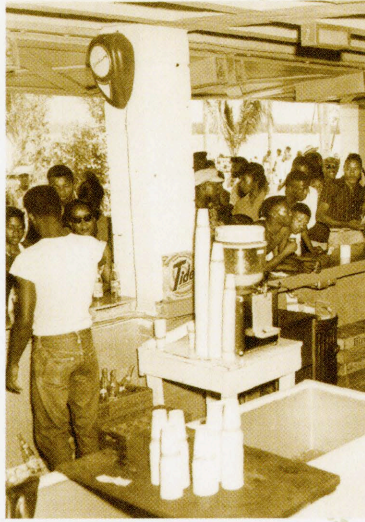




1950's era brochure for Virginia Key Beach notes “a well-shaded refreshment pavilion offers cold drinks and wholesome, appetizing snacks at reasonable prices. Outdoor grills, burning charcoal which may be brought from home or purchased at park stands, are available for use on a first come basis without charge. Besides the individual barbecue grills, a large 20X6 foot barbecue pit is available for large groups. Shelters for large organized picnics may be reserved, picnic tables spread under the coconut palms assure ample eating space—there’s a table waiting for you at Virginia Key Beach.”



Nowadays, visitors queue at the historically restored Concession Stand/Snack Bar where typical seaside taste treats from the past are still served. Sample an old-fashioned corn dog on a stick, a bag of kettle corn glistening with butter, a ruby-red candied apple or a sticky mountain of cotton candy. Then, wash it all down with a refreshing Nehi grape or Royal Crown brand cola, a perfect accompaniment to a simmering barbecue cooking on one of our conveniently located grills.

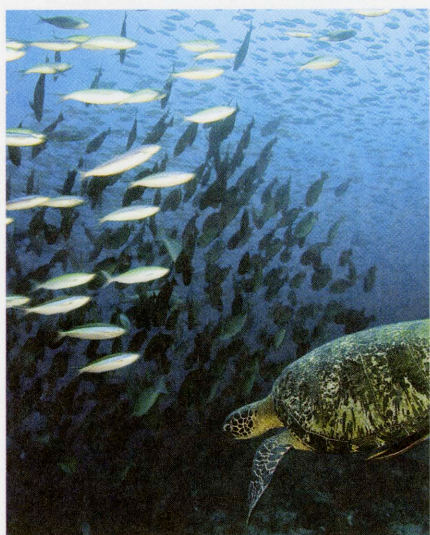
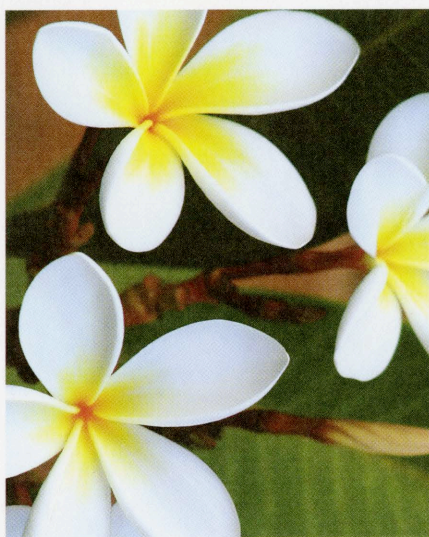
We invite you to hearken back to the days when Virginia Key Beach meant dawn to dusk family gatherings filled with plenty of talk, play and foods to be shared. Spread out a big blanket under a basket brimming with seaside picnic fare..., succulent fried chicken, sides of collard greens, cheesy macaroni, and sweet potato pie. And don't leave out those Bahamian dishes handed down from the past like pigeon peas with rice and 'Johnny Cakes' drizzled with syrup.

It's no wonder why everything tastes better in the great outdoors of Virginia Key Beach Park.

The Virginia Key Beach Park Trust is committed to the preservation of the park's natural resources, sustainable eco-friendly design and on-going maintenance practices. Since significant development is not visible from within the park, our separate barrier island retains an exceptional open setting within the urban context of Miami. Together, the coastal plant and animal communities along the Virginia Key shore represent an important vestige of the natural heritage of Biscayne Bay.

FLORA

The unique plant varieties that verge Virginia Key's Atlantic coastline include one of the oldest surviving Coastal Band Mangrove communities in Miami-Dade County. A giant Red Mangrove ((*Rhizophora mangle*)) can be seen near the beach on the eastern end of Virginia Key Beach Park and gives testament to the age of this part of the original plant life on the island. In addition to mangroves, the Atlantic coast of Virginia Key is fringed with fresh water wetlands, tropical marine hammock, coastal strand and abundant sea grass.



FAUNA

The many flora types provide valuable habitat areas for wildlife, including several threatened and endangered species. Federally protected animals present at Historic Virginia Key include the Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) and the Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*), which nests on the island, the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), which is frequently observed in the off-shore waters and the American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), which has been observed in our lake. The island also provides suitable habitat

for the Gopher Tortoise and a variety of shore and sea bird species, including the Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Piping Plover and many other migratory song birds.

66 **F**

ew people had automobiles but in the black community there was a main thoroughfare, Northwest 3rd Avenue. Youngsters, especially that did not have automobiles, would get their gear and stand at the side of the road. These fellows driving those large trucks would stop and pick them up. And everybody would get to the beach. That was the attitude of the community.”—*Dr. Edward Braynon*

Historic Virginia Key Beach Park was more than just a bathing beach to black communities. The island was, and still remains, a magical spot for fun, excitement, dancing, entertainment, and self-expression—a centerpiece for social gatherings both large and small—an oasis, available to everyone, apart from a developing urban core that provides scenic areas for reflection, rest and relaxation along the shimmering seaside.

