

The Florida Twins Attended Ida M. Fisher Elementary School¹ Miami Beach, Florida

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Pacific Palisades, California
February 27, 2003

Introduction

In August 1937, my cousin, Fanny, wrote a letter to her young daughter, Anita, when she was enrolled in a New York summer camp for girls. Fanny wrote, “Dear Happiness,” “Extra Extra, did you hear the news? Betty had twins...two lovely boys,...they are so small, like two unbreakable dolls, smaller than the dolls you used to play with...they may grow up to be prize fighters.” They didn’t become prizefighters. Instead, they pursued careers as physicians.² In 1942,

¹ According to the Official Directory published by the Classroom Teacher’s Association of the Miami-Dade County School System, the *Ida M. Fisher Elementary School* was known as *Central Beach Elementary School* in the years 1942-1946, when our family lived in Miami Beach. It has been renamed, the *Feinberg Fisher Elementary School*, 1424 Drexel, Miami Beach, Florida, which is located approximately at 14th Street and Washington Avenue, one block west of Collins Avenue. The original address of the school was 1420 Washington Avenue. Apparently, the school now faces Drexel Avenue, so the address was changed. The campus location remains unchanged, however. The original school was combined with a high school on one campus. There were sixty students enrolled when school construction was completed on October 4, 1920. John Collins financed the initial construction but Carl Fisher provided the final financing to complete the project. He named the school after his mother. Actually, his mother’s name was Mrs. Ida Graham Fisher. But to avoid promotion of Carl Graham Fisher’s personal name, he changed the school memorial name to Ida M. Fisher. Later after World War II, the high school portion of the campus was relocated. It is Miami Beach’s oldest school. Howard Feinberg was a longtime principal of the school beginning in the late 1960s. His name was added to the Ida M. Fisher’ designation. Later, he became an historian of Miami Beach. As late as the 1980s, it was the largest public elementary school in the immense Dade County public school system. They moved to Miami Beach, where the

boys were enrolled at the local *Ida M. Fisher Elementary School*.³ Thus began the twins' long educational process toward their medical degrees.

It was only recently that I learned from a friend the specific name of the school that I had attended in Miami Beach. My question, which followed that knowledge, was to determine who was Ida M. Fisher. The results of the research became the subject of this article. After a thorough search on the Internet followed by several telephone calls to the elementary school administrative staff, personnel at the Historical Museum of Florida, and a staff person at the museum bookstore, I discovered Ida M. Fisher. Key information was then excerpted from several additional books that I purchased and other books that were obtained through the Interstate Library loan agreement between California and Florida. In the process of discovery, I learned much about the history of the development of Miami Beach and much more.

Henry M. Flagler (1830-1913)

My story cannot begin with the Fisher family. It must commence by commenting about Henry M. Flagler, who became one the first major land developers in Florida. Flagler was born in Hopewell, New York, in 1830. His public school education ended in Ohio at age fourteen, when dissatisfied with school, he went to work for the grain sales enterprise, L.G. Harkness & Company, in Bellevue, Ohio. Harkness was a half-brother to Henry Flagler. Flagler succeeded in impressing his employer to the degree that Henry was promoted regularly until he was earning an excellent salary and was given greater responsibilities. Coincidentally, a co-worker at the Harkness Company, John D. Rockefeller, became good friends with Flagler. Rockefeller had grand entrepreneurial dreams and convinced Flagler to join with him in the 1860's in the search for newly discovered fuel material called petroleum. The two men, united by common interests, formed the Standard Oil Company in 1870.

Henry Flagler married Mary Harkness (daughter, related to his prior employer's family). They moved to New York, but Mary was not well. Both decided to move to Jacksonville, Florida, where it was hoped that Mary's health would improve. She died unfortunately in 1881 at the age of forty-seven. Flagler next married Ida Alice Shourds. He decided that he liked the business development opportunities in Florida and invested heavily in the railways of Florida. By 1885, Flagler had built his investments into a hotel entrepreneurship. He also became a very successful railway magnate. In 1888, Flagler constructed the Hotel Ponce de Leon in St. Augustine and extended the Florida East Coast Railroad to bring guests and investors southward from Jacksonville to his new hotel and real estate developments. Additionally, the railway provided more rapid means of transporting vulnerable agricultural freight to market. Later he extended the rail line to Daytona Beach.⁴ His businesses thrived so the railway was continued southward to Palm Beach, where he built the Hotel Royal Poinciana.

A timeline of the important dates and events in South Florida included:

1. 1894: Royal Poinciana Hotel completed
2. 1896: Extended East Florida Railway to Palm Beach
3. 1896: Palm Beach was incorporated. Population of 300

⁴ Refer to maps.

4. 1896: Royal Palm Hotel completed
5. After 1896: Water works
Miami Electric Light and Power
1st Hospital

It was an ideal vacation spot for the wealthy clientele from the Northeast and Midwest, who sought a warm refuge from their severe winter weather. By 1896, Flagler completed the Florida East Coast Railroad lines to Miami. Not satisfied, Flagler continued the line extension to Key West in 1905. Flagler recognized the vital importance of the commerce from the strategic port of Key West, when the building of the Panama Canal was started by the United States. He completed the over-water causeway and bridges to the islands of Key West by 1912.

Unfortunately, Henry Flagler fell at home on his huge Florida estate and died of his injuries in 1913. He never witnessed the completion of the commercial development that he started in Florida and was not able to enjoy the results of his enterprise.

John Collins (1837-1928)

No history about Miami Beach would be complete without mention of John Collins. His name was synonymous with the city. He was born in Morristown, New Jersey, December 29, 1837, as the sixth generation of Collins' farmers, who had homesteaded properties in western New Jersey since 1678. They were Quakers, but John Collins did not wear the traditional Quaker garb. John Collins was passionate about farming and horticulture. He founded the New Jersey Horticultural Society. In 1855, he established the Pleasant Valley Nurseries and farmer's supply yards, where he cultivated Kiefer Pears and Wilson Blackberries.

