
The Boom's Greatest Salesman

Oystering in Early Lantana

On Fort Lauderdale's New River

Picnicking with a Congressman

The Historical Association of Southern Florida

UPDATE

Volume 15, Number 3

August 1988

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UPDATE

Published quarterly by
**The Historical Association of
 Southern Florida**
 101 West Flagler Street
 Miami, Florida 33130

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PRINTED BY
Swanson Printing, Inc.

Update is the magazine of popular history published quarterly by the Historical Association of Southern Florida.

Receipt of Update is a privilege of membership in the Historical Association, a non-profit cultural, educational and humanistic organization dedicated to providing information about the history of South Florida and the Caribbean and to the collection and preservation of material relating to that history. Association programs and publications are made possible by membership dues, gifts from private sources and grants from federal, state and local government agencies.

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On the cover: Doc Dammers liked big crowds for his auctions in Coral Gables. Story on Page 3.

AROUND THE MUSEUM

South Florida's environment and history lost an avid supporter on May 1, 1988, with the death of Charles Brookfield. Charlie had spent the past 60 years of his life exploring our region and dedicating himself to the preservation of its natural wonders.

Born in Philadelphia in 1903, Charlie attended the Minnesota School of Forestry for two years. He moved to Miami in 1924. During the boom, he worked clearing land. With his earnings he built a boat, the *Manatee*, and went exploring. Within a few years, he purchased land on Elliott Key, and built a fishing camp, Ledbury Lodge, which he operated until 1940. The *Ledbury* from which he derived the name was a ship wrecked off Elliott Key in 1769.

From 1934 to 1936, he worked for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey revising charts of Florida Bay. Many of his names for keys and landmarks were adopted, among them Manatee Key (for his boat), Monroe Lake (after Wirth Munroe), Oyster Creek, Roscoe Key, Topsy Key, Sid Key, and Earl Key.

In 1940 Brookfield and Hugh Matheson brought up cannons and other artifacts from a 1695 wreck off Key Largo. Brookfield's account of the salvage of the *Winchester*, a British ship of the line, was published in *National Geographic*. In later years he gave one of the cannons and a number of the artifacts to the Historical Museum.

Later that same year he became a charter member of the newly formed Historical Association of Southern Florida. Six years later his history of the Cape Florida Lighthouse was published in *Tequesta*. He served as a member of the Board of Directors from 1951-1952.

During World War II, he served in the Coast Guard. He first served as Captain of the Port of St. Augustine, then New Smyrna, sending patrols in search of submarines and possible landings of spies. Aboard Landing Ship, Tanks (LSTs), he went to North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. During the Normandy invasion, he commanded



Charlie Brookfield wields a machete for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

a division of LSTs, and made 22 round trips across the English Channel. He reached the rank of Lt. Commander.

During the decades after World War II, Brookfield became a leader in environmental concerns in South Florida. In 1946 he was hired by National Audubon Society as a warden to protect the Shark River rookeries in what is now Everglades National Park. He was also given the responsibility of starting new local chapters of the National Audubon Society in South Florida. He organized Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, Broward County Audubon Society, Audubon Society of the Everglades, and the Florida Keys Audubon Society.

(Continued on Page 35)



Enlargements by: **KENYA PHOTO MURAL**



Doc Dammers, Super-Salesman



E. E. "Doc" Dammers.

By EMILY PERRY DIETERICH

When Edward E. Dammers arrived in Miami in 1910, the city claimed fewer than 6,000 permanent residents. Flagler Street was one of only a few paved roads, Miami Beach was sand and mangroves, and the overseas railroad extension had not yet reached Key West.

By the time Dammers disappeared from the scene some 20 years later, Miami's population was over 100,000. Millions of dollars worth of real estate had changed hands (mostly on paper), local residents had survived a devastating hurricane, and Miami was a bustling metropolis complete with skyscrapers. From Miami's first subdivision, to the demise of his own real estate development Edward Dammers was in the middle of all the hoopla, from boom to bust.

Edward "Doc" Dammers was undoubtedly one of the best known and most colorful of the boomtime characters. His close friend and admirer, journalist Theodore Weigall, claimed "no description of Florida's land boom would be complete without mention of 'Doc' Dammers, one of the most characteristic figures . . . and certainly one of the most popular."

Efforts to document Dammers' early life have proved unsuccessful so far; details are sketchy at best and often contradictory. Indications are he was born around 1869. According to one source, Dammers was born in New York City, the son of Civil War General James Dammers. He ran away from home to join the circus and seems "to have lived in most of the states of the Union."

Weigall described his boyhood as "wild and roving . . . seemingly spent largely in more or less violent collision with authority . . ." By many accounts he became an ophthalmologist, (which would explain the nickname "Doc"); however, Weigall confided that Dammers "possessed only the very flimsiest claims to any medical knowledge." One story has it that he started an optical business somewhere in the north and amassed a large fortune. At some point he ended up in California where he became a land auctioneer and appraiser.

Dammers may have begun visiting South Florida as early as 1903. He lived in West Palm Beach for several years and "was at once unbelievably successful in selling lots of what were at the time regarded as utterly useless wastelands." *The Miami Herald* credited him with "conducting the greatest auction sales ever put on in Palm Beach County."

By 1910 Dammers was in Miami auctioning lots at the city's first subdivision, Highland Park. The area covered by Highland Park is now bordered by Jackson Memorial Hospital on the west, NW 7th Avenue on the east, NW 20th Street on the north, and a portion of NW 11th Street on the south.

Emily Perry Dieterich, research historian for the Metro-Dade County Historic Preservation Division, is a contributor to both of the Historical Association of Southern Florida's publications, *UPDATE* and *TEQUESTA*.

Hoyt Frazure in his book, *Memories of Old Miami*, provided a vivid description of Doc's Miami debut as an auctioneer. Only eight years old at the time, Frazure remembered Doc as a "medium-sized balding man with a voice much bigger than he was . . . standing in the back of a one-mule wagon."

At Highland Park Doc established one of his most popular traditions, giving away prizes to lucky ticket holders in the crowd, no purchase necessary. Frazure recalls the biggest attraction at the auction was a much-publicized hot air balloon demonstration featuring a man swinging from a trapeze before parachuting to the ground.

