

## Selling the Highland Park Subdivision

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When the City of Miami was incorporated on July 28, 1896, its original borders on the west reached to today's NW Seventh Avenue, while its northern border in that area was today's NW Eleventh Street. Just beyond the northwestern limits of the nascent city was an unincorporated area studded with Dade County pines with some hammock land situated near the winding Wagner Creek, which flowed out of the nearby river in a northwesterly direction through today's massive hospital and civic center complex. The creek was named for William Wagner and his family who lived nearby on a homestead just north of today's Culmer Park Metrorail station. They were the first documented inhabitants, having arrived near the end of the 1850s, in an area that hosted Highland Park, one of the City of Miami's first suburbs, and a development lying diagonally northwest of its northwestern border. In 1913, the Highland Park subdivision, then just three years of age, was annexed to the City of Miami.<sup>1</sup>

Just north of the Miami River and approximately one and one-half miles northwest of downtown Miami, the southern part of Highland Park was originally called the Golf Links Addition. It was subdivided in 1910. The Golf Links Addition and the northerly-adjacent area both became part of Highland Park in 1911. The marketing of the Golf Links Addition and then Highland Park to the public employed sales techniques that introduced Miami to the rest of the country. The subdivision's marketing efforts were the work of one man, Albert James (A.J.) Bendle, who would go on to create numerous additional subdivisions in the Magic City.<sup>2</sup>

By 1910, the United States had recovered from the economic Panic of 1907, and investors had started purchasing vast amounts of land in Florida in the Everglades. Additionally, Miami was the destination for an increasing number of winter visitors, including some who would purchase land here, and call the city home, at least during the winter months. Several houses were being built in Miami, so that a “building boom” was declared in 1909 for the downtown area, south of the Miami River.<sup>3</sup>

One of these early investors and settlers was A. J. Bendle, who, along with other men from Colorado Springs, Colorado, invested large sums of money in Miami-area properties and even maintained residences in Miami. In 1909, Bendle became president of the Metropolis Publishing Co., owners of Miami’s first newspaper, the



Residence of B. B. Tatum, president of Miami’s first newspaper, *The Miami Daily Metropolis*. NE Corner of SE First Avenue and First Street. HASF 63-32-6.

*Miami Daily Metropolis*. Bendle was described by outgoing *Metropolis* President B. B. Tatum as a “retired capitalist;” Tatum assured readers that Bendle would not take an active part in the day-to-day operations of the newspaper, a job that would remain with Editor S. Bobo Dean. However, Bendle would use the newspaper to advance and publicize his real estate ventures, as B. B.

Tatum had done before him, when the latter, in 1904, began running large advertisements for the Tatum Brothers-owned Riverside section of Miami. To that end, soon after taking ownership of the *Metropolis*, Bendle opened a real estate office in downtown Miami at 234 Twelfth Street.<sup>4</sup>

Northwest of the city limits and near the Golf Links Addition, changes were also taking place at the Royal Palm Hotel Golf Links, whose origins can be traced to 1898, when Henry M. Flagler built a nine-hole golf course for patrons of his Royal Palm Hotel. The links stood near today’s civic center/hospital complex. In March 1909, it was announced that the golf links would be improved with the eventual

construction of a new clubhouse. This may have been a factor in Bendle's purchase in 1910 of thirty acres of land located due east of the Golf Links, near Wagner Creek. The land had belonged to Rose Wagner Richards and A. C. Richards, her husband, and had originally been part of William Wagner's homestead. The Wagner homestead had been willed to Rose Wagner Richards after William Wagner's death in 1899. Using current street names, it extended from NW Seventh Avenue west to NW Tenth Avenue, and from NW Eleventh Street (then called Allapattah Road) north to NW Thirteenth Street.<sup>5</sup>

Bendle quickly created the Golf Links Addition by subdividing that land into three hundred lots, a majority of which were irregularly-shaped and all of which were twenty-five feet wide. The width of lots contrasted with nearby City of Miami lots that were typically fifty feet wide. Bendle maintained the old street-naming scheme of the city with regard to north-south streets, using Avenue M, N, and P. And he explained the narrowness of the lots by suggesting that by doing so he was allowing more people to purchase land on which they could build homes.

Golf Links Addition was near Allapattah, an Indian term meaning "alligator," and an area rich in farmland. In fact, Allapattah truck farms were numerous just north and west of the Golf Links Addition subdivision. Since the lot prices offered in Golf Links Addition ranged from \$75 to \$200, less than half that of comparable nearby lots, and since credit terms were \$1 down and \$1 per month, it appeared that Bendle was giving people what they needed—affordable land to construct a home during a time when land was expensive. Further, taxes would not be applied to the purchase since the subdivision was then outside the city limits.

