

# South Florida History

M A G A Z I N E

Volume 24 No. 3

Fall 1996/Winter 1997, \$2.50



## *features*

- Houses of Refuge
- Milk from Fairglade
- The View from Miss Curry
- Key West Fires

COLLIER COUNTY MUSEUM • FORT MYERS HISTORICAL MUSEUM • CLEWISTON MUSEUM

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Books

clothing

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posters

posters

gifts

DECORATIVE OBJECTS

TOYS

toys

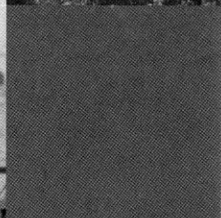
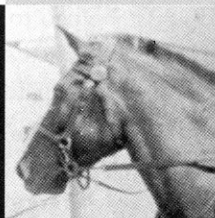
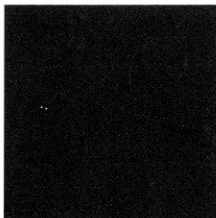
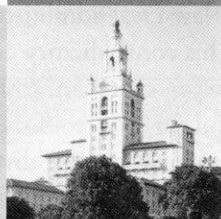
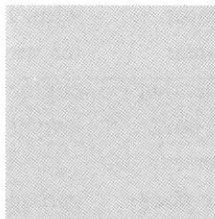
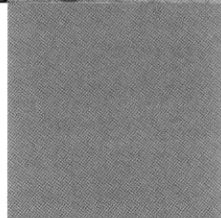
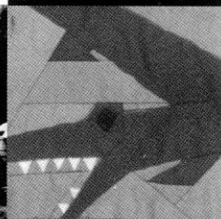
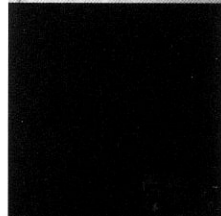
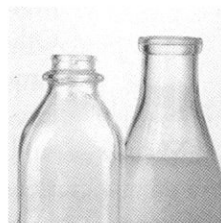
CLOTHING

... *and much more.*

historical jewelry

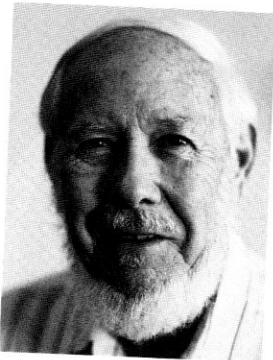
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By Stuart McIver

# Editor's Notes



Times are hard for Miami but the Magic City is not alone in its problems. Other cities have run into trou-

bles as bad as Miami's — and have come through them victoriously.

Let's go back to 1934 when the island of Key West was baking 'neath a scorching July sun and Conchs wondered where their next job and even their next meal was coming from. Per capita income was down to \$7 a month. The city, \$5,000,000 in debt, hadn't paid its employees in weeks. Garbage, lovingly warmed by a tropical sun, lay uncollected in the streets.

Enter Julius Stone, Jr., an unlikely and at the same time perfect choice to solve the dilemma. Stone held a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Harvard, was a wizard at playing the stock market (at least until 1929), and a member of a wealthy Ohio family of manufacturers. He was also a New Deal administrator and before his contradictory career ended, a lawyer, con man, embezzler, tax cheat and fugitive from the law. He brought many of these diverse skills into play to transform the poorest city in America into a world-famous tourist mecca.

Once Florida's largest city, the Conch Capital had seen its population plunge from 26,000 to 12,000 in 24 years. The cigar industry — 11,000 jobs — had moved to Tampa and the sponge diving trade to Tarpon Springs. The era of shipwreck salvaging, the nefarious pursuit which once made Key West America's richest city in per capita income, was long gone. Even the Navy was mov-

ing out after more than a century. Its biggest hotel and the only railroad serving the town were both bankrupt. Eighty percent of the Conchs were on welfare.

The city celebrated the Fourth of July, 1934, by declaring itself bankrupt. Key West surrendered all its legal powers to the state. Florida had problems of its own so it passed the island kingdom off to the federal government.

The timing couldn't have been better. America's New Deal president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, had put into motion a program called the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Florida Governor David Scholtz asked that FERA's southeast director handle the Key West problem personally. The director's name was Julius Stone.

Something about the challenge appealed to the imaginative, creative and totally high-handed Stone. Probably he was intrigued by the enormity of making the nation's biggest loser a winner again.

Stone had a million dollars worth of FERA funds to play around with. He also had authority to do it his way. He brought in a staff of 11: engineers, architects, city planners, a lawyer and a publicity man.

The city was a mess. The garbage in the hot, tropical paradise had to be taken care of right away. Stone's first move was to recruit unpaid volunteers, some 4,000 of them, to clean up the city. Unhampered by any environmental considerations, he had them simply dump garbage and trash into the ocean.

While the cleanup was taking the Conchs' minds off their troubles, he set about studying the three options set before him. One was simply to apply FERA funds to relief payments, which would include food

and medical care for the city for a five-year period. That would cost \$2,500,000 and would solve nothing in the long run. There would still be no jobs, no tax base, no hope.

The second option, estimated to cost \$7,500,000, would be to admit that Key West simply didn't work, then pay the cost of evacuating everybody on the island to the Tampa Bay area, where the cigar and sponge jobs had gone. Too costly, he concluded, and too likely to trigger armed insurrection from the individualistic Conchs.

The third way was to find some means of creating jobs so the Conchs could stay on their island and still make a living. Stone looked at the blue waters, the rustling palms, the sunsets. What he saw was a tropical island that a tourist could reach without an ocean cruise ship. America's Bermuda, that's what he saw.

