

ST. ANTHONY CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCHOOL

by Merrilyn C. Rathbun

I. Early Days and Settlers 1893 to 1910

The first recorded Catholic mass in the Fort Lauderdale area was said by the Reverend Father A. M. Fontan at Frank Stranahan's New River Camp on December 25, 1894. It was said to a congregation of Bay Biscayne Stage Line transit passengers, visiting sportsmen and one or two local people. Probably few, if any,

of the congregants were Catholic.¹

The first known Catholics to reside in Fort Lauderdale were Philemon and Lucy (Louisa Catherine)(Murray) Bryan. The Bryans, with their children and collateral relatives, were among Fort Lauderdale and Broward County's earliest families. The large Bryan family had migrated from Georgia to north Florida in the 1820s, settling

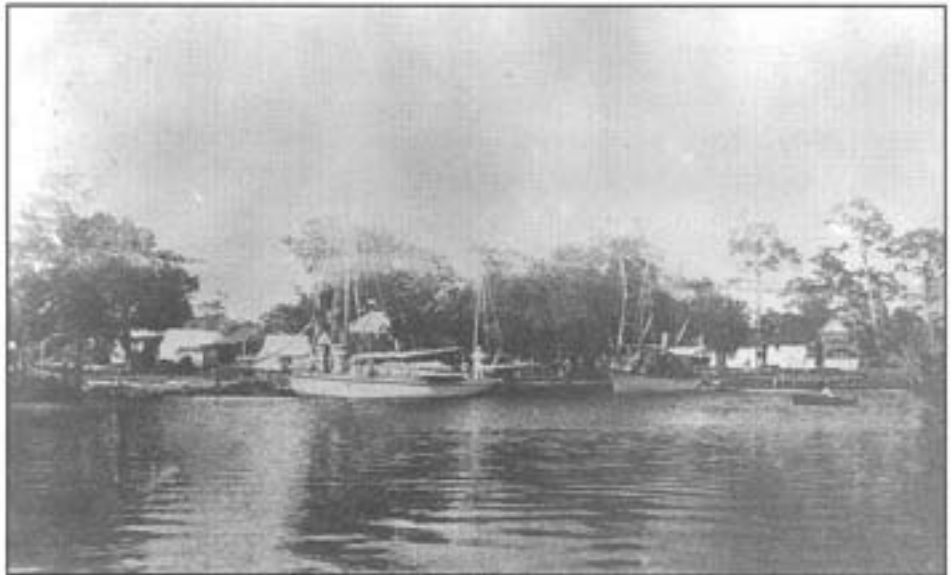
first in Hamilton County and later dispersing to Volusia and other central Florida counties.²

Philemon N. Bryan was a businessman, first mayor of the town of New Smyrna and grovesman in Volusia County. The great freeze of 1895 wiped out all seven of his orange groves and put his four packing houses out of business. Bryan, through his work as an orange grower, was acquainted with oilman and hotel and railroad magnate Henry Flagler, who was then extending his Florida East Coast Railway to south Florida. Flagler asked Philemon Bryan to undertake the job of building the roadbed north from the New River to Pompano.³ Philemon and his two sons, nineteen-year-old Reed Asa and seventeen-year-old Thomas Murray, brought four hundred black workmen, hired in Volusia County, down to the New River site by sailboat.⁴

Other Bryan family members followed Philemon to the district. Franklin Americus Bryan, Philemon's half brother, began farming in the Snake Creek region near Hallandale; eventually, Frank Bryan

Fort Lauderdale's and Broward County's oldest Catholic church, St. Anthony, was officially established as a parish in 1921. The parish school — also the city's and county's oldest — opened five years later. The story of Fort Lauderdale's Catholic institutions, however, reaches even further into the region's past, to the first recorded religious service on the banks of New River in 1894 and the creation of a congregation as a mission from Miami's Church of the Holy Name in 1913. From the beginning, St. Anthony's history has been tightly intertwined with that of the surrounding community and has included such figures as members of the pioneer Bryan family, boomtime architect Francis Abreu and several of southeast Florida's most noted early priests.

Author Merrilyn C. Rathbun has had a longtime interest in the architectural history of Fort Lauderdale. A graduate of Cornell University, she is currently employed as Research Assistant at the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society. This article is adapted from her successful nomination of St. Anthony School to the National Register of Historic Places. She continues to work on all facets of historic preservation.



Father Ambrose Fontan, S.J. (left), founding pastor of the Church of the Holy Name (later GESU) in Miami, celebrated the first mass in Fort Lauderdale at the Stranahan camp (right) in 1894 (Fontan photo courtesy of GESU Catholic Church; Stranahan camp photo courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).

became chairman of the Dade County Commission and, later, first Clerk of the Broward County Court. Philemon and Frank's cousin, John Milton Bryan, Sr., and his sons, John M., Jr. and Nathan, set about farming in the Big City Island area west of Dania. Nathan P. Bryan moved to Jacksonville and later became a United States Senator from Florida; as chairman of the first State Board of Control, he was instrumental in fixing Gainesville as the site for the University of Florida. In 1920 he was appointed Circuit Judge of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals by President Woodrow Wilson.⁵

The Bryan family was largely Methodist in religious persuasion. However, when Philemon married Lucy, the convent-bred daughter of the Catholic Murray family of New Smyrna, he apparently converted to her faith.⁶ There was also a marriage connection between Murrays and the John Milton branch of the Bryan family—Guilda Rose Murray, daughter of Lucy's brother Thomas Jefferson Murray of Volusia County, married John Milton Bryan, Jr.⁷

After completing his work for Flagler, Philemon Bryan began farming near Fort Lauderdale. By 1897 he owned 120 acres in the New River vicinity; six acres were planted with orange trees and four and one half acres were given over to tomato

crops. Both of Philemon Bryan's sons farmed with him, but it was the elder, Reed Asa, who was to make agriculture and the development of farm lands his life's work.

