

HISTORICAL SKETCHES AND SIDELIGHTS
OF MIAMI, FLORIDA

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CHAPTER I

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CITY OF MIAMI IN 1896

THE city of Miami, at this writing, is twenty-nine years old and has a permanent population of approximately seventy-five thousand. Its general aspect is that of a city of the one-hundred-thousand class. Of the recent settlers none but those of the most vivid imagination could form a true conception of the process of its growth and successive stages of its development.

The story of Miami, as related in these pages, is a record of the city's progress; the vicissitudes of its pioneers, their activities, foibles, contentions, ideals and aspirations. This narrative will commence with the city's topographical aspect in the summer of 1896.

Commencing at the north-shore line of the Miami River, at the foot of Avenue "D" (South Miami Avenue), and terminating at the inter-

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section of First Street (North Eleventh Street), the writer recalls the following structures: Captain Vail's steamboat hotel; the late Adam Correll's livery stable; a row of stores and a two-story hotel building on the east side of Avenue "D." These were occupied by Lummus Brothers, Frank T. Budge, the late S. A. Belcher, C. H. Raulerson and Salem Graham's baker shop. (The town had originally adopted the following street-naming system; commencing at the northern boundary line, at the intersection of North Miami Avenue and Eleventh Street, running in a southerly direction, the streets running east and west received consecutive numerical designations. Commencing at the west-shore line of Biscayne Bay, the thoroughfares running north and south, excepting the thoroughfare fronting on the bay which was named "The Boulevard," were designated alphabetically as avenues. This system was in force during the first twenty-four years of Miami's existence.) Across the street from the above-mentioned structures stood the home of Miami's first newspaper, the *Miami Metropolis*, and a huge tent in which religious services and community meetings were held. The storerooms in the south end of the hotel

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structure were occupied by Townley Brothers, Sewell Brothers and the late Dr. J. M. Jackson, Jr.

At the corner of the next block, on the east side of the avenue, stood E. L. Brady's building. East of the latter, fronting on Fourteenth Street (Southeast Second Street), stood the Bank of Bay Biscayne and John W. Watson's building. On the west side of the avenue stood the late Captain Chase's building. West of the latter, fronting on Fourteenth Street, there were several buildings housing various lines of business. The completion of the foregoing structures was followed by the erection of a number of buildings on both sides of the avenue, terminating at the corner of Thirteenth Street. These were occupied by operators of restaurants, cold-drink parlors, dry-goods, clothing and shoe stores, butcher shop, hardware store and racket store (the harbinger of the present-day five- and ten-cents stores). The latter were followed by two attractive two-story brick-veneer buildings, in each end of the block, on the west side of Avenue "D" (South Miami Avenue) between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets (Flagler and South First Streets), and a three-story brick structure on the southeast

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corner of Twelfth Street and Avenue "D." These are the oldest business buildings extant.

At the northeast corner of Avenue "D" and Eleventh Street (North Miami Avenue and First Street) stood a large frame structure, in which the biggest dry-goods store of that period was operated by a firm named Lovette & Laws. At the corner across the street from the latter stood a two-story frame building, the ground floor of which was occupied by the late T. N. Gautier as a grocery store, and the upper story housed Mrs. Gautier's boarding house. Toward the west from the latter, fronting south on Eleventh Street, there stood a frame building which housed the late Edwin Nelson's undertaking and furniture establishment. There were also several shacks along both sides of the railroad tracks, between Eleventh and Fourteenth streets, in one of which the city hall and jail were located.

East of Avenue "D" on Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets, several attractive two-story cottages were built by the late Henry M. Flagler, some of which are still in existence but have long since passed out of the latter's ownership. Sim-

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ilar cottages were erected on Avenue "B" between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets (South-east Second Avenue, between Flagler and Second streets). A number of other buildings were started in every direction, but the town had not as yet emerged from the plank-sidewalk stage of its development. In the beginning of the month of December, several of the leading firms had removed to Twelfth Street (Flagler Street), which thoroughfare soon superseded Avenue "D" (Miami Avenue) as the main business street.

At the beginning of 1896 there was a little business and residential center on the south side of the river, at a point close to the approach of the Southwest Second Avenue bridge (formerly Avenue "G"), in addition to a similar center at Brickell's Point, where the post-office was located. (The late Alice Brickell was postmistress. She was succeeded by Joseph S. Warner, H. C. Budge, Morgan E. Jones, F. M. Brown, A. E. Cully (acting) and the present incumbent, John D. Gardner.)

