

THE  
**FORT LAUDERDALE DAILY NEWS**  
 AND THE **CITY**  
**ELECTION OF**  
**1937**

by DONALD G. LESTER

The story of the Fort Lauderdale municipal election of 1937, perhaps the most acrimonious election in the city's history, and the part played by the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, has its roots deep in the city's past. Originally titled *The Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, the newspaper was established in 1911, the same year that the Town of Fort Lauderdale was incorporated. In the twenty-six years that followed, the newspaper took an active role in city governmental affairs, with both the paper and the city hall reflecting the personalities of their leaders. The convergence, in the mid-1930s, of a number of Broward County's strongest and most colorful characters, set against the background of the Great Depression, insured that political contests would be especially lively and memorable events. For the City of Fort Lauderdale, the 1937 election turned a spotlight on the contemporary power structure and proved to be a turning point in both municipal leadership and electoral policy which would long survive the immediate issues of the day.<sup>1</sup>

George G. Mathews, the founder of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, was born in Alabama in 1855. His parents, impover-

ished by the Civil War and embittered by the Confederate defeat, decided against living in a country "run by a bunch of Yankees," and moved the family to Brazil shortly after the conclusion of the war. Mathews continued to live in Brazil for many years before moving to Marion County, Florida, in 1882. He represented that county in the 1893 session of the Florida Legislature, and, later that same year, was appointed United States consul at Para (Belem), Brazil. He retained that position for five years, and then returned to Marion County. Mathews returned to the Florida Legislature in 1907, where he emerged as a strong supporter of Governor Napoleon B. Broward's Everglades drainage program. It was in this capacity that Mathews made his first trip to Fort Lauderdale in 1907 as part of a legislative delegation investigating factors connected with Everglades drainage. He moved to Fort Lauderdale as a permanent resident on December 30, 1910.<sup>2</sup>

Southeast Florida was largely empty country when George G. Mathews arrived on the premises. The village of Fort Lauderdale had a population of 143, and Miami, the largest town in the area, had

*Political turmoil, a common subject of today's headlines, is nothing new to Broward County. For the City of Fort Lauderdale, one of the most heated elections — and one which had a decisive impact on the municipal power structure — took place in October 1937.*

*In this article, Donald G. Lester traces the city's political background, defines the issues at stake in the memorable 1937 contest, and relates the powerful role played by the Fort Lauderdale Daily News and its aggressive publisher, Governor Robert H. Gore.*

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a population of 5,471.<sup>3</sup> To the north, West Palm Beach, the county seat of newly-created Palm Beach County, had a population of 1,743. Fort Lauderdale remained unincorporated, the nearest incorporated towns being Dania to the south, which had incorporated in 1904, and Pompano to the north, which had incorporated in 1908. The 1910 United States census listed the population of these two corporate entities as 269 each. Key West, with a population of 19,945, was the largest city south of Tampa in the state. In 1910, the present county of Broward formed parts of Dade and Palm Beach counties, with the county line running through what is today Oakland Park. The 1910 census listed Dade County's population as 11,933, and the population of Palm Beach, which also included present-day Martin County, as 5,577. So George G. Mathews was a Broward County pioneer in every sense of the word.<sup>4</sup>

At the time Mathews arrived in Fort Lauderdale, the village boasted one local newspaper. It was the weekly *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, which had been established earlier that year by William Heine.<sup>5</sup> However, the *Herald* was printed in Deland and shipped to Fort Lauderdale for distribution, so in 1910, no paper was printed locally in Fort Lauderdale.

George G. Mathews was a journalist by profession, having published newspapers in Bartow and Tarpon Springs. He therefore decided to start a weekly newspaper to rival the already existing *Herald*, and, on March 10, 1911, published the first issue of the *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*. Nearly three months after the first issue of Mathews' newspaper appeared, the

village of Fort Lauderdale was incorporated, with William H. Marshall as the first mayor.<sup>6</sup> The new town adopted the mayor-council form of government, with the mayor and the members of the town council elected separately.

After much political skirmishing which spanned a period of several years, Broward County was created in 1915 from the northern part of Dade County and the southern part of Palm Beach County. The new county was named for the late Governor Napoleon B. Broward. Fort Lauderdale was designated as the county seat, even though Dania and Pompano were older corporate entities, and former Fort Lauderdale Mayor William H. Marshall became the first Broward County representative in the Florida Legislature.

George G. Mathews had been elected mayor in 1913, succeeding Marshall and thus becoming the second man to hold that position. In 1916, Mathews made an unsuccessful effort to win election as county judge, and two years later he failed in an effort to unseat Marshall as Broward County's representative in the legislature.

By 1920, the United States census listed the population of Fort Lauderdale as about 2,000 and that of Broward County at around 5,000. In response to this growth, George G. Mathews stepped up the publication of the *Sentinel* to twice a week, a step likewise taken by the *Herald*, which by now was being published by Fort Lauderdale attorney Carl P. Weidling. Then, late in September 1924, as the Florida land boom began to gather momentum, Mathews took the big step, and the *Evening Sentinel*, as the paper had



Colonel George G. Mathews.

come to be known, became a daily. Mathews continued to publish the paper for several months before he sold it to the Galvin brothers of Lima, Ohio, for \$140,000. In short order, the Galvins bought out the *Herald* and renamed the combined paper the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News and Evening Sentinel*.<sup>7</sup>

From the beginning of his Broward County career, George G. Mathews took an aggressive stand on the political issues of the day. During the Napoleon B. Broward era, he strongly supported the governor, particularly concerning the Everglades drainage program. In 1916, Mathews strongly supported the successful gubernatorial campaign of Sidney J. Catts, who, running on a strongly-worded prohibitionist and anti-Catholic platform, defeated William V. Knott, the candidate of the Democratic establishment. In 1927 Mathews opposed the erection of the new Broward County Courthouse. Then, late in his career, he served as president of the local Townsend Club.<sup>8</sup>

From the time of his arrival in Fort Lauderdale, George G. Mathews remained extremely thrilled over the community's prospects for the future. In 1925, he predicted that the city's population would reach 50,000 by 1930. After his retirement from his publishing enterprises, he remained deeply involved in civic affairs, and subsequently made three unsuccessful efforts to obtain elective office. In 1927, after the city government changed to the commissioner-manager system, Mathews was defeated in an attempt to gain a place on the first Fort Lauderdale City Commission. In 1928 he was defeated in the Democratic primary for a seat on the Broward County Commission. The fol-



Fort Lauderdale City Hall on the northwest corner of Andrews Avenue and Southwest Second Street, 1930s.

lowing year he was again defeated in a bid to gain a place on the city commission. That final defeat, when he was seventy-four years old, ended Mathews' efforts to win elective office.

The middle of the 1920s witnessed the height of the Florida boom. Prices skyrocketed. The Galvin brothers took advantage of the business boom and sold the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* to Thomas and Horace Stilwell for \$480,000. The Stilwell brothers soon ran into financial trouble as the boom started to break. The downturn in business was accompanied by the devastating hurricane of 1926, a terrific storm which played havoc with much of south Florida and destroyed much of Fort Lauderdale. Property damage in Miami and Hollywood was also extensive, but the largest death toll was at the tiny town of Moore Haven, situated on the southwestern shore of Lake Okeechobee. Of the 392 reported Florida deaths caused by the storm, Moore Haven accounted for 300. Nineteen twenty-eight brought the failure of the Fort Lauderdale Bank and Trust Company, and, later that year, a second devastating hurricane. Thus, by the waning years of the 1920s, south Florida had already entered a period of hard times which soon melted into the Great Depression, by far the longest and most severe economic disaster in American history. This was the situation when Robert H. Gore of Chicago appeared on the Fort Lauderdale scene and bought the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* from the Stilwell brothers for \$75,000. The fact that Gore paid only one sixth of the amount that the Stilwells had paid the Galvins three years previously indicates the tre-

mendous drop in prices during the depression years.<sup>9</sup>

Fort Lauderdale's municipal government also felt the varied effects of boom and bust in the decades following incorporation. Dr. C.G. Holland had succeeded Mathews as mayor in 1914 and served for two years. In 1916, Will J. Reed, one of the most colorful figures in Fort Lauderdale history, became mayor, and would be in and out of the city's government for more than twenty years.<sup>10</sup> After a three-year administration, Reed was replaced as mayor by Fort Lauderdale attorney C.E. Farrington. Reed regained the mayor's office in 1921, but was succeeded the following year by Russell G. Snow. On November 4, 1924, Reed returned as mayor one more time.<sup>11</sup>

By the middle of the 1920s, the population of Fort Lauderdale had grown tremendously. The mayor-council system seemed inadequate to meet the needs of a city caught in the midst of the Florida boom, so, as a result of a 1925 referendum, the government was changed to the commissioner-city manager system. This new system called for five city commissioners elected at large in a non-partisan special election. Each voter could vote for as many as five candidates. The election would be held in two phases—a primary which would reduce the field to ten candidates, then a general election with the names of the ten surviving candidates on the ballot. The five candidates receiving the highest number of votes would form the city commission, and would choose one of their number as mayor. Generally, the commissioners would choose the top vote-getter as mayor, but they were under no

legal obligation to do so. The city commission was then to appoint a city manager whose duty was to carry out the policies set forth by the commission majority.