Stone even started wearing Bermuda shorts to work, hoping others would follow suit. One day one of his volunteers showed up for work in his drawers. His explanation: "If Julius Stone can come to work in his underwear, so can I."

Julius set his volunteers to work renovating some 200 guest houses, building thatched huts on the beaches, painting and cleaning up restaurants, bars and nightclubs and remodeling the bankrupt Casa Marina Hotel so it could reopen. Streets were landscaped and coconut palms were planted. A municipal sewer system replaced outhouses, work was resumed on a highway to link the island to the mainland by automobile and repairs were speeded up on the Key West Airport. An aquarium was built on Mallory Square.

Artists from the WPA Federal Arts Project were brought in to do watercolors and paintings. These

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were used on postcards and tourism brochures, then used to beautify restaurants and other businesses.

Within a year unemployment was cut by two-thirds and business at hotels and restaurants boomed. Two years after the program started Key West was able to resume the basic task of governing itself again.

Stone was not without critics. Labeled the "Kingfish," he was blasted in conservative papers and columns as a dictator. A killjoy Sarasota paper, offended by Stone's support of an enlivened nightlife in Key West, called the program "NCER — Night Club Emergency Relief."

Mightily impressed with his own importance, he once said: "With a scratch of my pen I started this work in Key West and with a scratch of pen I can stop it — just like that!"

No doubt about it, Stone was an arrogant, high-handed administrator. Many things he did were illegal and it is apparent that he continually bypassed democratic procedures. He made deals that FERA guidelines did not permit. If he wanted it done, he just did it.

"I got away with it," he said years later to a writer for *The New Yorker*, "because we were so far off no one knew what we were doing ... also because I chose a time when [Harry] Hopkins (FERA boss) was on a long vacation."

Stone's tactics wouldn't work in Miami's case. They were possible in part because conditions were so dire in the depression that people were willing to unite behind unorthodox new approaches. Something had to be done and everybody knew it. Nobody worried about taxes, they worried about breakfast.

Energy these days seems to be channeled largely into bickering, playing it safe and coming up with comfortable solutions when actually there might not be any that are comfortable.

Still, when things look dark in the Magic City, just remember it took the Kingfish only two years to turn the poorest city in America into one of Florida's most delightful destinations. Why would you doubt that great things also lie ahead for Miami? We just have to face up to the task.



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**General Information:** Open Monday through Saturday,  
 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursdays until 9 p.m.; Sundays, 12 noon-5  
 p.m. Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.  
 Adults \$4; Children 6-12 \$2. Members Free.

### SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

#### A SLAVE SHIP SPEAKS: THE WRECK OF THE HENRIETTA MARIE

February 14 - May 4, 1997

This exhibit features the wreck of the earliest merchant-slave ship identified by name in the Western Hemisphere — the *Henrietta Marie*. Visitors will experience the late 17th century first-hand while they come face-to-face with artifacts from the wreck, read a broad historical summary about the “triangular route” and trace the consequences of this grim trade into the present day. The exhibit will focus on Afro-European relations, and the influence of West African artistic, musical, oral and religious traditions on the evolution of modern America.

#### TRANSATLANTIC LINKAGES: THE GULLAH/GEECHEE-SIERRA LEONE CONNECTION

March 3 - May 25, 1997—Museum Lobby

An exploration of the West African traditions that have been preserved in a small community on the sea islands of Georgia and South Carolina. This exhibit will celebrate the cultural linkage and the rich heritage shared by the descendants of Africans taken from their homeland to work as slaves in America.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

#### “THE WRECK OF THE HENRIETTA MARIE” LECTURE SERIES

Thursday evenings, February 20 - April 24, 6-8 p.m.

Join in a series of lectures, workshops and films to learn more about the *Henrietta Marie*. Hear the perspectives of scholars, experience the discovery as members of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers recant their adventures, and discover the cultures of the *Henrietta Marie's* passengers and cargo in film and discussion. In conjunction with Miami-Dade Community College Adult Continuing Education program. Free to the public.

#### CARIB FEST - April 19, 1997

A day of music, dance, storytelling, poetry, crafts and foods from the diverse cultures of the Caribbean. Featuring artists from the Caribbean and from South Florida's Caribbean communities. Also guided tours of *A Slave Ship Speaks* exhibition and educational programs on the African diaspora at the Historical Museum. CaribFest and Historical Museum admission is free. On the Metro-Dade Cultural Center.

#### SPRINGTIME HARVEST FESTIVAL

April 26 - 27, 1997, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (both days)

Dade County Youth Fair Grounds & Expo Center at Tamiami Park, Coral Way and SW 112th Ave. If you crave even more diverse cultural experiences, check out this annual South Florida favorite as it continues the tradition of family fun with hundreds of crafts exhibitors, educational (and often entertaining) activities for kids, fascinating exhibits and more. Admission for adults is \$4, children (5-12) \$2. Call (305) 375-1492 for information.



THE MUSEUM OF FLORIDA'S ART  
 AND CULTURE

13300 U.S. Hwy. 98

Sebring, FL 33870

(941) 655-0392

<http://www.954.com/AARF/mofac>

**General Information:** The Museum is temporarily located at the above address. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Group tours are by appointment. There is no admission charge. The Museum is devoted exclusively to the artists of Florida whose work is an interpretation of Florida's history, heritage or environment.

### EXHIBITS

#### VANISHING FLORIDA

February 21 - March 31, 1997

Photography by Chica Stracener.

#### DOWN IN F.L.A.: A FAR SIDE VIEW OF THE SUNSHINE STATE

April 1 - May 31, 1997

Paintings by John Wilton.