J. N. Lummus, president of Miami's Southern Bank and Trust Company, claimed to have given Dammers his first job in Miami in 1913, although we now know Doc was here earlier. Lummus did hire Dammers to sell land for John Collins and Carl Fisher, who were developing an area called Miami Beach.

Even though the bridge to the island was not completed, Dammers attracted a crowd of 3,000 for the first sale of beach property in February, 1913. Interspersing his harangue with prizes of dishes and promises of profits, Dammers sold \$66,000 worth of lots in just three days. About half of the money was taken in cash and the balance pledged in monthly payments. Not only did Dammers sell thousands of lots at public auctions, he also invested his own money and is credited with helping make the public aware of the potential of Miami Beach.

Dammers subsequently conducted land auctions at many other boomtime developments including Riverside Heights, Rickmer's Addition to the Causeway, Coconut Grove Park and Biscayne Heights. At one time he acted as a purchasing agent for four large development companies in Miami and also established a reputation as a land appraiser. Doc was known as a master auctioneer throughout the state and, according to author Charles Nash, "was the type of salesman who could make a good living selling ice cream to the Eskimos."

Dammers was constantly trading on the fact that he "had once predicted a golden future for Miami Beach when he was standing in the middle of a mangrove swamp pitting his auctioneer's lungs against the angry whine of mosquitoes and the incredulity of the natives — and now look at it."

In 1921 real estate developer George Merrick launched his sales campaign for the most successful of all the boomtime developments: "Miami's Master Suburb — Coral Gables." Located to the southwest of Miami, Merrick's model city was planned as a community "wherein nothing would be unlovely." Merrick spared no expense when it came to his Mediterranean paradise and he insisted on wide boulevards, landscaped plazas, pink sidewalks and strict building codes. When the time came to sell home sites, Merrick wanted success, and he wanted the best, so naturally he hired Doc Dammers.

By this time Doc was a partner in a real estate firm known as Dammers & Gillette and Harry A. Burnes, located at 158 East Flagler Street. One rumor suggests there was no Gillette; Doc merely liked the sound of the name. Burnes was very real, however, and, according to the *Miami Daily Metropolis*, he was vice president of the Bridgeport Building and Loan Association and Director of the Stratford Trust Company. Dammers popularized the slogan, "here Coral Gables lies, your money multiplies" and he urged prospective customers "to buy right, buy at auction."

Doc conducted the first auction of Coral Gables property on November 28, 1921; he attracted over 5,000

Today At Absolute Auction We Offer the Finest First-Bearing Lot on the Coral Way

The Coral Gables Policy

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- To build and erect a new suburb that is unexcelled in its beauty and convenience and to be the most desirable and profitable investment in the South.
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\$2,000,000 in Improvements Already Accomplished and Under Construction, and More Than \$400,000 Spent in Development Work in the Past Eight Months, Proves That THE GREAT CORAL GABLES POLICY is Being Carried Out Faithfully in Every Detail

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Closed at Auction at Your Own Pleasure

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158 E. FLAGLER STREET
MIAMI, FLORIDA

Doc Dammers' favorite sales tool was a rip-roaring auction.

people. Doc's sales pitch was almost too good to be true. Prospective buyers were offered FREE transportation with their choice of a "private automobile" or "large comfortable bus," leaving four times a day from downtown Miami to Coral Gables. Customers were promised a FREE guided, sightseeing tour on the way to what most still considered "the back country."

The idea of "thousands of dollars worth of valuable presents FREE" must have aroused the curiosity of many. Now known in newspaper advertisements as "The Grand Distribution of FREE presents," the giveaway included such gifts as: "elegant tea sets, chocolate sets, artistic china, beautiful dolls, linens, and oriental table lamps."

In case folks got thirsty, Famous Coral Gables Punch was available, FREE of course. Hungry? One hundred boxes of grapefruit were given away daily. Live entertainment was provided by Sleight's Band.

During one sales campaign Dammers promised all who bought a lot a FREE 15 minute ride on a "big German Battle Plane" which was stationed at the Coral Gables Flying Field. Another advertisement offered FREE shares of stock in the Coral Gables Golf Club and Public Utilities Corporation to anyone buying a lot in Section B, on North Greenway Drive. Once a lot was purchased and the owner desired to build a house, building plans and native rock were provided FREE of charge. How could anyone even consider not buying property in Coral Gables?

And then there was the lure of Doc himself. He became so popular that when an advertisement appeared in the paper announcing a Dammers land auction, half the town showed up to join in the fun. Many early photographs show Doc standing in a wagon in the middle of a pine field or citrus grove selling home sites to an eager crowd.



Doc Dammers' magnificent entranceway to Central Miami, located on Red Road between SW 34th and SW 35th Streets, was recently designated as a local historic site by the Metro-Dade Historic Preservation Board.

Apparently many could not resist the charm of Doc's "persuasive voice and likable personality," as evidenced in the sales figures for Coral Gables. In the first five years of operations, Merrick sold \$150 million dollars in home sites and spent \$100 million dollars on improvements to create his "City Beautiful." He spent \$5 million dollars in newspaper advertising alone. At the peak of Coral Gables promotion, Doc was operating a sales force of 3,000 men.

The land boom was at an all time high and Doc was at the height of his career. Dammers and Merrick were enjoying a profitable business association as well as developing a lasting friendship. Merrick built a house for Dammers (in Coral Gables, of course), in 1924. The coral rock residence was designed by Merrick's cousin, well-known architect H. George Fink. Doc's house was often photographed and used in promotional material. The home still stands today at 1141 Coral Way, on Columbus Plaza, and was designated a local historic site by the Coral Gables Historic Preservation Board in 1978.

In October, 1924, Dammers announced he was forming a new million dollar firm, the Edward E. Dammers Realty Corporation, with an office at 17 East Flagler and a "sales force of 100 widely experienced real estate men." It was during this time that Theodore Weigall, of the Coral Gables Publicity Department, first met Doc. He described the scene in Doc's office:

"... one of the largest and most booming of all the land companies in Miami. In that vast room opening directly out on to the street through high folding-doors extending its whole length, scores of

white-shirted, coatless salesmen worked feverishly to the accompanying roar of two electric blowing machines which sent a continuous blast of air from one end of the building to the other with a sound like a squadron of aeroplanes in full flight . . . towards the front of the building groups of pleasant-faced young men lounged about the doors, willing to engage in conversation with anyone and everyone under the sun . . . as to the question of real estate and what were the best values in Miami."

