in truth, few Miamians in those days had the leisure for fooling around with boats.

Along the bay, running for a mile or two north from the 12th Street axis, buried in trees lay a sequence of relatively imposing houses owned by people who in the earliest days had recognized a choice bit of real estate when they saw it. One of these houses, distinguished by a red tile roof, was believed by me and my pals to be that of Miami's intriguing Count d'Hedouville. And why not? A red tile roof suggested to us a chateau and since the known habit of French Counts was to live in chateaux this must house our Count.

The Count was rarely seen about town; the massive foreign car he was said to drive would certainly have caught our bright eyes. The house was hidden from the landward side by extensive pineapple plantings and a screen of trees. The title and the seclusion created a tissue of surmise about him among our elders: why had he exiled himself in our raw settlement? An unfortunately mortal duel, some financial debacle, military disgrace, an ill-chosen political stance were among the possibilities discussed. Of course the Count's existence was probably unknown to most newcomers but such guesses were useful should his name happen to come up.

Then it was my fate to stumble on a curious discovery that seemed linked to d'Hedouville but so inexplicably that it only added to the mystery surrounding him.

Across the road westward from his pineapple patch stretched one of those long-leaf pine forests known to Florida as "the flatwoods." It was easy to get lost in the flatwoods. Once in their depths the endless repetition of tall, bare boles laid on a strange and disorienting feeling that of course fascinated the young. It was an adventure I had been repeating since childhood with a mix of bravado and trepidation, usually lugging a shotgun for moral support.

On that afternoon, empty of everything but sun and that loneliness

known only to the half-hollow skulls of teen-agers, I was deep in the flatwoods because I had wrenched off one of the Count's pineapples and wanted a place well away from the scene of the crime to carve it up. Suddenly I noticed something out of place in the forest, a rectangular shape. Nature does not make square corners. This was a work of man, raised a foot or two from the forest floor and naturally camouflaged by a thick blanket of pine needles, clearly the roof of an underground room. The woods were still, there were no signs of life and scared as I was, curiosity crawled me up to a narrow sort of window. Light came in from a western window opposite mine and I could see a built-in bunk, a chair, a small table with some books and a kerosene lamp. The room was clean but it didn't look lived-in.

On the back wall hung a military uniform. As an avid reader of illustrated books about the Napoleonic as well as the Franco-Prussian wars, the match-up between their cavalry uniforms with the one I was staring at was unmistakable; tunic and facings, epaulettes, various marks of rank, lighter colored breeches. On the floor stood black jackboots. Slung on the wall was the curve of a scabbarded sabre, its hilt and tasselling catching bits of light. In all, what but the uniform of a French Dragoon, in younger days, our Count? His rank, that of a Captain, at least.

Bewildered and frightened, too, I ran from those woods, never to return. Nor did I tell anyone what I had seen. The secret was mine and the Count's. But to this day the questions remain. If not the Count's cabin and uniform, then whose? Regardless of ownership why was the uniform in that hidden place? If the Count's, why not in a mothproof closet under the red tile roof of the bay? On and on. An eerie affair that remains lodged in memory.

One Saturday night later that year, a great high-sterned, topless automobile, carbide headlamps and brightwork bedazzling and coming from the direction of the red tile roof, rounded the corner from Avenue C into 12th Street. From my angle the driver was invisible behind a towering vertical windshield and my eyes switched to its massive drive-chain bucking on the sprocket in the turn. As the car swept majestically westward on 12th one of my pals on the corner who had caught a glimpse of the man at the wheel uttered a yelp, "There goes the Count." I had missed him, our Chevalier of France, my Captain of Dragoons. I had missed him. Was he pale of face? Had he a mustache crisply upturned? The look of D'Artagnan?

The Count and his clanking Darracq, the mystery of the buried room

in the flatwoods, the Dragoon uniform—all these were erased by the arrival in Miami of flying machines. Biscayne Bay, neglected by its adult marginals became a magnet for all ages due to its ideal suitability as take-off and landing surface for the pontoon-fitted biplanes of Mr. Glenn Curtiss who installed moorings and a ramp on the Bay's edge just below the Royal Palm Hotel. For the young, the Curtiss machines became an obsession. Enthralled from the first clatter of engines, we quickly assumed mastery of the science of flight, loudly noting the fine points of take-off and landing, heralding maneuvers in advance of execution, our figures itching for the controls.

