

CHAPTER XII

EVERGLADES RECLAMATION A BOON TO MIAMI

DURING the height of the reclamation of the Everglades excitement in 1909, Florida's famous governor, the late Napoleon B. Broward, who had made the drainage of the Everglades the chief issue of his campaign for the governorship, and subsequently of his last political battle for the United States senatorship (he died before induction into the Senate), both of which offices he won in a spectacular manner, agreed to dig a canal at the head of Miami River, provided the citizens of Miami would subscribe to a fund of \$40,000 for the acquisition of a dredge. In this enterprise he secured the coöperation of the Internal Improvement Board, whose members favored the opening for cultivation of an enormous area of fertile land contiguous to the city of Miami. In order to render this plan successful the subscribers to the proposed fund were offered twenty thousand acres of land along the contemplated canal at \$2.00 per acre.

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This proposal was received by R. T. Daniel, a noted booster of that period, who was one of the few discerning citizens who had manifested any appreciable faith in the reclamation project. Upon request of Mr. Daniel, backed by many citizens, among them John M. and T. L. Townley, the Tatum Brothers and J. E. Lummus, the Board of Trade had called a mass-meeting for the purpose of presenting the proposition to the public for action. At that memorable meeting, which was held at the central-school auditorium, Mr. Daniel, in an impassioned speech, exhorted the large audience to subscribe liberally to the purchase of the proffered land, and thus aid Governor Broward in the realization of his cherished ambition to found an empire in the Everglades with Miami its queen city. At the conclusion of the numerous inspirational speeches made by Miami's noted orators, the proposition was greatly over-subscribed.

Some months later the surprising announcement was made by the Internal Improvement Board that in view of the fact that the subscribers had neglected to make the first payments on their allotments, and inasmuch as a certain local real estate firm had offered spot cash for the

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twenty thousand acres of land, the Board had decided to withdraw the proposition. However, shortly after this disappointing announcement a dredge started operations at the head of the Miami River, and the reclamation of the Everglades became the all-absorbing topic of conversation among our people. In this great project our citizenship was divided, the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation partisans opposing it.

In the course of that period the late Richard Bolles, pioneer Everglades exploiter, who purchased a million acres of Everglades land at \$2.00 per acre with the stipulation that one half of the purchase price be applied to the drainage of that immense tract of land by the Internal Improvement Board, established a local office under the firm name of "The Florida Fruitland Company," which was in charge of Jesse L. Billingsley. A great many Everglades farms had been sold by the Bolles sales organization in all parts of the country, especially in the western states. Large delegations representing purchasers of these farms visited Miami with the object of viewing the famous Everglades. Our townsman, H. Dale Miller, who had been associated with the Ralston-Helm Everglades interests, was fre-

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quently seen on the streets of Miami at the head of processions of bewhiskered strangers whom he conducted to the Walter Waldin demonstration farm, at the edge of the Everglades, a few miles west of the city, from which point "Dale" gave the prospectors a view of their future imperial domains.

The Everglades issue was the chief subject of discussion at public meetings for several years. At one of these meetings Congressman Frank Clark spoke disparagingly of the reclamation scheme and its exploiters. He was particularly severe on dealers in Everglades land, whom he denounced as "land sharks." Adding insult to injury he admonished his audience not to buy such land by the acre, but by the gallon. This outrageous knock against the Everglades brought Henry Gould Ralston to his feet, dramatically exclaiming, "I dare you to say that the land my company is selling by the acre should be sold by the gallon." The undaunted congressman quickly retorted, "I do not only dare to repeat what I said, but I warn every one within the sound of my voice not to enter the Everglades without life preservers; and as to your particular portion of the Everglades," he added with

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asperity, "I care no more for it than I do for its owner."

It is gratifying to note that the subsequent drainage and agricultural experiments in the Everglades contiguous to Miami fully vindicated the attitude of reclamation proponents. It has been satisfactorily demonstrated that the reclamation of the Florida Everglades is feasible and that its soil is susceptible to intensive cultivation.