In 1891, John Collins first purchased investment property in Florida. He visited Florida in 1896 and was captivated by his vision of a land that could support vast agricultural development. He was particularly interested in farming coconuts. The sixty-five miles of coastal property in Miami Beach was planted with coconuts in 1882. However, Collins soon expanded his farming interests to avocados,⁵ fruits, potatoes and vegetables, and other exotic crops.

By 1896-1907, Collins purchased the Miami Beach property that extended from 14th to 67th streets today. There were no roads or bridges to Miami Beach, so Collins commuted from Miami by boat. An area of a wider part of the water inlet was deepened to form a pond, which was called Lake Pancoast.⁶ Only a few houses and one small dock existed in the swamp that housed tenant farmers.

In 1909, Miami Beach consisted of an unattended mangrove swamp. Collins purchased 1675 acres, which corresponded with the area of present day 14th to 67th streets. He planted avocado and tropical fruits. Pine trees were also planted alongside the fields for wind protection, which was the origin of the Pine Street Drive name used today.

Collins formed the *Miami Beach Improvement Company*. They dredged the marshes, built the water canal to Biscayne Bay, and a wooden bridge⁷ to

⁵ Avocados were also known as Alligator Pears.

⁶ Named after the Pancoast family of land developers in Miami Beach.

⁷ To support the bridge, Collins used iron cylinder jackets that were lowered into the water. Wooden logs were placed into the iron jackets and concrete was poured into the

connect Miami city. Land development was costly and John Collins accepted investments from Carl Fisher that enabled completion of the bridge and commercial development of Miami Beach. The added financing from Carl Fisher was sufficient to complete the bridge in 1913. However, the wooden bridge was replaced by a more sturdy structure, the *Venetian Causeway*, in 1920. When Collins died in 1928 at age 90, he had established the largest avocado and mango groves in the region. However, the land boom for developers continued, and the Collins' properties were eventually replaced by extensive hotel developments and a booming tourist industry.

A portion of Miami Beach, between 21st - 22nd streets, was deeded to the city to create the *Collins Public Park*. Former Atlantic Boulevard became *Collins Avenue*.⁸ The Collins Canal, as it was then called, became the principle means of transport of farm produce, dredging wastes, and construction materials for the developers. The canal allowed for barge transport of the dredging landfill and materials. Collins tamed the swamps, rid the area of rats, and removed acres of old roots to permit construction and development of his real estate. His initial partnership with Ezra Osborne, who died, and Elnathan Field, permitted the development of a fifty-block area of Miami Beach. That region was known as the *Collins Waterfront District*.

In 1914, the Pancoast family⁹ of developers deepened the wider portion of the waterway, which was known as Indian Creek. It became known as *Indian Lake*, but it was really only a pond. Subsequently, the official name was changed to *Pancoast Lake*.

Tourism and real estate development were booming. While his children¹⁰ supervised the nursery business in New Jersey, John Collins pursued his real estate dreams in Florida. Both his sons and daughters eventually contributed key funds in support of their father's land investments. Their plan was to create a "New Atlantic City" in the midst of the Florida beaches.

remaining spaces. When completed the pilings were capable of supporting the weight of the bridge and traffic.

⁸ 1914.

⁹ Arthur Pancoast.

¹⁰ John Collins' children were Arthur, Lester, and Katherine. Katherine Collins married Thomas Pancoast, who formed the Miami Beach Improvement Company, a real estate firm.

More and more financial capital was required to fulfill Collins' dreams. In 1912, Carl Fisher entered into the Collins development plans by investing \$50,000 to complete the bridge over the canal, which separated their real estate holdings from Miami on the mainland. In return for his investment, Carl Fisher not only received interest earnings on the money that he loaned to Collins, but also was given two hundred acres of prime beach property.

Carl Fisher (1874-1939)

Celebrity entertainer, Will Rogers, said of Carl Fisher, "...He was the midwife of Florida." The Fisher monument in Miami Beach is inscribed, "He created a great city out of a jungle." Other descriptions of Carl Fisher included the following comments, "...daring, impulsive, always in a hurry, he ate rapidly because eating interfered with his work and interests, crazy at times, show off, his life was a constant battle of personal and business lawsuits, shy yet generous and polite to everyone, his favorite color was yellow because it reminded him of the sun, he loved to snack on salted peanuts that were always in evidence in large jars located in every room near his "spittoon," and, he was very rich."

Carl Fisher was born in Greensburg, Indiana, January 12, 1874. His alcoholic father, Albert Fisher, abandoned the family leaving the raising of Carl and his two brothers, Rolly and Earle, to his mother, Ida Graham Fisher. Guilt and shame over the alcoholic father and the poverty, which ensued, haunted Carl for many years. It must have been a very troubling family matter, because much later in his adult life, Carl helped to reunite his parents.¹¹

Albert and Ida Fisher married and moved originally to Greensburg, which was located in southern Indiana. They had three sons, Earle, Carl, and Rollo. When they separated, Ida was determined to provide the children with both an education and disciplined behavior. At that time, Indiana mandated school enrollment through the 8th grade. Ida took in boarders to pay rent and help her to support her single-parent family. They raised chickens and sold the eggs. The sons helped to cultivate the family vegetable garden and harvest their fruit trees.

As background, Ida Graham came from a distinguished family. Possibly, the Grahams came from a Scottish Graham Clan. They arrived in America in the late 1700s and migrated through the Cumberland Gap to Kentucky. Later the family moved to Indiana.

John Gray's daughter, Elizabeth Gray, married John Graham. Ida Graham was one of their many children. She married Albert Fisher.

¹¹ The Fisher parents had separated, but never legally divorced.

The Fisher family history is less well known. Carl Fisher's great-great grandfather, Phillip Fisher, came from Berlin and settled in Pennsylvania about 1770. Phillip married and had an only son, Jacob, in 1774. Jacob married Barbara Kyte in 1799 in Virginia. Their family had moved to Ohio to raise corn. There were nine children, all of whom survived. Jacob Jr. was the youngest. Jacob Jr. married Elenor Wilson (from Kentucky) and also fathered nine children. Their fourth child was Albert Fisher. The family moved to Indiana, where Jacob Jr. became a land speculator and was especially interested in developing lands that were adjacent to the canal waterways. Jacob Jr. died at age 92 in 1866.