Some unusual rules were mandated for candidates in the new city commission elections. Section Twelve, page six of the Fort Lauderdale City Charter stated that, "No candidate for the office of city commissioner shall make any personal canvass among the voters to secure his nomination or election or the nomination or election of any other candidate in the same election." The charter thus placed rigid barriers against the usual form of campaigning and penalized those who violated the rules with the edict that their names must be stricken from the list of nominees. It therefore became necessary for the "friends" of the candidates to represent them to the voters. A candidate secured ballot position by means of a petition, but he himself could not circulate the petition. The petition had to be signed by at least 165 registered voters, and the candidate had to sign his acceptance of the nomination. The office was supposed to seek the man.<sup>12</sup>

The 1925 city commission election was held during the wild real estate and business excess that marked the Florida boom. Interest in the election was at a low ebb, with only 244 voters appearing at the polls. Voter lack of interest seems to have been shared by potential candidates, since only six candidates qualified to run for the five city commission positions. C.D. Kittredge, the owner of the Fort Lauderdale Mercantile Company, a hardware store located on Andrews Avenue, was the top vote-getter with 185 votes. John W. Tidball finished in second place with 175 votes. The other successful candidates were W.C. Kyle, a local banker, and Tom Bryan, a local businessman, both of whom had been members of the original town council in 1911, and J.S. Hinton. Will J. Reed, the incumbent mayor, finished dead last, and so was the "odd man out."

C.D. Kittredge, who received the most votes, was a very active citizen of Fort Lauderdale, a charter member of the First Presbyterian Church, and active in many civic enterprises. Nevertheless, the city commission, during its organizational meeting, by a unanimous vote chose John W. Tidball as mayor. Tidball's tenure as mayor is best remembered for the strong stand he took during the aftermath of the devastating 1926 hurricane, when he put the city under martial law.<sup>13</sup>

The 1927 city election saw C.D. Kittredge once again win the highest number of votes, Will J. Reed regain a seat on the commission as fifth place fin-



C.D. Kittredge (left) and John W. Tidball, Fort Lauderdale mayors during the 1920s.



isher, and Mayor Tidball meet defeat since he trailed in seventh place. W.C. Kyle retained his seat, and M.A. Hortt and well-known pioneer settler Frank Stranahan were also elected. This time, Kittredge was chosen mayor by the city commission.

The city commission election of 1929 saw John W. Needham finish first, with J.C. Alley second, M.A. Hortt third, Thomas E. Hoskins fourth, and Hershel Kelso fifth. Hortt, a wealthy real estate tycoon, and Needham, a property owner and hotel manager, would dominate the city commission for most of the following decade, sometimes as rivals and sometimes as allies. At the organizational meeting of the new commission, Kelso nominated Needham for mayor; there was no second. Then Alley nominated Hortt; again there was no second. Because of the impasse, there was nothing for the commissioners to do except to elect Hoskins as the next mayor, which they promptly did. Despite this initial confrontation, Hortt and Needham emerged as allies during most of the several years they served together, and apparently received strong support from the same element, the business community of Fort Lauderdale.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1931 city election, John W. Needham again led the field, followed by C.C. Adams, who was completing the unexpired term of the recently deceased J.C. Allen, M.A. Hortt, Broward County pioneer Frank R. Oliver, and M.H. Epstein, owner of the Seminole Laundry. Mayor Thomas E. Hoskins, who finished eighth, and Hershel Kelso, who finished twelfth, were defeated. This time the commission chose Needham as mayor. The city election of 1933 saw apartment house owner Ed Pynchon top the field, while Hortt and Needham skidded to third and fourth place respectively. Joel M. Taul, the owner of a typewriter agency, finished second, and was destined to be on and off the city commission for the next twenty years. Fort Lauderdale barber John H. Fidler, active in local Republican politics, finished in fifth place. Frank R. Oliver, M.H. Epstein, and C.C. Adams were defeated. Pynchon was chosen mayor.

The following year, Pynchon resigned his mayoral position in order to accept a federal job, and Fort Lauderdale druggist Lewis E. Moore was chosen in a special election to fill his seat on the commission. However, the commissioners subsequently chose Hortt as mayor. In 1935, John H. Fidler died as a result of an automobile accident while vacationing in the North, and Frank J. Norton, an elderly contractor, was selected in a special election to replace him on the commission.<sup>15</sup>

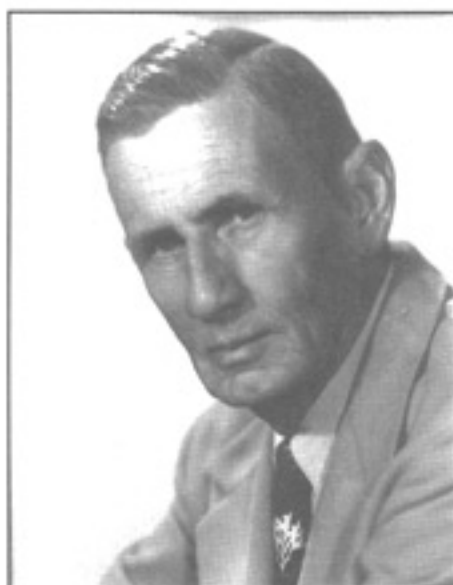
The first ten years of the city commissioner-city manager form of government thus set the pattern of longevity for the commissioners. Each new commissioner reached the apex of his popularity when he was first elected, and upon assuming office would see his popularity begin to erode. Will J. Reed, elected in 1927, was defeated in 1929, and failed in comeback attempts in 1931 and 1933. C.D. Kittredge was the high man in 1925 and again in 1927, but was badly defeated in 1929. Thomas E. Hoskins, very prominent in the development of Fort Lauderdale during the boom, was chosen to fill the unexpired term of the deceased Frank Stranahan in 1929 and was elected to a full term later that same year, but was defeated in 1931. Fort Lauderdale engineer Samuel E. Lawrence, who was elected in 1928 to finish the unexpired term of W.C. Kyle, who had resigned, provides yet another example of this trend.<sup>16</sup> A strong law and order man, who opposed the "wide open town to attract the tourists" concept, Lawrence was defeated in 1929, finishing fifteenth in a field of eighteen candidates. As the experiences of Reed, Frank Oliver, and others proved, name recognition was not a particular advantage. The two exceptions to the expectations of brief tenure were M.A. Hortt and John W. Needham. Hortt was elected in 1927, 1929, 1931, and 1933, and Needham in 1929, 1931, and 1933. Together, they set the record for longevity in office during the 1925-1935 period.

At the present time it is very difficult, if not impossible, to fix individual responsibility for editorial opinions expressed in the daily press. Individual responsibility

is hidden under a maze of faceless corporations and editorial boards. This situation presents a sharp contrast to the way newspapers operated during the era of personal journalism. During the 1930s and 1940s, every knowledgeable person in Fort Lauderdale knew who was responsible for the editorial opinions expressed in the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*. That man was Robert H. Gore, the publisher of the paper.

