

# The many faces of

# Guy I. Metcalf

by HENRY E. JOHNSON, III

It has been said of Guy I. Metcalf that he was one of the most industrious men in Florida's history. Entrepreneur, publisher, real estate developer, and politician, he was one of a group of colorful characters who migrated to the southeast Florida frontier in the late nineteenth century. Many different historical sources have mentioned Metcalf in passing, but none has explored in depth the career of this truly unique individual. Although his public and private careers were centered in Palm Beach County, he also played a major role in opening the New River region.

Guy Metcalf's illustrious career began on February 24, 1887, with the founding of the *Indian River News*, one of the first newspapers in southeast Florida. Located in Melbourne, the newspaper catapulted Metcalf, as its editor and owner, into the public eye through its biting editorials and cryptic literary style.<sup>1</sup> Metcalf had a real eye for the future, and he envisioned an enormous amount of growth on the southeast coast of Florida. So, even as his career as a newspaperman was in its infancy, he moved his newspaper further south, to the town of Juno, on March 18, 1891, and changed its name to *The Tropical Sun*.<sup>2</sup>

Juno, situated at the northern end of Lake Worth, was the ideal location for a newspaper. In 1890, the small settlement had become the county seat of

Dade County. One of the largest counties in Florida, Dade, at that time, extended from the upper Keys to what is now Stuart.<sup>3</sup>

*The Tropical Sun* soon earned the title of the "working man's newspaper." It was the only newspaper in Dade County and the official organ for the entire Palm Beach area.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the establishment of *The Tropical Sun*, Metcalf decided to expand and diversify his operations. Like many of Florida's early pioneers, he saw an opportunity to buy great expanses of land for relatively little money. Using his newspaper as collateral, Guy borrowed large sums of money to buy land and set up the Tropical Real Estate Exchange. Naturally, he used his newspaper to further his entrepreneurial exploits by running a column in each edition called "Tropical Real Estate," where he advertised not only his own land, but other property in the area for sale, for a modest percent of the profit, of course.<sup>5</sup>

Guy Metcalf was soon a successful businessman. However, something was about to happen which would significantly enrich his life; he was to meet Miss Edith Augusta Lacey. The chance meeting was described in great detail many years later by their son, Lacey Metcalf.

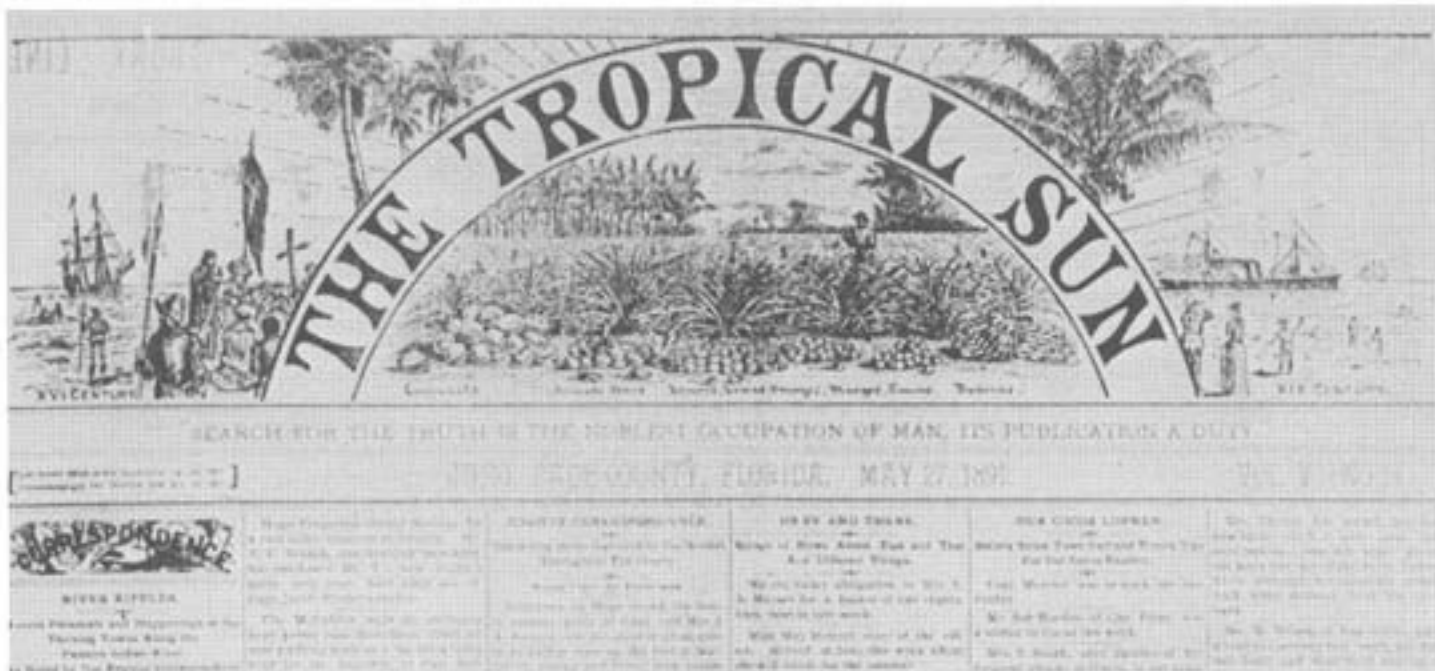
Edith Lacey, a talented violinist from Guy's hometown of Niles, Ohio, had