Carl was strongly influenced by his paternal grandfather, who set a fine example for him. His grandfather had been a respectable and successful real estate developer in Indiana and one of the first persons to have had taken a "tin-type" portrait photograph taken.

Carl was burdened by poor eyesight due to severe myopic astigmatism. He was nearly blind without spectacles until about age 31, when he was properly diagnosed. He was considered to be "clumsy" and was referred to as "stupid" and nicknamed, "crip," which was short for "cripple," by his inconsiderate classmates. Carl became a "show off" and his behavior was not exemplary at school. By age twelve, he abandoned public school and reported to his mother that, "...he was going to support this family." Even without spectacles, Carl excelled at playing tennis, polo, and baseball, as well as racing. Later in life, he donated money as gifts for students, workers, and his own employee's children, who needed glasses or shoes.

Initially, Carl worked as a clerk at a grocery store. Later, he worked as a messenger for the local bank, then as a "butcher boy"¹² for the railway and later yet, as a peddler of newspapers, cigars, and peanuts. He won a national sales prize from Ingersoll. He was a voracious reader and idolized French Emperor Napoleon and American President Abraham Lincoln. Portraits of Napoleon and Lincoln always hung over Fisher's bed. Carl also named many roads and buildings in honor of Lincoln.

¹² ***Butcher Boy*** was a term used to denote a person, who sold or peddled newspapers. They carried their newspapers in a butcher's apron. The job was known as "news butcher."

Carl declared that he had to be happy at all times. He surrounded himself with boisterous and active people. Carl Fisher was a “doer,” not an academic thinker. By the 1890s,¹³ he was racing bicycles. He was a master cyclist. Carl also became the biggest bicycle dealer in Indianapolis. His brothers, Rolly and Earle, joined him at the bicycle shop. They had a spectacular showroom and repair facility. Carl was a “showoff.” He would stop at nothing to promote his business interests. He conceived a plan to ride a bicycle on a tightrope across the space between two buildings. He advertised and took “risks.” To promote sales, he released 1000 balloons that contained his name. The first 250 people, who returned to the shop with a balloon, received a free bicycle. He had contracted with the best manufacturer to obtain bikes at factory cost, which guaranteed the cost of the give-away and long-term future business with the factory. Business boomed.

About 1900, Carl fell in love with the automobile. He loved fast driving and set a record for auto racing at sixty miles per hours. Carl befriended Barney Oldfield and other famous auto racers of the time. His first foray into the auto business resulted in creating a spectacular auto showroom of the best and latest automobile models in Indianapolis. His business promotions included tipping a car over the edge of the roof of a building. Fortunately, the car landed upright on the street below. By deflating tires, Carl succeeded in enabling the auto to remain upright and with little damage. He became a newspaper hero. He also dared to hoist himself in his auto under a huge vermilion-colored balloon, being dangled high above the pedestrians and gawkers on the streets below. That stunt cost him \$4800.

Fisher’s first auto was a 2 1/2 horsepower French model, “De Dion Boulon.” In reality, it was only a motorized tricycle. He paid \$650 for it.

One day he found an abandoned compressed gas tank in his auto showroom, which had been abandoned by Fred Avery. Avery had obtained commercial rights for the patent, while traveling in France. Fisher recognized that compressed gas could power signal lights, sea buoys, and lighthouses. He especially wanted to use the fuel for night-lights on his racing autos and for traveling at night. In those early days, roads were poor quality and were made from dirt. Paving was expensive and rarely used. Avery and Fisher formed a successful partnership.

¹³ Age fifteen.

Because he wanted to drive fast at night, he invented the gas powered lamp for autos. It was called the “Prest-O-Lite,” which was a name coined after “Presto.” The initial investment to develop the nightlight took about eight years time and cost about \$6000.¹⁴ The work was extremely dangerous. There were many explosions and many workers were killed at his several factories. However, an improved and safer version of the lamp was eventually sold to the Union Carbide Company for \$9,000,000. Fisher received \$6,000,000, which made Carl Fisher a very very rich man by adulthood.¹⁵ In 1909, he married Jane Watts, who was thrilled with his exciting lifestyle and prestige.

Jane was only fifteen years of age¹⁶ when she first saw him at a social dinner party. They did not actually meet there, they only observed each other. She remembered her “love at first sight.” Carl Fisher remarked to his male friends, “...I’m going to marry that girl.” Later that year, a small fire started at home. Jane was alone, but managed a telephone call to Fisher, who immediately drove over to her home to rescue Jane. He drove her to see the new construction site of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. There was no turning back, Carl pursued her, convinced the family that despite their age difference,¹⁷ he wanted to marry and care for Jane for the rest of his life.

Jane Watts married Carl Fisher in 1913. His first present to her was a yacht, which was already waiting for her in Florida, when they traveled on their honeymoon. However, Fisher’s behavior initially may not have been so romantic. It was said that after the couple were installed in their train compartment, Fisher abruptly left Jane. She reported that she cried all night. What Carl Fisher had really done was arrange for a ship architect to be on the same train. They consulted for many hours late into the night to arrange a design for the honeymoon yacht. When Carl and Jane arrived in New Orleans, apparently the yacht was waiting for them.¹⁸ Jane apparently

¹⁴ 1904-1912.

¹⁵ 1900-1909.

¹⁶ June 1909.

¹⁷ In 1909, Jane was fifteen and Carl was forty years of age.

¹⁸ The yacht was named, *Eph*. They sailed down the Mississippi River to New Orleans and then proceeded into the Gulf of Mexico. Historian believe that the Fishers were stranded in Mobile Bay. Since the ship was severely damaged in the storm, Fisher’s friend, John Levi sailed the Eph back to Jacksonville, Florida for repairs. Fisher stopped in Miami on the way back, where he fell in love with the tropical weather and jasmine

forgave his lack of honeymoon romance for the pleasure of the gift of the yacht. Many times, Fisher's behavior demonstrated total lack of understanding of the emotional needs of his wife.

