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DOWN TOWN NORTH MIAMI WORLD WAR II -- BLAIR CONNER

North Miami has gone through about five ethnocentric changes if you include the Tequesta Indian period that ended just previous to the 1900's. After the Indians the next change was the pioneer farmers that migrated into the community from the north. North meant a myriad of places ranging from central Florida to New York and that includes some folks from the mid west. By the early thirties most of the farmers were being pushed out of town as land values were increasing.

Several developers in the twenties were buying out the farmers and were promoting the community nation wide. The folks from up north, like New Jersey and New York, as well as the folks from Lemon City and Little River, just to the south, wanted to move into this newly created bedroom community. The great national depression and the resulting short cash flow stunted the growth of the community. In the early thirties the bedroom community fell into a slow growth pattern. In the final days of this slow growth, World War II gave the area a shot of economic green that was being generated by the said war. So you have had the Indians, the farmers, the town in growth and depression, the war town and finally the "City of Progress."

We (The GNMHS) previously have allocated several pages in past issues, to the founding farmers, the Miami Shores Incorporation and the subsequent litagative years that followed. There has been some notice of the depression years with the illustrative graphics and copy from the old newspaper "The Bulletin". We have said little about the War Time North Miami. So this time, we decided to some looking back into the war years.

World War II is the era that I know most about. For economic reasons my Dad moved the family to North Miami in July of 1941 from Fort Pierce, Florida. The Miami area was not unfamiliar to our family. We have had family in the area since 1896. My grandfather had been a railroad engineer (the train driver) with the FEC Rail Way when Henry Flagler brought his railway to Miami. It was my first time to live permanently in the area.

In 1941, if you could have looked at an aerial photograph of the city, you would have seen a large area of vacant lots and blocks with intermittent residences. All of the homes and businesses were lying north of the Biscayne Park city line (NE 121st) Street and between Biscayne Canal on the west and the FEC Rail Way on the east. This was all sort of centered on the old city hall and there was almost nothing north of NE 131st Street.

You can also forget about the "West Side" as it was a vast grid of rock roads left over from the unfinished and defunct subdivisions of the depression era. The hot spot of the "West Side" was the "Bottle Cap Inn" a tavern of national note. The "Bottle Cap" as it was called, was well known as it had been nationally syndicated in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" Commentaries. The entire interior, the walls, the ceiling, the top of the bar, the chairs, everything, and all was covered with bottle caps. If you want to see photos try a computer search "Joe Wiser's Bottle Cap Inn."

Actually you can see an aerial photograph of North Miami as the County had flown aerial photographs in 1938 by Abrams Aerials from Lansing Michigan. There also were aerials made in 1945 by the USGS. If, you view them you can see that there was not a lot of difference between the 1938 and 1945 aerials. Most of North Miami was still a town of vacant lots. The war did not add homes, however, it did fill up all of the vacant homes. V. Earl Irons, an earlier developer in the 1920's had recorded plats that contained hundreds of lots around the town. He had an interesting arrangement of types of residences; he included duplexes and apartments along with single-family units, in the same neighborhood. The block I lived in was a large one that for the part was vacant but it did contain three apartment buildings (2 story - 4 unit) and five or six single-family homes. These homes were constructed in the V. Earl Iron's time frame and

were just short of being 20 years old when the war broke out. In the first few months after December 7th 1941, a lot of the homes were vacant. More than several of the vacant homes were in bad need of repair but as the military personnel moved in they were repaired quickly. What about the homes the military personnel moved into? See the photos on Page 3, opposite.

Some may think that the military operation in the Miami area was a transient operation and that is true. Most of the troops were "Here today and would be gone tomorrow." They came in for schooling that ranged from Steno training in an office building that had been legally taken over by the government, to the men who were doing carrier training at Master Field (Now the community college campus). The government had confiscated buildings all over the county for many purposes. If you had a vacant building in 1942 and there were many as recovery from the depression was not near the top, you were about to recover some losses. With all these schools, storage yards, and administrative operations, consider that the instructors and permanent administrators for the most part were not transient. Many of the married ones were not living in the barracks. They received a "Quarters Allowance" for their dependents and were living off the base. They rented homes near their base of operations.