come to Florida for her health. She stayed at E. N. "Cap" Dimick's Coconut Grove House in Palm Beach. One afternoon, the Dimicks took her on a boat trip to Juno to watch the young country editor get out his weekly paper. The editor, not expecting visitors, wore his old ink-stained red flannel shirt and overalls. The press was out of kilter and, as he struggled with it, the pretty Miss Lacey made teasing remarks. After she left, Guy vowed to get even with the "Yankee Girl" even if he had to marry her.<sup>6</sup>

The wedding took place in Niles, Ohio, in June, 1892. As Metcalf's extracurricular activities increased, Mr. S. Bobo Dean became his assistant editor. Dean was later to become the editor of what is today the *Palm Beach Post and Times*.<sup>7</sup>

About the same time that Guy was courting Edith Lacey, he was also moving into a new phase of his career, that of road builder. In the late nineteenth century, Dade was the state's largest county in area, but with a very sparse population. Most of the early pioneers settled around Dade's two major bodies of water, Lake Worth and Biscayne Bay. The "Lake" had muscle enough in 1889 to snatch the county seat away from the "Bay" in a legal election, much to the chagrin of the Biscayne Bay people.<sup>8</sup>

Between these two rival areas, separat-

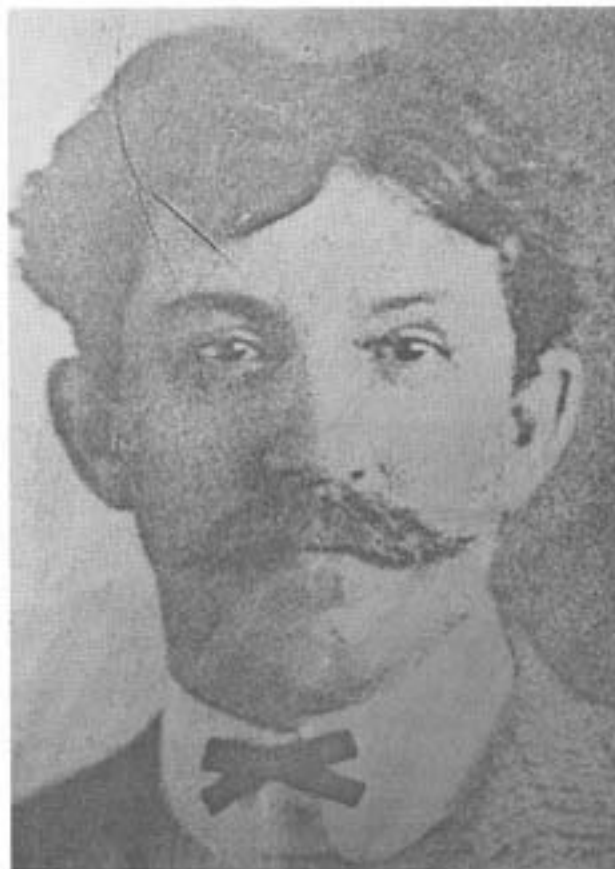


ed by more than sixty miles of pinelands, swamps, and alligators, travel was difficult at best. Two modes of transportation were available to travelers in those days: a sea voyage or a walk along the beach like the famed "Barefoot Mailman." Ocean voyages could be hazardous, and might take several days, depending upon the prevailing winds. Walking the beach was scenic but rigorous, and it was impossible to move cargo by that route. People needed a road. The Dade County commissioners paid E. L. White, a surveyor from Lemon City on upper Biscayne Bay, \$350 to lay out a road from Juno to Lemon City. Then, in an attempt to save money and labor, they cut off the upper twenty-six miles, since a boat line already provided adequate transportation along the lake.