Newspaper advertisements claimed Doc's company would "handle every phase of the real estate business . . . specializing in property owned or controlled by Mr. Dammers . . . valued at more than 1 million dollars . . ." Along with all those "thousands of satisfied customers," Doc hadn't done too badly for himself.

Perhaps every real estate developer dreams of creating his own city. Fisher's winter playground was Miami Beach, James Bright developed Hialeah, Glenn Curtiss turned an Arabian Nights fantasy into Opa-locka and Merrick had Coral Gables. Doc was no exception. Before long he began to push his pet project, "Central Miami," which he insisted "would soon become the center of rapidly expanding Miami."

The boundaries of Doc's development included Red Road on the east, 75th Avenue to the west, Coral Way to the north, and Bird Road on the south. The Central Miami Subdivision was platted in December, 1924, by W. C. Bliss, the same engineer who surveyed Coral Gables. Although his development was adjacent to Coral

Gables, Dammers was not really in competition with Merrick, for the latter was financially interested in the new project, and Dammers continued to sell Coral Gables real estate as well.

As revealed in Chamber of Commerce minutes, the Miami city fathers objected to the name Central Miami because of its location outside the city limits, and thought visitors who did not know the area might be misled.

"Chamber president E. G. Sewell reported that he had spoken to George Merrick and Telfair Knight about changing the name, but these gentlemen did not seem to desire to do so. The Executive Board moved that the President be so authorized to impress on Merrick and Dammers the immediate need for a change of name."

Apparently the objections didn't sway Dammers. A full page advertisement in *The Miami Herald* indicates Part One of Central Miami, which include 525 lots, sold out "in practically eight hours after it was placed on the market." In January, 1925, Dammers announced that the 330 lots comprising Part Two would be ready about February 5th, and he predicted "a complete sell-out in three hours time." Dammers promised to spend \$3.00 on "development work" for every \$1.00 he received from sales of lots in Central Miami.

Doc may have spent some of the money for a magnificent entranceway to Central Miami which was built in 1925. The entranceway still stands on Red Road, between Southwest 34th and 35th Streets, incorporating the Coral Gables Waterway as its centerpiece. A curved wall, set back from the street, creates a shaded, grassy area in front. The wall is punctuated by eight, tall, Medieval-looking towers, faced in textured stucco with oolitic limestone details. The towers display turrets and parapets with heart-shaped cut-outs which add a whimsical element to the rather romantic design of the entranceway.

That same year, Coral Gables was incorporated as a city, with none other than Doc Dammers as the first



Doc in a uniform from Old Spain.

mayor. It was during Doc's term as mayor, 1925-1928, that Theodore Weigall became his close friend and confidante. Apparently Weigall had become more involved in the advertising aspect of Coral Gables promotion and frequently "travelled out to meet distinguished visitors and escort them back to the city." He was also the editor of the *Coral Gables Bulletin*, "a somewhat feeble sheet . . . which consisted entirely of local news and personal gossip."

Weigall wrote a detailed description of life in Miami during the 1920s in his book, *Boom in Paradise*, published in 1932. He presents a behind-the-scenes look at the selling of Coral Gables, including particularly revealing stories about Doc Dammers.

One exciting adventure which Weigall describes involved an "official visit to Havana at the invitation of the Cuban government." The delegation included New York Senator James J. Walker, Mayor Dammers, Charles F. Flynn of the Bowman-Biltmore Hotels and Coral Gables Police Chief M. P. Lehman. "The function of the latter was to act as an official bodyguard to Dr. Dammers, who always travelled with a considerable amount of pomp."

According to Weigall, "our group made an impressive array" and was "generally accepted as being a sort of unofficial ambassadorial expedition from the United States, although the exact status of our party was never quite clear." The group traveling on the *Cuba*, the flagship of the Cuban navy, was formally greeted at the harbor by a "salute with an incredible number of guns." While Senator Walker discussed "government business" with Cuban officials, the rest of the group enjoyed sight-seeing and being wined and dined. Except for Doc, who was up to his old tricks.



Doc Dammers in a pensive mood.



After the boom has died, Doc walks sadly through the vacant pinelands of Central Miami.

"Doc, on the other hand, was flagrantly out to sell large tracts of a subdivision near Miami to whatever Cubans would buy; and by some strange means the local papers were — coincident with his arrival — filled with stories of this particular wonderland and with casual allusions to the fact that Dr. Edward E. Dammers, now a visitor to Havana, was its owner and representative and was to be found at the Sevilla-Biltmore Hotel. I believe he did a vast amount of business while he was over there, and with enormous profit . . ."

Even though many of the boomtime developments had solid reputations, all were affected by the "bust" of the real estate market, including Coral Gables and Central Miami. Banks curtailed credit, property values dropped and people were unable to keep up with their mortgage payments. A devastating hurricane in September, 1926, had far reaching effects on the economy. Many developers' personal finances were wiped out, preventing them from seeing the completion of their dream developments. Weigall reports that "according to rumor he (Doc) was one of the few who saw what was in the wind and managed to get out in time." Dammers was still advertising Central Miami in early 1927, claiming that "little damage was done by the hurricane to Coral Gables and Central Miami."

Doc insisted, "San Francisco had its earthquake, Baltimore had its fires . . . and look at these cities today." Unfortunately Doc's grand plans for Central Miami as a large community never materialized. Not much more than the entranceway and a few sidewalks were ever built.

By June, 1927, Central Miami was apparently part of the City of Coral Gables as indicated on a map where it is referred to as "Coral Gables Western Section." As popular as Doc was during the boom, there were plenty of bad feelings about "Merrick's Men" and "the Corporation" after the bust. Doc was not re-elected in 1928.

According to records from the State Division of Corporations, the E. E. Dammers Realty Corporation

changed its name to the Central Miami Corporation in January, 1929. Central Miami remained part of the City of Coral Gables until 1934 when a lawsuit involving taxes and services placed it within the boundaries of unincorporated Dade County.