**FLORIDA HISTORY  
CENTER & MUSEUM**  
Burt Reynolds Park  
805 North U.S. Highway 1  
Jupiter  
(407) 747-6639

**General Information:** The Florida History Center & Museum is open all year. Examine artifacts from early Florida inhabitants in the permanent museum collection and view the traveling exhibits. Open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and weekends 1-5 p.m. Closed on Mondays. \$4 adults; \$3 seniors; \$2 children.

The Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse is open Sunday - Wednesday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. (Must be 48" tall to climb.) For information: (405) 747-8380. \$5.

The DuBois Pioneer Home is open Sunday and Wednesday, 1-5 p.m. \$2.

**EXHIBITS**

**JUPITER SHIPWRECKS EXHIBIT  
AT THE JUPITER TOWN HALL  
JAN. 10 - JULY 31, 1997**

A very special display that features artifacts found by Peter Leo of The Jupiter Wreck to educate area residents about the unique history of our sunken coastal treasures. Free.



**FORT MYERS  
HISTORICAL MUSEUM**  
2300 Peck Street, Fort Myers  
(941) 332-6879

**General Information:** Open Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Closed Sundays and Mondays. Admission is \$2.50 for adults and \$1 for children under 12.



**BOCA RATON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
Town Hall, 71 N. Federal Highway  
Boca Raton, Florida 33432-3919  
(407) 395-6766.

**General Information:** The Boca Raton Historical Society operates a Museum and Gift Shop at the old Town Hall, 71 North Federal Highway, Boca Raton. Hours of operation are Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

**EXHIBITS AND EVENTS  
BOCA RATON RESORT & CLUB TOURS  
Tuesday afternoons — 1:30 - 3 p.m.  
\$5 per person. Call 561-395-6766 for  
information.**

**TROLLEY TOURS OF HISTORIC BOCA.  
Wednesday afternoons.  
\$5 for BRHS members, \$7.50 for non-  
members. Call 561-395-6766 for reser-  
vations.**



**COLLIER COUNTY MUSEUM**  
3301 Tamiami Trail East, Naples  
(941) 774-8476

**General Information:** The Collier County Museum explores the people, places and everyday events that have shaped Collier County's heritage. The museum and four-acre historical park are open Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Free.

**EXHIBITS**

**SPANISH TREASURE  
FEBRUARY 24 - JULY 27, 1997**  
Rediscover the lost riches of Spain's legendary fleets and set sail for high adventure in this exhibition of nearly 1,200 artifacts that have been on the ocean's floor for over 350 years. Admission: \$5



**CLEWISTON MUSEUM**  
112 South Comercio Street,  
Clewiston  
(813) 983-2870

**General Information:** 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 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, with seasonal adjustments. No admission fee is charged; however, donations are encouraged.

around the galleries

# Letters

Dear Editors:

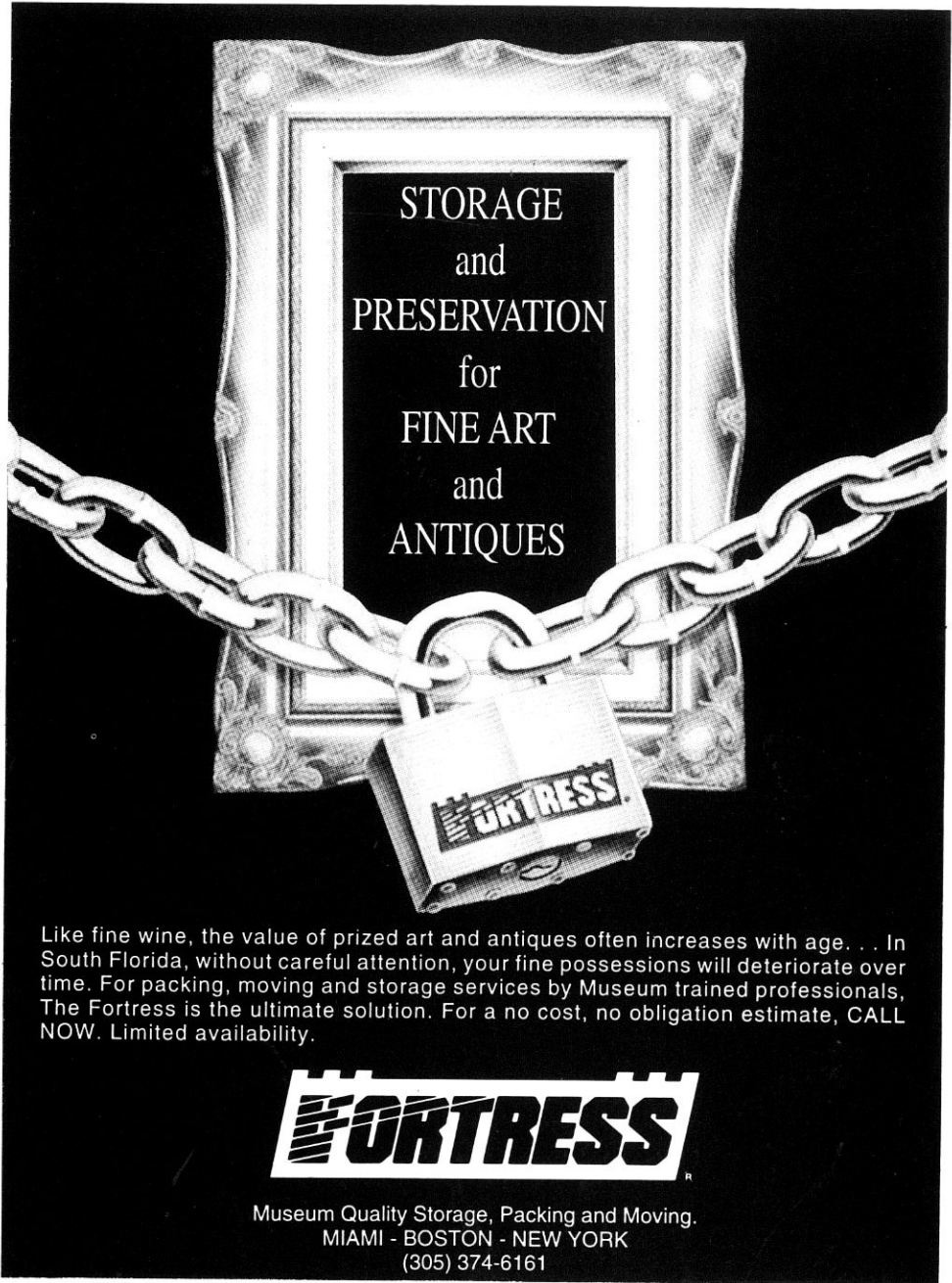
I picked up your excellent publication at our local historical museum. I enjoyed it and congratulate you both on the piece and for your 100 years. Ours was celebrated in 1995, but our growth does not begin to approach yours.