One afternoon a young fellow known to us all but somewhat older, parted the crowd, flashed a ten dollar bill, climbed aboard and was flown abundantly up and down the bay, thus achieving instant fame, a hero to us all. A few years later on a muddy street in a town in France, then brigade headquarters of an infantry division, I saw him again. Uniformed with exceeding smartness for a second lieutenant, even including a swagger stick tucked under his arm in the British style, he confided with a grin that he was hanging around HQ "awaiting court-martial." It would have been a breach of taste for me, a corporal, to enquire into the charges against him. Moreover I was still awed by the grandeur of his afternoon flight up and down Biscayne Bay. Ah, Swift, laughing cavalier, did you ever go back to Miami and the Green Tree Inn?

Summers were long. We explored up the river, swam, fished, hunted with our .22's and later on fooled around with a torpid sloop presented to us by a kind soul with the idea that we would organize a troop of Sea Scouts around it. We never got around to this and most of the time the sloop lay at anchor with a reputation for crankiness and leaking. Sometimes, however, one would take her singlehanded, or with a girl quite useless in handling the vessel, out into the Atlantic through Government Cut. In the open sea we would sail north until our nerve gave out, come about in the massive swells and in the late afternoon confront re-entry into Biscayne Bay through a shambles of tide-rip, flukey winds and mediocre seamanship.

Such exercises contributed perceptibly to growing up and perhaps helped to ignite the yen, latent in all men, for enterprise containing an element of risk. Warfare is one of these. Skiing, riding, climbing come to mind. And serious effort in any of the arts is hard, lonely, dangerous work.

Maybe Miami's emollient climate had something to do with it; in any case our anti-social acts were few and mild. One was an ingenious



arrangement for arousing half the town from sleep in the deep of night by clanging the high school bell. Involved was a tedious climb into the cupola to affix a breakable string to the bell clapper. Then, with a strong fishline tied to the string and ourselves well hidden half a block away we would clang out a doomsday clamor until lights came in the windows of honest citizens. Then a sharp jerk would break the string and let us retrieve our fishline and fade into the night.

Another exploit was the summertime invasion of the Home Economics Kitchen, there to combine ingredients left over from the school year into weird baked pastries. Afterward we always cleaned up with care.

During my student years not a single school-house window was smashed. Graffiti were unknown. This decency survived grammar and high school years intact. School was the social pivot around which our happy lives revolved; the vandalistic urge was totally absent.

Almost equal to the Curtiss flying machines in providing news for Miami's hustling journals was the advent of a company of moving picture people. On the premise that Miami had as much sunshine as California and was a lot closer to New York, a gaggle of producers, cameramen, scenic designers, grips, actors and camp followers swarmed upon us, set up headquarters in a grey-shingled hotel on the bayfront near the Terminal Dock, built a vast wooden platform over a vacant lot, rigged a muslin canopy over all to diffuse the sun's glare and began shooting.

High Schoolers of some presence who could rummage up reasonable facsimiles of formal evening clothes were recruited for a ballroom scene at five dollars a day, a fabulous proposition to us when twenty-five cents was pocket money for a week. The players brought us an authentic whiff of the outside world more tangible than that diffused by the seldom seen guests of the Hotel Royal Palm. Director and actors toiled around town in low-slung snorters and waved at us who had been extras. They were seen in the Spanish restaurants on Avenue D; a jolly crew, one of whom added to the fun by crashing his yellow racer against the Avenue D bridge. It was too good to last. After a while they folded their installations and neither they nor their film ever surfaced again. The actors in their fancy clothes were gone but for a time the echoes of a song that on moonlit nights had sometimes larked upward from the hotel window of the leading lady whose slave I had been since glimpsing her in the ballroom scene, a melody beginning, "... say, do you remember California in September..." a plaintive song whose echoes continued to wrench me.

