

MIAMI BEACH, FLA.--History walked along the sands of Miami Beach nearly for 1,000 years, with each high tide erasing her footprints.

South Florida was the first part of the American mainland sighted by the sailing masters who followed Columbus' trail to the New World. Yet this area was one of the last in the United States to yield to civilization.

In the year 1512 a breech-clouted Tequesta warrior <sup>(here)</sup> may have seen the three caravels of Juan Ponce de Leon pointed northward in the blue Gulf Stream waters two miles offshore. Not much later in that century he might have <sup>sighted</sup> ~~seen~~ the Plate Fleets lumbering along in the same waters. From time to time, from what is now Key West 160 miles southwestward, to what is now Cape Kennedy, 200 miles to the north, those treasure-laden galleons buried their bones and their gold and silver in the reefs and sands of this coast.

South Florida remained hostile to the White Man. Save for a mission established on Biscayne <sup>(bay)</sup>, probably at or near the mouth of the Miami river, in 1567, the archives are blank. The mission itself survived but a year or two. It was gold that interested the Spaniards and none was here.

But to get the gold from Mexico, Chile and Peru <sup>back to Spain</sup> in their sailing ships, winds and waters dictated a course skirting this coast. And to take that gold the corsairs and pirates followed the Dons. For more than two centuries the white men contended with each other <sup>and the elements</sup>, and the Tequesta administered the coup de grace to grounded survivors.

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Key West, the first settlement of any size and permanence on this coast, was called Cayo Hueso by the Spanish -- Islet of Bones. The community came into existence early in the 19th century. A few hardy settlers had drifted southward in Florida to Miami before 1850.

Indians attacked a lighthouse on Cape Florida, five or six miles south of Miami Beach, in 1838. The old light and surrounding acreage is now the newest of Florida's state parks.

Pioneers lived by salvaging wrecks, fishing, hunting and some farming. Native Indians died by the score from musket balls, by the hundred from new diseases such as smallpox and measles introduced by the newcomers.

The biggest event of the 19th century, even bigger than the decimation and pacification of the Indians, was the extension of the Florida East Coast railroad to Miami in 1896. It opened a way to market for winter truck crops and tropical fruit, and simultaneously brought in a trickle of winter visitors that later was to become a flood.

History properly began in Miami Beach in the 1880s with the planting of a coconut plantation here. The production of copra soon was abandoned in favor of fruits such as the avocado and the planting of tomatoes, beans and squash.

By 1912 the first of the beanfields was subdivided into lots for winter vacation homes and in 1915 the Town of Miami Beach received a charter from the state legislature. The 33 freeholders voted unanimously for the incorporation.

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What was the nature of this land that sheltered the Red Man and repulsed the White for so many years? Let us go back.

Along this Southeast coast of Florida is a rim of high land, averaging no more than 10 miles in width, between the salt water of the ocean and the fresh water of the Everglades. (Recent drainage with dikes and canals has extended this considerably.) Southward the land sinks, leaving the chain of islets known as the Florida Keys.

The climate is sub-tropical. It was one of Nature's great breeding grounds. Deer, panther, bobcat, raccoon and quail were plentiful. In the 'glades were myriads of water birds such as the ibis, egret and spoonbill, along with alligators <sup>and</sup> crocodiles. In the tidal swamp streams were shrimp and many edible fish.

Along the Atlantic side in the blue ocean waters were lobsters, pompano, mackerel, yellowtail and many other food fishes.

In the rich earth man could plant beans and pineapples, citrus and avocados. But of planting the early Indians did little. Nature offered enough just for the taking. In this idyllic setting the mosquito dealt misery.

The Tequesta and related early Indians learned to live with the mosquito, even as did the white pioneers. And so the Tequesta with wheel and bone-tipped spears, moving swiftly through jungle trails, poling in dugouts through trackless swamps and aided by his "air cover" of mosquitoes, was able to defend his land.

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But he never was very numerous. Trade with the Spaniards ~~also~~ brought disease as well as hatchets <sup>and beads,</sup> and it was disease that did the conqueror's work. Actually, it was other ~~the~~ Indians from the north rather than the White Man, who first filled the void left by the dying Tequestas. These Indians came to be called Seminoles.

They, too, fought for the land into which they had fled. But the odds were too great. And so it came about that a century ago or so, the Indian had been defeated. It remained to win the land. That victory may be said to have been accomplished by canals and dikes, highways through the heart of the Everglades, plows and bulldozers and insecticides.

Some of the birds remain, but not the sky-darkening flocks of yesterday. Enough of the fish are here to attract the sportsman from afar. But the famed "hunting ground" that once began just south of the Miami river has given way to homes and apartments and restaurants and filling stations and other amenities of civilization.

And the beaches, where man left <sup>no</sup> ~~his~~ marks for so many centuries, now are flanked by hotels, apartment buildings and streets with traffic lights.

Where once the Tequesta camped to fish and hunt, now 2,000,000 people take their vacations every year in a city of 70,000 permanent residents known as Miami Beach.