

# Tequesta

## THE JOURNAL OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA

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THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA

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**On the Cover**—The Granada Entrance to Coral Gables, one of the stone entrances to the City Beautiful. HASF 1976-70-108

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## Editor's Foreword

I have relished helping to prepare this issue of *Tequesta* because the articles constituting it are fascinating and informative, and it was a delight to work with each of the authors. In the mid-1990s, I received a letter from Donald M. Kuhn, a nephew of George Merrick, the creator of Coral Gables. Kuhn shared with me memories of his youth in that community. For Kuhn, a pioneer of database marketing, the Coral Gables of the 1920s and 1930s was a living museum and the interiors of such signature structures as the DeSoto Fountain and the Commercial Entrance at Douglas Road and Alhambra Circle, his playrooms. My fascination with these stories led me to share them with tourgoers when we toured the Gables.

Last year, I had the good fortune to escort Donald Kuhn on a tour of Coral Gables and other parts of Miami-Dade County. After the event, he regaled me with additional accounts of his youth in Coral Gables. I encouraged him to put these memories in writing, and he quickly responded with "Growing up in Coral Gables," a nostalgic, insightful look at the City Beautiful during that monumental period of boom and bust. Kuhn's piece reminded me of William Davenport's "Growing Up, Sort Of, in Miami, 1909-1915," (1980), my favorite *Tequesta* article, which contains a riveting account of Miami, the Magic City, in its early years.

Grant Livingston, a renowned south Florida balladeer, was a student in my Miami/South Florida History class in 1999. For his class writing project, Livingston authored an account of the annexation of Coconut Grove. I was struck by the depth of his research and the quality of his narrative, so we decided to "appropriate" the article for this edition of *Tequesta*. Ever diligent, Livingston made several additional visits to historical repositories and produced more drafts of his article, entitled "The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove," in preparation for its publication. Readers will enjoy this essay, especially since Coconut Grove has indicated on more than one occasion in the recent past that it might be better served if it "seceded" from the city of Miami.

Kip Vought, a regulatory affairs manager at a pharmaceutical firm in Colorado, has spent several years studying black Miami, the result of which is his article, "Racial Stirrings in Colored Town: The UNIA in Miami in the 1920s." This study began as a paper for an American History class taught by Dr. Gregory Bush. As a student in my Southern

History class at the University of Miami, Vought shared it with me. Since little was known of the UNIA or of black activism in an era characterized by violent incidents between the races in Miami, I was excited over the prospect of sharing it with a wider audience. Vought's essay represents a worthy contribution to the growing corpus of studies on early black Miami, a community that registered remarkable achievements in spite of the difficulties presented by racial discrimination.

This edition of *Tequesta* is as much the product of the Herculean labors of Sara Muñoz, managing editor, and Kelly Geisinger, copy editor, as any other factor. We thank them, members of our Advisory Board, and the aforementioned contributors to this, the sixtieth edition of *Tequesta*. We hope you will enjoy and learn from it.

Paul S. George  
Editor, *Tequesta*

## Growing up in Coral Gables

*by Donald M. Kuhn*

One of my first memories of Coral Gables must have been in 1925 when the streetcars were introduced. I was nearly three and playing alone behind our big home at 824 Ponce de Leon Blvd. The house was on the southwest corner of Antequera Avenue, one block south of the Tamiami Trail (Southwest Eighth Street). An office building now occupies that site. Suddenly there was a horrendously loud train whistle, and inching north on the boulevard came a huge, black steam engine, the first I had ever seen. It frightened me, and I crawled through an opening under the house to escape it. In all likelihood, that one-time appearance of the steam engine was in celebration of the coming of the street car to Coral Gables.

During the same period, incredible as it may seem, peacocks wandered along the boulevard, their tails spread like fans. I thought they were the most beautiful of all creatures. For some reason, they disappeared soon after.

My dad, Paul C. Kuhn, had died a year earlier in the summer of 1924, before I reached the age of two, and I have no memory of him. My two brothers, Merrick, the eldest, and Richard, the youngest, have no memory of our dad either.

My mother, nee Helen Merrick, was the youngest of George E. Merrick's three sisters, the other two being Ethel and Medic. Besides George, my mother had brothers Charles and Richard. Mother was a twin; her sister, Ruth, died of diphtheria a year before the family moved to Dade County in 1900.

Of the six surviving children of Solomon Greasley and Althea Fink Merrick, my mother was the only one to bear offspring, so we three kids grew up with unusually close relationships with our aunts and uncles.



**The home of Helen Merrick, the mother of Donald Kuhn, at 824 Ponce De Leon Boulevard, Coral Gables circa 1924—presently the site of an office building.**

Mother's second marriage was to John V. Bond, an uncle by marriage who was widowed. He was a contractor, specializing in building coral rock homes. In 1926 we moved into his house at 1217 Coral Way where we lived until I was ten years old.

People today think that when the boom wound down after 1926, everyone went broke overnight. That was certainly not the case with the Merricks. The economic decline was slow and insidious. Uncle George and Aunt Eunice lived in their house at 836 South Greenway Drive until the end of the 1920s, Aunt Medie in her home at 1133 North Greenway Drive, and Aunt Ethel and Uncle Ted in their home at 711 University Drive. We had servants during those years. We had telephones and automobiles.

From my earliest age, I knew that Uncle George was special. He had become the head of the family when my grandfather died in 1911. While still in his thirties, he had created and built Coral Gables, its splendid waterway, the Venetian Pool, the Douglas Entrance, the Biltmore Hotel, was a founder of the University of Miami, and donated the land for its campus. Despite his subsequent financial failure, the family held him in awe. I was no exception.

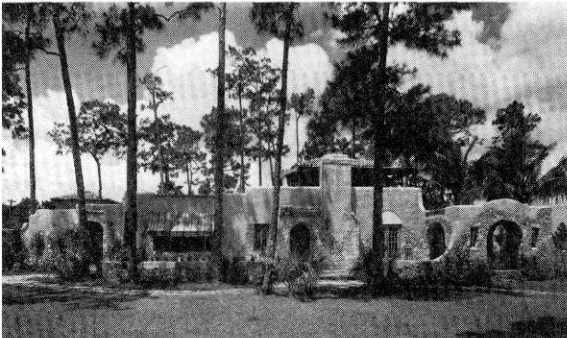
Uncle George had a big Lincoln (as I remember) and it was driven by a handsome, black chauffeur named George Allen who lived in the apartment above the garage. Uncle George's garage was unique. It had front and back garage doors. One could

drive from the street into the back, then out the front without backing up.

We never entered Uncle George's house from the front door on South Greenway Drive, but always through the side gate on Castile Avenue. George and Eunice kept two parrots on the porch. They had gorgeous blue, red and green colors. The living room decor was like nothing I had seen elsewhere—Spanish, of heavy dark woods and leathers. There was a strange, dark-wooded desk, obviously Spanish, trimmed in red and gold and possibly other colors, with many little drawers. That desk would fascinate any child. Uncle George always gave each of us three brothers a dime whenever he saw us, just like we heard Rockefeller did.

My brother, Merrick, who died in 1989, told me that he had read that a syndicate had offered Uncle George forty million dollars for his holdings in 1928, which George refused. I have not been able to verify that.

The great hurricane of 1926 struck when I was not quite four. Our sturdy home of coral rock stood like a fortress. However, there were



**The splendid home of George and Eugene Merrick at 836 South Greenway Drive. The Merricks resided there from 1924 until 1930. HASF M3687**

screened sleeping porches on the east and west sides, and the wind drove much water into the house. The water nearly reached my knees, and I was having great fun wading. Father stood me on a chair and ordered me to stay there while he began bor-

ing holes through the floor with a brace and bit to let the water out. Merrick's treadle car blew away during the night, and we never saw it again.

The 1926 hurricane was very exciting to us kids and we eagerly looked forward to more hurricanes from that time on.

The 1930s were hard for the grownups, but not for us kids. The chief effect of the depression on us three brothers was that we received

no allowances; we had to fend for ourselves. My mother, a free spirit, was very permissive. Father administered discipline.

It wasn't until 1933 when my stepfather lost his house at 1217 Coral Way through foreclosure that we moved back into my mother's home on Ponce de Leon Boulevard, at which time we no longer had a phone or car. Father got around on a bicycle. All the other houses except my grandmother's (Coral Gables Merrick House) had been lost by that time also. My Aunt Medie's automobile, her prized Wills Sainte Claire two-door convertible, rested on blocks in our driveway.

When I was growing up in the 1920s, most families never locked their doors. Traffic in front of our house on Coral Way was sporadic. One could hear noises long distances away. Every morning, somewhere to the east, a rooster crowed.

Every week, it seemed, a car would strike a dog somewhere, and we would hear that awful sound, "aiee, aiee, aiee," until it faded in the distance. When I was four or five, my grandmother's little fox terrier, Mike, was struck and killed at the intersection of University Drive and Granada Boulevard. Aunt Medie and I carried Mike home. He is buried somewhere on Coral Gables Merrick House property.

For some reason, loose dogs seem to be more car-savvy these days.

My brothers and I spent hours on the playground at San Salvador Park, a block away. When my mother wanted us home for lunch, she would stand at the front door and call our names—"Merrick, Donald, Richard!" We heard her easily from where we played in the park.

The Coral Gables Country Club was a lively place many evenings. I enjoyed lying in bed, listening to the music waft across the distant golf course as I dropped off to sleep.

In the distance, we would also hear, all too frequently, the sound of car accidents in Coral Gables. First would come the screeching of tires, then the bang, and then the distinctive tinselled sound of breaking glass settling to the street. Cars had no safety glass until sometime in the 1930s, and even in a minor accident, one could be seriously injured by shards of glass, some as deadly as kitchen knives. Seat belts weren't an option until the 1950s.

I witnessed my first accident when I was five. I was returning with my mother from a morning walk on Country Club Prado. I saw two cars crash at high speed at the intersection of Coral Way and Red Road. I wanted to see the accident close up because one



car had turned over, but mother shielded my eyes and marched me home.

A few years later, I saw a terrible accident on the Tamiami Trail at Cortez Street. A touring bus, identical to the one that Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert shared in the movie *It Happened One Night*, struck a car with such force that the car was hurled like a toy into a vacant lot, shearing off a pine tree before it landed. The car contained a family with children, all of whom had been ejected from the car. I was eight or nine and unused to such carnage. I ran to the corner and vomited.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the main section of the Gables lay between Douglas and Red Roads, and between the Trail and Bird Road. Beyond Bird Road there were miles of paved roads and sidewalks and vacant lots. The unique “villages” in the area with Dutch, Chinese, and French architecture were enclaves, somewhat like oases, separated by blocks full of Florida pines with a few houses here and there.

The Coral Gables waterway snaked through the area with only a half-dozen homes built on it. One of my favorite homes in Coral Gables was Telfair Knight’s home on the waterway. Telfair was Uncle George’s general manager. His home was on the west side of the waterway on University Drive, a little south of Bird Road. It was a large home, Mediterranean in style, painted a light brown. It had a circular driveway, and a swimming pool and cabana. The Knights entertained a lot, and as a kid, I enjoyed their parties. At one such gala event, the guests were given gold watches.

Father had three children by his previous marriage, and for a while they and we three brothers all lived together. Vernon, Mildred and Frances were in their teens and danced and partied a lot to the tunes of the day. By 1928, they had all moved north. Vernon left his Lyon and Healy trombone behind which I learned to play a half-dozen years later.

There were no locks on most of the city-owned buildings such as the Granada or Alhambra entrances or the castle-like circular stairway leading to the arch of the Douglas Entrance, or even the pump room under the De Soto Fountain near the Venetian Pool. In the 1930s, the cover of the manhole leading to the pump room was never locked, as it is today. It was our make-believe dungeon, dark and damp. We went there after dark, with candles or flashlights.

The coral rock entrances to the city were made-to-order clubhouses. The Granada entrance was okay, but our favorite was the one at

Douglas Road and Alhambra Circle. It was close to the elementary school. When school let out, we would head for our clubhouse in the arch over the street. It was easy to get into. The doors were never locked. No one ever bothered us. All of these sites at various times



**The De Soto Fountain with the Miami Biltmore Hotel (today's Biltmore Hotel) in the background.**

**HASF 1986-250-3**

became play areas for some of us as we were growing up.

Coral Gables was not without its hazards for young boys. There were bigger boys who bullied, for instance. The plazas around the city offered hiding places where one could waylay you. The plazas at Granada Boulevard and Columbus Boulevard were two of their favorite lurking spots. I was underweight and lithe, and I could run like a gazelle to escape them. I had no problem running through vacant lots and their sandspurs, but they did. Sometimes a bully would chase me, and I would pop into the house of a surprised neighbor for a haven; their door was invariably unlocked. What would a bully do if he caught you? Make you say “uncle,” stuff like that. By the time I was nine, bullies were no longer a threat to me.

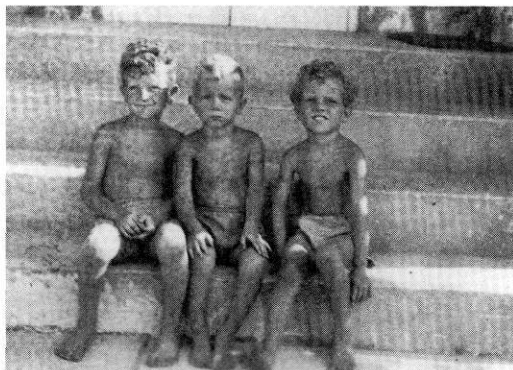
My mother believed that the sun was healthy for growing kids, so until we entered grade school, we rarely wore shirts or even shoes. This state of affairs upset a lady down the street at Madrid who complained about us “heathens.” Recently, I learned from Tommy Lifsey, who used to live in the same block in the rock house with a blue roof, that Daniel Redfern, a lawyer neighbor, wrote a letter to her that effectively shut her up.

Father, like Aunt Medie, owned a Wills Sainte Claire. Ours was a four-door convertible, a “gangster car.” Its hood emblem was a flying goose. We referred to it by its common name, the “Grey Goose.” It was an expensive car, high-powered and quiet-running. On Sundays we drove down Columbus Boulevard to the Congregational Church

where Father, Mother, and we three brothers attended adult services. There may have been a Sunday school, but we three never attended it. During sermons, Father could be counted on to nod off, and sometimes to snore. One evening a silent film was shown in the sanctuary. It was *King of Kings*, a 1927 movie directed by Cecil B. de Mille.

After church, nearly every Sunday, our family would climb back into the Grey Goose for long drives in the countryside. We ventured as far north as Opa-Locka where there was a zoo and huge zeppelin hangars, and as far south as Royal Palm State Park, south of Homestead. In 1929, we drove up to Palm Beach for a swim in the strong surf there. We also took in a movie, *The Canary Murder Case*, at a theater located in an arcade in West Palm Beach.

Two of the main northward thoroughfares, Le Jeune Road and Twenty-seventh Avenue were narrow, two-lane highways. They were sometimes crowded with traffic. Miles north on Twenty-seventh Avenue was the Municipal Airport where air shows were held. In 1936 or 1937, some of us rode bicycles there to see the new bomber called the Flying Fortress.



**Merrick, Richard, and Donald on the front steps of 1217 Coral Way, Coral Gables in 1927.**

Once, returning from Opa-Locka in the Grey Goose, coming down Le Jeune Road (or possibly Red Road), we

passed by a “train wreck” promotion. Tickets were being sold to the public for an upcoming Sunday in which two steam engines would be sent crashing into each other at high speed. Father said “no” to our pleas to attend, and he was right to do so, for the crash turned out to be a dull affair, in fact, one big dud, according to the newspapers.

Occasionally we would drive into Miami to a Spanish restaurant on Miami Avenue north of the Capitol Theater. (Mother always referred to that street as “Avenue D.”) Invariably Father ordered *arroz con pollo* for all of us. We brothers called it “rollio com pollio.”

Father's good friend Dick Rice and family owned an orange grove and packinghouse in Kendall. Father worked there on occasion, and he often took me with him. We would drive through Larkins, now South Miami, past the Larkins movie theater which became a Holsum bakery, through a piney area until we reached the Kendall grove. I would spend the day playing among the orange trees, or visiting the noisy packinghouse located across U.S. 1 by the Florida East Coast railway tracks. During cold snaps, black smoke pots would be put around the orange trees to help prevent freezing. Some time after World War II, Dick Rice's grove disappeared and the site became a snake farm tourist attraction.

The road to Homestead was mostly pine country. The little crossroad towns of Kendall, Perrine, Goulds, Princeton, and Naranja were easily identified, because miles of pines and palmettos separated them. Turn left toward the bay—pines. Turn right toward the Everglades—pines. Near Homestead were farms that grew tomatoes and other vegetables, and groves of oranges and avocados. Civilization ended at Krome Avenue.

On several trips that we made to Homestead in the Grey Goose, an ancient black steam engine facing north on a siding fascinated me. It was ancient because, like some of those old steam engines seen in Westerns, it had one of those odd funnels shaped like a fat, angular, pot-bellied stove, big in the middle and narrow at the top and bottom. It was near Princeton, always there in the same place. I fantasized that it was the "little engine that could" that in an emergency would come to someone's rescue, climbing an imaginary hill, chugging, "I think I can, I think I can." *The Little Engine That Could* was one of the first books that I read as a child.