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the road was to be built from a small settlement at the south end of Lake Worth called Lantana to Lemon City. The commissioners hired the young newspaper editor who boasted that he could build such a road at an astonishingly low cost of \$24.50 per mile. Constructing the road consisted of clearing an eight foot wide strip of trees, stumps, palmettoes, and rocks. The first wagon to use the road imprinted the ruts.<sup>10</sup> The bridges to cross the small streams were built by Peter W. Merritt, a bridge builder from Kentucky. New River, the deepest waterway on the route, was crossed by a ferry.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, Guy Metcalf did not get into the road business just to make money on construction. As soon as the road was completed, in December 1892, Metcalf began the first stagecoach line on the new route. The company was

The masthead of "The Tropical Sun" (above) reflects the themes of transportation and agriculture, both vital to the early development of south Florida. Guy Metcalf (below, as he appeared when he published "The Tropical Sun") moved the paper from Juno to West Palm Beach in 1895.



called the Biscayne Bay Stage Line, and consisted of two canvas-covered springless wagons, each drawn by two mules.<sup>12</sup>

The stage required two days to travel from Lantana to Lemon City with an overnight stopover at the ferry site on the New River. Guy Metcalf rented land at the ferry site from the Brickell family of Miami and set up a tent city. The tents were placed in a circle around a large campfire which provided light and helped to keep mosquitoes away. On January 25, 1893, the first southbound stage left Lantana with an enthusiastic Guy Metcalf aboard. Being a good journalist, Metcalf wrote about the entire trip and printed it in his newspaper. As one Dade County historian described it, "The plan was for the stage to run three times a week. As the southbound stage left Lantana, a northbound stage left Lemon City. At the end of the day they would deposit their passengers and baggage at Guy Metcalf's tent camp and then return the next day with the second set of passengers."<sup>13</sup>