In those experiments the late Walter Waldin had taken a leading part. His farm on the edge of the Everglades, a few miles west of Miami, has for a number of years been the show place and demonstration center, for countless Everglades land exploiters. (Died in 1924.)

The wide publicity given the reclamation project attracted numerous realty dealers to this city. In this connection it should be noted that among the various elements that are contributory to Miami's marvelous growth the realtor is in no inconsiderable degree entitled to credit. The early as well as later investors in Dade County real estate, under the guidance of their brokers, have met with such remarkable success, and have found Miami's climate so healthful

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and enjoyable, that they could not resist the temptation of making this city and environs their permanent home.

The Miami realtor has thus become an important factor in the material development of this section of Florida. The realtor's service to the community grows in proportion to the growth of his craft and the extension of his field of operation. However, in order to render his services truly beneficial to the community as well as to himself, he must adhere to the fundamental principle of his profession, namely, fidelity to the interests of buyer and seller in every realty transaction in which he acts as an intermediary. If the confidence of either is betrayed, the result is not only harmful to the guilty, but it reflects upon the moral status of the craft as well as upon that of the general community.

It is pleasing to note that Miami has so far been spared the affliction of more than a negligible number of undesirables, among its rapidly increasing influx of realty brokers and speculators. This gratifying condition is largely due to the vigilance of the Miami Realty Board. This progressive organization, through its highly efficient secretary, W. L. Greene, and president,

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L. W. Crow, is doing all in its power to make it decidedly unprofitable for the "get-rich-quick" variety.

In this connection it should be stated that Miami's extensive publicity, following the Everglades propoganda, directed by the enterprising Chamber of Commerce, has attracted many wealthy and notable people to this city and its environs. Among them James and Charles Deering, Carl Fisher, the late John Havlin, Locke T. Highleyman, and Mrs. Harriet Beers.

The Deerings have expended millions in the creation of magnificent estates which are still in course of development. Carl Fisher's infatuation with Miami, particularly with the beach, made him one of its foremost boosters. Locke Highleyman fell under the magic spell of this section of Florida and became somewhat of a magician himself by transforming a mosquito-breeding mangrove swamp, at what is now known as "Point View," into one of Miami's most attractive residential sections. Mrs. Harriet Beers has not only fallen in love with Miami's climate, but was quick to discern the great opportunity for profitable investments, thus becoming an

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important factor in the steady advancement of Miami real-estate values.

Among the notable permanent settlers and winter visitors of that period, and in the course of the succeeding decade, are numbered Mr. and Mrs. William Jennings Bryan and their daughter and son-in-law Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Owen, the late J. Whitcomb Riley, E. W. Howe, the late Col. Henry Watterson, Harold H. Bailey, ornithologist, and Madam Mana-Zucca, the noted composer, who like our own celebrated pioneer Kirk Munroe (notable author of boys' books), have found Miami's enchanting scenery and salubrious climate a source of inspiration.

Mr. Bryan has proved a most valuable asset to Miami in a spiritual sense as well as in a material. His weekly Bible lessons are received with avidity by thousands of tourists and local people who gather every Sunday morning, during the winter season, in the beautiful coconut grove (Royal Palm Park) on the shore of sparkling Biscayne Bay. His profoundly interesting and instructive Bible talks are published and circulated throughout the country, thus bringing Miami to the notice of people who were ignorant of its existence, and many of whom, sooner or

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later, come here to enjoy its wonderful climate. He is taking a keen interest in local affairs. He is generously contributing to the various needs of the community, and never fails to respond to invitations to speak in churches as well as before civic bodies that are engaged in the promotion of the spiritual, social and material welfare of the community. Since becoming a citizen of Miami, he faithfully performs his duty of citizenship by casting his ballot at every election as he is known to have done in his former home town. It is an inspiring sight to observe him wheeling his invalid wife to the polls whenever an election occurs.