There was a county hospital in Kendall where the poor were supposed to go. When I was ten, I had an abscess in my left hip. This was in 1932, and there was talk of an operation in the Kendall hospital. Thankfully, that was not to be, and Dr. Arthur Weiland of Coral Gables performed an operation on me at Jackson Memorial Hospital. I spent three weeks there and became a favorite of the nurses. My ward was in a screened sleeping porch. Recently I tried to identify the building with its tropical, red tiled roof, but I could not find it in the huge maze that is Jackson today.

The post-boom years were an okay time for us kids. The whole Miami area was one big playground, filled with vacant or unfinished

buildings and secret haunts. These included structures as large as a skyscraper and as small as a corner gas station. In Coral Gables, the two largest unfinished structures were the concrete skeleton of the administration building on the undeveloped campus of the University of Miami on University Concourse, now Ponce de Leon Boulevard, and the large, U-shaped, apartment building at 121-125 Zamora Avenue. We referred to it as the “Three-Story Building.”

The “Three-Story Building” was a concrete block shell on the outside. Inside were under-flooring, stairs and studs and no interior walls. Although the doors and windows were boarded up, we found a way in. Two bosom buddies, Jimmy and Billy McDonald, and we three brothers considered it our private playhouse. It was the biggest playhouse one could ever want. This was in 1933 after we had moved back to my mother’s house on Ponce de Leon Boulevard when I was ten. Coincidentally, Jimmy and Billy had moved, too, to an apartment at 144 Mendoza Avenue behind the “Three-Story Building.”

In downtown Coral Gables, during business hours, one was always aware of the Renuart Lumber Yard. It was off one of the side streets west of Ponce de Leon Boulevard. The noise from its electric saws reverberated up and down the boulevard. There was also a riding academy nearby.

The Coral Gables Theater, on Ponce between Alcazar and Minorca, was big, modern, and comfortable. Mr. Boone, a baldish man friendly to kids, managed it. His main usher was a suave young man with slicked down black hair who wore a classy serge uniform. During the 1930s, the theater sponsored occasional vaudeville acts between movie shows. I remember seeing Joe Penner (“Wanna buy a duck?”) perform there. The theater also sponsored the usual “dish” nights and prize drawings, such as for turkeys at Thanksgiving. In 1933, I saw *King Kong* there.

From Alcazar Avenue, the theater could be accessed through Hupps Pharmacy. Hupps was famous for its great candy counter, and also for its soda fountain that competed against the soda fountain of Alcazar Drugs across the street on Ponce. There was a gas station on the Minorca side of the theater, behind which two yellow school busses were routinely parked. They were used for transporting teenagers to Ponce de Leon High School on U.S. 1, opposite the undeveloped campus of the University of Miami.

There were only one or two vacant lots between the theater and Coral Way. In 1936 or 1937, on one of the lots, a narrow one, a new building was constructed which seemed to be a positive indicator for progress ahead. It housed a stock brokerage firm.

The main intersection of Coral Gables was Ponce de Leon Boulevard and Coral Way (Miracle Mile after WWII). Yet there were only two buildings at that corner, the Administration Building of the old Coral Gables Corporation and the Colonnade Building. For a few years, a miniature golf course occupied the northwest corner (we called it a Pony golf course). The southeast corner was vacant, until it too sported a miniature golf course. The two courses competed against each other. The intersection was further humbled when the administration building was modified to house Sam's Service Station on the southwest corner. Gas dispensing must have been a very good business in the 1930s; there were six gas stations on Ponce de Leon Boulevard between Coral Way and the Tamiami Trail. A pharmacy and bus station eventually replaced the miniature golf course on the northwest corner.

There were not many other structures along Coral Way. There was a three-story building on the north side a little west of Douglas Road. On Biltmore Way west of City Hall, there was only one building that I can recall.

All the Merricks liked ice cream, including Uncle George, and there were three parlors in the Gables. Two of them were located on Ponce de Leon Boulevard—one near Flagler Street, and one near Bird Road. The third and by far the most popular was Worthmore on Aragon Avenue off Ponce de Leon, two stores west of Dad's barber shop. Many flavors were available, including grapenut, but I always preferred their vanilla.

One of my very early memories was a "community night" held at the broad intersection of Ponce de Leon Boulevard and Alhambra Circle. The area was cordoned off from Ponce eastward to the triangular building that housed a bank in front, and post office at the rear. There was a root beer stand on the north side of the square. Father bought us ice-cold root beer that was dispensed from a huge barrel inside the stand. It was a balmy night, and the area teemed with people. A band played. I don't recall any speeches.

Eventually, the bank and post office were relocated, and the vacated building became a church. The post office moved into a section of the Administration Building of the old Coral Gables Corporation, across

an arcade from Uncle George's real estate office that he established in the mid-1930s. In 1938, when I was taken north by car to live with my



**George Merrick, the creator of Coral Gables, on the steps of the newly-opened Miami Biltmore Hotel, January 1926. HASF M4078 (W)**

Aunt Medie and Uncle Quint in Greenwich, New York, I saw numerous signs on U.S. 1 between Miami and Jacksonville advertising Uncle George's real estate business in Coral Gables.

Periodically in the late 1920s, my mother would take us three boys into Miami to shop at Burdine's, or Cromer-Cassel's (later Richards), which supposedly, until the downtown Walgreens store was built, had Miami's only basement. We would take a streetcar from downtown Coral Gables into Miami. We could go via Flagler Street or Coral Way. Most of the time we traveled via Coral Way. The streetcar on Coral Way was big, modern, and swift. The motorman allowed us to ride up front. Usually, we had lunch at a small corner restaurant on Southeast First Street toward the bay. I always enjoyed looking up to see the castle-like turrets of the Halcyon Hotel, and the sprawling, yellow Royal Palm Hotel on the river.

In 1927 when I was going on five, my aunt Medie took me to my first University of Miami football game. It was played on a field on the undeveloped campus, about where the University's baseball stadium is today. There were wooden bleachers along the west side of the field. I

enjoyed the excitement of the adults, but was more interested in the popcorn and peanuts than the game.

In 1928, our family was still well-off enough for my mother to take us three children to Basil, Ohio (now Baltimore), near Columbus, to visit my deceased father's parents. We took a train to Jacksonville, a ship to Baltimore with a stopover in Savannah, and a train from

Baltimore to Columbus, Ohio. In Baltimore, I experienced my first hill. I climbed it, ran down it too fast, and tumbled into a house at the bottom. Strangely, I have no recollection of the return trip from Columbus.

My grandmother's home, Coral Gables Merrick House, was always interesting and a source of fun. It was like entering an art museum. Paintings, mostly by family members—Mody, Uncle Denman, Uncle Richard—hung in every room. Photos of Uncle Richard were on a wall above a cabinet holding the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Mody's hand-

adorned the dining room. The whole family met there for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners.

My grandmother Althea (the grownups called her "Alley", and we three kids, "Mody," pronounced "Moady"), sat at one end of the table,

Uncle George at the

other. We boys were never allowed at the big table. We had a card table in the same room to ourselves. Sometimes, we would be allowed to run the player piano. We celebrated perhaps a dozen such happy occasions before my grandmother died in 1937.

After dinner at Mody's, when we were real young, we played under the sunroom behind the bamboo trees, among scores of conch shells stored there. The grotto was larger then than it is today. It included a large pond with goldfish, much larger and deeper than the pond in front. We became expert at starting the various sprinklers servicing the grotto, and enjoyed watching them run. The banyan tree in back and the rubber tree in front were great for climbing, especially the rubber tree. The swing outside the summer room was also a lot of fun. Our favorite game after dinner was hide-and-seek, and as I recall, I was usually the most successful at hiding myself. The south garage was



**The Coral Gables House, the boyhood home of George Merrick. Members of the Merrick family lived there throughout the boyhood years of Donald Kuhn.**

**HASF M3678**



off limits because that's where Uncle Richard and Uncle Charley made beer.

No recounting of early Coral Gables would be complete without comments on Coral Gables Elementary School. I entered kindergarten in 1927. I remember nearly all of my teachers – Miss Thompson in kindergarten, Miss Feaster in first grade, Miss Stoddard in second grade, Miss Dunlap who encouraged me in English, Miss Madry (mathematics), Miss Ware (geography), Miss Fulks (English), Miss Khoury (music and physical education), Miss Baccus (first grade), Miss Linder (eighth grade, art and penmanship) and one man who resembled the actor, Gene Raymond, but whose name I don't remember.

There were no fences at the school. Two custodians—janitors—lived on the premises. They were Mr. Garrett and Mr. Simpson. All of us children liked them immensely.

The school seemed to be a magnet for grocery stores. The Coral Gables Grocery was across the street on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Flanagan's, in the Laidlaw Building, flanked the school on the south at Minorca, and Table Supply was on the north at Navarre. Father shopped at the Table Supply, an early supermarket. Our food budget was \$10 per week. That fed our family of five, two dogs, and a number of cats.

The school day started with the playing of the bugle, the raising of the flag, and the Pledge of Allegiance.

By far, the dominant personality at Coral Gables Elementary School was Miss Abigail Gilday, the principal. She was a big woman, and to a child, utterly huge. She occupied a small office, so small that she seemed all the larger. Her upper arms were as big as logs. Her dress fell straight, like Mother Hubbard, to her ankles, nearly hiding her black, laced shoes. Her ability to widen her eyes and stare us down was such that no culprit dared lie to her, lest he melt into the floor. We respected Miss Gilday, but feared ever being brought before her, because we knew we couldn't fool her under any circumstance imaginable.

Miss Gilday believed that most studying should be done at school, so we had very little homework. The homework we did have was mostly confined to required memorization, such as selections from Shakespeare. Once a week we would assemble in the auditorium to listen to Walter Damrosch's radio show on music appreciation. Once a year at assembly, the Coral Gables police and firemen would demonstrate drug paraphernalia and educate us about the evils of opium and heroin.

Once when I was twelve, Billy McDonald and I (he was my best friend) had the audacity to skip school, play hooky, that is, and think that we could get away with it. It was a fiasco. We rode Billy's bike into Coconut Grove and were playing in the park on the site of the old Peacock Inn when a policeman intercepted us. He deposited the bike and us at the principal's office at Coconut Grove Elementary School. The principal phoned Fanny Tooley, legendary as the hard-nosed, red-haired truant officer from downtown Miami, to escort us back to Coral Gables. The principal then went to lunch, leaving Billy and me alone in her office. Billy's bike was leaning against a coconut tree just outside the principal's door.

We commiserated regarding our plight. Neither of us wanted to be confronted by Fanny Tooley, or Miss Gilday, or my stepfather, or Billy's mother. Our childish solution was to compound the situation by deciding to "run away" and travel north to see the world.

We jumped on Billy's bike, rode it to a nearby block that was vacant, and hid in the middle of the block until school let out. We envisioned that all the police in Miami were hunting for us. Using mostly back streets, we traveled north to Thirty-sixth Street, then up U.S. 1 past Seventy-ninth Street. By that time, we were tired and a little hungry, and decided to hitchhike. The first car that came along picked us up, bike and all.

The driver, a young man, drove us as far as Fort Lauderdale. There, he pulled over to the shoulder and tried to talk us out of traveling farther. While he was talking to us, a state trooper stopped to see if we needed aid. When the driver got out and began talking to the trooper, Billy and I, huddled in the back seat with the bike on our laps, knew the jig was up.

Fort Lauderdale at that time was a small town of under ten thousand. While the police awaited the arrival of Billy's mother who had both a phone and a car, they treated us like celebrities, and served us ice cream. The worst part of the ordeal was the long drive home. Billy's mother uttered not a single word, which was worse than if she had berated us.

We never faced Fanny Tooley. Father gave me a tanning with his razor strop. We survived Miss Gilday's withering stare and promised her our good behavior in the future. Mother and father ordered me to stop seeing Billy, but that was impossible to enforce, for I saw him at school every day.

I met Jimmy and Billy McDonald when I was in the second grade. Jimmy was a year older than Billy and myself. Their mother, Sara, was a

widow. She sold ties door-to-door initially, and then took a permanent job with Pan American Airways. The McDonalds lived in the downstairs part of a garage apartment on Madrid Street near South Greenway Drive. The Houston family lived upstairs. Billy and I became fast friends. Later, we discovered that we both liked the water. We fished and sailed near Dinner Key, canoed in the Miami River, and frequented the Venetian Pool and Tahiti Beach.

Billy and I particularly liked the area around Dinner Key. We enjoyed watching the PAA clippers land and discharge their passengers. Somehow Billy and I managed to own a small sailboat with a center-board and collapsible mast. We liked to take her out at six in the morning when the bay was like glass, and one could see the baby barracudas close to shore. We frequented a sandbar called "White Island." There was nothing on it but crabs and sand flies, but it was fun just getting off the boat and exploring it.

Sometimes we ventured as far as the two Deering Islands north of the Deering Estate (Villa Vizcaya). With their numerous Australian pines, the islands made excellent camp sites.

Once we beached the boat on the mainland north of the estate and visited the Devil's Punch Bowl. We had read about it in the newspaper. It was a mysterious, natural appearing round hole about a yard or so across, flush with the ground, in a heavily wooded area not far from the shore. I don't recall seeing water in it.

Swimming was an all-day affair. The Venetian Pool, with its caves, towers, and abundant foliage, was great for playing hide-and-seek. Once, by perching on the fence near the entrance to the pool, I successfully hid "in plain view" like ET in the closet. Two kids coming from opposite directions met directly in front of me, wondering where I could possibly be hiding. I could have touched them.

Our canoe in the Miami River was an apparent Seminole Indian dugout that Billy and I discovered buried in mud near the turntable train bridge of the FEC railway. We were pursuing an eel when we stumbled across it. The canoe easily held three or four persons. With the canoe, we were able to paddle real close to the manatees that frequented the mouth of the river.

One summer day, when the Brickell Avenue Bridge was being repaired in raised position, a workman high up accidentally dropped a large bucket of aluminum paint that hit the water only inches from me.

Had it struck me, I surely would have been severely injured or killed. I was splashed with paint, which I had a hard time explaining to my mother, for she was unaware of our boat in the river. She knew only of our boat at Dinner Key.

The Granada Golf Course provided sport many evenings. One of our unusual pastimes was a game we called "tanking." Dotted around the course were some thatched-roofed, open-aired huts that provided thirsty golfers with shade and cool water. The water was cooled by a block of ice resting on coils in a square tank above the spigot. One of the huts was near Madrid Street and South Greenway Drive, a half-block from the garage apartment where Jimmy and Billy lived. After dark, we would remove the lid from the tank, and if the block of ice was large enough, we took turns pulling down our britches to see who could sit on it the longest. It sounds crazy, but that's one of the ways we had fun.

Boy Scout Troop 7 occupied an edge of the course on South Greenway Drive. I joined the troop in 1935 and greatly enjoyed the camaraderie and activities. We usually ended our evenings playing "Capture the Flag," a game for which the golf course was amply suited. We camped on Snapper Creek, off Red Road across from a nudist colony. The nudist colony later became the Parrot Jungle.

In 1934 or 1935, we discovered the tropical jungle of Matheson Hammock, and sometimes spent all day there playing hide-and-seek on our bicycles. We rode our bikes through the narrow jungle paths. Some sections of Matheson Hammock with their giant ferns and huge tropical trees made us feel as though we were in deepest Africa. Farther down Cutler Road in front of a general store was a large, rare Sausage Tree that enhanced the Hammock's mystique.

Sometimes we played on an unfinished stretch of the Coral Gables waterway that wended west along South Alhambra Circle. The canal had been dug, but coral rock gravel from the excavations was still heaped on the south side, making mini-hills. Nearby, we found some corrugated, galvanized roofing panels, and rounded an end on each to make them into sleds. Then we would climb to the top and sled down, racing each other for hours at a time.

It was not unusual in that section of the Gables to find dry-land turtles that my mother called gophers lazing in the middle of an empty road. We played with them for a while, then put them into the weeds across the sidewalk so that they would not be run over by an occasional

car. Sometimes a family of six or eight fat little quails crossed the road toward some unknown destination, like organized chickens.

I abhorred and feared scorpions, and became adept at uncovering the little brown things hiding in old, damp woodpiles. I was rarely successful in destroying one. Once, when a tree was being planted in the Alhambra parkway at Ponce de Leon Boulevard, I saw an ugly, jet black scorpion as large as a man's hand crawl out of the hole into the grass. A workman killed it.

Then there were the rare centipedes, yellow, an inch wide, and nearly a foot long that we kids feared more than any other insect, because we were told that one could kill us. Other creatures that we feared were the coral snake and the white-mouthed water moccasin. Once, around 1934, a wild cat was discovered in a huge live oak at the rear of the Clara Reina Hotel on Alhambra Circle only a block from Douglas Road. A hotel staff member shot it out of the tree.

I was by no means non-studious. The Coral Gables Library was located nearby in the Douglas Entrance, on the first floor, beneath the Grand Ballroom. The librarians, Miss Beaton and Miss De Pamphilis were extremely helpful to my brother Merrick and me. Merrick encouraged my reading, and the two of us enjoyed many evenings at the library, taking books home to read. My younger brother, Richard, was less interested in reading, but he had a natural bent for arithmetic. The library was later moved down the street to its own building.

Merrick liked to own books. At one point, he owned an entire set of books by Horatio Alger. He had a large collection of books on Napoleon. I favored biographies on pirates, inventors, and statesmen, particularly George Washington.

