

# South Florida History

HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA VOLUME 34, NO 2, 2006 \$3.00





- Preview our newest exhibition *Haitian Community Arts: Images by Iris PhotoCollective*.
- Take a guided tour of our permanent exhibition *Tropical Dreams* led by Dr. Paul George.
- Tour our current exhibition *Miami Beach: America's Tropical Resort* and explore future exhibitions.
- Visit the Research Center and its collection of photographs, books and other resources.
- Watch a vintage bathing suit fashion show.

Hear about upcoming events and discover free cultural, educational and family programs. Sign up for tours and camps and receive a discount. Become a member or renew and receive a gift. Purchase discounted Harvest festival tickets.

## celebrating **your** museum

annual season kick-off 2006

Thursday, September 28

5:30–9 pm FREE

Enjoy live Haitian music,  
dance and hors d'oeuvres!

*Your Story, Your Community... Your Museum*



**HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA**

101 West Flagler St Downtown Miami 305.375.1492 [www.hmsf.org](http://www.hmsf.org)

*South Florida History* Volume 34, No 2, 2006

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Cover—The "Days Catch." Pier Five, Miami. HMSF 81-142-147.



The summer 2006 issue of *South Florida History* offers readers another broad choice of articles on the rich history and culture of South Florida. Florida Gulf Coast University historian Irvin D. S. Winnsboro's careful study of southwest Florida's Koreshan Communitarian experiment provides fascinating reading on a 20th-century Utopian settlement, its ideals, uniqueness, the industriousness of the communards and, ultimately, its demise. Arthur "Chappy" Chapman, a longtime Miamian now living and teaching in Georgia, is a frequent contributor to this magazine. Chapman brings us the story of the

remarkable DesRochers family, who migrated to the Little River area at the time of the birth of the city of Miami. The DesRochers were in lockstep with the area's astounding development in the century since Miami's incorporation. Their businesses stretched from Little River and nearby Lemon City south to the Miami River. Author Chapman dedicates his article to Lenore DesRochers McClean, who lived for nearly a century and was a proud, enthusiastic supporter of the Magic City.

We learned of the history of Bayfront Park in the previous issue of *South Florida History*. Two elements closely associated with the greensward, the *Prins Valdemar*, the ill-fated Danish barkentine, and bustling Pier Five are featured in this number of the magazine. After the *Prins Valdemar*, which sunk in Miami's harbor as the great real estate boom of the mid-1920s was beginning to dissipate, was towed to the city's bayfront, it was converted to the Miami Aquarium. This compelling story is told by Alice L. Luckhardt, the godchild and namesake of Alice L. Walters Wallace, whose father, Capt. Richard J. Walters, owned and piloted the vessel. The article contains new information on the ill-fated ship, efforts to refloat it and its life after that. Luckhardt, who was raised in Miami but now lives in Stuart, is a longtime teacher, genealogist and writer. Just south of the *Prins Valdemar*, near the entrance to today's Bayside Marketplace, stood Pier Five, one of the city's favorite hangouts from the time of its opening in the mid-1920s till the end of the 1960s. I wanted to tell its story, and that of its predecessor, Elser's Pier, since few would remember them today. Yet, in earlier, simpler times, they provided Miamians and visitors with a rich outlet for entertainment and socializing.

While most readers know the story of the transformation and renaissance of South Beach in recent decades, no one has told it better than M. Barron Stofik in *Saving South Beach*, a work reviewed in this issue of the magazine. Stofik was part of a small group of preservationists and activists battling steep odds to protect, restore and even save the properties comprising today's Art Deco District, gain recognition for them for their singular styles and bring investors to the neighborhood to assist in its transformation. *Saving South Beach* is both informative and riveting reading.

I hope our readers will visit the Historical Museum soon to experience the wonderful exhibition *Miami Beach: America's Tropical Resort*, which opened in June and will be up until January 14, 2007. Brimming with photographs, memorabilia and moving images, the exhibition promises something—and more—for everyone who has memories of "The Beach." Already hordes of delighted visitors have come away from the exhibition with smiles on their faces and a new awareness of those elements that make Miami Beach unique.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul S. George". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## *South Florida History*

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# Collections

## *IMLS Grant Funds Collection Project*

by Rebecca A. Smith

We live in an information revolution, an age that is reshaping our lives as completely as the Industrial Revolution did those of our ancestors, but at a much more rapid pace. Personal computers, the Internet, scanners, digital cameras and many other inventions have raised patrons' and staffs' expectations of how accurately, rapidly and thoroughly museums provide access to their collections.

Unfortunately, all does not magically happen with the click of a mouse. Someone still has to catalog the artifact or book, select the photograph to scan, catalog the digital image, write the collection guide, create Web pages and store thousands of digital images offline. Hard work makes easy access possible.

Late in 2005, collections staff began a three-year project to improve collections access and intellectual control using the tools the information revolution has given us. This project is partially funded through a three-year grant from the Museums for America program of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The IMLS grant has funded two three-year positions at the Historical Museum.

Karyn Anderson recently graduated from the University of Miami with an M. A. in Art History. She has already added more than 1,000 records from the antiquated card catalog to the Intranet catalog. Over the next few years, retrospective and original cataloging of thousands of publications and visual materials will be carried out.

Adriana Jean received a B. A. in Art History from Southern Methodist University. She has joined Registrar Rachel Malloy in the Objects Collection, where they have begun a shelf-by-shelf

inventory of 9,000 artifacts. The inventory process includes research, records checking, digital photography and editing (sometimes creating) the database catalog record.



Above—Adriana Jean works on the objects catalog.  
Below—Karyn Anderson cataloging books.



Additional project activities will include the creation of collections guides and finding aids for the museum's Web site; selection, digitization and cataloging of 2,000 to 3,000 prints and photographs; digitization of the museum's periodicals (back issues of *Tequesta*, *Update* and *South Florida History*); the accessioning and indexing of primary resources generated by the Folklife/Community Research Program and the conversion of archaeological records to digital format.

To accomplish these ambitious goals, all collections staff will work on various aspects of the project throughout the next three years. Although most of these activities will not show results until project completion, some have already begun to incrementally improve collections access. For example, point your browser to [www.historical-museum.org/collect/findingaids/findingaids.htm](http://www.historical-museum.org/collect/findingaids/findingaids.htm). There you will discover guides and finding aids to some of the museum's manuscripts and visual materials collections. While primarily for students and scholars planning visits to the Research Center, several of these guides include links to digital images—one need not be studious to enjoy them.

Collections catalogs and finding aids used to be laboriously made with paper, cards, pencils and typewriters, and stored in drawers and books. Now they are even more laboriously made of bytes and pixels and stored on file servers. They are also more accurate and easier to use. The collections access project will help the museum take full advantage of all that bytes and pixels offer.—*SFH*

## Historical Museum of Southern Florida

**Miami-Dade Cultural Center, 101 West Flagler Street, Downtown Miami, 305.375.1492, [www.hmsf.org](http://www.hmsf.org).** Open seven days a week, Monday–Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm; Sunday noon to 5 pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Discounted parking available at 50 NW 2nd Ave. Adults \$5; Children 6-12 \$2; HMSF members and children (5 and under) FREE.

### SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

#### ***Miami Beach: America's Tropical Resort***

*On display through January 14, 2007*

Discover the glamorous story of Miami Beach—its transformation from a 1910 mangrove-covered sandbar into a world-famous resort city, attracting over 4 million tourists annually. Enter a replica of a Miami Modern hotel lobby, sign-in at the reception desk and grab a travel guide. See panoramic photographs, hotel brochures, postcards, souvenirs and a collection of vintage bathing suits. Watch home movies of tourists vacationing on the beach and listen to personal stories of industry workers and entertainers, who over the years built America's Riviera.

#### ***Stereoviews of Florida & the Caribbean***

Lobby Exhibition

*On display through September 10, 2006*

Explore this early form of photography in which two nearly identical images, with the assistance of a special viewer, can be seen as a three-dimensional image. Drawn from the museum's collection and private collections, this exhibition presents over 100 stereoviews from the late 19th and early 20th century that depict images of Florida and the Caribbean.

#### ***Bathing Suits of America's Winter Playground, 1898-1921***

Window display

ArtCenter/South Florida, 810 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach

*August 24 through October 2, 2006*

Discover what vacationers did and wore on Miami Beach during its first two decades as a resort destination. A new display from *Miami Beach: America's Tropical Resort*, in collaboration with the ArtCenter/South Florida.

#### ***Haitian Community Arts: Images by Iris PhotoCollective***

Lobby Exhibition

*September 28, 2006 through January 14, 2007*

See over 50 color photographs of artistic, festive and religious traditions in South Florida, home to the largest Haitian community in the United States. Featured art forms include *fe koupè* (steel drum sculpture), woodcarving, sewing, baking, drumming, dancing, singing, poetry, kite-making and children's games. Iris PhotoCollective's award-winning photojournalists André Chung (*Baltimore Sun*), Carl Juste (*Miami Herald*) and Pablo Martínez Monsiváis (Associated Press) offer a view rarely seen in mass media coverage.

### SPECIAL EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

#### ***Celebrating Your Museum***

##### **Annual Season Kick-Off**

*Thursday, September 28 5:30 to 9 pm FREE*

See all the museum has to offer. Preview *Haitian Community Arts: Images by Iris PhotoCollective*. Tour our current exhibition *Miami Beach: America's Tropical Resort* and explore future exhibitions. Watch a vintage bathing suit fashion show, enjoy live Haitian music and dance and delicious hors d'oeuvres, and cash bar.