Opa Locka Naval Air Station had an engine overhaul shop that repaired and rebuilt naval airplane engines from all over the country. They, the Navy had a large engine rebuilding operation and an engine test cell. This cell is a necessity for all large engine and overhaul facilities. Later this cell became the base for the Miami based Aerodex General Corporation. One of the men who worked in this Navy shop spent the entire war at Opa Locka and lived in North Miami. He was a neighbor. There were many more like him. I would believe that most of the Opa Locka Naval Base personnel (permanent) lived in the greater North Miami area during the war years. The demand for off the base housing for permanent personnel was so great because of local shortages, that the government built housing for the men with families. In the City of Opa Locka they built single-family homes for the Officers, and for the Enlisted there were two bedroom apartments constructed in barracks style. All of this housing still remains today. The enlisted housing has been given over to Miami-Dade County for housing the impoverished. The Officer's homes were subdivided into residential lots and were auctioned off to the highest bidder around 1970. The transients were billeted in hotels and barracks and marched off to school every day and then off to war. The instructors and the folks that ran the schools and the shops, however, were more or less permanent personnel and lived amongst us in North Miami.

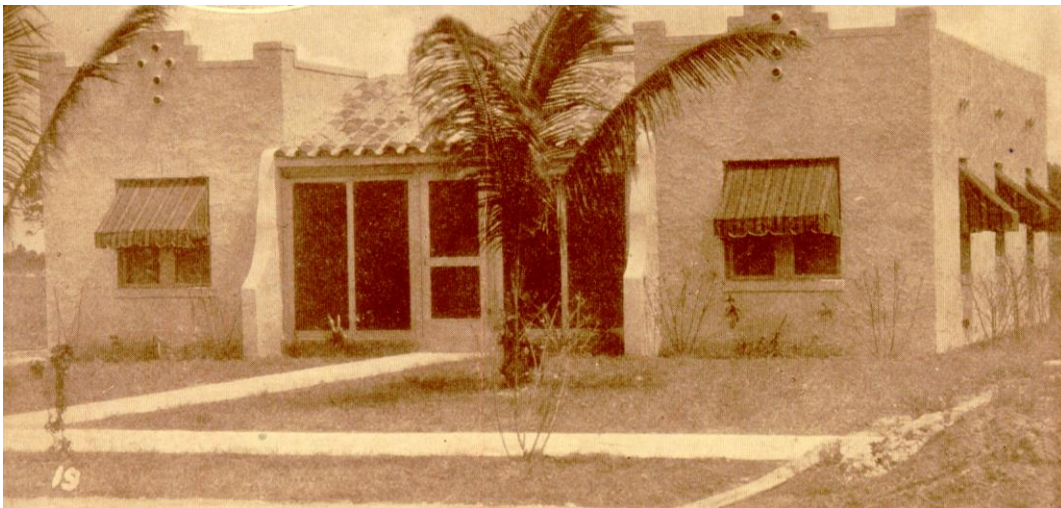
It was several months before the citizens felt the full impact of the war. I guess the first real problem was gasoline. The big Standard Oil Company station at Dixie and 125th Street was the busiest station because of its location at "Five Points." Big meant it had a hydraulic grease rack and both a men's and lady's room. For a gas station this was a hot spot as five of the busiest roads in north Dade County intersected here. A fellow named Pendry owned it at the beginning of the war but as gas became scarce so did he. Gas rationing was a definite impact on the station owners. After Pendry retired from the gas business a fellow named Dalrymple took over and his first move was to keep the station open later during Biscayne Dog Tracks Racing dates. That was a good move as every one from Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale came to the dog races, came down and across to the Kennel Club on the diagonal West Dixie Highway or the "Short Cut High Way." The old Pure Oil station on West Dixie at NE 131st closed before the end of war, probably not for the lack of gas or rationing problems, but it never seemed to be open. My uncle inferred that the fellow went fishing too much. He never defined fishing but somehow I felt it meant something other than real fishing. He may have had failing health.

