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HISTORY OF MIAMI BEACH

Miami Beach, a swampy wilderness a scant 40 years ago, is today a world-famous seaside resort, a winter and summer vacationland for thousands of visitors annually, and a year-round home to a permanent population that, at the 1950 census, numbered 45,541.

Originally, except for one narrow strip of natural land, it was a stretch of sand, of wild and snarled growth, of swamps from which the mangrove roots stood up like tangled skeletons. But it had sun and sea, blue skies and balmy sub-tropical atmosphere, with the Atlantic Ocean lapping it to the east and Biscayne Bay separating it several miles from the mainland. The rank growth was hacked away and waterways were dredged and swamp and lowland filled.

John S. Collins and J. N. Lummas were early developers. Collins came to Miami Beach in 1907. Having had previous experience in observing the development of other cities, he saw the same possibilities here. Accordingly he acquired acreage. On the single strip of natural land he planted avocado groves. With the remainder of his property he hoped to attract other developers.

The only method of reaching Miami Beach from the mainland was by boat. Collins Canal was therefore constructed to provide boat passage through the undeveloped area. The next step was the building of a wooden bridge from the mainland, but with completion in sight funds ran out and work was temporarily stopped.

Early in 1912 Carl G. Fisher arrived in Miami and he, too, envisioned a great future for that thumb of land between the ocean and the bay. With capital to invest he purchased property from Collins, Lummas, and others. Thus Collins was able to finish the bridge in 1914, providing access to the whole area.

The first hotel was constructed at the southerly extremity of Miami Beach not long after, and a few houses went up. Streets, parks and golf courses were laid out. The population increased enough to permit the organization of a city, and a charter was granted on March 26, 1915.

For the next five years a stream of investors drifted south, some to get sand in their shoes and remain to help create the new city. But it was between 1920 and 1923 that the avalanche of investors descended. Building rocketed. Real estate prices rocketed as well; and America's greatest land boom was precipitated. People poured in from all over the United States until by the end of 1925, hotel, apartment and home construction was valued at \$30,000,000.

The land boom collapsed and the 1926 hurricane struck soon after. But the invaluable lessons had been learned and the town made a determined come-back. By 1928 it was making good progress and it continued to do so even during the depression years.

In 1942, almost overnight, military uniforms swarmed over Miami Beach. Almost every hotel and most apartment houses were quickly leased by the army to house men sent here for training. Golf courses, parks and streets became training grounds, and the citizens took justifiably pride that the unique facilities of a resort, such as the immediately available housing, could be turned to the distinct advantage of the war effort. Time was the important element in the emergency, and Miami Beach had barracks all ready to move into -- its hotels and apartment houses. With the turning back of the properties to their owners at the end of the war, the city entered on a five-year period of growth that has been unprecedented.