Oftentimes in the summer, and after school, I visited my grandmother Mody. She suffered from arthritis, and got around the house on crutches, never complaining, just sometimes saying, "ouch." My visits to Mody usually included playing board games with her, our favorite being "Pollyanna." My grandparents had been true pioneers. They moved to Florida from Massachusetts with five children in 1900 when Dade County had only one thousand people and "Coral Gables" was a wilderness. Uncle Richard, the sixth child, was born in 1903; he came in with the airplane, as he liked to say.

After Uncle George and Aunt Eunice lost their home around 1930, they moved into Miami to live on West Flagler Street, near Southwest

Twenty-second Avenue. They would come over on weekends and take Mody for drives around Coral Gables. I accompanied them sometimes. I think that Uncle George never tired of viewing his creation, his "City Beautiful." He would point out his favorite buildings. He was particularly pleased with the Biltmore Hotel; it was always the last sight on our drive. Mody was fun to be with and I was sad when she died in 1937.

Occasionally, in the rainy season, we could expect mosquitoes from the Everglades. They came in swarms on hot, humid evenings, blackening screen doors in their attempts to enter. Tourists in the winter often complained about the many bugs in the area; I would think to myself, "They should see them in the summer."

It was a common occurrence for tourists to stop their cars, stick their heads out the windows, and ask me for directions to a destination in the Gables. Sometimes they complained that they were hopelessly lost. I enjoyed helping them. Earlier, until the beginning of the 1930s, pink telephone-type booths housed "You Are Here" maps, that dotted Coral Gables. These had been placed strategically around the city for the benefit of prospective buyers and tourists. Gradually, they disappeared, as did the handsome, wooden street signs. One of the last surviving map booths was on Coral Way at Anderson Road, across from the Granada Golf Course.

When we kids weren't playing in the "Three-Story Building" on Zamora Avenue, or at one of the arched entrances, we earned "movie money." Our supply source were the "secret" fruit trees throughout the Coral Gables area, starting with the avocado, mango, key lime, and guava trees at my grandmother's place, Coral Gables Merrick House. Our favorite avocado tree was concealed by pines in a lot on Ponce de Leon Boulevard across from the Antilla Hotel. Every year, it produced huge avocados for us that we sold for a dime a piece. There were additional trees in the same general area near the Coliseum, and across the Tamiami Trail west of Ponce de Leon Boulevard. These included some orange trees, and several wonderful Persian lime trees. West of Le Jeune Road in an unincorporated area was a small grove of pecan trees. Around the Venetian Pool and stretching toward the Biltmore Hotel were numerous grapefruit trees planted by the Coral Gables Plantation that survived the building of Coral Gables.

Five of us—Billy, his brother Jimmy, my brothers Merrick and Richard, and I—considered these to be our private source of income.

In season, we picked the fruit and sold it door-to-door. Year-round, we searched various areas, especially behind gas stations, for recyclable bottles. Certain quart milk bottles were worth five cents. The right ones had a large five cent symbol embossed in glass on the bottom. To us, they were a mother lode.

Our goal: Fifteen cents per person—ten cents for a movie, and five cents for a candy bar, my favorite being a Butterfinger. Usually, we exceeded that amount.

The Coral Gables Theater was our favorite theater, but when another friend, Henry Bryant (he later became a surgeon) and his numerous beautiful sisters moved to an area a little south of Southwest Eighth Street near Seventeenth Avenue, we gravitated toward the Tower Theater. The Tower was a kid's dream. On a Saturday afternoon, the Tower's program would include Pathe News, The March of Time, a cartoon, a comedy, a serial, and a Western. The comedies featured Our Gang, Edgar Kennedy, Leon Errol, or Pete Smith. All for only ten cents. Each of us had favorite cowboys, such as Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, or Buck Jones. My favorite was Tim McCoy, who, years later, I was pleased to notice, played a cameo role in the movie *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Occasionally, we would go to the Tivoli on Flagler Street near Seventh Avenue or the Rex, or The Olympia in downtown Miami. The Olympia advertised itself as "air-cooled."

A movie downtown was usually an all day event. We would go to the southwest corner of Ponce and the Trail. (The lot there was vacant, except around July 4th when a stand would be erected for selling fireworks.) When the light turned red, we would split up and go car-to-car seeking a ride into Miami. We competed to see who could be the first to arrive in front of the Olympia Theater. Then we would play hide-and-seek in the four-block area between Miami Avenue and the Olympia Theater at Second Avenue, and between Southeast First Street and Northeast First Street. We knew all the sites that offered access through a block, such as Burdine's, the Red Cross Department Store, and the Halcyon and Seybold Arcades. When we tired, we went to a movie, and usually enjoyed exiting into the heat and brightness of the late afternoon. If we had the money, there was a soda fountain at the entrance to the Seybold Arcade on Northeast First Avenue that, for 10 cents, served, we felt, the best milkshake in town. The stoplight at the

corner of Southwest Eighth Street and Second Avenue was the best place to catch a ride home.

Sometimes we went to Bayfront Park to play in the sunken tropical garden there, or to Pier Five to admire the Chris Crafts.

Occasionally we kids would have the money to eat at the Dinner Bell restaurant in downtown Miami. It was located on Northeast First Avenue, and what a bargain it offered! For only fifteen cents, one could get a full course dinner. One's only choice was the entrée. With it came a salad, vegetables, and dessert. The beverage may have been extra, I don't recall. On holidays such as at Christmas or Thanksgiving, the price was twenty-five cents.

In the summer of 1936, when I was thirteen, the family sent me north to visit Aunt Medie and Uncle Quint in Englewood, New Jersey. The Clyde Mallory Line ran ocean liners to New York. I was put on the *Algonquin*, traveling steerage for twelve dollars. Because I was a kid, I was allowed the run of the ship, and on the three-day, 900-mile trip, my love for the ocean was secured.

Uncle Quint worked in New York as chief detective for the Essex House Hotel, and sometimes I accompanied him into the city. I promptly fell in love with New York, roaming it alone from the Metropolitan Museum to the Battery. In Englewood, my neighbors were George and Dick Button (Dick became an Olympic skating star). Another neighbor was the young Malcolm Forbes. Malcolm, three years my senior, introduced me to the game of croquet. At summer's end, I returned home on the *Seminole*, this time confined to steerage, but looking forward to entering Ponce de Leon High School. Unfortunately, I never kept in touch with my newfound friends in Englewood.

In November, I became a newsboy, and began selling the *Miami Daily News* on the street. Sales were brisk during the winter season between November and May. Tourists were interested in racing results, closing stock market prices, and the weather up north. I quickly discovered that many sales could be made to people entering or leaving restaurants. One of my best restaurants was the Barcelona, the Gables' most upscale restaurant at the time. It was next door to our home on Ponce de Leon Boulevard, separated from us only by a vacant lot.

The building that housed the Barcelona had an interesting history. It was built to sell and service Buick automobiles. The showroom occu-



pied the first floor facing Ponce. Its garage was on the second floor, accessed by a ramp at the rear. When Buick vacated the premises early in the Depression, Arthur Fishman housed his realty agency in the showroom. He installed a white-picket fence in front of the glass showcase to create a rustic appearance. Coming home from elementary school I discovered that if I took a stick and strummed it across the fence, I could produce what I later learned was a Pavlov reaction in Mr. Fishman. On each such occasion, he could be expected to come rushing out of his office, his face flushed, yelling, "I'll break your neck!"

At some point in the 1930s, Viola Belasco rented the garage upstairs where she conducted dance classes for young boys and girls. When the Barcelona moved in downstairs, Viola moved her studio to the Douglas Entrance. It was located south of the arch, facing Douglas Road. Occasionally, we less advantaged kids would annoy her classes by making funny faces through the glass front of her studio.

I never dined at the Barcelona, but peering in, I admired its décor—the tiled floor, the chandeliers, the dark Spanish tables and chairs, the thick red water glasses, and elegant red napkins, and the waitresses in costume. I remember the fuss made when golfer Ralph Guldahl and his entourage came there to dine. He won the 1937 U.S. Open.

The Barcelona was so successful the management opened a second restaurant, the Seville, opposite Coral Gables Elementary School. It too, was elegant, but the clientele there never had the level of interest in newspaper-reading that the Barcelona crowd did.

The Ponce de Leon Restaurant, a little south of Alhambra Circle on the east side of the street was also an easy place for selling newspapers. It had a U-shaped counter with stools, surrounded by an aisle and sit-down tables. Two men ran it, one tall and one short, both of whom were easily recognized as owners by their tan jackets. I thought of them as Mutt and Jeff. They were the only managers who allowed me to circulate inside among their clientele. Many of their diners were singles who purchased papers to read while they ate. It was a very popular restaurant, and I made many sales there.

Other restaurants of the era were the San Sebastian in the San Sebastian Hotel, the Tiffen (later the Green Lantern) on Le Jeune Road, and Nina's Tea Room on the Tamiami Trail at Douglas Road. Newspaper sales were not good at these restaurants, primarily, I believe, because tourists were a small fraction of their clientele.

My great-Uncle Denman Fink and Aunt Zillah often ate at the non-touristy restaurants. Like all of the Merricks, they also enjoyed movies. I remember seeing Uncle Denman and Aunt Zillah at the Coconut Grove Theater one evening at a showing of "The Ox Bow Incident." Uncle Denman was turned off by the movie, commenting to me that he didn't need a "lecture" on lynching.

Uncle Denman made a good living as an artist, even in the Depression. He was an illustrator for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and painted portraits and murals. He allowed me occasionally to watch him work on his murals. Like my grandmother Mody (his sister), Uncle Denman had a fine sense of humor. He delighted sometimes in racing his car through the driveway that ran between Coral Way and Castile Avenue at Coral Gables Merrick House, honking his horn furiously at his sister, on his way to play tennis at the Coral Gables Country Club.

Newspapers in those days, when there was extraordinary news, issued "Extras." These events always resulted in bonanzas for us street sellers. These included the assassination of Huey Long, the disappearance of Amelia Earhart, and the retrieval and execution of Bruno Hauptmann.

Henry L. Doherty was a big name in the Miami area in the middle 1930s. He controlled both the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables and the Roney Plaza in Miami Beach. He flew guests between hotels by auto-giro—a helicopter with wings. During Christmas of 1935 or 1936, I joined a line of under-privileged children to receive presents from Mr. Doherty at the Biltmore. When it became my turn, I realized the occasion was being filmed, and I hid my face from the newsreel camera, because I was embarrassed, as a Merrick, to be there. I am ashamed to admit that I accepted the present. It was a disappointing, insignificant gift to boot.

The year 1937 was pivotal for me. Pan American Airways moved the McDonalds to Port Washington, New York, where Clippers flew to Europe. A car struck my stepfather on the Trail near the Douglas Entrance, severely injuring him. His older children moved him to Maryland for years of recuperation. My grandmother Mody died. We lost our house on Ponce de Leon Blvd and moved to a small bungalow at 2261 Southwest Sixtieth Court, west of Red Road near Coral Way. I was in the 9th grade at Ponce de Leon High School, and doing poorly in my studies. I was not used to being assigned homework.

The family managed to buy me a new bicycle at the Sears store near the County Causeway. I proudly pedaled it to Coral Gables, parked it

by the Coral Gables Theater without a lock, and went in to see a movie. When I came out, it had disappeared. Another of life's lessons learned the hard way.

Somehow, another bicycle was purchased for me. I was expected to help pay for it by taking on a paper route. At the time, Miami had three dailies: the afternoon *News*, the morning *Herald*, and a newcomer, the morning *Miami Tribune*, a brash tabloid that sold on the street for a penny a copy. The *Tribune* was featuring a series of stories that depicted Miami policemen as redneck Cossacks. It had a fairly broad home delivery in Coral Gables, but not nearly as great as the *Herald*. So I took on the *Herald* route.

I had some seventy-five customers who lived between Granada Boulevard and Douglas Road, and between Coral Way and Menores Avenue. Each morning, I biked myself from Southwest Sixtieth Court and Coral Way, picked up my papers at the boomtime Alhambra Building (since replaced) at the corner of Alhambra Circle and Le Jeune Road, beginning my deliveries at Granada, and ending up at Menores.

I heartily embraced the dark, early morning hours with the accompanying quietude and dearth of traffic. I even welcomed rain. Once lightning struck a tree a dozen yards away, introducing me to that strange, indescribable smell of ozone. Sometimes I preceded my pickup with a stop at Peacock's Coral Gables Bakery on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. The Peacock's pastry smelled so good in the early morning, and tasted terrific! I knew Buddy Peacock well, having gone through elementary school with him. He was famous for the bread named for him. His picture was on every wrapper! I always wondered, but never inquired, whether they were related to Aunt Eunice who was a Peacock.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the *Herald* job very long. Life is sometimes unfair, I learned. An old lady complained to the Coral Gables Police that she saw me steal a bottle of milk off her front steps early in the morning. I was apprehended at the end of my route, and two policemen escorted me to confront the lady, a Mrs. Campbell. Although I stoutly denied being the thief, they believed her, and curiously, on the way back to the station, tried to beat me into a confession. They did this by placing me between themselves in the front seat, instead of seating me in the rear as they had earlier. Then, in a lonely stretch of road, they stopped the car and turned and shoved me hard, back and forth between themselves, like a basketball, while shouting at

me to confess. Through tears, I fiercely retorted that I had all the milk I needed at home, and that I wasn't about to confess to something I didn't do. Finally they gave up and returned me to the dinky police station on Salzedo Street at Minorca (or was it Alcazar?), where, at about 10 a.m., Chief Sox entered and ordered me home. The next morning when I reported for my papers, I found that the *Herald* had fired me.

In retrospect, I believe the thief may have been the *Tribune* carrier. He had my build and also had curly hair like I did. In the early morning darkness, Mrs. Campbell could easily have mistaken him for me.

Even though I shall never forget the incident of the stolen milk, I have always tried to look upon it in a positive light, as a life experience to be appreciated for its worldly teachings. After all, I hadn't been arrested, and I didn't go to jail! And I have been mistrustful of eyewitness accounts ever since.

I continued to sell the *News* on the street.

Before summer's end of 1937, to relieve my mother of trying to handle her three unruly, teenage sons, Uncle George and the rest of the family arranged to send us three brothers to an inexpensive boarding school in Maitland, north of Orlando. Uncle Richard drove us to the school in September in his Willys automobile. Forest Lake Academy was a work/study school, and I labored on its farm. I also resolutely worked to improve in my studies. In November, I turned fifteen.

However, I did not exhibit model behavior. My lifelong adventure-some spirit caused me, recklessly, to accept a dare to hitchhike to Miami, 250 miles away. I rationalized that I needed a new pair of shoes. With little forethought, and no funds, on a cold Saturday morning in January 1938, I easily slipped away from the school and set out for Miami.

I arrived at the foot of Flagler Street after dark, distressed that the weather was no warmer than in the Orlando area. I was cold and hungry, and worse, I realized that I had no idea where my mother lived. She had recently moved. Uncle George and Aunt Eunice lived the closest to where I was, so I decided to seek refuge for the night with them.

Despite the cold, East Flagler Street was abuzz with people, noise and music. In the Walgreens block, Professor Seward, the astrologist, was at his usual spot in front of his imitation railroad observation car, and I stopped briefly to enjoy his spiel. Twenty more blocks and I would be at Uncle George's.

They lived in a bungalow on the south side of West Flagler Street near Twenty-second Avenue. I stepped onto the porch and knocked at the door. Uncle George opened the inside front door, and with eyes widened, peered down at me through the screen door that still separated us. He asked, incredulously, "Does the school know you are here?" I replied, "No, but—," and that was as far as I got. I don't recall his additional words, for they came in a roar, revealing the famous Merrick temper, which we three brothers inherited also. He thrust open the screen door and tried to grasp me, but I jumped to the sidewalk and hightailed it west on Flagler Street, with Uncle George chasing me in a hot, but futile pursuit. He had become quite portly, and I easily outdistanced him. I decided to head for the Gables and turned south on Twenty-second Avenue Road to the Trail. After my adrenaline settled, I realized that I probably would be no safer with Aunt Eppie at Coral Gables Merrick House, because Uncle George would undoubtedly be there waiting for me. I decided to go to one of my childhood haunts, the Douglas Entrance. After collecting some discarded newspapers along the way, I climbed the circular staircase to the room above the arch. Stone seats traversed the room on either side across the road. Using the newspapers, I slept a fitful night on the east seat, mostly shivering, while reveling in the idea that I had at least half-fulfilled the dare. Coming to Miami had been a bad idea, I realized, and I decided



**The Douglas Entrance to Coral Gables, one of Donald Kuhn's boyhood haunts. HASF X-793-1**

to return to the school when daylight arrived.

The next morning I caught a ride to Biscayne Boulevard. As I was walking north along Bayfront Park, a policeman in a car spotted me as a vagrant. He picked me up and continuing north deposited me at the city limits at Seventy-ninth Street,

advising me not to return. This was followed by a swift lift to West Palm Beach where unfortunately I was then stranded until dark. Finally,

I managed to hitch a ride in an open truck to St. Cloud, where I awakened a policeman snoozing in his car on the main street at midnight. It was still very cold. I asked him for a bunk in jail for the night. Instead, he took me home and provided a bed for me in his garage. His wife gave me a great breakfast the following morning, my first food since leaving the school. Then the kindly cop sent me on my way, after assuring himself that I was, indeed, headed back to Forest Lake Academy.

It was now Monday, and I arrived at the school in time for lunch. I learned that the school had been unaware of my absence until Uncle George called to see if I had returned. I became a minor hero among the students. And the school was lenient with me. No roller-skating for two weeks.