The oldest station in town was the Good Gulf Gas Station and Auto Repair Shop just west of NE 7th Avenue on the south side of NE 125th Street. When I first moved into North Miami this station still had gas pumps that were manually operated. You had a large handle on the side of the pump. When you moved it with some effort back and forth the gas would be pumped up into a 10-gallon glass container located about 7 feet from the ground on top the pump. Release the valve in the hose handle and gravity did the rest as the gas flowed through the hose and into the tank.

Some towns have an old park bench where all the old veterans of the last war sit, talk and tell lies about the old days. North Miami did not have a park bench like this. The old guys, however, did sit around

**TYPICAL DWELLINGS IN NORTH MIAMI IN WORLD WAR II 141 –1945
WERE “IRON’S MANOR” DWELLINGS CONSTRUCTED 1924 – 1925**

At the beginning of World War II a great portion of the homes that were available for rent or lease in North Miami had been built by V. Earl Irons in 1924 and 1925. Iron’s Subdivisions were named “Iron’s Manor”. The homes he constructed have been referred to as Mediterranean by some Architects of today. They for the most part were stucco on wood frame. In that they made it through the monstrous 1926 hurricane with very little damage and many more hurricanes thereafter, you can say they are strong and safe. Many of Iron’s homes and apartments are still in use. Some need a lot of work and others have been restored and need to be identified as historical. In North Miami the area north of NE 125th Street even if not designated is truly a historical district. These Mediterranean type dwellings need to be rescued or a bulldozer will soon be at their doors. Also, in this district there are a few wood frame houses from the earlier farming period that have significant historical value. In reviewing the 1945 aerials it is interesting to note that the area south of NE 121st Street (Biscayne Park) had very few vacant lots and the area to the north of NE 121st Street was a bonanza of vacant lots. Biscayne Park, even though smaller, was more densely populated than its larger neighbor North Miami to the north. At the end of World War II these vacant lots were a bonanza for the local builders in the area.



This 1924 duplex still exists at 729 NE 126 Street and was part of the mix of single family and multi family dwellings. A four-unit apartment set at 771 NE 126th Street near the east end of the same block also remains in existence.



At NE 11th Avenue at NE 127th street looking north are single-family dwellings and an apartment house all under construction in 1924. A photo blow-up showed workman on the apartment roof and the roofing trash chute hanging on the front of the Corner house. Other photos show awnings up during construction?

in worn out old wicker chairs, in the back of the old “Good Gulf Gas station and tell their tall tales. The survival of many gas stations, during the war and gas rationing, depended on how much you were into auto repair. Many times even if you had the gas, the patrons did not have rationing stamps. Good Gulf had an active auto repair shop and was not totally dependant on the flow of gasoline. My uncle, who had an auto shop across the street, was never worried about the competition with gas pumps. He said, “that the more work they did was more work for him, straightening out the mess. The problem over there is with the old fellows directing a cohort who was a mechanic when Models T's were running around. All the young mechanics are off to war and what remains is the old guys and kids with limited knowledge. I do my own work and they have to rely on questionable hired help.” He also suggested that the gas that was produced over there was not all ways Good Gulf. Of course the guys at Good Gulf responded to him as he was one-man operation and you had to wait a week.

The quantity of gas that was allotted to a person was established by the government's assessment of your need. That was a joke, “your need.” See if you agree. The average everyday Joe or Jane citizen who was unemployed or worked in a store or an office and did not have a war related job got 3 gallons a week. In addition you were entitled to a decal for the windshield (right front) that displayed a large white A on a black background. If you had a war related job you got 5 gallons a week and a B decal. If you were rated as essential to the war effort i.e. general contractor, factory owner or politician you had an unlimited ration book and a C decal. Ration stamps were issued on a time frame or periodic basis. If you used all of your stamps before allotted period ended and you were out, you were in trouble. You could find a black market stamp dealer or find a friend with a surplus or make friends with a “ C” type person. You, however, never drove into a strange station with a “C” stamp and “A” sticker on the windshield.

