

CHAPTER IV

PIONEERS' POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

MIAMI's pioneers were noted for their fondness of political campaigns. Their frequent local elections were full of human interest. They were not the impersonal things of recent years, as will be perceived by a perusal of the following narration of the campaign of 1906.

That exciting campaign started with a dramatic, almost tragic, mass meeting, which was held in the Central Grammar School auditorium (then a frame structure) and terminated with a still more exciting baseball game (described in a preceding chapter), in which all candidates for office participated.

The agitation for deep water in Miami Harbor was then at its height. In order to commit the numerous candidates aspiring for office to the deep-water project, its proponents called a mass meeting which every candidate had pledged to attend, and did attend. The auditorium was crowded beyond its capacity, and as the clock struck 8 P.M. things commenced to happen in

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rapid succession. In the midst of a tense silence, Judge Frank B. Stoneman (then editor of the *Miami Record*) arose from his seat in the rear of the hall and in stentorian tones declaimed, "In view of the fact that the appointed time for the opening of this meeting has passed, I move to adjourn." This unexpected motion received a spontaneous and unanimous second from all candidates present (the candidates were eager to escape the ordeal of speech-making). A motion to adjourn being undebatable (Miami's early settlers were noted for their parliamentary erudition), the large audience maintained an ominous silence until it was submitted for voting, when it was shouted down in a thunderous "no" that shook the flimsy walls of the building. The disposition of this sensational motion was followed by loud and persistent calls of names of prominent citizens in the audience to act as chairman of the meeting. The name uttered the loudest happened to be that of E. A. Waddell, who made his first appearance at a public meeting.

Mr. Waddell met this call by feigning illness and pleading to be excused. His refusal to preside, however, was interpreted by the audience as pure modesty, for which he has always been

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noted, and was therefore unheeded. Thereupon H. M. King, the undertaker, advanced toward the victim of circumstances at a professional gait and seizing the former by the lapels of his coat, attempted to drag him to the platform. After considerable struggle that ceased on the victim's realization of the futility of resisting an undertaker, he allowed himself to be escorted to the platform, where he remained standing for some time scrutinizing the agitated audience. At last, pointing an accusing finger in the writer's direction, he shouted, "You are the one that's responsible for this confounded meeting (in those days public meetings were called by the secretary of the Board of Trade), come over here and preside."

At this stage of the proceedings the audience, being thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the occasion, burst out in a campaign song which ended with the refrain, "What's the matter with Waddell? He's all right." Upon restoration of order, the writer yielded to the good-natured demand to preside and assumed charge of the spirited meeting in the course of which some remarkable speeches were delivered by the candidates that dared remain in the hall. Deep water for Miami Harbor was the keynote of every

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discourse inflicted upon the long-suffering audience that night, and it remained the keynote of subsequent campaign speeches until recent years, when the burden of this song was taken up by President Sewell of the Chamber of Commerce.

The first speaker, John W. Watson, who was a candidate for the legislature, in a forceful speech, reviewed his past official record and pledged his support to the deep-water project. G. A. Worley, the former's opponent, pleaded that he would not only push the deepening of Miami Harbor with all the force at his command, but would in defiance of the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation partisans cut down the wire fence which was put up along the bay shore, between Flagler Street and the terminal dock, by the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation. (Although defeated, Judge Worley kept his promise.)

W. W. Prout (a noted booster of that period who about five years later had passed out of Miami's history) started his harrangue with a vitriolic attack upon the railway corporation, accusing it of trying to ruin Miami by building the oversea railroad to Key West, and finished with the inevitable deep-water climax. Frank

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Wharton, Mr. Prout's opponent for the mayoralty, and the rest of the candidates, after taking an oath of allegiance to the deep-water project, in tones that were calculated not to lose them any votes, recited their genealogies for the delectation and instruction of their highly appreciative audience. Some of them modestly claimed direct descent from the feudal barons of Scotland, from Captain Kidd, the pirate, and one of the candidates, a more adroit politician than the rest, claimed descent from the lost tribes of Israel — the last, of course, was a bid for the chairman's vote. At a little past midnight, a motion to adjourn by some one in the audience, whose brain was still functioning, put an end to what was threatened to be an all-night session.

The last act of that memorable campaign was staged at the city hall a few days later, when the official score-keeper handed the baseball score to the election clerk who, on finding that Frank Wharton's team had defeated Prout's by a score of twenty-seven to twenty, calmly announced that the count of the ballots (by some strange coincidence) showed a majority of seven votes in favor of Mr. Wharton. Mr. Prout, in his congratulatory remarks to his successful opponent,

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admitted that the election was won fair and square. However, he was distressed by his discovery that he had been credited with at least two hundred votes less than his records of pre-election promises indicated. This discrepancy led him to the conclusion that there were at least two hundred liars in the city of Miami at that time.

