

Seminole Beach

“The Best Beach in Dade County”¹

By Frederick H. Harrington

It is still a wonderful beach though it is no longer in Dade County. Seminole Beach is one of the forgotten developments that scattered the South Florida landscape with the bones of dead dreams. It belongs with Inter-Ocean City, Holleman Park, Fulford-by-the-Sea and other schemes to build a fortune in a sub-tropical land.

Some of these ventures were poorly planned or badly located. Some were successful and survive as part of another city. Some were poorly timed, too soon or too late. Seminole Beach was too soon. In spite of an excellent location and delightful beach, it was doomed before it began. Events no one could control or foresee made success impossible.

Famine in Ireland was the push to begin a career that provided financing for Seminole Beach. The 1914 war in Europe caused inflation that made failure certain. The money was the life savings of an Irish immigrant, a successful Irish contractor.

The immigrant was Thomas Hamilton, naturalized in 1856 at Cleveland, Ohio.² He was born January 4th, 1833 at Saintfield, County Down, North Ireland.

Though of a family of landowners, the potato famine and panic of 1848-49 made life in Ireland impossible.³ He and a brother took advantage of the offer of a labor recruiter and sailed for America and Cleveland in 1850. There they were to help build a new post office.⁴

Frederick H. Harrington, retired and living in Hialeah, was born in Miami and graduated from Miami High School. He is the great grandson of Thomas Hamilton and has in his possession many of the letters and other papers about Seminole Beach referred to in the notes.

Thomas fulfilled his contract with the recruiter, working until the post office building was completed on Cleveland's Public Square. He was a good worker, soon a foreman, perfecting his skills as a builder who would help Cleveland grow.

Cleveland was rapidly expanding and Thomas Hamilton soon learned to apply his construction experience to the contracting field. He was successful and had a part in building many Cleveland landmarks. Among his clients was John D. Rockefeller who lived nearby in East Cleveland.

By the first years of the twentieth century he was feeling the effects of long years of very hard work. An accident with an adz had caused a leg injury which refused to heal, and many years of Ohio winters had begun to show in colds and chest infections that did not go away.

A friend and neighbor, Dr. John Griese, prescribed a trip to a warmer climate. Thomas did not need much persuading. He was involved in a church quarrel, the result of building Park Congregational Church.⁵ The quarrel and the misery he felt made the decision easy.⁶

Florida was his choice. Henry M. Flagler, a business associate of Rockefeller, had built a Florida railroad and was advertising the state intensely. Miamian Julia Tuttle had asked both for advice.⁷ Thomas Hamilton set off for Florida after Christmas of 1907.

It was a tortuous railroad journey of more than three days with train changes at Cincinnati, Louisville, Atlanta and Jacksonville before he was delivered to the Ponce de Leon Hotel at St. Augustine. This old town was not what he had in mind, too old and too social. Thomas took the advice of an acquaintance and boarded the train for Daytona.

Daytona did not impress Thomas. Mr. Casper, a friend from Cleveland, had more advice; he should see Miami before returning to Ohio.⁸

The Flagler System supplied another slow train through the south, one that traveled a rough new roadbed and stopped at every station. It had a coal fired engine and as warming weather made open windows necessary, the passengers were showered with a constant rain of soot and sparks. It was a tedious ride through endless corridors of slash pine scarred with turpentine taps.

In Miami at last, he stayed at the Seminole Hotel on Twelfth Street, now Flagler.⁹ This was a traveling salesman's hotel and more to the taste of Thomas Hamilton than the society ridden Ponce de

Leon of St. Augustine. It was in the middle of town and he could walk to see all there was of Miami.¹⁰

An experienced developer, he saw opportunity everywhere. The empty high and dry waterfront property available all around caught his eye. The warm soft breezes in mid-winter made him feel better at once. This time he did not stay in Miami but, after a look around, entrained for St. Augustine to use the return portion of the excursion ticket from Cleveland.

Back home he liquidated his property, selling everything he could for cash, until he had \$42,000. He returned to Miami in the fall of 1908.¹¹

By good planning or good luck, he arrived in time for an auction of Brickell property being held on the steps of the Bank of Bay Biscayne, on the corner of Miami Avenue and Flagler Street. Thomas bid actively and bought lots and blocks of vacant land, subdivided with streets laid out, along Miami Avenue between Southwest Eighth Street and Southwest Fifteenth Road, which was not then dedicated.¹² His enthusiastic bidding made the sellers wary. They sent word to the Brickell office questioning the old man's credit. The answer came promptly from Charlie Brickell, "Sell him everything; he's got money." He was covered of course. When he arrived he had put his \$42,000 in the First National Bank, made friends with president Ed Romfh, and established credit.¹³

He never returned to Ohio to live, but set to work at once. He explored the area and enjoyed the beach. He had purchased considerable property that he planned to develop. It was a simple plan — build houses to sell.