The biggest and most expensive problem or shortage was automobile tires. Having a ration allotment for tires was not a guarantee that you would get any. There were not many to be had. If your tires were wearing down to the bottom of the groove, you could opt to have the tire re-grooved a little deeper. If you had been re-grooved or you were worn down to thread line then you ready for re-capping. Re-capping was not a suggested thing in the prewar times but during the war it was all that was left. It was common sight to motor down the Dixie highway and see remains of recaps on each side of the highway.

In order to buy a new tire you had to have more than a ration allotment, you had to have hard cash money. In addition to the allotment requirements for tires, the Office of Price Administration fixed a sales price cap. Most folks could afford the OPA cap as it was fixed by the government so they could. This was an effort to stop profiteering. There was no way to stop profiteering. The tires came in to the dealer in the middle of night or were delivered to a secreted warehouse. Of course they were for sale but no one except the dealer knew where they were so you did not know if they were available.

A less than honest dealer (most of them) knowing that you needed new tires may approach you and suggest that he had tires coming in. He would suggest that, if you got a front-end alignment, lubrication, tune-up, and some other repair work, which included an inflated charge to put the tires on, he thought he could find some tires for you at OPA prices. He would dare not sell one at a higher price, because that may get him a big fine or jail time. No one complained very loudly, as they knew that the next time they would not be included in the inner-circle of the hidden tire market. After the war, however, some of these less than honest tire dealers found it hard to stay in business.

It was a scary time on the highways with all the bald tires on cars running around. Hardly a day passed that you did hear he loud bang or pop from some poor soul blowing a tire on land crab covered Biscayne Boulevard. The land crabs by the hundreds ran across and up and down the Boulevard, like it was the bottom of their favorite ditch. As the crabs were smashed, their claws cut into the tire that flattened them out. There was no way to avoid the little monsters running and crawling out of the Sanchez Swamp (now Keystone Point). The moral here is: You never drove on the Boulevard with bad tires, day or night.

Can you imagine being out on the crab infested Biscayne Boulevard at night without headlights? In addition there were no streetlights. If you were north of NE 123rd Street you were in a tunnel of mangrove, although you were on concrete, you were on the west edge of a tidal swamp. Some time like the crabs the tide came up and over the boulevard during the spring tides. Many folks avoided this daring feat at night. What has night to do with driving on the Boulevard or anywhere?

The Civil Defense Agency required that the top half of everyone's headlights be painted/blacked out. This was supposed to reflect the light to the road way and keep the reflection from going in the sky. This was part of an anti-submarine strategy that was to keep the city profile dark and the ocean tankers and cargo ships from becoming silhouettes. If you were out at night and you had not conformed to the rule you could be ticketed or jailed by a Civil Defense Warden for the violation. The Civil Defense Wardens were also called Air Raid Wardens but they were more, as they were deputized to do other task in the law enforcement area.

My uncle, Tom Ritten, the auto repair shop owner mentioned above was also the City Commissioner over the Police And Fire Departments and thus inherited the job as Civil Defense Coordinator. He appointed Air Raid Wardens in the town's neighborhoods. He assigned a lot of task to others who were not full-fledged Air Raid Wardens. He gave me a job after all the new rules had been sent out to the North Miami residents. My job was to go out at night on my bike and list all of the folks between 125th Street and 131st Street and between 9th Avenue and 12th Avenue that had not installed Blackout Curtains. Shortly thereafter they got a warning notice in the mail. Next time they got a ticket and a lot of noise about being unpatriotic. For the younger set, Blackout Curtains were heavy-duty and prevented the flow of house light out of the windows. This action was another part of the anti-submarine strategy.

In North Miami there were more changes that were noticeable; one was the sheer number of people out on the street even if there was a war and gas shortage. The war related families moving in were making an impact on traffic. A lot of folks, mostly ladies were now out on bicycles. It was a common sight to see ladies bicycling down NE 125th Street with baskets on the front full up with small grocery orders or other packages from the shopping district that was centered at "Five Points".