Robert Hayes Gore was born in Knottsville, Kentucky, on May 24, 1886. He entered St. Mary's College in St. Mary, Kentucky, and finished his college work and graduated after two years. After several nondescript jobs, Gore began his career in journalism as a reporter for the *Owensboro Inquirer*. After stints with several other papers, Gore came up with the idea of selling insurance through newspapers and having the paper boys collect the premiums when they made their regular collections. The idea caught on, and Gore eventually became involved primarily in the insurance business.<sup>17</sup>

His newspaper work also led Gore into the political field. In 1912, he supported Theodore Roosevelt when the ex-president attempted a political comeback by running as the candidate of the Progressive Party. In 1920, Gore campaigned for the release of the famed socialist leader and five-time presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs, who was languishing in a federal prison for having violated the espionage law during World War I. In a newspaper editorial, Gore called Debs a martyr and made the astonishing comparison of the socialist leader with John Brown.<sup>18</sup>



Fort Lauderdale mayors Thomas Hoskins (elected 1929) and Ed Pynchon (elected 1933).



Autographed photo of Franklin D. Roosevelt presented by the president to his "old friend," Governor Gore.

In 1929 Robert H. Gore was in Fort Lauderdale and paid a visit to the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* to sell insurance. His conversation with Tom Stilwell developed into a strange turn-around. Instead of buying Gore's insurance plan, Stilwell offered Gore the paper for \$90,000. In return, Gore offered \$75,000, which Stilwell eventually accepted. Robert H. Gore would publish the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* for the next thirty-four years. Throughout this period, he kept a very firm grip on the operations and policies of the newspaper.

Gore was an early backer of Franklin D. Roosevelt for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1932. He had first met the future president in 1931. After Roosevelt was nominated on the fourth ballot at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Gore became active in his campaign, working closely with the Democratic National Committee. In November 1932, Roosevelt overturned twelve years of Republican rule to win the presidency for the Democrats. In a victory of landslide proportions, he carried forty-two of the forty-eight states. He carried Florida by a three to one majority, and Broward County by more than two to one. Naturally, Robert H. Gore was elated at the proportions of the Democratic triumph and stood in line with other "deserving Democrats" to await the spoils of office. He had in mind the position of collector of internal revenue.

Whether Gore was ever under serious consideration for that post is problematical. To obtain such a powerful and prestigious position, he had to compete with genuine political and financial heavyweights. The Democratic Party had been out of office for twelve years, leaving many party hopefuls who had served well during those lean years hungry for the choice political plums. Nevertheless, whatever chance Gore may have had for the internal revenue position vanished as a result of an ill-advised speech delivered in Havana, Cuba, during the interim period between the presidential election in November 1932 and the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt on March 4, 1933.

During the early part of 1933, Cuba was under the grip of the Machado dictatorship. Discontent with the government combined with the effects of the Great Depression had created much unrest on the island. The Platt Amendment was still in force, and most Cubans were touchy to the point of being paranoid about the possibility of American armed intervention in Cuba.<sup>20</sup> That was the Cuban situation when Gore and a group of powerful and "deserving" Democrats journeyed to Havana for a victory celebration in anticipation of receiving the spoils of office. Also among the group was James A. Farley, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee. At the Havana celebration, the American contingent was joined by a

number of Cubans. There, over food and drinks, Gore made a speech that caused a furor. He said in part, "I have just come from Warm Springs where I had a long conversation with the President-elect of the United States; and I can tell you gentlemen that unless you put your house in order; unless you put an end to these outrageous going-ons here; the United States Government will send an army to do the job for you." Members of the group, Americans as well as Cubans, were stunned. The effect on Gore's political future was devastating. The immediate result of that ill-considered speech was that Gore's chances for appointment to the coveted position of collector of internal revenue vanished. The job went to Guy T. Helvering of Kansas.<sup>20</sup>

But Gore could not be shoved aside completely. Since he had actively and aggressively supported the victorious Democratic ticket, he still "had to be taken care of." So, in due time, Gore was appointed Governor of Puerto Rico. His appointment was confirmed by the Senate, and he traveled to San Juan with his family to take office. Gore's inaugural address lasted twenty minutes, and, during that speech, he made two proposals that did not sit well with many people in the United States. First, he advocated cock fighting and supported promoting that barbarous activity as a national sport to attract tourists. Many Americans could not help but wonder as to the caliber of tourists who would be attracted by such a cruel "sport." Humanitarian organizations in the United States were outraged and complained to President Roosevelt, who referred them to the appropriate government agencies. Apparently, the matter was eventually lost in the government bureaucracy. Gore's second controversial suggestion was that there be a vast migration of Puerto Ricans to Florida. Puerto Ricans had already been settling in New York City, and Gore commented that New York was too far away and the climate unsuitable for Caribbean emigrants. Florida, he pointed out, was much closer and had a climate similar to that of the island territory. No doubt this proposal pleased many New Yorkers, but it infuriated most Floridians, including Governor Dave Sholtz, who publicly denounced the scheme.<sup>21</sup>

Upon taking office as Governor of Puerto Rico, Gore found himself facing an impossible task. Puerto Ricans were bitterly divided over a number of issues, the most notable being the future status of the island in relation to the United States. One faction favored complete independ-



Robert H. Gore (back row, third from left) with his family upon his arrival to take office as governor, June 30, 1933 (courtesy of Paul A. Gore).

ence, while another favored Puerto Rican statehood. Still another faction was willing to settle for commonwealth status. None of the groups seemed satisfied with the current situation. This dissension led to much violence, including attempts on the governor's life. In addition to dealing with this no-win situation, Gore had a feeling that he was losing the support of the Roosevelt administration. His relationship with James A. Farley, chairman of the Democratic National Committee and now postmaster general, had become estranged as a result of the Havana speech. Faced with mounting difficulties, Gore resigned as Governor of Puerto Rico in January 1934. He had served for only six months, but cherished the title of "Governor" for the rest of his life.<sup>23</sup>

Robert H. Gore had purchased the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* in 1929, but waited for six years to establish his official residence in Fort Lauderdale. Soon after settling in the city, he also became a principal downtown property owner. At the urging of Fort Lauderdale attorney George W. English, Jr., Gore purchased the unfinished Will Mar Hotel, a casualty of the collapse of the Florida boom, which had remained an eyesore for many years. Gore completed the unsightly skeleton structure as the Governor's Club Hotel, which opened for business in the fall of 1937. The Governor's Club became Robert H. Gore's greatest property acquisition and remained Fort Lauderdale's most famous and prestigious hotel for the next forty years.

As stated previously, Robert H. Gore, in

his capacity as publisher of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, kept firm control of the paper's policies. He took strong stands on issues, personalities, and candidates, on the national, state, and local levels. Some of his personal feuds became legendary. His rift with Franklin D. Roosevelt, for example, became deeper and deeper, until Gore eventually became a bitter critic of Roosevelt and his policies.

Gore also took a keen interest in the ongoing course of Fort Lauderdale city politics. The city election of 1935, Gore's

first year as a resident, was a memorable event. First, the multitude of candidates, twenty-two in all, set a Fort Lauderdale record. Furthermore, the election resulted in the unexpected downfall of the two strong men of the city commission—wealthy real estate mogul M.A. Hortt and wealthy property owner John W. Needham. These two men, rivals at first but more recently allies, had dominated the city commission during the first half of the decade. The 1935 city election also marked the successful comeback of former Fort Lauderdale city commissioner and mayor Will J. Reed, who had been out of office for six years. The list of candidates included three former commissioners: Reed, M.H. Epstein, and C.C. Adams, as well as such interesting personalities as J.K. Huey, a longtime city functionary, Broward pioneer Jasper Lawson, who had served as city clerk under the old city council, and former Fort Lauderdale police chief Lucian Craig.<sup>24</sup>

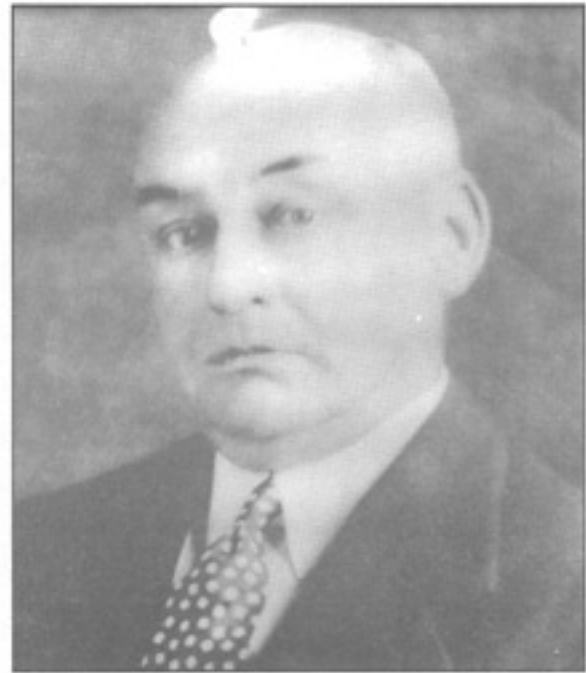
The primary election was held on October 21, 1935, and the ten candidates who qualified for the general election and the votes they received were:

- |                                |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Lewis E. Moore, incumbent   | 1,023             |
| 2. Frank J. Norton, incumbent  | 840               |
| 3. B.V. Pace                   | 655               |
| 4. J.M. Taul, incumbent        | 572               |
| 5. Will J. Reed                | 533               |
| 6. J.F. Dickey                 | 402               |
| 7. J.P. Moe                    | 362               |
| 8. Samuel L. Drake             | 346               |
| 9. M.A. Hortt, incumbent mayor | 320               |
| 10. John W. Needham, incumbent | 302 <sup>24</sup> |



Downtown Fort Lauderdale looking eastward on Las Olas Boulevard, c. 1938, showing the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* building and the Governors' Club Hotel.