That summer, I sought and went to live permanently with my Aunt Medie and Uncle Quint who had just purchased a 65-acre farm with a one hundred-year-old farmhouse, near Greenwich, New York, 30 miles north of Albany—for \$1,200, I later learned. I was nearly sixteen, and eagerly looked forward to experiencing my first snowfall, and temperatures below zero. We lived happily without electricity, telephone, running water, or indoor plumbing; Aunt Medie cooked on a wood-burning range. I studied by kerosene lamp. In 1941, I graduated from Greenwich High School in the upper tenth of my class.

With Uncle George's help, I received a music scholarship to the University of Miami where I matriculated in September 1941. I played trombone and was obligated to perform in the orchestra and march in the band. I majored in drama and minored in journalism.

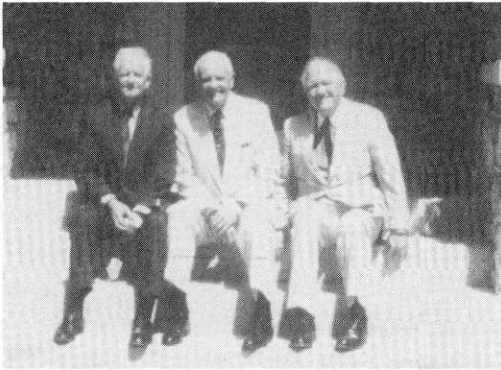
One evening in October 1941, en route to a Friday night football game at the Orange Bowl, I stopped by the bungalow from which Uncle George had chased me three years earlier. I was dressed in my U-M marching uniform. George and Eunice invited me in. After some chit-chat, Uncle George, digging into his pocket, said, "Well, I suppose you are here to ask for some money." I was startled, and it gave me great satisfaction to inform them that I didn't need any money, but just dropped by to say "hello." This incident provided me some insight into Uncle George's interaction and relationship with the family during his lifetime.

Pearl Harbor was attacked a few weeks later, and I joined the Navy as an apprentice seaman.

Shortly before I boarded the musty troop train that would take me north to Norfolk, I briefly visited Uncle George to say my goodbye at his office in the main post office in downtown Miami. He wished me

well but said he felt that I was rash in entering the war so soon. However, I think he understood when I explained that if I was drafted, which was certain, I might not get my choice of service.

Only three months later, in March of 1942, Uncle George died. My ship, the destroyer *Hambleton*, was in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, fresh from the South Atlantic. The captain denied me permission to attend the funeral. Although I was nineteen, I cried quietly in my bunk that night while a fellow sailor tried to console me. Uncle George had been a major father figure to me. Despite my rebellious ways, and perhaps sometimes his better judgment, he always stood ready to counsel me



**Merrick, Richard, and Donald on the front steps of 1217 Coral Way, Coral Gables in 1988.**

and help me in whatever way he could.

After the war, I returned to the University of Miami on the GI Bill and graduated in 1949 with a BA in journalism and a minor in drama. I was married and moved to Chicago. Then, from 1954 to 1959 I once again lived in Coral Gables, at 7300 Mindello Street, but moved to Minnesota and

a number of other states to pursue a career in fund-raising.

My childhood memories of Coral Gables and Miami were in the main pleasurable ones, with a struggling, yet close-knit family, many caring and generous uncles and aunts, and a wonderful grandmother.

As for my childhood friend Billy, I long ago lost track of him and Jimmy, his brother, died in California of diabetes.

## The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove

*by Grant Livingston*

The city of Coconut Grove,<sup>1</sup> along with the towns of Silver Bluff, Allapattah, Little River, Buena Vista, and Lemon City, was annexed to the city of Miami by means of an election held on September 2, 1925. The election was held under a Florida statute enacted in 1905 allowing a single vote to be taken by all voters in the annexing city and the territory to be annexed. An examination of the election returns shows overwhelming support of the annexation within the city of Miami, Little River, Buena Vista and Allapattah, a mixed vote in Silver Bluff, and overwhelming opposition to it in Coconut Grove.<sup>2</sup> One of Coconut Grove's pioneers, Commodore Ralph Munroe, described the event:

Not content with actual growth, Miami began to reach out, like Los Angeles, and absorb its smaller neighbors—not always to their satisfaction, or even with their consent! For the state law most curiously provided that in cases of proposed consolidation between two communities the question shall be decided by a *joint vote*<sup>3</sup> of the two, so that where such a union is manifestly to the advantage of the larger town, the smaller is robbed of all voice in the matter. Such was the case with Coconut Grove, which felt itself not only at a considerable distance from Miami, but in complete contrast to its citizenship needs and interests, and not in the least interested in helping to pay the rapidly mounting expenses of the ambitious young city. Its resistance was effective for a time, but eventually a joint election was held, and Coconut Grove was swallowed, willy-nilly, like a trout by a bass.<sup>4</sup>



### **The Annexation Law of 1905**

Prior to 1905, annexation required that residents of both the annexing city and the territory proposed for annexation approve the move. Florida law called for a two-thirds majority vote in each area. A revised annexation bill, before the Florida Legislature in 1905, however, specified only that a two-thirds majority of voters in the entire district was necessary in order for annexation to occur, "including alike the voters within the then existing corporate limits of the [annexing] city or town, and those to be included [by the election] within the corporate limits."<sup>5</sup> The law specified that voters must be specifically registered for the annexation vote. This was to be the impetus for an ambitious special voter registration drive in the city of Miami in 1925. The law also excluded the annexed territory from liability for any existing bond indebtedness of the annexing city. This clause would prove to be significant in the city of Miami's first attempt at annexing Coconut Grove (and other areas) in 1923.

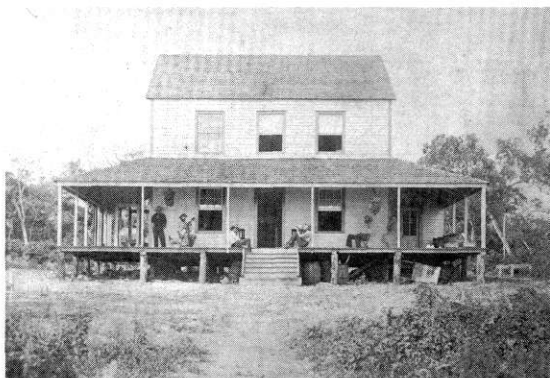
The revised annexation bill was approved by the Florida State House on May 8, 1905, by a vote of 31-14. It was passed, with minor amendments, by the Florida Senate, and was signed into law by Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward on May 29, 1905. The 1905 law was in effect in the 1920s, when the annexation of Coconut Grove occurred, and remained on the books essentially unchanged until 1961, when the law was revised to once again require that a separate vote be taken in both the annexing city and in the territory to be annexed.<sup>6</sup>

### **Early Coconut Grove and Miami**

Coconut Grove's opposition to annexation can be understood by an examination of its history, which was quite distinct from that of the city of Miami. Formerly known as Jack's Bight, Coconut Grove was a thriving community years before 1896. Ralph Munroe, while squatting temporarily on the banks of the Miami River in the 1870s, met and convinced Charles and Isabella Peacock to open an inn in Coconut Grove, known as the Bay View House, or the Peacock Inn, by promising to bring guests to it in winter. Munroe fulfilled his promise by bringing an odd assortment of creative types. The 1885-86 winter season saw the arrival at the Peacock inn of Counts Jean de Hedouville and James Nugent, as well as Kirk Munroe, a well-known writer of boys' adventure stories, among others. The Bay View House also served

as the catalyst for Kebo, the black Bahamian settlement along Evangelist Street (now Charles Avenue in Coconut Grove). Two workers hired by Peacock were among the first settlers of that community.<sup>7</sup>

Before the arrival of the railroad in Miami, the Bay View House was the only hotel between Lake Worth and Key West.<sup>8</sup> Naturally, it was



**The Peacock Inn or Bay View House was the center of Coconut Grove life in the late nineteenth century.**

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the Bay View House which played host to Henry Flagler and Julia Tuttle at the time of their first meeting. They lunched on a delicious repast prepared by Isabella Peacock while working out the understanding by which Flagler agreed to bring his Florida East Coast Railway to Miami in exchange for

a portion of Mrs. Tuttle's land. The written form of this agreement is commonly known as Miami's "birth certificate." Upon the arrival of the railroad, and the opening, in 1897, of Flagler's Royal Palm Hotel, the city of Miami exploded in growth, quickly surpassing Coconut Grove in size.

Although the five miles between the centers of Coconut Grove and Miami seem short today, the distance was great enough to allow the two communities to retain their distinct identities. In 1913, Miami annexed unincorporated land in three directions, narrowing the gap between itself and Coconut Grove. Nineteen sixteen was the year Everest G. Sewell, a pioneer Miami merchant, and the Miami Chamber of Commerce began their highly successful national advertising campaign.<sup>9</sup> With slogans like "It is always June in Miami," and "Where the Summer spends the Winter," the Chamber blanketed northern states in publications promoting Miami. Between 1914 and 1924, its advertising expenditures exceeded \$1 million.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, the city's population increased from 29,571 in 1920 to 47,000 in 1923, the year of the first annexation attempt.<sup>11</sup>

### 1919—Coconut Grove incorporates, and expands slowly

The first outright conflict between Miami and Coconut Grove came just after World War I. During the war, the federal government built a



Coconut Grove's Dinner Key was an important aviation venue and, later, the site of Miami's city hall. HASF 1989-011-3957

naval air station in Coconut Grove. After the war was over, there was disagreement over whether the air station should remain as a permanent facility. Boosters of the city of Miami, such as Everest G. Sewell, believed that the station should stay, and campaigned for its permanent location there, while Coconut Grove resident James Deering disagreed in a letter to his influential neighbor, William Jennings Bryan.<sup>12,13</sup>

Although the Coconut Grove side won this fight, it became apparent that Miami was expanding so quickly that it would soon come in direct contact with Coconut Grove. It was at least in part for this reason that Coconut Grove chose to incorporate as a town.<sup>14</sup> Barely a year after its incorporation, Coconut Grove's mayor, William V. Little, called for his municipality to annex a larger territory, to enable the town to be incorporated as a city. The Coconut Grove Town Council minutes of June 21, 1920 include a letter from the mayor advocating extending the town limits, "to include all territory that is now generally known as Coconut Grove . . . [to have a petition] circulated chiefly in Mundyville and along the Ridge. . . One thing that might happen

[if this is not done] would be that Coconut Grove might find itself without enough registered voters to become a city instead of a town.”<sup>15</sup>

On January 3, 1921, a petition was presented from voters “between corporate limits of Coconut Grove and the city of Miami,” asking to be incorporated into Coconut Grove. The minutes from the town council do not specify how many signatures appeared on this petition, but the council appears to have acted on it. On January 17 the following ordinance was adopted:

Ordinance proposing to extend the Corporate Limits of Coconut Grove ... [technical description of the limits of the territory to be annexed appears here] ... said annexation shall be effective 45 days after the approval of this ordinance by the Mayor, provided the same shall be approved by a majority of two-thirds of the registered voters actually voting at an election held in the same district, and [by a two-thirds majority] at an election to be held in the Town of Coconut Grove as hereinafter provided ...<sup>16</sup>

The ordinance is notable for the fact that it required a two-thirds majority in both the existing town of Coconut Grove, and also in the proposed new territory, in order for the proposed annexation to occur. This stipulation stands in marked contrast to the language of the ordinance by which Miami annexed Coconut Grove in 1925.

### **1923—Miami’s initial attempt at annexation**

The first mention in the Coconut Grove Town Council minutes of the proposed annexation of Coconut Grove by Miami occurred on January 15, 1923. A committee from the neighboring town of Silver Bluff was present at the meeting to request “minor changes in the boundaries of the two towns so crossing of so many lots by the boundary lines may be eliminated.”<sup>17</sup> Both towns were at that time subjects of proposed annexation by the city of Miami, which had published a resolution seeking to expand its city limits on January 9, 1923.<sup>18</sup>

... a general discussion followed regarding the annexation of Coconut Grove to Miami. Dr. S.L. Jeffrey presented two petitions to the Council requesting that the Council take any necessary action to prevent annexation to Miami. A committee consisting of Aldermen Emerson, Price, Swanson, and Dr. Jeffrey was appointed to confer with Commissioners of the city of Miami regarding their intentions in the matter of this proposed annexation.<sup>19</sup>

This committee met with the Miami City Commission on January 16, 1923. There was also a representative present from the town of Allapattah. The committee presented its opposition to annexation, and asked what they might expect if annexation were to occur. They were told by Mayor C.D. Leffler "that the City Commission was unable to make any promises or statement at this time," and that, "the commission could not do anything but let it go to an election."<sup>20</sup>

On January 25, a special meeting of the Coconut Grove Town Council was called.<sup>21</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways to head off the annexation movement. "Mayor Matheson . . . called the meeting to determine if anything can be done to amend the Town Charter to prevent annexation to Miami." A general discussion followed. It was agreed that postcards ("Return Postal Cards") were to be sent to voters and other taxpayers within the limits of Coconut Grove, with the following questions:

- 1) Are you in favor of being annexed by the city of Miami under the present movement?
- 2) Do you desire the Town of Coconut Grove to present to the state legislature an amendment to the present charter (*sic*) providing that Coconut Grove cannot be annexed to any other city without the consent of the majority of the registered voters of Coconut Grove?

The canvas by postcard was held, and the following results were reported on February 5, 1923.<sup>22</sup> Those favoring annexation numbered 42, while those opposed were 155. There were 162 proponents of legislative action to make annexation more difficult, and just 36 who opposed such action. Two weeks later, on February 19, the minutes of the Coconut Grove Town Council reflect that there was discussion of Representative Ben Willard's "Act of the Legislature for Coconut Grove." Also, City Attorney Floyd L. Knight was commissioned to draft a section of the new city charter relating to non-annexation.<sup>23</sup>

By then, however, annexation in 1923 was a dead issue. The city of Miami had withdrawn Ordinance 605, the annexation ordinance, at the city commission meeting of January 23, 1923.<sup>24</sup> The minutes provide no explanation for the action, but the reason appears in a letter from the city attorney, A.J. Rose, dated January 22, which was also entered into the minutes.<sup>25</sup> The letter quoted the sections of the 1905 annexation law pertaining to bond indebtedness, and another law

regarding amendments to city charters, and conferred recommendations about the appropriate timing of annexation elections and bond issue elections. Thus, legal questions over bonds appear to have been the reason for the cancellation of the annexation election in 1923.

Frank Sessa, in "Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and its Environs during the 1920s," a doctoral dissertation written in 1950, also cited the bond indebtedness issue, and the influence of Chester Masslich, who was instrumental in the sale of \$500,000 in city of Miami bonds in 1922.<sup>26</sup>

...in the middle of the debate the city decided to withdraw its call for an election to extend city limits ... [its decision] seems to have been influenced by legal complications in the city charter and the advice of a New York bond attorney, Chester B. Masslich, who advised that the sale of bonds would be difficult if a part of the city was exempt from bond indebtedness.<sup>27</sup>

The annexation process was temporarily derailed. The opinion of the voters of Coconut Grove was clearly expressed in the postcard poll, and the mayor and Coconut Grove City Council seemed committed to taking all possible action to prevent further attempts by the city of Miami to annex Coconut Grove. Perhaps the annexation, which occurred in 1925, was inevitable, but the March 1923 election for city commission and mayor of the city of Coconut Grove may have been pivotal in determining the future of the city. Dr. Jeffrey, who was the first person to bring the issue of non-annexation before the town council, ran for the mayor's seat, and was opposed by Alderman H. deB. Justison. Justison prevailed in the election by a vote of 171-134, to become Coconut Grove's fourth, and final, mayor. The minutes of the first meeting of the city council after Justison's election indicate that he was far less opposed to annexation than Jeffrey. The following excerpt is indicative of this fact:

Mr. F. E. Case brought up the question of annexation to Miami. He had with him a petition signed by some of the voters and property owners of Coconut Grove to be presented to the Governor asking that Coconut Grove not be annexed to Miami. This petition was read by the clerk. Mr. Case asked that the Council go on record as being opposed to the annexation of Coconut Grove.

Mayor Justison asked that the Council go carefully and thoughtfully before committing themselves one way or another.

Attorney Knight explained the process by which local legislation goes through the Legislature and advised how best to get this local bill through if it is to go through at all.

Mayor Justison suggested that the best way is to see the local Senator and Representative and to get their cooperation.

Mr. Case and Alderman Smith state their opinion that open action and publicity would gain the end best.

Alderman Matheson moved, and Alderman Reynolds seconded, that the Council go on record as being opposed to the annexation of Coconut Grove by any other municipality, unless such action be favored by a majority of the voters of Coconut Grove. This was carried unanimously.<sup>28</sup>

For the time being, the annexation issue was dropped. For a lengthy period, annexation by the city of Miami was not mentioned in the minutes of the Coconut Grove City Commission. In fact, more than two years passed before the issue came up again on July 20, 1925, and then only in response to the call by the city of Miami for a new annexation election.

### **1925—Coconut Grove annexed despite opposition**

On July 7, 1925, the city of Miami passed an ordinance to extend its city limits to include Coconut Grove, Silver Bluff, and several other communities, and set the election for September 2, less than two months away.<sup>29</sup> This move for annexation was better organized than the one in 1923, and proved successful.

