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“GLADIATOR” THE SAVAGE CROCODILE OF ARCH CREEK

At a meeting of the Board of Directors of the GNMHS last year Joe Leonard, a veritable fountain of little known and unusual historical data, mentioned the existence of the giant and ferocious crocodile that once inhabited the waters of Arch Creek in the area of the Natural Bridge. Later on (this past summer) Carole Helene, another Board Member, sent us a copy of an article about a crocodile published by Dr. John G. DuPuis in his book “History of Early Medicine, History of Early Public Schools and History of Early Agricultural Relations in Dade County.”

The story of the savage crocodile is a bit of an Indian legend and some truth that was spun into an interesting tale by Dr. DuPuis. Dr. DuPuis was a pioneer doctor who came to Dade County (Lemon City) in 1898.¹ Dr. DuPuis, in addition to being a doctor to the local white community, was also an accepted Medicine Man for the local Indians. His rapport with the Indians was as great as it was the white community. His book mentioned above is an interesting compilation of historical documentation of life shortly before and after the turn of the century.

The heritage of the “Crocodile of Arch Creek” is a bit of a legend told to the Doctor by “Alligator Joe” and a group of his Indian brothers. According to “Alligator Joe” the Crocodile was large and combative and kept his habitat (Arch Creek) free from marauding shark and swordfish. You would guess that from this came his name “Gladiator.”

They (the Indians) contend that the mother of the crocodile was a large female who was in the “Crocodile Hole” in Indian Creek on Miami Beach. In the dredging operation of Indian Creek she was injured, captured, and sold to F.W. Anderson a Zoologist. Mr. Anderson took her to his Lantana Zoo where she recovered from her wounds, became docile and was on exhibition for many years.

“Alligator Joe” said, that later on he captured ferocious a 17-foot crocodile, that he considered was the father of the “Crocodile of Arch Creek”. He said he brought him in to 2nd Avenue on the Little River and placed him in the bottom of an ocean going schooner. A schooner tied up at 2nd Ave on the Little River, how about that history buffs.

It was “Alligator Joe’s” opinion that a hurricane dislodged Gladiator (then a baby croc) from the Indian Creek crocodile hole and he was blown across Biscayne Bay into Arch Creek. A mother manatee adopted the young crocodile and protected him until he was large enough to fend for himself. After that time “Gladiator” kept Arch Creek free of all large invaders. “It was said, as he grew larger and stronger, he became a vicious and terrific fighter and if a shark or saw fish or animals invaded his home he executed them without fear or favor.” As ferocious as he was he never bothered the manatees that were in the creek.

With the Indians as neighbors Gladiator never had to worry about his life as they considered him a friendly occupant of the creek. I would suppose that they were not swimming in the Croc Hole and gave him his run of the creek when he wanted it. With the coming of the white settlers in the communities of Arch Creek, Miami Shores, Little River and Lemon City, the aesthetic qualities of the creek eventually drew picnic and partygoers. Dr. DuPuis also threw in “Political Rallies.” So in time Gladiator met his demise with a shot from a rifle. For a good many years (more than 50) his skin hung in the reception room of the White Belt Dairy. So ends the Tale of Gladiator, the Savage Crocodile of Arch Creek, according to “Alligator Joe” and his fellow Indians. The White Belt Dairy is another interesting part of the life and times of the DuPuis family. I remember the White Belt Dairy well. They were the only Dairy around that produced my favorite ice cream (a lemon custard flavor) and with the demise of the dairy so went my lemon ice cream.