May I draw your attention to a little error in the terms of the Adams-Onis treaty of 1819, finally ratified by Spain in 1821. Spain ceded Florida, East and West, to the United States. In return the U.S. agreed to assume the claims of its citizens against Spain up to five million dollars. Thus, the money would remain in the U.S. when and if paid. The U.S. also dropped its claim to Texas and defined the border with Spain in the southwest and California. Your version indicates that the U.S. would pay five million to Spanish claims against the U. S.

As a fellow historian, I know you realize how easily misinformation sneaks into print and later gets repeated as fact.

Thanks for listening and congratulations on your museum. I wish ours was as nice as yours and I wish we were closer to your to visit more often.

Very Sincerely,  
Francis Commiskey  
Fort Myers, Florida




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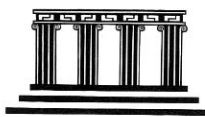
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# Historic Tours & Programs Schedule

**COCONUT GROVE TWILIGHT WALKING TOUR**

April 5, 1997, 5:30 p.m.

Meet at the first Pan American Airways headquarters, now Miami City Hall, 3500 Pan American Drive. Members: \$10; Non-members: \$15.

**STILTSVILLE/KEY BISCAIYNE BOAT TOUR**

April 13, 1997, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Advance reservations and non-refundable payment are required. Members: \$20; Non-members: \$25. To reserve, call (305) 375-1625.

## Historic Tours

• • • • •

**HISTORIC GESU CHURCH TOUR**

April 17, 1997, 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Meet in front of the church, 118 NE 2nd Street. FREE!

**CORAL GABLES HOUSE DINNER**

May 4, 1997. 5:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Advance reservations and non-refundable payment are required. Members: \$35; non-members: \$40. To reserve, call (305) 375-1625.

### Thursday Evening Presentations

## at The Historical Museum

• • • • •

**MARCH 20**

“Visual Re-Presentations of the Middle Passage.” Conversations with author/illustrator Tom Feelings (*The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargoes*) and S. E. Anderson (*The Black Holocaust for Beginners*).

**MARCH 27**

“The Middle Passage and the African Diaspora.” A lecture/slide presentation by Linda Heywood, Associate Professor of History, Howard University, Washington, D.C., and John Thornton, Associate Professor of History, Millersville University, Millersville, Pa.

**APRIL 3**

“*Dos Amigos/Fair Rosamond*: Replica, Traveling Museum, International Memorial Shrine.” Discussion and slide presentation by Dinizulu Gene Tinnie on a project to build a full-scale replica of a nineteenth-century slaver and anti-slave trade pursuit vessel, utilizing actual surviving design plans.

February 20 - April 24, 1997  
6:00 - 8:00 PM

**APRIL 10**

“The Maroon Experience.” Screening of *Maluala*, a feature film on African maroons in Cuba. With comments from director Sergio Giral.

**APRIL 17**

“The Power of the Word: Re-Presenting the Middle Passage in African World Literature.” Readings and discussion of historic and contemporary literary selections. With Jamaican writer/critic Erna Brodber and others.

**APRIL 24**

“The Cultural and Spiritual Legacy of the Middle Passage in South Florida.” A conversation with Dr. Dorothy Jenkins Fields, Black Archives, History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc. With screening of film/video footage from the Louis Wolfson II Media History Center.

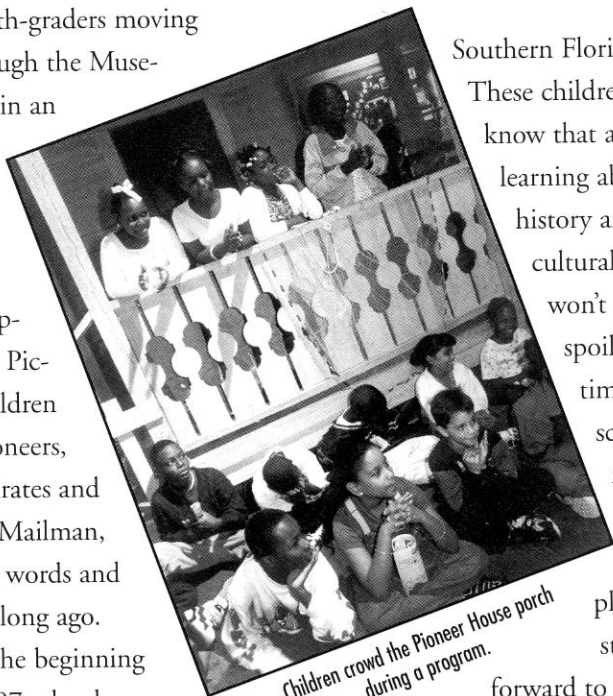
*All Thursday evening programs are free and open to the public.*

Produced in collaboration with the African American Caribbean Cultural Arts Commission, Inc., with additional support from the Florida Humanities Council.