M.A. Hortt (left) and John W. Needham, predominant city commissioners during most of the 1930s.

The two top vote-receivers were incumbents filling unexpired terms. Drug store owner Lewis E. Moore had been elected to the commission in the 1934 special election to complete the unexpired term of Mayor Ed Pynchon when the mayor resigned to take a federal job. However, as has been previously related, M.A. Hortt had been chosen mayor upon Pynchon's departure. Contractor Frank J. Norton had taken his seat as a result of a special election held earlier in 1935 to fill the vacancy left when Commissioner John H. Fidler died as a result of an automobile accident while vacationing in the North. The third place finisher in the 1935 regular primary, B.V. Pace, was a furniture store owner who was very active in civic affairs. J.F. Dickey, the head of a local abstract company, finished sixth, and Joseph P. Moe, a painting contractor active in local Republican politics, finished seventh. Broward pioneer Samuel L. Drake, active in public affairs for a quarter of a century, finished eighth, after which came the dismal showing of M.A. Hortt and John W. Needham, the two strong men of the commission, who brought up the rear. The primary election also saw the failed comebacks of two of the three former commissioners involved. M.H. Epstein finished eleventh with 279 votes, and C.C. Adams came in seventeenth with 209 votes. Other outcomes of interest included long-time city functionary J.K. Huey in thirteenth place with 248 votes, former city clerk Jasper Lawson fifteenth with 240 votes, and former city police

chief Lucian Craig nineteenth with a vote total of 204. As in past contests, name recognition proved to be no advantage in this election.<sup>25</sup>

The day following the primary, questions arose as to whether one or more of the primary survivors met the minimum qualifications necessary to be eligible for a place on the city commission. George W. English, Jr., the city attorney, stated that it was the responsibility of the city clerk to check on candidates' qualifications. Nevertheless, M.H. Epstein, the eleventh candidate and thus the beneficiary if one of the first ten would be disqualified, refused to issue a challenge. He said, "I am going back to my laundry and mind my own business." *The Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, in an editorial, condemned attempts to challenge the election results, calling such efforts "reactionary," and stating that the people had spoken.<sup>26</sup> The matter was dropped.

The general election was held on October 28, and, for the once dominant M.A. Hortt and John W. Needham, it was a crushing defeat, with the vote count as follows:

1. Lewis E. Moore	1,337
2. Frank J. Norton	1,208
3. B.V. Pace	1,138
4. Will J. Reed	1,021
5. J.M. Taul	977
6. J.F. Dickey	668
7. J.P. Moe	635
8. Samuel L. Drake	569
9. M.A. Hortt	473
10. John W. Needham	331 <sup>27</sup>

The top vote-getter, Lewis E. Moore, was chosen mayor by his fellow commissioners at the organizational meeting, but Will J. (Cap) Reed soon emerged as the strong man of the commission. Reed formed an alliance with commissioners Norton and Taul, and together they formed the commission majority, with Reed directing the city's agenda. Mayor Moore and Commissioner Pace were thus placed in the unenviable position of being the minority on the commission.

William James (Cap) Reed, a colorful character on the Fort Lauderdale scene for over thirty years, was born in Chicago on October 18, 1871, nine days after the Chicago fire, in a former schoolhouse at the corner of Calumet and Twenty-sixth streets. He graduated from the city's public schools, and enlisted in the army, entering an infantry regiment in 1888. In succeeding years, he served in the Spanish-American War, reached the rank of captain, and retired in 1906 after eighteen years of service. Along with his father, Robert J. Reed, he moved to Fort Lauderdale in 1910, and soon became very active in civic and business affairs. Will J. Reed served as Mayor of Fort Lauderdale from 1916 to 1919, from 1921 to 1922, and from 1924 to 1925, and also served on the city commission from 1927 to 1929. Despite this impressive record, he had also suffered his share of political defeats, being defeated for a place on the city commission in 1925, in 1929, in a special election in 1931, in the 1931 regular election, and again in 1933. During this period he



Above are William J. (Cap) Reed (left) and Joel M. Taul, and below is an announcement from the October 29, 1935 *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*.

remained active in a number of fraternal organizations, being a member of the BPOE Number 1517, the F&AM, a thirty-second degree Mason, and a Shriner. Will J. Reed was perhaps best known as a great promoter of sports activities, and as one of the few city commissioners of that era who was a good public speaker.<sup>28</sup>

As was evident from the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News'* denunciation of efforts to question the eligibility of the victorious candidates, Robert H. Gore seemed satisfied with the results of the 1935 city commission election, apparently finding no fault with the top city officials at that time. This apparent satisfaction was soon to change into bitter criticism.

In the meantime, Gore continued to express his strong opinions on state and national political figures. As mentioned previously, he was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal administration. He also started delivering bitter editorial attacks on the local congressman, J. Mark Wilcox of West Palm Beach, a man who could equal Gore in trading insults.

In the June 1936 Democratic primary, Gore strongly supported the congressional candidacy of Pat Cannon, a little-known Miami lawyer, who was trying to unseat the two-term incumbent. The Dade Countian also had the all-out support of the powerful Townsend Clubs.<sup>29</sup> Gore's antagonism to Wilcox certainly overcame any reservations he might have had concerning the feasibility of the expensive old age pension plan advocated by the

## **WE THE NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE CITY COMMISSION**

**TAKE THIS MEANS OF  
EXTENDING OUR THANKS  
TO THE VOTERS OF THE  
CITY OF FT. LAUDERDALE  
FOR THE CONFIDENCE  
THEY HAVE IMPOSED IN US.**

**LEWIS E. MOORE  
FRANK J. NORTON  
B. V. PACE  
WILL J. REED  
JOEL M. TAUL**



Townsend Clubs. Wilcox survived the primary, but in November found himself opposed by Republican attorney Thomas E. Swanson of Fort Lauderdale, who strongly endorsed the Townsend Plan. Robert H. Gore endorsed Swanson with the same enthusiasm that he had previously given Pat Cannon. However, much to the publisher's great chagrin, Wilcox was a beneficiary of the great Democratic landslide that swept F.D.R. into his second term, and won his third consecutive term in the United States House of Representatives.<sup>30</sup>

By this time, Gore's satisfaction with the results of the 1935 city election had also begun to wear thin. He soon became very critical of the city commission's policies—those promoted by the solid majority of commissioners Will J. Reed, Frank J. Norton, and Joel M. Taul. As a new city election loomed on the horizon in 1937, editorials in the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* constantly attacked the extravagance of the city commission majority, time and again mentioning the "\$1,100 a day city commission," and referring to the majority as the "Big Three."<sup>31</sup>

The city election of 1937 broke the record set two years previously with a total of twenty-seven candidates qualifying for ballot position. Although Mayor Lewis E. Moore and Commissioner B.V. Pace declined to offer themselves for another term, the candidate list might be considered a "Who's Who" of Fort Lauderdale's business and political world. The commission majority of Reed, Norton, and Taul attracted the most attention and received attacks from the many critics of the existing city administration. The two strong men of previous commissions, M.A. Hорт and John W. Needham, also were candidates. William H. Marshall, who had served as Fort Lauderdale's first mayor back in 1911 and as the first Broward County representative in the Florida Legislature from 1915 to 1921, also attempted a comeback, as did Thomas M. Bryan, early Broward County pioneer, successful businessman, and veteran of many political wars. Bryan had served on the first town council in 1911, on the first Fort Lauderdale city commission from 1925 to 1927, and was Broward County's representative in the Florida Legislature between 1927 and 1929. Those political successes were followed by a pair of defeats when Bryan was beaten in the Democratic primary in an attempt to retain his legislative seat in 1928 and was again defeated in the 1932 Democratic primary in an effort to gain a place in the Florida Senate.