In 1936 the entrance park property was still owned by Central Miami Corporation which listed George Merrick as president and Eunice P. Merrick as secretary. In 1937, the property, approximately 1.4 acres, was conveyed to Dade County specifically for "park purposes." Presently the property is known as Coral Gables Wayside Park and is maintained by the Dade County parks department.

Doc Dammers became a legend in his own time. As early as 1925, he was included in Frank Shutts' book about "the builders of the Florida East Coast." Shutts proclaimed him the "iron man" of the real estate business in Miami and an "outstanding figure in the progress of south Florida." A 1926 newspaper article detailed the story of how Doc had acquired his "now famous" auctioneer's wagon. The wagon was being moved to "a place of honor" near City Hall. Another article reported on the construction of a new apartment building, the Dammers Arms, named for the illustrious mayor.

Nobody knows what became of Doc. Weigall reported that he "heard that he had become again associated with Carl G. Fisher in some very successful development on Long Island, New York . . ." This would have been Montauk, Fisher's "Miami Beach of the North," which included oceanfront hotels, golf courses and a yacht club. Doc's name was not listed in the Miami City Directory after 1929, nor was his wife Lillian's.

A series of photographs by Gleason Romer show Doc walking through vacant pinelands in Central Miami in 1931. When or where he died is not known and very little tangible evidence remains of Doc Dammers and his role in Miami's development. The entranceway towers on Red Road stand as a reminder of one of Miami's most unforgettable characters. You might want to tip your hat to Doc as you drive by.



Well-dressed onlookers check on Lantana fish catch.

Oysters Kept Shuckers Busy

By MARY LINEHAN

Early accounts of Lantana all speak of the abundance of fish and sea life. One of the Lyman family enterprises was the Lantana Fish Company. The fish house was on a dock on the north side of Lyman's Point on Lake Worth. Through the years the business was operated by various managers, including Bill Barker, John Madison, and John Hazelwood.

Finally it was turned over to Charles Kennedy "lock, stock, and barrel" by Mr. M. B. Lyman, after 1908, "with an agreement" which provided that all business of groceries and supplies by his fisherman must be through the Lyman store. It was an oral agreement, but it was done!

The gathering and marketing of oysters was the leading industry of Lantana at its peak about 1910. At its height, there were seven oyster houses, up on stilts, out in the lake where the oysters were shucked.

A tram line with one hand car fa-

cilitated the job of transporting the barrels and ice to the lakefront and returning the oysters and fish to the depot about three blocks away. Near-by West Palm Beach had an ice plant about 1895.

As a child, Rachel Lyman liked raw oysters and remembers nearly choking to death when she tried swallowing a very large one. Some oysters were large enough to cover a small plate.

During the winter seasons Charles Kennedy had great crews of Nassau Negro fishermen at his several fish camps, one of which was at "Dead Man's Camp," so called due to a shipwreck which left bodies strewn on the beach, so badly decomposed that it was necessary to bury them on the beach ridge nearby. "Dead Man's Camp" was the first fish camp north of Hypoluxo Island.

Kennedy had watching "towers," nests built into the top of the highest trees, with one man on duty with a

telescope, watching for the big Spanish mackerel runs. At each camp there were great, mile-long seines, vast numbers of crewmen and dories to lay out the nets, join them together, and windlass into shore from both ends of the nets. One site of a lookout was a wrecked ship, the *James Judge* in front of the Croker Estate, about a mile north of Sloan's Curve in the south end of Palm Beach.

One hundred thousand pound catches (runs) were made. Kennedy had the two women of his house-

Mary Linehan, author of *EARLY LANTANA, HER NEIGHBORS — AND MORE*, is the official historian for the City of Lantana, one of the earliest settlements on the shores of Lake Worth. She is a former president of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

Seven oyster houses sat on stilts in the waters of Lake Worth.



hold take turns being seated in the front door of the Lantana Fish Company fish house watching with a telescope for the flag to go up at any one of the camps. A flag up meant that a catch was in the making. The motor launch went over with the many skiffs in tow to bring in the catch to be processed. All hands — men, women, boys, girls, white and black, were employed getting mackerel for a run that might last three days and nights. Workers were paid \$.25 an hour.

Frank Lyman stated that when he was about 15 he gutted a couple of runs of fish and then found that he could make more money by running telegrams to Boynton on his bike. He got 25 cents for each telegram he brought to Kennedy, but not a cent for the ones he took from him to Boynton. However, he made what he considered "good money."

During Kennedy's biggest mackerel run, Frank Lyman was doing the work of the Railway Express Agent. He started waybiling barrels of fish — weighing about 200 pounds — about 3:00 p.m. The train was due at 7:00 p.m., but it was delayed — which was not unusual. Wires had been sent requesting extra cars.

The long, low platform was stacked two barrels deep, all the high platforms on the northeast and west sides were also stacked, and then the whistle was heard. It took over two hours to load all the barrels of fish and still the hand car from the packing house, with eight barrels to a load, kept coming. When the last barrel was on the train, still another eight barrels bumped the low platform, and the conductor, kindly, but

fuming, accepted them. Frank, needless to say, had writer's cramp.

Frank added that Charles Kennedy went about each evening with a large canvas bag containing money to pay each worker for their day's work.

Many of the early settlers came from Michigan. However, Charles A. Kennedy was born in Danville, New York in 1867. He came to Lantana about 1908. In 1911 Charles Kennedy went to West Palm Beach where he organized the Atlantic Fish Company, of which he was the president. It was one of the largest indus-



McCarley Oyster House was run by Dan McCarley, shown here with daughter Birdie.

tries of its kind in this section of the state.

In the meantime he had been acquiring large property holdings in the area. He was one of three men responsible for the building of the El Verano Hotel. This hotel is better known as the George Washington Hotel on North Flagler Drive, and later, in 1979, as the Helen Wilkes Retirement Home.

His sons were Chester D. and Harold A. Kennedy. They and other Kennedy relatives have continued to be citizens of Palm Beach County.