## LIVING AND LEARNING

Try to imagine 200 fourth-graders moving through the Museum's galleries in an orderly fashion, with only a few giggles and whispers escaping their lips. Picture these children dressed as pioneers, Seminoles, pirates and the Barefoot Mailman, repeating the words and actions of so long ago.

Since the beginning of the 1996-97 school year, 6,000 students have experienced education Historical Museum of



Children crowd the Pioneer House porch during a program.

Southern Florida-style. These children now know that actively learning about Florida history and being culturally enriched won't necessarily spoil their good time! The school year may be half over, but there are plenty of kids still looking

forward to coming to the Historical Museum. One special group who will be

sharing a historical adventure at the museum are the students of Dunbar Elementary School. With the financial support of the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Arts Council, several grade levels from Dunbar Elementary have been able to plan on visiting the museum and participating in Passages, an interdisciplinary exploration of African-American history and culture from the colonial era to the present. Through a grant from the Division of Cultural Affairs' Arts in Education Partnership program, over 1,000 Dunbar students in grades K-6 will have danced, drummed, sang, acted and drawn their way through African history by the end of this school year.

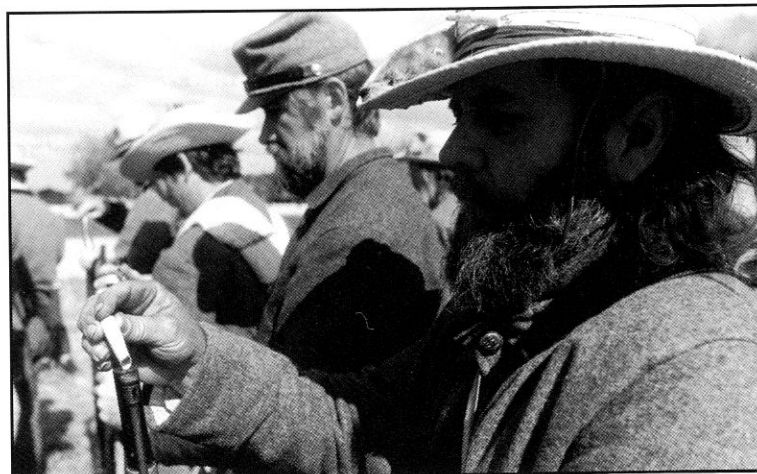
## HARVEST'S A HIT

When people think of holiday shopping, they think of Harvest. Nearly 20,000 people gathered at the Dade County Youth Fair and Expo Center November 23 and 24, 1996, to start their shopping, fancy some folk-life, recognize a reenactor, tap their toes to trippin' tunes or grab some great grub. Raising an impressive \$183,207, the 23rd annual Harvest Festival surpassed previous years' profits and all expectations. The money from this fabulous festival goes towards the Historical Museum's education and outreach programming.

This year was the

second year the Historical Museum prepared for Harvest with the popular pre-sale. More than 1,000 serious shoppers stormed the gates at 7:30 a.m. to conquer the crowds and consume croissants. This new tradition has been so well-received, we can look forward to future festive (early) buying.

Harvest Festival would not be possible without the help and contributions of many people. More than 600 volunteers gave their time to make the weekend worth working. The Historical Museum takes this opportunity to thank everyone who donated their time and made Harvest a success.



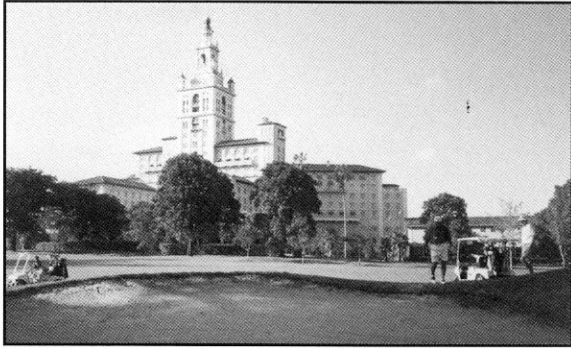
A Civil War reenactor loads his musket.

## NOT JUST PLAYING A ROUND



### Whether Historical Museum Golf Classic

participants spent the day at the Biltmore Hotel & Golf Course in Coral Gables playing a round on the greens or playing around by the pool, all were proud of the role they played in raising money for the Historical Museum's annual series of education



Getting caught in the sand trap at the Biltmore Hotel & Golf Course. A bad day at golf is better than a good day at work!

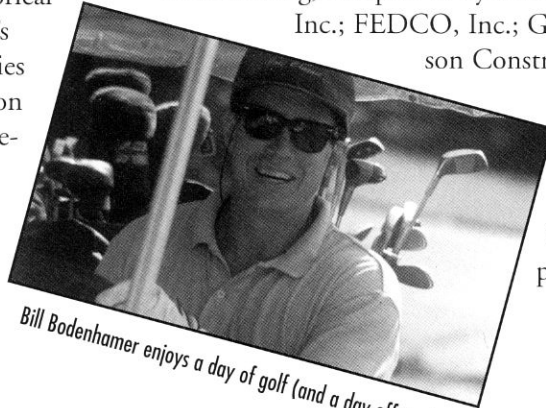
programs. These cultural and academic activities benefit and enrich the diverse youth groups of South Florida year round.