In 1900 Philemon Bryan purchased Block C of Fort Lauderdale's fledgling downtown, where he built a small hotel. This was the impetus for younger son Tom's career; he began to look for ways to promote the urban expansion of the region. In time, Tom built the first ice plant, started the electric company and discovered that he could have telephone lines strung on his electric poles for the first phone company.⁸

II. Political and Economic

Development 1911 to 1920

By 1910 Fort Lauderdale's population had reached 143.⁹ Stranahan's one-story trading post had been replaced by a handsome two-story Bahamian-style house built by another former Volusia County man, E.T. King. The trading post business had evolved into Stranahan and Company; it was now located on Brickell Avenue, the town's small, thriving business district. The Florida East Coast Railway docks at the foot of Brickell were shipping a growing volume of farm produce from the area. The Fort Lauderdale State Bank, with Frank Stranahan, who had acted as town banker in the old trad-

ing post days, as president, had received its charter in 1910; Tom Bryan was a bank board member. In 1908, Philemon Bryan had replaced his earlier hotel with the New River Inn, also built by Ed King. Andrews Avenue, which had been bridged in 1904, was becoming a major thoroughfare.¹⁰

The spur for all of this development was Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward's championship of Everglades drainage, a major plank of his 1904 gubernatorial campaign. Once the project was authorized by the state legislature, Broward, who was distantly related to the John Milton Bryan family, hired Reed Bryan, as a man who knew the locality, to superintend the work.¹¹ Reed directed the construction of two steam-operated dredges across the New River from his father's hotel; then he started work on the North New River Canal.¹²

A direct result of the drainage project was the 1911 land lottery at Progresso, Richard Bolles' Florida Fruit Lands Company's development, which drew national attention to Fort Lauderdale. By 1911 the town had two newspapers, William Heine's *Fort Lauderdale Herald* and George Mathews' *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*. Incorporation of the town was the most significant event of the year; the little burg now had a mayor, a town

council and embraced one and one-half square miles of land. William H. Marshall served as the first mayor; Ed King, W.O. Berryhill, W.H. Covington, W.C. Kyle and Tom Bryan were elected as town councilmen.¹³

Residents of outlying districts have always been convinced that their interests are neglected by those at the center; Fort Lauderdale civic leaders, being no exception, started a drive to separate from Dade County. A committee comprised of M.A. Marshall of Dania, and W.O. Berryhill, Reed Bryan and George Mathews of Fort Lauderdale was in Tallahassee in May 1913 lobbying for the county division.¹⁴

Committee member Mathews, the *Sentinel* publisher, had just run for the office of mayor against the incumbent W.H. Marshall.¹⁵ An experienced journalist who had owned two newspapers prior to his purchase of the *Sentinel*, Mathews clearly understood the value of media ownership in a political fight; the mayoral campaign was largely conducted in the pages of the *Sentinel*.

Colonel Mathews was an admirer of Thomas E. Watson, the Georgia populist politician and editor who, at



Colonel George G. Mathews (courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).



Lucy and Philemon Bryan in front of the New River Inn, ca. 1918, with grandchildren (left to right) Reed A. Bryan, Jr., Perry N. Bryan and James H. Bryan.

that time, had a winter home in Fort Lauderdale. One of Mathews' campaign arguments was "...the injustice of private ownership of public utilities."¹⁶ Councilman Tom Bryan had just sold his ice and electric plant to Southern Utilities. Bryan protested Mathews' criticism of the sale in a letter to the newspaper, which Mathews published and answered at length in his editorial column. Colonel Mathews, the populist, the outsider, won the election, becoming the town's second mayor.¹⁷

After some delay, the house and senate of the state legislature approved the county division in May and June 1913; now all that was left was ratification by the voters. Dania and Hallandale were considered to be crucial to the success of the plan. The committeemen were confident that they had the support of the voters of both communities. They were wrong; the vote failed in both towns.¹⁸

Other blows struck the community. In 1912 the Brickell Avenue business district had largely burned; in 1913 the town's largest hotel, which had escaped the previous year's fire, went up in smoke. These hurdles, however, did little to dampen the sense of optimism enjoyed by Fort Lauderdale's civic leaders. Between 1914 and 1916, the town argued, and eventually won, its first court case, a suit to gain ripar-

ian rights from Mary Brickell, who had retained the rights as she sold her riverfront property in Fort Lauderdale.¹⁹ The town fathers also contracted with the Champion Bridge Company of Wilmington, Ohio, for a new bridge on Andrews Avenue, which was completed in December 1915.²⁰

By April of 1915 Fort Lauderdale leaders made another—this time successful—attempt at county division. On April 30 the *Sentinel* announced that Fort Lauderdale was the new county seat. In the same issue Mathews commended the work of Tom and Frank Bryan; the Bryans had used their influence in Dania and Hallandale where the vote was again crucial.²¹ The Colonel was no longer mayor; the term was for one year.

Before the new county went into effect on October 1, a religious controversy engulfed the Fort Lauderdale school. The new county had named a Superintendent of Public Instruction and a school board, and each town had elected a slate of school trustees.²² Among the new teachers the Dade County School Board assigned to Fort Lauderdale was Julia Murphy. The Fort Lauderdale school trustees refused to accept Miss Murphy as a teacher after discovering that she was Catholic.²³ A public meeting, chaired by editor Mathews, was called to consider the

trustees' refusal of Miss Murphy. The assembly voted 181 to seven to uphold the trustees' refusal.²⁴

Miss Murphy's pastor in Miami, Father Clifford McLaughlin, then approached Frank Stoneman, editor of the *Miami Herald*, who roundly condemned the Fort Lauderdale action in a series of articles in his newspaper. Father McLaughlin also apprised the recently-installed Bishop of Saint Augustine, Michael J. Curley, of the situation. The bishop sent copies of Stoneman's articles to every newspaper in Florida and not a few outside the state. Curley also wrote a letter of protest that was widely printed.²⁵ The school trustees' action drew severe criticism from across the state. In the *Sentinel*, editor Mathews reproved critics of the trustees' action, saying among other things, "Thank God, the people are waking up . . . We will no longer stand for the Catholics to receive eighty-five per cent of the salaries paid by this government."²⁶ The situation was ensnared in politics, a prelude to the coming 1916 elections.

The community was still feeling the deleterious effects of the allega-

tions of fraud in Richard Bolles' Progresso land lottery, which had been criticized as a scheme to sell underwater lots in Florida to the unwary. The nationwide negative publicity the scheme had received compromised the entire Everglades drainage project. Now Lauderdaleians with an interest in the town's development were faced with further damaging publicity from the Murphy incident.