Next to the foregoing political campaign in point of interest, Miami's recrudescant local option campaigns are outstanding features in the city's history. Despite the restrictive clauses, relating to the establishment of saloons within the city limits which were incorporated in the deeds made by the late Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle and Mrs. Mary Brickell, several liquor saloon keepers succeeded in evading the restrictions, and for a number of years remained formidable competitors of the North Miami barrooms which made that section notorious. Numerous attempts by the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Miami's militant clergy to close these saloons had proved abortive. In 1907 and 1909 the town found itself in the throes of exciting "dry or wet" campaigns. Both of these elections were lost by the "drys" in spite of the aggressive and well-

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organized campaigns under the able leadership of Mrs. Edwin Nelson, the president of the then very active Women's Christian Temperance Union.

The "drys" had the support of the Miami *Metropolis* which, in this propaganda, carried out the policies of its former publishers, Messrs. Graham, Featherly, Tatum and Hethrington, who had succeeded each other as editors of this paper. S. Bobo Dean, editor during the local option fights, had suspended his ceaseless attacks against the Florida East Coast Railway Corporation and devoted much of his space to the prohibition cause. Its contemporaries, the *Record* and the *News*, supported the "wets." (The Miami *Record*, an afternoon paper, was published by LaSalle & Stoneman. The Miami *Morning News*, prior to its mergence into the *News-Record* (present Miami *Herald*), had been edited and published by a former resident of this city, Col. E. C. Byington, who, at a very early stage of Miami's history, had succeeded the late Mr. Gardner, editor of a paper called the *Sunny Land*, who was shot and killed by a sixteen-year old son of one of our pioneer merchants for vilifying his widowed mother in the columns of that paper.)

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The legal phases of those "dry or wet" campaigns were looked after by Senator F. M. Hudson, who opened a law office in this city in 1905. It is said that his connection with our local option fights cost him the governorship of Florida which he sought some years later.

The local option campaign was enlivened by the presence in this town of the late Carrie A. Nation, who came here at the solicitation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. During her short but stormy sojourn in our midst several prominent young citizens had narrow escapes from being raided in the notorious joints of North Miami, which were invaded by nightly expeditions led by that famous crusader.

The newspapers were full of exaggerated reports of Carrie Nation's activities. This publicity brought multitudes of people to the big tent at Flagler Street, opposite the courthouse, where the crusader held her nightly meetings. At one of these meetings Mrs. Nation assailed the officers of the law, whom she accused of nonenforcement of the liquor laws. She was particularly severe on Judge H. P. Branning, who was then Dade County's solicitor, for his alleged failure to keep the saloons closed on Sundays. The judge, who

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stood close to the platform and who had manifestly anticipated the attack, leaped upon the platform, wildly waving his arms in close proximity to his sensational accuser, and in a voice tense with emotion cried, "Prove it, prove it." Whereupon, the militant Carrie withdrew two quart bottles of whiskey from the mysterious folds of her nondescript dress which she waved frantically above her head, and dramatically cried, "Here is the proof." The astounded solicitor was rendered speechless. His lips moved without uttering a sound. At last he pulled himself together and attempted to deliver a discourse on the evils of fanaticism and the brutality of woman against man, but his words were made inaudible by the loud peals of the organ, reënfined by the joyful voices of the congregation singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," to the tune of which he dejectedly descended from the platform and made his inglorious exit from the tent. It should be noted that our highly esteemed judge suffered no permanent injury from his clash with the conquering Carrie. Some years later he was honored with the office of Circuit Judge, which important office he administered with distinction until a year or so ago

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when he resigned in order to resume his law practice.

Carrie Nation's victorious encounter with Judge Branning had inspired her to still greater deeds of valor. Upon leaving the tent at the conclusion of that sensational meeting she espied a group of citizens who were quietly smoking their cigars. The alert Carrie suddenly pounced upon them, knocking the cigars from their mouths and screaming, "You tobacco-saturated loafers, why don't you go home to your wives?"

The several election campaigns incident to county division, which in the year 1909 culminated in the creation of Palm Beach County, were also full of excitement and forensic eruptions.

At a public hearing before the Board of County Commissioners, which was held in the Dade County Court House in the city of Miami, with the Chairman of the Board, the late George B. Baker, presiding, a large pro-division delegation from West Palm Beach, headed by Counsellor C. C. Chillingsworth, George O. Butler, M. C. Hardee, and George G. Currie, had finally succeeded in banishing the acrimonious opposition interposed by Miamians on many previous

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occasions. (In the year 1915 Dade County was again divided, and the County of Broward, with Fort Lauderdale its county seat, was created. There is now a movement on foot to cut off a portion of the southern end of Dade and create a new county which, if successful, will be named "Redland.")