#### **Live On The Plaza**

Cultural programming in conjunction with

*Miami Beach: America's Tropical Resort.* **FREE**

Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and cash bar.

**Thursday, October 19**

6:30 pm **LECTURE The Making of Miami Beach**

Learn about the making of Miami Beach from authors Seth Bramson, Michele Oka Doner and Dr. Abraham Lavender.

**Thursday, October 26**

6:30 pm **PANEL DISCUSSION Marketing the Beach**

Hear "Mr. Miami Beach" Michael Aller, Director of Tourism for the City of Miami Beach, and public relations gurus Susan Brustman and Charlie Cinnamon discuss the marketing of Miami Beach through the decades.

#### **Family Fun Days**

*Every Saturday beginning September 2, 2006 FREE*

Take part in fun and unique family programming. Discover South Florida and Caribbean history through arts and crafts, tales and discoveries, and interactive and imaginative activities. For a complete listing of Family Fun Days programs, call 305.375.1492.

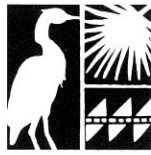
Sept 2	Deco Design	Sept 23	Beachfront Tourists
Sept 9	Hurricane History	Sept 30	Fun in the Sun
Sept 16	Mangrove Madness	Oct 7	Terrific Towels

### HISTORIC TOURS WITH DR. PAUL GEORGE

#### ***Tropical Dreams Gallery Walk with Dr. Paul George***

*Thursday, September 28 6-8 pm FREE*

Explore 10,000 years of South Florida history as you tour our permanent exhibition with Dr. Paul George.



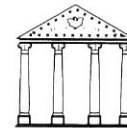
**Collier County Museums, 3301 Tamiami Trail East, Naples—239.774.8476.** Journey back over 10,000 years of Southwest Florida's unique past at our four museum locations. Visit the Collier County Museum at 3301 Tamiami Trail East, Naples, the Naples Depot Museum (opening soon) at 1051 5th Ave South, Downtown Naples, the Museum of the Everglades at 105 West Broadway, Everglades City and the Immokalee Pioneer Museum at Roberts Ranch at 1215 Roberts Ave, Immokalee. Admission is free for all museums, donations appreciated. For information and operating hours, please call: 239.774.8476.



**Boca Raton Historical Society Town Hall, 71 N. Federal Highway, Boca Raton—561.395.6766.** The Boca Raton Historical Society operates a museum and gift shop at the old town hall. Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 10 am–4 pm.



**Clewiston Museum, 112 South Comercio Street, Clewiston—863.983.2870.** The Clewiston Museum, founded in 1984, is a growing museum, collecting and displaying items, large and small, important and trivial, which reflect the past of Clewiston and its surrounding area. The Clewiston Museum is open 1–5 pm Tuesday through Saturday, with seasonal adjustments. No admission fee is charged; however, donations are encouraged.



**The Historical Society of Palm Beach County, 139 North County Road, Suite 25, Palm Beach—561.832.4164.** A nonprofit membership organization devoted to collecting and preserving archives and artifacts pertaining to the history of Palm Beach County and Florida. Make local history a part of your life and join as a member to help support this effort. You will enjoy lectures and special events, discounts on historical books and research fees. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 9 am–5 pm. Research hours are by appointment Tuesday through Thursday from 10 am–3 pm.

*The above institutions subscribe to South Florida History as a benefit for their members.*

## Yesterday's Visions for Sale at the Historical Museum

A treasure trove of revealing, dramatic and scenic photographs of South Florida's past are available to adorn the walls of your home or place of business.

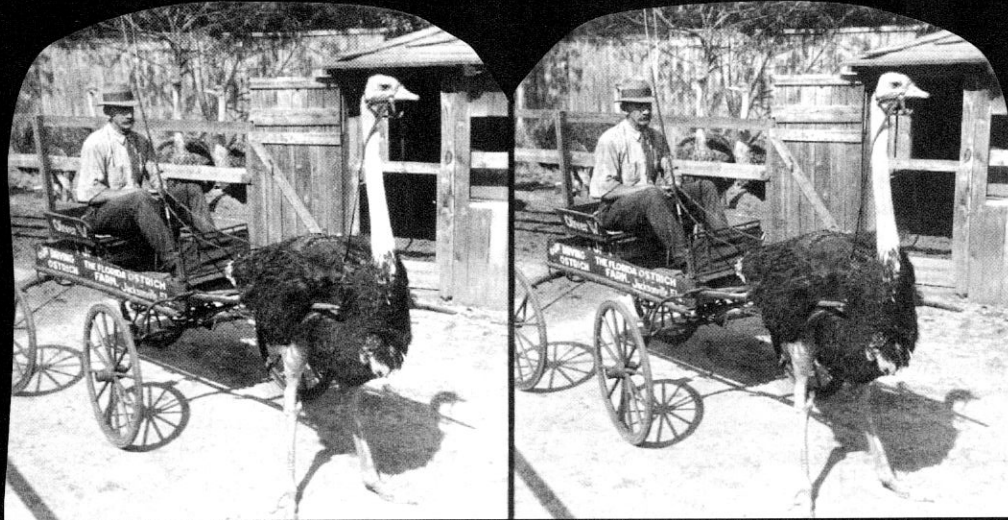
With more than one million photographs and postcards, there's something for everyone.

Call 305.375.1492, or stop by the Historical Museum's Research Center for further details.



Historical Museum of Southern Florida

*Stereoviews  
of Florida and the Caribbean*



*On display June 23  
through September 10, 2006*

The Famous "Oliver W." Driving Ostrich—Jacksonville, Florida. ca. 1905. Courtesy Bill Moll Collection.

## *Florida & the Caribbean in Stereo*

*by Karyn Anderson*

The late 19th and early 20th centuries, sometimes referred to as the Gilded Age, can appear at first glance to be an era of refinement and prim restraint. Once one digs a bit deeper, however, the tumultuous changes taking place in American society come into focus. Industrialization ushered in a new era of greater abundance and urban migration, which introduced a new lifestyle for many, irrevocably altering American society. The expansion of the railway and increasing use of the steamboat led to greater mobility throughout the world

for those who could afford to travel. Middle-class Americans, starting to benefit from paid vacations offered by employers, were now also traveling for pleasure, a privilege once limited to the very wealthy. More importantly, the concept of leisure, once viewed as detrimental, was beginning to be seen as constructive, even necessary, in an increasingly fast-paced society. Accompanying all of these changes was the introduction of the stereoview, a popular form of photography and an important component of the visual culture of this period.



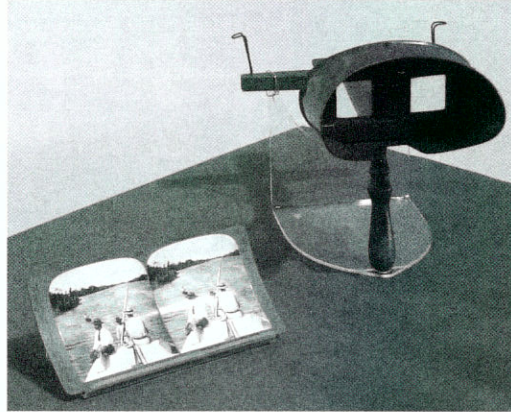
Developing alongside standard photography, stereophotography mimics human binocular vision by capturing two views of a subject with lenses a small distance apart, then placing the two nearly identical images side by side on a card. When viewed through a stereoscope, the two images appear to merge into a single three-dimensional picture, giving the viewer the illusion of being transported into the scene depicted. First developed by Sir Charles Wheatstone in England in the 1830s, the stereoscope was further refined for popular use by an American, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., when he created a hand-held version of the viewer in 1859. The production of stereoviews for consumer use began as early as the 1850s in the United States and increased rapidly following the Civil War.

As more Americans became interested in travel and the world around them, purchasing and viewing pictures from faraway places became a widespread hobby and entertaining pastime. During this era, technological developments were facilitating the mass production and distribution of consumer goods, and advertising began enticing Americans to purchase new types of consumer goods, especially for leisurely activities. Stereoviews became an affordable and appealing product for many Americans.

Tapping into the growing popularity of stereoviews as home-based entertainment, companies such as Keystone View Co. and Underwood & Underwood began mass production of stereoviews, also known as stereo cards, stereographs and stereograms. These companies, among others, sent stereophotographers throughout the world to capture new and interesting views and dispatched legions of door-to-door salesmen to American homes to offer families the chance to purchase the latest series. Stereoscopes and stereoviews were also available through the rapidly growing use of mail-order catalogues.

*Stereoviews of Florida and the Caribbean*, an exhibition on display at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida through September 10, explores the phenomenon of stereophotography during its golden age and provides visitors the opportunity to see over 100 examples of stereoviews depicting life in our

region. This exhibition was developed in collaboration with the National Stereoscopic Association, whose 2006 Annual Convention took place in Miami July 11–17. The exhibition showcases stereoviews from the private collections of NSA members Bill Moll, Douglas Hendricksen and Russell Norton alongside treasures from the Historical Museum’s collection.



Stereoview—Great Panama Canal, near Colón, Panama. Courtesy Bill Moll Collection. Stereoscope, ca. 1900. HMSE



“Enjoying life in wheel chairs amid tropical scenes, Palm Beach, Florida.” HMSE

In organizing this exhibition, we sought to present the most common types of stereoviews produced during the height of the medium's popularity, the 1880s through the 1910s. In this way, visitors will be able to see how average Americans (and Europeans) learned about Florida and the Caribbean basin, its environment, its economy and its cultures. The most common views focus on the tropical environment and its unique plant life, agricultural products, rural vistas and urban centers, as well as the customs of Floridians and the diverse populations of the Caribbean. Responding to the demand for images appropriate for genteel home entertainment, stereoviews primarily celebrated the picturesque, offering viewers tranquil and charming scenes of daily life.