In 1913 Fort Lauderdale's small Catholic congregation had purchased a house at Valentine and South Third Street (now Southeast Third Avenue and Southeast Seventh Street) for use as a church. Father Clifford McLaughlin, S.J., from Miami, said mass once a month at the remodeled cottage. In 1916 fifteen ladies formed an Altar Society to pay off the remaining indebtedness of \$96.00 on the cottage. The ladies held bake sales and bazaars; on Thursdays they somehow got themselves across New River Sound — it was not bridged until 1917 — to sell lunches to beachgoers in front of the bathhouse.²⁷ Perhaps the ladies crossed by "pop" boat, small ubiquitous vessels with the motor housing in the center of the craft, so-called because of the loud popping noise their engines made.

Sidney J. Catts, candidate for governor in 1916, arrived in Fort Lauderdale in December of 1915 and spoke to the town's school children. Colonel Mathews editorialized on his visit that ". . . he showed the danger that menaced this nation from the Catholic Hierarchy."²⁸ Anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration proved to be the text of the coming election. Catts and incumbent governor Park Trammell, who was running for the U.S. Senate seat held by Bryan cousin Nathan P., embraced the nativist positions.

George Mathews campaigned on behalf of Catts and Trammell. He traveled to Jacksonville to speak at a Baptist church, but the minister of that church objected to his pulpit being used for an anti-Catholic diatribe.²⁹ At about the same time that Mathews was in Jacksonville, Senator Bryan was denouncing the

Guardians of Liberty, a nativist organization which was strongly influenced by Tom Watson and actively supported Catts and Trammell. Throughout the campaign Bryan's opponents, relying on a 1914 controversy when the Senator had obtained the appointment of a Catholic postmaster of Jacksonville, portrayed him as unduly influenced by Rome.³⁰ Interestingly enough, the Senator's Catholic kin never became an issue in the campaign, although the connection was certainly known to George Mathews and through him to his nativist allies, possibly including Tom Watson.

While Lucy and Philemon Bryan and at least one daughter, Florence Bryan Barrett, were practicing Catholics, neither Tom nor Reed were in their later years.³¹ If knowledge of the Bryan family's Catholic connection had become public, the information might have been used against the Senator in the campaign. Since Tom Bryan chose not to run for office that year, as a private citizen his parents' religious preference was no one's business. The Colonel did not relish direct personal confrontations, and did not risk printing such private information in his paper. But Nathan Bryan lost the election in any case; Catts and Trammell were elected governor and U.S. senator respectively.³²

III. Expansion, Land Boom and Establishment of Saint Anthony Parish 1920 to 1928

Between 1910 and 1915 the population of Fort Lauderdale increased from a few hundred to almost two thousand (1,870).³³ Now, the town was on the verge of a much greater expansion. Tom Bryan and S.P. Snyder had completed Las Olas Boulevard to New River Sound in 1917, and the sound had been crossed by a swing bridge from the Champion Company. D.C. Alexander, who had purchased Tom Watson's beach property in 1913, was platting Las-Olas-by-the-Sea, south of the boulevard.³⁴ Hugh Taylor Birch, the owner of beach property north of Las Olas, who was popularly considered some-

CHURCHES			
(White)			
All Saints Episcopal	—Rev R D Tracy	rector	
Baptist—Deerfield, Fla.	Rev W S Gibson	pastor	
Catholic—Rev Father McLaughlin		pastor	
Episcopal—Dania, Fla.	Rev R D Tracy	rector	
First Baptist	—Rev A E Atchison	pastor	
Methodist—Dania, Fla.	Rev J A Wales	pastor	
Methodist (North)	—(No pastor)		
Methodist (South)	—Rev J A Wales	pastor	
Presbyterian	—Rev H E Dunning	pastor	
Union—Hallandale, Fla.			
(Colored)			
Baptist—Bryan av			
Baptist—Hallandale, Fla.			
Episcopal—Hallandale, Fla.			
Mt Herman A M E	—Rev H W Gary	pastor	
Mt Olive Baptist	—N Brickell av		
St Christopher Episcopal	—Bryan av		
St John's A M E Chapel	—N Metcalf		

This listing of Broward County churches in the 1920-21 Fort Lauderdale City Directory was the first to note the Catholic congregation.

what hostile to development, nevertheless platted Birch Ocean Front Estates on the beach.³⁵

After discovering Miami Beach, Carl Fisher, the Prest-O-Lite and Indianapolis Speedway founder, had returned to the north enthusing about the development potential of south Florida. In 1920, Joseph W. Young, also of Indianapolis, began buying property south of Lake Mabel, near the natural inlet to the New River Sound, to build his dream city, Hollywood-by-the-Sea.³⁶ Thomas and Horace Stilwell of Anderson, Indiana, and Indianapolis purchased a spit of land on the west side of the sound, just south of Las Olas Boulevard, from Fort Lauderdale realtors M.A. Hortic and R.E. Dye. The Stilwells proposed to dredge three "finger isles" from the mangrove swamp west of Idlewyld, their new property.³⁷

There is some controversy over the origin of the finger isles concept. Fort Lauderdale has claimed credit for the idea, although similar isles were being constructed in other parts of the country at the same time or earlier. However, as early as 1916 George Mathews wrote that "...a visionary group" had discussed dredging canals in the tidelands east of Fort Lauderdale to form islets.³⁸ It is not too great a stretch from dredging canals to drain the Everglades for agriculture to dredging to drain the mangrove swamps to form land for housing.

Mary Brickell began developing her Colee Hammock property about 1916. In October 1920 she platted her property on the south side of the river, east of East Avenue (U.S. 1), then the city limits, calling the subdivision Rio Vista.³⁹ That same year, Ross Clark, an investor from New York, sold his North Fork home to a man from Montana, by way of Miami, William Carmichael. Clark and Carmichael formed a partnership to develop Clark's land holdings south of the Tarpon River along Andrews Avenue.⁴⁰

In March 1921 C.J. Hector, owner of Hector Supply Company, a farm provisions business, bought Mrs. Brickell's Rio Vista interests. A few months later Mrs. Brickell sold her

Colee Hammock land to realtors Hortic and Dye.⁴¹ Hector replatted Rio Vista, and began looking for investors. In 1923 he sold the Rio Vista Isles portion of the development, which had been dredged out along the Stranahan River, to W.F. Morang.⁴² Hector then went into partnership with William Sunkel to develop the rest of the subdivision.

