

CHAPTER VI

PIONEERS' CIVIC ACTIVITIES

THE pioneer business and professional men of Miami found an outlet for their surcharged energy in the frequent and animated meetings of their first two civic organizations, namely, the Board of Trade and the Merchants' Association. The former was organized in the very infancy of the town, and the latter some years later.

W. W. Prout, at the initial meeting of the Board of Trade, had announced his self-election to the office of president. Arriving a little late at the following meeting he found his office filled by Miami's first mayor, John B. Reilly, who complacently announced his own succession to that coveted office. This precipitated a heated argument between a small group of anti-corporationists and the supporters of the Flagler interests. The ruling of the presiding officer, however, prevailed. This incident had intensified the hostility that existed between the two factions and it soon became manifest in all public movements, especially in election cam-

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paigns. This organization had a stormy career. However, it continued to function with more or less vigor in the interest of the community until the year 1913, when it joined its contemporary, the Merchants' Association, in merging into what is now known as the Chamber of Commerce.

During its independent existence it supplied the community with an open forum which attracted the public to its weekly meetings. Those meetings proved highly interesting and full of inspiration. A great many projects which are now in course of development by the present Chamber of Commerce have had their birth upon the rostrum of that organization. Among its successive presidents were W. W. Prout, John B. Reilly, John W. Watson, T. V. Moore, the late Joseph A. McDonald, R. M. Price and the writer. The office of secretary was successively filled by Rev. E. V. Blackman, Captain Duncan G. Brossier, C. H. Ward and the writer (the office of secretary carried no salary).

The Board of Trade was very active in its tireless efforts to secure deep water for Miami Harbor. Its members realized that water transportation was absolutely necessary for the development of Dade County's agricultural resources

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and for the establishment of manufacturing industries in this city, in order to provide employment for the growing population and create all-year-round business for the merchants. It took the initiative in all civic movements for the welfare of the city and county. Its influence in the City Council and with the County Commissioners resulted in extensive municipal improvements and road construction. It maintained lobbies in the state legislature and in Washington, where it was instrumental in the enactment of legislation favorable to this section of the state. It was successful in securing repeated appropriations for harbor improvement. It fostered Miami's infant manufacturing industries. It rendered valuable aid to the late Governor Broward in his intensive campaigns relating to his tremendous undertaking of reclaiming the Everglades, and finally, through its persistent publicity it succeeded in making Miami the best advertised city in the state. This publicity attracted northern capital and brought many people of note who made Miami and its environs their winter homes.

The activities of the Merchants' Association consisted chiefly of matters affecting the welfare

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of its members. It was successful in regulating the hours of closing the stores operated by members of the organization and otherwise serving the interests of employers and employees. This organization had frequently taken coördinate action with the Board of Trade for the benefit of the community. Among its officers were the late J. C. Keller, the late W. James Rodgers, J. M. Burdine and the late Julius Smith. Shortly before its consolidation with the Chamber of Commerce it became involved in an agitation seeking to restrain the *Miami Metropolis* (now the *Daily News*) from criticising the policies of the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation. The editor of that newspaper, S. Bobo Dean (who has recently sold his interests in the paper to Governor Jas. M. Cox), had defied that audacious organization and continued his attacks against the Railway Corporation with increased vigor.

In a secret conference of the leaders of the corporation partisans, who were affiliated with the organization, it was resolved that a petition be circulated among the patrons of that paper, demanding its cessation of hostilities against the Flagler interests. At a subsequent conference it was reported that the president of the organiza-

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tion (the writer) had refused to affix his signature to that petition. Whereupon a committee was appointed to interview the dissenting president with instructions to demand his resignation in the event he failed to recant. The president did not only refuse to recede from his position, but published several articles in criticism of the petition and its sponsors. This was followed by a grand caucus, the object of which was the dethronement of their untractable president and the boycotting of the anti-corporation paper. These punitive measures had been agreed to by all present, excepting the vice-president, the late J. C. Keller, and the secretary, the late W. James Rodgers, both of whom refused to support such drastic measures.

The regular meetings of the organization were held weekly. On the meeting day following the foregoing incidents, the president, vice-president and secretary came to the meeting place as usual. After vainly spending a half hour in tense waiting for the arrival of the more conservative members, the president called the meeting to order. After recovering from their amazement at the unusual proceeding, by their chief, in declaring the meeting open for business with only three members

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present, they gamely entered into the spirit of the occasion. Following the routine of the so-called meeting, several important resolutions were adopted, one of which condemned the radical action of the members favoring the boycotting of the newspaper. Upon adjournment of that memorable meeting a full report, not without sensational embellishments, was given to the newspapers for publication. The appearance of the *Metropolis*, with that report on its front page under conspicuous headlines, mystified the leaders and filled their followers with suspicion of being double crossed.

This stratagem was repeated several times. At last a considerable number of the members, no longer being able to repress their rising curiosity, had simultaneously concluded to attend the next meeting, with the object of exposing their guilty colleagues who had apparently violated their mutual agreement to avoid the meetings, as a means of ridding the organization of its recalcitrant president. They came, they saw and were conciliated. As true Miamians, all joined in the hearty laughter that ensued on learning the facts incident to the mysterious meetings during their absence and the fight was called off.

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The Merchants' Association has been the means of bringing together business rivals and engendering in them a spirit of amity. The friendly relations now existing between merchants engaged in kindred business, and the substitution of a spirit of coöperation for that of hostile competition, can be directly traced to the influence of that organization.