In addition to the images found on the front of stereoviews, many manufacturers included extensive texts on the back to further explain the subjects depicted, such as the cultivation of sugar and bananas or the architectural style and use of buildings. This educational component encouraged the collection of

stereoviews on the part of schools and libraries, as well as their use in private homes.

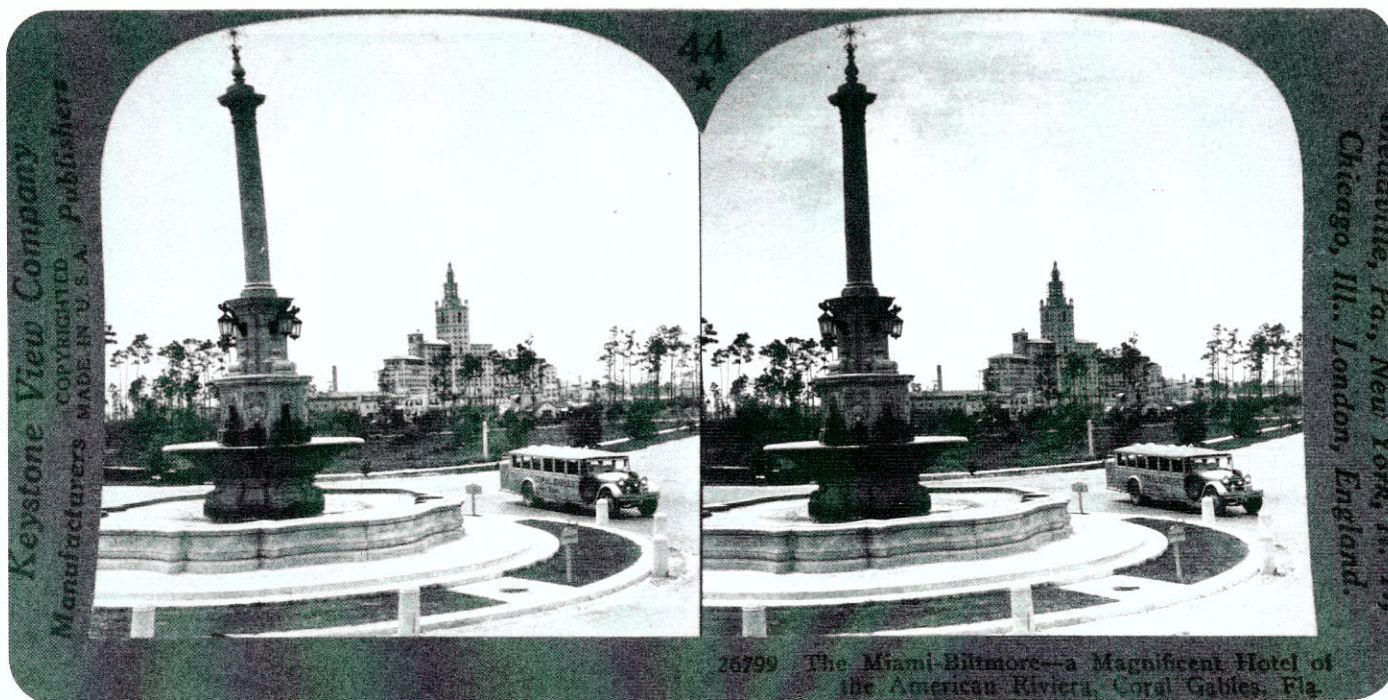
Alongside views produced to enlighten and educate viewers on daily life around the world, stereoviews also served a photojournalistic role, documenting the important stories of the day. To demonstrate this aspect, the Historical Museum's exhibition features stereoviews that capture images of the Spanish-American war, chronicle the horrific damage caused by earthquakes and volcanoes throughout the Caribbean and celebrate new feats of technology, such as the construction of the Panama Canal.

In addition to stereoviews, several stereoscopes of the period from the museum's collection are on display. These wooden and/or metal

devices enabled viewers to appreciate the images in three dimensions. The stereoscope, frequently misnamed the stereopticon, was specifically designed to hinder peripheral vision so that the viewer could fully engage with the image, thus enhancing the sensation of being part of a faraway scene. Visitors to the



A museum visitor uses a 3D viewer to see stereoviews in the exhibition, dating back to the late 1800s.



"The Miami Biltmore—a magnificent hotel of the American Riviera, Coral Gables, Fla" with the De Soto Fountain in the foreground. Courtesy of Douglas Hendricksen Collection.



Stereoviews of Florida & the Caribbean 7/13/2006

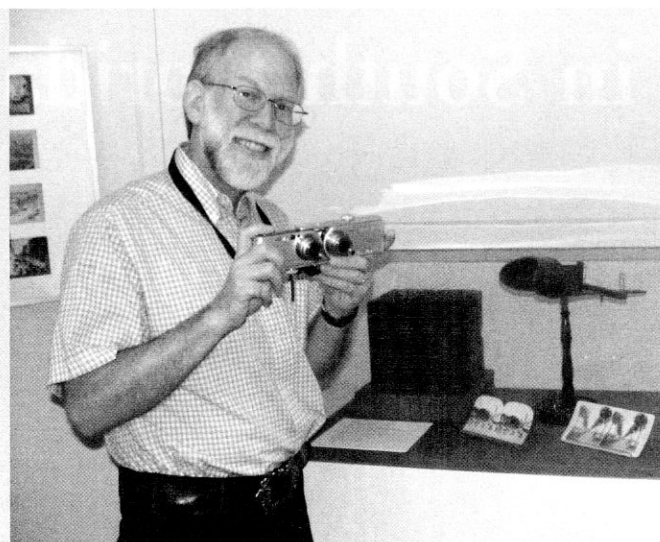
Above—NSA Convention attendees explore the *Stereoviews* exhibition while at the museum for a private reception. Courtesy of David Starkman.  
Below, right—Visitors to the museum's *Stereoviews* exhibition see history in 3D. Below, left—Convention goer, David Starkman, shows off the latest in digital 3D/stereo cameras.

exhibition will be provided with disposable plastic stereoscopes in order to fully appreciate the three-dimensional effect of stereoviews.

With the advent of new types of entertainment, such as the phonograph, radio, movies and, eventually, television, stereoviews became less popular as a form of home entertainment, and production of stereoscopes and stereoviews fell into decline. Subsequent developments in three-dimensional visual forms, such as View-Master and 3D films, however, remain popular today.

Visitors to *Stereoviews of Florida and the Caribbean* will have

the opportunity not only to see these regions as they were depicted during this period of great social and technological change, but to discover how earlier generations learned about Florida, the Caribbean and their peoples.—*SFH*



For more information about the  
**National Stereoscopic Association,**  
visit [www.stereoview.org](http://www.stereoview.org) or  
e-mail Bill Moll at [whmoll@aol.com](mailto:whmoll@aol.com).

**The Koreshan  
Communitarian  
Experiment  
in South Florida**

1894-1961

by Dr. Irvin D.S. Winsboro



Koreshan members at Crescent Beach, Fort Myers, Fla., early 1900s. Photo courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

For historians and history buffs alike, seldom do the words utopian community and South Florida history come together. Yet one of the major American utopian communities of the late 19th and early 20th century, the Koreshan Unity, appeared in the improbable environs of southwest Florida. That communitarian experiment, which experienced its “Golden Years” from 1900–1908 but lasted in diminished form until 1961, is perhaps one of the least-known but most interesting aspects of the rich history of the southern region of the peninsula.

In the post–Civil War era, the Koreshan Unity represented a number of utopian societies that implemented their brand of communitarianism through the creation of remote settlements. Historians recognize the Shakers, the Harmonists, the Perfectionists, the Zoarites and the Koreshans as characteristic of such utopian endeavors. Just as such groups as the Shakers owed their origin and existence to Mother Ann Lee, the Harmonists to George Rapp, the Perfectionists to John Humphrey Noyes and the Zoarites to Joseph Baumeler, so the Koreshans owed their founding and development to the charismatic leadership of physician Cyrus R. Teed. By the mid-1880s, Dr. Teed, known to his followers by the biblical name of Koresh, claimed to be the prophet Cyrus. Teed’s new religion, Koreshanity, included a

number of novel beliefs, notably that God is male and female, human beings lived on the inner surface of a concave Earth (the “hollow Earth” theory), that obedience to these principles would result in immortality and that the eternal law of God demands celibacy and communal living arrangements. He eventually organized his dozens of disciples into the Koreshan Unity, which he described as a “post-Christian community of religious communism.”

Teed gained notoriety for his unusual charisma and claims to being the “new Messiah” in the New York City area prior to moving in 1886 to Chicago, where he created a cooperative home for his 123 followers. Teed organized the first Koreshan celibate and communal facility to be a “separatist” community that practiced a cooperative lifestyle. Short-lived Koreshan “study groups” and business cooperatives appeared thereafter as far away as San Francisco. Shortly after relocating to Chicago, Teed claimed to have some 500 communal members and another 10,000 persons interested in his utopian teachings.

In the bustling city of Chicago, however, Teed’s followers drew scorn from the media because of the group’s secretive communal lifestyle. In the midst of this controversy, Teed claimed to have experienced a supernatural “revelation” directing him to create a new utopia in a remote and isolated location. According to Teed,

"The city which Cyrus is to build is the New Jerusalem, the resurrected truth." It would be started in a remote region where prying eyes could not penetrate its workings, and it would eventually number 6 million devout practitioners of Koreshanity.