Advertising for Golf Links Addition first appeared in Bendle's *Miami Daily Metropolis* at the start of the 1910 tourist season. The first advertisement was a full-page spread with a map, where the terms of the sale were given. Readers were told that they could circle the lot or lots they were interested in, secure them with the down payment, and mail it to Bendle. This aggressive sales tactic had not been seen before in Miami.<sup>8</sup>

Two weeks after these initial ads, a daily advertising campaign began in the *Metropolis* that would last into the following month, and would occasionally be accompanied by a front-page article. In

**A CHANCE FOR EVERYBODY**  
**\$1 Down and \$1 a Week Buys a Lot in**  
**GOLF LINKS ADDITION**  
 To the City of Miami, Dade Co., Fla. Do interest to pay per Year.  
 A Plat of the GOLF LINKS ADDITION is Printed Below:

**These Lots will be Placed on the Market**  
 Saturday Morning, Jan. 29th, 1910 at the Business Office  
 of the City of Miami, Dade Co., Fla. at 10 o'clock A. M.  
 Interest to be paid \$1 per lot per week, with \$1 down  
 when the lots are sold. The lots are 25 feet wide and  
 125 feet long. The lots are numbered 1 to 100.  
 The lots are located in the City of Miami, Dade Co., Fla.  
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 The lots are located in the City of Miami, Dade Co., Fla.

**The Number Subdivided Out as This**  
**A. J. BENDLE,**  
 Owner, GOLF LINKS ADDITION,  
 Office, No. 514 Twelfth Street, Miami, Fla. Phone 1277

The first advertisement for Golf Links Addition. *Miami Metropolis*, Jan. 4, 1910.

after the start of the sale of Golf Links Addition, Bendle's investment company began advertising other, more expensive properties within the city limits and as far away as Fort Lauderdale. Bendle's growing interests in developments elsewhere may have been the reason for his jettisoning the Golf Links Addition, since the subdivision, as well as the contracts on sold parcels, was sold in December 1910 to the Highland Park Company.<sup>10</sup>

The Highland Park Company consisted of A. J. Winfield, president; Frederic H. Rand, vice president and treasurer; and Mamie E. Morgan, secretary. Winfield had worked in the area for many years and was the owner of a twenty-five-acre grove in the Little River section of the county, about seven miles north of the Miami River, having moved there from Virginia in 1896. Winfield also had on that site a grove and fruit and vegetable processing plant. In Miami, he had recently opened the first independent fruit and vegetable packing house at Cook's Dock on the Miami River. Frederic Rand was a twenty-six-year-old attorney who had been practicing law in Miami since 1905, and would become one of the city's most ambitious developers in subsequent decades.<sup>11</sup>

one article, Bendle stated that he was surprised by the number of inquiries he had received about Golf Links Addition, with a surprisingly large number of them coming from residents of other states. Regardless, the next *Metropolis* ad for Golf Links Addition declared: "Stop paying rent and buy a lot in the Golf Links Addition."<sup>9</sup>

By May 1910, Bendle had evidently changed his strategy for selling Golf Links Addition. In a series of *Metropolis* advertisements, the lots for sale had grown to 50 feet wide instead of 25 feet, and the terms of sale were now \$5 down and \$5 per month. And

The Highland Park Company also used the services of F. C. B. LeGro to develop the property. LeGro, who bore the nickname “Fresh Country Butter LeGro,” staged a feverish promotional campaign for the new subdivision, which brought a big crowd to the subdivision when the first lots went on sale. The occasion featured a hot air balloon rising above the area and reaching an estimated height of more than one thousand feet before a parachutist leaped out of it to a safe landing.<sup>12</sup>

The auctioneer on that occasion was E. E. “Doc” Dammers, who was a glib, gifted salesman. The colorful Dammers later sold millions of dollars of property for George Merrick’s Coral Gables and became that city’s first mayor in 1925. LeGro’s importance to Highland Park was underlined by the fact that a street in that community is named for him. Perhaps A.J. Bendle was also involved in developing his old neighborhood, since the Highland Park Company named another street for him.<sup>13</sup>

Before the Highland Park subdivision was platted, other properties were purchased and added to that of the Golf Links Addition, increasing the total size of the subdivision to eighty acres. Highland Park then consisted of all the land from what is now NW Seventh Avenue to NW Tenth Avenue (excepting a triangular lot that included Wagner Creek) between NW Eleventh Street and Seventeenth Street.<sup>14</sup>

When the “new” subdivision of Highland Park was announced to the public in a *Metropolis* article, no mention was made of Golf Links Addition. Rather Highland Park was emphasized as resting on high ground with enormous native and fruit trees probably planted by William Wagner on the properties, justifying in the minds of the owners the word “park” in Highland Park. Also, several building restrictions were prescribed, such that any house built would have to cost one thousand dollars, and no house could be less than twenty-five feet from the street. Further, the suggested financing was now \$10 down and payments of \$10 per month. Surely the image of Highland Park was changing as the new owners envisioned it as a more upscale subdivision.<sup>15</sup>