The young and impulsive merchants composing its membership were fortunate in being guided by such conservative members as the late William M. Burdine, the late J. C. Kellar and the late Julius Smith. These departed pioneer merchants have, through their wise counsel, averted many unpleasant consequences which would have followed the action favored by the less conservative element in that organization in their eagerness to push Miami forward.

The late William M. Burdine took a keen interest in every community movement for the moral, intellectual and commercial advancement of his adopted home town. He was a generous contributor to all worthy causes and an indefatigable worker in many of them. His reputation in his former home town, which had preceded him to Miami, coupled with a highly

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developed faculty for business and an affable disposition, backed by what was then regarded as considerable capital (in the form of merchandise), combined in rendering his Miami enterprise successful from the very outset. The little store, which Mr. Burdine had opened in 1898, grew and expanded from year to year until his premature demise in 1911, when his surviving family inherited the business and finally developed it to its present eminent position in the mercantile world.

In the founding of the Burdine store, John M. Burdine, son of William M. Burdine, and Mrs. Eva P. Quarterman, had figured prominently. Some years later young Mr. Burdine and Mrs. Quarterman formed a partnership under the firm name of Burdine & Quarterman; and conducted, until recently, a high-class dry-goods and women's ready-to-wear store. This establishment is now being operated under the firm name of "The Burdine & Quarterman Co. Inc."

John M. Burdine was an active member of the Merchants' Association until its merging with the present Chamber of Commerce. For a number of years he served the organization as its secretary.

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The late Julius Smith was also an active member of that notable organization. Mr. Smith served as its president and contributed much to its usefulness in the community. He was also active in all undertakings for the welfare of Miami and its citizenship. (Died in 1919.)

In 1911, when Miami reached its fifteenth birthday, the Board of Trade and the Merchants' Association united in celebrating that grand event. The program for the day contained many entertaining features that were successfully carried out for the delectation of the crowds that filled the city to overflowing, one of which was the great novelty of an aëroplane flight by the noted aviator, the late Howard Gill, who, shortly after his visit to Miami, was killed in Texas in a similar performance.

At this memorable celebration the following of our prominent citizens distinguished themselves in a variety of stunts: E. G. Sewell, as celebration-manager and amateur aviator (he flew with Aviator Gill); John W. Watson, as an expert meat-barbecuer; Robert R. Taylor, as a promoter of jiu-jitsu exhibitions (the Japanese performers came from Yamato, an agricultural

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settlement between Miami and West Palm Beach); and Harry Budge, as a bicycle race promoter.

The next important celebration in which the local civic organizations participated occurred about one year later, in the city of Key West, in commemoration of the completion of the Oversea Railway. That notable celebration was staged at the Key West Naval Station, where a brilliant banquet in honor of the late Henry M. Flagler was given. Two long tables lined both sides of the spacious hall, at which were seated many notables. Amidst a tense silence, the aged Mr. Flagler appeared in the entrance supported by the arms of his faithful lieutenants, the late J. R. Parrott and the late J. E. Ingraham. This distinguished group slowly and impressively advanced through the broad aisles toward the head of one of the tables, accompanied by a spontaneous demonstration from the guests that continued until they were seated. Mr. Flagler, whose eyes were shielded by a green celluloid shade, experienced some difficulty in recognizing faces. To those of the guests whose names were called by his general manager, the late Mr. Parrott, he smiled and nodded in a pleasing

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manner. After the disposal of several courses of refreshments, the animated conversation of the guests ceased at the announcement by the toastmaster that Mr. Flagler was to make a few remarks. Upon being assisted to his feet, Mr. Flagler delighted the assemblage with a very interesting talk which ended with this statement: "A new era has begun for the city of Key West and its people; in ten years from today the city will boast of a population of fifty thousand, and I shall live to see it." (Mr. Flagler died on the 20th day of May, 1913, at a ripe old age filled with great achievements, the greatest of which is the development of the east coast of Florida which will eventually become the most popular playground of the nation.)

There is another pioneer civic organization that deserves much credit for Miami's marvelous growth, particularly for its agricultural progress, namely, the Dade County Fair Association. This organization, which is still functioning, came into being a number of years ago when the periodical fairs which were held under the auspices of the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation and managed by Rev. E. V. Blackman, then in the employ of the corporation as publicity agent, had

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demonstrated their value to Miami and Dade County. A permanent organization was formed with John B. Reilly, treasurer; Rev. E. V. Blackman, manager; S. A. Belcher, vice-president, and the writer, president.

At the first annual fair under the new management, the printed prize list contained a \$10 award for the largest Porto Rico pineapple. The pineapple industry of that period being in its infancy nobody competed for that prize. One of the exhibitors who was noted for his financial shrewdness, having noticed the absence of any Porto Rico pineapple exhibit and hating to see the \$10 prize withheld from circulation, had made a thorough search of his pineapple field and succeeded in resurrecting a thing that looked more like a common pine cone than a Porto Rico pineapple, brought it to the fair building and with this agricultural freak won the prize. During the past several years the annual fairs have been managed by J. C. Baile, J. I. Wilson and Rev. E. V. Blackman.

In a more recent period the management of the annual Dade County Fair has been taken over by J. S. Rainey, county agricultural agent. Under Mr. Rainey's administration, the annual

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fairs have gradually developed into notable expositions which are well patronized by winter visitors as well as local folk and are highly educational.