By 1922 Carmichael and Clark, with S.L. Drake as contractor, were building their development, "Placidena," a name chosen by Ross Clark. At that time there was a cigar called Placidena that was widely advertised; perhaps it amused Clark to call his housing estate after a smoke.⁴³

By October of that year, Carmichael was planning a house for himself, "Knob Hill," to be built on Rose Drive along the Tarpon River.⁴⁴ In the same month a development field office of Spanish design was erected on the corner of Andrews Avenue and a then-unnamed east/west street.⁴⁵

Many out-of-town investors had been attracted to the area by one project. By 1917 there was much talk about town on the desirability of building an up-scale tourist hotel in Fort Lauderdale.⁴⁶ In January of 1918 developer George Henry of Winchester, Massachusetts, announced plans to build a \$125,000 hotel at

Andrews Avenue and New River.⁴⁷ Reed Bryan was one of the local investors in the project.⁴⁸ When the hotel opened in November 1919, the first guest to sign in was motion picture director D.W. Griffith.⁴⁹ Manager and hotel lessee John Needham offered embarrassed apologies when he registered Griffith; the hotel



Frances Heimberger (above, courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society) arranged the meeting at the Charles Link house on New River (below) where the establishment of St. Anthony's parish was announced in 1921.





Bishop Michael J. Curley

kitchen equipment had not arrived. Griffith reassured him by saying that he always traveled with a field kitchen when on location.

Of course Griffith's visit created wonderful publicity; the hotel began attracting day trippers and curiosity seekers. Tom Stilwell came up from Miami to see the place; he liked it well enough to register at the hotel for the 1920 winter season.⁵⁰ Among the visitors to the hotel that season was the Diego Abreu family of Newburgh, New York and Cuba. The Abreu's eldest son, Francis, was studying architecture at Cornell University. In a few years, Francis would play an important part in Fort Lauderdale's Catholic community.

Amid this flurry of activity, Fort Lauderdale's Catholic congregation, bolstered by new arrivals from the North, began the first steps toward organizing a local parish. In 1966, Mrs. Edward Heimberger, an early Catholic resident of Fort Lauderdale, recalled Bishop Michael J. Curley's visit to town in 1921. Bishop Curley, a personal friend of Mrs. Heimberger's family, asked her to arrange a meeting with all of the town's Catholics.⁵¹ Mr. and Mrs. Charles Link owned a big house on the northwest corner of Block 44 in the Farrow and Bryan subdivision on the south bank of the river, which could

easily accommodate a large meeting and reception. At the meeting Bishop Curley announced that Fort Lauderdale's Catholic congregation would have a church. Mrs. Heimberger and Miss Corinne Cheadle were given the task of selecting the site for the new church and rectory. Later, at the reception, the bishop spoke to about one hundred visitors, emphasizing community cooperation and conciliation.⁵² Mrs. Heimberger and Miss Cheadle chose a site for the new church at Las Olas Boulevard and Valentine Avenue, about three blocks east of the new Hotel Broward.⁵³

Reverend Father E. F. Callahan, Fort Lauderdale's first resident priest, arrived in December 1920. In January 1922, he was joined by Reverend Father G. J. Plunkett, the "builder priest." The diocese assigned Father Plunkett pastor and Father Callahan assistant pastor for the new parish.⁵⁴ Father Plunkett had been supervising church building projects for fourteen years; he had just finished building a church in Ocala. Previously he had overseen construction of a \$60,000 church for the Jacksonville black community.⁵⁵ Fathers Plunkett and Callahan were diocesan priests; until this time the south Florida mission field had been given to the Jesuits. Bishop Curley, through a series of negotiations with the Jesuit Society, opened up the territory to other priests.⁵⁶

The reverend fathers rented one of the Stamatz cottages at the beach. Father Plunkett told a reporter from the *Herald* that he hoped to get in some fishing before construction started.⁵⁷ If Father Plunkett preferred deep sea fishing to surfcasting, parishioner Charles Link would probably have been happy to take him angling. Link, a member of the Angler's Club and a noted fisherman, had caught a record tarpon which was displayed in a glass case on the approach to the Andrews Avenue bridge.⁵⁸

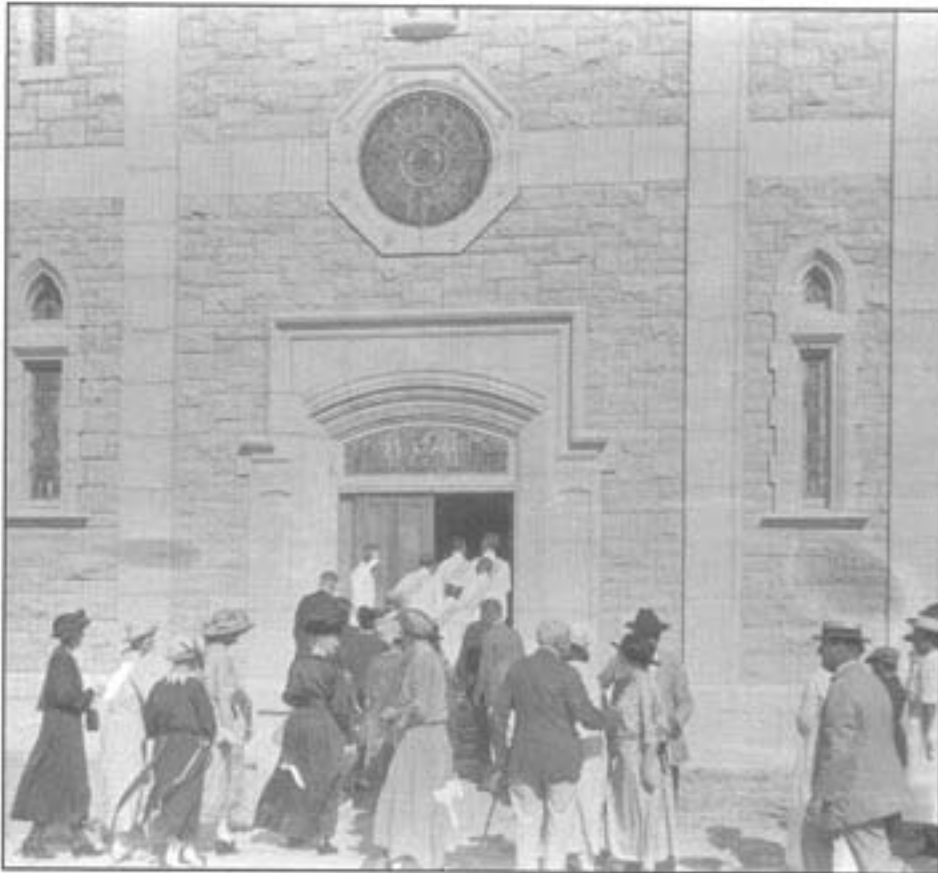
Father Plunkett announced that he would say the nine o'clock mass that first Sunday, January 29, and would meet the parishioners after the benediction. Mass during this period