“After a bitter storm in the Gulf of Mexico, which required sheltering on a remote beach for days, they were rescued by a fisherman. Jane returned to Indianapolis to reassure her worried parents. Carl remained in Miami, purchased two lots with a small “winter” home and summoned Jane to return to see their new residence. In their lifetime, Carl purchased seven homes throughout the U.S., and a small “fleet” of luxury yachts.

Carl Fisher built the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1909. At first the roadway was made of level dirt. Fatal accidents occurred, which included deaths of spectators, who stood either too close to the road or were in the way of an uncontrolled spinout. The first Indianapolis tract was built and then closed after too many fatalities. Carl had the idea to test better roadways and to test creative auto designs.. He wanted to entertain the public with daring races by the fastest drivers in the world. However, he wanted American auto with American drivers to win the races. He finally decided upon brick material and bought out the entire factory stock. He inclined the turns to be able to maintain high speeds and remain on the track.

Carl convinced enthusiasts to pay \$1 for a ticket at the Speedway. It became a 500-mile race and started a long standing racing tradition, which continues to this day. The first Memorial Day race in 1911 cost Carl \$25,000 in promotion and other costs, but 80,000 people attended. It was an enormously profitable venture. Carl was flamboyant. He loved business promotions, which amused the clientele. His enthusiasm was insatiable. Fisher also envisioned creative designs for boats and airplanes. He conceived trans-Atlantic flight a decade before the famous Charles Lindberg flight to Europe.

By 1913, Fisher helped to build the Lincoln Highway connecting New York with San Francisco. He realized that the future of the auto depended upon having reliable roadways across the nation. President Woodrow Wilson wrote Carl of his personal appreciation for the road plan to unite Americans

aromas. In 1910, he telegraphed Jane about the “pretty little town” and invited her to return immediately. Fisher impulsively purchased two lots in Biscayne Bay to build a winter home.

across the continent. The Lincoln Highway Association was formed to raise funds and publicize the project. There were detractors, but in the end, Carl raised \$1,000,000 and helped to enable that bold plan. Fisher tried to enlist the donations of the major automakers and was often turned down. Eventually, there had to be Federal and State governmental funding to complete the expensive project. Competition for funds was often based upon the potential commercial benefits sought by towns that would become enriched by the business of the travelers along their local new roads. It is difficult to imagine an America without the major national highways.

Much publicity from the newspapers and radio was sent throughout the country. Donations were received from the major auto manufacturers, politicians, and corporations. However, there were equally generous donations from simple farmers, eager students, and ordinary citizens, who believed in the concept and development of national roadways. In contrast, the transcontinental railway system was completed many years prior in 1869, when the famous “gold spike” was nailed to unite the eastward and westward lines in Ogden, Utah.

The potential benefits that extensive railways and roadways could have upon the sales of real estate were well understood by Carl Fisher. Good roads brought many guests to his Indiana Motor Speedway. With the Lincoln Highway project well under way, Henry Flagler was already buying and extending the Florida East Coast Railway system to Palm Beach, and later to Miami and Key West. Carl immediately began to promote the north-south highway project, known as the Dixie Highway, which would link the northeast of America to Miami Beach. Roads in the south in the Carolinas and Georgia were poor, often flooded, or blocked by fallen trees. To sell Miami Beach real estate, Fisher needed year-round easy road and rail access to South Florida. Only the very wealthiest folks could sail the Atlantic to Florida.¹⁹

¹⁹ Carl Fisher never wanted to travel outside the United States. However, his wife convinced him to take a trip to Europe in 1914. While there, World War I began and the Fishers were barely able to obtain ship tickets to return to America. Carl was immediately aware of the value of aircraft in both the defense of America and the military offensives of the war. He had built Allison engines from the aircraft designs of General Motors Corporation. His interest in aircraft stemmed from his ideas about racing. However, the war and his passionate interest in developing Miami Beach as a vacation paradise distracted him.

He helped to plan the Dixie Highway from Indiana to Miami Beach. Carl Fisher envisioned Florida as the most important automobile destination for recreation and development in America.

In 1917, the Florida Convict Lease Act was signed into law. It provided for convict labor to build the needed roadways. In addition, there were no provisions for “facilities” for auto travelers to Florida. Therefore, camps of tents, lodging, and facilities for fresh water, as well as, gas, and tire and auto repair stations developed along the Dixie Highway. Later an additional roadway from Tampa along the Gulf coast to Miami was completed in 1927. It was called the *Tamiami Trail*.

By 1920, Fisher’s vision was realized as the Florida real estate boom was peaking.²⁰ In his massive effort to promote his plan, Fisher utilized every possible publicity stunt including using elephants, parades, and flamboyant newspaper press advertisements. He even escorted President Harding from Jacksonville to his newly completed Flamingo Hotel²¹ penthouse in Miami Beach in order to capitalize upon the sensational and extravagant episode. The publicity stunts paid off in a massive public interest to attract sales of land in Miami Beach.²²

²⁰ Our granduncle was among the many Miami Beach real estate venture capitalists during the booming 1920s. Two Halperin’ letters are appended to this article. The first was written on the Ponce de Leon Hotel stationery (Miami, Florida) in 1925 to Louis’s niece, Anita Fisherman, in New York. Halperin’ real estate ventures were named, ***Southern Realty Sales Co., Incorporated, Subdivisions General Brokerage***, 1618 Old Halcyon Arcade, Miami, Florida, and ***Metropolitan Investment & Realty Company, Inc., Real Estate Brokers – Investments***, Suite 202-204, Lorraine Arcade, Miami, Florida. Their real estate investments in Miami Beach were ruined by both the hurricane in 1926 and the devastation from the 1929 Great Depression. Our granduncle returned to his residence and management of his principle businesses in New York.

²¹ The Flamingo Hotel was finally completed in 1921 at an astonishing cost of \$2,000,000.