Charles Kennedy's niece, Arystine Peerson, remembers coming to Florida as a small child and following the "woodpecker" trail from New York state. Roads were poorly marked then, and someone had been ingenious by posting woodpecker images at strategic points.

An article by Steve Mitchell in the November 13, 1978, *Palm Beach Post* gives another recollection of this trail. Roads in the 1920s were not well marked with numbers and other directional signs. Many of the roads were narrow, graded dirt or clay roads, being paved only as they approached the larger towns. The Woodpecker Trail ran about where U.S. 1 does now, in the South. To show travelers the way, there were little tin cutouts of a redbird tacked to trees at intervals. One man reported taking eight days of hard driving from daylight to dusk to travel from Georgia to Philadelphia.

This article was reprinted from Mary Linehan's *Early Lantana, Her Neighbors — and More*.



Stranahan House, 75 years ago.

Stranahan's Recalls Early Lauderdale



Ivy Cromartie Stranahan.

By GALE BUTLER

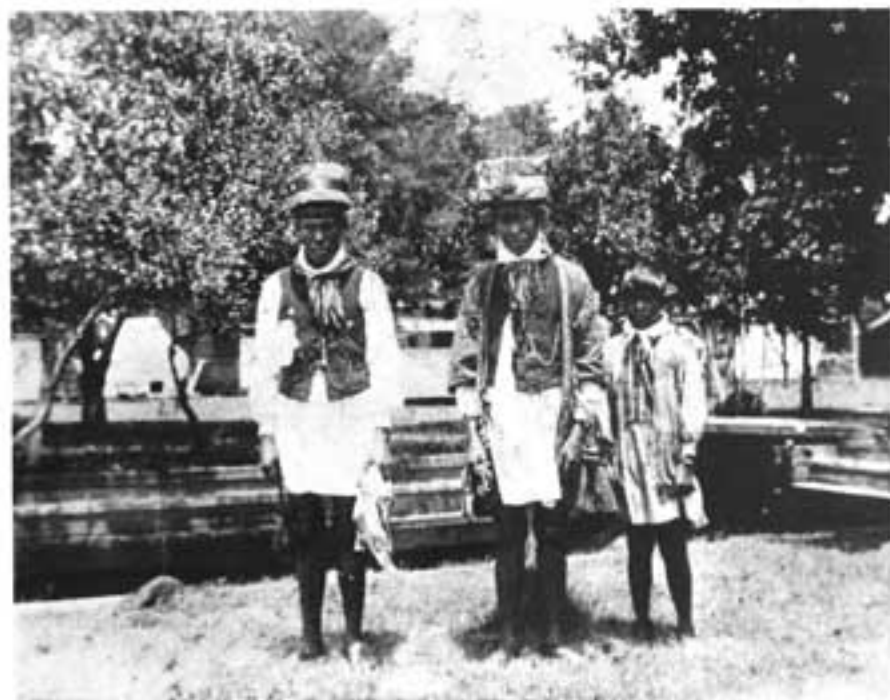
If you stand at one of the tall, lace-curtained windows of the Stranahan House and look out over the veranda up the New River, you can — for a moment — imagine colorfully dressed Indians rounding the bend of the river; their canoes laden with otter pelts, egret plumes and alligator hides for trade.

And, as they come closer, if you turn to face the living room, panelled in sturdy Dade County pine, restored to the way it looked in 1913 with Victorian era furnishings, you can glimpse a view of the past — of all that the Stranahan house was; the first home, the first meeting place, the first trading post, the first post office, and the first resort in Fort Lauderdale.

In 1882, a county road was built linking Lantana with Lemon City. Frank Stranahan, a young man from Ohio, was hired to run the newly built "overnight camp" on the county road on the banks of the New River. The camp served as a way station for travelers.

Using Frank's camp as a retreat wealthy sportsmen soon discovered the exciting challenges of South Florida's water for fishing and the serenity of its beauty for relaxing.

Gail Butler, communications officer for C.&S. Bank's Florida operations, is a native of Fort Lauderdale, a graduate of the University of Miami and an enthusiastic supporter of the Stranahan House.



Seminoles came down New River to Stranahan's Trading Post.

Within a few years, Frank Stranahan was a successful businessman with a thriving tourist camp, post office and a trading post for the Seminoles, who lived farther up the river and in the Everglades.

In 1896, Henry M. Flagler brought his Florida East Coast Railway to the New River and Frank Stranahan's business boomed. Soon, families with children began to arrive in South Florida which in turn brought an 18-year-old county appointed school teacher named Ivy Julia Cromartie. Shortly after her arrival, Frank and Ivy began courting and were married at her family's home in Lemon City on August 6, 1900.

Together, Frank and Ivy would shape the future of the rapidly growing community. While Ivy befriended the Indians and taught their children to read and write, Frank formed Stranahan & Co. and branched out into banking and real estate. He founded the Fort Lauderdale State Bank and served as its president. He also became politically active in the community, serving as a member of the City Council for many terms.

As Frank's business fortune and prominence in the community grew, so did the Stranahan House. It was updated with awnings and a porch, generally renovated and wired with electricity. It even appeared on several tourist postcards as a landmark for Fort Lauderdale.

Then in 1926, the "land boom" collapsed and along with it many

businesses in town, including Frank Stranahan's Fort Lauderdale Bank. With his hard-won fortune crashing down around him, Frank's health began to fail. He watched in horror as many of his friends' businesses and lives took a downturn. Finally, severely depressed, Frank Stranahan took his life at the age of 63 by diving into his beloved New River and drowning.