The Seminole Hotel was all right for a short stay. Still he wanted something a little more settled. Perhaps he needed a better address than a drummer's roost, perhaps he just wanted to live on his own land. He began to build a house.

The new house was small, frame construction, with one bedroom, intended for the old man only. The splurge at the auction had attracted attention and the new white house became known as "Uncle Tom's Cabin". He lived alone with a Bahamian woman to clean and wash.

Thomas had visitors. The folks in Cleveland were concerned. He had vanished without a trace, not writing or replying to telegrams. His son Herbert came down to see what was going on and reported the old man doing well but the cooking was poor. Herbert did not think well of Miami as compared to Cleveland.¹⁴

When he did begin correspondence, the letters were short and vague about his life in Florida. He wrote for medicines and materials for his building projects. In a letter of April 17, 1911 he complained that, "Everything you buy here costs almost double." It was necessary to order hardware, plumbing, doors and windows from the north. He bought from Sears and Roebuck whose prices he thought much lower than the local supply companies.

His letters indicated that he was lonely, that his projects were burdensome. In January 1911, his granddaughter, Mary, visited, staying at the Seminole Hotel. He wrote, "Mary is homesick and may be home anytime although she is having a good time." Thomas offered to set up a dress shop for her if she would stay with him. Though she had experience in clerking in such a shop, she refused. The attraction of home and friends in Cleveland was too much. As soon as she could, she went back to Ohio.

In April 1911, he reported, "I bought the lot on the bay." This lot was near Southeast Tenth Street. The old man expected to find a beach like the ocean where he could wade and find shells. Instead, he waded into the bay and cut his feet badly on sharp rocks and had to be rescued. He sold the lot hurriedly causing title and collection problems.

In May 1911 he wrote to Cleveland, "I have been putting on the lot where I live orange, grapefruit, mango and guava trees." He had begun a new and more elaborate house on Southwest Twelfth Street, across the street from the small frame house where he was living. More and more friends and relatives were coming to Miami and he needed room.

The new house was made of poured concrete with two stories and a large front porch. It was not a house for Florida living. It faced the wrong way (north) and had small windows and small rooms. It was the same house he had been building in Ohio and a total failure during Miami's hot summers.

In the same letter of May 8, 1911, he invited his grandson to come south and help him with his many ventures. This was Thomas B. Hamilton, then sixteen and a junior in high school. He had been accepted as an engineering student at Case School of Applied Science, now part of Case - Western Reserve University. In return for the help he needed, the old man offered, "If your folks are willing I will give you a partnership in real estate and building but I don't advise anybody. You better take an excursion down here and see for yourself. Your

mother would be mad if I coaxed you here.”¹⁵

When he graduated in 1912 Thomas B. Hamilton (who will be called Tom to distinguish him from his grandfather, Thomas Hamilton) decided that a summer in Florida would be a dandy adventure allowing him to look around before starting at Case in the fall. He guessed that the grandfather’s supervision would be less strict than the parental oversight of his mother and father in Cleveland. Tom set out for Miami which he found much to his taste, a lively frontier town which he never again left willingly.

In 1911, when Thomas Hamilton began to develop his land, Miami was still a small town. There were barely 10,000 people, almost all north of the Miami River.¹⁶ Beyond the city line was a string of stations on the new railroad: Buena Vista, Lemon City, Little River, Arch Creek, Fulford and on.

Julia Tuttle and Henry Flagler included deed restrictions on property they sold forbidding the sale or possession of spirits in Miami. Since they owned most of the property, this led to the establishment of an area of bars and other enterprises just beyond city jurisdiction and called North Miami. Police protection and most civilization stopped just north of the cemetery at seventeenth street.¹⁷

Along the river were a few fish houses, warehouses and marine railroads for boat building and repair. At Miami Avenue there was a swing bridge that led to the southside, the Brickell house, and a few settlers trying to become vegetable and fruit growers. The Collins bridge to Miami Beach was not opened until 1913. To go swimming in the ocean or beachcombing, you took the launch Sallie or Lady Lou from the dock at Flagler Street and the bay.¹⁸ Other boats took sightseers to Cape Florida or up the Miami River to see the Everglades.