²² By 1925, the mad rush of the real estate boom “sold out.” Miami Beach properties had totaled over \$37,000,000 in real estate sales, which included 56 hotels, 800 private residences, 8 bathing pavilions, 3 polo fields, 3 golf courses, and 1 church (which Fisher had promised to the community). Carl Fisher owned 5 of the Miami Beach hotels.

Carl Fisher and *Altonia*²³

The first recorded information about Florida followed the explorations of Ponce de Leon and the Spanish missions to Christianize the native populations in 1567. There was a long period of neglect of the area after the Spanish conquest. In the 19th century, there was rediscovery of Florida. At first, development was tentative. Even by the mid-1850 the only significant human inhabitants of Florida were the *Seminole tribes*, who replaced the *Toquestas (Tekestras)*.²⁴ Colonial exploration of the region of Louisiana had been undertaken and supported by the French Monarchy, but the French had no apparent interest in Florida.

It was in 1870 that Henry B. Lum and his son, Charles, from New Jersey, described the modern details about the Florida region. He reported the area to be "...oceans of sand and tangled masses of sea grapes, rattlesnakes, mosquitoes, wildcats, raccoons, 'possums, rabbits, and bears." Henry Lum was the first farmer, who planted crops in Florida. The Lums purchased several hundred acres of land in the middle of the future Miami Beach island. They were joined by other venture capitalists, Ezra Asher Osborn and Elnathan T. Field from New Jersey. In all, they bought about sixty-five miles of oceanfront swamp from the Florida government at the astonishing price of about \$0.75-\$1.25 per acre. They planted coconuts brought from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Trinidad. Bad weather, impossible marshland, rats, and rabbits contributed heavily to the failed agriculture attempt. In addition to the inadequate quality of the soil, the agricultural failure was also related to the inability to transport sufficiently large quantities of crops to market. Shipping by boat was too expensive for the small volume of crops to ensure any profits.

However, John Stiles Collins, a horticulturist from New Jersey, learned about the potential of tropical coconuts and purchased a large section of the Osborn's land in 1896. Osborn had died and Elnathan Field was eager to sell off property. In 1907 the crops again failed. Collins bought 1,670 acres

²³ Carl Fisher originally called his property, Alton Beach. He referred to it as *Altonia*. In 1915 the island was officially incorporated as Miami Beach, Florida, and the name was changed. The initial population of the newly incorporated Miami Beach was 150.

²⁴ Tequesta natives died out after becoming infected with the communicable diseases brought to the area by the Spaniards.

from Field. Collins' son-in-law, Thomas J. Pancoast, joined the venture and the two of them planted avocados.²⁵

When John Collins completed the canal to bring water-borne transportation to his section of land, he could not obtain adequate investment interest due to the poor road accessibility to the island. Collins conceived of the wooden bridge to connect the land to both mainland Miami and Biscayne Bay. However, despite the added capital invested by his children, Collins needed more money to complete the bridge. Carl Fisher provided \$50,000, from which he gained significant interest on his investment. However, Carl also obtained land from Collins.

Fisher next purchased land from the Lummus brothers²⁶, who had originally obtained 660 acres of the southernmost tip of the peninsula. The Lummus's properties were called the ***Ocean Beach Realty Company***. By 1920, Fisher owned not only the original 1670 acres obtained from Collins but also another 2760 acres purchased from the Lummus brothers. He cleared the swamps, raised the land level adequately, and brought in the Everglades' topsoil to create a permanent base for sub-dividable properties. He utilized manual and mule labor, water transport, and eventually road transport over the bridge, as the means of accessing labor and materials. Eventually, machines replaced the mule and hand labor. The Fisher properties were called ***Alton Beach Realty Company***. Collins and his son-in-law, Pancoast, joined to form the ***Miami Beach Improvement Company***.

The city of Miami Beach was officially incorporated in 1915. The following individuals administered Miami Beach:

1915-1918, John Newton Lummus, Mayor

1918-1920, Thomas J. Pancoast, Mayor

1920-1922, Thomas E. James, Mayor

²⁵ Avocados were originally called avocado pears or alligator pears.

²⁶ The Lummus brothers were also prime Miami Beach developers. John N. Lummus was a native of Bronson, Florida. He worked as a telegrapher in Miami in 1895, but became a railway dispatcher for Flagler 1896-1908. His brother, James E. Lummus opened a general merchandise store 1900-1908. When the railway was extended to Key West, James Lummus won a commissary contract with the Flagler railway and soon opened another bank in Miami. The brothers joined to create a 3rd bank in 1911. Together they developed 600 acres of the southern tip of Miami Beach called, ***Ocean Beach Lots***.

1922-1926, Louis F. Snedigar, Mayor
1926-1928, John Newton Lummus, Jr., Mayor
1928-1937, Louis F. Snedigar, Mayor
1937-1941, John Hale Levi, Mayor
1944-1945, John Hale Levi, Mayor
1918-1947, John Hale Levi, City Councilman

Carl developed the swamps into subdivided parcels, laid out the streets and placed the utilities. He built the elementary and high school, which were originally combined onto one campus on 14th street. The school project was completed in 1920 and was named after his beloved mother, *Ida M. Fisher School*.²⁷

On October 11, 1920, the first public school opened in Miami Beach. Carl Fisher had donated the money to complete construction. He named it after his mother, Ida Graham Fisher, but to avoid any personal recognition, he purposefully changed her initial to “M.” Thus, it has remained the Ida M. Fisher School. It was both an elementary school and high school initially. Later, the high school was moved to a separate campus. There were also private schools in Miami Beach. The Montemare School was built in 1921 to educate the children from the upper class and served as a boarding school. Thomas J. Pancoast supported a one-room classroom in 1916-1920, which was called the Eunice Martin School.

The swamps of Miami Beach were barely above the waterline. Fisher had to build sturdy and high sea walls, clear the roots, pump in sea mud utilizing dredges, and wait for the residual water to drain out. However, by that process, the dry land level was sufficiently raised to permit land development. Vital topsoil was imported from the Everglades region, which permitted both profitable agriculture and other land development. The entire process required barges to move the materials to and from the region. The parcels could then be sold off to eager tourists and investors.

