

HISTORY OF MIAMI BEACH

In 1870 Henry Lum and son Charles arrived by sailboat on the large sandbar off the southeast Florida coast, and were so impressed by the island they landed on, that they bought from the federal government, for 25 cents an acre, most of the island and property further north. Lum would later sell the property to fellow New Jerseyites Elnathan Field and Ezra Osborne, who, in turn would sell the land to John S. Collins and his son-in-law, Thomas Pancoast, who were also from New Jersey.

In 1913, Collins and Carl Fisher, who had made his fortune from his invention and later sale of the Presto-o-Lite Corporation and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, embarked on an agricultural venture on the beachfront land. Fisher loaned Collins the money he needed to complete the first bridge from Miami to Miami Beach that same year and the bridge, at the time the longest wooden bridge in the world, would be the catalyst for the 1915 incorporation of Miami Beach with a population of 150.

The great boom of the 1920's would see enormous growth, while during the Depression, new groups from the northeast would build many small hotels along lower Collins Avenue and Ocean Drive. This building boom helped bring the area out of the Depression and forty years later that area of Miami Beach would become the famous Art Deco District, known the world over as "South Beach," or "SoBe."

During World War II 500,000 Army Air Corps cadets passed through Miami Beach when it became a major training center. Many of these servicemen returned to make the area their permanent home after the war. By the end of the 1950s, Miami Beach had doubled its pre-war population from 28,012 in 1940 to 63,145 in 1960. WWII veterans continued to vacation in Miami Beach and many returned to South Florida as retirees.

When Fidel Castro took over Cuba in 1959, the revolution radically changed South Florida as half-a-million Cuban exiles came into the area. The 1980's and early '90's brought a massive infusion of investment capital that has produced a reborn Miami Beach. Although it has changed almost beyond recognition (again), Miami Beach has thrived amidst that change as it continues to be an international mecca for travel, business and 93,535 permanent residents in 2007.



The Miami Beach Historical Association, Inc., is a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Florida for the purpose of promoting and stimulating public interest and appreciation for the area's history, preservation of historical records, encouragement of scholarly research, and publishing about Miami Beach and surrounding areas

www.miamibeachhistory.org

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