By late 1893, Teed had decided through "divine computation" on the gulf coast of southern Florida as the planned "vitellus" (life center) for the new utopian society. Teed thereafter visited Lee County, Fla., following his correspondence with a local real estate broker. After initial communications, the agent convinced Teed in 1894 that the area along the gulf, known as Estero, in south Lee County would make an ideal location for the prophet's new society.

Teed's uncritical acceptance of the real estate broker's claims minimizing the need for extensive dredging to render the tide-water creek of Estero and its estuary into the gulf, a sustainable port, is a mystery. Whether Teed blindly ignored the daunting elements in Estero or simply defaulted to the brashness of his Messiah complex is another matter of historical debate. In any event, the Koreshan leader told his followers that frontier South Florida, improbable as it may seem today, would be the vitellus of his new religious-commercial metropolis.

Cyrus Teed and a small inner group of followers visited the Estero Bay region on the sloop *Ada* in early 1894. They spent their first night on the ancient Calusa Indian stronghold of Mound Key in Estero Bay. The next morning they sailed to the mouth of the Estero River, wending their way by skiffs up the mangrove-choked stream to the higher saw-palmetto hammocks where they encountered the cabin of widower Gustave Damkohler, the locale's only homesteader. Damkohler quickly succumbed to Teed's vision and offered him 300 acres of his 320-acre homestead bordering on the Estero River. Damkohler's son, Elwin, later recalled that Teed "had a big, beautiful map showing the streets of his dream place. Father's place was to be the center with streets running in all directions about like the streets from the Capitol in Washington, D.C."

Damkohler's gift to the Koreshans proved to be a shrewd business deal for Cyrus Teed. Within short order, the Koreshan leader and his council had also purchased nearby land claims and a sizable number of beachfront acres on Estero Island (Fort Myers Beach), Big Hickory and Little Hickory Islands and Mound Key, the archaeologically-rich Calusa Indian stronghold. Although Teed might have convinced his followers that he would convert the shallow, largely unnavigable Estero River area into a worldwide utopian and commercial empire by "spiritual guidance," the rugged environment of southwest Florida promised little success for the Koreshans. Certainly, Teed recognized the advantages of the remote location, especially regarding the "isolation" factor that would keep away detractors, but just as certainly his common sense must have dictated that remote Estero, Fla., would never yield his ambitious new world. The location, navigation problems and burden of the frontier simply would overcome all his grandiose plans. Even so, Teed continued to sell the dream to his followers, who loyally obeyed their prophet.

Indeed, South Florida seemed a most implausible site for Teed's dream. Estero was little more than a rugged backwater

when the Koreshans arrived in 1894. The federal and state governments classified the area as one of unlikely human settlement because of its extensive swamp lands. Fort Myers, the county seat, existed some 16 tortuous land miles or a full day's water voyage north of Estero on the Caloosahatchee River. Moreover, Fort Myers lacked a rail connection and contained but 750 residents, most of whom worked as cattlemen rounding up and selling unattended "scrub" cattle left over from the Spanish era. A child of an original Koreshan settler wrote in a letter back to Chicago, "About the only signs that civilization had ever touched this place was [sic] the two ruts in the...sand."



Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, founder of the Koreshan Unity, poses with a tarpon. Photo courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

But the Koreshans pushed on in their attempt to establish utopia in South Florida. In the late 1890s, an advance labor force of 44 persons arrived from Chicago and established a small, commercial plant nursery, machine shop, boat ramp and commercial saw mill that enabled this party to sell services and lumber to local residents. Thereafter, the Koreshans ended activities in Chicago



A Koreshan house, Estero Island (Fort Myers Beach), 1908. Photo courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

and began a mass exodus to Teed's "New Jerusalem" in remote and rugged southwest Florida.

At the dawn of the new century, some 200 Koreshan pioneers lived in Estero. The prophet's utopia was located on 7,500 acres of isolated land in south Lee and neighboring Monroe Counties (now Collier County). Within a few years, the hardy Koreshan settlers had carved a lively community out of the piney woods and palmetto hammocks of isolated southwest Florida.

In an attempt to control the governance and taxes of that section of Lee County, Teed incorporated the 110-square-mile area surrounding the Koreshans' own 10-square mile enclave into the town of Estero. The new municipality then established a post office and Teed consolidated its general store, bakery, dairy, commercial laundry, machine shop, tin shop, concrete shop, woodworking and pattern shop, power plant, windmill and bank into commercial sectors. He also supervised construction of a planetary court building for him and his "inner council" and the advanced Art Hall in which the Koreshans and guests engaged in a wide array of cultural and educational activities, including classical and Koreshan-produced plays and popular and Koreshan-composed orchestra and marching music.

The Koreshans then began to produce and service items that both sustained and enhanced the growing community. Representative of these were the various shops, lathes, power saws, grinding and polishing machines and extensive complement of work tools. By 1904, the Estero utopian inhabitants had

constructed some 35 structures worth \$250,000. They also had created a riverine commerce of approximately 1,000 tons annually.

By 1905, the Koreshans—now with a population as high as 300—spent thousands of dollars attempting to expand the trade inland by dredging the Estero River, but they achieved little success. In these attempts, Teed and the Koreshan faithful inevitably compromised their ambitions in the face of reality. As noted, South Florida simply did not provide the hospitable environment that Teed so needed to breathe life into his vision for a great utopian-commercial metropolis. In the end, the reality of wilderness and isolation, coupled with Teed's lack of foresight, doomed the colony to future discord. Even so, the Koreshans' businesses and drive moved them briefly to the center of southwest Florida's economic life, if not to the center of worldwide commerce per Teed's plans for his New Jerusalem.

As a matter of practicality, the Koreshans soon began to concentrate on their local commerce. They added an apiary, restaurant, greenhouse, decorative sculpture works and a large "rustic tea garden," composed of three Seminole-style chickee huts from which clerks sold or bartered homemade woolen items, fresh produce and paintings. In the same period, the major Koreshan occupations were not that of world traders but rather they were those of more provincially-oriented mechanic, engraver and business agent. All of these efforts resulted in a commerce that peaked between 1906 and 1908. An Army Corp of Engineers study of southwest Florida in 1906 placed Estero's

commercial contribution to the county at a value of \$80,700, and another Corp study in 1907 set the commercial value at \$189,614.75.

By the time of Teed's death in 1908, this commerce was in decline. In an effort to rectify their slumping commercial sector, Teed's followers continued to develop locally-oriented business rather than widespread agricultural endeavors so characteristic of utopian ventures, but their efforts met little success. The limited agrarian experiences of many Koreshan members and the loose, sandy topsoil and other harsh environmental factors of South Florida all contributed to agricultural failures, other than the community's productive fruit and vegetable gardens. The few Koreshan agricultural endeavors that succeeded simply complemented their other business enterprises.

Thus, the self-described "golden years" of the Koreshans proved short-lived. Signs of decline could be seen by the end of 1908. At the end of that year, the 69-year-old Teed, who had dominated the direction of life in his New Jerusalem, succumbed to a chronic nervous disorder. The Koreshan faithful watched for Teed's resurrection, but after a few days, they accepted his mortality, placed his now decomposing body in a bathtub and entombed it on Koreshan property at Estero Island (Fort Myers Beach). Teed's corpse lay in its concrete shrine until the destructive hurricane of 1921 passed over Estero Island and destroyed his resting place, sweeping the body out into the Gulf never to be seen again. Thus, even in death Koresh added one last irony to the memory of himself as a self-described prophet who would be immortal.

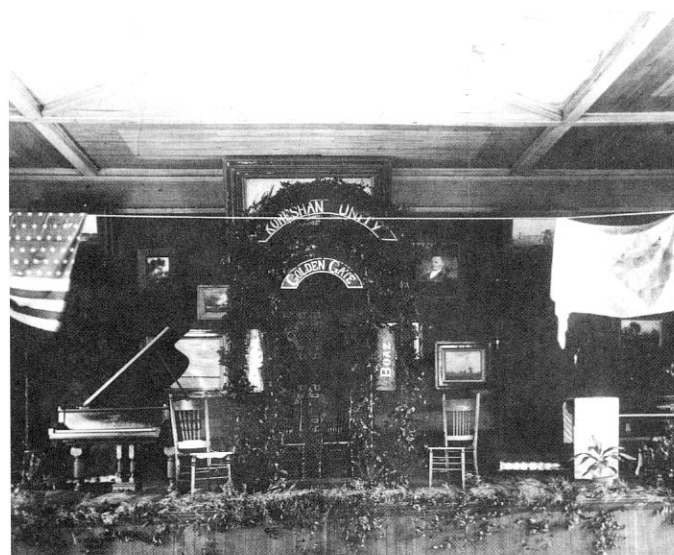
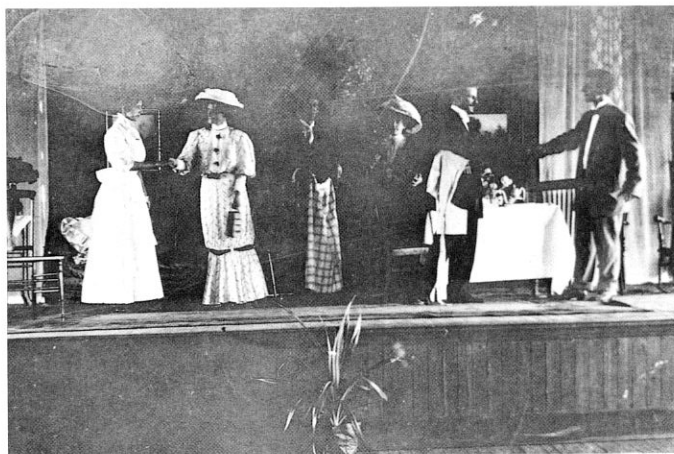
Without their leader's system of "Imperio-Republic-Regal" rule, the Estero community's religious fervor and economic activities declined notably as the Koreshans bickered among themselves over issues of leadership and focus. Another setback occurred in that era when the Army Corps of Engineers recommended against dredging and improving the Estero River and Estero Bay because local commerce did not justify the expenses. The Koreshans' once boisterous plans for worldwide maritime commerce now languished. The internecine squabbling, departing membership, Corps of Engineers setback and the surrounding population's animosity inevitably crippled the settlement.