was not offered at the priests' cottage, but at the Elk's Club building and, later, at the New River Inn. An evening service was offered that Sunday, and parishioners were encouraged to attend and examine the plans for the new church.⁵⁹

John Olsson was contractor for the project.⁶⁰ The church was built of non-native rusticated stone. Father Plunkett worked on the site and with his suppliers, earning the respect of local businessmen and his contractor, Olsson, a strict Lutheran who by all reports did not suffer fools gladly.⁶¹

Father Plunkett's job involved as much public relations as church building. His mention of interest in fishing, for example, may have been somewhat calculated. The townsmen were for the most part avid hunters and fishermen, and the Father's fishing expedition was something they could understand. His southern background — Plunkett was from Tennessee as was Father Callahan, who had been head of Catholic missions for East Tennessee — was helpful as many Lauderdaleians were from other parts of the South, where a man could live his whole life and never encounter a Catholic, let alone a priest, and where the word Jesuit conjured a sort of bogeyman.⁶² Father Plunkett presented himself as a man who wore a Roman collar, but also as a man who could be found wearing overalls, working on the building site, supervising the unloading of a shipment of stone at the railway yard, or dickering for the best price with a building materials supplier. He wanted to be seen as a regular sort of fellow.⁶³

The church and rectory were completed in October 1922, but not dedicated until December. The delay was to allow Bishop Patrick Barry of Saint Augustine to attend the ceremony. Father Peter O'Sullivan of Miami delivered the sermon. The celebration began with a parade of the congregation, led by the Knights of Columbus, around the church property. A choir from Miami provided music during the service, with locally noted soprano Juliette Lang as soloist.⁶⁴



Worshippers gather for the dedication of St. Anthony Church, December 17, 1922 (courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).



Father Peter Paul O'Sullivan, S.J., standing on left with two other priests in front of the Church of the Holy Name (later GESU), was a noted orator and spoke at the dedication of St. Anthony in 1922 (courtesy of GESU Catholic Church).

In his sermon, Father O'Sullivan said, "... there had been denominational dissention in this city in years past, ... but bigotry had been largely dispelled in the community."⁶⁵ He went on to say that Catholics "... looked to Rome in religious matters but in ... political matters and governmental affairs their first allegiance was to America."⁶⁶

After the service, about 150 people, including principals from the parishioners and their guests from the community, attended a dinner at Philemon Bryan's New River Inn. After dinner, Bishop Barry addressed the assembly. The *Herald* reported that the bishop "... assured the people of Lauderdale that they would be proud of the class of tourists the new church would attract to this city in the future."⁶⁷

On March 26, 1926 the *Fort Lauderdale Morning Sun* reported that the town's Catholics were planning to build a \$60,000 school building.⁶⁸ The amount of money to be spent on the school was an indication of what

had happened to the community in the preceding four years. The amount spent on Saint Anthony Church in 1921/22 was \$10,000. Although the foundations of real estate development and tourism emerged in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the frenzied speculation known as the "Florida boom" is usually reckoned to have begun in 1924, reached its apogee in 1925 and to have finished in 1926. In 1926 the people of Fort Lauderdale could not believe it was over; on January 1 the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, successor to Colonel Mathews' *Sentinel* and owned and published by the Stilwell Brothers, declared that the new year would be the best yet. During the boom the city had achieved great, although inflated, prosperity, had undergone a population increase from 2,065 in 1920 to 5,625 in 1925, and had seen development projects of all sorts, but it had also suffered a housing shortage and the health problems associated with overcrowding and temporary encampments.⁶⁹ The city had borne the financial shenanigans of the "binder boys," which eventually led to state-wide investigations

LARGE CROWD WAS PRESENT AT THE CHURCH DEDICATION

250 PEOPLE IN LINE OF MARCH
LED BY D. J. HEFFERNON, NAV-
IGATOR OF THE FOURTH
DEGREE ASSEMBLY.

A crowd that well filled St. Anthony's, the new Catholic church in this city, witnessed the dedication ceremonies Sunday morning. At 10:30 a procession formed at the New River hotel and marched two abreast to the church. The parade was headed by the uniform rank of the Knights of Columbus of Miami, in uniforms of white. They were followed by the Catholic Daughters of America of the

Report of the St. Anthony's dedication from the December 19, 1922 *Fort Lauderdale Herald*.

by federal tax authorities, and had experienced a devastating freight embargo, affecting shipments of building materials by the Florida East Coast Railway. To cap it all, in 1926, the state of Florida was in the midst of a smallpox epidemic of such severity that the government of the Bahamas refused to allow ship passengers from Florida ports to disembark in that country.⁷⁰

With all of these difficulties, the Catholic plan to build must have seemed to be a sign of confidence in the city's future, but there were other factors influencing the project. Bishop Curley, who was now Archbishop Curley of the Diocese of Baltimore, was a strong advocate of Catholic education, as he proved by his spirited defense of Saint Augustine nuns arrested for teaching black children in 1916.⁷¹ Given his earlier acquaintance with the city, the bishop probably felt that there was a definite need for Catholic education in Fort Lauderdale.

