

## MRS. BARFIELD IS INTERESTED IN HER COUNTY

### Believes in Future of the Southwest Section of Florida

On the first of this month the Post Offices at Marco and Caxambas were abolished and Collier City, comprising the entire island of Marco, established. To visit the old town sites on either end of the island there is very little difference in the material appearance of the two places; but if one will stop and listen it is not difficult to hear the growing hum or under current of "things happening or about to happen. Every one you meet seems to be in a hurry and with something very important on his mind.

### She Enters Public Life

Besides her duties in the hotel and factory with very little help, she assisted Mr. Barfield at the store which carried general merchandise including dry goods and notions which were under her special care. But never did she consider her work as drudgery. It was always a means to be a definite end, and her quick wit, her ready smile, and helping hand won to her the hearts of the island people which were to make her a power in the future development that was soon to play a role of great dramatic propensities.

Mrs. Barfield's first entry into the public affairs of the island was in the building of the highway connecting Marco and Caxambas, a distance of five miles over sand hills on the southern end and across mangrove swamps toward the north. At this time, the tri-weekly mail from Fort Myers via "aples was landed at Marco and transported by wagon and later by Ford car over the poor excuse for a road to Caxambas. In the wet weather the mangrove swamp was a bog and in dry season the sand hills made travel very difficult. The first car to attempt this run with the mail soon cut deep ruts into the road, and as the county seat and the county commissioners were then many hours of weary travel away from Fort Myers, the road soon became impassible, and a boat was employed to take the mail around the island.

### Work For A Road

The county commissioners were beseeched by the islanders to give them relief from this situation but with only desultory results. Feeling the vitalness of the situation to the success of her plans, Mrs. Barfield finally went into action in such a forceful manner as to soon establish her in the minds of the county commissioners of Lee County. Taking a handful of her constituents with her, she took

### Mrs. Barfield Is Interested (Cont.)

a boat from Marco to Fort Myers, an all day journey, and presented the situation to the board. After much delay and several days away from her numerous home duties, the board instructed her to purchase a Ford truck and to proceed with the work in making a fill across the swamps that would permit liason between the two island towns. Acting on the verbal instructions of the commissioners, she placed an order for a second hand truck and returned to Caxambas, well pleased with the result of her labors.

However, no sooner had Mrs. Barfield left the city than private interests presented a proposition to the commissioners purporting to save the county money and accomplish the same results by the use of privately owned equipment, and the order for the truck was countermanded.

### She Displays Tact

When word reached Caxambas of this double dealing, Mrs. Barfield became justly incensed and again set out for Fort Myers for verification of the reports, which was finally confirmed with numerous explanations. But feeling assured, and knowing from past experiences with the same situation that this only meant another outlay of county funds with no results to the community, Mrs. Barfield was not to be thus easily cast aside. Taking the offensive she set out for Tampa and with her own private funds from tireless labor in the hotel and manufacture of fruit products bought a truck and had it delivered at Caxambas. Again facing the commissioners, she asked permission to build the road, and it is of record in the county offices today that the piece of road bed constructed was of the most lasting material at the lowest cost to the county of any similar road built before or after.

### She Creates Ferry Service

But still, there was no outlet from the island to the mainland except by boat and a small privately owned barge that, if not in use at some other point on the island, would sometimes transport one across the channel if one would assume the personal risk of life. Mrs. Barfield therefore began another campaign for a ferry across the channel, and backed by her faithful constituents presented her petition before the board, which was promptly laid on the shelf with the excuse that a ferry across an open channel was illegal and was contrary to the regulations of the war department.

The commissioners, nevertheless, had not yet learned to know and appreciate Mrs. Barfield. Their refusal of

### Mrs. Barfield Is Interested (Cont.)

her petition only augmented her determination to see it through. Other channels were spanned by ferries and even bridges. She knew it. Why not Marco Pass?

For nine months, at every meeting of the board, Mrs. Barfield continued to present her petition--not passively, but with new reasons and more urgent demands at each meeting, until, finally feeling the force of her arguments and the power of her personality, she was instructed to secure a barge and begin operation of the ferry.

Again, however, private interests interfered, and at the following meeting of the board, the ferry was awarded to another party who falsely claimed that Mrs. Barfield had been unable to secure a suitable barge.

But though absent from the meeting, Mrs. Barfield read of the board's action and again set out for Fort Myers by way of the slowmoving boat and without delay called the several members of the board from their homes, had a special meeting called, the late contract with the private interests rescinded, and the ferry for which she had unceasingly worked for nine consecutive months to the neglect of her home duties and at her personal expense was at last definitely established.

These early frays and tilts with county officials not only established Mrs. Barfield as a woman of unusual will power and force in her community, but laid the foundation for her greater work in the creation of a new county and the development of "Florida's last frontier," at the coming of Mrs. Barron G. Collier.