The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad's venture into Fort Myers in the early 20th century also drastically altered the economic life of the region, which turned from water transportation to rail. The forces of modernization the railroad represented doomed Estero to a declining regional role. Hereafter, the growing town of Fort Myers, through its railroad and complementary deep-water river port, attracted almost all of the region's freight, maritime business and new settlers. The death of Teed, steady commercial setbacks and dwindling membership launched a long and steady phase of Koreshan decline. While the permutations of modernization engulfed nearby Fort Myers, Teed's utopian endeavor in South Florida faded.

A meager flat-boat commerce continued on the tiny Estero River, but an Army Corps of Engineers study of the region reported that the river commerce now fell under the sway of

local, non-Koreshan citrus and vegetable farmers. United States Census records for 1910 identified the remaining Koreshan commercial workers as "laborer, business agent, mechanic, drum maker, and printer." The total Census enumeration in the Estero compound demonstrated a sharp decline from just a few years prior.

By the time of the Census of 1920, Estero's population had again dropped sharply and its workforce had become even less specialized. Most workers now fell under the Census classification of general laborers, although some Koreshans, those in the printing house, for example, pursued higher forms of specialized



Top—A Koreshan-produced play in progress in the Art Hall Theater, early 1900s. Above—Art Hall Theater. To the right of the stage hangs the Koreshan flag. Photos courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

labor. Lee County court records for this period suggest that the Koreshans sustained themselves by selling parcels of their lands and mortgaging real estate and other tangible assets. Still, the Koreshans could not manage to avoid mounting debts, most notably in the form of delinquent taxes.

The completion of the "Tamiami Trail" (U.S. 41) from Tampa to Miami in 1928 dealt yet another serious blow to the declining





Koreshan members standing at Dr. Teeds tomb, where his corpse lay until the destructive hurricane of 1921 passed over Estero Island and destroyed his resting place. Photos courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

community. The highway passed through Fort Myers and proved a boon to that town's commerce, while further punctuating the economic isolation and moribund character of Teed's once-ambitious experiment. As the Koreshans' children steadily departed, the land and buildings fell into deeper disuse and disrepair. By the Great Depression of the 1930s, Koreshan Unity membership had plummeted to a handful of aging and financially struggling members.

The character of the once-vibrant settlement remained essentially in this state until German war refugee Hedwig Michel joined the commune in 1941. As a new, youthful force, Michel set about to resurrect the Koreshans' business enterprises and spirit. She ordered electric wiring for the general store and contracted with Standard Oil to establish a Koreshan-run filling station on Tamiami Trail. Even though Michel tried valiantly to revitalize the community, her efforts fell short. The general store and the filling station lasted but a few years. Not only were the forces of modernization sweeping past the Koreshans, but the aged and dying membership placed unrealistic demands on the community's limited finances and on Michel's resourcefulness.

As the realization of her losing battle to resurrect the Koreshan Unity settled in, Michel sought to convince the state of Florida

that the once-prosperous utopian community and its remaining land and buildings should become a public memorial site rather than a possible tax burden. Michel succeeded in 1961, when Florida Governor Farris Bryant signed a bill funding a 272-acre Koreshan state historical site. The resulting Koreshan State Park opened in 1967, and in 1976 it joined the National Register of Historic Places. Today, over 50,000 curious visitors annually tour the renamed Koreshan State Historic Site in southwest Florida and its refurbished New Jerusalem buildings, which stand as silent testimony to the Koreshans' utopian experiment. Although Michel herself had failed to revitalize the dying community, by the time of her death as "the last Koreshan" in 1982, she had managed to institutionalize the historically significant compound and a number of original Koreshan structures, notably the planetary court and Art Hall, as a lasting site of South Florida's and America's communal heritage.—*SFH*

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# The DesRochers Family

Pioneer Miamians who left  
their mark on the Magic City

by Dr. Arthur Chapman



The name “DesRochers” means in French “People of the Rock.” The forebears of an early Miami family by that name hailed from an area south of Paris. By playing a fascinating, even influential, role in the developing story of Miami, the DesRochers represent still another of those magical elements of Miami, the Magic City.

Henry DesRochers purchased a large orange grove in Melrose, Fla., near Gainesville, in 1893, with plans to work there for the rest of his life. But, like so many other pioneers, the freezes of 1894 and 1895 left him in financial ruin, so he turned to his former trade of carpentry, leaving his family in Melrose and traveling to Jacksonville. There he obtained a temporary job before finding one of Henry Flagler’s job announcements seeking construction workers for his Royal Palm Hotel in Miami. Upon being hired, Henry arrived in Miami in April 1896 and was assigned to work on the wooden trim and decorations of the hotel. His wife, Katherine Bender, and their six children (Calvin, Estelle, Arthur, Raymond, Ralph and Leonore) joined him on July 6, 1896.

The rest of the DesRochers family came to Miami on one of Flagler’s first trains, arriving at the original depot near Biscayne and Sixth Street. There Henry DesRochers met them in a buckboard taking them to their temporary home, a small cottage rented from the Peters family located at today’s Northeast Second Avenue and 75th Street in what became known as Miami’s Little River neighborhood.

After settling in, the DesRochers went to work on some important business. They proceeded to have an additional five children (Hazel, Oscar, Pearl, Una and Ora), helped a son (Arthur) start an important company that exists today and motivated two of their 11 children, Leonore McLean and Una Webb, to become active in an important pioneer organization, the Miami Pioneers Club.

Through hard work, Henry fared well and was able to purchase 20 acres of land at today’s Northwest Second Avenue and 75th Street (where St. Mary’s Cathedral stands today). There he built their new home, a split-level structure owing to the slope of the

Above—Henry DesRochers arrived in Miami in 1896, where he worked as a carpenter on the Royal Palm hotel until its completion. Courtesy of Thelma Peters Collection. Right—Katherine Bender, Henry’s wife, and children arrived in Miami a couple of months later. Courtesy of Thelma Peters Collection.

ground with the dining room in the basement. So unusual and distinctive was their new home that in the June 11, 1897, edition of *The Metropolis*, in the "Lemon City News" section, there appeared a note on the "new DesRochers home overlooking the prairie west of town." In typical pioneer style, while the family planted and developed a large garden and raised a variety of small animals, Henry worked on the Royal Palm Hotel. The DesRochers family was mentioned again in *The Metropolis* on November 18, 1898, with the journal noting that they had planted three and a half acres of tomatoes, eggplant and peppers.

Following completion of work on the Royal Palm Hotel, Henry became an independent contractor and remained busy since his skills were in high demand. To supplement his income, Henry also operated a "gasoline and oil wagon," making home deliveries. This was another important contribution to the community for almost everyone used oil (kerosene) for light, cooking and other functions.

Henry enjoyed the weekends for he would frequently go to the 61st Street Seaport in Lemon City and obtain his favorite dish, king fish (about 15 cents a pound then). Every other day, Katherine baked 13 loaves of bread along with sweet rolls and coffee cakes that she would sell. As a result, the DesRochers family prospered and soon became one of the first families to move from an open well to a water pump. The children of this family were educated, as were so many others, in a one room schoolhouse known as Lemon City Elementary, located just east of the railroad at Northeast 60th Street. There the children received their education from the first teacher, Miss Adaline Merritt. She was well known and highly regarded by her students as she was not only an outstanding educator but rode a beautiful white horse to school each day.

The long walk to school was not easy as the prairie between their home and the school was frequently underwater. Even after Northeast Second Avenue was corduroyed, the ditch alongside the road was filled with clear, sparkling water providing a place for a quick cooling dip. A member of the DesRochers family was enrolled in school every year from 1896 until 1970 in Lemon City!

As a public building, the schoolhouse provided for a number of other important functions. It doubled as the home of the First Baptist Church, which at a later date became the Lemon City Baptist Church. There a daughter, Estelle, married Frank Zumwalt, which represented the first marriage in the church. It was Frank and his sister Lily who were the first dressed in white and baptized in the beautiful waters of Biscayne Bay. As expansion became necessary, Henry and Mr. W. W. Kellam built a new home for the church at Northeast 59th Street and Northeast Second Avenue. The Methodists also conducted services at the school until moving to Northwest Second Avenue and 65th Street. Since the Methodist service was in the afternoon and the Baptist was in the evening, many chose to attend both services, as religion filled an important socialization need.

The fledgling community also had a post office and a library located at the home of a Mrs. Keyes who lived near the Bay. Those first post office boxes were ever so important to everyone, and the DesRochers family was proud to own Post Office Box Number One.

Always civic minded, Henry helped to raise money and construct a proper library on Northeast 61st Street next to the railroad tracks. People would come from as far away as Hallandale and Goulds to meet there and socialize at dances, fish fries and political meetings. This building was lost to us a number of years ago, taking a multitude of memories with it.