With all that Metcalf was involved in, it soon became apparent that he would

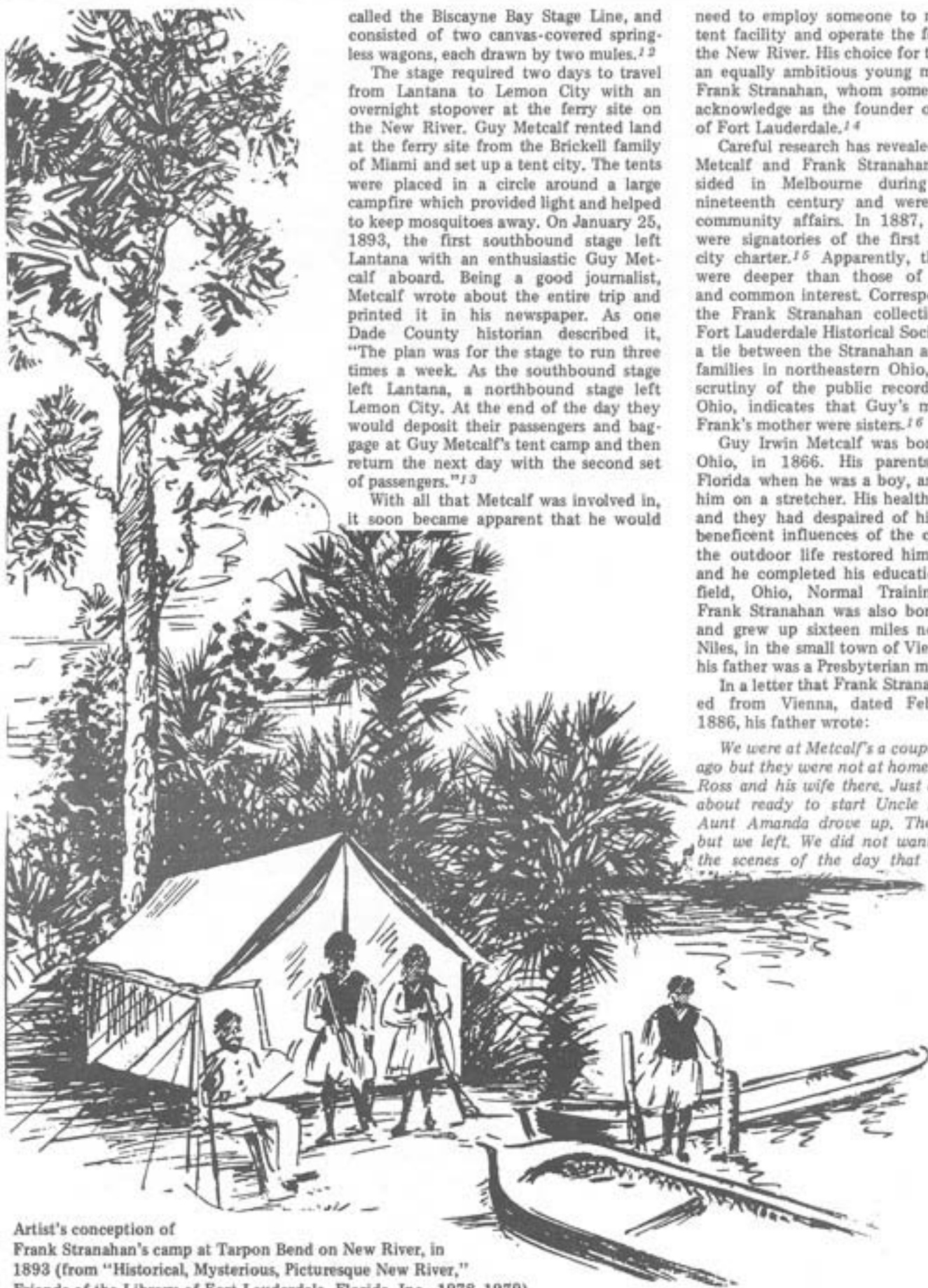
need to employ someone to manage his tent facility and operate the ferry across the New River. His choice for the job was an equally ambitious young man named Frank Stranahan, whom some historians acknowledge as the founder of the City of Fort Lauderdale.<sup>14</sup>

Careful research has revealed that Guy Metcalf and Frank Stranahan both resided in Melbourne during the late nineteenth century and were active in community affairs. In 1887, both men were signatories of the first Melbourne city charter.<sup>15</sup> Apparently, their bonds were deeper than those of friendship and common interest. Correspondence in the Frank Stranahan collection of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society reveals a tie between the Stranahan and Metcalf families in northeastern Ohio, and close scrutiny of the public records in Niles, Ohio, indicates that Guy's mother and Frank's mother were sisters.<sup>16</sup>