For all those who "love the sport" October 30, 1996, was a great day for team work, teeing off, slicing, chipping, putting, and scoring. For those who just love a good time there were sumptuous

meals, fabulous prizes, elegant trophies, and an array of unique items up for auction. Close to 150 duffers cut through the course and more than 200 people at the Silent Auction brought the proceeds of both the auction and the tournament to an exciting amount that exceeded \$37,610.

The Historical Museum wishes to thank the many sponsors who made the Golf Classic such a great success: Daniel Electrical Contractors; American Airlines; Fidelity Investments; Grand Slam by Munsingwear; Keen Battle Mead & Company; Steel Hector & Davis; Therrel Baisden & Meyer Weiss; Arrow Air; Honeywell, Inc.; Associated Printing; Coopers & Lybrand; EAS Engineering, Inc.; FEDCO, Inc.; Golden Press; Harrison Construction; McClain &

Company; Northern Trust Bank of Florida; Shutts & Bowen; and Turner Construction Company.



Bill Bodenhamer enjoys a day of golf (and a day off work!)

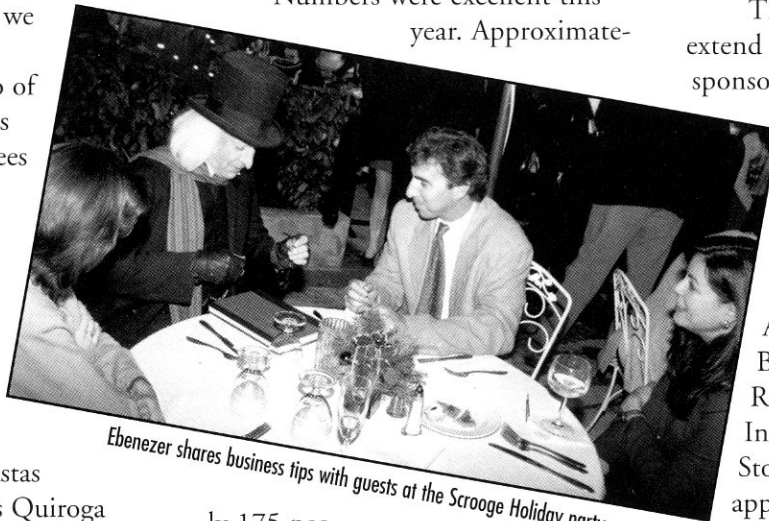
## IN THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT



Ebenezer Scrooge may have changed his ways after a night of bad dreams, but the Tropees continue to stick to their Scrooge-like ways. And we should all be glad.

The outdoor patio of La Palma Ristorante was the setting for the Tropees sixth annual **Scrooge Holiday Party** on December 11, 1996, where Scrooge himself greeted guests at the door and everyone enjoyed complimentary champagne and an exquisite selection of pastas and hors d'oeuvres. Aris Quiroga delighted all with his guitar repertoire of holiday favorites, but the big draw was the fabulous door prizes

and the infamous fruitcake presentation at the end of the evening. Numbers were excellent this year. Approximately



Ebenezer shares business tips with guests at the Scrooge Holiday party.

ly 175 people attended this signature event and raised approximately \$1500. The membership committee

broke a museum record by recruiting 26 new members and bringing in an additional \$910! Ebenezer would be proud.

The Tropees would like to extend a special "thank you" to the sponsors and door prize donors who shared their Christmas spirit-Sponsors: La Palma Ristorante, Curbside Florist and guitarist Aris Quiroga; Door prize donors: Confection Connection, Saks Fifth Avenue at Bal Harbor, Miami Brewing Company, La Palma Ristorante and Bar, and the Indies Company Museum Store. Last, but not least, our appreciation goes to the Tropees' Scrooge committee: Julie G. Tatol, Mike Strahm and Orianna Serrano-Nicolas.

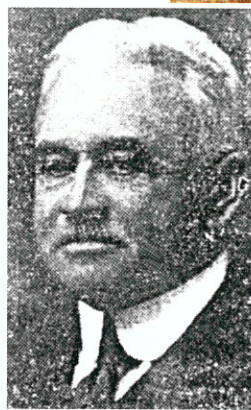
**G**ilbert's Bar House of Refuge, one of ten Houses built on the east coast of Florida, was the first home of Stuart's first homesteader, Hubert Bessey, and his wife, Susan. The House was a haven for shipwrecked sailors and for the Besseys.

During an October storm in 1873, a ship ran aground on the beach of what is now Hollywood, Florida. Miraculously all the sailors made it ashore but when they looked around for help there was none in sight — no water, no food, no shelter.

Days later a second miracle occurred when a beach-comber happened by and saved the sailors from certain death. History does not record the beachcomber's name but it does chronicle how his rescue set in motion events that led to the creation of ten Houses of Refuge for generations of sailors.

When the story of the sailors' plight and subsequent rescue was picked up by northern newspapers, a public outcry prompted the government to begin construction on "Houses of Refuge" on Florida's east coast. In charge was Superintendent Kimball of the Life Saving Service who observed:

*"Florida's .... conformation is such that vessels driven ashore come so near the beach as to enable their crews to gain the land by their own efforts... But they are then in danger of perishing by hunger and thirst, the coast being entirely desolate. Houses of refuge in charge of keepers are the form of aid dictated for the benefit of such sufferers. Houses of refuge are supplied with boats, provisions and restoratives, but not manned by crews. A keeper resides in each through out the year, who after every storm is required to make extended excursions along the coast to ascertain if any shipwreck has occurred and finding and succoring any persons that may have been cast ashore."*



Hubert Bessey



# HOUSE of



Watercolor painting of the Gilbert's Bar House of Refuge

# REFUGEE

by  
Jean  
Matheson

kitchen was a dining room, then a parlor. The bedroom was on the southeast corner to catch the prevail-

ing breeze from the Atlantic. Every family used the rooms in this same order.

