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The Early History of Miami Beach

The three companies to start the development of Miami Beach were THE OCEAN BEACH REALTY COMPANY, otherwise known as the LUMMUS DEVELOPMENT, the MIAMI BEACH IMPROVEMENT COMPANY, otherwise known as the COLLINS DEVELOPMENT, and the ALTON BEACH REALTY COMPANY, which was known as the FISHER DEVELOPMENT.

The Ocean Beach Realty Company, or Lummus Development, was the first to start developing a subdivision and filing its plat with Dade County. Collins was second, and Fisher, third. None of this territory was incorporated as a town or city at that time.

The Lummus crowd filed their plat in Book No. 2 of Plats, Page 36, Records of Dade County, Florida, July 9, 1912. Collins filed his first plat on December 11, 1912, in Book No. 2 of Plats, Page 47. Fisher's first plat was filed on January 15, 1914, Book No. 2, Page 77.

In 1913, Crate Bowen, Attorney representing Fisher, and I, representing the Lummus Company, made a trip to Washington to secure a government permit for the dredge work. Our engineers had prepared the plans and all necessary data, and the original Clark Construction Company of Baltimore, Maryland, was the best bidder.

According to the plans, we had to move six million cubic yards of bay bottom onto the land. When I speak of "we" I mean Carl Fisher and the Lummus Company let the contract together and the work was done at a cost of ten cents per cubic yard, or in other words, Six Hundred Thousand Dollars(\$600,000.00) for the dredging.

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Our (the Lummus Company's) part was Three Hundred and Fifteen Thousand Dollars(\$315,000.00), and Fisher's was Two Hundred and Eighty-five Thousand Dollars(\$285,000.00). ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING FEATURES OF THE GOVERNMENT PERMIT WAS THAT IT WAS FEDERAL PERMIT NO. 1, FOR WORK OF THIS KIND IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

The Contract was let on July 1st, 1913 and completed on July 1st, 1914. The cost of timber disposal and bulk heading of the Lummus Company was over \$150,000.00. I don't know what Fisher's was, but it must have been approximately the same.

Carl Fisher was one of the best sports I ever knew. He had money and the nerve to jump into the swamp in 1913. The Lummus Company had the nerve but not much money. So we borrowed \$150,000.00 from Fisher in 1913, paid him 8% interest for it and gave him 105 acres of land, Ocean to Bay on the South side of Lincoln Road as a Bonus. We were spending money so fast in 1914 we borrowed \$150,000.00 from E. B. Lent of Peekskill, New York, \$120,000.00 from Frank A. Furst of Baltimore, Maryland, \$120,000.00 from R. P. Clark of Galveston, Texas, and \$50,000.00 from B. F. Potter of Miami. We paid them all every dollar, and never had a law suit.

The Lummus Company gave away 33 lots on Collins Avenue for houses to be built in 1914. These houses were all completed and occupied the latter part of 1914. My home on the northwest corner of 12th Street and Ocean Drive, next to the Tides Hotel, also T. J. Pancoast's home on Collins Avenue and Pancoast Lake were completed the same year.

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On March 26th, 1915, we had 33 qualified voters,--women did not vote at that time,--so we incorporated the Town of Miami Beach, which took in all of the Lummus and Fisher holdings, and most of the Collins and Pancoast holdings, in other words, all of the Territory, Ocean to Bay, from the Government Ship Channel to what is now known as the Firestone place. All of the voters when Miami Beach was incorporated lived on the Lummus development with the exception of three; these three lived on the Collins and Pancoast end; there were none on Fisher's development. We were going so strong and doing so well that we got a Legislative Charter which is published in full in Special Acts of the Florida Legislature in 1917 on Page 806, Chapter 7672. I, J.N., and J.E. Lummus owned the Lummus Company and paid all the cost of incorporating the Town, and making it a City. I as pioneer developer and the first Mayor of the Town and City, wrote The Miracle of Miami Beach. All copies are sold. The photographs in that book, taken while the work was going on, are very interesting from my point of view. I sold the City of Miami Beach 1200 of these books.

In 1916 we organized the Miami Ocean View Company, with Carl Fisher, Arthur C. Newby, James Allison, James H. Snowden, Henry McSweeney, and George Snowden, all millionaires. John Levy, my brother, J.E., and I took some Stock in the new Company, and I remained with the Miami Ocean View Company one year as Vice President, and we built Star Island. John Levy remained with the Company as Secretary-Treasurer.

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The late John S. Collins was a good Sport; he was in his seventies when he commenced the wooden bridge. It was begun in 1912 and completed in the early part of 1914. He had lots of land north of 23rd Street but like the Lummus Company he had to operate on borrowed capital. So Carl Fisher loaned the Collins Company the money in 1913 to complete the Bridge, which was located where the Venetian Causeway now is. Collins' Company charged one dollar for cars and 25 cents for each passenger when the Bridge was first opened, but Fisher and the Lummus Company each paid the Collins Company \$2500.00 per year for 1914, 1915, and 1916 and got his Company to reduce the charge to 25 cents for cars regardless of the number of passengers in the car.

In 1912 the late Avery C. Smith owned a Bathing Casino on Biscayne Street. In 1913 Dan Hardie owned a Bathing Casino on Ocean Drive. They both owned their own boats, and carried passengers from 12th Street, Miami, now Flagler Street, to Biscayne Street, Miami Beach. The Lummus Company finally purchased all the boats and carried passengers between Miami Beach and Miami for 5 cents. When we were running Auction sales we carried passengers free, and gave away china by the car loads. There are numerous people in Dade County today who still have and treasure this china.

The wonderful financial condition of the City is due to its good management.

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Claude A. Renshaw became City Manager on or about September 1st, 1925, and C. W. Tomlinson has been City Clerk and Tax Collector since August 3rd, 1920. My old Secretary, J. F. Canova, was City Clerk and Tax Collector from 1915 to his death in 1920.

The above was the start of Miami Beach that I visioned in 1912. About 1919 Carl Fisher and Associates took Collins and Pancoast holdings with them and completed the development work north of 23rd Street. Thousands of people now living on Miami Beach have helped build the City, with which nothing in the world today can compare.

This written by me, November 21st, 1949.