Other contestants in the 1937 city elec-

tion included G. Frank Croissant, a real estate man best known as the developer of Croissant Park; E.H. Hart, a long-time resident and prominent businessman who had emerged as one of the most severe critics of the current commission; John H. Durham, an elderly retired businessman and former member of the Kentucky Senate; Fort Lauderdale liquor store owner H.J. Newsham; Thomas B. Manuel, a farmer and veteran of World War I; and two prominent real estate men, E.L. Kokanour and Watson Eltinge. The long-established male monopoly of the city commission was threatened when two women, Mrs. Blanche Burns, a housewife, and Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon, apartment owner and wife of former Fort Lauderdale mayor Ed Pynchon, entered the contest. It was certainly a star-studded field.<sup>32</sup>

As the numerous candidates entered the race, the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* continued its assault on the commission majority which it had dubbed "The Big Three." The paper's criticisms included attacks on the commission's financial policies as well as attacks on the major appointed city officials.

On October 13, 1937, a mass meeting was held in Stranahan Park in downtown Fort Lauderdale. All twenty-seven candidates were invited to give a brief expression of their views on the various issues raised during the campaign. The meeting was sponsored by the board of trade, and board president and former city commissioner C.C. Adams presided. Each participant was limited to three minutes speaking time. Three candidates—incumbent commissioner Frank J. Norton, former commissioner and former state representative Tom M. Bryan, and C.W. Allen, a real estate operator and political nonentity—failed to appear. The incumbents spoke first, and were followed by the other candidates in alphabetical order. Joel M. Taul gave a rather weak defense of his stewardship, but Will J. Reed gave a strong defense of his and of the commission's record. Reed was at his oratorical best. Of the challengers, John W. Needham made the most sensational effort when he advised taxpayers who had not yet paid their city assessments not to do so because the new city commission would lower the assessments. Mack Klein, a salesman, used his allotted three minutes to tell the audience, "This office is not all that I expect from you. Later I expect you to send me to Tallahassee and then to Washington."<sup>33</sup>

The primary election took place on Monday, October 18, 1937, and the voters indicated that they were ready for a

change. John W. Needham and M.A. Hорт lead the field of twenty-seven candidates. For the three incumbent commissioners, Taul, Norton, and Reed, the initial result was a severe setback. They finished fifth, eighth, and ninth, respectively. Two Broward pioneers lagged behind the leaders. Thomas M. Bryan finished in a tie for eleventh place, thus suffering his third consecutive political defeat, and William H. Marshall finished in thirteenth place. An interesting sidelight in the election results was that salesman Mack Klein, who expected the city commission seat to serve as a springboard to take him to Tallahassee and then to Washington, finished dead last in a field of twenty-seven candidates. The primary survivors, with their respective vote totals, were as follows:

1. John W. Needham	1,188
2. M.A. Hорт	1,130
3. Thomas B. Manuel	952
4. Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon	659
5. Joel M. Taul	610
6. J.H. Durham	599
7. H.J. Newsham	549
8. Frank J. Norton	545
9. Will J. Reed	516
10. E.H. Hart	379

The defeated candidates, with their vote totals, were:

11. Thomas M. Bryan	326
12. E.L. Kokanour	326
13. William H. Marshall	323
14. C.O. Hayes	318
15. Watson Eltinge	306
16. W.J. Feldman	265
17. W.W. Clark	259
18. Mrs. Blanche Burns	258
19. John N. LaChance	236
20. G. Frank Croissant	232
21. C.E. Parks	167
22. George G. Hanna	159
23. C.E. Allen	130
24. L.N. White	81
25. H.L. Fetzer	72
26. Lee J. Saban	57
27. Mack Klein	53 <sup>34</sup>

With the primary completed, the list of candidates was reduced to nine men and one woman, and the campaign continued. The "friends" of the three incumbent commissioners defended their stewardship of city affairs, while the "friends" of five challenging candidates, Needham, Hорт, Mrs. Pynchon, Newsham, and Hart, continued their severe attacks against the incumbent city government. The "friends" of the two remaining primary survivors stressed the qualities of their respective candidates, but stayed out of the incumbent versus anti-incumbent battle. As was previously noted, candidates were not allowed to solicit votes in

## Give the Women a Voice!

Women of Fort Lauderdale are entitled to a voice in the direction of this City's affairs. Long ago women received the right to vote. We believe our contention that we are entitled to a definite part in the management of our City's business is reasonable. We ask representation on the City Commission. That request, we think, is reasonable and will meet with approval of the majority of voters of this City.

Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon is a candidate for election to the City Commission. She ran fourth in the Primary. She is fully qualified to serve as a Commissioner. She is a business woman, a family woman, a homemaker. Her interests are the interests of propertyowners, for she is a propertyowner. She has managed and directed her own affairs successfully. She can and, we are confident, she will prove an efficient City Commissioner.

We believe the women of Fort Lauderdale have a right to representation on the City Commission. We feel that the City's official family should include a woman. We believe the women of the City should have a voice in how the City is operated. We believe a woman on the Commission will prove a definite asset to our City.

We all the support of all the home-loving, home-building, constructive-minded voters for Genevieve Pynchon. We KNOW that she will serve faithfully and efficiently. Women of the City have full confidence in her. Is it asking too much to request that the men of Fort Lauderdale bestow OUR judgement of the qualifications of this one woman candidate?

Please vote for Genevieve Pynchon on Monday and help the women of Fort Lauderdale in their effort to make this a better, finer, cleaner City in which to bring up their children.

## Women Taxpayers of Fort Lauderdale

Official advertisement paid for by Women Friends of Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon

## THE FRIENDS OF MR. MACK KLEIN CANDIDATE FOR Commissioner in the City of Fort Lauderdale,

Present the platform on which we base his fitness for the position, besides the broad view he takes of the future of the City as Commercial and Resort Center for Broward County.

1. He is a permanent resident, and a home owner of the City.
2. His experience in business covers a wide range in both managerial and sales capacity, having been associated successfully for seventeen years with two exceptionally large organizations of National scope, as Sales Manager.
3. He has always been honest in his endeavors; upright in the transaction of his business, holds the respect of all with whom he has been associated, either in business or socially.
4. Last but not the least he has always been in favor of Union Labor.

The management of a City is in no wise different from that of any other big business. Any private individual or corporation spending more than its income sooner or later lands in the bankruptcy courts. The City of Fort Lauderdale is no exception to the rule.

He proposes to use his influence to keep the budget of the City of Fort Lauderdale balanced. To keep the expenditures well within the receipts.

He is in favor of reducing the taxes rather than adding to them, and will work toward that end by lowering some of the extravagances that have crept in almost unawares in the City's management.

He will use his earnest and untiring effort to see that the servants of the City, drawing their sustenance from the funds furnished by the tax payers, give back to the public the courtesy and service for which they are paid.

He will use his efforts to advance the interests of this City, both morally and financially, and help to make Fort Lauderdale what its founders intended it to be, a better and safer place in which to live.

(Paid Political Advertisement)

## TOM M. BRYAN Candidate for CITY COMMISSIONER

One of the first Councilmen and later a City Commissioner, before resigning to represent Broward County in the State Legislature, one of City's largest taxpayers, experienced and familiar with the problems of our City—

STANDS FOR—

1. Drastic reduction on Real Estate taxation.
2. Furnishing only such municipal services as absolutely essential, and curtailment of expenditures under present City Budget, and there are many items where this can be done.
3. Planned campaign of City beautification—of streets, highways and parks.
4. No Politics or Favoritism in selection of employes—on merit basis only.