The launches ferried the bathers to the south end of the beach where a boardwalk brought them to the ocean and Smith’s Casino. Miami Beach was a strip of sand dunes facing the ocean with a mangrove swamp behind to the bay. The area was owned by John S. Collins, Quaker and bridge builder, to the north; Carl G. Fisher, retired from Prestolite, in the middle; and the Lummus brothers, J. E. of Bank of Bay Biscayne and J. N. of Southern Bank and Trust Company, to the south. While waiting for the bridge, land sales and development, Collins planted the high ground in potatoes, bananas and avocados.¹⁹

After the fire of 1896, the center of Miami shifted away from

the river to Flagler Street and Miami Avenue.²⁰ This important corner had the Bank of Bay Biscayne, Frank T. Budge Hardware and the Biscayne Hotel. To the west was city hall, the police department, the fire department, and the county courthouse. Toward the bay were Burdines, Mr. Foster's Store, Seminole Hotel, Red Cross Drug Store, the Halcyon Hotel and Dr. James M. Jackson's home and office.²¹

Before the railroad arrived in 1896, Miami was isolated, reached only by unscheduled inter-island boats from Key West. It was much easier to travel from the state capital at Tallahassee by way of New York and Key West than by land. Walking with the Barefoot Mailman, who carried the mail by walking the beach, was the easiest way to travel from Palm Beach. Even with the railroad, it was more comfortable to take the train from Cleveland to Baltimore, steamer to Jacksonville and the S.S. Morgan to Miami.²²

Grandson Tom dove head first into the swim of this exciting community and became a plunger with the best. He was of enormous help to his grandfather running errands, collecting rent, interest and mortgage payments, and supervising construction on the many projects underway. He had a sure hand in managing black work crews. He treated them as workers, not slaves, and they responded with extra effort. The payroll was on time and, when really needed, money could be advanced to be paid back next payday. In an era when most bankers did not make loans to black people, Tom and his grandfather had mortgage money for good workmen.²³

The property bought from the Brickell's proved a good investment. After the panic of 1907, Miami was expanding rapidly. Every train brought new people, new buyers and renters for the houses Thomas was building on the south side.

Once started, Thomas' letters were frequent, addressed to his grandchildren Ina and Thomas B. Hamilton. On May 31, 1911, he wrote, "I have the roof on the new house. Wages is very high \$3.50 a day for 8 hours." In the letter of July 11, 1911 he wrote, "I sold four lots on Twenty-fifth Street (now Thirteenth Street) to the Board of Education for a school house."

Through the summer and fall the letters report the lathing and plastering of the house. The garden he planted became a harvest of melons, lettuce, carrots, beets, and cucumbers. The last letter of the year, December 30, 1911, brags: "The thermometer ranges about 75% *never lower than 65%* (sic)," in short a booster. His letter of

January 5, 1912 complains "Thermometer stands at 45 degrees the coldest I have seen yet."²⁴

When grandson Tom arrived in the spring of 1912, the south side, the area south of the Miami River, was quite empty. Most of the land was palmettos and pines. Part of it had been cleared or "scarified," which meant removing all of the growth to the bare rock. South of the Hamilton holdings was part of Brickell Hammock which extended unbroken to Coconut Grove and beyond. It was hard to clear and grew back rapidly.

Young Tom was overseeing the building of several houses, all on the same plan. Called the "California Bungalow," they varied the houses by reversing the plan or making it larger or smaller. The result was five or six houses that while similar were not quite alike. This design was open and better suited to Florida summers. They sold well, mostly to retirees from the New York area.

All this supervising and collecting was not enough to keep the grandson busy. He borrowed from the old man and with William Mizell, Jr. and G. M. Hopkins, built the Atlantic Tire and Supply Co. on Flagler just west of Miami Avenue. They were agents for Allen Motor cars, Kelly Springfield, and Diamond and Mohawk (guaranteed 5,000 miles) tires. They pumped gas, sold oil, repaired, and Vulcanized tires.²⁵

Another entrepreneur, Hugh F. DuVal, had been busy since 1910 selling Everglades acreage that he called Miami Gardens. He had 6,000 acres and was promoting it for truck gardens. Hugh's father, Harvie DuVal, had a contract to survey the range and township lines from the St. Lucie River south to Miami. In the process the DuVals located and contracted to buy all the choice bits and pieces in the area within eight and one half miles of the ocean.²⁶

Florida and the Internal Improvement Board had completely mis-used the Federal Swamp Land Act of 1850 so that when the Florida Coast Line Canal Company was granted state land in return for building the inland waterway from Jacksonville to Miami, there was not enough land left to meet the state's promise of 1,200,000 acres. They settled for an even million acres.²⁷