Well, the service families filled up any excess homes apartments and added to the traffic problems as well. They were not a big a big impact but with them was the as a lot of additional military traffic activity. Incorporated now I believe for the first time the women dominated the traffic scene for the first time. Consider, that there were millions not thousands of males in the United States who had gone to war and their wives and other female contenders were out on the road filling in the employment vacancies and other gaps that had been created by their absence. North Miami was no different. For instance I remember Leroyd's grocery store. It was more than a Mom & Pop convenient store. It had a Meat Department and had a separate Produce Department. It was the beginning model for the super market to come. Mr. Leroyd prior to December 7th had an assistant grocer, a sweeper (cleaner and runner) as well as a butcher. Shortly after that date it was Mr. Leroyd, a lady helper, and a butcher. I think he had problem with butchers going off to war until he got an unemployed older Baptist Minister to fill in.

Down town North Miami had all the required amenities. In addition to Leroyds there was a beauty salon, two barbershops, two auto-repair shops, four gas stations, a couple of taverns, an appliance store, a sundry store, a pharmacy, a dry cleaners and a mom and pop convenience store. All around the "Five Points." The Beauty Salon was on the north side of NE 125th Street and was part of series of store fronts just to the west of NE 6th Avenue. The salon was not affected by the labor shortages, as it was already a woman operated business run by Frances Anne Hoecherl and backed up by a Beauty Operator another member of her family, Lieila Bennett. Leila's grandfather had been one of the first families in the preceding farming era. Harry Owens Barber Shop, in the same building with Leroyd, was the busy barbershop as it served as meeting place for the American Legion Post Committees. The Legion did not have a hall or their own building at that time, they held all regular meetings in the Town Hall. So if it was Legion Committee business, they met over in Harry's shop. It was sort of like the TV show Mayberry. My mother sent me to the other barbershop that was operated by Al Smick Sr. and was across the street from Harry and next door to the beauty salon. Mom believed I got a better haircut as Harry buzz cut all the kids to get them on their way so he could get back to Legion business. I said Al Smik Senior because we don't want to mix him up with Al Smik Jr. who later operated a successful paint store and was a popular city activist. Mr Smik was a great barber and eventually moved down to Miami Shores and the high rent district. According to my mother, "It was a shame he did that, now he charges a quarter for a hair cut." Smik still got my money even it was dime more. Larry's Sundry Store (Larry Goff) was just west of the vacant lot at NW corner of NE 6th Ave and NE 125th Street and in the same building with the Smik barbershop and the Beauty Salon. This little store had

been a busy little store for some time selling every thing from Yo Yos to ice cream. As far as the younger set was concerned it was the local center for comic books. The labor shortage did not really affect Larry as he had a one-man show going with an occasional helper. I am sure the increased population pumped up his sales but there was a lot of folks in line to get in. Larry, however, did become a celebrity; he died un-expectantly from typhus and put the community in chaos for a week or so.

The most attractive watering hole for those who needed a little boost in the evening or on the way home, was the White Castle Bar and Package Store. Area wise it was a large building but only the front one-third that was fronting on 125th Street was utilized. The building originally was a theater that had been destroyed in the 1926 hurricane. When it was rebuilt the rear two-thirds walls were left standing and the cement floor within was undisturbed. This made a great skating rink and it was used as one for quite some time but the skating had ended by the time the war came. It was a fellow named Stanley Parks, a fellow from North Dakota who came (I believe) in the early thirties and reconstructed the front one-third into bar and restaurant and used the rear as storage and the skating rink..