Guy Irwin Metcalf was born in Niles, Ohio, in 1866. His parents came to Florida when he was a boy, and brought him on a stretcher. His health was poor, and they had despaired of his life. The beneficent influences of the climate and the outdoor life restored him, however, and he completed his education at Canfield, Ohio, Normal Training School. Frank Stranahan was also born in Ohio, and grew up sixteen miles northeast of Niles, in the small town of Vienna, where his father was a Presbyterian minister.<sup>17</sup>

In a letter that Frank Stranahan received from Vienna, dated February 19, 1886, his father wrote:

*We were at Metcalf's a couple of weeks ago but they were not at home. We found Ross and his wife there. Just as we were about ready to start Uncle Henry and Aunt Amanda drove up. They alighted but we left. We did not want to repeat the scenes of the day that they came*



Artist's conception of Frank Stranahan's camp at Tarpon Bend on New River, in 1893 (from "Historical, Mysterious, Picturesque New River," Friends of the Library of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Inc., 1978-1979).

here . . . If Aunt Beck knew how things were, she would turn over in her grave. Such manners and greediness I never saw.<sup>18</sup>

A second letter from Robert Stranahan, Frank's father, dated Vienna, December 8, 1886, states:

*I know of nothing specially interesting. Metcalf's folks have gone to Florida. Charlie is the only one at home. [Guy had a brother, Charles P. Metcalf.]<sup>19</sup>*

The strongest evidence of the relationship between Guy Metcalf and Frank Stranahan may be found in a letter written on stationary with the letterhead of "The Tropical Real Estate Exchange." This letter, dated New River, January 31, 1893, was written by Frank Stranahan to his brother in Vienna:

*One week ago tonight I left Melbourne. Here I am in camp. Two of us, myself and darkey cook. Will you join us? My nearest neighbor is Capt. O'Neil [Dennis O'Neill]. Guy and Uncle Will were here last week.<sup>20</sup>*

Guy Metcalf's father was William I. Metcalf.

During Guy Metcalf's short career as a road builder he constructed two roads, the route from Lantana to Lemon City and a small road from Mangonia to Juno.<sup>21</sup> Then, in 1893, Henry Flagler came roaring into the area like an economic hurricane and began to build his great winter resort at Palm Beach. By 1895, it was becoming apparent that with the extension of the railroad and the creation of Palm Beach, the area was destined to boom with new growth. Guy Metcalf always liked to be where the action was, so he moved his newspaper from Juno to West Palm Beach, a new town on the west side of Lake Worth. The industrious editor and his associate, Bobo Dean, loaded all their equipment onto a barge and floated it down the lake. After arriving in West Palm Beach, the two set up shop on the north side of Clematis Street, two blocks from the lake.<sup>22</sup>

Guy Metcalf's *The Tropical Sun* was not the first newspaper in West Palm Beach. Just one year prior to its arrival, a man named C. M. Gardner started a newspaper called the *Gazetteer*. Mr. Gardner did not seem to have much luck with newspapers. The *Gazetteer* burned to the ground in a fire which destroyed much of downtown West Palm Beach in February 1896. Shortly thereafter, Gardner sold what was left of his newspaper to the Dean brothers. This paper evolved into the present-day *Palm Beach Daily News*. Gardner then went to Miami and started a second paper, *Our Sunny Land*, but eventually went broke.<sup>23</sup>

While Gardner was in West Palm

Beach, the rivalry between the town's two editors was fierce. Gardner was described as a black-whiskered, frock-coated man of uncertain temper and a heavy drinker. When the *Gazetteer* was late in publication, Gardner blamed it on his drunken printer. Since he was the sole factotum of the plant, there was no doubt as to the identity of the "drunken printer." At one time the two editors met in combat. Gardner, toting a pistol, was felled by Metcalf, armed with a printer's mallet.<sup>24</sup>