By 1892, when the Flagler railroad reached Rockledge near Cape Canaveral, Flagler learned that there was no more state land left for the land grants he expected in payment for his railroad building. The canal company realizing, with persuasion, that their land without access was nearly worthless, agreed to give the railroad 1500 acres

for each mile of rail completed south of Rockledge.²⁸

When the DuVals completed the survey, Hugh's brother decided to stay in Miami where he shortly died. Hugh then returned to Miami with his brother's partner, J. M. Barrs, a Jacksonville attorney, to sell the land and settle the estate. Hugh decided to complete purchase of 6,000 acres of Everglades near Miami and two sections of land on the south shore of Lake Okeechobee. In addition there were one hundred and eighty acres on the ocean south of the New River. Neither DuVal nor Barrs considered the beach property of any value. They tossed a half dollar for it and DuVal won.

Later Hugh and his secretary, Roy Busby, decided to look at the beach land. This was not easy. The train left them at Hallandale but there was no road or bridge to the ocean. They walked through the tomato fields to the Florida Coast Line Canal, swam across and climbed the dunes to the beach. Hugh DuVal reported that the beach was strewn with thousands of board feet of excellent pine lumber, some schooner's deck load. Hugh wrote, "It was not worth salvaging because of the low price of lumber, twelve dollars per thousand," and transport to Miami was too expensive. Recrossing the canal, Busby was alarmed when a "long-snouted crocodile" made a swirl in the water behind him.²⁹

Hugh DuVal, to facilitate the sale of Miami Gardens acreage, rented a building on Flagler Street which later became the Red Cross Drug Store and eventually Jackson Byron's Department store. This was very near the Atlantic Tire and Supply garage and Tom Hamilton soon became friendly with Hugh DuVal. When Hugh spoke of his beach property, Tom and his grandfather were interested. Thomas Hamilton still wanted to enjoy the beach in spite of his poor experience with Biscayne Bay. After a look at the Hallandale Beach, Tom persuaded the old man to put up \$4,000 for a one half interest in a mile of ocean beach.³⁰

In February 1912, before Tom arrived, Thomas took a trip to Fulford to look at the land. He was not impressed. He wrote, "The land was some good and some poor," but the large fields of vegetables interested him. He was more interested in the beach and Tom made it possible for him to see it by means of a boat which could be rowed across the Florida Coast Line Canal. Still the trip by car from Miami along the rough rock road or by rail was slow and there was a difficult walk from the road or the railroad station at Hallandale to the canal. They decided to buy a powered sailboat, but the engine was inadequate

for the long trip from Biscayne Bay up the canal. The next boat was a twenty-foot launch with rounded stern and canopy from front to back. There were canvas curtains to lower when it rained. It looked like a miniature sightseeing boat.³¹

Pictures of Hallandale Beach of this era show an empty landscape. There was no permanent structure on the beach for the thirty miles between the Biscayne House of Refuge at Surfside and the House of Refuge on the New River near Fort Lauderdale. These shelters for wreck survivors were still needed since after the Barefoot Mailman stopped delivery no one had regular business on the beach, though visitors came by boat during the egg season to collect eggs and kill turtles. The beach was littered with flotsam and jetsam of every sort. Some, such as the lumber DuVal described, was of value but the difficulty of access and isolation made salvage unprofitable.

The beach was golden sand with a bluff above the highest reach of storm waves. Beyond the bluff the sand was covered by sea oats, vicious sandspurs, and scattered sea grapes. From this the land sloped toward a fringe of buttonwood and white mangrove to the red mangrove bordering the Florida Coast Line Canal. This stretch was potentially a great beach but without swimmers, shellers or sunbathers it was not yet a beach, only a coastline.³²

Thomas Hamilton set out to make it a beach. It was exactly to his taste. He could paddle in the surf or wade to collect shells as it pleased him. As soon as it was practical, he ordered Tom to build a beach house for changing clothes and for shelter. Tom discovered that a shallow well above the high tide line would provide drinkable water. This made it possible for the old man to spend much time on the beach, sometimes for a week or more until someone worried and rescued him. He was certain that the saltwater and sun were curing both the adz wound and his chest congestion.

The big house on Twelfth Street was complete. In spite of granddaughter Mary's poor report, the warm weather of Miami began to draw other relatives and friends from Cleveland. The matriarch of the clan, Thomas' wife Mary, followed and moved into the small white house. She visited the new beach property but did not approve of it. She said it was too lonesome.

Some of the children were critical and came south to find just how the old man had spent his money. Son Herbert changed his mind when forced to retire by a crippling hernia. He found the climate and gardening potential a good exchange for Ohio winters.

Using an exaggerated bungalow design, Herbert began building a house on South Miami Avenue. The Twelfth Street house was too popular.