Since the 1905 statute required that a special registration be held for this election, a massive registration effort was required. This effort was spearheaded in Miami by the "Committee of 400," part of the Miami Chamber of Commerce, and headed by Roddy Burdine, the



**Roddy Burdine, Miami's Merchant Prince, led the fight for the annexation of Coconut Grove and other communities to the city of Miami. HASF 1989-011-19468 (N)**

department store magnate. Burdine helped devise the committee's strategy, and some of its meetings were held at his offices at the Burdine's Department Store in downtown Miami.<sup>30</sup> In July 1925, Burdine observed that, "Should the city limits be extended by voters at annexation September 2, Miami will be the largest city in the state."<sup>31</sup> Burdine turned over the chairmanship of the Committee of 400 to Miami civic leader A.J. Cleary when the effort appeared to be taking up too much of Burdine's time, but he remained involved in the annexation effort.

Despite the fact that Cleary's wife was ill and out of town during this campaign, he spent nearly all of his time working toward the annexation vote.<sup>32</sup> A large rally was held in downtown Miami's Royal Palm Park on August 7. The speakers included Mayor E. C. Romfh, Worth Trammell, a jurist, and former mayor C. D. Leffler. Miami's short-lived pictorial newspaper, *The Illustrated Daily Tab*, described the festival atmosphere at this gathering:

Trammell was greeted with applause as he urged the voters to "make Miami the New York City of the South." Several hundred persons availed themselves of the opportunity extended by Tax Collector Simpson and Roddy Burdine and Edward Wells to pay their poll taxes on the grounds. Mutchler's orchestral band entertained the crowd with a musical program. Percy Long, soloist, responded to repeated encores.<sup>33</sup>

The *Illustrated Daily Tab* described the Committee of 400's efforts to stimulate voter registration, "through the medium of four-minute speakers on the streets and in the theaters, banners, newspapers, and virtually every other form of advertising ... to reach every eligible voter in the city of Miami and affected territory."<sup>34</sup> The *Tab* also reported that more than one thousand automobiles had been borrowed from prominent Miami citizens to "parade through the streets of Miami bearing placards, 'Hop In And Vote For Annexation.'"<sup>35</sup> When the registration was completed, Cleary was still concerned that the votes might not be enough to prevail, as the *Miami Herald* noted on August 29, 1925:

A.J. Cleary—acting chairman of the Committee of 400—which has had charge of the registration work stated, "Every voter who has registered must consider it his duty to vote on the question of annexation. Unless everyone in Miami eligible to vote does this we stand in danger of seeing the annexation measure defeated."



Tuesday night Cleary will send 4,000 telegrams reminding voters to be at the polls Wednesday, and laying out the polling places.<sup>36</sup>

Everest G. Sewell, president of the Miami Chamber of Commerce, who was in New York at the time of the election, and therefore unable to vote, nevertheless expressed his support in a telegram to the *Miami Herald*:

It will be impossible for the city to keep pace with the needed improvements if this election should fail. It is most important that Miami's harbor should be started at once. The present embargo on freight should convince the most skeptical pessimist of the fact.

Cleary placed several advertisements in the *Miami Herald* on the day of the election. An ad on page one insisted that, "It's Your Personal Business—cast your vote for annexation." Another, on page nine, exhorted voters to, "Vote early today FOR Miami City Annexation. VOTE at polling place where you register." The *Herald* observed that, "Last-minute efforts by the 'Committee of 400' included the sending of 2000 telegrams to persons known to be favorable to annexation, urging them to vote in favor ..."<sup>37</sup>

Coconut Grove appeared to have been caught by surprise by the new move for annexation. No comments about the planned annexation appear in minutes of the Coconut Grove City Commission until after the July 7 ordinance was passed. Additionally, on June 9, 1925, less than three months before the city of Coconut Grove would cease to exist, a special act of the State Legislature provided for the city to adopt the commission/manager form of government. Why would Coconut Grove make the effort to change the form of government at that late date? It seems to be further evidence that the annexation move was not anticipated by Coconut Grove. Once the election was set however, the city commission of Coconut Grove made its opposition to annexation clear, by resolving, "that the City Commission of the City of Coconut Grove is in favor of an action of injunction or otherwise being brought to test the constitutionality of the proposed annexation of the City of Coconut Grove to the city of Miami as proposed by the city of Miami . . ."<sup>38</sup>

If the city of Coconut Grove was surprised by the annexation movement, it appears that the new city of Coral Gables, incorporated on April 27, 1925, was not. If the city of Miami sought to expand its tax base, why not annex George Merrick's new development? The following

letter, addressed to the Miami City Commission from Merrick and other Coral Gables officials, indicated that Coral Gables anticipated this possibility:

Gentlemen,

In accordance with our verbal understanding with you gentlemen, we, the undersigned City Commissioner of the City of Coral Gables, recently chartered by the Legislature of Florida, do hereby give you our personal assurance that just so soon as it is possible for Mr. Merrick to complete his development plans in Coral Gables, we will all be glad to use our best endeavors to bring the municipality of Coral Gables into the municipality of Miami. We feel sure that there will never be any opposition to this move as we are all interested in creating Greater Miami, but we are glad to go on record as favoring the annexations that there may be no misunderstanding of our feeling and policy on the subject.

Thanking you gentlemen for your courteous cooperation in assisting us to secure the city charter, we are

Yours very truly,

George Merrick

Telfair Knight

Charles F. Baldwin

Edward E. Dammers

F. W. Webster<sup>39</sup>

One may reasonably infer from the language of this curious letter that there was a prior meeting and agreement between officials of Coral Gables and Miami. Miami had much to gain, in the way of an increased tax base, by annexing Coral Gables, but much to lose by opposing George Merrick. First, there were estimated to be 2,500 summer residents in Coral Gables in 1925, enough to endanger the two-thirds margin needed for annexation to succeed if their opposition was to be organized.<sup>40</sup> The two cities were working toward similar goals. For instance, the building of the street trolley between downtown Miami and Coral Gables was about to be undertaken. The franchise was to be granted to Merrick's Coral Gables Rapid Transit Corporation by means of a special election to be held on August 31, just two days before the annexation election.<sup>41</sup> Advertisements taken in the *Miami Herald* were quick to note, "This is Not the Miami City Annexation Election," to avoid confusion.<sup>42</sup> A spirit of cooperation existed between the two

cities. Contrast this with the history of confrontation between Miami and Coconut Grove dating back to the naval air station conflict.

The developers of Miami Shores, located northeast of the city of Miami, also attempted to remove themselves from the annexation election. As the Coral Gables representatives did, they cited the desire to complete their development before being annexed. The Miami Commission denied this request, as the minutes of its July 14, 1925, meeting explained:

Mr. Frank K. Ashworth appeared before the Commission and stated that the new boundaries of the city of Miami proposed to be voted upon at an election to be held September 2nd would incorporate part of the subdivision development known as "Miami Shores" and requested, on behalf of the developers, that the subdivision be not incorporated with the city of Miami until the developers had completed their improvement program. The matter was discussed by the Commission and it was the sense of the members present that the boundaries as fixed by the Ordinance adopted July 7th should not be changed.<sup>43</sup>

The annexation issue was addressed again on several occasions by the Coconut Grove City Commission before the election of September 2. Mayor Justison was absent from the city commission at all meetings between July 20 and September 7. E. W. Ayars was appointed acting mayor in Justison's absence at the August 3 meeting.<sup>44</sup> The Coconut Grove Commission met in "adjourned session" three more times during that week.<sup>45</sup> Little information about the content of these meetings is recorded in the minutes, but one could surmise that the annexation election was the prime issue discussed. On August 11, a proposal was made that the city of Coconut Grove be a party to the suit brought by J. T. G. Crawford against the annexation of Coconut Grove to the city of Miami.<sup>46</sup> It carried unanimously. The minutes of August 17, 1925 note the visit from a representative of Silver Bluff: "Mr. Potter of the Silver Bluff Town Council is present and asked what action Coconut Grove was taking in regard to the annexation movement of Miami. Mr. Potter stated that the Town of Silver Bluff was willing to cooperate with Coconut Grove to stay out of Miami."<sup>47</sup>

Former Coconut Grove Mayor Hugh Matheson filed a petition for injunction in circuit court on August 21, asking that the city of Miami be prevented from holding the annexation election. The petition,

according to the *Illustrated Daily Tab*, argued that annexation would result in a large tax increase for citizens of Coconut Grove to pay for



**Hugh Matheson, member of the prominent Matheson family and mayor of Coconut Grove in the 1920s. Courtesy of the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club.**

city of Miami developmental projects not benefitting Coconut Grove. The injunction was also asked because the city of Coconut Grove and the city of Miami were not “immediately adjacent,” as required by the annexation statute. A further argument was that the statute was “illegal because it would allow Miami to annex Coconut Grove, but would not allow Coconut Grove to annex Miami.”<sup>48</sup> A.J. Cleary responded the following day to the taxation argument saying, “Complaint has been made by

some voters in the adjacent territory that annexation will cause an increase in their taxes. At present the tax rate in these municipalities is almost nothing while they reap millions in profits because they are in the Miami territory and truthfully a part of Miami, but pay no taxes.”<sup>49</sup>

The petition for injunction was denied by Judge E. F. Atkinson on August 26. During the hearing, Mr. Matheson’s council argued that the state annexation law itself was unconstitutional.<sup>50</sup> The *Tab* reported that an appeal to the State Supreme Court was to be filed immediately, and that “while he does not anticipate stopping the election, Mr. Matheson, should he win in his appeal, hopes to declare the election null and void.”<sup>51</sup>

Matheson was also responsible for the appearance of a series of advertisements in Miami newspapers on behalf of the Coconut Grove City Commission. On August 27, the Commission’s minutes recorded “a motion by H. M. Matheson that the city manager of Coconut Grove be authorized to arrange proper ads for the different papers, instructing

the people why they should vote ‘no’ on annexation.”<sup>52</sup> The following advertisement appeared in the *Miami Herald* on Monday August 31, two days before the annexation election was held. It is signed “representative citizens of Coconut Grove:”

“Coconut Grove Lays Its Cards on the Table”

We are being forced into Miami against our wills  
by the use in this election of an unfair law passed twenty years ago  
and which has never been used:

If 2/3 of voters in a territory are in favor the cities are joined . . .  
not, mind you, 2/3 of the votes in Coconut Grove,  
but 2/3 of ALL the votes cast in Miami and  
the territory to be annexed!

Coconut Grove has not more than 240 votes against  
possibly 25,000 in Miami

WHAT CHANCE DO WE HAVE?

Not a chance unless our good Miami friends, who believe in fair,  
square dealing will go to the polls on September 2 and  
VOTE NO on the annexation question.<sup>53</sup>

A similar advertisement appeared in the *Miami Tribune* on September 1, with slightly different wording:

VOTE NO!

Vote against the Annexation Question on Wednesday, September 2  
The Citizens of Coconut Grove appeal to Miami’s sense of FAIR PLAY

Coconut Grove is being forced into Miami by the use of unfair,  
obsolete election laws that were passed in 1905, but which have never  
been used in any election in the State of Florida until this time, as far  
as we have been able to learn . . .

IS THIS FAIR?

IS THIS RIGHT?<sup>54</sup>

The Coconut Grove ads did not seem to have influenced many voters in the city of Miami. When the votes of the September 2 election were counted, over 97 percent of the votes in the five precincts voting within the city of Miami were in support of annexation. Little River, Buena Vista, and Allapattah also voted overwhelmingly for their towns to be annexed, by votes of 81, 82, and 83 percent, respectively. A 59

percent majority in Silver Bluff also favored annexation. In Coconut Grove, over 87 percent voted against annexation. Because most of the voters lived in Miami, the total number of votes were 88 percent in favor of annexation.

### Voting Results for September 2, 1925

Election for the city of Miami to Annex

Little River, Buena Vista, Allapattah, Silver Bluff, Coconut Grove  
and certain unincorporated areas<sup>55</sup>

No.	Precinct Location	Registered	For	Against
1	Little River	278	154	36
2	Buena Vista	367	217	48
3	Miami (NE 2 Ave, 24 St.)	526	400	5
4	Allapattah	326	181	37
5	Miami (No 2 Fire Station)	300	240	7
6	Miami (Downtown)	1368	1048	17
7	W Flagler & 17th Ave	479	369	17
8	S Miami Ave & 10th St.	291	222	15
9	Silver Bluff	111	51	36
10	Coconut Grove	240	26	180
	Total	4286	2908	398

On the day following the election, Coconut Grove's unhappiness with the election results was clear, but there were mixed reports over what was to be done next. The *Herald* published the results under these headlines, "Greater Miami Wins at Polls in Heavy Vote, 9 of 10 precincts carried. Coconut Grove, which fought proposal in court, goes against plan."<sup>56</sup> The *Miami Daily News and Metropolis* indicated that there would be no further fight with the election results, "town officers declared they knew of no move on the part of the village to carry their opposition to the state and federal courts."<sup>57</sup> The *Miami Tribune* told quite a different story, under the headline "Grove Prepares for Hot Contest over Annexation:"

Coconut Grove will fight annexation. The community was grooming itself Friday [September 4, 1925] to battle "Greater Miami" on the question of being annexed without its consent.

On the street, in the shops and in the city hall—wherever citizens congregated, there was talk of the approaching battle. It was learned, unofficially, that a committee of leading citizens were in conference with a coterie of well-known Miami attorneys Friday morning. Object of the conference was said to be to determine the exact status of the Grove in fighting the annexation.<sup>58</sup>

The *Tribune* reported that Coconut Grove residents were willing to take the issue to the United States Supreme Court, if necessary.<sup>59</sup> Miami's city attorney, John Watson, wondered what all the fuss was about:

J. W. Watson, Jr., city attorney, is of the opinion that there will be no trouble with the town of Coconut Grove. He said that the citizens of the Grove undoubtedly were misinformed as to the intentions of Miami regarding their community. He said that Miami had the interests of the Grove at heart and could not understand hostility to the annexation.<sup>60</sup>

On September 7, in the last meeting of the Coconut Grove City Commission, with Mayor Justison once again presiding, a committee of Justison, former mayor Matheson, and City Manager William Sydow was authorized to arrange details of the annexation to the city of Miami.<sup>61</sup> This committee, along with the Coconut Grove city attorney Harold Costello, met with representatives from the city of Miami the same day. Under the headline "Mayor [E.C. Romfh] assures Coconut Grove quick benefits," the *Herald* wrote, "The Coconut Grove delegation requests government under the borough system, and expressed themselves as confident that Coconut Grove would be dealt with fairly by Miami officials. A final conference is to be held Tuesday evening [September 15]." An assistant city manager and a municipal judge were promised for Coconut Grove, and Mayor Romfh also promised that a police precinct and fire station would be maintained there, and that the city of Miami would complete Coconut Grove's improvement programs. A report of this meeting is also recorded in the Miami Commission's minutes:

Mayor H. deB. Justison, Hugh Matheson, the City Manager and the City Attorney of Coconut Grove appeared before the commission in reference to the recent annexation of Coconut Grove by the city of Miami. Matters pertaining to the administration of affairs in Coconut Grove were discussed and it was the sense of

the City Commission that the best possible way to handle the situation would be to create a new department of the city to be known as the Department of Coconut Grove, as well as to create other departments for handling the affairs of other towns and communities taken into the city, and to place at the head of the Department of Coconut Grove the present city manager of



**Main Highway approaching McFarlane Road—Grand Avenue. The intersection of these three arteries represented the business center of Coconut Grove.**

HASF 1989-011-3963 (N)

Coconut Grove. Mr. Hugh Matheson of Coconut Grove was in favor of creating a ward [borough] system of government, but it was the sense of the Commission that under the present city charter the City Commission had no authority to install such a plan. The committee from Coconut Grove were

assured that it was and would be the policy of the City Commission to aid them in every way to complete the improvements already started; to furnish adequate fire and police protection and to aid them in sanitary matters...<sup>62</sup>

The *Illustrated Daily Tab* also reported a battle over the borough system at this meeting, but noted a surprising lack of animosity by the meeting's completion: "Owing to bad feelings over the annexation election it commonly was supposed that wild scenes would result from the meeting yesterday. On the contrary, while members of the [Coconut Grove] delegation at first showed slight resentment over being annexed, the meeting developed into a love feast (sic), and when the conference ended in a temporary deadlock, it was apparent that the issue would be settled to advantage of all concerned." One member of the Grove delegation, while agreeing to a compromise, expressed reservations about convincing the Grove citizenry. "This looks good to me," the *Tab* quoted him as saying, "but, you know we voted almost unanimously against annexation. We will have to go back



home and talk this over with the people. They want to be assured of a fair deal.”<sup>63</sup>

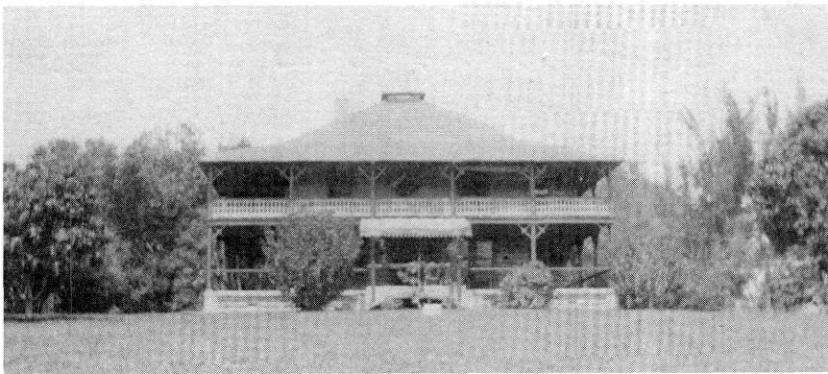
### **After annexation**

The annexation election of 1925 came at the height of the land boom in South Florida. This was a propitious time for the election. A delay of one year could have brought with it a different outcome. The railroad embargo of August 1925 was the first sign that the boom might not last forever. Building was slowed by lack of construction materials, many of which had arrived by ship. The grounding of the *Prins Valdemar* at the mouth of Miami’s harbor in January 1926 all but closed the harbor for months, further isolating Miami. Negative advertising in northern states seeking to stem the flight of capital to Miami may have had its effect, too. Frank Sessa quotes a bulletin from the state of Minnesota which announced, “Go to Florida—if you can afford it. But keep the old farm in Minnesota so as to have something to fall back on.”<sup>64</sup> The Internal Revenue Service’s decision to tax paper profits on real estate sales put a damper on the wild real estate speculation in 1926. By the summer of 1926 the boom was over. Soon after, the great hurricane of September 1926 ravaged the area.