By Blair Conner 1/8/01

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¹ Thelma Peters, Lemon City 2nd Printing 1980 (Banyan Books) p 198

THE PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Things are really hopping as we enter North Miami's 75th anniversary year. Originally founded as the Town of Miami Shores in 1926, we will officially mark the date in early February. On March 2nd, we are planning to hold a gala birthday banquet at William Jennings Bryan Elementary School. One of the older structures in the city, the grand courtyard will serve as the perfect backdrop for a gathering of residents old and new. A couple of selected speakers will reflect on the journey our city has traveled and the food and drink will be plentiful. The dinner is tentatively scheduled to start at 7:00 P.M. that evening. Watch for your invitation in the mail. Our thanks go to the City of North Miami for their leadership role in the event. Other events will also take place during the year. A fireworks show is being discussed, potentially being held at the North Miami Athletic Stadium. Imagine the sky lighting things up as people far and wide recognize our anniversary! We will be certain to inform you via special mailing if and when events like these are cemented.

"The GNMHS" is also discussing potential sites for a Historical Museum, even if it is a temporary one. We have outgrown our space in the basement at City Hall and would like to put on more accessible display the wonderful treasures we have found. The old CoCA Museum behind city hall would make a great location, but it is currently in the middle of a 5-year lease to the Miami-Dade County Fire Department for use as a permitting location. If we bide our time, and get a little lucky, perhaps that location will eventually become accessible to us. The old fire station located on NE 131 Street and 8 Avenue also has potential. However, it is in need of repair and may be too costly for us to tackle. Should you know of a good spot for us to set up shop, please let us know! This is going to be an exciting year for "The GNMHS!"

Celebrating our 75th Diamond Jubilee will allow us to let the community know what a great place North Miami is. I know that our membership will continue to grow as people see what great work we are doing.

OLD THAT'S NEW

Our collection grew a little more this quarter. "Flash" Greene brought in a couple of coffee mugs from the 70th Anniversary of the City of North Miami Beach. Lets all wish "Flash" a fast recovery from his bout in the hospital with a severe respiratory condition. Get well Flash and run down some more good memorabilia If you need a token for the toll basket on Broad Causeway we now have a couple from the middle fifties that came in from Dorothy Drybread. Lee Feldman, the North Miami City Manager, was bargaining on E-Bay and acquired a post card for us of the North Miami Motel formerly located at NE 123rd Street and West Dixie Highway. In 1933 the William Jennings Bryan Junior High and Elementary school produced a popular Operetta under the direction of Mrs. Mildred Mahood and now through the benevolence of Eileen De Nino we a have a copy of the original program and the names of the cast therein. We have up updated our file and yearbooks on the local P.B.A. and Fire Dept. with documents given to us by Elaine Shlom. Any photographs out there from down town North Miami over the years? We need them.

NEW MEMBERS THIS QUARTER

The New Year has brought us a few new members and we welcome them into the Greater North Miami History Society and hope they will be attending our meetings on the first Friday of the month. Those new members are: Robert Bourne, Robert Colon, Warren Ellstrom, Rick Ferrer, Jan Grove, Paul Gysan, Neal Keys, Donald Knecht, Penny Santilli, Marilee Thurman, and Ellen Underwood. Joyce Mumford is our new member on the Board of Directors as of the last meeting in January. Welcome aboard Joyce. We are now approaching a hundred members and will soon be on our way to two hundred. We hope to have our paper work completed for the 501c3 soon and when that is completed your donation dollars will be deductible. Have a friend who is a history buff? Sign him up with GNMHS.

Oh yes! If you have not paid your dues for the year please do so.

ARTIST ARRIVE AT PUEBLO FELIZ VIA THE S.S. KROONLAND

The SS Kroonland brought two hundred players and musicians to the Port of Miami in January of 1926. Their destination was Pueblo Feliz (Happy Town) in Miami Shores, Florida. Pueblo Feliz was a unique entertainment center that was being created by Arthur Voegtlin¹, at what is now NE 123 St and NE 18th Avenue. Voegtlin was an entrepreneur, producer and manager of spectacular Broadway shows and movie extravaganzas. His name is mentioned quite frequently along with D.W. Griffiths of Hollywood fame. Voegtlin also had been the manager of the famous and enormous Hippodrome Theater in New York that was famous for circus proportioned shows.² Pueblo Felix was circus-proportioned center with out a tent.