In 1912, at the time of the Lummus²⁸ brother’s and John Collins’ real estate development, the only way to transport materials and investors to Miami

²⁷ The twins attended the Ida M. Fisher Elementary School in Miami Beach from 1944-1946 (Grades 1-3).

²⁸ The Lummus brothers actually loaned John Collins more money than Carl Fisher, but Fisher’s loan was very timely and guaranteed the completion of the bridge.

Beach was by boat. The Collins Canal was not yet completed, despite an infusion of cash by the Lummus brothers, Collins, and his son-in-law, Pancoast. Fisher loaned the balance of \$50,000 needed by Collins and obtained land in exchange, plus interest on the loan. The newly constructed railways to Miami Beach²⁹ and the Dixie Highway later permitted a huge influx of residents and tourists, which led to the sales boom of the 1920's.

Fisher set out to clear the swamps of the overgrowth of tangled roots that covered his newly acquired land. It was backbreaking manual labor and nearly impossible. One friend from the west coast remarked about using a plow, so Fisher advised him to build the largest plow possible. The work then proceeded rapidly. Mules were used to pull the plow. Later, machines assisted and speeded the process. Dredges were employed to fill in the sea walls with mud from the bay. The sandbar was allowed to drain and "sweeten." What resulted was a brilliant reflective white sandbar of land. Topsoil was barged from the Everglades to Miami Beach, which was then devoid of any vegetation. Gone also were the rodents and mosquitoes. A world search for exotic plants, trees, flowers, bushes, and fruit trees was begun and the new plantings brought to Miami Beach. Beautiful birds and butterflies took up residence in the newly created "paradise." Tourists followed. By 1928, Fisher had amassed another 2760 acres to compliment his original 1670 acres received from Collins. He also filled in two adjacent islands, Sand Island and Bull Island. Bull Island was renamed Bell Island. Sand Island became Star Island, with the express purpose of housing the Flagler monument, which was dedicated to the man who brought the railways to south Florida. Star Island housed the Miami Beach Electric Light and Power Company plant.

By 1917, Carl Fisher had completed construction of the Lincoln Hotel, which was located two blocks inland on Lincoln Road. It was modeled after Henry Flagler's famous Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach. Fisher completed the Flamingo Hotel in 1921. In 1925, he established the Nautilus Hotel. He built the Dade Hotel for his office employees, which was followed by the King Cole Hotel outfitted for sportsman. Lincoln Boulevard had been built in the center of his property. So it was natural that the Fisher Office building headquarters and Lincoln Hotel were nearby. In a fascinating way, Fisher was extremely generous. He dreamed of creating a winter paradise in

²⁹ Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway.

Miami Beach with his fortune, but did not covet making his fortune through his real estate investments. Later this principle would become his undoing.

In general, the layout of Miami Beach was principally divided between the properties owned by Collins, Fisher, and the Lummus brothers. Collins and Pancoast held properties along the canal, which extended to the bay. Fisher properties were in the mid-section of the region. The southern tip of Miami Beach contained the Lummus's properties, including the Lummus Park that was generously donated to the city by the family.

Jane Watts Fisher was drawn to Carl's flamboyance and excessive enthusiasm. She loved their fast lifestyle. The Fishers established their own home in Miami Beach in 1915. Jane was a celebrity and was often photographed in bathing costumes. However, she scandalized the public when she appeared without the traditional full-length black stockings. Despite the sensation that she caused, Jane loved to be photographed and her publicity started a new trend in bathing attire. Her husband approved of her style setting and even promoted the bathing beauty concept in Miami Beach. There were famous athletes and "stars" invited to compete in swim contest and beauty pageants, all the more to promote his real estate empire. Movie studios of Hollywood were encouraged to "shoot" their new films in Miami Beach.

At first there were few sales of the subdivided properties. The period from 1915 to 1920 was a real estate lull. There were no "takers." Fisher dreamed up a sensational idea, he raised prices and increased his advertising. He instructed his employees, "...if property doesn't sell, raise the price. If it still doesn't sell, raise the price again." And indeed the real estate sales "boomed" in the 1920's. The initial population of Miami Beach in 1920 was 644. It increased to 30,000 by 1926.

Other Fisher accomplishments included:

1. 1917, leased Miami Beach Land for the U.S. Army Air Corps for winter training during World War I. Fisher charged the Army \$1.00 per year for the use of his property.
2. 1919, a moderate-sized resort development in Detroit called, Grosse Lake, which was located fifteen miles south of Detroit on the river that connected Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie.
3. Considered developing properties on the Connecticut seashore.

4. 1921, started development of the Montauk resort on the eastern tip of Long Island. Acquired more estate land on the north shore of Long Island in 1922, and built the Purdy Boat Works for yachts and speedboats. The Montauk Manor Hotel and Resort opened with 200 rooms. There was a 6-story office building for Fisher employees, the Montauk Yacht Club, and several expensive homes.
5. 1924, founded the Detroit Marine-Aero Engine Company, which produced experimental engines for speedboats.

Fisher built facilities to encourage tennis players, swimmers, golfers, water sportsmen, and yacht racing. Hydroplanes brought passengers 1539 miles from New York to Miami Beach. Initially, the hydroplanes required refueling stops and hand held lights from the ground to illuminate the flight path. Planes flew at altitudes of only 500 feet. During the period of Prohibition, alcohol could be obtained by sailing or flying to clubs in Havana, Bimini Island, and Nassau. Those places for obtaining “booze” were called “wet spots.” The tourists also sought gambling. Less well discussed in history books was the fact that the general interest in obtaining alcohol and gambling contributed mightily to the development of rapid transportation, road and railways, profitable commercial air flights, and a booming economy in south Florida. Luxury chartered flights and steamships, such as the P & O (Peninsular and Occidental) were inaugurated. Interestingly, P & O Steamship Company was a subsidiary of Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway Company. Flagler was a significant player in the Florida real estate boom. His railway held a monopoly in rail transportation to south Florida. In fact, when Henry Flagler learned of the U.S. plan to build the Panama Canal, he immediately recognized the economic importance of the Key West port facility in bringing shipping to Florida and the east coast. Fisher promoted air and ship travel by encouraging the “Aero Club of America” Derby races in Florida and was a leader of the development of International commerce from Central and South American routes through Florida.