The school's designer, Francis L. Abreu, was the second architect to open an office in Fort Lauderdale; his contemporary and great rival, John M. Peterman, had beaten him to the punch by opening his office a few months earlier in 1923. Both men had worked in south Florida since 1921. Abreu's parents had come to Fort Lauderdale in December 1920 while their son was still a student at Cornell University. Liking what he saw, Diego Abreu rented a house on Las Olas Beach for the season and began looking for property to buy.⁷²

Cuban-born Diego Abreu had married Marie Jova, daughter of Juan Jacinto Jova, a sugar importer from New York and Spain. Their son Francis was born at "Dannskammer," the Jova estate on the Hudson near Newburgh, New York.⁷³

Francis entered Cornell's College of Architecture in 1916. His education interrupted by World War I, he returned to Cornell in 1919, resumed his studies and graduated in 1921. During his first few years he took work wherever he could find it. Family sources believe that he may have worked for Joseph W. Young's Hollywood-by-the-Sea development.⁷⁴



Fort Lauderdale architect Francis L. Abreu (left) designed the St. Anthony school building. In picture to right Abreu (at left) points out architectural features at the Las Olas Casino, which he also designed (both photos courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).

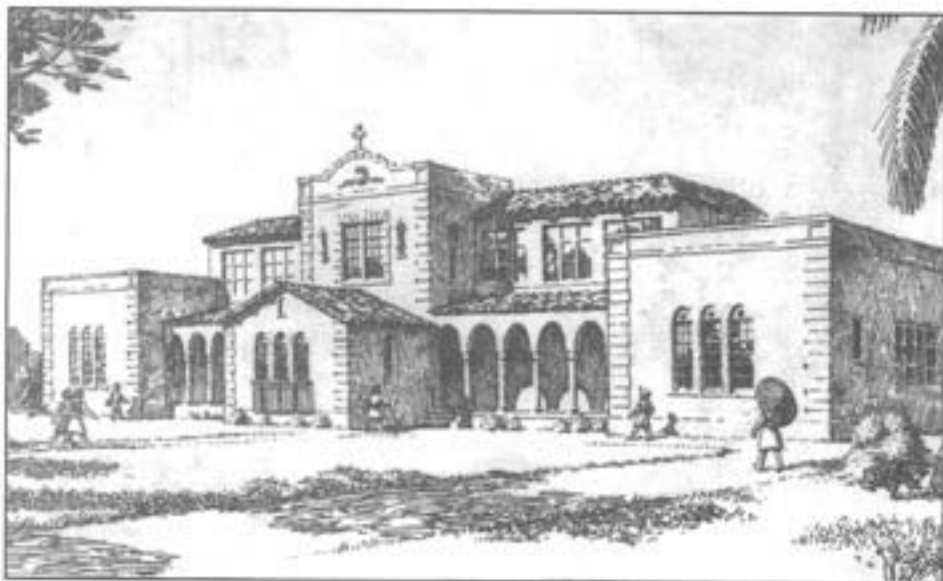
Soon after moving to Fort Lauderdale, the Abreus were joined for the winter season by several members of the Jova family, including Juan Jacinto's widow, a daughter and several sons. Mrs. Jova and her daughter became active in St. Anthony's Parish and made a number of social acquaintances in town while the men of the family took advantage of the area's renowned fishing. Abreu's early commissions included a remodeling job that he undertook on a house that Mrs. Jova had purchased in the Colee Hammock area of Fort Lauderdale.⁷⁵

The family's social connections proved crucial to the young architect's career. During both his early career in Fort Lauderdale and his later work in Sea Island, Georgia, Abreu worked as a "society architect," primarily designing residences, while his rival John Peterman concentrated on commercial projects. Abreu also bid on commercial projects, but often lost out to Peterman, especially when bidding on projects for developers who did not have local connections. However, Abreu's acquaintance with Tom Bryan brought him a number of com-

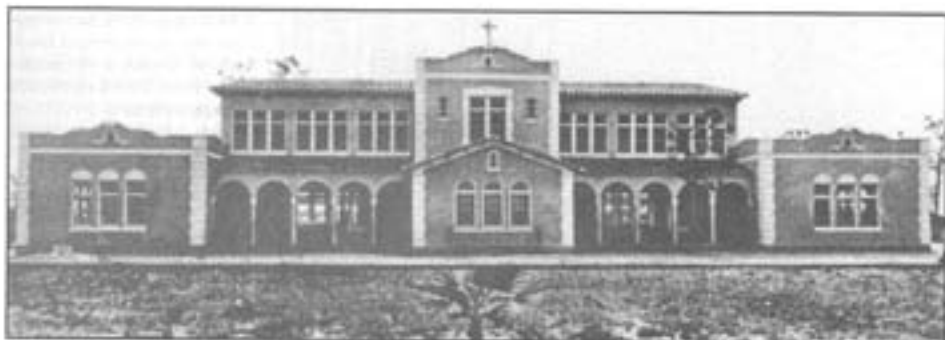
mercial and public projects.⁷⁶

During the 1920s, Tom Bryan was one of Fort Lauderdale's leading political and business figures. He obviously favored Abreu for his own commercial projects and was able to steer such public projects as the Fort Lauderdale Golf and Country Club clubhouse in the young architect's direction. Because of his parents' connection with Saint Anthony Church, Bryan may have had some influence in the choice of an architect for the school, but the Abreus' and Jovas' own memberships in the church was probably a deciding factor.⁷⁷

After the collapse of the boom, Abreu's Fort Lauderdale practice survived another two years, partly because of two public projects that Tom Bryan may have helped him secure — Westside Fire Station Number Three and the Las Olas Beach Casino. The casino proved to be Abreu's passport out of Fort Lauderdale. Young Alfred Jones of Sea Island, in Florida to invite famed Palm Beach architect Addison Mizner to Georgia, was so impressed with Abreu's design for the casino that he invited him to investigate the opportunities his development offered. Abreu went to



Above is Abreu's architectural drawing of the St. Anthony School, below is the school as it appeared at the time of its completion in 1926 (both courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).



Sea Island and decided to relocate. Although he occasionally took commissions in Fort Lauderdale during the next decade, this move essentially ended his south Florida career.⁷⁸

On August 19, 1926 the women of Saint Anthony Parish gave a benefit dance at the new parochial school.⁷⁹ On August 23 four Adrian Dominican nuns arrived to staff the school.⁸⁰ It was also announced that there would be a reception for the general public to see the new school building. The school was dedicated by Bishop Barry from Saint Augustine. The official opening was announced for September 13, with classes to begin on September 16.⁸¹

In August and September many prominent Fort Lauderdaleians were in the North or abroad. Tom Bryan

had gone to New York on business with Joseph Young of Hollywood. Francis Abreu was visiting his family in Newburgh, New York. Abreu returned from the North on September 16.⁸² At that time, various agencies were tracking a hurricane off shore. The summer of 1926 had been an unusually wet season; one relatively mild hurricane had hit Florida's southeast coast in July. People were not overly concerned with the prospect of the new storm; they thought that if the storm came ashore in their area they would have a few nasty hours, perhaps suffer some minor damage to property, but then would go on with their lives much as they had before.