A short time after Gardner went broke in Miami, he returned to West Palm Beach to visit. He began taunting

Marcus Frank of West Palm Beach to step outside his mother's store. Frank did, drew a line with his toe on the dirt street, and told Gardner, "Step over that line and I'll kill you!" Gardner did, and Frank shot him dead. Interestingly enough, an inquest was never held. The local officials simply ruled the shooting "self defense."<sup>25</sup>

Guy Metcalf continued for six more years as owner and editor of *The Tropical Sun*. Then, on April 4, 1902, he sold the newspaper to the Model Land Company, which was owned by Henry Flagler.<sup>26</sup> In the early 1900s, railroad builders in Florida were granted 8,000 acres

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- It is--The Official Organ of the Town of West Palm Beach, in which are published all Town Ordinances, Legal Notices, Etc.
- It is--A Complete Record of the progress and development of the Lower East Coast Region of Florida generally, and of Lake Worth in particular.
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- It is--Recognized as a fearless advocate of the rights and interests of the common people, and is conducted strictly as a "people's paper."
- It is--A paper that no owner of property in Dade County can afford to be without. Attention to its Legal Notices will save its cost several times over each year.
- It is--An Old Established Paper that has not missed a single issue since February, 1887.
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- It is--Undoubtedly, the Best Advertising Medium on the Lower East Coast of Florida.
- It is--Published at West Palm Beach, Fla., and its Subscription Price is \$2.00 Per Year; Six Months for \$1.00; Postage Paid.

GUY I. METCALF,  
Editor and Proprietor.

This advertisement for "The Tropical Sun" appeared in the "Business Directory, Guide and History of Dade County, Fla. for 1896-97," which was printed on "The Tropical Sun" press, but was published by Metcalf's rival, C.M. Gardner.



James E. Ingraham, vice-president of the F.E.C. Railway and president of the Model Land Company, which purchased "The Tropical Sun" in 1902.

of land for every mile of track that they laid. The Model Land Company was simply a holding company designed to liquidate the land Flagler received as he built his railroad south.<sup>27</sup> Flagler bought *The Tropical Sun* primarily to help promote land sales, and he turned it over to Harlan W. Brush to edit and run.<sup>28</sup>

In September 1902, Guy's father, attorney Will Metcalf, became a judge in West Palm Beach.<sup>29</sup> This event seemed to launch Guy into a whole new career—that of politician. In 1904, Guy Metcalf entered the political arena through the one avenue in which he was originally trained, education. He was elected as one of the three trustees of Dade County's School District No. 1.<sup>30</sup>

On June 27, 1885, Dade County had been broken up into four school districts. District No. 1 embraced all that portion lying between the northern boundary of the county and the Hillsboro Inlet. District No. 2 included all of the county from the Hillsboro Inlet to the south line of section forty, known as the Jonathan Lewis Donation Grant. District No. 3 was to include all the county from the Jonathan Lewis Donation Grant to the southernmost point of the mainland. District No. 4 included Elliott Key and all other islands and keys adjacent thereto.<sup>31</sup> By 1904, when Guy Metcalf ran for office, most of these school districts had been subdivided into nine separate districts, but District No.

1 remained the largest and most heavily populated.

Many things occurred in the northern end of Dade County during the years that Guy Metcalf served as trustee of School District No. 1. The other two trustees were Dr. H.C. Hood, one of the first doctors in the West Palm Beach area and one of the city's original founders, and Mr. H.T. Grant.<sup>32</sup> South Florida was in its infancy at this time. However, the Palm Beaches were booming with new inhabitants and millions of railroad dollars. Construction was going on everywhere, and schools had to be erected to educate the many children who were being brought into the area by their parents.

