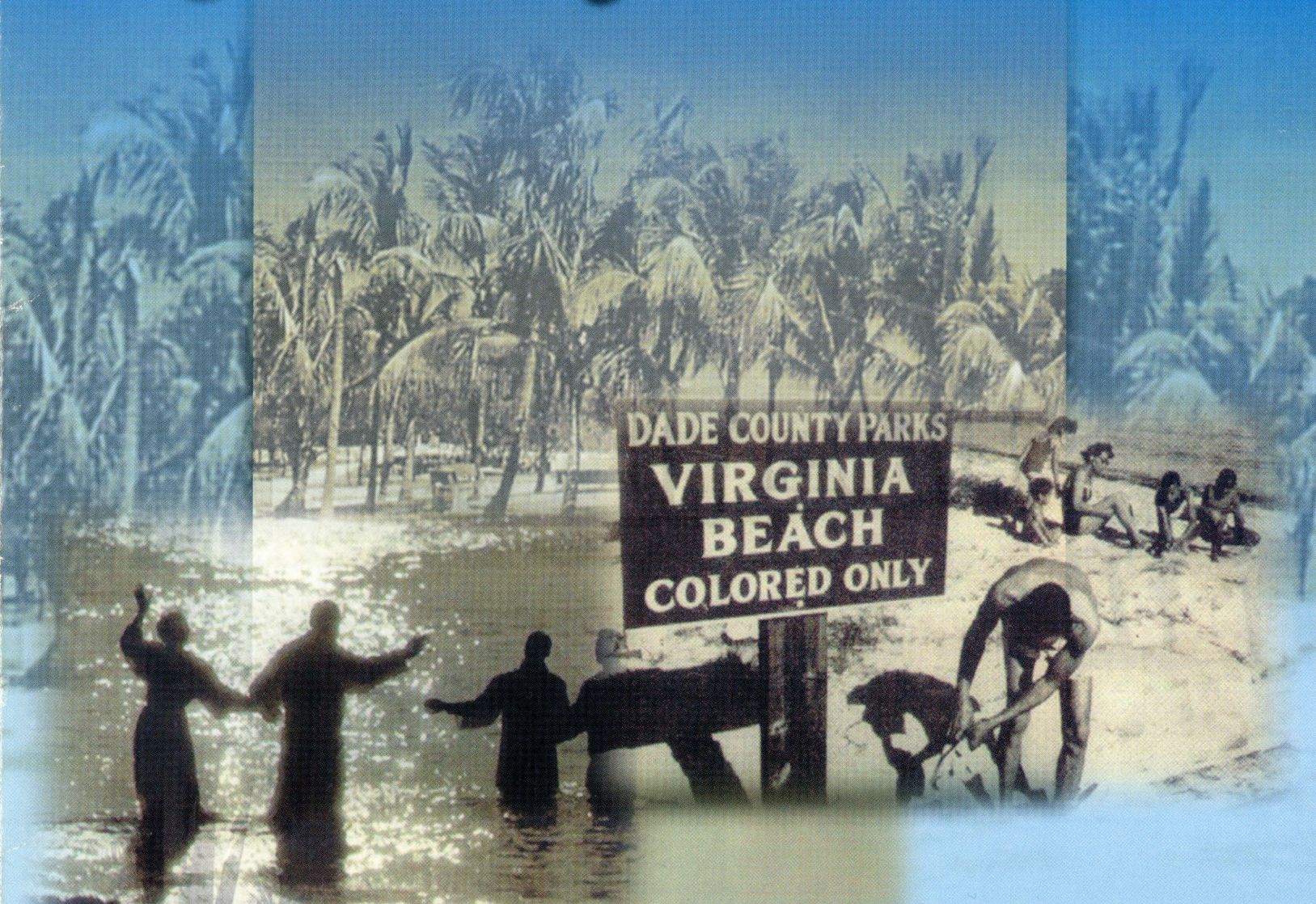


Virginia Key Beach Park

Miami, Florida



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Virginia Key Beach Park

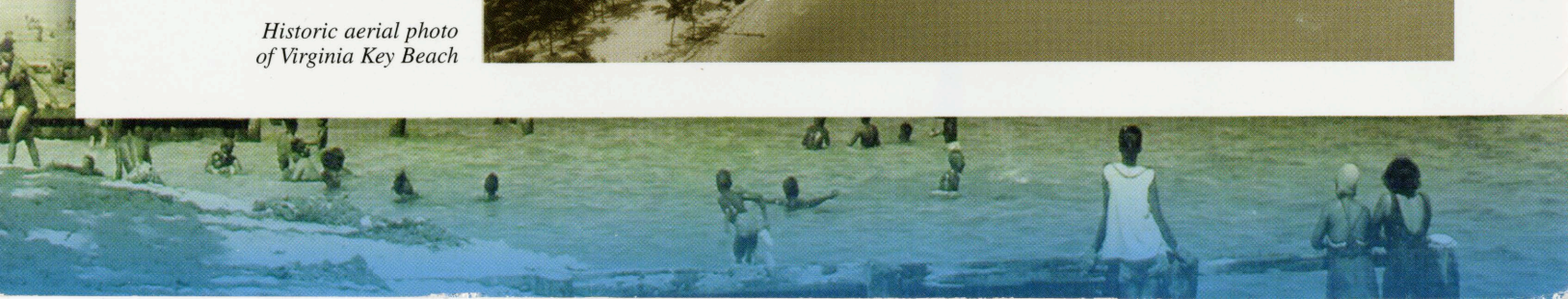
Segregation was a reality that systematically excluded all Blacks from its miles of beaches, one of Dade County's most famous attractions. As the City grew by 1920, many of these beaches were developed into parks and public swimming facilities exclusively for the White population.

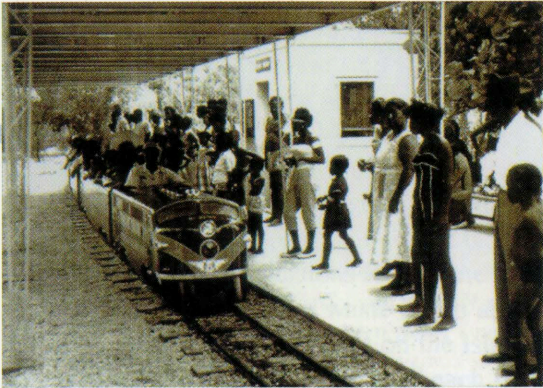
D.A. Dorsey, an African American millionaire, purchased what is now known as Fisher Island so that Blacks could have a beach of their own. Due to increasing property taxes, Mr. Dorsey was obligated to sell the property. As a result, the Black community was left without a beach to enjoy, except for the designated beach locations they would travel to in Fort Lauderdale and Pompano Beach.

There were unofficial areas that were exclusive to the Black population. One such place was a very special beach located on Virginia Key, known as "Bears Cut" This property became an official recreation site for "Colored Only" as a direct response to a bold protest led by the late Judge Thomas. Under Thomas' leadership, Black men defiantly entered the water with the intention of being arrested at Baker's Haulover in North Dade County, a beach exclusively for Whites. To avoid costly embarrassment, County authorities decided against legal action of the protesters. Instead, they acquiesced in very short order to the protesters' demands for an officially designated swimming area for Blacks. Though only accessible by boat from a downtown dock on the Miami River, "Virginia Beach, a Dade County Park for the exclusive use of Negroes," was opened on August 1, 1945.



*Historic aerial photo
of Virginia Key Beach*





The Mini-Train ride was one of the Park's most famous and popular features