The storm that struck in the early morning hours of September 18

has been called a one hundred year storm. There was no rating system for hurricanes in those days, but it probably reached a force five category, the strongest category in today's ratings. Unlike the modern storm of nearly equal force, Hurricane Andrew, which affected a relatively small territory, this so-called Miami Hurricane had a major impact in an area from the upper Keys to Palm Beach County.⁸³

Saint Anthony School is located on Northeast Third Street, north of Broward Boulevard, and some blocks north of New River. Downtown Fort Lauderdale was mostly underwater for two days following the storm, however the school had been unaffected by the storm surge and flooding. As damage to the building was minimal (a few windows had been blown in) the school was used to house some of the many people made homeless by the storm.⁸⁴

Saint Anthony's 1926 school year began on October 1. It has been in operation as a school ever since. When first opened, the school served grades one through eight; unfortunately, enrollment figures for the early years of the school are no longer available. The four classrooms on the first floor each accommodated two grades in the early years. The second floor of the building was used as a convent for the teaching sisters. In 1939 the Adrian Dominican nuns moved to a convent building and, as had been planned from the beginning, the second floor of the school building was turned to classroom use.

Expanding enrollment during this period dictated the addition of portable classrooms and a cafeteria on the campus. An auditorium/gymnasium was added after 1939. Also in 1939 high school grades nine through twelve were added. Saint Anthony remained the only Catholic high school in Broward County until Saint Thomas High School opened in southwest Fort Lauderdale in 1952. At that time St. Anthony's returned to serving solely as an elementary school. Additional land was acquired for an expanded playground in the early 1980s, and the entire complex was surrounded by a stuccoed wall

with wrought iron inserts about ten years later.

Some notable graduates of Saint Anthony School include tennis star Chris Evert, mystery and detective story author Michael Connelly, and baseball player Mike Stanley, formerly with the New York Yankees and presently with the Boston Red Sox. Today the school serves the parish children from pre-k to eighth grade.⁶⁵

Saint Anthony parish was the first parish established in Broward County; Saint Anthony School was the first Catholic school between Gesu in Miami and Saint Ann in West Palm Beach. The number of sisters teaching increased from four in 1926 to eighteen in 1948; in the 1970s five Adrian Dominican sisters were assisted by nineteen lay teachers. At the present time the faculty is completely laicized.⁶⁶

Lucy and Philemon Bryan did not live to see the parish school built. Lucy Bryan suffered a fall from the porch of her home; she broke her femur. A few days later, on August 31, 1924, Mrs. Bryan died of heart failure; her family was with her. Services were conducted by the pastor, Father Michael Francis Mullaly, at Saint Anthony Church on September 1. Ironically, one of Mrs. Bryan's pallbearers was *Sentinel* publisher George Mathews.⁶⁷ The Bryans had just celebrated their fifty-seventh wedding anniversary. A few months later, on April 18, 1925, Philemon Bryan passed away. Like his wife, he was buried from Saint Anthony Church with Father Mullaly in charge of the services.⁶⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Bryan are buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

Today, after seventy-eight years, Saint Anthony's parish is thriving, and the church and school serve both the local Catholic population and the larger community. As the clergy and congregation look toward the future, Saint Anthony's inspiring past has not been forgotten. Father Plunkett's 1922 church building still stands. When replaced by a larger church building in 1949, it was dismantled stone-by-stone and removed to Northeast Third Avenue, where it



The current St. Anthony Church, adjacent to the school building, was completed in 1949.

now serves as the First Lutheran Church.⁶⁹ In September 1997, the historic Saint Anthony's School, including the original classroom building, convent, and gymnasium, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its sig-

nificance in Fort Lauderdale's religious, educational, social and architectural heritage.⁷⁰



Notes

¹ *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, February 23, 1923.

² J. L. Heede, "Our Bryan Pioneers," part I, *Broward Legacy*, vol. 7, nos. 3 & 4 (Summer/Fall 1984), 39.

³ Heede, "Our Bryan Pioneers," part II, *Broward Legacy*, vol. 8, nos. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 1985), 24-25.

⁴ "Thomas Murray Bryan (Tom Bryan)," *New River News*, October 31, 1965.

⁵ Heede, "Our Bryan Pioneers," part I, 21-32.

⁶ "Lauderdale's First Settler is Buried," *Miami Herald*, September 2, 1924.

⁷ Heede, "Our Bryan Pioneers," part II, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-30.

⁹ August Burghard and Philip Weidling, *Checkered Sunshine* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹ Bryan Family Collection, Broward County Historical Commission archives, Fort Lauderdale.

¹² Burghard and Weidling, *Checkered Sunshine*, 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴ "County Division Committee at State

Capital," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, May 9, 1913.

¹⁵ "Nomination of Town Officers" and editorial, *Ibid.*, March 7, 14, 1913.

¹⁶ "If Mathews is Elected Mayor," Advertisement, *Ibid.*, March 28, 1913.

¹⁷ "Mathews Elected Mayor of City," *Ibid.*, April 4, 1913.

¹⁸ "County Division Bill Passes the House," "Broward County Bill Passes the Senate," "Broward County Election July 8," "Dade County Division Defeated," *Ibid.*, May 16, June 6, July 4, 11, 1913.

¹⁹ "Institute Suit for Riparian Rights," *Ibid.*, April 16, 1915.

²⁰ "Contract Let for Bridge," "Local News," "Local News," "Opening New Bridge to Public," *Ibid.*, January 8, August 6, December 3, 10, 1915.

²¹ "County Division Will Be Asked For," "Broward County Is Assured," "Fort Lauderdale County Seat," *Ibid.*, April 2, 23, 30, 1915.

²² "Broward Officials Nominated Saturday," *Ibid.*, June 18, 1915.

²³ "People Sustain School Trustees," *Ibid.*, August 27, 1915.