Guy Metcalf was an innovator and quite frequently did things his own way. This particular quirk in his character was to cause his downfall. J. R. Anthony was elected to represent Special Tax School District No. 1 on the Dade County School Board, and a vicious rivalry ensued between Anthony and Metcalf.<sup>33</sup> As a trustee, part of Metcalf's job was to scout the county for possible school sites whenever a particular group of people within his district petitioned the school board for a school. After he located a suitable site for the new school, the petitioners were to raise \$250 for the cost of lumber (supplied by George Lainhart) and provide plenty of men to build the school. The school board would provide a teacher. After the

school was opened, it was the trustee's job to see to it that the building was kept in good repair, that there were enough desks for each student, and enough textbooks to go around. Among the other duties of the trustees were recommending teachers for renewal for the next year; making out a financial statement for each fiscal year, including the budget for the upcoming year and all itemized costs; and procuring transportation for students.<sup>34</sup> Transportation facilities usually consisted of a school boat that ran up and down Lake Worth. However, the most common mode of transportation, especially for blacks, was walking.

Guy Metcalf was a man who was used to making his own rules and running his own business according to his values. Thus, even though he was an extremely innovative individual, he was irrepresible when it came to rules and regulations. One notable example of Metcalf's unwillingness to abide by established rules can be found in an affidavit sworn by Dade County's Superintendent of Public Instruction, R. E. Hall, in 1914. On July 1, 1907, according to this affidavit, Metcalf borrowed from Hall's office in Miami, Minute Book Number Two of the School Board, containing the official minutes from January 1897 to July 1905. The book was never returned.<sup>35</sup> The disappearance of the minute book appears to have been connected to recent developments in the ongoing battle between Metcalf and J.R. Anthony.

On January 25, 1908, charges were filed with the school board of Dade County by J.R. Anthony against the three trustees of School District No. 1.



Judge William I. Metcalf, Guy's father, stands at upper left in this 1919 photograph of Lake Worth area pioneers (photo courtesy of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County).



Completed in 1909, the Central School building for which Metcalf battled is now part of Twin Lakes High School in West Palm Beach.

These charges included: 1) dereliction of duty; 2) failure to maintain school property; 3) failure to apply for state aid by the allotted deadline and losing \$600 in revenues for the district; 4) failure to pay the janitors; 5) failing to maintain sanitary conditions at the West Palm Beach school, and causing the health department to close the school; 6) knowingly hiring the firm of Smith and Grier to build a school at the end of Hibiscus Street in West Palm Beach for \$40,000 and withholding the warrants for the money in order to exclude the architect; 7) by withholding the money for the new school, violating the contract with the builder, causing the builder to sue; 8) stopping all construction on the new school "on the hill" because of the builder's suit; and 9) during the summer of 1907 entering into a secret contract with the teachers of School District No. 1 to pay them more money per month than the school board had agreed to pay them. Charges six and seven specifically cited Guy Metcalf.<sup>36</sup>

On the morning of Tuesday, February 4, 1908, the trustees of School District No. 1 — Guy Metcalf, Dr. Hood, and George L. Branning — appeared before the school board to answer these charges. The trustees were accompanied by their counsel, Will Metcalf. A rather violent argument ensued between Guy Metcalf and J.R. Anthony, but the