(Paid Political Advertisement)

## To THE VOTERS —OF THE CITY OF— FT. LAUDERDALE

In selecting Commissioners to represent you during the next two years you should be guided by the records of accomplishment of the men who have offered themselves for your approval. The Committee for Economic Advancement of City Affairs has investigated the records of Neuman, Hunt and Neufuss during this former term of office and set before you some of the many achievements (taken from the official records) that you, the voter, may know exactly what to expect from these two able, energetic, and devoted men.

### Here's what the Records Reveal:

During the administration of which Neuman and Hunt were members, the City collected ONLY 47 PER-CENT OF THE TAXES DUE. That was because propertyowners were unable to pay. Not on the record reference the City was forced, proposed, to proceed.

The present City Administration has collected 87 percent of taxes due—and has arranged, even to the extent of dipping into money pledged and set aside for the payment of bonded debts.

### Compare that Record, Please!

During the Neuman-Hunt administration the Commission widened the roadway to the beach. Remember that!

Revised and improved the Fort Broward Budget and Budget, allowing access to the City's municipal government.

It purchased the Free Public Library Building.

It paid a large balance due on a Fire Department purchase—and saved a demand of 20 percent on a saving the taxpayer about \$1,000 on that one item alone.

Advanced money for construction of the demolished old one South Side School, making the face of recreation available to the public.

Built many shuffleboard courts in order that residents and visitors might enjoy the best of entertainment.

Lighted Taylor subdivision, Yellowstone Park, and also installed new lights in the North End via the New Side street in fact, throughout the city.

Purchased pipe with which to install water meters at the Golf Course, which was so placed that it could be removed to any part of the city if needed.

Bought new fire hose.

Re-modelled the City Hall and installed new roof and completely remodelled the inside—and Commission Neuman of the present Board was then Building Inspector. (It, of course, by members of the present Commission working backward, that was a shoddy job, SAID TO BY BLAISE!)

Had City Hall Building tested for extermination of rodents.

Paid less to \$26,000 of unpaid bills and found the City hospital behind in its account with the Florida Power & Light Co.

Actually BUILT MORE NEW STREETS, under Commissioner Adams' direction, than the present City Commission has OILED.

PAID FOR THESE OPERATIONS OUT OF ITS OPERATING MONEY, and, besides, PAID OFF \$1,000,000 of our Bonded Debt. And this payment SAVED \$80,000 PER YEAR interest for the next years.

Operated the City efficiently and progressively in 1934 for \$147,051.12 and in 1935 for \$196,321.41.

Compare these OPERATING COSTS to the 107,741.31 spent by the present City Commission during the last fiscal year, and its budget of \$401,000 for the next fiscal year!

Make the comparison, and decide whether you, as taxpayers, can AFFORD the luxury of a Spending Commission or whether we want, and need, a Saving Commission.

**VOTE ON THE RECORD**

—WEATHER—  
 FORT LAUDERDALE  
 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1937

# FORT LAUDERDALE DAILY NEWS

—TIDES—  
 FORT LAUDERDALE  
 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1937

AND EVENING SENTINEL

VOL. XXVII, NO. 29

ISSUED EVERY MORNING

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1937

WEEKLY RATE \$1.00

PRICE FIVE CENTS

## VOTERS TO HEAR CANDIDATES' CLAIMS

### MASS MEETING IN PARK EXPECTED TO TURN OUT GREAT CROWD TONIGHT

*Daily News* headline announcing mass meeting in downtown Fort Lauderdale's Stranahan Park.

their own behalf during that era, and relied upon their "friends" to gather support.

As the regular election approached, the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* continued its attacks on the three incumbent commissioners. The paper endorsed no particular candidate, but seemed satisfied with any of the contenders except "The Big Three." Name recognition appeared to be of no particular advantage with many citizens. One voter stated, "I might possibly vote for John Needham, but I will be damned if I will vote for old Hortt, even if everyone votes for him but me."<sup>36</sup> A prominent citizen decided to take the negative route and said, "I will leave out the three present commissioners plus Hortt and Needham."<sup>36</sup>

On Friday, October 22, 1937, the weekly edition of the *Fort Lauderdale Shopper*, a "throwaway" sustained by advertising and edited by O.D. Stiles, who also edited a weekly paper in Hollywood, was distributed throughout Fort Lauderdale. The news portion of the paper was largely concerned with the city election, defended the record of the three incumbent commissioners, and was extremely critical of R.H. Gore and the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*. The *Shopper* ridiculed Gore's stand for economy and pointed out that in previous years the *Daily News* had regularly supported increases in the city budgets. The *Shopper* also derogatorily referred to the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* as the "Daily Snooze."<sup>37</sup>

The *Shopper* article was not O.D. Stiles' only attack on Gore and the city commission challengers he supported. Stiles also distributed an anonymous circular that made comments on each of the city commission candidates and contained a blistering attack on Robert H. Gore and the

*Fort Lauderdale Daily News*. It accused Gore of using his wealth and power to obtain special favors from the city, including the paving of a public road that led to the Gore home. The circular also accused the five city commission candidates who strongly opposed the three incumbents of being supported by the gambling interests, the liquor interests, and the "wide-open-town crowd." By implication, the circular connected Gore and his paper with those unsavory elements.<sup>38</sup>

Because of the nature of his business, Fort Lauderdale liquor store owner H.J. Newsham, an arch foe of the incumbent commission, was especially targeted for attack. Newsham was labeled as a "Liquor merchant" whose "chief sport [is] cheap gambling" and an advocate of a wide open town. The circular also stated that E.H. Hart believed in "cheaper water and free whiskey—too cheap won't do." It charged that M.A. Hortt, if elected, would "shut one eye on gambling as his past record verifies" and also attacked Hortt as an enemy of union labor. The circular described Hortt as a "Capitalist—against Labor—Daily News candidate," and continued, "Politics makes strange bedfellows—Imagine Hortt laying down with Gore and Needham—If elected, fur will fly before Thanksgiving and the old feud between Gore and Hortt will be renewed as after all Hortt isn't a YES MAN." Of John W. Needham, who led the primary ticket, the circular declared: "Politician—tax dodger and former mayor—past record bad (see minutes City Commission March 29, 1932 for record as tax dodger)—mayor during reign of gamblers, bootleggers and wiretappers—Daily News wheelhorse—If you want an open town support

this candidate—Gore will dictate this fellow's action—God help City under Gore Rule and Yellow Journalism." Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon was dismissed by the circular as "A bad bet for decency," and accused of being supported by the most unsavory characters in the city.

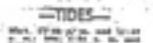
On the other hand, the circular praised Will J. Reed, the strong man of the current city commission, in glowing terms. Reed was described as "being fought tooth and toe by every gambler in Broward County." Commissioner Frank J. Norton was described as "Honorable—sincere—fearless and honest—Defeated Gore in his attempt to snatch five years free taxes on the Governors' Club—Against gambling though approached and offered their support." The circular also gave incumbent city commissioner Joel M. Taul a "Clean Bill of Health." Thomas B. Manuel and John H. Durham, the two candidates not involved in the incumbent versus non-incumbent squabble, also received high praise from the circular. Manuel was described as "the Next Mayor" and as being "against illegal gambling." Durham, too, was declared as "against lawlessness such as gambling and other forms of vice." Immediately following the distribution of the circular, candidates Manuel and Durham both came to the *Daily News* office and disclaimed any knowledge of or responsibility for the attack on the character of their opponents.<sup>39</sup>

M.A. Hortt, when contacted by the *Daily News*, issued a vigorous response. "I have served this city efficiently as a city commissioner," he stated. "I intend to serve efficiently, practically, and to assist in giving people an economic government based on sound business principles. The records are open for anyone to examine. I





# FORT LAUDERDALE DAILY NEWS



VOL. XXVII, NO. 36

ISSUED FOR THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1937.

PUBLISHED DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAY

PRICE FIVE CENTS

## CHARACTER ASSASSINS ATTACK FOES OF "BIG THREE" COMMISSION GANG

### CITY HALL RING TICKET NOW CLEARLY DEFINED

DailyNews counter-attack on the anonymous election circular.