During that period and for a number of years thereafter, the territory beyond the north line of the city limits (at the intersection of North Miami Avenue and Eleventh Street) harbored a

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number of saloons, gambling houses and kindred evils. Numerous murders and other outrages were committed in that erstwhile notorious locality. That former unsavory district, which was known as "North Miami," flourished until about fifteen years ago, when Dan Hardie, having been elected sheriff of Dade County, fulfilled his preëlection promises in driving its denizens into the northwestern section of the city adjoining colored town. That new segregated district became known as "Hardieville." After years of protest by the decent element of the colored population the neighborhood was finally purged of its incubus.

As the year advanced new settlers arrived on every train, and the town expanded in every direction. The majority of Miami's population of the first year came from West Palm Beach, Titusville and Kissimmee. In spite of the countless buildings that were hastily erected, numerous families had been obliged to live in tents. At this stage of Miami's development, the Flagler and Tuttle land agents vigorously pushed the sale of building lots, offering special inducements to those who possessed enough funds to make small payments on same. Flagler Street corner lots

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sold at \$900, and inside lots at \$800 (50 x 150). Miami Avenue lots sold at \$300 to \$400 each, and West Flagler Street, between the railroad tracks and the river, at \$300 to \$400. First and Second Avenue lots sold at about the same prices. Little attention was paid to bay-front property, owing to its seeming great distance from the center of the city, although that locality possessed the attractive features of water frontage, and a potential park along the shore between Seventh and Twelfth streets (Fifth and Flagler streets).

Before the year passed parts of the Boulevard (North Bayshore Drive), Flagler Street, Second, First and Miami avenues were paved with native rock (the same material that entered into the construction of the present courthouse, city hall and Halcyon hotel), and the town assumed the appearance of a modern little city. This improvement, however, had caused insufferable annoyance to the inhabitants who were obliged to shield their eyes with colored spectacles from the glaring whiteness of the streets. In the course of time repeated attempts to eradicate that nuisance were made, in which a liquid known as "Tarvia" was employed, all of which proved abortive. However, the sensitive eyes of

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the pioneers finally became adapted to this irritation and no permanent harm resulted therefrom.

During that period Miami's population looked with longing eyes towards the ocean, across the bay, which was then inaccessible. Some of the more daring pioneers, however, frequently crossed the bay in rowboats, pushed through the mangroves that lined the eastern shore, took dips in the surf, hunted bears and collected turtle eggs. The scattering natives used to visit the peninsula in quest of ship timber and other wreckage which the sea yielded in abundance. Much of this well-preserved timber was used in the construction of buildings. Those who had explored the peninsula harbored fears of its imminent inundation and the ocean's encroachment upon the city of Miami. Time, however, has proved the absurdity and baselessness of such fears.

The Everglades west of Miami were another inaccessible region which the pioneers sought to explore. This brought them in contact with its denizens, the Seminole Indians, who received them kindly and made their visits highly profitable through barter. During that period there was an abundance of game in the Everglades.

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The territory on the south side of the river, known as "Brickell's Point," and the large area on the west side of the river, now known as Riverside, could not be reached except by boat (for a short time, there was an improvised bridge connecting the two shores of the river, at a point a little east of Avenue "G," now Southwest Second Avenue) and therefore remained undeveloped until the city bridged Miami Avenue, and the Tatum Brothers, some years later, built a bridge at the foot of Flagler Street in conjunction with their riverside development (both of those bridges have since been replaced by the present magnificent structures).

There was a trail leading from the Brickell homestead, in a southerly direction, to a settlement known as "Coconut Grove" (now the beautiful town of Coconut Grove, a noted center of culture and place of attractive homes) which the pioneers were fond of visiting on their bicycles. In traversing this trail one had an impenetrable jungle on one side and the bay on the other. There was a spring east of the trail which was known as "The Punch Bowl," and it was believed that frequent drinking of the water from that mysterious spring endowed one with

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perpetual youth. Many of the early settlers made regular excursions to that enchanting spot despite the inconvenience in reaching it.

At the beginning of the year 1897 the town presented an entirely different appearance, caused by the following incident in its history:

At about one o'clock Christmas morning, shortly after the merchants closed their stores, flames were seen issuing from the roof of the store building occupied by E. L. Brady, at the corner of Avenue "D" and Fourteenth Street. The fire rapidly spread to both sides of the avenue and into the cross streets, and in a few hours the heart of Miami's business district, Avenue "D" between Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets, was wiped out. The only remaining buildings were a two-story brick-veneer structure at the northwest corner of Avenue "D" and Thirteenth Street, a three-story solid brick building at the southeast corner of Twelfth Street and Avenue "D" and a two-story brick-veneer across the street from the latter (the first two are still in existence, the last has been destroyed by a subsequent fire and replaced by a three-story structure).