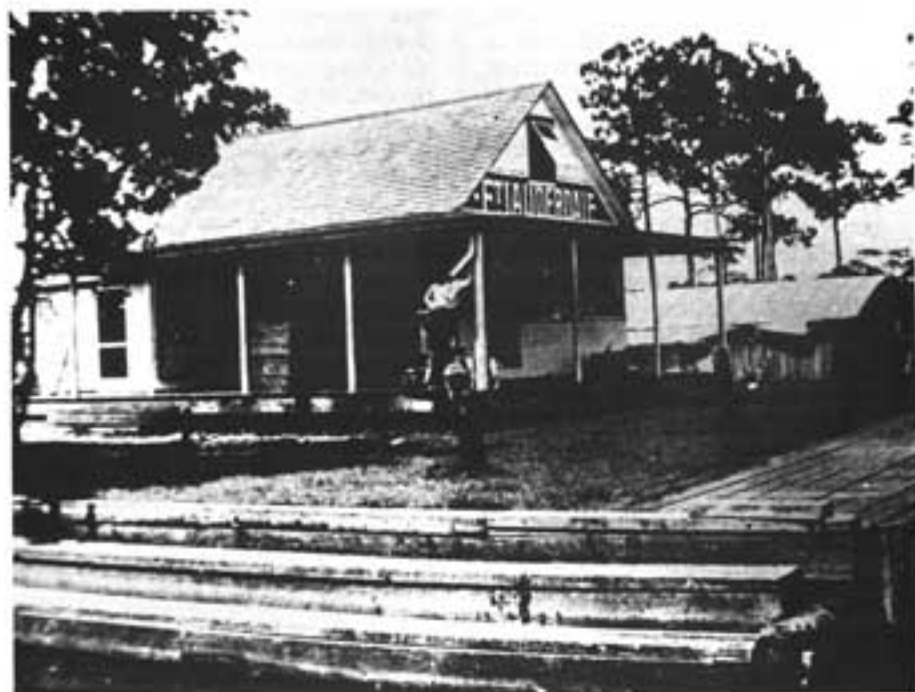
Always a strong, resourceful

woman, Ivy Stranahan saved what she could of her husband's holdings. Left with only the house and in need of money, she leased the downstairs as a tea room and restaurant called the Waters Edge Inn. From time to time, Ivy would also rent rooms on the second floor to winter tourists while she made the attic rooms on the third floor her home.

Finally in 1939, the Blackwells leased the home and turned it into a lovely family restaurant called the Pioneer House. It welcomed the families of Fort Lauderdale into its cozy rooms for dinner for over 40 years. Once the tunnel under the New River was finished in the late 1960s, it diverted traffic away from the House. The property and the business went into decline and in 1979, the Pioneer House closed its doors for good.

Ivy died at the age of 90 on August 30, 1971, two years before the House was added to the National Register of Historical Places.

Today, the House stands ready to welcome visitors once again into its time warp rooms — into Fort Lauderdale's past. It is used by many civic and social groups for outings for everything from girl scout tours to society weddings. There are rooms in which to hold intimate dinner parties and verandas just made for dancing. It is there as always, waiting to serve its community, on the banks of the New River on the road to Lemon City. Truly, a view of our past.



Frank Stranahan's first trading post.

In September, thousands of South Floridians will be drawn to one of the oldest and most colorful political traditions in our community: the annual Dante B. Fascell Labor Day Picnic.

There they will find fun and music and children and games — friendly and enthusiastic crowds enjoying the holiday at Miami's Tropical Park. By any measure, the picnic is a major event, drawing heavy coverage in the local news media. Certainly, it is a far cry from its humble beginnings nearly 40 years ago.



Congressman Fascell hosts vast throng of picnickers.

Congressman's Labor Day Bash

By CONGRESSMAN DANTE B. FASCELL

The picnic began small, with a few friends who supported me when I ran for the Florida Legislature in 1950 but during the 32 years of my Congressional service, the picnic has grown, much as our community has grown. And it has evolved much as the nature and tastes of our South Florida society have evolved over the past four decades. What hasn't changed is the core concept — a family affair with food, entertainment and an emphasis on young people.

Labor Day was agreed upon because families and friends were reunited then after summer vacation, and it was the last holiday to enjoy before school, election campaigns and the usual busy season for all of us. More than 100 people volunteer their time, talent and efforts to the picnic; thousands of dollars must be raised each year to purchase food and supplies, rent equipment and pay for other incidentals; all donations must be reported under our strict campaign laws, and there has been no charge for those attending.

As Dade County's population boomed and my Congressional district shrank geographically (four Congressmen now represent wholly or in part the area I was first

elected to serve), the picnic has moved from place to place — although never to Dante Fascell Park, located in South Miami. I am happy to say it is a well-used park, especially by families and children, but it is not large enough to accommodate the crowds of the annual picnic which now average 5,000 to 6,000 people, but at one point hit nearly 20,000. Like our community, the picnics have had their moments of drama, both high and low.

When it all began, of course, everyone brought his own food and drink to the picnic, then as more and more people participated that became impractical so we had to standardize the operation, the picnic developed its own momentum, because so many people responded — and soon the Fascell Labor Day Picnic became a recognized political tradition.

In the early days, the Vic Damiano family, because they were in the catering business, took over food preparation responsibilities. We'd go to their catering facility on Saturday, and help prepare food: 15,000 pieces of chicken or 20,000 hamburgers; cut up 400 pounds of onions and make hundreds of pounds of salad, all of which went

into huge refrigerators until delivery to the picnic. One year, we prepared and served, hot, 2,500 pounds of pasta (rigatoni). Other years, there were hot dogs with mustard, catsup, relish and all the trimmings, potato salad, you name it. Another year, a carload of corn was donated, and was shucked, cooked and served.

At one point, we were serving three meals a day and drawing nearly 20,000 people to Crandon Park. Holiday picnickers created massive traffic jams at the Rickenbacker Causeway. The picnic committee and I decided the event was getting too large to manage properly, so the picnic was moved — first to Tamiami Park, then the Police Benevolent Association grounds, Larry Thompson Park and other locations, until finally we settled on Tropical Park. It is an ideal site with easy accessibility, lots of parking and plenty of shade. The picnic has been held there for the past five or six years.

Dante B. Fascell, a South Florida Congressman for the past 32 years, represents the State's 19th Congressional District. He also serves as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

The picnic has always featured entertainment for the whole family. One year, the local sky-diving club offered to put on a free show at Crandon Park. Unfortunately, the weather turned bleak, and as the planes took off, a dense cloud cover settled in and it appeared we would have to call off the drop. However, as so often happens if you live right, at just the proper moment in the program, a hole opened in the clouds and the sky-divers dropped. Three of them hit their marks on the beach. A fourth landed in the drink, but a safety boat was on hand to pull him out.



Congressman Fascell leads the bagpipers.