Anonymous, Unlabeled Circular Produced In Effort To Blast Down Opposition to Reed-Taul-Norton Trio; "Big Three" Painted As "Lily White"

suggest that they be looked into because the answer is in the records." John W. Needham told the *Daily News* that no answer was required and that "only a pretty cowardly sort of individual or organization would make such an attack." Nevertheless, he went on to defend his record in greater detail:

"Everybody who has been here any length of time knows that I served this town in an efficient way, and that I helped keep our operating expenses down. Everybody also knows that I own some property here and everybody who has asked me has learned that I am opposed to any "wide open town" proposition. I just think that this circular proves how desperate the opposition has become and I'm not worried in the slightest about its effect. Instead of being a tax dodger, as this circular charges, I am just the opposite. Only this week I had to give up seven lots, on which the city commission sold tax certificates to Mr. Burns of Miami, because I couldn't pay the high taxes."<sup>43</sup>

The circular dismissed H.J. Newsham, a bitter critic of the city commission majority who loudly voiced his determination to "clean out city hall," as a "Liquor merchant—chief sport cheap gambling—suits Gore but not strong enough for *Daily News* to openly support. Pass this one up—won't do—open town man." Newsham told the *Daily News*, "I don't give a rap about what's in this dirty thing. The City Hall gang is against me. I have said I'd clean out the City Hall and I mean it. I

mean, too, to clean out the Fire Department, and I've told them so. They don't like me and this is their way of showing it." "Friends" of Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon put a paid political advertisement in the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* in which Mrs. Pynchon stated that the charges against her were unfair. She emphatically denied that she favored a wide open town.<sup>44</sup>

The *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* responded to the circular in a furious manner, attacking it as a "Scandal Sheet" and calling its anonymous author a "Character Assassin." Then the *Daily News* did some investigative work and traced the authorship to O.D. Stiles of Hollywood, the publisher of the *Fort Lauderdale Shopper*. R.H. Gore made an issue of the fact that the circular did not carry a union label.<sup>45</sup> Distribution of the circular was traced to Mrs. Lelah Losey, and she produced an affidavit which follows:

#### AFFIDAVIT

Before me a Notary Public in and for Broward County, State of Florida, there appeared Mrs. Lelah Losey, who after being duly sworn, deposed and said:

On Saturday morning the circulars in question were left at my house for distribution. I was not at home at the time, but my daughter took the circulars and three dollars as part payment for their distribution. My daughter told me that they had been left by Mr. O.D. Stiles, for whom I regularly distribute a weekly

circular. My daughter is acquainted with Mr. Stiles.

My son told me there were some "hot things" in the circular and said I had better show them to someone in authority before distributing them. I took a copy of the circular to Chief of Police Kaiser, and Mr. Kaiser told me there was nothing illegal in the circular and it would be all right for me to distribute them.

I met Commissioner Taul on the street after I had shown the circular to Mr. Kaiser. I told Mr. Taul that I had undertaken to distribute circulars in which his name was mentioned and I told him that he ought to see it.

I had no intention of distributing anything that might cause anyone any trouble.

LELAH LOSEY

Sworn to before me this 25th day of October 1937.

Marguerite K. Armbrust

My commission expires 5-9-39.<sup>46</sup>

The controversial city election was held on October 25, and the results were revealing. For Joel M. Taul, Frank J. Norton, and Will J. Reed, the three incumbent commissioners, it was a crushing defeat. They finished seventh, ninth, and tenth, respectively. This was the first election since the city commission form of government was established in 1925 that not a single incumbent commissioner was returned to office. Needham and Hortt returned to office, after an absence of two

years, finishing third and fourth, respectively. Thomas B. Manuel and John H. Durham, the two challengers not involved in the anti-incumbent rhetoric, finished first and second respectively. Obviously, Manuel and Durham received votes from both factions, so their strategy paid off politically. Mrs. Pynchon finished in fifth place, thus becoming the first woman to be elected to the Fort Lauderdale City Commission.

The five anti-incumbent candidates finished third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth, with the complete returns as follows:

1. Thomas B. Manuel	1,507
2. John H. Durham	1,437
3. John W. Needham	1,410
4. M.A. Hottt	1,348
5. Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon	1,232
6. H.J. Newsham	1,097
7. Joel M. Taul	777
8. E.H. Hart	761
9. Frank J. Norton	708
10. Will J. Reed	507**

The political broom swept clean. An entirely new city commission was sworn into office and quickly chose Thomas B. Manuel as mayor and John H. Durham as vice mayor. The new commission then proceeded to make a clean sweep of the top city positions by means of mass firings. City Manager Albert Merrill was ousted and replaced by John K. (Old Man) Huey, a former commission candidate and long-time city functionary who had served in various city positions during previous administrations. City Auditor and Clerk J.A. Warren, a former Broward County tax collector, was fired and replaced by Mrs. Florence Hardy. Chief of Police John Kaiser was fired and replaced by R.B. McDonald, who had previous law enforcement experience. Fire Chief John Cody was replaced by Jerry Carter, who had previously held that office. The twenty-five-year-old municipal judge, Edward Heimburger, who was prominent in the local Elks Lodge, was fired, but the commission managed to pacify the Elks by appointing A.L. McMillan, who was also very prominent in that lodge, to the position. City Recreation Director Ernst Bratzel was removed by means of abolition of the recreation position. Also slated for the "ax" was City Attorney George W. English, Jr., who had held that position for nine years. But English was temporarily retained until current city legal work could be completed. This "current legal work" was not completed until 1939, at which point English resigned. Also targeted for ouster was the long-time manager of the Las Olas Casino and very successful swimming coach, the vener-



**Thomas B. Manuel.**



**John H. Durham.**

able Al Gordon, who had held that position since the opening of the Casino in 1928, and who had served during four city administrations. But Gordon was protected by contract and managed to hold on to his position until 1938.<sup>45</sup>

The new city administration also dealt with the budget in a "meat ax" manner. Property assessments were reduced by ten percent, and the city work force was reduced by mass firings. However, as so often happened in the Fort Lauderdale of that era, the commission soon accumulated more than its share of critics. Hortt had a falling out with Gore, as had been predicted by the infamous election-time circular, retained his existing enemies, and acquired new ones. John H. Durham soon lost his popularity, and it became evident that John W. Needham's political days were numbered.

In the 1939 election, Needham did not seek reelection, and Hortt suffered a crushing defeat, finishing fifteenth in a field of eighteen candidates, with 343 votes. He never again sought public office. John H. Durham finished seventh in the primary and eighth in the general election. He lived in retirement until his death in 1946. Thomas B. Manuel and Mrs. Genevieve Pynchon were the only incumbents reelected in 1939. However, since he finished fifth, Manuel had to settle for being one of the commissioners rather than serving as mayor. In 1940, he was called into active duty by the army and resigned as city commissioner. He served in combat in the Pacific theater during World War II. In 1946 Manuel returned to the political field as an unsuccessful candidate for a place in the Florida Senate. During the 1950s he served as chairman of the Florida Turnpike Commission under Governors Dan McCarty and Leroy Collins. He died in 1987 at the age of eighty-eight. Mrs. Pynchon did not run for reelection in 1941. She died in 1943. The city election of 1939 sent one message that was both loud and clear—the era of Hortt and Needham was over.<sup>46</sup>

The other figures involved in the rancorous 1937 election had varied futures as well. B.V. Pace, one of the two incumbent commissioners who did not seek reelection in 1937, died the following year. Mayor Lewis E. Moore, who also declined to seek another term, waged an unsuccessful campaign for congress in 1938. He returned to city government as mayor-commissioner from 1939 to 1941, and again from 1951 to 1953. However, twelve years later, Moore "went to the well" once too often and made an unsuccessful attempt to return to the commission. He died in 1985. The commissioners that R.H. Gore

labeled "The Big Three" encountered various fates. The colorful Will J. Reed made several unsuccessful efforts to return to the commission and never again held elective public office. He remained a conspicuous figure in Fort Lauderdale until his death in 1944. Frank J. Norton, well along in years at the time of his 1937 defeat, remained in retirement. Joel M. Taul returned to the city commission from 1941 to 1947, and again from 1949 to 1953. He died in 1964.

Robert H. Gore continued his aggressive editorial policies. His personal feuds with public figures became legendary, and his numerous investments in Broward County real estate continued to increase his already substantial fortune. Gore sold the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* to the *Chicago Tribune* interests in 1963, but remained a powerful figure in Broward County until his death in 1972.