Except for the fleeting appearances of hotel guests, fancy clothes

were rarely part of our scene. Miamians tended to wear the clothes they had on when they sold the plumbing business and left their homes in Michigan; thick woolens, stiff collars, derby hats. Indeed, after these hair shirts had worn out or been consumed by mildew and moth the same outfits seemed always to take their place. Women were the only ones able to cope with the climate; putting their sewing machines to work they whipped out light cotton dresses for themselves and daughters.

An astonishing part of becoming a high schooler was being addressed by the faculty as Miss and Mister, a dignity that brought male juveniles for the first time to some concern for their appearance – with mixed results. We could not aspire to the haberdashery of the young dudes holidaying at the Royal Palm; their superb flannels, white and blue-striped blazers, straw boaters, white oxfords, were not for sale on 12th Street. Few of our families would have been either likely or able to finance them anyway.

We settled for vested blue serge suits with augmented shoulders selling in the vicinity of fifteen dollars. Our shoes, relentlessly high-top, were laced or buttoned, some a feverish yellow in color and with peculiar raised blips on the toes. The Arrow collar man, painted by the immortal Leyendecker brothers was our nemesis. His elegant variations were advertised to the saturation point in magazines, billboards, store windows, his cool eyes commanding us to look like him day and night. Ah, those sleek types in dinner jackets, crisp wing collars, precise black bows and always the white-tipped red carnation boutonniere. The pain we suffered during those years of deprivation no doubt made us, when we achieved solvency, better than average customers of F.R. Trippler, The Bretheren and, in due course Savile Row.

Were the girls in high school similarly racked? It is doubtful. The circulation of *Vogue* in Dade County could not have been appreciable. Any sort of garment whose skirt reached the shoe-top was adequately in the mode, or so it looks in contemporary photographs. Middy blouses swathed a multitude of camisoled bosoms. A bit of fretwork around the neck of a dress, a locket on a thin chain and the girls were off and running. Hair ribbons, large bows in back, were important, sashes too. Underneath it all – corsets. What else, no one knew.

Photographs of the '15 and '16 high school classes arranged on the big front steps reveal a sort of della Francesca dignity in the faces of the girls. No one is saying "cheese." There are such lovely extroverts as Dorothy Davies, Joaddie Harper, Lucile Atkisson, who got up parties and taught us the art of Irene and Vernon Castle. There is Katie Dean whose

mission was the disciplining of pushy boys (her greeting all too often was, "... the trouble with you, Bill Davenport, is ..."), beautiful Bessie Sandlin, cool and elfin Florence Wharton, warm-hearted Mamie Mizell. There also is a fragile girl from Georgia's peach country to whom on moonlit nights, an ocean breeze troubling the palm fronds, I droned the *Rubaiyat*, every single quatrain by heart.

Growing up progresses by exposure to assorted humans against various backgrounds but the process is smartly accelerated by the reading of books. In that I was lucky. Before moving to Miami we lived my eighth to eleventh years in the hamlet of Lake Helen buried in Florida's high pine country. During its brief flowering as a winter haven for quiet people from upper New York and Massachusetts, one of the visitors, Mr. Hopkins by name, built and endowed a small jewel of a library. To me it was the Kohinoor.

Always an adroit shirker of chores, I devoted much of those years to swimming and bending the oars of my skiff on the lake. But mainly I wove in and out of the library. My family always had quantities of books but many migrations had depleted them and anyway I had read them all. Now for the first time I had access to an unlimited supply. Reading four or five a week I spun through staples, classics, novels, histories, biographies, books of archaeology, adventure, warfare and poetry with equal and insatiable zest, the beginning of a lifelong addiction. My sneaky custom was to load books and a sandwich into the skiff, row to a shady cove, tie up and read all day. A very good life it was. Characters, scenes, illustrations, ideas from those books butterfly about in memory but Swift and Kipling remain, perhaps, most firmly imprinted. Alexander Dumas and G.A. Henty close seconds.

In Miami magazines mitigated our provincialism, mainly the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers* but off and on subscriptions to such as *McClures*, *Harpers*, *Outlook* and the *Literary Digest*. *Colliers* entranced me with a series of center spreads in some early color-printing process, of paintings by Frederick Remington, stunning evocations of Indians, cowboys and the U.S. Cavalry in the canyons, water-holes and prairies of the old West. Following this editorial coup was a series of the great explorers who forced their way through the new world's mazes.