For Thomas this pleasant life ended abruptly with the death of Mary in Miami April 27, 1914. Thomas missed her fiercely and began to lose interest in the Florida projects. He took her back to Cleveland where she was buried in Lake View Cemetery.³³

Tom dreamt of profit from the beach and its location. He and DuVal set up the Seminole Realty and Development Co. with H. F. DuVal president and Thomas B. Hamilton secretary and treasurer. They opened an office at 320½ Twelfth Street. This, by present numbering, was between Miami Avenue and Southeast First Street on the south side of Flagler Street. The account book of Seminole Realty is dated April 2, 1913 with May 1, 1913 the opening day for the office. The first order of business was a survey to establish boundaries and prepare the plat of the proposed subdivision.

Crabtree and Zoll ran the survey which cost a total of \$121.20 and was completed by September 19, 1913. Some of the expenses of the survey are interesting for their record of prices:³⁴

May 20	20 gals. gas for boat @ \$0.19	\$ 3.80
June 7	To Hallandale Hotel for 33 meals @ \$0.35 and 2 beds 3 nights @\$0.50	\$14.58
June 7	To one team mules towing auto car onto road.	\$ 2.00

To sell the lots at the beach, a road and a bridge were essential. This was a complicated process. Permission was required from Hallandale and Dade County for the bridge and road. In addition the bridge over the Florida Coast Line Canal needed to be built to state specifications and with state permission. The oolite limestone for the road would have to come from a canal dug parallel to the road for which permission was also needed. Seminole Realty started work with permits from Dade County and Hallandale, state licenses applied for.

The account book shows a payment on August 12, 1913 to A.A. Bunnell for \$300; this bought the dredge, *Klondike*. Pictures show a clam shell bucket on a boom from a floating barge. Sometimes it was rigged as a steam shovel. The *Klondike* floated in the canal it dug as it hoisted the material it removed onto the bed of the proposed roadway. The bucket held ¾ yard and was supposed to

make two trips a minute. When in proper working order it moved about 1000 yards a day.³⁵

Bunnell towed the dredge up the Florida Coast Line Canal to Hallandale Beach. The surveyors had laid out the right of way for the road and canal to connect with the streets of Hallandale. This was through a dense mangrove jungle beginning at the canal bank. The *Klondike* commenced digging into the mangroves. These had to be cleared first which was very hard work for a crew of four black men and a strawboss.

The dredge was wood-fired which required a steady supply of pine logs cut to fit the boiler firebox. The cordwood came from the pinelands west of the railroad. The *Klondike* needed an engineer to run the clamshell and boom and a fireman to keep the boiler hot. In addition there were a couple of roustabouts to fetch and carry and help keep the dredge in position, moving it forward as the canal was dug. One week of dredging cost about \$125. This was not the only expense.

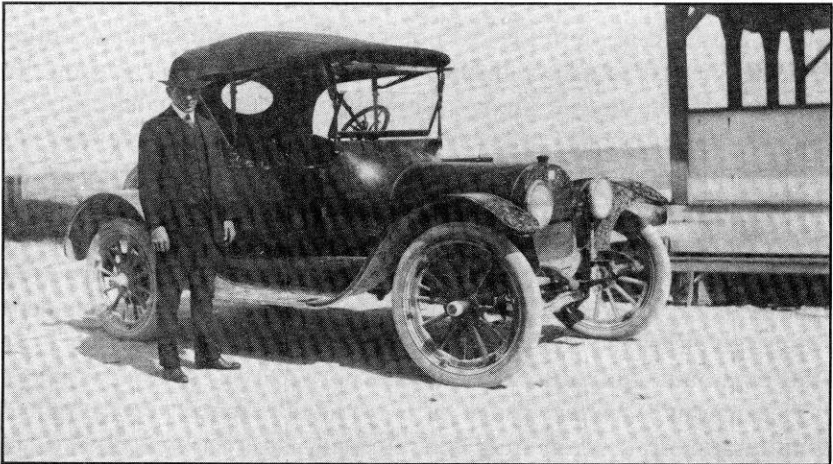
The *Klondike* was no bargain, even at \$300. The first few weeks of operation show costs in the account book for roll roofing, castings, pumps and oakum. Both the roof and the hull leaked. This was only the beginning. They bought the dredge knowing the boiler was weak but hoped that it would last until the canal at Hallandale was complete. They would replace it before moving the operation to dig canals in the Everglades. Instead, after a week of digging, the boiler began to leak enough steam to poach the fireman. A new boiler was essential and had to be ordered from Macon, Georgia. This was done, but it took weeks to get the boiler ordered, shipped, and installed. This delay hurt as they hoped to have the canal dug, the road passable and lots ready for sale by the time the tourists arrived in early winter. They were enjoying a great deal of expense but no income.³⁶

