

COLONEL MATHEWS

AND THE FORT LAUDERDALE SENTINEL

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FOUNDER DAILY SENTINEL

COL. GEORGE G. MATHEWS
HOED A HARD ROW FOR MANY
YEARS AND HAS SEEN HIS
DREAMS OF A GREATER FORT
LAUDERDALE REALIZED

by George G. Mathews

My first visit to Fort Lauderdale was July, 1907. Being a member of a legislative committee to investigate the I. I. [Internal Improvement] Board. I came with Governor Broward to examine the North and South New River canals, which had just been started. Governor Broward had built the two dredges then in use on the banks of New River in the present city of Fort Lauderdale.

The population at that time was not more than one hundred people. Frank Stranahan was the pioneer to blaze the way for development of our splendid city, having come here from Ohio because of ill health. And we must admire the man who could isolate himself from human touch and civilization. He came in the year 1893 and after three years was joined by P.H. [actually P.N.] Bryan and [John] Milton Bryan with their large and interesting families. They were driven here by the great freeze of 1895 which killed their fine groves from which they were deriving large incomes.

The sons of those old men have played an important part in the progress of this section. Reed A. Bryan was one of the greatest factors in pushing development in this city; while Tom Bryan is unrivaled at the present time as a progressive developer and has become one of the wealthiest men in Broward County. These boys were well worthy of their father, Hon. P.H. Bryan. Of the sons of the Hon. Milton Bryan, two of them became United States Senators and one of them is now a U.S.

District Judge. John, another son, has been very successful in the citrus industry and is now one of our county commissioners.

Frank Oliver, Dr. T.S. Kennedy and W.H. Marshall who came in 1895 [Kennedy and Marshall actually came in 1898] with nothing but vigorous minds and willing hands have all become financially independent. Dr. Kennedy was for a number of years the only doctor here and was a real benefactor to the small community.

The Cromarties, Berryhill, Covington, H.G. Wheeler and a number of others whose names we cannot at the moment

recall came here, produced and shipped early vegetables to northern markets. Frank Oliver was one who made in one crop enough to start business and make investments that have since made him a rich man. He was the first president of what is now the Fort Lauderdale Bank & Trust Company.

Frank Stranahan started the first store here and was a kind of Godfather to the Indians, buying their hides and supply their needs.

In his scheme of drainage Broward showed an unerring vision which will in time result in giving to our nation a new

Although little known to most Broward Countians today, Colonel George Greene Mathews was one of Fort Lauderdale's outstanding figures of the 1910s and 1920s. Born in Alabama in 1855, he migrated to Brazil as a boy with his family, one of a group of Confederate families who relocated to that country following the Civil War.

During the administration of President Grover Cleveland, Mathews served as American consul at Para, Brazil. Returning to the United States, he settled in Ocala, where he became involved in local politics, serving two terms in the state legislature from Marion County. He also entered the newspaper business, publishing the *Tarpon Springs Leader*, the *Bartow Record*, and, in 1911, the *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*. The *Sentinel* was the town's second newspaper, closely following the *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, which had begun publication in late 1910.

Strongwilled and outspoken, Colonel Mathews was a tireless champion of Everglades drainage, the project which had first attracted him to southeast Florida. He also supported a number of civic improvements and reforms.

Although elected mayor of Fort Lauderdale in 1913, his greatest fame was as publisher and editor of the *Sentinel*. The paper, which he sold in 1925 at the height of the land boom, became the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News and Evening Sentinel* and has evolved into today's *Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel*. These articles, originally printed during the boom and depression years, outline Mathews' early life in Fort Lauderdale, and the newspaper's origins.

During the depression years of the late 1920s and 1930s, Colonel Mathews dedicated his efforts to the economic recovery of Fort Lauderdale and Broward County. For this purpose he founded the Taxpayer's League and served as president of the local Townsend Club. He died in Fort Lauderdale in 1944 at the age of eighty-nine.

empire. In 1907 while here with Broward we said to him, "This will be a city of 50,000 by 1930." He said the city would come but he thought more time would be required to give that population. From that visit, I had Fort Lauderdale in my mind, and three years later, selling my papers in Bartow and Tarpon Springs, I came here December 30, 1910 and established the Sentinel March 10, 1911, three months later. It was a daring thing to invest \$3,000 in machinery when the population was not more than three hundred men, women and children. Then we had only three hundred business houses; so the chance for advertising was small. But at that time our payroll was \$19 a week, a printer \$16 and a girl \$3 and the total expense did not exceed \$45. The rate we received for advertising was twelve and one half cents per inch, while the job

work never amounted to more than \$125 a month.

Those were hard years. To succeed meant hard work and privation. By bravely telling the truth we had but little patronage from the banks, and the few merchants gave us less business than the other paper which seemed to know how to keep them friendly. But we lived through those trying days.

When we resolved to start the Daily Sentinel we were told that would lead to bankruptcy, and we will confess we felt doubtful of the issue at times ourselves. But we were surprised that the first month showed a profit. The editorials gave us a large number of readers, but resulted in reducing our income. Well, "All is well that ends well." In spite of all said we put the daily across, giving a far better paper than the business justified. And we are

pleased that we turned the paper over to the Galvin brothers whose experience and resources will enable them to give a paper in every way worthy of our city and people.

In selling the Sentinel we have not lost interest and faith in Fort Lauderdale. For us it is the one spot on earth. The sale of the paper will enable us to devote a few years to literary work in which we will find pleasure, if we do not derive profit.