Real estate speculators also flocked to Miami Beach. Often they were dishonest, which infuriated Fisher. To protect his professional name and person, he temporarily stopped all Miami Beach sales of his property, advertised nationally that Fisher property investments were solely confined to Miami Beach and were not part of the furious speculation on the Florida mainland. At the time, speculators were obtaining mortgages on property with barely any down payment. For a tiny amount of cash, the sale could be

“bound” by merely the receipt of the sale. At times, a property could be resold at increasingly inflated prices several times in one day. The speculators were referred to as the “Binder Boys.” By the time one property sold, it could be resold for a large profit. The “value” of the sales were totally inflated and without equity. Fisher countered by demanding a 25% down payment on all sales of his land. That ended the speculation of property on Miami Beach. The “Binder Boys” went home. However, the most serious causes for loss of the Miami Beach property values were related to the devastating effect of the 1926 hurricane and the Wall Street crash in 1929. With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, real estate prices for investments in Miami Beach were nearly ruined.

With the advent of booming property sales in the 1920’s, as well as the development of the auto roads, railroads, shipping lanes, and air flights, increased demands for communications followed. In 1920, 400 telephone lines were connected to Miami Beach. Fisher received the first 200 telephones at the Flamingo Hotel and another 60 telephones at his Lincoln Hotel. At first, operators made the connections manually. Soon afterwards, South Atlantic Telephone & Telegraph Company installed their first automatic central exchange in Miami Beach. Western Union Telegraph Company also opened in Miami and Miami Beach in 1920. There was a huge public demand for service. 1920 was the year that Movie Studios sought venues in Miami Beach. With the added publicity, Miami Beach had succeeded in establishing itself as America’s greatest winter resort.

The first hotel to be completed in Miami Beach was known as the Atlantic Beach Hotel (1915). The owner, William J. Brown, who was a Scottish born developer, later changed the name of the hotel to “Brown’s Hotel”. Brown’s Hotel boasted concrete foundation floors, two-level apartments with modern kitchens. In addition to the hotels, there was a huge demand for apartments and living quarters for both the tourist public and workers.

A list of the names of some of the Miami Beach Hotels of the era is fascinating to review:

1. 1915: Brown’s Hotel (first hotel in Miami Beach)
2. 1917: Breaker’s Hotel (Seaplanes could land within 100 feet from the beach.
3. 1920: Lincoln Hotel (Carl Fisher)
4. 1920: Flamingo Hotel (Carl Fisher)

5. 1920: Numerous apartment houses were constructed to accommodate the huge number of tourists from the over-booked hotels.

Fisher's real estate empire eventually earned him a net worth of \$50,000,000 by the time of his prime in the mid 1920's. His plan encompassed his passion to create in Miami Beach the "Rue de la Rue of Paris," which would contain pedestrian malls and wide sidewalks, electric street lamps, and large windowed shops with the latest fashionable merchandise. Fisher built and managed the "Miami Beach Electric Light and Power Company," which provided adequate power to his new hotels and resort operations.

Although not owned by Fisher, there was a popular restaurant opened in Miami Beach in 1920. It was called, "Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant," owned and operated by Joe and Jennie Weiss. Joe was a cook at another restaurant originally, but decided to create his own establishment. "Original Joe's" was housed in a small home in 1920. In 1940, "Joe's" was rebuilt in another venue and continued to operate under the management of his children. In 1998, my wife and I were taken to Miami Beach's newest "Joe's," which was a beautiful restaurant with a fabulous assortment of seafood on its menu.

Despite his enormous wealth, Carl Fisher became an alcoholic. His womanizing was notorious. He and Jane had only one child, but that son died at one month of age due to pyloric stenosis. Jane attempted to keep their marriage together by adopting another son. Jane and Carl Fisher divorced in 1926. Jane remarried several times, but none of the subsequent husbands could provide her with the opulent and exciting life she had experience as Carl Fisher's wife. Jane died later in 1968.

Fisher had attempted to develop another "Miami Beach" on Long Island. He envisioned fabulous development of Montauk, Long Island, which could accommodate a large port facility to support European tourists en-route to America. Montauk would have been an hour closer by airplane to England and Europe. It was his dream to create a "summer paradise" in Montauk to rival the "winter paradise" in Miami Beach. Financing the Montauk development required issuing construction bonds. The bonds were backed by the equity of his Miami Beach properties. Therefore, when the severe hurricane of 1926 occurred, followed by the 1929 Wall Street and stock market crash, Miami Beach real estate values plummeted. Additionally, the Montauk investment was hampered by bad weather and a short season (unlike Miami Beach) and the cash flow was poorly managed. He stopped

construction in Montauk as a result, fearing he would become too cash poor to pay for the development. When the bonds became due, the depressed value of the equity in the Miami Beach properties was insufficient to pay off the Montauk bonds.

During his latter years, Carl Fisher became involved in diverse interests besides the resort developments in Miami Beach and Montauk. He invested in engineering improvements for diesel engines. It was his foresight in auto and boat racing that enabled Fisher to envision advanced diesel designs that would permit more efficient land and sea transport of heavier machines and cargo. He understood that better highways would permit more Americans to enjoy auto travel. He developed the "Aerocar," which was a trailer that could be hauled behind an automobile. The Aerocar was manufactured in Opa Locke, Florida in 1929. However, the stock market crash in 1929 resulted in severe decreased auto sales and interest in the trailer travel. It was the correct product but the wrong timing. The Aerocar never had a chance of economical success.