Tom found that a bridge, with a forty-foot span built to state specifications, would cost about \$1500. They began to build the abutments and piers needed for crossing the Florida Coast Line Canal.³⁷

The new boiler was installed at the end of October 1913 and the *Klondike* began to perform according to promise. The canal and road were reaching toward Hallandale from the beach at a more reasonable speed. The limestone from the twenty-two-foot-deep canal was piling up on the right-of-way ready for grading into a proper road, or it was until the dredge reached Mud Lake. This was

an opening in the mangrove about one half mile across which soaked up fill as fast as the boom hoisted it from the canal. It was so bottomless that even the mangroves would not grow. All the rock for the roadway splashed into the ooze and sank slowly out of sight.³⁸

Mud Lake stopped progress in its tracks. There was no need for a canal if the road could not be built. A solution was at hand. The early trees that were cut to clear a path for the dredge had been burned. Now the tree trunks were used to make a corduroy road bed on which the limestone could be floated. It seemed temporary but the road was rough but serviceable until 1959 when the state road department built Hallandale Beach Boulevard, the present four-lane road and bridge to the beach.³⁹



HASF, gift of Frederick H. Harrington

Tom Hamilton at the pavilion at Seminole Beach. Now Hallandale Park, the land was given to Broward County by Seminole Realty.

The leaks, failing boiler and Mud Lake had delayed the *Klondike* so that there was no chance of completing the road in time for the winter season. Seminole Realty began to sell lots anyway. To compensate for the incomplete road and bridge, they added a paragraph to their legal forms promising to finish the work in progress as promptly as possible. Seminole Realty sold lots with an Agreement for Deed which guaranteed the issuing of a deed when the final payment was received. The price for a beach lot, not waterfront, was two hundred fifty dollars, fifty dollars in cash when the agreement was signed and fifty dollars every six months. There was six percent

interest on the unpaid balance due with each payment.

They sold many lots. Some buyers bought two or more. Many of the buyers were residents of Hallandale or employees of the Florida East Coast Railroad. Some were winter visitors to Miami and Fort Lauderdale. Most completed payment and received their deeds.⁴⁰

The dredge continued operating in 1914. The caption of a 1914 photograph of the *Klondike*, brags of a mile and one half of work completed since January first. Since the total distance from the beach to the Florida East Coast Railroad was about two miles, the work was well along. The bridge construction, in preparation for the steel span, was also progressing. This work was delayed by the traffic in the waterway. One of the piers was severely damaged when struck by a barge.

The death of Tom's grandmother (Thomas' wife) Mary Hamilton, in April 1914 involved him in the complications of settling the estate as she left no will. The old man had been devious in his property dealing and most parcels were in his wife's name. There was no Federal inheritance tax in 1914 so the process of settling the estate was mainly transferring the property titles. Thomas, in his letter dated June 22, 1914, insisted: "don't put anything in my name." Tom had the new deeds made out to his aunt, also named Mary Hamilton. She was called Mamie and had been brain-damaged when very young by scarlet fever. Thomas asked that Ed Romfh of the First National Bank administer the estate.⁴¹

Early in 1915 the bridge piers and approaches were complete enough to need contracting for the steel and its erection at the bridge site. John W. King, engineer and architect of Miami, offered the best bid for the job. The steel delivered to the bridge site at Hallandale would cost \$1,032 payable in cash on receipt of a certified bill of lading, and \$475 would pay King to erect the steel on the site when the pier construction was complete. Specifications required a forty-foot clearance swing bridge with gas pipe railing ready for the wood flooring and counterweights.⁴²

For the steel erection, King agreed to accept three lots on Southwest Eleventh Street in Miami. This was a complicated deal. King had to mortgage the lots to raise money for the steel. Seminole Realty gave him deeds to the lots in order to secure the loan but demanded King deed the lots back, these deeds to be held until the bridge was complete. This made two sets of deeds and a mortgage on the same property.⁴³

In 1915 the legislature created Broward County. They took part of southern Palm Beach County and part of northern Dade County making a new county named for Florida Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward. This change produced a new group of county officials whose approval was required for road and bridge building. Thomas Hamilton made trips to Fort Lauderdale, the new county seat, where his Cleveland experience in negotiations with elected officials was valuable.⁴⁴