The DesRochers family continued to work hard for their future security and advancement, founding the DesRochers General Store and Bicycle Shop on the east side of Northwest Second Avenue and 62nd Street (Pocomoonshine Road). Operated by Henry's wife and children, it quickly became another meeting place as it was the only store between Little River and Miami.

At a much later date, Henry spent much of his time assisting in the construction of the Miami Pioneers' Club House located on the east bank of the Miami River between Northwest Second and Third Streets. The Pioneers remained there until the 1990s, holding regular public meetings and numerous social functions, including an annual special program around the time of the city's



birthday in July honoring the pioneer family members who helped make this the "Magic City." Henry was not finished, however, for upon retirement he worked at handicrafts, creating several beautiful violins that quickly became the "talk of the town."

Of all of the gifts of Henry and Katherine, perhaps the greatest was their children. Estelle studied nursing with Dr. John DuPuis and helped to deliver a future senator and governor, Bob Graham, and Leonore became known as the oldest living pioneer, passing in 1993 in her late nineties. Son Arthur worked for a number of years at the Miami Yacht Club and Machine Works mastering the marine trade. Later, with a partner, he operated a marine shop on the river and also engaged in boat towing and dredging. They supplied much of the sand used for construction work in the Miami area as well as for the Overseas Railroad. Additionally, they imported large boulders from North Carolina to build jetties in both channels and lighthouses. These durable boulders are still in place at the Government Cut.

Later, George A. Freas and Arthur founded a larger machine shop just south of downtown Miami. There George worked as a secretary-treasurer and Arthur was the manager-machinist (later known as Dawson's Marine).

But Arthur DesRochers had a more important role to play and a greater claim to fame. About 1920, the firm merged (with Alfred F. Warriner) and became the Warriner-DesRochers Machine Shop located on the Miami River just west of Southeast First Avenue where the south shore bulges north ("Cook's Dock"). This was one of the largest machine shops on the river, serving the community for well over a half-century. Then, in March 1926, during Prohibition, the Coast Guard captured a lovely sailing vessel, *The Rum-Runner*. In so doing they seized 1,800 cases of illegal liquor and 600 cases of alcohol. Arthur ultimately purchased the ship and kept it at his docks, as his interest in maritime matters soared.

History had more in store for Arthur DesRochers and his sand dredges. Little did Miami know just how important it was that this family chose to come here and create the DesRochers Dredging Company that operated till near century's end in the Allapattah neighborhood. For during the 1920s, Miami experienced the "Boom," a fantastic period of real estate speculation and construction projects that lured large numbers of people to

South Florida. During the Boom, construction materials were in such demand that the Florida East Coast Railway was overwhelmed with shipping orders, forcing it to declare a freight embargo in August 1925. Consequently, additional ships began bringing materials into this red-hot real estate market through the Port of Miami. With shipping volume reaching record levels, the port found itself, by the beginning of 1926, unable to

handle all of the ships waiting to unload their cargo. Consequently, many material-laden vessels waited offshore for the time when they could bring their cargo to the port. One such vessel was the *Prins Valdemar*, a steel hulled 240-foot Danish trading ship. While waiting offshore, it ran aground on January 10, 1926, in Government Cut and capsized, effectively blocking the ship channel for more than 40 days. Disaster resulted since the lone entrance to the port was now totally blocked to any vessel of size. Miami shuddered as construction ground to a halt.

Numerous ideas were proposed to remedy the problem, but it was left to Arthur DesRochers, who employed his sand dredges to cut a temporary channel around the stricken ship. Then, when time permitted, Arthur and his men righted the *Prins Valdemar* and grounded the now infamous vessel at Northeast Fifth Street and Biscayne Boulevard where she stayed for many years, serving a

wide variety of purposes, not the least of which was to serve as a downtown landmark.

This brief summary of the lives of several members of Miami's DesRochers family casts a light on what makes Miami, the Magic City, the unique place it is.—SFH

This article is dedicated to the memory of Leonore DesRochers McLean, who was living in Miami before it was a city and was a prominent member of the Miami Pioneers Club for many years.



Above—Miss Adaline Frances Merritt, the first teacher at Lemon City Elementary, taught the DesRochers children. Photo from Douthitt, Ola. C. *Footprints on the Sands of Time*, Miami, n. p., 1942. HMSF 76-18-1. Right—Leonore McLean, the DesRochers second daughter, became active in the Miami Pioneers Club, an important pioneer organization. Courtesy of Thelma Peters Collection.

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*Arthur Chapman, a native Miamian and past president of Miami Pioneers, teaches history in suburban Atlanta.*



Miami &  
the



# *Prins Valdemar*

by Alice L. Luckhardt

In the shipbuilding port of Elsinore in Denmark, a fine four-masted square-rigged barkentine sailing ship was constructed in 1892. This steel hulled vessel made from wood and English iron was 241 feet in length with a beam of 38 feet. It was named for their Danish Prince George Valdemar and was used as a training ship for the Danish navy. At the beginning of the 20th century, it served as a Danish merchant ship carrying cargo to various ports of call. From then on, it found itself involved in a series of amazing incidents.

While in the Gulf of Mexico during the Mexican Revolution of 1911, it was seized by the government of that embattled nation purportedly for gun running. A couple of years later, the *Prins Valdemar* was sold by the Mexican government to an American merchant, George W. McNear, a major grain exporter from California. He used it to haul grains and lumber to foreign ports. It was captured by a German warship in 1916, during World War I, and used to carry supplies for Germany. The vessel's swift speed allowed it to outrun the allied blockade. At one point for safety reasons, it sought a neutral port in Copenhagen and remained there for several years.

By the early 1920s the *Prins Valdemar* was located in New York City and then purchased by George W. Reisen, Clifford A. Storm and Capt. Richard J. Walters in 1922. Their goal was to make money with the ship by hauling tropical cargo out of Central and South American countries for sale to locations up and down the eastern coast of the United States. They were successful with their venture, which included the transport of lumber, coconuts and tropical fruits.

While in the Port of Miami in the mid-1920s, the ship's owners saw the need for huge amounts of building supplies because of the extensive land boom underway in the Magic City. George Reisen, who also owned hotels in New York City, came up with the idea of converting the vessel into a "floating hotel, restaurant and nightclub" to serve the Miami area during this growth period. Reisen sought to transform the *Prins Valdemar* into a 100-room hotel and include services such as entertainment and food to attract additional customers to it. The partners agreed on its new direction, but before beginning its transformation, they embarked on one last journey to transport lumber, cement, brick and tile from New York to Miami.

The ship, its crew and a hull filled with building supplies arrived off the coast of Miami at the end of October 1925, and spent the next few weeks unloading materials. Then crews of carpenters began the transformation after the *Prins Valdemar* was moved near Miami's harbor. A grand opening was set for January 28, 1926, with a gala party planned. The restaurant's fine dishes contained the image of the *Prins Valdemar* in full sail and the ship's name was engraved on each piece of flatware. The staterooms were decorated as elegant hotel rooms and a fabulous nightclub while an orchestra was taking shape. Anticipation and excitement filled the air among those who learned of the vessel's conversion.

On January 9, 1925, the vessel ran along the edge of a sandbar as it was being positioned into its new permanent berth. It was resting high up on the bank of the sandbar as darkness overtook the area. The next morning, January 10 at 11:05 a.m., an

extremely high north wind suddenly came up causing the great ship to keel over. First, there was an abrupt dip and then it was on its starboard side in the deep water channel. Water poured into every open area and quickly filled the ship causing the 80 workers and crewmen on board to leap over the railings to safety.

The *Prins Valdemar* now lay on its side partially submerged. A call immediately went out to the nearby Coast Guard station as well to government vessels employed in chasing down rumrunners. They assisted in pulling several of the crew from the waters. Luckily, no lives were lost and very few injuries were suffered. The chief devastation was with the *Prins Valdemar* now stretching

more than 100 feet across the channel and blocking any other sailing ships, vessels or schooners from coming in or going out of Miami's harbor. Only smaller boats could navigate around the ship. With no movement of the large vessels, there was, of course, a halt to the unloading of building supplies and other cargo so necessary for Miami's building boom. All passengers and perishable cargo had to be unloaded onto tenders from ships anchored off the coast.

The following days and weeks were spent trying to find ways to reopen the channel. Attempts were made to cut new, wider and deeper dredges around the fallen vessel but these endeavors proved unsuccessful. By the end of January 1926, there were approximately 50 ships offshore waiting to enter the harbor, and just as many stranded in the facility unable to leave. Other vessels, like the *City of Portland*, a schooner, tried to hoist with cables the *Prins Valdemar*, but were unsuccessful. Several developers, unable to acquire supplies after weeks of waiting, went out of business. In light of the difficulty of acquiring building supplies, many new building plans for the county were abandoned indefinitely.

By February 4, a few smaller vessels were carefully moved around the barkentine after a bypass was dug. In mid-February 1926, the decision was made to cut away the four massive steel and wooden masts of the stricken sailing ship. After that was accomplished, water was pumped out of the ship's interior. Finally, on February 22, the large ship was finally raised and her majestic deck now stood above water. Soon it was towed out of the channel to a secure location along the bayfront at approximately Northeast First Street. Miami's harbor was finally cleared but during that six weeks that vessels were unable to unload their cargoes, the great real estate boom began dissipating. Many now realized the critical necessity of a wider, deeper harbor if Miami was to continue to grow and prosper.