The Miami Herald describes Voegtlin's Pueblo Feliz: "It is with the same genius, the same flight of imagination, and along the same lines of magnitude and magnificence with which he has established as a permanent amusement feature in Miami, this Pueblo Feliz, place of happiness and its central feature the Teatro de Alegria, which very pleasantly translates into theater of mirth. – It stands imposingly and unique just as Arthur Voegtlin dreamed and planned and built it for Miami, the only playhouse of its kind in all America."

According to the Herald, the layout of the Happy Town had risen in the heart of Miami Shores and covered an area of about 350' X 300' feet. It had adobe walls and the ambience of an Old Spanish City. This figure 350' X 300' is not a reasonable figure for the entire area within the walls. I would suppose that this figure represents the measurements for the auditorium only. From the pictures that I have seen I think that the auditorium alone could equate the area for the 350' X 300' measure. From the description below you can see that the facilities provided Voegtlin would surely cover a lot more area than the 350' X 300'.

At Pueblo Feliz you entered or passed through rusty iron gates and walked down an Old Spanish street with rough flagstone paving, shadowy nooks, and little shops and Bazaars. In the center of all this was the Teatro Alegria built in Mission style with an auditorium that seated 2000 on comfortable cushioned benches. The production or show that Voegtlin was preparing for the "Teatro Alegria" was a Floridian fantasy entitled "Fountania" and would tell a story about Ponce de Leon with beautiful, sets, music, drama, dancing, and comedy.

As time went on, the name "Fountania" became synonymous with Pueblo Feliz. The Herald and other newspapers ran ads that informed the people that busses ran from the Hialeah Track or down town Miami to Fountania. The ads also said that dinner and dancing were part of the Fountania mystique so come on over after the races or come on up from the city and dine and dance to the music of Perez at the Cabaret de Luna. The dance floor was under the moon and a soft glow from the directed lighting was found in a setting of Palms and Pines.

The entertainers did not have to be concerned about housing as Voegtlin Productions had constructed dormitories and a diner for them. Free transportation was provided by the Voegtlin busses that ran into the city or as the ad said to Hialeah Track. The Town of Miami Shores was in the spotlight of the nation with a "Four Star" nightclub and theater. Remember this is 1926 and like the Fulford Speed Way the Pueblo Feliz did not survive the great hurricane of 1926.

An interesting sidelight to the entertainers coming to Pueblo Feliz was how they came. They came from New York City on the S.S. Kroonland, an old luxury liner belonging to the Panama Pacific Line out of San Francisco. It was a 17 day trip from New York to San Francisco or inversely so. The Kroonland made stops in Miami and Havana and then on to San Francisco via the Panama Canal. The entertainers coming from New York only were at sea a few days and never made the Port of Havana, the hot spot on the Lines advertisement of Ports of call. They disembarked in Miami for the big show and Pueblo Feliz.

The S.S. Kroonland had been commissioned just after the turn of century (1902) and became a part of the luxury fleet of the prestigious Red Star Line, sailing out of Antwerp and New York. She was owned by a Belgium company but was sailing under the American Flag and registry. In 1915 she became part of the famous Panama Pacific Line headquartered in San Francisco. The S.S. Kroonland was the first ship to use wireless in an emergency situation. A great many other ships had been using wireless for some time but a real emergency had

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¹ "Artist Arrive Today." Miami Herald January 3, 1926 p 4-E

² Laura Winkiel. "Circuses and Spectacles" Journal of Modern Literature Fall 1977 XX1 pp 7-8

CONT. PUEBLO FELIZ

not presented itself. On the 9th of December 1903 in heavy weather she damaged her tiller and was steering with her twin engines and notified the authorities of her predicament. ³

During World War I, she was converted to war duty as a troop ship and took on some heavy damage. In one fracas at sea she took a torpedo that did not explode. In maneuvering after the hit she rammed the sub that apparently was not aware of the Kroonland scrambling above her. She damaged her screws but escaped the sub. In the north Atlantic on a return trip she was being pursued by a sub at periscope depth. The gun crew got a lucky shot, with the 5" shell hitting the exposed periscope. Shortly after, a great gust of blue smoke was erupting from the sea and the erratic path of the sub could be tracked from the smoke and damaged periscope. Eventually the smoke turned into an oil slick and the sub disappeared.