In the rambunctious grammar school days, breathing chalk-dust and sweating out long division, we were not concerned with girls nor they with us. The mood was indifference; to each other we were non-persons. High school introduced a different tune whose beat was not easy to catch. No one had informed us that we were to confront relations between the

sexes, a subject that proved twice as touchy as algebra or Latin. Sex was a word like cancer, absent from speech and print.

Our girls, mysterious personalities, always from somewhere far away, were sweet and gentle creatures who spoke quietly, laughed often but did not giggle. We met on a straightforward basis, no coquetry on their part, no machismo on ours. Still, we were not the same kind of people. Fellow students enduring the same bruising introduction to learning, mixing in classes and all kinds of school activities, there remained an awkwardness on our part which they did not display. We breathed the same jasmin-scented air, bathed in the same unnerving tropical moonlight but the effect on us was more unnerving than it was on them.

Girls were a problem that demanded solution. We considered them social fixtures but difficult. They were, of course, far and away our social superiors, possessed of a moral solidarity based on the old established taboos. All in all they gave us a span of pleasant and sufficiently exciting years. The passes we made, inept, lacking in focus, were artfully grounded without demeaning us. Mutual infatuations revealed them as romantically vulnerable up to a point but that point was a stone wall. I am convinced that in not a single instance did chastity of any of our high school charmers suffer even the tiniest nick. Indeed the taboos were equally built into the male contingent. We were younger than our years—in retrospect, how fortunate we were! For our more timely discovery time and circumstance had preserved almost intact a delightful new landscape of human experience.

Opportunities for getting together were limited. The sole automobile in the school population was that of Landon Carney and he lived in Coconut Grove. From school we walked home in groups, together for a few blocks and then dispersed. Once in a while, after agonies of consideration, we took a girl to the movies followed by a grape-ice at the soda fountain. Holding hands walking her home was an electric intimacy. As social groups jelled there were impromptu get-togethers for an orgy of the haunting Hawaiian music then on records.

Other efforts toward sociability were evening parties which we called “killings,” with stuff to eat and grape-juice punch. There was no precedent for drinking anything stronger and no one did.

Smoking was not part of the scene either. In grammar school the baseball pictures enclosed in packs of cigarettes induced a bit of puffing but the craze was brief. In high school we tried the excellent “green” cigars made in Key West of Cuban tobaccos and sold untaxed in paper

bags but most of us were involved in some athletic team or other and considered ourselves “in training” and barred from smoking—an idea derived from the antiseptic books about prep school life by Ralph Henry Barbour of which we were rapt readers. The far superior books for juveniles by our Coconut Grove neighbor Kirk Monroe we read but disregarded since they were about the Everglades and the Keys. We called on him one day and he received us graciously.

In high school dancing arrived to boost our growing up along. The girls insisted that we learn and with the aid of victrolas put us over the jumps mastering turkey trot, bunny hug, hesitation waltz. The Argentine tango followed and tough going it all was. But to the tinny beat of International Rag, Too Much Mustard and other compositions deided by our elders we slowly caught on. Scraps of the International Rag lyrics survive;

*Dukes and Lords and Russian Czars  
Folks who own their motor-cars  
Throw up their shoulders to that  
Raggedy melody, full of originality—  
Italian opera singers  
Have learned to snap their fingers  
All the world goes around the sound  
Of the International Raaaaaaagggggg.*

On scholarship within the non-ivied walls of our new High School there is little to be said. Out of my class of forty-six students no less than twenty flunked their exams and were required to repeat the entire Junior year. The seventeen males in this sheepish group included most of my close friends and my name would have led all the rest had not I moved away in mid-term. Our instructors were qualified and worked hard but we spent too many hours gazing from the study hall windows at airplanes skimming along over the coconut trees and weighing the Royal Canadian Air Force route to a hero’s career in the skies over Flanders Fields. From this airy dream we were to come to earth crawling on our tummies through Argonne Forest mud and machine guns.