Popular belief holds that there was a ‘Negro Dancing Pavilion’ on the island as early as 1918. The restored circular concrete slab located within the Historic Zone, amidst a circle of shady palms and park benches, still holds testament to the spell of love and evening romance under starry skies.



Also, surviving is a 70-foot wood ‘tunnel of love’ surrounded by timber block, originally constructed in 1956, for the enchanting Miniature Train Ride coined the ‘Biscayne Virginia/Rickenbacker Central’. Recently, re-commissioned, the mini-railroad now transports a new generation of visitors on short tours through scenic nature trails and wetlands.

The most fondly recognized feature at the beach park is the octagonal Carousel Building. Housing a vintage ‘Allan Herschell’ merry-go-round with

brightly painted wooden horses against a dramatic backdrop of the sea; conjuring up ageless flights of fantasy. For even more youthful exploration, children can enjoy the Boundless Playground adjacent to the Carousel Building.

The realness of family connections and fellowship are celebrated amongst the three Picnic Pavilions at Historic Virginia Key Beach Park. Countless picnics, church outings, sunrise services, ancestral ceremonies, baptisms, family reunions and organized corporate retreats still utilize Historic Virginia Key Beach Park as their official meeting place and, in so doing, pay reverence to the historic significance of this special site.



Artist's rendering

The Virginia Key Beach Park Trust staff is readily coordinating the work of scholars, scientists, educators, architects, designers and contractors for a future museum/cultural center at the park's entryway.

When the museum complex opens to the public, the design features and exhibitions will celebrate, illuminate and honor Miami's African-American culture, social history and the unique part played by our barrier island's location.

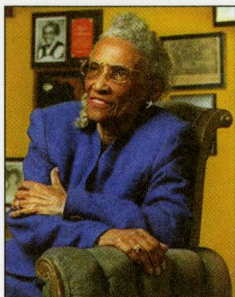
The museum is projected to be a modern interpretive structure that integrates with the park's old and newly built environments as well as the physical features of the site. Eventually, the open spaces around the new facility will incorporate varied groupings of sculpture, artistic evocations to lost historical structures and an ecological sciences teaching pavilion.

The project's unifying concept will define the land as sanctified, spiritual, reverent and alive with the spirit of ancestors; the first people and those who followed in their footsteps, the interaction of the island and the inhabitants who frequented it. The story will begin planted in the time, place and people who required their public space, the civil rights actions that gave birth to Historic Virginia Key Beach Park and end with the civic collaboration which ultimately led to its restoration as a National Register of Historic Places site.

Present day multicultural America will be examined in an environmental context that thematically unifies the livelihoods of immigrant populations, their creative expressions on the island and their particular recreation uses of the sea. Educational programs and interactive exhibits promise to make the museum a fun learning experience for all ages who visit the beach park.

M. ATHALIE RANGE

FOUNDING CHAIR



“Virginia Key Beach was special to us because of the laws of segregation. It was ours. It was the only place that welcomed us and the only place where we could be free, in a way. It was not a very good feeling to have the coast of Miami as a beach with all this beautiful water around you and you couldn’t enjoy it during the days of segregation when blacks were not welcome. Signs on beaches said No Jews, No Dogs, and No Coloreds.

I remember the popcorn, corndogs and Nehi sodas. The hurdy-gurdy music of the carousel, the whistle of the beach’s mini-train. I remember how going to the beach was an all-day affair; families would pack blankets and enough food to feed a small army and while away hours at the beach dancing, swimming and fellowshiping.

There were several developers and entrepreneurs who wanted to build on the beach. When we found that out, through public meetings, we had to plead with them not to let this happen. That is when we made the push to revitalize the beach as it was in those days. People don’t know the history of South Florida. Nobody talks about the segregated beaches and golf courses.

Those were our lunch counters (at the concession stand). Those are the things that need to be remembered. I hope my 10 grandchildren and 10 great-grand children will be able to enjoy the work we’re trying to accomplish today. There is a legacy here.”

— *M. Athalie Range, Founding Chair*



“I have happy memories of the beach during the 1960’s. There was always a party going on. Whether it was the Cubans or another group that started it, we always had a good time together.

Restoring Virginia Key Beach is as much about giving people a quiet place to connect with nature as it is about preserving a legacy. We have become a concrete jungle. Therefore, Virginia Key Beach is vital for the survival of green space in the city.”

— *Miguel Germain, Trustee*



“Those were the best times of my life. We had the mini-train, the carousel and dance pavilion. It never faded me that there was another beach nearby that we couldn’t go to.

The jewel of our new multicultural beach will be the museum, a place where we will be able to share our memories, while just outside the beach, new generations begin to form their own, extending the legacy as if it had never been broken.”

— *Maud Newbold, Trustee*



“Historic preservation is in my blood. My parents gave me a sense of identity and taught me to respect my heritage.”

I was a teenager when my late father, Bishop Henry Curtis, performed Sunday services and baptisms at the beach at sunrise. Later in the day, families gathered to talk and share food. We fixed many traditional Bahamian dishes.

What I remember most about Virginia Key Beach was “F-U-N’.”

— *Enid Pinkney, Trustee*



“My husband, lawyer Lawson E. Thomas, myself and other black civic leaders staged a wade-in at the whites’ only Haulover Beach to the north. He sent people to get in the water with money in case they got arrested and sailors even joined in. The sheriff arrived and told them they knew they weren’t supposed to be there.

My husband then met with County Commissioner Charles Crandon who persuaded the City of Miami Commission to designate Virginia Key Beach—a chunk of his property off Key Biscayne— as ‘Colored Only’.

I hope my late husband’s legacy lives on because it’s a story to be told. People need to know.”

— *Eugenia Thomas, Trustee*