Another year, at Tamiami Park, a gas balloon was brought in complete with volunteer crew for demonstrations. While we couldn't take anybody up, the balloonist allowed the picnickers to climb into the baskets and the kids loved it.

The picnic has developed traditions of its own, not the least of

which is music. The reason is simple: I like music and so does everyone else. Besides, you can't have a holiday picnic without music, flags, kids and food. We've had performances by marching bands, uniformed units, and once, some years ago when coffeehouses were in vogue, we had coffeehouse entertainers from all over South Florida performing on our stage.

Faithful friend and music-maker Judge Eddie Swanko and his group have performed for years at our picnics. During one picnic, at Flagami Park, it was raining so heavily Eddie and his group had to take shelter in a shed — undaunted, they pushed open the shutter and continued playing for the people outside. The deluge never did let up but it didn't dampen appetites. People came out of their cars, stood in line and got their food. Unfortunately, we were serving hot-dogs, beans and coleslaw on paper plates that day. I recall one picniker pausing to wring the water out of the sodden rolls before eating the hot-dogs, rolls and all.

We have a short, entertaining program which starts with singing our National Anthem. This is followed by the "march-in" festivities led by that perennial crowd-pleaser, the rousing St. Andrews Bagpipe Band under Pipe Master John (Scotty) Sutherland. Their stirring music and colorful performance are a particular favorite of the Labor Day picnic crowds.

No two picnics are ever alike, and even after all these years, we learn with each one. Food service has evolved from people bringing their own to the operation in which the food was prepared, refrigerated and then cooked again at the picnic so the food was good and hot. One year, Skip Shepard's DuPont Plaza Hotel cooks worked all night long frying chicken; then the picnic committee worked all day boxing the chicken.

That great American picnic favorite, the hot-dog, proved to be somewhat of a problem. They had to be cooked in huge pots, lifted with tongs carefully to avoid being scalded, and then people had to go to another table for the fixings. The process, we learned, takes too long — people simply do not like standing in line waiting to get fed.

So, eventually, we decided to serve fried chicken prepared by experts in the business and boxed with all the trimmings and utensils, which is much easier to handle. This method has worked very successfully in recent years.

Another tradition over the years



Congressman talks to constituent.

has been the food service by the Pete Kouchalakos family and other volunteers. And there is Bob Tardif spinning cotton-candy for kids at the picnic, rain or shine. And Frank Gatteri and his wife, Kent, photographing the picnic for posterity. The picnic also traditionally served as the anniversary celebration for my beloved friend and supporter, the late George Korge, and his lovely wife, Jo.

In recent years, each picnic has had a theme. One year, we honored one of our men Missing in Action in Viet Nam. We marked our nation's Bicentennial with members of the picnic committee dressed in colonial costumes. For the 200th anniversary of our Constitution, we had quizzes and awarded prizes. Another time, we offered free health checks with civic groups providing blood pressure tests and the like.

Fortunately, our picnickers have departed in much the same condition they arrived in. We have experienced nothing more than the usual cut feet, twisted ankles and too much exposure to the bright Florida sun; we have never had a major mishap. Thank goodness. The picnic committee does keep an ambulance ready and a doctor is in attendance just in case.

In all the years, we cancelled the picnic only once — in the early 1970s, to protest the high cost of food. Several times, we reluctantly postponed the picnic, because of bad weather; the food that had been prepared was donated to charities.

After each picnic, our volunteers, led by the Kiwanis youth club, have always performed the clean-up,



Kids were always a big part of the Labor Day picnic.

which is a considerable chore. One year, at Tropical, we got a train-car load of watermelons. They had to be delivered in refrigerated trucks, sliced and laid out on tables. Then it began raining. People waited in their cars until, finally, one brave soul got out and helped himself to a slice of melon. Soon everyone followed, rain or no, and we ended up with watermelon rinds up to our ears.

The picnic committee has become quite skilled over the years in estimating the crowds and ordering sufficient food, supplies and equipment. Only once did we run short of food. That was the year we decided to serve fish filet sandwiches. It was at Flagami Park and a huge crowd showed up, far more than expected.

We quickly ran out of fish, so we rushed to a nearby supermarket and purchased more fish filets, then cooked up a second batch. That quickly disappeared, and we wound up making three trips to the markets that day to buy more fish and all the things that go with it. That was the last time we served fish.

While much about the picnic has changed over the years, what has never changed since the beginning is the core concept of the Fascell Labor Day Picnic — a day for family, friends, fun, flags and children. That will not change. With respect for the working men and women, and pride in our community and country, the picnic will likely continue to be a major South Florida tradition, an event for the entire family.

LETTERS

A HAPPY NOTE

Your article in the February *Update* on the opening of the Biltmore is delightful and great fun to read. The extra bonus is that you told me my father, Tex Rickard, was there. It is nice to know that he was on hand to enjoy such a lovely occasion.

Maxine R. Halprin
10532 SW 115 Street
Miami, FL 33176

Mrs. Halprin's letter to Helen Muir, sent to the Historical Museum, was given to *Update's* editor who has relayed it to Mrs. Muir.

BEAN SEED OIL

Your Fairchild article in the February *Update* reminded me:

The United States Government during WWI distributed castor bean seeds to plant for the oil for airplanes. I was the recipient of two batches of seeds, which I planted for the purpose of oil. I was ten years old. That was my farmer's contribution to WWI.

F. Spencer Houghtaling
4304 Russett Drive
St. Louis, MO 63134

The Final Word

In a sense you can think of Southern Florida as a region, bound together by common interests and common irritations, shared transportation systems that don't quite work, even weather.

Yet Southern Florida remains one of the most richly-varied of all United States locales. In this issue we have tried to capture some of this fascinating diversity with stories from the three largest Gold Coast counties, Dade, Broward and Palm Beach.

You can read stories about the greatest of all the salesmen of the Miami Land Boom in the 1920s, a Labor Day picnic which has transcended its political origins to establish itself firmly as a Dade County institution, a picturesque old house on the New River which served as an Indian trading post and also as the home to Fort Lauderdale's "first family," and the commercial oyster houses which thrived on Lake Worth in Lantana around the turn of the history.