Roman-profiled W.R. Thomas led us through Gaul with Julius Caesar and coached basketball as well. His degree was a Master’s from the University of North Carolina. Lilliam McGahey did her best to inculcate some faint understanding of mathematics, if only to preserve intact the athletic teams. Miss Brown, I believe, was from Boston—her drawling style being otherwise untraceable. With her we skimmed *Mac-*

*beth* and *David Copperfield*, wrote papers and grinned at her mannered reproofs; to one chronically tardy member of her class, "Late again, chewing gum and raising a disturbance as usual."

The school year ended with a picnic on Miami beach, reached in an implausibly afloat ferry launch to a rickety dock across Biscayne Bay and a trudge through sand to the gaunt shape of Smith's Casino, sole structure on the ocean beach. It offered cubicles for changing into bathing suits, orangeade and Coca Cola for refreshments. Upstairs was a breezy room which later on proved a pleasant dancing place on summer evenings.

Coconut trees posed in their beguiling curves, the ocean was benign, miles of untouched beach lay in the sunshine but Miami Beach with capital letters had not yet evolved. Far-sighted men were drawing plans, money was being rounded up but the awakening was not yet.

When surveying crews first began to chart the taming of Miami Beach's bayside swamp, jungle and mangrove I got my accustomed summer job as chainman. Handling the chain, which was not a chain at all but a heavy coil of steel measuring tape, was a form of galley-slavery marked out for high schoolers of strong back and weak mind. Armed with machetes and axes, lugging chain and bundles of stakes, our function was to slash and chop a line-of-sight through whatever intervened, measuring and driving stakes as we progressed guided by signals from the civil engineer squinting through the telescope of his tripod-mounted transit instrument. If response to challenge is a builder of character we must have laid in a bit, sweating day-long among snakes, mosquitoes and alligators, chest deep in swamp, knee-deep in mud, suffering infected cuts from dense sawgrass high over our heads. Luckily we were outdoor kids, the pay was satisfying, the science interesting and the engineers generally agreeable men.

One Llewellyn, tall, thin, stork-like in the riding-type breeches we wore with leather puttees as some small deterrent to snake-bite, was smitten by a lovely and vivacious aunt who visited us. Perhaps that was why he so often found work for me.

Another professional named Parlee, a Scot, was small, darkly sun-browned, spare of words, a hard driver with one inappropriate weakness; a cold horror of snakes. With him I worked on a three week expedition deep into the Everglades. On this enterprise, in addition to the tools of our job, including enormous bundles of stakes we were equipped with a 30-30 rifle in case of serious dispute with alligators and with revolvers to even things up between us and the serpent population. In practice and when necessary we killed snakes with our machetes; when push came to shove there was no time to fool around with a pistol.

Parlee asked me to bring along another chainman and I shanghai'd from Joe Dillon's poolroom on Avenue C a semi-pro baseball player named Chapman with whom I had worked before. We took the train to West Palm Beach, met up with the engineer and were transported by launch through various watery ways a day's journey north and west of Lake Worth. Abandoned there to the glades we had for shelter a shack on stilts with cots and a kerosene stove. For food there was lumpy sacks and bundles of bulk stuff that required cooking of which none of us knew anything. Starvation stalked us throughout the entire affair.

The sawgrass was ten feet high, the water knee to waist deep. Hammock barriers required tree chopping and jungle slashing. Which-ever, there were perhaps half a dozen more or less intimate collisions with snakes during a day's work of which two or three would be with moccasins or rattlers. Poisonous or not the hazard was constant. Every step, machete stroke and driven stake had the possibilities of unpleasant response. Sometimes the tension self-destructed into wildly comic moments.

One forenoon in a soggy hammock we were felling a tall cypress that blocked the transit's cross-hairs, Chapman swinging the axe, Parlee standing near. As the tree trembled ready to fall, its high branches loosed a shower of assorted snakes, including one bright yellow one. I had seen them coming and ducked but they plunked down on Chapman and Parlee. Gallows humor, but a relief. I wonder if Parlee ever shook off those weeks of acute discomfort. Chapman and I suffered also to the degree our youth allowed.

Quite early we literally fell into a very private trick of the glades. After a long dry spell and in certain places the muck would develop deep cracks, crevasses, some of them, and when the normal water covering returned they were invisible, as we found out wading homeward after a wearying day.