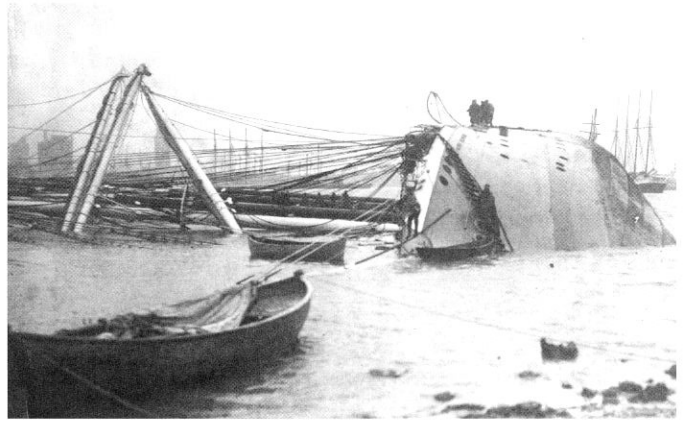
Extensive dredging soon commenced in the harbor, but on September 18, a mighty hurricane struck the Miami area with



Left—The *Prins Valdemar* was once a Danish merchant ship carrying cargo to various ports of call, later becoming the Miami Aquarium, 1940. Above—The ship was purchased in 1922 by Capt. Richard J. Walters (photo 1925), George W. Reisen and Clifford A. Storm. Photos courtesy of the Walters family.







Above—The vessel lay on its side partially submerged after an extremely high north wind suddenly came up causing the great ship to keel over, 1926. HMSF 1962-24-121. Left—*Prins Valdemar* turned over in the Miami Channel. HMSF, BC x-265-1.

winds in excess of 130 miles per hour. In the aftermath of the storm, many buildings in downtown Miami and elsewhere suffered great damage. While many vessels also suffered damage, the *Prins Valdemar* emerged unscathed.

For the remainder of 1926 and 1927, Miami rebuilt. Among the many persons who lost their homes was Capt. Richard Walters, the skipper of the *Prins Valdemar*. At the same time, many Miamians began viewing the *Prins Valdemar* as a dilapidated hulk, an eyesore to the community. In February 1928, Captain Walters and the ship's other owners proposed converting the ship's hull into a tourist attraction. Seeing the success of other aquariums across the county, they envisioned an aquarium within the ship comprised of tanks of varying sizes holding a vast array of fish, mammals and other marine life from the Caribbean and South America. With the city's blessings, Captain Walters oversaw the movement of the vessel to the north end of the city yacht basin between Northeast Fifth and Sixth Streets near Biscayne Boulevard. The city of Miami even loaned the new aquarium tanks and equipment it had secured from the closed Miami Beach Aquarium in 1925. The city agreed to lease dockage space for the next few years to help the new attraction get started. It cost about \$10,000 to outfit and convert the ship into an aquarium. The grand opening of the Miami Aquarium, as it was known, was held May 1, 1928; it was an instant success. The public could view up close alligators, tropical fish, sharks, turtles, piranhas, octopuses and iguanas. Admission was 50 cents per person, and even during the economically grim times of the 1930s the public enjoyed this premier showplace.

After a few years, Captain Walters designed and built a permanent bulkhead around the hull to make it a landlocked attraction. He added different shows for the public's entertainment. One of the most popular attractions was the manatees, swimming in their tanks, so the public could observe them up close.

Captain Walters experienced difficulties with the city of Miami over the issue of the Miami Aquarium in the early 1940s. The city declared that the ship *cum* aquarium was no longer under the



purview of the city's Port Authority, so it could not continue to lease dock space. Instead, the city viewed the Aquarium as a building and wanted it placed under the regulation of the City Parks Department. In spite of the fact that Walters had built up the land that the vessel sat on, this property was now owned by the city of Miami and so rent would be required. With the United States at war from 1941 to 1945, tourism dropped off significantly, and revenues declined for the Miami Aquarium, which now found it difficult to pay the new annual rent of \$600.

Even with these hardships the Aquarium experienced, now and then, a spasm of joy. One joyous occasion came on July 21, 1948, when "Lady," one of its manatees, gave birth to the first manatee born in captivity. The newborn was named "Baby Snoots" or "Little Snoots." It quickly became the star attraction. Only nine months later, however, the city of Miami refused to renew the rental lease for the land the Aquarium was situated on, so it meant either moving the ship and its contents or forfeiting everything to the city. To move this huge vessel was too expensive, so Captain Walters decided to surrender his *Prins Valdemar* to the city of Miami.

Over the next few months, Captain Walters found new homes with other aquariums across the nation for his vast assortment of aquatic life. In order to provide a safe home for "Little Snoots," the South Florida Museum in Bradenton, Fla., agreed to build a permanent home for the baby manatee. The same manatee, now known as "Snooty," is still alive and greeting the public at the Museum in Bradenton; in July 2005, he celebrated his 57th birthday.

Even with the transport of thousands of species from the Miami Aquarium to other facilities by February 1950, there were still 2,500 remaining, which were then safely released into Biscayne Bay. After 22 years on Miami's bayfront, the Miami Aquarium, one of those historical elements of the city that provided with it a certain distinctiveness, had passed into oblivion.

Now under the ownership of the city of Miami and freed of its previous function, the *Prins Valdemar* was converted to a civic

center for community dances and club meetings. The vessel also received a new \$30,000 facelift. Just two years later, however, the aging barkentine was declared structurally unsound, with its plumbing and electrical fixtures unsafe for public use. On June 4, 1952, the Miami City Commission approved \$13,000 for the expense of scrapping the ship and hauling it away. On the former site, the city authorized the construction of smaller public meeting venues with recreational rooms and a small auditorium.

The once great sailing ship was soon disassembled but not totally removed. In December 1964, as construction progressed on a road connecting Biscayne Boulevard to the new Dodge Island Causeway, remains of the ship were unearthed. Decades later, in 1998, a new, massive entertainment structure was built on the former site of the Miami Aquarium and opened in December 1999 as the American Airlines Arena along Biscayne Boulevard. While the area upon which its foundation would be laid was being excavated, additional remnants of the *Prins Valdemar* were uncovered.

While many people derive great pleasure from the wide variety of entertainment fare and sporting events offered in the imposing arena, few individuals realize the history

and legacy of the once great Danish sailing ship that occupied the site in earlier times. Even those who may recall the *Prins Valdemar* and its lengthy stay in Miami could hardly imagine the many twists and turns it endured in the period leading up to its entrance into the city's harbor.—*SFH*



Left— The *Prins Valdemar* was converted into the Miami Aquarium in 1928. The public could view up close alligators, tropical fish, sharks, turtles, piranhas, octopuses and iguanas. HMSF 1996-421-11. Above—Declared structurally unsound, wrecking crews dismantle the vessel, December 1952. HMSF, Miami News Collection 1989-011-150057.

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*Alice L. Luckhardt, a native Floridian and a teacher in Stuart, Martin County, for 18 years, has done extensive genealogical research and written nonfiction stories. Some of her published articles have appeared in Ancestry Magazine, Florida Monthly Magazine, Family Chronicle Magazine, Reminisce Magazine and Jupiter Magazine.*



Elser's Recreation Pier, designed by August Geiger, opened at the foot of today's Flagler Street and Biscayne Boulevard in January 1917. HMSF 52-2-74.

# A Tale of **TWO PIERS,** Told Briefly

by Paul S. George, Ph.D.



When Bayfront Park was under construction in the early 1920s, Pier Five was rising on its northern edge. HMSF 1982-49-25.

Few urban areas are defined more completely by the waters in their midst than Miami and southeast Florida. Naturally, Miami and the region's other cities have seized the promotional and financial opportunities presented by their water orientation. While building a strong tourist economy around its water and weather, Fort Lauderdale has promoted itself as the "Venice of America," a reference to the more than 100 miles of waterways coursing through its confines.

To the south, the city of Miami had, from the time of its incorporation in 1896, turned its attention and energies toward exploiting the alluring waters of Biscayne Bay. First came a busy seaport, fish houses, the wood frame Fair Building and houseboats with their live aboards on the Bay. Then came the amusement and fishing piers. Of these piers, Elser's Recreation Pier and Pier Five were, for sheer amusement and enjoyment, hard to beat.

Designed by August Geiger, a prominent southeast Florida architect, for Miami resident Matthew Elser, Elser's Pier opened at the foot of today's Flagler Street and Biscayne Boulevard in January 1917. With its twin entrance towers and flags that flapped above roof level, the structure bore the look of an early 20th century amusement or recreational pier, such as those along

the New Jersey shore or on Coney Island in New York. Three stories tall, Elser's Pier thrust itself 400 feet into Biscayne Bay. The second floor contained a large dance hall; above it was a roof garden. The pier offered food, a fish market, charter fishing boats, retail shops, games and even a peep movie featuring Helen, the Hula Dancer; for just one penny and the simple turn of a crank, a pubescent patron could view the sultry Helen and her bewitching moves. Later, standing above the entrance to the pier was a large neon sign bearing its name.

The pier also hosted a wide array of scheduled activities, including dances, parties and even Miami's first automobile show. Perhaps the pier's strangest offering was "The Thing," a 30,000-pound whale shark, which was reportedly the "biggest fish in the world." Caught by famed Miami fisherman Capt. Charlie Thompson after a titanic 38-hour struggle off of Knight's Key in the Florida Keys in 1912, the whale shark was 45 feet in length. "The Thing" became "The Smell" in the summer of 1912, and it was soon moved away from the pier—and the city—after its stench became unbearable. Thereafter, it embarked on a "tour," which took it up the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes region and as far east as Atlantic City.



Above—Elser's Pier's short life came to an end after the city purchased Miami's bayfront in 1922 and demolished the facility two years later. HMSE Miami News Collection 1989-011-18401. Below—Fish caught on *Bobby Ann*, a fishing boat chartered from Pier Five. HMSF 1994-341-1.