Virginia Key Beach quickly became a cherished getaway, social gathering place, and sacred site for religious services. The beach included amenities, such as large shaded picnic areas with barbecue pits, cottages, a boat ramp and the famous Mini-Train and Carousel ride. With its lush windswept palms and inviting beach, Virginia Key lured thousands to this tropical paradise. The scenic beauty, the openness and the fresh air offered visitors an experience different from everyday life in Miami. Though the park remained segregated through the 1950s, it was not a factor for many new Caribbean, South American, and Cuban immigrants who preferred Virginia Key Beach to other Miami beaches.

In 1982, the City closed Virginia Key Beach Park, citing the high cost of maintenance and operations. The Park has remained closed ever since, except on a daily rental basis and as a training facility for law enforcement agencies and large entertainment events. In June 1999, a group of citizens called the Virginia Key Beach Park Civil Rights Task Force was established in response to plans of private development of the beach park. Later that year, the Miami City Commission established the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust to oversee the development of the historic park property. The Trust has been working diligently to restore and preserve this historical jewel. At the end of the restoration process, Virginia Key Beach will provide the community an estate for family events and corporate meetings, as well as a pristine beachfront for swimming and water activities. The new Virginia Key Beach Park is scheduled to re-open with all of the amenities of the past as well as some new venues as suggested by the community.

IT'S ALL COMING BACK AGAIN



The Carousel, 1956




Picnics on Virginia Key Beach

IN AUGUST 2002, VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK WAS PLACED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES.



Virginia Key Beach Park Trust

MISSION STATEMENT

ur mission is to create a vision for the development and use of Virginia Key Beach Park, promoting and maintaining absolute public ownership and access, fostering its perpetuation as a passive open green-space that includes nature trails, recreational facilities and museum structures appropriate and compatible with the nature of Virginia Key; preserving it as a valuable resource to be enjoyed for posterity, and to honor the rich historical legacy of the social and civil rights history of South Florida.

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