### Mrs. Barfield Meets Collier

It is interesting to note the occasion of Mrs. Barfield's first meeting with Mr. Collier. Always on the alert and interested in any action--legislative, political, or fiscal--pertaining to her section of the county, she had heard of Mr. Collier's proposal to buy the holdings of the Southern States Land and Timber Company in the Southern part of Lee County, in which he would pay into the county treasury the long past due taxes. As these properties were near Marco Island, which would receive certain benefit from the tax money, if collected, Mrs. Barfield attended the meeting of the county commissioners to see that her sections interest were properly represented and protected, and for the first time came face to face with the man who was later to play such an important part in the development of what was then lower Lee County.

### Mrs. Barfield Is Interested (Cont.)

The next meeting with Mr. Collier was at her home in Caxambas after a tidal wave in November, 1921, which had destroyed a large acreage of tomatoes owned by Mr. Barfield. Mr. Collier, passing through the vicinity, found Mrs. Barfield with her sleeves above her elbows, busily officiating over all the force she could command to save the crop, too green for shipment, by making tomato pickles. This remarkable energy in what he had known as a peculiarly lazy clime appealed to Mr. Collier, and he engaged her in conversation with a suggestion of purchase of the Barfield holdings on the island.

### Collier Makes Purchase

Somewhat disheartened by the effects of the water on her crop, and knowing that Mr. Collier had already made some purchases near the Clades, she turned an attentive ear to the suggestion, trusting that he had not already spent all his money. Taking him up to the top balcony of the hotel, they looked over the entrancing vista that met their gaze across the undulated terrain and she pointed out the acres and acres of the Barfield holdings. "Perhaps, if you cannot handle the whole thing, you could buy half of it."

Mrs. Barfield laughingly told this incident as quite a joke on herself, making the smaller proposition to the man who afterward bought not only the greater part of the entire island, but millions of additional acres in the territory of what was to be the county that now bears his name.

"What do you see in the future for these rugged hills of cactus-covered shell?" Mr. Collier asked as they continued to survey the panorama of colorful grandeur, so different in character from the surrounding plains.

### She Pictures Future

"A railroad," Mrs. Barfield answered promptly, pointing toward the distant mainland, "from out yonder somewhere, coming across the pass. This island, covered with all the wonderful fruits and shrubbery of the tropics. A great hotel, bigger than anything in Florida, occupying the crest of this very hill."

Mr. Barfield, who overheard this conversation, admitted to the writer that he was of the opinion that his good wife was dwelling for the moment in the clouds for

### Mrs. Barfield Is Interested

the sake of the prospective sale, but that since that time in the light of present happenings it appears that she possessed certain powers of clairvoyance.

Sometime after this conversation at the top of the hotel, Mr. Collier returned to Caxambas. Mrs. Barfield listened to his plans of the huge development which he proposed. She believed him. She felt that this was the opportunity for which she had been waiting and preparing. Through Mr. Collier's efforts highways would be constructed; railroads would be built and access to the outer world assured. She felt that by aligning herself with Mr. Collier's interests that she would be doing for her children and her neighbors in this great undeveloped, inaccessible country an unselfish service. She might hold out for greater personal profits, but in so doing, she might deter the great work that was promised.

### Mrs. Barfield Joins Collier

Mr. Collier did not know, at the time of his first business dealings with her, that he was getting much more than land and what money could not buy. He secured the loyalty and the friendship of a woman of dynamic force and personality that was to win the day for him in his fight for county division.

Quoting from the Tampa Tribune of May 10th, 1923, they have the following to say: "Mrs. Barfield of Caxambas is being given much credit for the passage of the bill by the House last Thursday night. As a lobbyist, Mrs. Barfield has few equals, although her experience at the session this year, was, she said, her first."

In an earlier issue of the Tribune on April 25th, "Mrs. J. M. Barfield, hotel proprietress of Caxambas, presented a petition signed by one hundred and two residents which she said had a total population of one hundred and seventy-five....In the midst of her talk, the chairman of the committee received a telegram signed by about twenty-five persons in her section protesting against Collier county. It developed that a large part of the names signed to the telegram was also signed to the petition." This introduction of the telegram from Mrs. Barfield's constituents while she was on the floor of the House speaking in defense of the bill was calculated to be a master stroke of the opposition designed to place the speaker in an embarrassing situation; but contrary to expectations, it

Mrs. Barfield Is Interested

resulted disastrously for the instigators of the movement. Coolly facing the issue, Mrs. Barfield denounced the telegram in no uncertain tones, stating and proving to the satisfaction of the House that some of the names were fictitious, that some did not live at Caxambas, and that those who did sign could not read and had signed without proper knowledge of the content. The telegram was thrown out.