In 1914, the Congress of the United States ordered 5 gold medals and 29 Bronze Medals be minted for the heroic action of the officers and crew of the Kroonland. This was for going to the relief of the burning steamer *Volturmo* in the North Atlantic and heroically rescuing 89 members of her crew.⁴

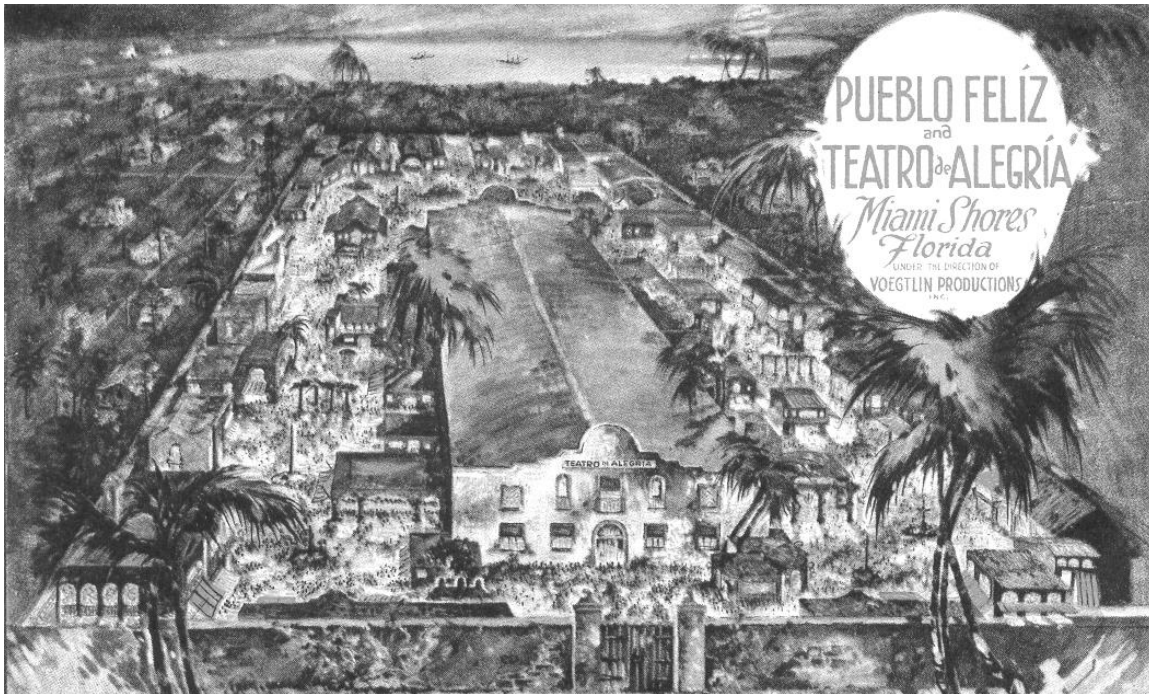
After the war her service varied between the San Francisco – New York run and other Atlantic adventures⁵ In 1926, she was back on the San Francisco – New York run and was at the service of Arthur Voegtlin and the *Pueblo Feliz* entertainers. The *Kroonland* continued on until 1928 when she was sent to Genoa and scrapped. There's not much local history in this sideline about the *Kroonland* except that she brought at least 200 entertainers to the area. Then who knows how many others over the years also came by sea and the *Kroonland*? I wonder how many of the 200 entertainers got sand in their shoes and stayed?