A deal was struck with Hallandale and Broward County which was presented to members of both groups during a meeting at Hallandale on December 21, 1915. In this proposal, Seminole Realty offered to build the road and the bridge and donate three hundred fifty feet of ocean frontage with a bath house and pavilion to the county in return for the needed permits and \$7,000. The beach would revert to Seminole Realty unless used perpetually as a public park.⁴⁵

In Europe, World War I was heating up. Among other things it produced an enormous demand for steel which was being consumed faster than it could be produced. England, France and Germany were bidding up the price and the United States steel producers were following this inflation enthusiastically. Inflation made King in a great hurry to complete the deal before steel prices got entirely out of hand and he could not fill his contract.⁴⁶

In July 1915 a letter from the War Department stated that they had no objection to the bridge as planned but that the canal might be widened in the future, and they indicated that the span would have to be increased to fifty feet. Tom complained that no one in Washington or the War Department would admit responsibility for the canal. The letter did require additional piling and piers to protect the bridge. These had to be finished before the steel could be set up.⁴⁷

The year 1916 began with the news from the War Department that they really did have an interest in the Florida Coast Line Canal. Probably it looked good for protected water transport as the European War escalated. They expected to widen the canal and dredge it to the planned depth which had not been maintained. This would make a wider fifty-five-foot span necessary. They would not consider the forty-foot span and reported that the longer bridge needed more space and the piers already built would have to be removed.⁴⁸

These changes made John King's contract and steel order useless. It would have to be refigured anyhow because the steel company in Alabama had canceled King's order due to the price increases.⁴⁹

Tom went to Washington and on to Cleveland. His father needed help with a building project that had become impossible for him. The stop in Washington confirmed the War Department order.

Thomas stayed in Miami and Seminole Beach. He was pestered by John King to release the deeds being held to insure completion of the bridge contract.

Other things were worrying him. He thought that the beach venture was a bottomless hole gulping all the money and property that he had accumulated so painfully. It was his eighty-third year and time had begun to tell. He was forgetful and wrote petulant letters complaining of being cheated and demanded accounting of his funds and explanations that Tom was certain he had made clear often before. Thomas' letter dated only June 1916 is bitter. He writes: "You took advantage of me and collected all the money you could and left me in the lurch."⁵⁰

He and Tom had loaned DuVal money on the Everglades acreage but the 'glades land began to be more difficult to sell. A mortgage payment was due that Hugh could not meet. A complicated deal was set up by which DuVal gave up his interest in Seminole Beach for satisfaction of the mortgage on the 'glades land and three lots on Southwest Twelfth Street in Miami. The lots included a building, a former school house. DuVal had more than \$1,000 of expenses connected with Seminole Beach which were repaid by the Hamiltons as a part of the agreement.⁵¹

A Hamilton family feud erupted in the spring of 1916. Ida and Eva, daughters of Thomas Hamilton, were suspicious of his activities in Florida. To them he seemed to have disposed of a great deal of money with little to show for it. The death of their mother, Mary Hamilton, gave them an opportunity to seek an accounting. The estate had not been settled so they had grounds for an inquiry. They hired attorney John C. Gramling to defend their interests. Thomas engaged the law firm of Price and Eyles to protect him. After considerable expense and a court hearing, the suit was settled against the petitioners. This did not soothe the family bitterness which would be reawakened later.⁵²

The War Department's plans for the canal and bridge made a new agreement with the county necessary. King, The Converse Bridge and Steel Co., the pier builders (Furst-Clark Co.), Hallandale, Broward County and even the Seminole Beach lot buyers all had to be convinced that the bridge and road would be built under the new specifications.

The coordination of these various demands and claims was left in the hands of C.T. McCrimmon while Tom was in Ohio. McCrimmon Lumber Co. had supplied much of the material for the Miami projects and the dredge. McCrimmon was also involved in the Bay Biscayne Canning Co. that produced guava jelly and other tropical fruit preserves. He was a reasonable, capable man who had been saddled with a complicated problem.⁵³

The terms for the building of the piers, bridge and the road were agreed upon again. Broward County would build the road and bridge. When the work was complete, the county would pay \$8,000 for the surveys, work already done, steel, etc. Seminole Realty in turn agreed to hand over the steel and machinery, road and right-of-way and furnish the deed for the beach property they had promised when the road and bridge were completed.