As promised, in the September 7, 1925 meeting, the city of Miami created a Department of Coconut Grove, and placed at its head the former city manager of Coconut Grove, William Sydow.<sup>65</sup> One important contribution of the department was the retention of Coconut Grove’s street names. In Coconut Grove, streets run north and south, and avenues east and west, the opposite of Miami’s street system, and many of the streets are named for Coconut Grove’s early settlers. In December 1925, there was a proposal to standardize the street names, so that Mary Street, for example, would become Southwest 28th Avenue. While the Coconut Grove Housekeepers Club did not meet between April 30 and November 9, 1925, and thus seemingly missed the annexation fight, its members did, however, weigh in on the issue of street names. According to the club’s minutes, “Miss Lester presented the matter of changing the names and numbering streets which Mr. Sydow asked our support to prevent. Mrs. Haden moved that Mr. Sydow be informed that our club wished to retain old names of streets and asked that he be requested to represent us before the Miami Council.”<sup>66</sup> Coconut Grove has kept its original street names to this day.

The end of the land boom signaled the end of Miami's attempt to expand its borders. The annexation of Coral Gables, which George Merrick had gone on record as favoring, never happened. In fact, some of the areas annexed by the city of Miami in 1925 were de-annexed in 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression.

One wonders what effects annexation has had on the Grove since 1925. Unlike its neighbor, Silver Bluff, Coconut Grove has retained an identity distinct from that of the city of Miami. Today, the generally recognized informal boundaries of Coconut Grove<sup>67</sup> include much of the former town of Silver Bluff. Residents of Coconut Grove still prefer their addresses to be written as "Coconut Grove," rather than "Miami". As historian Arva Moore Parks has noted, "they always get their mail!"<sup>68</sup> Unsuccessful secession movements were undertaken by residents of Coconut Grove in the 1970s and in the 1990s, proving that this issue has not died completely. In 1997, Coconut Grove residents were active in bringing the abolition of the city of Miami to a vote. The vote was reminiscent of the election of 1925. Countywide, the measure was defeated overwhelmingly, but in central Coconut Grove six precincts voted to abolish the city of Miami, the only six precincts in the county to do so.<sup>69</sup>



**The Barnacle in the early 1900s. One of Coconut Grove's most historic structures, it was the home of the Commodore Ralph Monroe for four decades. HASF 1955-1-3**

In 1971, historian Parks observed that, "Fortunately, though stripped of all official designation, Coconut Grove shows no signs of loss of identity."<sup>70</sup> This is less true today. Recent years have seen the erosion of the village-like quality of Coconut Grove. Neighborhood-oriented businesses, like grocery stores, drug stores, and the like have been steadily

replaced by tourist-oriented malls and restaurants. The artist-centered sensibility, which began with Ralph Munroe and his group of “crazies” in the 1880s persisted through the 1960s and 1970s, but began to fade in the 1980s and 1990s. Munroe’s home, the Barnacle, still stands, protected as part of the State Park system, but its character is changing as large new buildings surround it. Nothing is more indicative of the change than the steady disappearance of the Grove’s trademark trees. Each successive year finds the percentage of overhanging canopy reduced as developers take advantage of reduced setback requirements.

The annexation of Coconut Grove is not forgotten. As recently as December 1999, *Miami Herald* columnist Howard Kleinberg mentioned it in an article.<sup>71</sup> How would Coconut Grove have developed over the last seventy-five years if it had continued as an independent city? The answer, of course, is purely speculative. But Miami City Hall today stands in an area that would still be the city of Coconut Grove, were it not for the peculiar annexation law of 1905, and the annexation election twenty years later.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Historic Coconut Grove, Self-Guided Tour*, Junior League of Miami, 1987. The spelling “Cocoanut Grove,” with an extra “a,” was generally used until incorporation in 1919, when the “a” was dropped. For simplicity, the modern spelling, “Coconut Grove,” without the extra “a,” is used throughout this article.

<sup>2</sup> See table above.

<sup>3</sup> Italics are Munroe’s.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Middleton Munroe and Vincent Gilpin, *The Commodore’s Story*, (Miami, FL: Association of Southern Florida, 1985), 333-334. Italics are Munroe’s.

<sup>5</sup> *Acts of the Florida Legislature*, Regular Session, 1905, Chapter 5464, 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Laws of Florida*, 1961. c.61-350. Section 171.05 was amended.

<sup>7</sup> Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Arva Moore Parks and Gregory W. Bush, with Laura Pincus, *Miami, The American Crossroad, A Centennial Journey 1896-1996*, (Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1996), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Paul S. George, “Passage to the New Eden: Tourism in Miami From Flagler Through Everest G. Sewell,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LIX (April 1981), 450.

<sup>11</sup> Paul S. George, “Brokers, Binders, and Builders: Greater Miami’s Boom of the Mid-1920s,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LXV (July 1986), 27, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Arva Moore Parks, *The History of Coconut Grove, Florida 1821-1925*, (Thesis, University of Miami, 1971), 56-61.

<sup>13</sup> Arva Moore Parks and Gregory W. Bush, with Laura Pincus, *Miami, The American Crossroad, A Centennial Journey 1896-1996*, (Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1996), 66.

<sup>14</sup> *Minutes of the Coconut Grove Town Council*, hereinafter cited *MCGTC*, May 14, 1919, 10. Note: the Town Council became the City Council on February 19, 1923, when Coconut Grove registered its three-hundredth voter. On June 9, 1925, it became the City Commission when Coconut Grove adopted the commission/city manager form of government.

<sup>15</sup> *MCGTC*, June 21, 1920, 89-90.

<sup>16</sup> *MCGTC*, January 17, 1921, 135.

<sup>17</sup> *MCGTC*, January 15, 1923, 263.

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes of the Miami City Commission*, hereinafter cited *MMCC*, January 9, 1923, Book No. 13, 139. Resolution Number 605, as reprinted in the minutes.

<sup>19</sup> *MCGTC*, January 15, 1923, 263.

<sup>20</sup> *MMCC*, January 16, 1923, Book No. 13, 144.

<sup>21</sup> *MCGTC*, January 25, 1923, 264.

<sup>22</sup> *MCGTC*, February 5, 1923, 267.

<sup>23</sup> *MCGTC*, February 5, 1923, 269.

<sup>24</sup> *MMCC*, January 23, 1923, Book No. 13, 146.

<sup>25</sup> *MMCC*, January 23, 1923, Book No. 13, 148. Communication from City Attorney A.J. Rose, January 22, 1923, as entered in the minutes.

<sup>26</sup> *MMCC*, August 21, 1922, Book No. 13, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Frank Bowman Sessa, "Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and its Environs during the 1920s," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1950), 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Minutes of the Coconut Grove City Council*, March 19, 1923, 274.

<sup>29</sup> *MMCC*, July 7, 1925, Book No. 14, 529. An ordinance entitled: "An ordinance extending the corporate limits of the city of Miami so as to include the adjacent territory, whether incorporated or not, not now included within the limits of the city of Miami, so that the corporate limits of the city of Miami shall include all the territory included within the description in section one of this ordinance and shall incorporate all the inhabitants within the same, and to call an election of the qualified voters of the entire territory proposed to be included within the corporate limits and to provide for the registration of all persons residing within the entire territory to be included within the proposed city limits eligible to qualify to vote at such election, and providing for the location of the polling places at such election."

<sup>30</sup> Paul George, "Miami's Merchant Prince: Roddey Burdine and the Burdine Department Store," unpublished manuscript, 133.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> "Directed Greater Miami Campaign," *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1925, 1-A.

<sup>33</sup> "6,000 Hear Annexation Plea at Mass Meeting Held in Park," *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 8, 1925, 1.

<sup>34</sup> "Plans Laid For Final Annexation Drive," *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 26, 1925, 2.

- <sup>35</sup> “1,000 Autos For Use of Annexation Voters,” *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 28, 1925, 1.
- <sup>36</sup> “Success of the Special Election Would Add Suburbs To City Limits,” *Miami Herald*, August 29, 1925, 1-A.
- <sup>37</sup> “It’s Your Personal Business,” *Miami Herald*, September 2, 1925, 1-A, “Annexation Up Today,” *Miami Herald*, September 2, 1925, 3-A, and “Vote Early Today,” *Miami Herald*, September 2, 1925, 7-A.
- <sup>38</sup> *Minutes of the Coconut Grove City Commission*, hereinafter cited *MCGCC*, July 20, 1925, 529.
- <sup>39</sup> *MMCC*, May 12, 1925, Book No. 14, 481. Letter from the Commissioners of the City of Coral Gables to the Miami City Commission, dated May 4, 1925, as entered into the minutes.
- <sup>40</sup> Helen Muir, *The Biltmore: Beacon for Miami, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Miami:Valiant Press, 1998), 8.
- <sup>41</sup> *MMCC*, July 14, 1925, Book No. 14, 539.
- <sup>42</sup> “To Every Citizen Who Believes in Miami’s Prosperity and Wishes to Assure its Continuance,” *Miami Herald*, August 29, 1925, 3-D; (August 30, 1925): 5-E.
- <sup>43</sup> *MMCC*, July 14, 1925, Book No. 14, 539.
- <sup>44</sup> *MCGCC*, August 3, 1925, 531.
- <sup>45</sup> *MCGCC*, August 4, August 5, and August 7, 1925, 535.
- <sup>46</sup> *MCGCC*, August 11, 1925, 537.
- <sup>47</sup> *MCGCC*, August 17, 1925, 541.
- <sup>48</sup> “Injunction Is Asked on Annexation,” *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 22, 1925, 2.
- <sup>49</sup> “Annexation Most Practical Solution of Miami’s Problem, A.J. Cleary Says,” *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 23, 1925, 3.
- <sup>50</sup> “Writ To Halt Vote on Annexation Denied,” *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 27, 1925, 2.
- <sup>51</sup> “Annexation Adherents Issue Urgent Pleas as Registration Time Limit Nears,” *Illustrated Daily Tab*, August 28, 1925, 1.
- <sup>52</sup> *MCGCC*, August 27, 1925, 543.
- <sup>53</sup> “Coconut Grove Lays its Cards on the Table,” *Miami Herald*, August 31, 1925, 7-C.
- <sup>54</sup> “Vote No,” *Miami Tribune*, September 1, 1925, 11-C.
- <sup>55</sup> *MMCC*, September 8, 1925, 607. Figures reported in the *Miami Herald* vary slightly from these.
- <sup>56</sup> “Greater Miami Wins at Polls in Heavy Vote, 9 of 10 Precincts

Carried," *Miami Herald*, September 3, 1925, 1-A.

<sup>57</sup> "Miami Extends Bounds to 50 Square Miles", *Miami Daily News and Metropolis*, September 3, 1925, 2.

<sup>58</sup> "Grove Prepares for Hot Contest Over Annexation," *Miami Tribune*, September 4, 1925, 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> "Mayor Asserts Greater Miami To Hurry Work," *Miami Tribune*, September 3, 1925, 1-A.

<sup>61</sup> *MCGCC*, September 7, 1925, 545.

<sup>62</sup> *MMCC*, September 7, 1925, Book No. 14, 599.

<sup>63</sup> "Coconut Grove, Miami Make Peace, Annexation War Ends In Love Feast," *Illustrated Daily Tab*, September 8, 1925, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Bowman Sessa, "Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and its Environs during the 1920s," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1950), 284. Sessa quotes "Terrible Crash is Sure to Come," in the *Immigration Bulletin*, Minnesota Department. of Conservation, October 12, 1925; George, "Brokers, Binders, and Builders," *FHQ*, LXV, 46-49.

<sup>65</sup> *MMCC*, September 8, 1925, 606.

<sup>66</sup> *Minutes of the Coconut Grove Housekeepers Club*, December 3, 1925.

<sup>67</sup> Map of Coconut Grove, Coconut Grove Chamber of Commerce, 1997.

<sup>68</sup> Arva Moore Parks, *The History of Coconut Grove, Florida 1821-1925*, (Thesis, University of Miami, 1971).

<sup>69</sup> Karen Branch and Dan Keating, "City's Abolition Found Favor in Six Precincts" *Miami Herald*, September 6, 1997, 1-B.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Howard Kleinberg, "Was county's name change the will of the people?" *Miami Herald*, December 14, 1999, 7-B.

## **Racial Stirrings in Colored Town: The UNIA in Miami during the 1920s**

*by Kip Vought*

On Thursday evening March 8, 1928, Laura Koffey, a black nationalist, spoke before a large gathering of supporters in Fox Thomson's hall located in Colored Town—Miami's segregated black community now called Overtown. She claimed to be an African princess and spoke of black pride, self-help, and African repatriation. Her message was very similar to that of Marcus Garvey and members of his international movement, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Just days before, Koffey was a UNIA member whose dramatic, inspirational, and passionate speeches led to an increase in the organization's membership throughout Florida. By the time of her address in Fox Thomson's hall Koffey was a former member of the UNIA, taking with her most of its members to form the African Universal Church (AUC). This address was her first as a member of the AUC, but it was cut short by an unknown gunman who fired two fatal shots at her head through a crack in a door fifty feet from the podium. Koffey's departure from the UNIA and subsequent death brought an end to the UNIA in Miami, a movement that spanned eight years, claimed hundreds of members, and gained wide support in Miami's black community.<sup>1</sup> This article tells the tale of Miami's UNIA division (chapter) and its impact upon the city's black community in the 1920s.

While scholarship exists for Laura Koffey and the AUC, very little is known about UNIA's Miami chapter or division. Clearly the existence of a black nationalist movement such as Garvey's UNIA was challenging in Miami given the city's racial climate during this time. In many ways, Miami was a typical southern city racially. Since its incorporation in 1896, Miami's lawmakers established through Jim Crow laws a

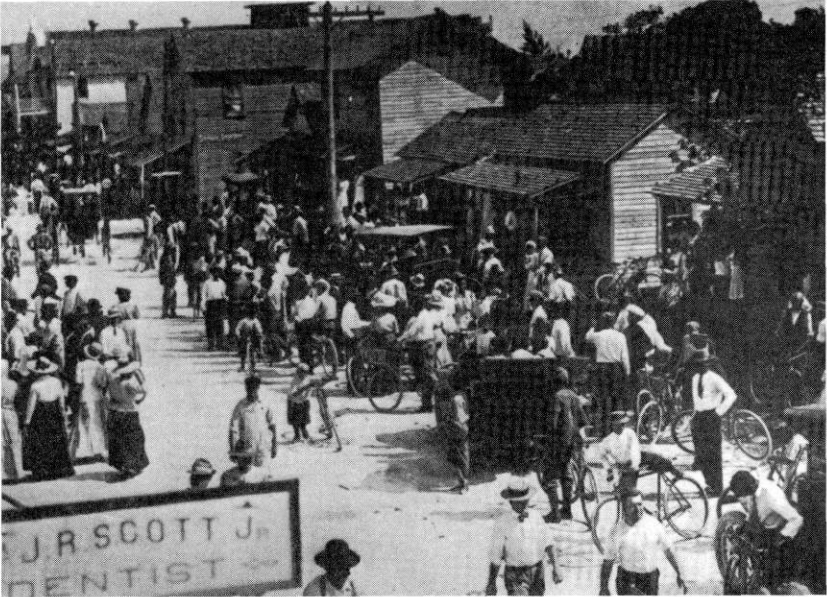


racially segregated society.<sup>2</sup> White violence against the black community, along with a police force that overlooked and sometimes participated in these atrocities, was commonplace.<sup>3</sup> A resurgent Ku Klux Klan (KKK) terrorized the black community. Moreover, the white community feared the UNIA as a black subversive group working to overthrow the white establishment, and occasionally lashed out at it with violence. Yet the UNIA persevered and was able to establish itself in Miami and become an intrinsic part of the black community. While the beginning and end of Miami's UNIA is marked with high drama and violence, its existence and role in Miami imparts an understanding of the black community's social and race consciousness. The UNIA was arguably one of the strongest forms of expression of these communal elements during this racially turbulent time in the city's history.

Attempts to form a UNIA chapter in Miami began in 1920, only four years after Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican "firebrand," came to the United States and created an international organization with the goal of improving the social conditions of blacks, establishing racial pride and solidarity, and reclaiming Africa from European control and making it the new homeland for African Americans. The movement grew quickly and soon hundreds of UNIA divisions were operating throughout the country and abroad, with one division formed as far away as Australia. The majority of the chapters, however, were rooted in northern cities within the US, and in various Caribbean nations.<sup>4</sup> The UNIA eventually moved South, but it was met with strong resistance from white communities that feared the movement would lead to a black upheaval against white domination.