The present boom justifies our early predictions, and causes us to believe that 50,000 in 1930 is a very conservative estimate. The present demand, and prices for real estate portends a future greater than we dreamed of in our most enthusiastic moments. Happy we are, to have been a small factor in the present growth of our city. Let us help to make the Daily Sentinel great, and it in turn will help to make this one of the leading cities in Florida.

Geo. G. Mathews.

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COLONEL MATHEWS STARTED THE FIRST PAPER IN CITY

ESTABLISHED THE "SENTINEL"
IN 1911; MANY OBSTACLES HAD
TO BE OVERCOME

The Fort Lauderdale Sentinel, now the Fort Lauderdale Daily News, which this year entered upon its 20th year of service to the community, was founded by Col. George G. Mathews on March 10, 1911. Previous to his establishing his permanent home in this city, Col. Mathews had paid his first visit to the vicinity late in 1907, when he came here as a member of the legislative committee to investigate the drainage of the Everglades. At that time, Governor Broward had two dredges operating in this territory, and work was already considerably under way in the cutting through of the North and South canals. Although Fort Lauderdale was a small settlement of perhaps 150 people, Col. Mathews saw great possibilities in the future development of a thriving city—the balmy climate, rich soil and geographical position all contributing to this belief.

EARLY RESIDENTS

People living here in 1907 were Frank Stranahan, pioneer of this section, who had a general store on Brickell and also served in the capacity of postmaster, Philip [should be Philamon] Bryan, Reed and

Tom Bryan, Dr. T.S. Kennedy and family, the former having been the first practicing physician between Miami and Palm Beach, W.O. Berryhill and family, Ed King and family, H.G. Wheeler and family, the Craig brothers, Joe Farrow, and others whose names cannot be recalled at this time.

NEWSPAPER ESTABLISHED

So favorably had Col. Mathews been impressed, that three years later he disposed of his papers at Tarpon Springs and Bartow and moved to Fort Lauderdale. He was determined to establish a weekly publication here and was confident that the future would justify any expenditure or sacrifice he might make during the first few years. S.H. Watson of Washington, D.C., who came to Fort Lauderdale to look over conditions here, formed a partnership with Col. Mathews and a two story tin building was hastily constructed on Andrews Avenue and the corner of Second Street. The old Sentinel building was isolated from the remainder of the small business section, and Andrews Avenue northward from Wall Street had not yet advanced from the simple sand path stage.

"We bought machinery," replied Col. Mathews in describing the newspaper's first days, "which included the first cylinder press used by the Miami Herald. We bought this for \$400. We also put in a job press, a gas engine, stones and type. Our first paper was issued March 10, 1911, the first seven issues being published at Deland."

LAND BOOM

At that time, the George Boles [should be Richard J. Bolles] land sale was held in the northern section of the town known as Progresso. Thousands of people rushed here from every state in the Union and Fort Lauderdale's first land boom was on. Innumerable lots had already been sold, and these people came for the purpose of drawing numbers of their property and many of them made additional investments before returning north.

TENT CITY

Fort Lauderdale became overnight a veritable tent city as hotel accommodations were inadequate and newcomers were forced to supply themselves with such temporary housing facilities, or else move to Miami or Palm Beach.

"I employed three or four young women to get subscriptions for me and in less than a week they had secured over 400 paid subscribers made up of people from nearly every state in the Union," said Col. Mathews in reminiscing upon his early experience.

DIFFICULTIES

Col. Mathews' main obstacle, however, was the fact that Fort Lauderdale at that time boasted only five business houses, and as these were not in a financial position to advertise extensively, he had great difficulty in establishing the Sentinel upon a running basis. Although his payroll for several years averaged only \$19 weekly. Of this amount \$16 was paid to a printer,

the remaining \$3 to a girl assistant.

"I drew out never more than \$10 weekly to buy groceries, making the whole cost of getting out the paper and running a job plant not more than \$40 a week. It was difficult to raise even that much," declared Col. Mathews, "and also meet small monthly payments on machinery and supplies."

PAPER GREW

Fort Lauderdale was then part of Dade county, and the Sentinel gradually secured enough advertising from Miami to establish the newspaper upon a paying basis. Col. Mathews also secured the Dade county tax list one year during the early struggles of his publication, and this

business which amounted to over \$2,400, enabled him to pay off much of the indebtedness upon machinery and to meet other pressing obligations.

"No one can ever know the mental torture I endured in those years which were so surrounded by uncertainty," said Col. Mathews. "However, I managed to survive what appeared to be impossible conditions. Finally I raised the advertising rate to 20 cents an inch, then to 25 cents, and I was getting 30 cents when I sold the paper in 1925 to the Galvin brothers with a 2,000 paid daily subscription list."

DISASTROUS FIRE

In alluding to the great fire of 1912, Col. Mathews said that he experienced

his darkest days with the Sentinel following this disaster, as every business house with the exception of the Berryhill store was destroyed and thus his only means of support cut off. However, Oliver Broa. soon constructed a splendid brick building on Brickell Avenue and H.G. Wheeler erected the Gilbert Hotel and other buildings which lent quite a progressive aspect to Fort Lauderdale's main business street. The Gilbert, now known as the Morrison, was until the construction of the Broward, the city's principal hotel. One of the pet policies of the Sentinel was the advocating of large hotels for the city, and during all the years of its existence, it kept up a persistent fight to bring about the furnishing of more adequate hotel accommodations for winter guests.

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