The road and bridge were still further delayed because the county had to advertise for construction bids. The new bridge was to be longer and much stiffer than the original design so that the steel work and piers were heavier and stronger. The road and bridge were not completed until late in 1917.⁵⁴

Thomas was worried about replacing the beach house. The original house would be deeded to the county and he wanted his own place on the beach. Tom arranged for the building of a small bungalow of poured concrete just south of the county park, very close to the high tide line. Work was slow as it depended on the collection from rents and mortgages. The house had to wait until money came in which annoyed Thomas who did not realize the extent of his fiscal responsibilities. It was a good house with a wide front porch furnished with cast-offs from the Miami houses and equipped with a rain water collector and a kerosene stove.⁵⁵

The old man did not have much time to enjoy his new beach house. Letters from Miami throughout 1916 express concern about his health. McCrimmon reported that Thomas had difficulty walking and that his memory was becoming more unreliable.⁵⁶

Thomas wrote son Herbert (Tom's father) in October 1916 that he felt he did not have long to live, and that he would like Herbert to come to Miami. Herbert found the old man still mobile but deteriorating. Herbert tried to make him comfortable and provided for his needs and nursing. Thomas suffered a massive heart failure and died in Miami November 2, 1916.⁵⁷ Herbert accompanied the body to Cleveland and Thomas was buried in Lake View Cemetery.

This time there was a will, a valid will drawn by R.F. Burdine partner of the prestigious law firm Atkinson and Burdine. The will left all property to Herbert Hamilton, Thomas' oldest son, with provisions for his brain-damaged daughter, Mary Hamilton. Thomas B. Hamilton was appointed executer with Ed Romfh as alternate.⁵⁸

This will omitted Thomas' son Howard and daughters Ida and Eva who had initiated the law suit demanding an accounting of the estate of their mother Mary Hamilton. Since the will was drawn by a partner of a respected local judge there was no possibility of considering the old man less than competent so those left out had to attack in another manner. They sued in Cleveland, in 1917, for explanation of the handling of the property and the rent and mortgage payments there. This set off suits and counter suits, claims and counter claims that lasted into 1918.⁵⁹

The result was that Tom had to go to Cleveland. Herbert Hamilton was a skilled cabinet maker and an intelligent man, but law and lawyers worried him. Tom had to do all the work of engaging a law firm and helping organize the defense. The main legal tactic of both parties was delay and Tom was stuck in Cleveland until the suits were settled.

The previous summer, C.T. McCrimmon had been an able advocate for Seminole Beach and its problems. He expected to continue while Tom struggled with Cleveland lawyers and courts. Unfortunately, McCrimmon was taken ill while on a trip to New York and died very suddenly. Hugh DuVal was drafted to substitute and was again involved in the roads, canals and lot sales of Seminole Beach.⁶⁰

The law suit foundered on Thomas Hamilton's deviousness. For many years, his wife Mary was holder of much of his property. The confusion of names with his daughter, also Mary Hamilton, made it impossible for the petitioners to set upon any collections or property that had not been carefully handled. The suit was dismissed.

By the end of 1917, prospective purchasers of beach lots were being told that there were none available. All the lots of the platted sections had been sold. In some cases, where the payments were not completed, the lots were sold twice. The section that was subdivided and platted was only about one quarter of the total acreage. Beyond the area of streets and lots, about four blocks long, was another three quarters of a mile of palmettos and sandspurs that remained untouched.⁶¹

Because of the war and the depression that followed, Seminole Realty made no effort to follow up on the opening development. The beach stayed empty, a place for swimmers and picnickers willing to walk from the road, A1A, to the ocean. In spite of the boom of 1925, this section was not built upon until the 1950's.

The Boom did make a difference. In 1925, N.B.T. Roney, Miami businessman and hotel builder, and former governor and presidential candidate James M. Cox, bought the area north of Golden Beach, known as Seminole Beach, for \$3 million. The news of the sale aroused speculators and promoters who demanded to be let in on the deal. Roney resold the area by parcels in six and one half hours for \$7.6 million. It was sold again, within a week, for \$12 million.⁶² Seminole Beach did pay off; \$3 million in 1925 was real money. The value in today's dollars would be many times that.

Tom invested most of his money in ventures in further real estate projects. As a partner in Hamilton and Glenn he helped develop Crystal Bluff between Tigertail Road and South Bay Shore Drive. Later, associated with Hugh Anderson, he helped start Miami Shores. Both of these promotions were successes but the boom, bust, and bank failures soaked up capital and profits. Today Seminole Beach is only a pleasant memory.⁶³

NOTES

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34. Cash Book, Seminole Realty and Development Co., from April 2, 1913.
35. Photographs, "Dredge Klondike," 1913-1914, Harrington Collection.
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47. Letter, Thomas B. Hamilton to Thomas Hamilton, July 25, 1915.
48. Letter, C.T. McCrimmon to Thomas B. Hamilton, June 26, 1916.

49. Letter, Thomas B. Hamilton to Thomas Hamilton, June 26, 1916.
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