By 1920, Miami contained 29,571 residents, 9,259 of whom (30 percent of the total population) were black. Large numbers of black Miamians were immigrants, who hailed from the Bahamas, and to a lesser degree, the West Indies. Black "islanders" totaled 4,815, comprising 52 percent of the city's black population and 16.3 percent of all residents.<sup>5</sup> Escaping from economically depressed conditions in the Bahamas, many came to Miami hoping to prosper; they also brought with them a strong black nationalist sentiment that proved to be an important element in the formation of Miami's UNIA. The majority of the American-born blacks resided in Colored Town whereas Bahamians predominantly resided in the nearby Coconut Grove community.<sup>6</sup>

Colored Town lacked proper plumbing, sewage facilities, and roads, causing it to become congested with crime and infected with disease. In spite of the rapid growth of Colored Town's population, the white com-



Colored Town was a bustling, congested corner in its early decades. HASF 1988-102-6

munity resisted the expansion of Miami's black quarter—sometimes in violent fashion. Many black Miamians fought these conditions and violence, forming organizations to address the community's needs. The Colored Board of Trade and the Negro Uplift Association of Dade County, comprised of black businessmen and community leaders, fought segregation legislation, white terrorism, and police brutality. These groups lobbied for better job opportunities, improved living conditions, more parks, and for the presence of black policemen in Colored Town.<sup>7</sup> The Negro Uplift Association of Dade County and the Colored Board of Trade were precursors of the UNIA in Miami. Indeed, many members of these groups became UNIA leaders.<sup>8</sup>

A considerable percentage of UNIA chapters arose in black churches, which, in addition to their spiritual offerings and social ministrations, served as venues for black solidarity and independence, and provided an outlet for nationalist sentiment.<sup>9</sup> Miami was no exception as local black ministers were organizers of the local UNIA division and remained

active members. The UNIA carefully worked with Miami's black ministry, though it remained a political and social movement as opposed to a religious movement.<sup>10</sup>

In 1920, national UNIA organizers arrived in the Miami area to solicit member and form a local chapter. They collaborated with such locally important figures as the Reverend John A. Davis, minister of the Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, and Dr. Brookings, the presiding elder of the Florida District A.M.E. Church. Both had attended the 1920 UNIA National Convention in New York City.<sup>11</sup> This convention, one of the largest in the UNIA's history, reached its climax with Marcus Garvey's address to an estimated 25,000 blacks at Madison Square Garden. In his speech, Garvey boasted that, "The nations of the world were aware that the Negro of yesterday has disappeared from the scene of human activity and his place has been taken by a new Negro who stands erect, conscious of manhood rights and fully determined to preserve them at all costs."<sup>12</sup>

Davis was appointed Miami's district UNIA organizer at the convention and he, along with Dr. Brookings, returned to Miami and quickly went to work soliciting prospective UNIA members at local churches and lodges. The division's first organizational meeting in Colored Town took place on September 16, 1920.<sup>13</sup> Two months later, on November 14, 1920, the Miami chapter of UNIA was born in the English Wesleyan Church. Percy Styles, a local businessman and a prominent citizen of Colored Town, chaired the meeting and was nominated as "traveling organizer" to gain further support for the UNIA. Dr. Alonzo Burgess Holly, a local doctor and another prominent resident of Colored Town, delivered a "fiery" speech on "the revolutionary activities of his native country of Haiti."<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Reverend J. H. Le Mansley, minister of the English Wesleyan Church, "outlined some of the wrongs committed against the Negro."<sup>15</sup> Reverend G. E. Carter, who had recently moved to Miami from the North, was also actively involved in the meeting.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Holly possessed a long history of involvement in black nationalist causes before the inception of the UNIA in Miami, while the Reverend Carter would use Miami's UNIA as a springboard for a career as a prominent international figure. Dr. Holly was the son of James Theodore Holly, a mid-nineteenth century black nationalist and emigrant who left the United States for Haiti. He became Haiti's Episcopal

Bishop, the first African American to achieve that rank.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Holly was born in Port-au-Prince, educated at Harrison College in Barbados, Cambridge University and the New York Homeopathic Medical College where he received his medical degree in 1888. After a successful medical practice in Nassau, he moved to South Florida around the turn of the century and established practices in West Palm Beach and Miami.<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence that Holly became an official UNIA member, but it is known that he was a faithful supporter of the movement.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Holly had strong nationalist feelings and was an outspoken proponent of black concerns. He had allegedly been run out of town several times by the KKK. The white community perceived him as one of the more radical activists in the black community, but he continued to maintain a clinic in Colored Town in spite of all the threats he received advising him to move.<sup>20</sup>

Reverend Carter was a member of the Colored Board of Trade and Secretary of the black YMCA. Carter became an active member of the UNIA and was the first delegate to represent Miami at the International Convention of Negro Peoples of the World in 1921. Eventually he left Miami for New York where he became active in the UNIA at the international level. Carter became the assistant to the UNIA President-General at the 1922 convention and was appointed UNIA Secretary-General in 1924, holding that position until 1926. He was also Secretary of the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, the UNIA's shipping company. In addition, Carter authored the "Weekly Sermon," one of the longest running features in the UNIA newspaper *Negro World*.<sup>21</sup>

As soon as Davis and Brooking arrived and organized these early UNIA meetings, the local police and FBI began monitoring Miami's UNIA activities, and continued to do so for the eight years of the organization's existence in Miami. On December 5, 1920, another UNIA meeting was held at a Baptist church. FBI agent Leone E. Howe claimed that a general call was made at this meeting to establish equality with whites and eventually to bring about black supremacy. Agent Howe also claimed that interracial marriage was advocated. The FBI reported that by the time of this meeting, the UNIA chapter contained 400 members and was meeting once a week.<sup>22</sup>

The FBI correspondence indicates that the agency feared that the Miami UNIA was being formed by blacks who came from the Bahamas

and West Indies to overthrow the white establishment of Southeast Florida.<sup>23</sup> The FBI was also concerned with a report that alleged that “90 percent of the Negroes in the area are in possession of fire arms.” There are further indications that the FBI or local authorities might have instigated violence against UNIA members, or suspected members, in mid-1921.<sup>24</sup>

The violence actually began in Key West and appeared to be connected to similar violence in Miami. By June 1921, the Key West chapter of the UNIA had great momentum and boasted 700 members. Local whites became wary of the movement especially after Garvey himself arrived on the island to assist the UNIA Chapter in recruiting new members. The FBI feared that the large Bahamian and West Indian populations were poised for violence against the white community. Reverend T. C. Glashen, President of the Key West UNIA, was quoted as saying, “We have been under white people’s control long enough. The time has come for us to strike, and all of us Negroes must let the world know that we are a power strong and ready to defend our rights. If we can’t succeed with words, we will use other methods, and never mind what happens. If blood is needed let it be shared. We fought to help this and other countries to be free, so let’s fight to free ourselves.”<sup>25</sup>

These words, along with fear of a black revolution, were enough to reactivate the Key West Chapter of the Ku Klux Klan that had been long dormant, exacerbating racial tensions on the island. The president of the chamber of commerce gave Glashen twenty-four hours to leave town. When Glashen refused, he was arrested for inciting a riot and was jailed, which angered the island’s black citizenry creating further potential for violence. A representative from the parent UNIA in Harlem and a judge visited Glashen and begged him to leave before a racial clash between the UNIA and the white mob ensued. Glashen finally left for New York by boat via Havana due to threats that he would be pulled from a train and lynched if he tried to leave Key West over land.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after Glashen’s arrest, Dr. Kershaw, Key West’s UNIA vice president, was arrested on allegations that he stole UNIA funds. Kershaw turned over the UNIA books and papers to FBI agents, was released on bond, and resigned from the UNIA. The books and minutes were examined by those agents who noted membership size, and forwarded a list of 690 members to the FBI regional headquarters in Jacksonville.<sup>27</sup>

The KKK announced its presence in Miami in the spring of 1921 with a parade of 200 men clad in the traditional hoods and robes. On July 1, 1921, Reverend Reggie H. Higgs, a black minister in Coconut



The Ku Klux Klan maintained a visible presence in Miami throughout the 1920s. HASF 1995-320-5

Grove and an associate of the exiled Glashen, was kidnapped by eight hooded men from his home. Higgs was a Bahamian who moved to Key West and became involved with

the UNIA through Glashen before moving to Coconut Grove as a minister of St. James Baptist church. Higgs continued his involvement with the UNIA, helping to organize and becoming vice president of a smaller chapter located in Coconut Grove. The *Miami Herald* noted that some of his “revival meetings” had created violent race conditions leading to the shooting of two black men by the police. After his abduction, Higgs was taken to a wooded spot, was tied and placed face down on the ground, and was whipped with a rope. The kidnappers placed another rope around his neck and ordered him to leave town within forty-eight hours. He was taken back the same night and dumped on a Coconut Grove street.<sup>28</sup>

The kidnapping of Higgs angered black residents of Coconut Grove and many took to the streets with guns the night he was abducted, resolving to find Higgs and his captors. The riot alarm was sounded, bringing in the police. One black man was shot and seriously wounded by a police officer when he allegedly “failed to halt upon command.” The police disarmed twenty-five blacks and arrested nine, releasing them the next day.<sup>29</sup>

On July 5, 1921, Albert Gibson, also a UNIA member, claimed that he and other friends put Higgs on a British vessel destined for Nassau. “We put him on the boat, gave him a couple hundred dollars and let

him get lost. He hasn't been back since, but he dared them to come and get him," Gibson told the *Miami Herald* in February 1975.<sup>30</sup> Oscar Johnson, financial secretary of the Miami branch of the UNIA, became frightened by the treatment of Glashen and Higgs and left with Higgs for the Bahamas, although it was believed that he was not directly threatened.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to these incidents the FBI and local authorities had placed Higgs, Glashen, Holly, and other UNIA members under surveillance and had reportedly intercepted a letter that was sent to Glashen from Higgs. The FBI claimed that Higgs advised Glashen to "organize the Negroes in Key West and on the given date poison everybody and take possession of the island."<sup>32</sup> The content of the letter was released to the press; on July 3, 1921, the *Miami Herald* reported that the Higgs kidnapping unveiled a plot to kill whites in Key West. The *Herald's* source was the Miami Police Department, which claimed that Higgs' scheme to kill whites led to his kidnapping. The letter from Higgs to Glashen was not mentioned in the article, but the authorities claimed that Higgs spoke of such plans in speeches to the Miami UNIA.<sup>33</sup>

The violence continued. On July 17, 1921, twelve days after Higgs left the country, eight masked men abducted Archdeacon Phillip S. Irwin, the white minister of the St. Agnes Episcopal Church in Colored Town. Irwin claimed his abductors handcuffed, gagged, hooded and forced him into a car. After driving for one half-hour, the car stopped, Irwin was taken



**St. Agnes Episcopal Church in Colored Town.**  
This Church was built in the 1920s replacing the earlier structure where Irwin had preached.  
HASF 1989-011-3459

into the woods, strapped to a log and stripped of his clothing. The men told Irwin that he had been preaching racial equality and interracial

marriage and that it would not be tolerated. Irwin was whipped thirty to forty times and then tarred and feathered. He was told to leave Miami within forty-eight hours or he would be lynched. He was dumped on a street in downtown Miami where he was found by a police officer.<sup>34</sup> Irwin left Miami two days later.<sup>35</sup>

The white community appeared unsure of the origin and purpose of the UNIA. The *Miami Herald* reported that the UNIA was a clandestine branch of the Overseas Club headed by a man named "Garvin" (misspelling Garvey's name) that was disbanded by not following the policy of the parent organization. Even though there was no apparent connection between the two organizations, Father Irwin was linked to the UNIA through his association with the Overseas Club.<sup>36</sup> Irwin may have supported the UNIA, but it is unlikely that whites would have been allowed to become members.

In spite of the violence and intimidation, the Miami UNIA endured and grew. The FBI was able to obtain the books containing a membership list and detailed meeting minutes. The agency noted that Miami's UNIA membership had reached one thousand and included members in Coconut Grove and Homestead, as well as Colored Town. The membership was predominantly Bahamian. Financial records indicated that the organization took a year's lease on the Airdrome Building in Colored Town, renamed it "Liberty Hall, UNIA Branch No. 136," and purchased a motion picture machine. The FBI believed that the UNIA was in "flourishing condition."<sup>37</sup>

The FBI also reported that tensions remained high between white and black residents and it predicted a recurrence of racial troubles. The report indicated that residents of Colored Town were well supplied with arms and ammunition, which, it claimed, prompted the city to obtain nineteen machine guns, riot guns and large quantities of ammunition in anticipation of a black uprising. The agency stated that since the Higgs and Irwin incidents, the UNIA had required a warning to refrain from meeting.<sup>38</sup>

It appears that the racial tension subsided with no further recorded acts of violence between the black and white community.<sup>39</sup> This is curious since both the *Miami Herald* and the FBI reported considerable concern from the white community towards UNIA activity, with the latter eventually reconvening its meetings in spite of the warnings. Whether the UNIA allowed for a cooling-off period or perhaps made some sort of conciliatory gesture towards whites is not known.



Garvey himself became concerned over KKK violence directed toward the UNIA, and, in spite of protests within his ranks, met with its leader, Edward Young Clarke, in 1922 to discuss this problem. After recognizing similar goals such as racial purity and agreeing that the United States was a white man's country while Africa should be reserved for Africans, Clarke offered his assurance that the Klan would refrain from further attacks on the UNIA.<sup>40</sup>

How the UNIA avoided further violence during this formative period remains a mystery. Garvey's meeting with the KKK may have played a part in the UNIA's peaceful existence in Miami in the following years, but it does not explain how the tension between the UNIA and white community subsided. In order to survive in Miami, the UNIA needed to gain acceptance by the black community and its churches and to assure the white community that it was not a threat to it. It appears that the Bahamian and West Indian community championed the movement and comprised the majority of the chapter's membership. This is consistent with the predominantly West Indian character of the UNIA's main body in the northeast and during the pivotal first half of the movement's history. However, many black Americans were elected to positions of authority, including the chapter's first three presidents and its first chaplain. These American chapter officials were also community and church leaders in Colored Town.<sup>41</sup> The UNIA respected the authority of the powerful churches in the black community yet firmly identified itself as a political and social organization as opposed to a religious movement.<sup>42</sup>

Once established, the Miami UNIA conducted its affairs consistently within the guidelines of the parent organization. The members voted for a president, three vice presidents, a financial secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, trustees, chaplain, and advisors. Elections were held annually and only UNIA members could vote. There was a women's division that met separately; its officers were elected by the women members of the organization.<sup>43</sup>

The UNIA conducted its meetings in the open after it built Liberty Hall, thus removing the "clandestine" atmosphere that surrounded it in the early years. The UNIA held meetings three times a week, and on special occasions. The women's division held one meeting a week. A general public meeting was held on Sundays. James Nimmo, a one time UNIA member, claimed that the UNIA allowed whites to attend some meetings to observe their activities. "The police would sit in on meet-

ings attempting to intimidate us and see what we were up to, but we would proceed with the meetings as planned to show them what we were about.”<sup>44</sup>

A typical meeting began with a call to order by the designated chairman of the meeting. An opening ode was sung, usually “From Greenland’s Icy Mountain” or “God Bless our President.” The associations elected chaplains or a guest chaplain conducted prayer and scripture readings. Then the meeting would be turned over to a speaker who usually spoke on a wide range of topics. A meeting often contained a reading from the UNIA’s newspaper, *Negro World*, or a reading from a message from Garvey. The band would perform, or Miss Mabel Dorsett, long time UNIA member, would play a piece on the piano. Sometimes movies or a movie reel from the parent organization in Harlem would be shown. Songs were sung by the choir and the chapter President would give a short talk followed by a collection. Each meeting ended with a singing of the National Anthem of the United States.<sup>45</sup>

Like most UNIA chapters, Miami’s chapter contained a uniformed branch called the African Black Legion headed by Nimmo. Nimmo was a Bahamian who came to Miami at sixteen in 1916 to enlist in the United States Army, after being refused a similar request by the British. He served with American Forces in France during World War I and returned to Miami after his discharge. Like many southern cities, Miami welcomed home black veterans with violent reminders that the city was segregated and that their service to the country did little to change this situation. Nimmo felt disenfranchised and found that the ideals of the UNIA corresponded to his growing black nationalist sentiment. He joined the UNIA and was put in charge of 150 to 200 uniformed men and two officers.<sup>46</sup>

The Miami chapter purchased its uniforms from the parent organization in Harlem. The uniform was blue with brass buttons and a red stripe running down the trouser legs, spit-and-polished shoes, and a military cap with insignia. The officers had dress swords while the others had wooden rifles made by local black carpenters for drill practice on Sundays after church in Colored Town’s Dorsey Park. Members also bought regular rifles, but drilled with the wooden rifles. One would imagine that a large group of uniformed black men marching with rifles, albeit wooden rifles, would be viewed with consternation by the white community. Nimmo claimed that the police broke up the drill

only on a few occasions and confiscated the rifles. "We would just go home, make new rifles, and drill next week," he noted.<sup>47</sup>

As Miami's UNIA grew, it became an active participant in Colored Town's political and social affairs. Politically, the UNIA offered its Liberty Hall, one of the largest halls in Colored Town, as a meeting place for debates and discussion of issues affecting the black community. The UNIA also sponsored guest speakers at the hall. Socially, the UNIA opened its hall for dances, prayer meetings, parties, fundraisers, and celebrations.<sup>48</sup> The UNIA participated in parades along with the uniformed African Black Legion. Judge John D. Johnson reflected, in a later era, when he was a teenager in Colored Town: "We heard about Garvey and knew something about the movement. I was too young to fully comprehend the full meaning of it all, but I do remember the Legion marching in the parade—that was new. We never saw that before and I was filled with pride."<sup>49</sup>