As varied as the South Florida subject matter is, the authors of these four articles comprise an even more diverse lot — Emily Perry Dieterich, research historian for the Metro-Dade County Historic Preservation Division; Mary Collar Linehan, official historian of the City of Lantana; Gail Butler, communications officer for Citizens & Southern Bank's Florida operations, and Dante Fascell, one of our most powerful and influential Congressmen.

Clearly, the Historical Association of Southern Florida and the Caribbean serves an intriguing part of the world.

Mary Linehan's story on Lantana oystering is excerpted from her book, *EARLY LANTANA, HER NEIGHBORS AND MORE*. The book is now in its third printing but it's not that easy to find. If you want to know more about Lantana, send a check for \$18.50, which includes book, tax, postage and handling, to the Lantana Chamber of Commerce, 212 Iris Avenue, Lantana, 33462, or to the author at 139 Prospect Road, Lantana, 33462.

I trust M. R. D.

(Continued from Page 2)



Charlie Brookfield's Ledbury Lodge on Elliott Key.

In 1949 he found the first Spotted-breasted Orioles nesting in Coconut Grove. Several of these Guatemalan birds had apparently been blown to Coconut Grove during a tropical storm the previous year. Their descendants now can occasionally be seen in much of suburban Dade County.

He also helped establish the Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. In 1954 Fairchild Tropical Garden awarded him a Thomas Barbour Medal for "vision and unselfish devotion to the preservation of the vanishing Eden of South Florida."

Brookfield led National Audubon Society field trips to Everglades National Park and the Florida Keys. The boat tours started opposite the McAllister Hotel in downtown Miami. The showpiece of the tours was the Cuthbert Lake Rookery near Flamingo. The tours were discontinued after Hurricane Donna destroyed that rookery in 1960.

He continued to serve as National Audubon Society's Florida representative until his retirement in 1967. He wrote of another sanctuary, the then new John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, in *National Geographic* in 1962.

With Oliver Griswold he wrote *They All Called It Tropical*, a collection of essays on South Florida subjects such as John James Audubon, Indian Key and Guy Bradley. First published in 1949, the book has been reprinted eight times. Brookfield gave the copyright to the Historical Association in 1977. The eighth and ninth editions, in 1977 and 1987, were part of HASF's reprint series.

Charlie's ashes were scattered over Biscayne Bay, a final return to a place he loved so much.

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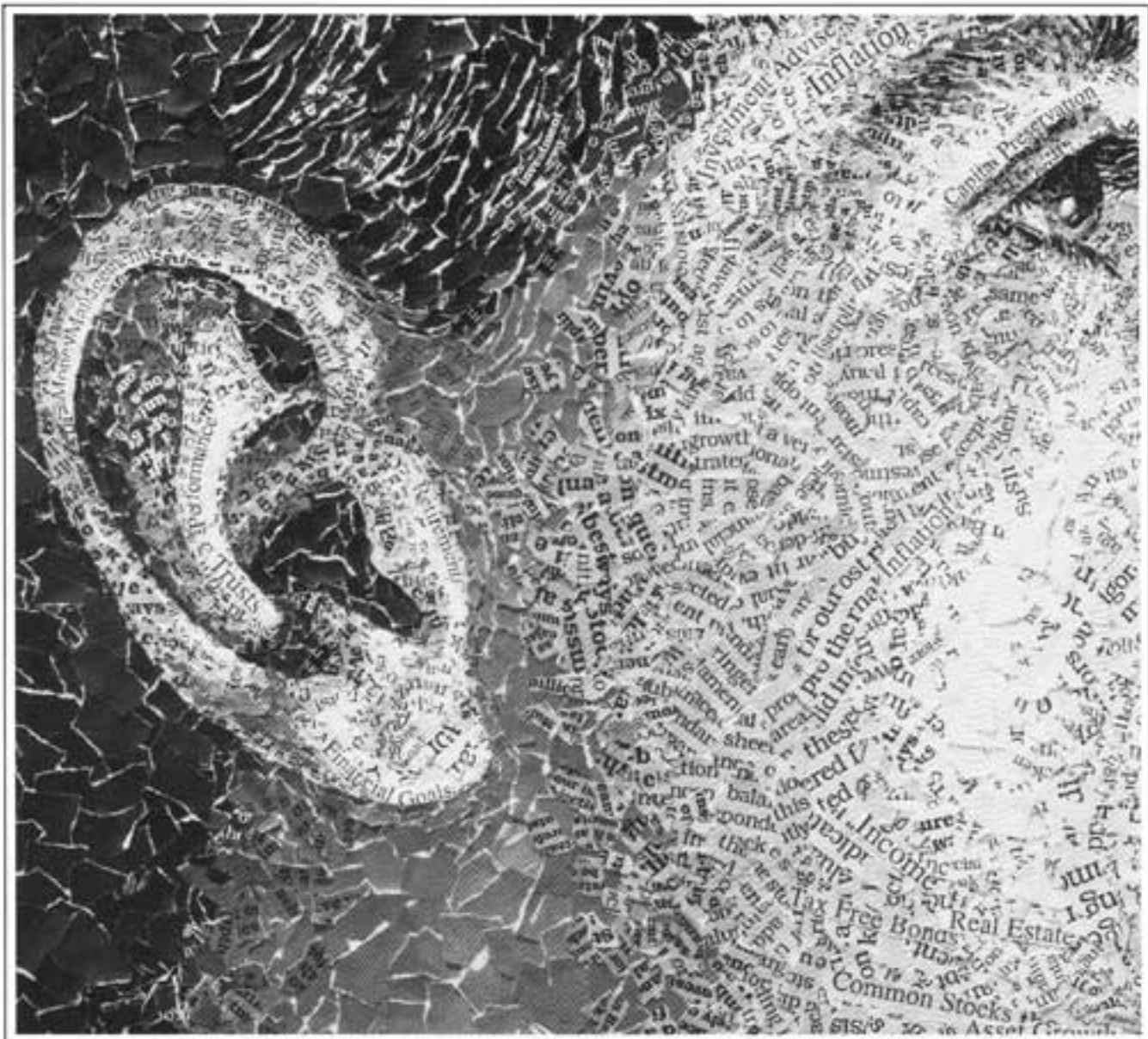


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