Mrs. Bryan, although in delicate health, vies with her distinguished husband in contributing to the social and intellectual prestige of the community. She frequently attends the Woman's Club meetings where her comprehensive addresses on current events are eagerly received and appreciated. Her frequent social gatherings at the Bryan home, "Villa Serena," although democratic in their character, are the outstanding social events of Miami's winter season. These occasions are enhanced by the presence of their talented daughter, Mrs. Reginald Owen, who is very popular in Miami's literary circles as well as

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in the general community. (Mr. Bryan has recently sold the "Villa Serena" and removed to his new home, which has been christened the "Marymont." This beautiful home is located at Coconut Grove, overlooking Biscayne Bay.)

Among the large contingent of wide-awake young business men attracted to Miami by the Everglades reclamation publicity are numbered R. M. Price and Henry G. Ralston. Mr. Price is one of the organizers of the Miami Bank & Trust Company which opened for business in 1911. He held the position of vice-president for a number of years under the old régime and is occupying this office at this writing. Mr. Price had given the community invaluable service as president of the former Board of Trade. Mr. Ralston has for a number of years been active in public service. He served as a member of the City Council and with the change of Miami's municipal government he was honored with the office of Director of Public Welfare. (He resigned shortly after his appointment.)

Among others who were attracted to Miami during that period is J. E. Junkin, Sr., who, after firmly establishing himself in business,

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joined the progressive forces of this city in the service of the community. He has taken a prominent part in the agitation and realization of the present Commission-Manager form of government, and has been honored with the election as a member of the City Charter Board.

Of the notables who came to Miami during that period in its history and set up a new standard of community-boosting through repeated investments in property, building enterprises and financial undertakings of large magnitude, W. S. Witham ("Uncle Billy") of Atlanta, Ga., is an outstanding figure.

Mr. Witham, then the head of the community interest banking system with an aggregation of one hundred and thirty-five banks located in various states of the Union, had picked Miami as the logical and most promising place for an addition to his novel banking system. In a very brief time he succeeded in establishing the Miami Bank & Trust Company, under the administration of a personally selected local organization, which proved highly successful from the very outset. The following year he embarked into realty trading, in which occupation he has been remarkably active ever since.

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As a relaxation from intensive trading he practices unheralded philanthropy. His favorite endeavors in this direction are the assisting of ambitious and worthy boys and girls to acquire college education, and the association with his distinguished friend, William Jennings Bryan, in the conduct of the most unique Bible class in the world, namely, the "Royal Palm Park Tourists' Sunday School," to which reference was made in a preceding paragraph of this chapter.

"Uncle Billy," as he is familiarly called by his multitude of friends and associates, discovered Miami's charming climate about the same time his friend Bryan did. In this connection it should be noted that in a conversation with the latter, who was then Secretary of State, Mr. Witham had explained the operation of his community-interest banking system, with its deposit-insurance feature and other public-safeguarding devices; which historic conference, it is said, probably influenced the subsequent inauguration by the government of the present Federal Reserve banking system which is founded upon the same principle as the community-interest banking system. After thirty years of active supervision over that unique

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banking system, Mr. Witham sold his interests and is confining himself to Miami realty trading.

The influx of new settlers, which followed in the wake of the Everglades publicity, also brought A. H. Perry, who founded the Southern Business College in this city. This institution was incorporated in 1916, and in 1919 was taken over by W. J. Liddy and its name was changed to the Pan-American College of Commerce.

Graduates from this college are filling responsible positions requiring a high order of proficiency. It gives finishing courses of study and trains countless boys and girls for careers of economic independence. It also assists its graduates in securing remunerative employment in business as well as in the professions. Under the administration of Mr. Liddy and his son, the Pan-American College of Commerce has made tremendous progress and has proved a valuable asset to this section of Florida.