Miami Beach is a new city approximately halfway between two of the oldest settlements in the Americas, Havana, Cuba, and St. Augustine, Florida. Havana dates from the very early part of the 16th century, St. Augustine was founded not many years later, in 1565.

Miami Beach began its official life in 1915 by the unanimous vote of its 31 freeholders. The site, however, was chosen for a coconut plantation in *1870* and when a swift drop in the price of copra thwarted the economic feasibility of this undertaking, much of the land was planted to avocados, mangoes and winter vegetables.

As a matter of fact, the first bridge and causeway between Miami Beach and the mainland three miles across Biscayne bay, was conceived by John S. Collins as a means of transporting the produce of his plantation to Miami. Collins was primarily an agriculturist, and while it was true that many of the people of the small town of Miami sailed to Miami Beach for oceanside picnics and swimming parties in the early 1900s, Collins was much more interested in getting his fruit and vegetables to market than in transforming his groves into a resort.

Two of the first to see the possibility of building a city amid the coconut palms, vegetable fields and mangrove swamps of Miami Beach were J. N. and J. E. Lummus, who had moved to Miami from northern Florida. The Lummus brothers purchased the coconut plantation in 1912 with the sole idea of selling lots to, and building homes for, winter visitors.

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The Lummus brothers joined with Collins in trying to push the causeway across the bay, at the same time laying out a few streets and staking business and residential lots. Their problems were many.

It must be remembered that in 1912 a journey to Florida was no trifling undertaking, even on the railroad then being pushed onward across the keys to Key West and a ferry to Cuba. Highway travel was distinctly adventurous, with both roads and automobiles in their primitive stage of development. Not many people came to Miami to spend the winter. So financial backing/required wealthy men with vision of an order that was extremely scarce.

for a resort city

Such a man arrived however, quite by chance, in 1914. Carl G. Fisher of Indianapolis, got in the automobile game when it was young, and made millions with his Presto-O-Lite Co., which manufactured new-fangled carbide automobile headlamps.

Fisher bought a yacht, delivered to him at Cairo, Ill., and with several friends started on a voyage down the Mississippi, planning to cruise around the southern tip of Florida and complete the journey at Jacksonville. A series of minor mishaps with both machinery and navigation caused Fisher to leave the yacht at Mobile, where he planned to ship it by rail to the north Florida port. A low bridge that would not permit passage of the boat forced abandonment of this plan, so Fisher and his friends went on to Jacksonville while John H. Levi, a marine engineer, agreed to complete the cruise as planned originally.

When Levi finally brought the vessel into Miami he liked the growing little town so much he telegraphed Fisher to meet him there. Fisher liked the place too, and spent the winter.

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So it came about that Fisher glimpsed the building causeway and heard of the great plans for the as yet un-named Miami Beach. When he investigated he found Collins and the Lummus brothers practically at the end of their financial road, with cash almost gone and credit stretched to the limit. But he also found the dream of Miami Beach, and he adopted it -- enlarged it.

Fisher supplied the money to complete the causeway; he put dredges to work filling new land, /~~making~~ creating new islands, dredges that were to make subdivisions from baybottom without stopping, day or night, for 10 years. He employed engineers who laid out golf courses, public parks, streets and bridges. He built the first major hotels, piped water from the mainland to replace the shallow wells and pitcher pumps then in use.

By 1925 most of the United States had contracted a new disease known as Florida fever. It was spawned in stories of spiralling land prices, of fortunes made overnight in a paradise of sparkling waters, graceful palms and perpetual springtime. The air was scented with orange blossoms and jasmine, with now and then a fresh sea breeze adding a tang of good, clean salt. In many instances Florida fever was so severe the only cure was to sell the old homestead and move lock, stock and barrel to America's tropics.

Fisher was getting his investment back in large chunks when the fever ran its course and the Florida bubble burst. Had he stayed with Miami Beach his wealth would have been greatly increased in the matter of a few years. As it was, he tried to repeat his Miami Beach dream on Long Island, N. Y., and met severe financial reverses when that development ran head-on into the depression of the early '30s.

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Miami Beach, of course, also was affected by the national economic reversal, but was well on the road to recovery by 1935. In that year 21 hotels were erected. From 1935 through 1941, an average of 31 hotels were constructed annually, or 217 in the seven-year period.

During the war, when private travel and building came almost to a complete halt, Miami Beach's hotels were turned into barracks, the parks and golf courses into parade grounds for the army air force. After the war the growth trend began again with renewed vigor, with the city now having 380 hotels, 2,600 apartment buildings and a permanent population polnaxkex of more than 50,000.

Thus it may be seen Miami Beach is a new city although located in an area that goes back through Indian, Spanish and French wars, piracy and the lost history of pre-Columbus days. Treasure laden galleons piled up on the treacherous reefs a few miles south of Miami Beach. Corsairs preyed on commerce just off these shores. Seminoles attacked and partially burned the Cape Florida lighthouse five miles south of Miami Beach, almost roasting its keeper in the process. That was in 1836.

But history left Miami Beach untouched until less than 100 years ago. Kitchen middens show the island was used by tourists for centuries, but they left no mark. They built no buildings, no burial mounds. They came to fish and picnic by the sea, just as did their followers, the early white settlers of Miami. They went home when their holidays were over.

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