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In one of the burning buildings, on Fourteenth Street west of Avenue "D," an explosion occurred, shooting fragments of a cylinder into the midst of a crowd that collected on Thirteenth Street while the fire was raging, one of which struck a merchant named J. M. Frank, who died a few hours afterward.

Early in 1896 incipient Miami presented a very crude aspect and was much less alluring than in the period immediately preceding the conflagration, as revealed in the writer's diary which follows:

February 6th. Arrived at a point where Biscayne Bay and the Miami River converge. Traveled on the newly extended Florida East Coast Railway from West Palm Beach to its terminus, Fort Lauderdale, thence by small steamboat via Lemon City. On arrival at this point have been informed by D. R. Knight, proprietor of a general merchandise store, at whose dock the boat landed, that there were no docking facilities at the point of my destination. Was obliged to leave my stock of merchandise, which was packed in a large dry-goods box and in a drummer's sample trunk, at Lemon City.

Upon making a survey of surroundings in the

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vicinity of Miami River and Biscayne Bay, have observed a home place on the north side of the river and another on the south side. Was informed that the former belongs to Julia D. Tuttle and the latter to William Brickell. Adjoining the latter there is a mercantile establishment, operated by that family, in which a post-office is located. There are also several frame buildings in course of construction on both sides of the river, among them a big building which will be named "The Miami Hotel." This is situated on the Tuttle homestead. Communication between the two shores of the river is by small barge operated by hand with the aid of a wire spanning the river.

Had an interview with Mrs. Tuttle, who is said to be the owner of the north-side territory, in regard to renting a piece of ground for the erection of a store building. Result very disappointing. Must wait until land is cleared and streets laid out, when lots will be put on sale. On declaring that I could not wait, owing to my destitute condition, I was told to take a job clearing land, whereupon I tried to impress this naïve lady that the last labor of this character my race had performed was in the land of Egypt, and that

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it would be a violation of my religious convictions to resume that condition of servitude.

February 7th. Decided to locate on the south side of the river, west of Brickell Point, adjoining a small saw mill which is being operated by a Key West man named Cobb. This kind-hearted man has agreed to let me use part of his land and to furnish the material to build a small structure thereon. Another generous man, named Clayton, whose wife is conducting a boarding house in that vicinity, has agreed to build the desired structure. Both cheerfully consented to wait for payment until able to meet my obligations. Have arranged with the owners of a sailboat, Captains Cuttrell and Gorry, to bring my merchandise from Lemon City upon completion of my store building.

February 8th. Am getting acquainted on the north side. Am amazed at the rapid progress noted in this territory. A street has been laid out, commencing at the foot of the river opposite Brickell Point, the east side of which is lined with several store buildings which are approaching completion. A bank is about to be opened. Dr. Graham is planning to publish a newspaper which will be named the *Metropolis*. Buildings

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are springing up in every direction as if by magic.

February 9th. My building is nearly completed. Have secured a rowboat to carry customers to and from my place of business. The river is too deep for people to wade across, and the privately owned barge is not available when wanted. Am taking lessons in navigation as I can not afford to take chances with the lives of my prospective patrons, although some whom I have met so far I would not mind drowning.

February 10th. Sailed to Lemon City to get my stock of merchandise. While wrangling with the dock owner over storage charges, Captains Cuttrell and Gorry retired to a neighboring tent for refreshments. After locating them and finding that they were incapacitated for the performance of the services for which they had been hired, I was obliged to undertake the loading of my cargo and sailing home without them.

I managed to deposit the trunk on the boat's cabin and was in the act of lowering the big box to the side of the boat when the jolly captains approached with unsteady gait. After a noisy and incoherent conference, Captain Cuttrell ordered his colleague and me to the deck. Taking

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positions on the side of the boat, we took hold of the box while the former was bracing himself to let it slide down to the deck of the boat. On reaching the edge of the deck its weight unbalanced the boat and caused it to capsize, throwing us into the chilly water of Biscayne Bay.

The first to sink was the trunk, next to give up was the box. I clung to Captain Gorry until rescued by a gang of Nassau negroes who were attracted by our cries for help. Upon being promised a dollar each for the recovery of the box and trunk, the whole gang dived into the bay and after repeated efforts succeeded in bringing up and depositing the cargo on the boat. After assuring my rescuers that they would receive their promised reward the following day, when they presented themselves at my store, we sailed for home.