The initial advertisement in the *Metropolis* for Highland Park was in many ways similar to the first ad for Golf Links Addition, complete with a map displaying the available lots, as well as their price and the financing available. And again that initial campaign

was followed by small ads in one form or another, but this time the ads appeared almost continuously for the entire year of 1911.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of LeGro's (and perhaps Bendle's) influence, in the course of the next two years one could follow the development of Highland Park as a subdivision. First the streets were constructed and landscaping planted, the approach developers took to creating subdivisions designed to attract buyers of some means. Soon afterwards, construction on the first house began. By the end of February 1911, there were five houses in various stages of development, including residences under construction or being planned for subdivision owners T. A. Winfield and Frederic Rand. By July 1912, those houses had been completed, and ten others had been started. Later that month, it was announced that Highland Park had reached "city class" because the sewer and water lines had been completed.<sup>17</sup>

From the start of the sale of Highland Park lots, strong emphasis was placed on attracting homebuyers among the visitors to Miami. Free rides to the subdivision were provided by the developers in a new E.M.F. touring car. At the Halcyon Block, along downtown Miami's Twelfth Street (today's East Flagler Street), an area frequented by tourists, there was a display of fresh tropical fruit with their names attached to them by the Highland Park Co. LeGro also orchestrated attractions near Highland Park such as a balloon ascension to draw crowds to it. By the end of February 1912, an article appeared in the *Metropolis* listing the names of several visitors who had purchased lots in Highland Park.<sup>18</sup>

An early history of Highland Park, compiled in 1922, and published in the *Metropolis*, noted a common complaint among early residents: the smells from the city garbage dump and a crude incinerator that was situated directly west of the northern half of Highland Park. The dump existed at that location until 1917 when the city decided to build what would become Jackson Hospital on the site.<sup>19</sup>

By 1922, Highland Park possessed its own section in the *Metropolis*. It was also a vibrant area with a civic club and businesses operating along today's NW Seventh Avenue. A drug store opened there, and Highland Park Elementary School was built south of Allapattah Road on Seventh Avenue, on land in the Spring Garden subdivision. In a *Metropolis* article written in 1922, an early Highland Park resident noted that, initially, lots in the subdivision were sold primarily to



View of the park in Highland Park, looking south from NW Thirteenth Street. At the park, NW Thirteenth Street divides into north and south sections, joining again beyond the park. The shelter at the center of the park is gone, but the park itself and the house behind it (808 NW Thirteenth Street) still exist. HASF 1989-22-327.

out-of-state visitors, and that many of those buyers did not settle here. In time, the houses were sold to people who intended to live in them. One of the early residents was Isabelle Peacock, a member of one of the founding families of Coconut Grove. These residents were now petitioning the city to improve NW North River Drive, the quickest access road to Highland Park from downtown. The homeowners were originally promised that the road would be paved after incorporation in 1913.<sup>20</sup>

By the 1920s, Highland Park had settled in as a residential community with much to show for itself. In the era following World War II, it experienced several adverse developments that diminished it as a vibrant neighborhood. By 1956, the Golf Links were closed and re-platted as the civic center complex. New roads were built, and NW Fourteenth Street cut right through one block of Highland Park. Civic center buildings quickly filled the original plat of the Golf Links, and beginning in the early 1960s, they expanded eastward beyond it into Highland Park. Today, only a few buildings exist from the original Highland Park subdivision north of NW Fourteenth Street, with most of them east of NW Seventh Court. Another development that further diminished the size of Highland Park was the creation of the State Road 836 (the Dolphin Expressway) in the late 1960s. The expressway cut a swath through



Isabelle Peacock, a member of one of the founding families of Cocoonut Grove, sitting on the front porch of their house, with the Cormack house (1320 NW Eighth Court) in the background. HASF 1988-22-361.

the heart of the neighborhood and, in the process, prompted the demolition of many homes north of NW Thirteenth Street. Consequently, Winfield Street was eliminated, leaving only small eastern and southern sections of Highland Park undisturbed.