Blair Conner 12/10/2000

³ "Kroonland Disabled" New York Times December 9, 1903

⁴ "Volturmo Wreck" Congressional Gold Medals

⁵ N.R.P. Bonsor "North Atlantic Seaway" Vol. 2



COURTESY SETH AND MYRNA BRAMSON POST CARD COLLECTION

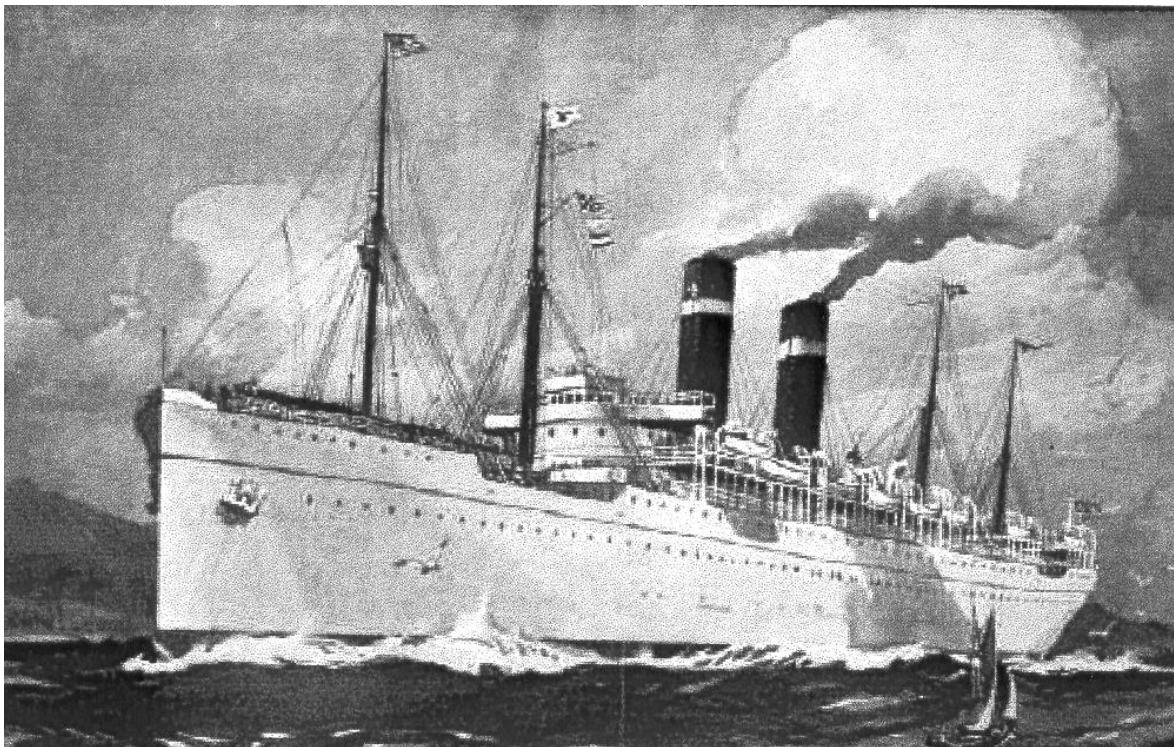
AN OVERVIEW OF PUEBLO FELIZ FROM A POST CARD PRODUCED BY
VOETGLIN PRODUCTIONS

PUEBLO FELIZ, MIAMI SHORES, MIAMI, FLA.



COURTESY SETH AND MYRNA BRAMSON POST CARD COLLECTION

**STREET SCENE IN THE PLAZA OF PUEBLO FELIZ
ON THE CALLE DE LAS ROSAS**



**THE S.S. KROONLAND FEBRUARY 1925
PANAMA PACIFIC LINE OFF THE CALIFORNIA COAST
580 FEET LONG, 60 FEET WIDE, 22,000 TONS
BUILT BY WILLIAM CAMP & SONS PHILADELPHIA, PA.**