February 11th. Spent a miserable night out of doors watching my soaked merchandise which was spread on the ground to dry. In the afternoon a gang of more negroes than I had ever seen before at one time presented themselves as my rescuers and demanded a dollar each for their services. Instead of contesting the claims of some of them I deemed it expedient to recognize

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all. This action appealed to them so strongly that none demurred when I allotted each one three dollars' worth of merchandise, applying one dollar on their respective allotments and demanding and receiving two dollars in cash from each satisfied customer. (This proved a wonderful business start.)

February 12th. Finished the arrangement of my varied stock of merchandise on the shelves, prepared a comfortable sleeping place under the counter, obtained a small oil cooking stove, and am now firmly established in business as well as in housekeeping. The opening day's business is rather discouraging. My good neighbors of the south side, Mrs. P. Ullendorff, Mrs. Arthur Weaver, Mrs. Clayton, Mrs. Jack Graham, Mrs. J. W. Johnson and Mrs. Fields visited my store, made a critical inspection of my merchandise and sadly wished me "good luck."

First part of March. One day, while immersed in a game of pinochle with a friendly competitor, as I melded a hundred and fifty in trumps, my opponent emitted a cry that froze what little blood the mosquitoes had left in my body. Pointing a trembling finger toward the entrance of the store he shrieked "Snake, snake!" Without tak-

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ing time to look in the pointed direction I leaped upon the counter where I landed almost as quickly as my terrorized pinochle opponent. On looking downward and seeing no snake, I began to suspect my friend of trying to cheat me out of the big meld. However, he soon convinced me that he was an honest pinochle player (there was no money at stake), for, on gazing in the direction of the rear entrance I beheld the wriggling form of a large snake which was seeking shelter beneath some logs that were piled behind the building. The snake's exposed rear end presented a safe target for a few shots which I succeeded in firing before its withdrawal from sight. The shooting attracted, among others, an aged negro, who frightened us by saying that he was well acquainted with that snake, and that he was sure of its return to avenge the injury inflicted upon it.

My pinochle partner spent the night with me but we lost all interest in our usual game and retired rather early. Some hours later I was awakened by a sensation of pain. Upon regaining full consciousness I became aware of a weight resting on my chest. Filled with terror I bounded from my resting place to the counter, where I

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was instantly joined by my equally terrified friend who had been startled by my cries for help.

While awaiting the first rays of daylight, we shiveringly discussed my frightful experience, concluding that I was attacked by the snake which I had maltreated the preceding afternoon. Presently, on opening one of the doors (there were no windows in the building) to admit the light of the dawn, we noticed to our great relief, a big rat making its swift exit.

Last part of March. Removed to the north side, where I have secured one of the new stores erected by banker Brown. I consider the rental, \$30 per month, outrageously high. Am seriously thinking of accepting Mr. Kingsley's (Tuttle's agent) offer of a lot, across the street, for \$300 with a small payment down.

First part of April. Am doing good business, although there is keen competition on this side of the river. I no longer mind the high rent, especially since banker Brown has promised to give me a line of credit of \$100 without endorsements. Am too busy to play pinochle these days, my store is kept open until a late hour. One thing worries me, however, namely, the high insurance rates, \$100 per thousand. This compels me to

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keep my stock uninsured, causing me to pass sleepless nights in dread of fire.

Last part of April. The entire community (about three hundred people) turned out to meet the first passenger train. The station is located on the northeast corner of Twelfth Street and Avenue "E," directly opposite the colored settlement. I met Mr. Flagler, Mr. Parrott, Mr. Ingraham and Mr. Golf — the big four of the Florida East Coast Railway.

First part of June. There is some talk about incorporating this place. The *Metropolis* claims that we have enough citizens to become incorporated as a city. I wonder what this corporation paper is up to? There is a rumor that either J. A. McDonald, or his son-in-law, John B. Reilly, will be made the first mayor. The railroad crowd is certainly taking control of politics in this neck of the woods.

Last part of June. This is going to be a wonderful city. Things happen in rapid succession, and everybody is happy. Various societies are being formed. I am joining most of them (excepting the Tuxedo Club; am disqualified for membership because of lack of a tuxedo suit). Have joined a political organization which has

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been formed by Sam Fitts, the manager of Adam Corell's livery stable, who is very active in his efforts to destroy the growing political influence of J. A. McDonald, leader of the railroad corporation partisans. The corporation faction, besides having the support of the local paper, seems to have control of Jacksonville's leading newspaper, for which a local Methodist minister, named Rev. E. V. Blackman, is correspondent.