Parlee was in the lead, the precious transit on his shoulder. Chapman and I sloshed along behind with the rest of our tools. Suddenly Parlee disappeared under the water. When we reached him he had resurfaced and was hanging on to the transit which had lodged athwart the crevasse. He said he had gone straight down and found no bottom. This was a trying new problem against which there was no defense except the post-facto staking of places where one of us had made the plunge.

Aside from the mosquitoes, serpents, crevasses and saurians the Everglades atmosphere was not actively hostile but neither was it a comfortable wilderness. The space was far too much. Between us and the level horizon all around lay nothing but water, sawgrass and the scattered

blobs of hammocks, all canopied by an overwhelming aloofness. We were there uninvited, at our own risk, our tiny presence totally ignored. One of the effects of this primeval emptiness was to make any sort of unexpected encounter disconcerting.

One day we were taking a short cut across a dry, open hammock, its earth white sand instead of black muck, its growth scrub pines and palmettoes in place of jungle. We walked as the Indians did, eyes on the ground and were startled when, stark in brilliant sunshine, appeared a ramshackle hut, its door shut and the sand in front untracked. On the door, stretched from top to bottom, hung the skin of a giant rattlesnake. The shock of coming on a human habitation in that wilderness, intruding on our isolation, upsetting the established monotony of our working day, was, as I have mentioned, disconcerting. None of us spoke, we just stood there. The idea of trying the latch on that outlandishly decorated door entered no one's head. We began slowly to circle away from the hut only to find our way barred by the glitter of a monstrous rattler, coiled and very much alive, tail sounding its vicious warning. Just behind the snake's head, no doubt adding to its ill-temper, clung a complete necklace of gray, bloated woodticks. A sinister neighborhood from which our extrication was delicate but swift and, thanks to the pattern of our surveying, for good.

An equally surprising and more wholesome sight greeted Chapman and me one day when we finished grubbing our way through a jungle hammock and with the last machete stroke were able to stand erect under an open sky. At our very feet stretched a dazzling expanse of pure white lilies cheek to cheek as far as we could see. Though growing in water they were not pond lilies. Wiping our sweat, Chapman and I swung our eyes out over the field and then looked at each other in the silence and surmise of those Spaniards on the peak in Darien. Then, as we stared again at the mat of white flowers rumples began to move across, a sign we well knew: alligators. I was glad our surveying line turned ninety degrees at that point and we had neither to bruise the lilies nor challenge the saurians.

I got back to Miami with a pocket full of money and a feeling of elation that comes with success whatever the contest but quite unconscious of the experience as a rung in the growing-up ladder and I was embarrassed when I met up with Clarkson who nearly wrung my hand off.

His grin ear-wide, he spoke, "By God, Bill, you are a man!" It is possible that a tear hung in Clark's admiring eye—or was it in mine.

Our growing up was indeed nourished by the surveying work, as it



was soon to be further fed by the coming of war to my generation. We liked to be seen heading off into the Everglades, the flatwoods or some fetid mangrove swamp down the coast. The hardships and dangers attendant were well known and the touch of bravado with which we accepted them gave us a twist of pride, a feeling that our manhood in some degree stood certified.

In 1915 Europe lay convulsed in war, first in a chain of wars the merciless 20th century was to inflict. Biscayne Bay was bridged to the beach. The town raised a couple of thousand dollars for promotional advertising. Our age of innocence had begun to crumble.

Grown up? Well, sort of. A big six years worth anyway, years I remember with love for the sunny young town and those who sort of grew up with me. The process does not culminate. Life and growing up bump along together all the way.

In the middle of my junior year at Miami High my family moved to Tennessee where no coconut trees grew and in winter it snowed.

At various times, by various routes, various of my family returned to Miami—some to stay. My half-brother A. Jay Sheldon and his wife and daughter Thetis, who was born in Miami in 1913, stayed for many years. My half-sister Helen and her husband Arthur James Wakefield with their daughter Gertrude, Miami-born in 1911, to stay. My mother, Gertrude Morrison Baker Sheldon Davenport returned to enjoy her final years with the Wakefields. Only my sister Alice and I had to content ourselves with visits. One of mine was in the spring of 1942 for six weeks in Air Force Officer's Training School billeted at the noble Roney-Plaza. Another visit, a very happy one, has been in the writing of this piece for Tequesta.

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