Being a teenager the shortage of booze was not a problem but it was a big one for those who needed more than a little nip. Alcohol was high on the list of shortages as well as sugar, shoes and meat. I found out the real value of booze when a friend and I were on a beachcombing adventure on Haulover Beach and found several cases of Scotch that had washed ashore from a ship sinking out in torpedo alley. The other watering hole was the Diamond Inn and it seemed too be livelier and louder and it had more patrons (sailors from Opa Locka). My dad referred it as a beer joint and the White Castle was a (hard liquor) lounge. After Larry from the Sundry Store passed on the new owner "Doc" Themlis opened a beer joint in the rear of the store separate from the soda fountain. I worked on the soda fountain for several weeks but was eventually terminated because the good doctor thought that I was overloading ice cream sodas for my friends. Actually he was not a real doctor but was the Spiritualist type. He had a large home in West Palm Beach where séances were held during winter season for socialites and celebrities from Palm Beach. In the off-season he chased his real estate investments around the area. My source: In 1946 my mother and father moved into the place as caretakers. It was large beautiful home and had five bedrooms, three baths, a huge kitchen a large formal dinning room and a small auditorium type room for séances. Doc Themlis sold out to Ed Taigman who later on became, the Mayor of North Miami

Edlin's Market the Mom And Pop store was down in the west end of the "Five-Point" center between the Post Office and Adler's Pharmacy in the Potts Building. The Potts building like the Mediterranean homes were from the "Iron's Manor" period. And been used as the city and community action since completion in 1925 or 26. It was a two 2-story building with a meeting area on the second floor and four-business units on the ground floor. The ground units are still there today what's upstairs is unknown at this time. The Shellhorse family who go back to the farmer's time had an appliance after the war.. Over the years, however, they had a grocery store (1926-27) then moved to a new grocery store in Little River and then back to the grocery store in North Miami. By December 7th 1941 they were in the Appliance business and from there they went to Radios and later the TV area.

The original community that began down on the east end adjacent to the Florida East Coast Railway tracks in the early 1900's except; for the Arch Creek (later W.J.Bryan) School, The First Community Church (Congregational) and the Knight's of Pythias Hall by 1941 had moved to west-end of NE 125th Street. I say west-end because NE 125th Street ended at Biscayne Canal. Gribble's old store was abandoned and the railroad platform and building had burned down. The major traffic artery, Biscayne Boulevard, had no streetlights and was full of land crabs as well it had no business activity. One bright light at the east end, was the planning and the beginning construction of "The Miami Air Country Club." It would soon arise out of the Sanchez Swamp, eradicate the land crab problem (somewhat) and later give birth to Keystone Point. Many of the service families would stay in town and thousands of the transients would come back to the land of sunshine. V. Earl Irons put down the real foundation for this city with the construction of his homes and his most important water plant in 1927 and this gave the community a jump-start for the post-war building boom that began in early 1947. The city is still growing on the "Iron's Manor" base and geometry. The City of Progress was on the horizon at the end of World War II.

THE PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

The year 2001 came to a fitting close with the Greater North Miami Historical Society finally obtaining a long-sought tax-exempt 501©3 status from the Internal Revenue Service. After having worked so hard on several events related to North Miami's 75th Anniversary, it was a sweet feeling to have the IRS approve our application as the year came to an end.

The tax-exempt status allows the GNMHS to pursue grants that will assist in our collection of historical items. It is likely that somewhere there are funds available to help us with projects both large and small. Also, we can accept donations of a greater value now that contributors can write-off their gifts. Eventually, the status might allow us to obtain funding to open the museum we've been screaming about.