In 1926 Miami's UNIA chapter lobbied Calvin Coolidge, the President of the United States, for executive clemency for Garvey after he was sent to the Atlanta Penitentiary for mail fraud.<sup>50</sup> Collections were made for a relief fund to benefit Garvey's wife, Amy Jaques. Miami's UNIA members sometimes visited other Florida UNIA chapters such as those in West Palm Beach, Tampa, and Key West. At the same time delegates from other UNIA chapters visited Miami's division.<sup>51</sup> The Miami division participated in the State UNIA Convention in West Palm Beach in August 1925, which was recognized as a great success, and which ended with Nimmo marching 150 UNIA men in honor of the West Palm Beach division.<sup>52</sup>

By the mid-1920s, Miami's UNIA chapter was recognized by the parent organization as one of its larger and more influential divisions. It was growing and gaining support while other divisions were in decline after Garvey's imprisonment. Many high-ranking UNIA officers paid visits to the Miami division.<sup>53</sup> Fred A. Toote, who succeeded Garvey following his imprisonment, visited Miami in 1926 and received a warm welcome in Colored Town.<sup>54</sup> One of the most successful meetings for Miami's UNIA chapter was a visit in 1927, from J. A. Craigen, the executive president of the Detroit division and special representative to the parent body. Liberty Hall was filled to capacity with people standing in the street to see the man that worked closely with Garvey. The entire division of the African Black Legion turned out for the occasion,

along with members and non-members of the UNIA, to hear “inspiring speeches from Craigen and his associates.” Motion pictures were also shown at the gathering.<sup>55</sup>

Two large, successful fundraisers were held by Miami’s UNIA. One was staged in 1926 to pay for renovations to Liberty Hall; the other was held to raise money for repairs to the UNIA-owned ship, *George W. Goethals*, which made an unexpected visit to Miami in June 1925. The *Goethals* was one element of Marcus Garvey’s attempt at initiating a black-owned shipping company. The ship had been touring the Caribbean to raise money by selling stock for the line. Returning from an unsuccessful fundraising drive in Jamaica, the ship hit a reef and docked in Miami for repairs although it did not have the funds for the work. A fundraising dance was held aboard the ship with a great turnout from Miami’s black community. Nineteen hundred dollars were raised and the ship was repaired prior to its return to New York.<sup>56</sup>

By 1927, the Miami UNIA division was firmly in place and it continued to grow. Laura Koffey’s presence in Miami only bolstered the UNIA and further increased its membership. Prior to her involvement there, Koffey had been active in a UNIA division in Jacksonville, Florida. The *Negro World* noted in a May 14, 1925 issue that the Jacksonville UNIA was experiencing rapid growth after a visit from Koffey, who was described as a worker from the West African Gold Coast. Koffey was hailed as a “real conscientious race lover...and a radical one too.” She claimed to have a “burning message from the kings of the Gold Coast, West Africa...that the door is now opened in the Gold Coast to the four hundred million Negroes of the world, and no power can shut it until all have entered.” Koffey spoke every night of the week and twice on Sundays. The *Negro World* claimed that forty to fifty new members joined the Jacksonville UNIA every time she spoke. In all, nine hundred new members joined the Jacksonville UNIA during her stay in that city.<sup>57</sup>

Koffey claimed to be an African princess from the West Gold Coast of Africa sent by her father and her people to America to find the “lost children of Africa” and bring them back home. She had plans to build sawmills in Alabama to pay for leased Japanese boats to carry out the exodus. She further claimed to have met with Garvey in prison and to have received his blessing to speak before the chapters. Those who opposed Laura Koffey considered her a fraud. Some claimed that she

was an African American from Athens, Georgia, who betrayed the black community both by luring blacks from their traditional churches and by subverting the nationalist goals of Marcus Garvey. Others claimed that she hailed from Detroit, was a Red Cross nurse who had spent time in Africa during World War I, and later worked in New Orleans as a teacher.<sup>58</sup> Followers and detractors agreed that Koffey was a powerful, inspiring speaker.

On May 29, 1927, Koffey came to Miami to deliver a week-long series of speeches; according to the *Negro World*, over three hundred members enrolled in Miami's UNIA chapter that week, indicating that "Garveyism is spreading like wildfire in Miami." Koffey stayed another week "to see if she could convince 300 more that they need freedom and Africa needs them." Three thousand persons were reported to have gathered to hear Koffey speak at Liberty Hall during a mass meeting. A report in *Negro World* indicated that "another 300 more were looking through black spectacles."<sup>59</sup>

Later in August of the same year, Koffey and four other Miami UNIA members visited Garvey in prison. Claude Green, president of Miami's UNIA and former president of the Jacksonville UNIA, wired ahead to Garvey announcing Koffey's visit. Green asked Garvey to "please take note of the fact that Lady Koffey will visit Miami..." and to "get in touch with her we find her worthwhile." Koffey made the visit with UNIA members Kitty Jones, James Baltrau, Thomas Brooks and Maxwell Cook. Cook was a captain of the African Black Legion under Nimmo's command. What was discussed between Koffey and Garvey is not known.<sup>60</sup>

Early in 1928, Koffey began breaking away from the UNIA, though she continued to speak to UNIA chapters throughout Florida. Koffey began mixing black nationalism with a prophetic religious message: "I am a representative from the Gold Coast of West Africa, seeking the welfare of Africa's children everywhere. God called me out of Africa to come over here and tell you, His people, what He would have you do."<sup>61</sup> She began to speak on Sundays, which emptied the churches of their members. This upset the UNIA's delicate relationship with local ministries. Koffey also rankled UNIA members by criticizing its dances and other fundraisers, and by advocating prayer meetings in their place. She also criticized Nimmo's uniformed African Black Legion for drilling on Sunday. Many within the UNIA now became suspicious of Koffey's intentions. The ministers oversaw her expulsion from Miami.<sup>62</sup>

Koffey left Miami to travel throughout Florida and speak at UNIA halls, but she continued to criticize UNIA activity. She reportedly collected nineteen thousand dollars during this speaking tour. UNIA chapters in St. Petersburg and Jacksonville had Koffey arrested for unknown reasons. While she was in jail in Jacksonville, Koffey was stripped in order to discover if she had, as her enemies claimed, 'voodoo roots' on her body to explain her charismatic power.<sup>63</sup>

Koffey returned to Miami in March 1928 and again spoke before large audiences in the UNIA hall, as well as local churches. Suspecting that Koffey was a fraud, three UNIA members, Professor Leslie, a local teacher, Maxwell Cook, who accompanied Koffey during her Garvey visit to the Atlanta Penitentiary, and Nimmo wired Garvey on March 7, 1928, inquiring about Koffey's 'Back to Africa' exodus. Garvey responded that he had not given Koffey the authority to collect funds for any type of African exodus and denounced her as a fraud.<sup>64</sup>

Armed with the Garvey telegram, Nimmo and the others returned to the UNIA hall that same day to confront Koffey while she was speaking. They were largely ignored, and resorted to heckling Koffey, which prompted a division between loyal Garveyites and Koffey's followers. After both factions sought police protection for use of Liberty Hall, the police padlocked the facility and prohibited its use by either group. Defying her opponents within the UNIA, Koffey continued to speak at Fox Thomson's hall the following night, March 8.<sup>65</sup>



**H. Leslie Quigg was Miami's Chief of Police from 1921-28, and again in a later era. Quigg and his force were tough on residents of Colored Town. HASF 1989-011-22995**

Koffey encouraged her followers to break with the UNIA and join her African Universal Church (AUC). Maxwell Cook was there to heckle her, and Nimmo planned to join him but was working late. Someone fired a gun at her head in mid-speech, killing her instantly. The frenzied mob beat Cook to death with bricks, stones, and fists. A mob bent on revenge sought out Nimmo, but he went to the police for protection. The police arrested Nimmo and

UNIA President Claude Green and other UNIA members. Most were set free the next day, but Nimmo and Green were indicted in the murder of Koffey, tried, and acquitted. Koffey's killer was never caught or, according to some, found guilty.<sup>66</sup>

While the AUC continued to operate, Miami's UNIA chapter died the same night as Koffey. An organization called the 'Garvey Club' was started, but it failed to garner the support or popularity of the UNIA. The majority of the UNIA members stayed with the AUC, but it too declined in numbers without the charismatic leadership of Koffey.<sup>67</sup>

While the nature and persona of Laura Koffey, as well as the complicity of Nimmo in her murder, was discussed and debated for some time, these issues detract from the importance of the UNIA's presence in Miami. Since Miami's incorporation as a city, blacks had challenged, usually without success, the racial tyranny afflicting their community. The UNIA's contribution in this struggle lies in the fact that it brought the message and philosophy of black nationalism to Miami's blacks thirty to forty years before the civil rights movement. Many former UNIA members, including Nimmo, were in the forefront of Miami's mid-century labor and socialist movements, and later a civil rights movement, which helped desegregate such facilities as lunch counters before other areas of the South. While UNIA's existence in Miami was brief, its influence was long-lived.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> While there is little information available on the Garvey movement in Miami, there is an extensive article on Laura Koffey and the African Universal Church. See Richard Newman, "Warrior Mother of Africa's of the Most High God: Laura Adorker Koffey and the African Universal Church," *Black Power and Black Religion: Essays and Reviews*, (Cornwall, Locust Hill Press, 1987), 109-131.

<sup>2</sup> Jerrell Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History: The Enduring Influence of Florida's Black Code," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LV (January 1977), 290.

<sup>3</sup> The author gained perspective on Miami's black community in the Garvey era through the scholarship of Dorothy Fields of Black Archives, History and Research Foundation of South Florida; Paul S. George, Raymond Mohl and Jean C. Taylor. See: Paul S. George, "Policing Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930" *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LIX (January 1981), Paul S. George, "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930" *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LVI (April 1978); Dorothy Fields, "Reflections on Black History: Fun and Games in 'Overtown'" *Update*, IV (June 1976); Raymond Mohl, "Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami" *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LXV (January 1987).

<sup>4</sup> See Edmund D. Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1955); Elton C. Fax, *Garvey: The Story of a Pioneer Black Nationalist*, (Cornwall: Cornwall Press Inc., 1972).

<sup>5</sup> US Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Population II (Washington 1922), 960, 795; Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century* (Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 1997) 120.

<sup>6</sup> US Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Population II (Washington 1922), 960, 795.; Mohl, "Black Immigrants," 271-272.

<sup>7</sup> George, "Colored Town," FHQ, 440-441; George, "Policing Miami's Black Community," FHQ, 437; David Cohen, "The Development and Efficiency of the Negro Police Precinct and Court of the City of Miami," (MA thesis, University of Miami, 1951), 21.

<sup>8</sup> George, "Colored Town," FHQ, 433-439.

<sup>9</sup> See Rodney Carlisle, *The Roots of Black Nationalism* (Port Washington:



Kennikat Press, 1975), 131-132; *Black Nationalism in America*, editors, John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1970); Wilson J. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism 1850-1925* (Hamden: The Shoe String Press Inc., 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Hill, ed., "Reports by Bureau Agent Leon E. Howe, Miami, Florida, 7/6/21," *Marcus Garvey Papers and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* Volume VI, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 514; Transcript of interview with James Nimmo conducted September 11, 1990, in possession of Dr. Gregory Bush, University of Miami, Department of History, Coral Gables, Florida.

<sup>11</sup> Hill ed., "Reports by Bureau Agent Leon E. Howe, Miami, Florida, 7/6/21," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 514.

<sup>12</sup> Fax, *Garvey*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> "Reports by Bureau Agent Leon E. Howe, Miami, Florida, 7/16/21," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 514.

<sup>14</sup> "Report by Bureau Agent William C. Sausele, Jacksonville, Florida, 11/22/20," *Garvey Papers*, Hill ed., 91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Carlisle, *Roots of Black Nationalism*, 58-59.

<sup>18</sup> Hill ed., *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 91-92; Interview Kip Vought with James Nimmo, Judge D. Johnson and Thomas Johnson, Miami, Florida, October 12, 1990, in possession of Dr. Gregory Bush, University of Miami.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Nimmo.

<sup>20</sup> Interviews with Nimmo, Thomas Johnson and Judge John D. Johnson.

<sup>21</sup> "Report by Bureau Agent Leone E. Howe, Miami, Florida," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, Hill ed., 112.

<sup>22</sup> The philosophy of Marcus Garvey is found in Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Volume I and II, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969). The Bureau of Investigation, founded in 1908, was renamed Federal Bureau of Investigation by the Congress in 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Garvey, *Philosophy*; Hill ed., "George Washington to Harry Daugherty, Attorney General, 615 Thomas Street, Key West, Florida,

April 28, 1921," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 375-376; Hill ed., "Report by Bureau Agent Leone E. Howe, Miami, Florida, 6/29/21," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 494-495; Hill ed., "W.J.H. Taylor, British Vice-Consul, to Tom Ffennel Carlisile, British Consul, New Orleans, Key West, Florida, July 5, 1921," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 512-515.

<sup>24</sup> Hill ed., "Report by Bureau Agent William C. Sousele," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Hill ed., "Report by Bureau Agent Leone E. Howe, Miami, Florida, 6/29/21," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 494-495.

<sup>26</sup> *Negro World*, July 16, 1921.

<sup>27</sup> Hill ed., "Howard P. Wright, Bureau Agent in Charge, to Lewis J. Bailey," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 244-247. Dr. Kershaw's first name was never mentioned in any of the documents or FBI correspondence.

<sup>28</sup> Hill ed., *Garvey Papers; Miami Herald*, July 2 and 3, 1921, 1; George, "Policing Miami's black community," *FHQ*, 446; Dunn, *Black Miami*, 117. The Klan maintained a visible presence in the Magic City throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It appears the members of the KKK were the perpetrators of the Higgs abduction and subsequent race-related crimes in Miami, although no one was ever arrested for these crimes.

<sup>29</sup> *Miami Herald*, July 2, 1921, 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, February 12, 1975; "Report by Bureau Agent Leon E. Howe 7/6/21," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, Hill ed., p. 513.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, July 3, 18, 1921, 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, July 3, 1921, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, July 18, 1921, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, July 3, 18, 1921; Hill, ed., *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 247.

<sup>36</sup> *Miami Herald*, July 18, 1921, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Hill ed., "Report by Bureau Agent Leon Howe, Miami 7/6/21," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 513-515.

<sup>38</sup> Hill ed., *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 515.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with James Nimmo and Thomas Johnson.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 183-187; Judith Stein, *The UNIA Goes South: Garvey and the Ku Klux Klan in The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 153-170.

- <sup>41</sup> Hill ed., The FBI documents noted the nationality of the UNIA members, *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 514.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Nimmo.
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with Nimmo; Hill ed., "Report by Bureau Agent Leone E. Howe 7/8/21," *Garvey Papers*, 514.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with James Nimmo.
- <sup>45</sup> The *Negro World* was published in New York. *Negro World*, February 2 and July 19, 1924; March 21 and June 20, 1925; March 27, May 22, August 7, 1926; February 19, March 12, May 7, June 11, July 23, July 30, August 1, September 17, October 1, October 8 and October 15, 1927.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with James Nimmo.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with Nimmo and Judge John D. Johnson.
- <sup>50</sup> Interview with Nimmo and Judge John D. Johnson; *Negro World*, May 22, August 7, 1926.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Nimmo and Judge John D. Johnson; *Negro World*, March 21 and September 24, 1925.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview with Nimmo and Judge John D. Johnson; *Negro World*, September 24, 1925.
- <sup>53</sup> Garvey intended to visit Miami after first going to Key West and the Caribbean in mid-1921, but Dr. Holly warned him that Miami's racial climate could imperil him. See Hill ed., "Howard P. Wright, Bureau Agent Leone Howe, Miami, Florida., March 11, 1921," *Garvey Papers*, Volume VI, 244-246.
- <sup>54</sup> *Negro World*, March 26, 1926.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, March 12, 1927.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Nimmo.
- <sup>57</sup> Newman, *Black Power and Black Religion*, 131-134; *Negro World*, May 14, 1925.
- <sup>58</sup> Newman, *Black Power and Black Religion*, 131-134; Interview with Nimmo; *Negro World*, June 11, 1927 and April 7, 1928.
- <sup>59</sup> *Negro World*, June 11, 1927.
- <sup>60</sup> Copy of Western Union Telegram from Claude Green to Marcus Garvey, Black Archives Foundation Inc. of Miami; Copy of visitors registration of the Atlanta Penitentiary, August 1, 1927, Black Archives, History and Research Foundation of South Florida.

<sup>61</sup> Newman, *Black Power and Black Religion*, 134-135.

<sup>62</sup> Newman, *Black Power*; interview with Nimmo.

<sup>63</sup> Newman, *Black Power and Black Religion*, 13-135.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Nimmo; *Miami Herald*, March 9, 1928, 6; *Miami Daily News*, March 9, 1928, 6; Interview with Gloria Bridgewater of the African Universal Church in possession of Gregory Bush, University of Miami.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Nimmo; *Miami Herald*, March 9 and 12, 1928, 6,2.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Nimmo; Newman, *Black Power and Black Religion*, 142-143.

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