Last part of July. Business better than ever. We have a big demand for mosquito-bars. The pests are with us day and night. During the day we defend ourselves by burning rags and insect powder. We are also tormented by a vicious breed of giant horseflies.

An excursion train brought in a large number of people from all parts of the state who, on arrival, were attacked by the mosquitoes that found no available spots on the bodies of our home folk. These poor victims begged the railway officials to take them back to civilization.

This is now the city of Miami. We are duly incorporated and we expect to beat Key West in population within a short time. We are almost up to the population of West Palm Beach, in spite of the fact that the latter is about two years

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old. The slate made up by McDonald, Reilly, Morse, Sewell, Dr. Graham and the rest of the railroad partisans has been duly elected as follows: John B. Reilly, Mayor; Jack Graham, Clerk; Y. F. Gray, Marshal; J. A. McDonald, Dan Cosgrove, W. S. Graham, W. M. Brown, Fred Morse, F. T. Budge and E. L. Brady, Councilmen; and C. H. Garthside, Treasurer.

The railway partisans were strongly in favor of naming this city "Flagler," but the opposition defeated this movement and the name "Miami" has been adopted, after the Miami River, which in the Indian language signifies sweet water.

Last part of December, 1896. Miami looks like a real town. We have a city hall, a jail, a volunteer fire department, and water and light systems (the latter have been installed by the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation). Both sides of Avenue "D" are lined with store buildings; the business center, however, is shifting to Twelfth Street. Our merchants are doing good business, derived chiefly from building operations carried on by Henry M. Flagler and from railroad employees.

We have had a hard, uncomfortable summer. The mosquito and horsefly pests were reënforced

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by ants and roaches which get into the food, and by a specie of sand fly which gets under one's skin and defies capture. We are looking forward to some real business which will doubtless come with the opening of the tourist season next January. I like the north side much better than my former location. I don't have to depend entirely on my pinochle partner for social diversion. I made a number of new friends, among them Jack Graham, Louis Woolf the tailor, John Kronowitter another tailor, John Seybold the restaurant keeper, J. M. Frank, David Singer, Sam Singer and Jacob Schneidman, merchants, C. H. Raulerson the butcher, John and Tom Townley the druggists, Y. F. Gray the Town Marshal and John Frohock the Constable.

In spite of the climatic and other discomforts, this is a wonderful town. The people are very sociable. Every fellow tries to entertain every other fellow he meets. Our most popular entertainment at present is the discussion of the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation and the political destiny of Miami. These discussions often culminate in fist fights with an occasional display of knives.

The leaders of the anti-corporation faction,

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John M. and Thomas L. Townley, Sam Fitts, John Frohock and Guy Metcalf, of West Palm Beach (Palm Beach and West Palm Beach, like Miami, are situated in Dade County, its seat of government being located at Juno, on Lake Worth), are rendering this section of Florida invaluable service in vigorously opposing the political and civic domination wielded by the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation. This aggressive group of citizens is convinced that Miami and Dade County will not make much progress as long as it remains under control of special interests. Those who are identified with the opposition are called "Antis" (I am one of them), and those who happen to be in the mercantile business receive no patronage from their antagonists. However, we are compensated for this loss of trade by the good will of the common people.

I am convinced that a public utility monopoly possessing political power is a menace to the locality in which it operates. I shall therefore do all in my power to support the courageous citizens in their efforts to destroy the growing political influence this ambitious corporation is wielding through its ubiquitous partisans in this promising town. Although we were defeated in

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the first election held in this city in our effort to put some of our men on the City Council, we are undismayed and every one of us is determined to follow up the activity started against the Corporationists, until their political power is vitiated. None of us has anything against the Corporation partisans personally. They are nice fellows, whose company we enjoy when we come in contact with one another, but we don't like their connections.

In spite of this deplorable situation we entertain the highest respect for Henry M. Flagler personally. He is doing a great work in developing this wild country. Then, too, he is a most agreeable gentleman. His two chief lieutenants, J. R. Parrott and James E. Ingraham, are also very fine gentlemen, but they are too easily influenced by their local leaders. However, I consider our own leaders more than a match for them. We are at a great disadvantage in not having a people's newspaper in this town. But Sam Fitts assures us that it is only a matter of time when such a paper will be established — then watch the fur fly.