In 1933-1935, after Franklin Roosevelt became President, Fisher proposed to develop inexpensive pre-fabricated houses. He envisioned a large market for such easily constructed houses made especially for concentrations of government workers, Negro laborers in larger cities, etc. Fisher also conceived of large outdoor advertising signs to be hung from tall poles and buildings, which could be lighted electrically. That concept later became part of the immense advertising industry in America.

By 1936, Fisher attempted to develop an auto speedway in Miami, which would have been based upon his successful Indianapolis Motor Speedway. However, the Miami venture did not come to fruition. Fisher promoted the use of rubber-soled shoes and the use of a mixture of rubber and sand to make skid-resistant belting, hammers, and surfaces. Also in 1936, Fisher patented a solar operated refrigeration system. The product was never manufactured, but Fisher seemed to have a never-ending succession of creative ideas and important engineering concepts.

Carl Fisher married his secretary of many years, Margaret Collins. Margaret had been his mistress for many years, including the latter part of Fisher's marriage to his first wife, Jane. Margaret also enjoyed consuming large quantities of alcohol, which served to encourage Carl in his own excessive drinking.

Slowly, Fisher began to lose his empire. As the bonds became due, he was forced to sell off the properties that he had coveted. Eventually, all of the properties were lost, including his magnificent hotels, polo fields, golf courses, and the Montauk resort. Fisher had been enormously wealthy, but he was cash poor. In fact, Fisher was a very poor business manager and never properly accounted for cash flow. He had almost no receipts or detailed managerial books to determine the solvency of any of his businesses.

Carl drank heavily, despite the pleading of his doctors, personal friends, and his former wife, Jane, with whom he maintained a close friendship even after their divorce. By 1934, Fisher developed diabetes. He gained weight, which then caused him to require daily insulin injections. He became anxious, depressed, and hypochondriac. He sought out quack doctors for fad diets and treatments. Within a few years, Fisher developed severe complications of diabetes that included neuropathies and retinal hemorrhages. His vision deteriorated markedly. By 1937, he retained large amounts of abdominal ascites fluids and cirrhosis of the liver. He had a massive gastric hemorrhage on July 15, 1939, presumably from esophageal varices, which bled, and was hospitalized in Miami Beach, where he had lived as a boarder in a small room. He was miserable, mortally ill, and lonely. He died in the hospital.

Conclusion

By 1920 Prohibition had ended. Miami Beach “Firsts” included:

1. Luxury Flamingo Hotel
2. Causeway across the bay
3. Electric trolley service, which connected Miami on the mainland and permitted the import and ease of transportation for both the tourists and the labor force required to provide the services at the hotels and facilities.
4. Automatic telegram and telephone services, including Western Union
5. Post office on Miami Beach
6. City address with street names instead of “rural Miami” post
7. Public School (Ida M. Fisher)
8. PTA (Parent Teacher’s Association)
9. Congregational Church of Miami Beach. Later, the first Church of the Latter Day Saints was established in a private home in 1920, St. Patrick’s Catholic church was built in 1926, and Beth Jacob synagogue was established in 1927.
10. First Miami Beach official census
11. Electric Power service, with the plant facilities located on Star Island
12. Polo was introduced to Miami Beach by Carl Fisher

Later developments in Miami Beach included the severe hurricane in 1926, which ruined much of the properties and ended the real estate boom. Al Capone, the Chicago gangster, moved to Miami Beach. He lived on a nearby estate that was located on Palm Island. Capone brought in casinos and speakeasies, but was shunned by the newspapers, the American Legion, the governor of Florida, and other influential residents. However, Capone’s influence in the Miami Beach area was finally terminated when he was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to Alcatraz Prison in San Francisco in 1931. Capone died in prison of tertiary syphilis. The final destructive blow to the real estate success of Miami Beach was the economic devastation from the Great Depression, which began in 1929. After 1929, Fisher worked for the Pancoast family in their Miami Beach Improvement Company. They built the Key Largo Caribbean Club and Fishing Club, which later became a gambling club. Carl Fisher died in 1939 of alcoholism and cirrhosis of the liver.

The famous properties of Miami Beach had been divided between John Collins and Carl Fisher. Collins’ properties were to the south, while Fisher

developed the properties to the north. Arthur Pancoast built the Pancoast Hotel at 29th street in 1923. Other investors arrived, which included the Lummus brothers, who sold oceanfront properties. They also sold a large parcel of the land to the city of Miami Beach, which was dedicated as a permanent public park. Collins Boulevard had been built in the middle of the property so that it provided excellent access to the subdivision of homes, hotels, and apartments. The land north of 44th street became much more exclusive and was referred to as “millionaire row.” A “jog in the road” along Collins Boulevard became the site for both the Fontainebleau and Hilton Hotels. In 1942, an “Ocean Walk” was built, which separated the hotels from the beach and cabanas. The Edgewater Beach Hotel was constructed at 1410 Ocean Drive, a well-known site.

World War II changed Miami Beach completely. Beginning in 1942, 500,000 enlisted and drafted army and air force military personnel had to be housed in the Miami Beach hotels and apartments. The military was trained and exercised on the beaches. New recruits were crammed into all available quarters. The army technical training center was housed at 24th street and the troops were drilled on the beaches and golf courses. Many facilities were used as hospitals and clinics. During the most active part of the war, GI’s were brought to Miami Beach for rest and recuperation from their battle exhaustion. They were also housed in Miami Beach in facilities that were located between 24th – 42nd streets.

During the post-war period, Miami Beach underwent renovation. The art deco style of architecture of the area established in 1920s-1930s was preserved. Growth of the beach area was slow at first, but investors were encouraged to build residences and hotels with direct access to the beach. Pre-war buildings were gradually replaced by new developments in the post-war period. Much greater attention was placed on the development of the south beach area. More and more glamorous hotels began to appear in the 1950s-1960s.

After the over throw of the Cuban government by Fidel Castro, there was a huge influx of Cuban immigrants into the south Florida area. Large numbers of Haitian immigrants followed to Florida during the next decades. Today, Miami Beach is a bustling town of glamorous hotels, shopping malls, discotheques, and teaming tourists.

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