Each House had a loft equipped and ready for 20 sailors. Twenty metal cots lined the walls and complete outfits of heavy clothing — more suitable for New Jersey than Florida — hung from pegs. Stacked around the small loft were boxes of books and a couple of wooden medicine chests that held aqua ammonia, carbolic solution, Epson salts, Vaseline and mustard plasters. Dried food, salted meat and canned staples such as sugar and coffee were stored in the house.

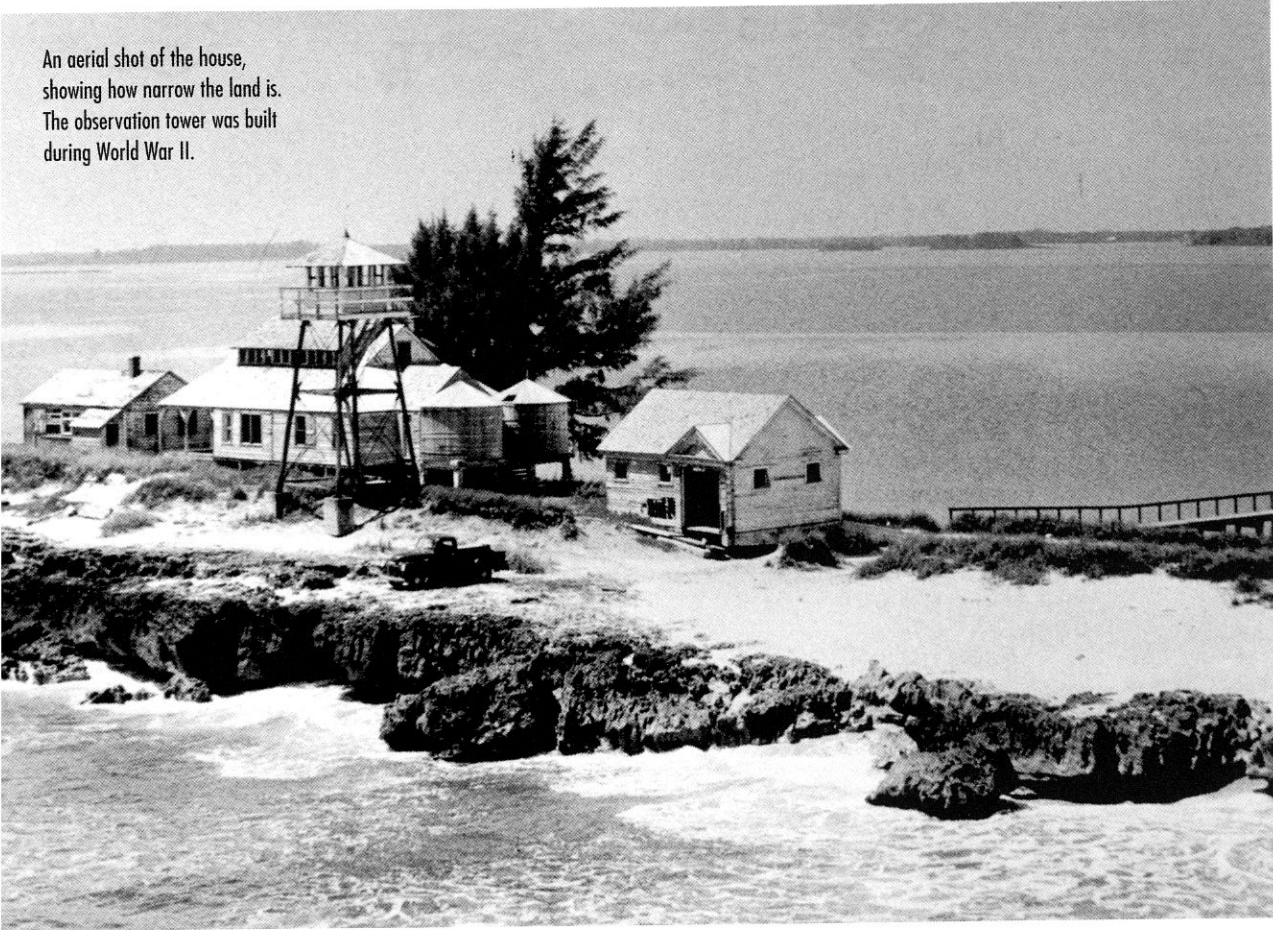
Gilbert's Bar House of Refuge — House #2 — was built on a high coral ridge on Hutchinson Island. The front of the house overlooked a reef named for Spanish pirate Don Pedro Gilbert, the back of the house

faced the Indian River. After the house was completed in 1875, notice was posted for a keeper: salary \$40 a month. At that time it was one of the few salaried jobs in south Florida. Fred Whitehead answered the ad after the 1876 hurricane season. As instructed, he placed a directional marker every mile on the dune line so that shipwrecked sailors could find the nearest House of Refuge.