- ²⁴ Editorial, *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Michael J. McNally, *Catholicism in South Florida 1868-1968* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1982), 43.
- ²⁶ Editorial, *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, September 10, 1915.
- ²⁷ John Howe, "History of Saint Anthony Parish," unpublished ms. in the archive of Saint Anthony Church.
- ²⁸ Editorial, *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, December 17, 1915.
- ²⁹ Editorial, "The Editor of Thomas Watson's Jeffersonian Defends George Mathews," *Ibid.*, March 24, 31, 1916.
- ³⁰ L. Davis Givonetti, "Fort Lauderdale's Shame: Nativism and the Julia Murphy Incident," *Broward Legacy*, vol. 18, nos. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1995), 26-28.
- ³¹ "Tom Bryan," "Funeral Rites Announced for Reed A. Bryan," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, May 6, 1937.
- ³² Editorial, *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, May 12, 1916.
- ³³ Nathan Mayo, Commissioner of Agriculture, *Florida State Census — The Sixth Census of the State of Florida, 1935* (Tallahassee: State of Florida, 1935), 91, table 24.
- ³⁴ "Valuable Beach Property Transfer," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, August 15, 1913.
- ³⁵ Burghard and Weidling, *Checkered Sunshine*, 115; *Plat Book of Ft. Lauderdale Florida and Vicinity* (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins Co., 1953), plate 9.
- ³⁶ "Development of Hollywood," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, November 18, 1921.
- ³⁷ "Real Estate Has Been Selling Fast," *Ibid.*, February 6, 1920, "Big Suction Dredge Arrives on New River," June 25, 1920.
- ³⁸ "Modern Tropical Venice Here," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, September 15, 1916.
- ³⁹ "Plat of Rio Vista Subdivision Recorded," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, October 26, 1920.
- ⁴⁰ "Another Sale of Fort Lauderdale Real Estate," *Ibid.*, March 5, 1920.
- ⁴¹ "Hector Buys Land of Mrs. Brickell," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, March 18, 1921, "Colee Hammock Bought by Hott and Dye," September 23, 1921.
- ⁴² "Rio Vista and Rio Vista Isles Sold to New Company," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, August 3, 1923.
- ⁴³ "Work Begins on Big Subdivision South of City," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, August 18, 1922; Advertisement, *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, July 13, 1923.
- ⁴⁴ "Local News," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, October 20, 1922.
- ⁴⁵ "Another Building for Placidema," *Ibid.*, October 27, 1922.
- ⁴⁶ "We Must Have a Tourist Hotel," *Ibid.*, April 11, 1917.
- ⁴⁷ "\$125,000 Fireproof Hotel to be Built This Spring," *Ibid.*, January 18, 1918.
- ⁴⁸ *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, May 6, 1937.
- ⁴⁹ "David Work [sic.] Griffith Is First Name on Hotel Register," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, November 28, 1919.
- ⁵⁰ "Local News," *Ibid.*, January 27, 1920.
- ⁵¹ Howe, "History of Saint Anthony Parish," 2.
- ⁵² "Archbishop Curley Honored Guest of Local Catholics," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, November 11, 1921.
- ⁵³ "Catholics Will Build Church At Some Later Date," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, March 19, 1920.
- ⁵⁴ "Ground Broken For New Church," *Ibid.*, January 13, 1922; "Resident Priest for Fort Lauderdale," December 28, 1920.
- ⁵⁵ "Reverend Father Plunkett the Builder Priest Starts Church Here," *Ibid.*, January 27, 1922.
- ⁵⁶ McNally, *Catholicism in South Florida*, 46-48.
- ⁵⁷ "Reverend Father Plunkett," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, January 27, 1922.
- ⁵⁸ "Charles Link . . . Picture . . . New York Times," *Ibid.*, October 20, 1922.
- ⁵⁹ "Reverend Father Plunkett," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, January 27, 1922.
- ⁶⁰ Howe, "History of Saint Anthony Parish," 3.
- ⁶¹ "Resident Priest," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, December 28, 1920.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ John DeGroot, "St. Anthony . . . Broward's Mother Church," *Saint Anthony Parish, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, October 13th, 1996* (Fort Lauderdale: St. Anthony Church, 1996), unnumbered.
- ⁶⁴ "Large Crowd Was Present at Church Dedication," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, December 19, 1922.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ "Catholics to Build \$60,000 School Here," *Fort Lauderdale Morning Sun*, March 21, 1926.
- ⁶⁹ Nathan Mayo, Commissioner of Agriculture, *The Seventh Census of the State of Florida, 1945* (Tallahassee: State of Florida, 1945), 84.
- ⁷⁰ "Bahama Quarantine is Set Up," *New York Times*, January 29, 1926.
- ⁷¹ McNally, *Catholicism in South Florida*, 44, 64.
- ⁷² Francis L. Abreu biographical files, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Francis L. Abreu Scrapbook, microfilm in Broward County Historical Commission archives, Fort Lauderdale.
- ⁷⁷ Abreu biographical files.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*; Abreu Scrapbook.
- ⁷⁹ "Society," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, August 19, 1926.
- ⁸⁰ "Catholic Nuns Arrive Today," *Ibid.*, August 23, 1926.
- ⁸¹ "Bishop Barry to Dedicate School," *Ibid.*, September 1, 1926.
- ⁸² "Society," *Ibid.*, September 16, 1926.
- ⁸³ "Known Death Toll Now 15 in Lauderdale," *Ibid.*, September 20, 1926.
- ⁸⁴ "Have You Heard," *Ibid.*, September 29, 1926.
- ⁸⁵ Howe, "History of Saint Anthony Parish," 3, 5, 7, 9.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.
- ⁸⁷ "Lauderdale's First Settler is Buried," *Miami Herald*, September 2, 1924.
- ⁸⁸ "Bryan Funeral to Take Place This Afternoon," *Fort Lauderdale Evening Sentinel*, April 18, 1925.
- ⁸⁹ "The Fortieth Anniversary, 1929-1969, of the Pastorate of Monsignor John J. O'Looney, St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida," commemorative booklet in archives of Broward County Historical Commission.
- ⁹⁰ National Register of Historic Places, file in archives of Broward County Historical Commission.