But traces of the original Highland Park remain. From the Culmer Park Metrorail station platform one can look north and still make out part of the original layout of Golf Links Addition, platted by Bendle in 1910, including houses on very narrow lots. And there is still a large tree canopy there, including descendants of the trees from the era of William Wagner. And if you drive along NW Ninth Avenue or NW Seventh Court, just north of NW Eleventh Street, you can still see several aging examples of early Highland Park houses waiting to be appreciated for what they once were—the homes of the first adventurous homebuyers who ventured beyond the limits of the City of Miami.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Map of the City of Miami and Environs Florida*, City of Miami Planning and Zoning Department, ca. 1955; Hoyt Frazure (as told to Nixon Smiley), "Miami's First Subdivision," *Memories of Old Miami*, (*Miami Herald*, Miami, no publication date), 4-6; *Dade County Book of Plats*, Volume B, 41.
- <sup>2</sup> *Dade County Book of Plats*, Volume 2, 10; *Dade County Book of Plats*, Volume 1, 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Adam G. Adams, "Some pre-boom developers of Dade County," *Tequesta* 17 (1957), 31-46. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 13 December 1909, 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Donald C. Gaby, "A sketch of the life of Richard Ashby. Miami, FL," unpublished manuscript in possession of the Charlton W. Tebeau Research Center, Historical Museum of Southern Florida, 1993. "A Parting Word," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 20 April 1909, 2; Advertisement for Riverside, Tatum Brothers, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 16 December 1904.
- <sup>5</sup> "Novel sale of building lots will begin Saturday morning in Miami," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 4 January 1910, 1; "Golf links and six tennis courts to be built this summer," *Miami Metropolis*, 24 March 1909, 1; *Dade County Book of Deeds*, Volume 52 (1910), 175; *Dade County Book of Wills*, Volume 1 (1901), 273.
- <sup>6</sup> "Novel sale of building lots will begin Saturday morning in Miami," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 4 January 1910, 1; *Dade County Book of Plats*, Volume B, 41; Volume 2, 10.
- <sup>7</sup> "Novel sale," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 4 January 1910, 1.
- <sup>8</sup> "Golf Links Addition," advertisement, *Miami Metropolis*, 4 January 1910, 8.
- <sup>9</sup> "Golf Links Addition being sold rapidly," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 24 January 1910, 1; "Stop paying rent and buy a lot in the Golf Links Addition," advertisement, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 24 January 1910, 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Advertisement for Golf Links Addition, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 21 April 1910, 8; Advertisement by A.J. Bendle, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 10 September 1910, 11.
- <sup>11</sup> Charter for the Formation of the Highland Park Company, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 13 December 1910, 8; A.S. Chesney, F.G. Hunter, H.S. Liles, et al, *Miami Diary* 1896, (Miami, self-published, n.d., c. 1996), 118; Ethan V. Blackman, *Miami and Dade County, Florida*.

- Its settlement, progress and achievement.* (Victor Rainbolt, Washington, D.C., 1921), 31-32; Advertisement, Winfield and Company, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 16 November 1910, 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Frazure, *Memories of Old Miami*, 4-6; "Highland Park new suburb to be opened by newly formed company," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 22 December 1910, 1.
- <sup>13</sup> Frazure, *Memories of Old Miami*, 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Plat Book of Plats, Volume 2, 10. Advertisement for Highland Park, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 6 January 1911, 6.
- <sup>15</sup> "Highland Park New Suburb," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 22 December 1910, 1; "Highland Park is Being Made into a suburb of Miami," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 7 January 1911, 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Advertisement for Highland Park, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 6 January 1911, 6; 19 January 1911, 7. "Notice-renters," advertisement, *Weekly Metropolis*, 14 April 1911, 9. Advertisement for Highland Park, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 3 July 1911, 3; Advertisement, Highland Park, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 21 September 1911, 5; Advertisement, "Get your deed to Highland Park lots. 20% discount with substantial cash payment," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 28 November 1911, 7; Advertisement for Highland Park, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 23 December 1911, 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Advertisement, Winfield, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 6 November 1910, 2; "Will Start first home in Highland Park on Monday," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 21 January 1911, 1; "Stone for homes in Highland Park is being hauled," *Miami Weekly Metropolis*, 24 February 1911, 1; "Winfield to have home in Highland Park right now," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 31 January 1911, 1; "In Highland Park Greatest activity seen these days," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 10 January 1912, 1; "Build 10 bungalows in Highland Park, to cost \$2500 each," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 5 July 1912, 1; "Highland Park has entered city class with improvement," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 19 July 1912, 1.
- <sup>18</sup> "Highland Park Co. to give a treat," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 20 January 1911, 1; "Window display of Highland Park Co. attracts notice," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 28 January 1911, 1; "Highland Park receives new settlers daily," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 2 February 1911, 1.
- <sup>19</sup> "Golf Links Addition was the first name for Highland Park," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 28 April 1922, 4; John G. DuPuis,

*History of Early Medicine. History of Early Public Schools. History of Early Agricultural Relations in Dade County.* (Miami, Privately Printed, 1954) 66.

- <sup>20</sup> “Highland Park people called to meetings,” *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 11 May 1922, 4; “Highland Park section,” *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 21 June 1922, 6; “Old section wants its due says a local resident,” *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 11 May 1922, 4; “North River Drive will Be Paved,” *Miami Daily Metropolis*, 20 June 1913, 1.