Two years later, Whitehead entered the first "wreck report" in his journal:

*"On the first of March 1879 at five o'clock three sailors from the ship Norina came to this station saying that the ship was ashore on the sea beach ten miles north of this station. Immediately taken a boat and with the help of said three sailors went up the (Indian) river opposite said ship and cut a path through the mangrove swamp to the ship where I found the captain and ten other sailors on the sea beach in much need of water and food, which I carried with me. I then taken the captain, first and second mate and one sailor in my boat and directed the other seven sailors to walk the sea beach to station where we all reached and I proceeded to make them comfortable. He reported a month later— April 6, 1879, officers and*

An aerial shot of the house, showing how narrow the land is. The observation tower was built during World War II.



crew of the ship *Norina* left this morning for Sand Point (Titusville) where they expect to take shipping to Jacksonville....”

In Jacksonville the men could take a ship home, wherever home was to them.

Whitehead was keeper for two and a half years. However the next two keepers, Ezra Stoner and Preston McMillan, did not stay long, each citing boredom as cause. On the other hand, David Brown, who was either better suited for the job or more desperate to feed his family of seven, stayed three years. The next keeper, Thomas Peacock, also had his family with him at Gilbert's Bar. Having a family there was an asset because they could help patrol the beach after a storm and assist in a rescue but it was dangerous work. Keeper Samuel Bunker's son almost lost his life in April 1886 when he assisted his father in a rescue.

Samuel Bunker, his son and two men who had sought shelter at the House during the April storm, later

patrolled the beach looking for shipwrecks. South of Gilbert's Bar, almost a mile off shore, the four men saw the brigantine *J.H. Lane* breaking up in the rough sea.

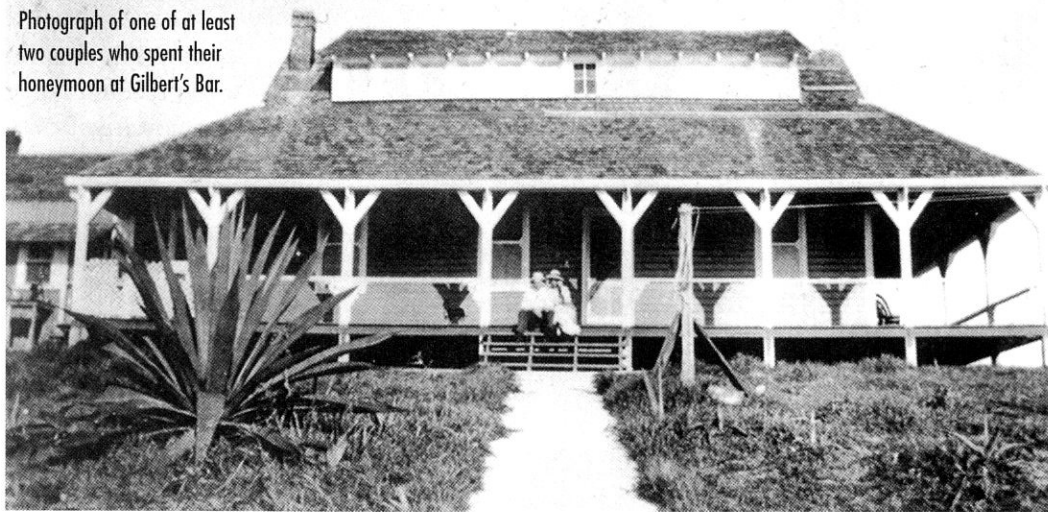
They saw the crew abandon the brigantine and climb aboard a small boat which almost immediately capsized. The sailors clung to the overturned boat with “desperate energy” Bunker wrote in the wreck report. “A breaker would now and then sweep over them, with such resistless force that they would be torn from the boat,

but they would bravely swim back to her again.”

One sailor lost his hold and drowned. The seven that survived held onto the small boat until they floated close enough to shore for Bunker to reach them. He fastened one end of a line to himself and rushed into the surf, grabbing one man, then another, each time shouting for his assistants to haul ashore. “Cold and wet, some hardly able to stand,” he wrote, “it seemed hardly possible that they would be able to reach the station seven and one half miles distant, the nearest shelter from the rain that poured down upon the already chilled and half dead men.”

Bunker revived each man with a swig of brandy. Then he led them to within a mile and a half of the House where he motioned them on. After leading the men to safety, he went back for his son who had fallen from exhaustion. Bunker half carried - half coaxed his son, stopping to rest every few steps until they finally reached the House at two in the morning.

Photograph of one of at least two couples who spent their honeymoon at Gilbert's Bar.



There is no indication that this story of rescue was picked up by northern papers that were always eager for Florida news. But about this time an Ohio newspaper carried a story about farming in Florida. The story caught the attention of Hubert Wilbut Bessey, a young man who was intelligent, curious and determined.

Just a few years out of Oberlin College with a degree in agriculture, Hubert had taught school and surveyed in the west. Now he was eager to seek his fortune in the orange groves of Florida and he convinced his brother Willis to join him.

In 1880 Hubert and Willis Bessey arrived in Ormond, Florida, where they discovered that it took years for a mature orange grove to produce. They decided to grow pineapples instead so they set sail for Eden to learn how to grow “pines” from the expert, Captain Thomas Richards.

From Richards they learned the art of growing pineapples and what to look for in suitable land. They found their land on what is now known as Bessy Point on the shore of the St. Lucie River in Potsdam, now Stuart. There they built a shack and cleared the wilderness for their “quick money crop” of pines.

While they waited three years for the plants to fruit, Hubert and Willis built sail boats then advanced

to steam launches using a design of neighbor Frank Allen. Eventually Bessey boats were fine enough to win the Titusville regatta. Both brothers found boat building

far more gratifying than farming and in time Willis left the partnership altogether. Hubert stayed on the land, farming pineapples and building boats as he waited to validate his land claim to the 148 acres.

On June 5, 1890, he received his claim — called a Patent — which qualified him as the first homesteader