Soldiers stationed in the area during and after World War I especially enjoyed dances at Elser's Pier, which worried parents, school officials and local do-gooders, who, accordingly, warned the many girls who flocked to the amusement pier to stay away from it.

The pier's short life came to an end after the city purchased Miami's bayfront in 1922 and demolished the facility two years later. By 1925, brand-new Bayfront Park rested on landfill where, earlier, the waters of Biscayne Bay had played host to Elser's Pier and other elements of the city's original bayfront.

At the time Bayfront Park was under construction, Pier Five was rising on its northern edge. One of a series of new piers stretching from the port to the northern edge of Bayfront Park, Pier Five quickly became a favorite destination for tourists and residents alike, and maintained its appeal for more than four decades. After it was destroyed by a hurricane in 1945, the city quickly rebuilt it. In the era following World War II, Pier Five's popularity soared as it recorded approximately 1 million visits annually. The success of the facility, which jugged 330 feet into Biscayne Bay, prompted city dock master Andy Bloodworth to characterize it as "the number one walking, sightseeing attraction in the city limits of Miami."

The pier offered food, recreational activities, gift shop, newsstand with newspapers "from every corner of the continent" and even portraitists for visitors at one of the open-air stalls. The thousands who visited the pier daily lent it, in the words of an observer, "a Coney Island atmosphere." Upon entering the facility under its signature sailfish, visitors were greeted with an "assault of sounds."



Vendors shouted "out the names of out of town newspapers." Up and down "the length of the pier, ship captains call out 'one open' or 'two open' for fishing in the Keys or Caribbean." Visitors heard the "splash of pelicans as they plop in the water to battle furiously for fish scraps." Many were jarred by the "horn blast" of a returning fishing vessel.

Indeed, what drew so many visitors to Pier Five was its magnificent fishing fleet. By the 1960s, the "World's Finest Fishing Fleet" included 50 beautiful, well equipped sport fishing crafts. Anglers chartered the vessels daily for fishing trips to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulfstream. Marlin and sailfish were the



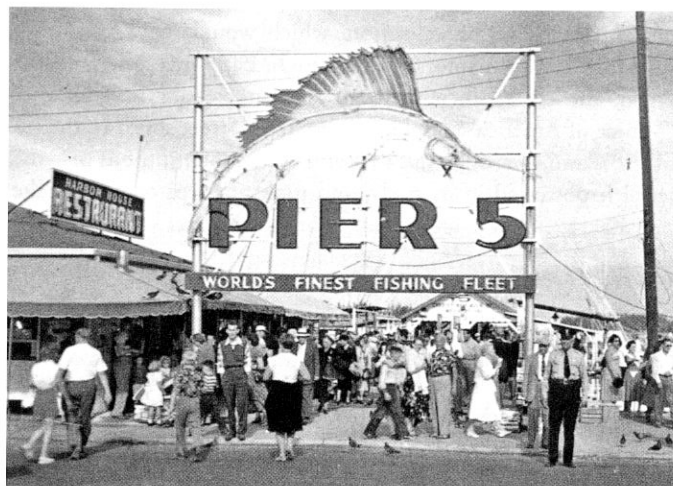
Above—After Pier Five was destroyed by a hurricane in 1945, the city quickly rebuilt it. Below—As late as 1967, the *Herald* maintained that Pier Five contained the “world’s most well-known charter fishing fleet.” Photos courtesy of Larry Wiggins.

fish of choice. But dolphin, wahoo, mackerel, bonita, snapper, snook, barracuda, pompano and bonefish were also popular catches.

One of the most exciting moments at Pier Five came in late afternoon when the vanguard of the charter fishing boats returned with the catches for the day. A *Miami Herald* reporter described the scene 50 years ago: “Four and five deep, the crowd lines the railings on each side of the twenty foot wide pier. Boat captains begin to throw the day’s catch proudly onto the four foot catwalks lining the dock. Knives flash as crew members deftly scale and clean the fish before offering them for sale to spectators.” The crowds reacted to the sight of the fish with “oh’s,” “ah’s,” or “I’ve seen better days.”

As late as 1967, the *Herald* maintained that Pier Five contained the “world’s most well-known charter fishing fleet.” For \$70 expert fishing guides took sports fishing enthusiasts for an all-day tour of the Gulfstream in quest of marlin and sailfish.

Pier Five’s days were numbered by the late 1960s, however, when people turned away from downtown and the bayfront as recreational areas. Additionally, the pier had fallen into a state of disrepair and calls for its closing and demolition came from city officials and the media. By the beginning of the 1970s, the Miamarina had replaced the colorful recreational pier, and an era of quiescence had overtaken that portion of Biscayne Bay. Twenty years later, however, life returned to the site of the old pier with the opening of the Rouse Corporation’s Bayside Marketplace. A small number of charter fishing boats are moored within the attractive complex. Not surprisingly, their quarter is called Pier



Five. Even in a city that seemingly redefines itself every generation, the memories of this revered attraction remain too strong to erase it completely.—*SFH*

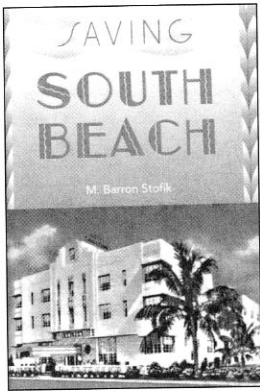
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*Dr. Paul S. George, a professor at Miami Dade College, is the Historical Museum of Southern Florida’s historian. He has toured his way to local, national and international acclaim with his continuing series of historic tours offered at the museum.*

# Book Review

## SAVING SOUTH BEACH

by M. Barron Stofik, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2005. 304 pages—**hardcover**. \$27.95



by Paul S. George, Ph.D.

The renaissance of South Beach is unlike any other story of urban revival. Most of us are familiar with the tale. In the 1970s, historic preservationists led by Barbara Capitman “discovered” a down-on-its-heels neighborhood brimming with Streamline Moderne (Art Deco) buildings from the late 1930s/early 1940s. A determined lot, they

organized themselves into the Miami Design Preservation League in 1976 to pursue preservation objectives, extol the virtues of Art Deco and the neighborhood’s potential to anyone who would listen, fight demolition activities, undertake a historic survey of a proposed national architectural and historic district covering a one square-mile area with more than 1,200 buildings, and exult in the achievement of this objective in May 1979. The Miami Beach Architectural District stretches from Sixth to 23rd Streets and from Ocean Drive west for several blocks.

But the task was far from complete. Now came the challenge of protection and revitalization, which would require securing investors for this diamond in the rough. Early investment efforts failed; the city’s officialdom, fixated on creating still another “Venice of America” reaching from Sixth Street south to the tip of the island, was oblivious to—and even contemptuous of—the jewel it possessed in its midst and took no steps to protect the new district. Slowly, an awareness of its potential set in as many outsiders recognized its uniqueness and attractiveness, but cherished buildings continued to come down while bigtime investors, necessary for the arduous costly preservation efforts that would make it shine, stayed away. Finally, in the second half of the 1980s, major investors like Tony Goldman began purchasing multiple properties as the district’s fame grew through media exposure and a surging public fascination with it. By the end of the 1980s, the district was booming as costly restorations of the Park Central, Cardozo, Essex House and other

cherished hotels were underway, while new nightclubs and restaurants were opening along Ocean Drive, Collins Avenue and Washington Avenue. The “beautiful people” had arrived. The ripple effect from Ocean Drive’s rebirth stretched north to Collins Avenue and Lincoln Road and south to the hard-pressed neighborhood below the Art Deco District. The Art Deco District and South Beach had become an international destination, one of the most famous playgrounds in the world.

In *Saving South Beach*, M. Barron Stofik provides an insider’s view of the revival of the once-forlorn area. Stofik covers every major piece of the puzzle from the Capitman “discovery” of the Art Deco jewels in the early 1970s to today’s scintillating scene. The author’s account is fast-paced, riveting, carefully researched, heavily anecdotal and broadly drawn. Stofik profiles the lonely band of fledgling preservationists who, in spite of great odds, ultimately triumphed, and who remain heroes to those familiar with the story of the district’s redemption. Stofik also described the villains in this story whose numbers were significant in the early going. The reader comes to know members of both camps because of Stofik’s vivid characterizations.

*Saving South Beach* is a balanced study because it examines the negative consequences of the district’s success as well as its accomplishments. Among the former was the displacement of many elderly persons from the same hotels (more akin to residential hotels) that are the showpieces of today, often with no place to go. The author also explains the divisions within the ranks of preservationists over what shape a restored, revived Art Deco District should take, as well as the approach the Miami Design Preservation League would take in its historic preservation fights. Stofik wonders in the final portions of the book whether the unique architectural heritage of the Art Deco District has been forgotten in the astounding success of the district as a venue for some of America’s most scintillating nightspots, personalities and events.

I encourage you to pick up a copy of *Saving South Beach*, so you can experience the same feeling of discovery and excitement that I derived from this wonderful book.—*SFH*

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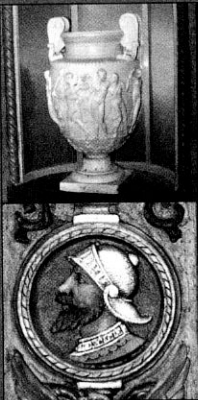
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## Historical Museum of Southern Florida



## Haitian Community Arts Images by Iris PhotoCollective

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This project was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Photo—*Fé Koupé* Artist, Almann Ulysse, March 5, 2005.  
Photographer—André Chung.

## Historical Museum of Southern Florida



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