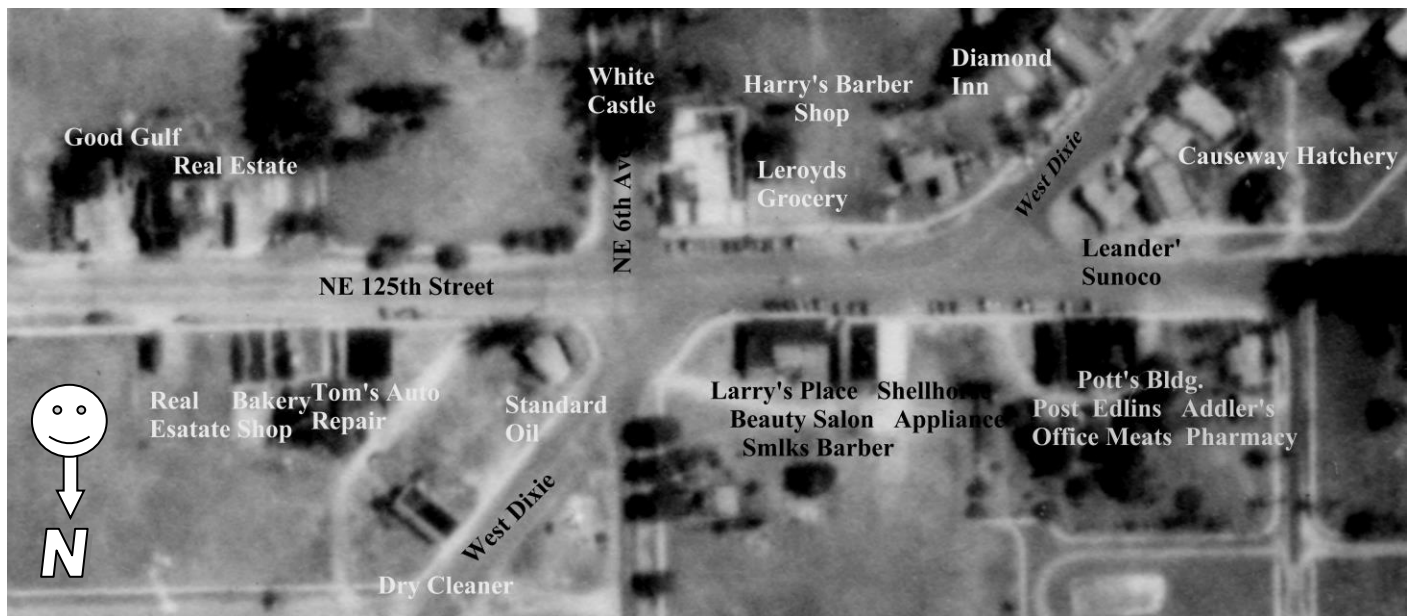
Special thanks are owed to Joel Galpern, CPA and Chamber member, who finally got our application through the red tape in Washington. We're also appreciative to Bennie Trinidad of NANAY and to Penny Valentine for their roles in getting the application completed. We're now off and running to a great start for 2002!

MEMBERSHIP

Overall we gained a few new members this year but there are a few who for some reason did not renew. We are sure that most of those folks forgot, mislaid or lost the last notice. We are pretty sure they will continue to support the GNMHS by just slipping a check in an envelope with their return address. Send it in now while you are thinking about it. Teem Bucks is not a lot.

Welcome to the new members, Pierre Andre the Executive Vice President of the Greater North Miami Chamber of Commerce and Tony Prada of Signature Printing and a member of the Board of Directors of the Chamber. Also welcome to Sandi D. Kumm who came out to our last to say hello in person.

WHERE IT WAS - IN DOWN TOWN NORTH MIAMI - 1941 - 1945



The Greater North Miami Historical Society



The Greater North Miami Historical Society is an organization established to preserve historical artifact, written, and oral history, ephemera, and memorabilia relating to the current City of North Miami and the areas surrounding the city.

The Society came into being when a group of interested citizens decided that the history around the Arch Creek Basin was as important to county history as is the Miami River Basin. Collections or data gathering, along with archiving are its basic tasks. The Society needs the papers, the photos, the stories, and any other documentation that is important to the historical archives of the community. The Society needs the help of the community and the friends of the community. So if you have a document, a photo or a story that you can donate or let us copy please contact us at the below address

13100 WEST DIXIE HWY
NORTH MIAMI, FL 33161
(305) 891-7811 FAX (305) 893-8522

**GREATER NORTH MIAMI HISTORICAL SOCIETY
13100 WEST DIXIE HIGHWAY
NORTH MIAMI, FLORIDA 33161**

**APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP
GREATER NORTH MIAMI HISTORICAL SOCIETY
13100 WEST DIXIE HIGHWAY NORTH MIAMI, FL. 33161**

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MEMBERSHIP DUES \$10.00 ANNUAL