The 1937 city election was significant for several reasons. It was the first time

that R.H. Gore took an active and aggressive interest in city politics. It was also the first election in which not a single incumbent city commissioner was reelected. Finally, this election demonstrated once and for all that the system which did not allow candidates to campaign in the normal political manner was not workable. The *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, the *Fort Lauderdale Shopper*, the eleventh hour circular, and others could write or say anything that they chose about and against any candidate, yet the offended candidate was unable to make an adequate response, having to rely upon "friends" for any defense in their behalf. Eventually, the rules would be changed to conform with reality. Only then could candidates for city office campaign in the normal manner. In the meantime, Fort Lauderdale city politics provided a unique and lively spectacle, as strikingly demonstrated by the election of 1937 and the involvement of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*.

**WE** THE NEWLY ELECTED  
MEMBERS  
of the  
**City**  
**Commission**

Take This Means Of  
Extending

**OUR THANKS**

TO THE VOTERS

of the  
CITY OF FT. LAUDERDALE  
for the

CONFIDENCE THEY HAVE PLACED IN US

THOMAS B. MANUEL  
J. H. (Senator) DURHAM  
JOHN W. NEEDHAM  
M. A. HORTT  
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# Endnotes

- For material covering the career of George G. Mathews, the founder of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, the author relied on the Mathews file located in the archives of the Broward County Historical Commission, Fort Lauderdale. An excellent characterization of Robert H. Gore, long-time publisher of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, can be found in *Past the Edge of Poverty*, by Gore's grandson, Fort Lauderdale attorney Paul A. Gore (Fort Lauderdale: R.H. Gore Company, 1990). The author also relied on appropriate issues of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*. For characterizations of the personalities involved in city politics during the era 1925-1937, the author is indebted to his father, Fort Lauderdale attorney Hugh Lester (1884-1957), who was a keen observer of the political scene and who knew the leading candidates personally. Some of the material is based on the author's personal knowledge.
- Mathews file in the archives of the Broward County Historical Commission.
- Philip Weidling and August Burghard, *Checked Sunshine, the Story of Fort Lauderdale, 1793-1955* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), 31.
- The official 1930 United States Census results, published by the Government Printing Office that year, also contained the 1910 and 1920 figures.
- William Heine arrived in Fort Lauderdale in 1909 to serve as principal of the Fort Lauderdale school. The following year he started the *Fort Lauderdale Herald*. He published the paper until 1916, when he sold it and moved to Deland. After a short stay in Deland, Heine moved to Connecticut and resumed his work in education. He died suddenly in 1919. See Heine's obituary in the *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, December 7, 1919.
- Conflicting accounts have led to some confusion over the date Fort Lauderdale's municipal government was organized. The dates March 27, 1911 and March 30, 1911 are most frequently cited. See Weidling and Burghard, *Checked Sunshine*, 35, for a discussion of this question. Despite this uncertainty, incorporation did not become official until June 2, 1911, when the town charter was approved by the Florida Legislature.
- Gore, *Past the Edge of Poverty*, 219.
- Mathews file, Broward County Historical Commission archives.
- Gore, *Past the Edge of Poverty*, 229 ff.
- Will J. Reed (1871-1944) was a very conspicuous figure in Fort Lauderdale for thirty-four years, and was active in civic, fraternal, and sports activities. The late Broward County Historian Dr. Cooper C. Kirk (1920-1989) has related that Reed coached a town baseball team on which Dr. Kirk participated during the 1930s.
- Weidling and Burghard, *Checked Sunshine*, 279-281, contains the names of the Fort Lauderdale mayors during the town's formative years.
- Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, October 4, 1937.
- Weidling and Burghard, *Checked Sunshine*, 12; The author's personal knowledge.
- Told to the author by his father, Fort Lauderdale attorney Hugh Lester.
- The author's personal knowledge.
- Samuel E. Lawrence (1882-?) lived in Fort Lauderdale only eight years, but he certainly made a big impression during that time. Armed with two degrees from Purdue, a veteran of World War I, and very active in the American Legion and the Masonic Lodge, as well as in civic enterprises, Lawrence assumed the duties of Commissioner of Public Safety in 1928. He was a rigid, unbending puritan who was determined to end vice in the city by strict enforcement of city laws. He made a major political blunder by appointing an outsider, a man from West Palm Beach whom he had met at an American Legion meeting, as chief of police. The new chief became very unpopular because of his allegedly hardboiled and highhanded tactics. This perception contributed to Lawrence's decisive defeat in 1929. In 1933, Lawrence moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he joined the United States Corps of Engineers and worked on Mississippi River projects. He was a member of the army reserves and was called into active service during World War II. In 1946 he became professor of hydraulic engineering at Louisiana State University. He was the author of a textbook in his field as well as a number of articles in professional journals and in *The American Legion* magazine. Much of this biographical material was furnished by the author's father, Fort Lauderdale attorney Hugh Lester, a close friend of Lawrence. Lawrence's listing in *Who Was Who in America, 1985-1989* does not give the date of his death.
- Gore, *Past the Edge of Poverty*, 5.
- This background indicates that Gore was not always a consistent supporter of the Democratic Party. Also his praise of John Brown (1800-1859), the fanatical abolitionist, is surprising. Considering the political climate of the 1920s, Brown was probably as unpopular in the North during this period as he was in the South. Debs probably did not appreciate being equated with John Brown, since Brown ended his career on the gallows.
- The Platt Amendment was adopted after the Spanish-American War and gave the United States the legal right to intervene in Cuban affairs to insure the public order. Many Cubans objected to the amendment. The Platt Amendment was repealed in 1933.
- Gore, *Past the Edge of Poverty*, 116.
- Ibid.*, 341 ff.
- Ibid.*, 144 ff.
- The appropriate issues of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*; The author's personal knowledge.
- Ibid.*
- Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, October 22, 1935.
- Ibid.*, October 22, 1935 ff.
- Ibid.*, October 29, 1935.
- The Reed file in the archives of the Broward County Historical Commission; "Broward County's Development During the Great War: Broward's Businessmen, 1918," *Broward Legacy*, vol. 10, nos. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1987), 44.
- The Townsend Plan was an old age pension plan promoted by Dr. Francis E. Townsend of Long Beach, California. According to this plan, the United States government would pay a pension of \$200 a month to every person over the age of sixty, with the provision that the entire amount must be spent within the United States during a one month period. The Townsend Plan attracted wide support during the lean Depression years, and Townsend Clubs sprang up across the country. In Florida they developed much political clout, and elected many candidates to office between 1936 and 1938. Former newspaper publisher George G. Mathews was at one time president of the Fort Lauderdale club. Gore, who later developed a reputation as a conservative, supported the Townsend candidates instead of the more conservative Wilcox because of his strong animosity toward the incumbent congressman. The Townsend Plan never became law.
- Donald G. Lester, "Broward Politics 1928-1938: Political Influence in Depression Era Broward," *Broward Legacy*, vol. XIII, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1990), 18-20.
- Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, July 6, 1937 ff.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*, October 14, 1937. The impressions are those of the author, who attended the meeting.
- Ibid.*, October 19, 1937.
- Told to the author's father, Fort Lauderdale attorney Hugh Lester, by W.C. Burkett. The author overheard the exchange.
- Told to the author's father, Fort Lauderdale attorney Hugh Lester, by J.F. Charlton, a prominent surveyor.
- The Fort Lauderdale Shopper*, October 22, 1937, copy in the possession of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society archives, Fort Lauderdale.
- Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, October 23, 25, 1937.
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.* During the Great Depression, certain speculators, called "tax sharks," acquired property by paying the property taxes of delinquent taxpayers and then holding on to the property until better times, when they sold it for a large profit. Many a fortune was made by that process. Burns was one of the most notorious of the "tax sharks" in south Florida. Needless to say, "tax sharks" were very unpopular during those hard Depression years. It seems strange that John W. Needham let seven lots go by tax default. Most people thought of Needham as a very wealthy man.
- Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, October 23, 1937.
- During his long Fort Lauderdale career, R.H. Gore was known for his strong bias against organized labor. It is therefore interesting that he accused Stiles of not employing union labor. He no doubt did so to point out Stiles' hypocrisy for attacking Hott on this issue.
- Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, October 25, 1937.
- Ibid.*, October 26, 1937.
- The author's personal knowledge.
- Ibid.* It is the author's opinion that Tom Manuel has probably seen as much military action as anyone in Broward County. He was a veteran of three wars, serving in the Mexican Border War, as well as overseas in two world wars.