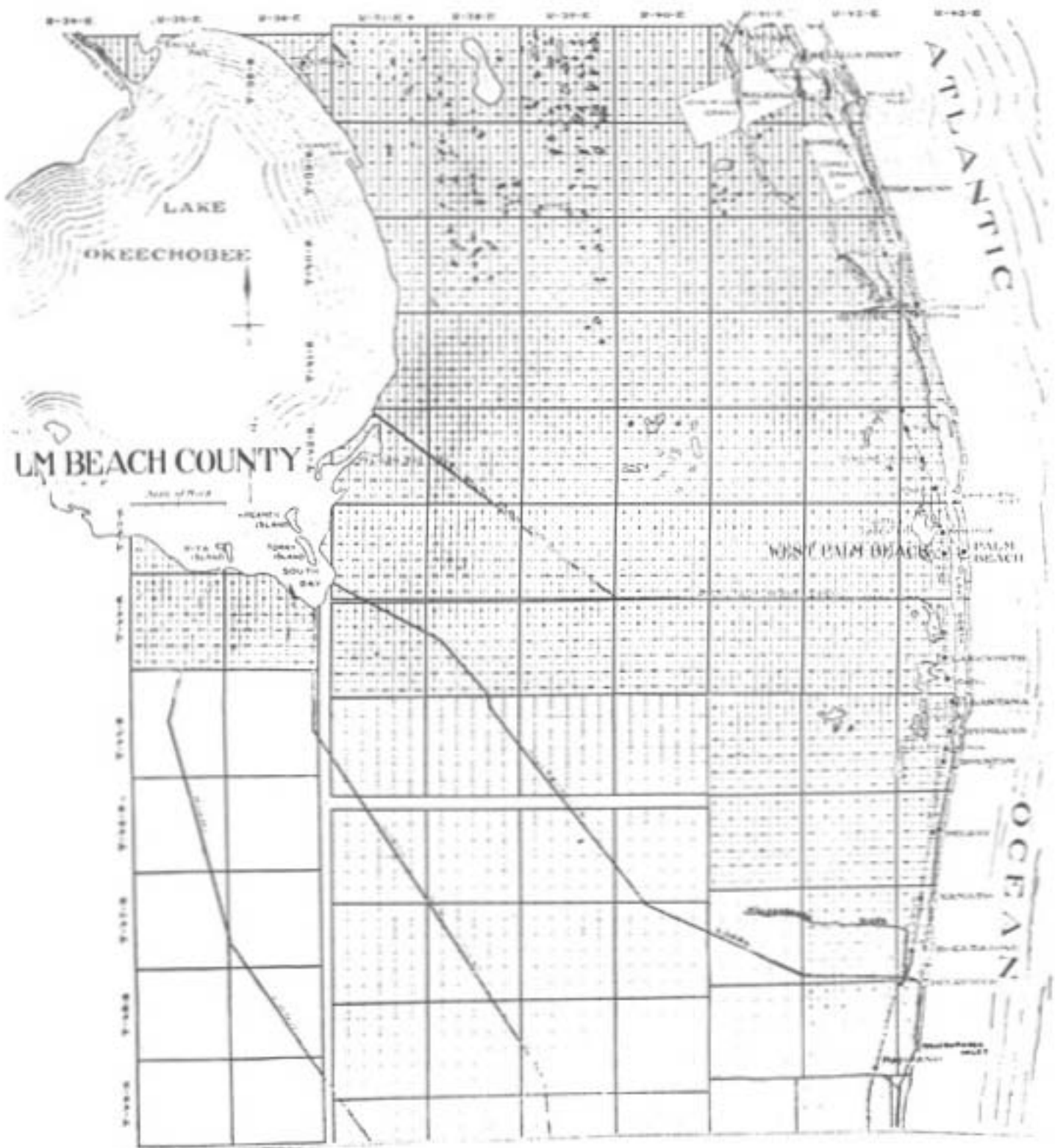
final decision of the board was to drop all charges against the trustees in return for assurance that all the problems spoken of in the charges would be corrected.<sup>37</sup>

Despite his controversial methods, Metcalf's main concern was the education of the youth in School District No. 1. Securing adequate facilities was an important priority in the relatively new school system. The first classes in West Palm Beach had met in the Union Congregational Church at the northwest corner of Olive and Datura streets in 1894.<sup>38</sup> In 1895, the Board of Public Instruction appropriated the sum of \$500 towards the erection and furnishing of a public school building in West Palm Beach on the conditions that the citizens furnish at least \$500, and that Henry M. Flagler give a further sum of \$500 and a deed, in fee simple, to a suitable lot of not less than one half an acre.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of this three-way partnership, a two-story, four-room school building was erected on the southwest corner of Dixie Highway and Clematis Street.<sup>40</sup> This 1895 school met the needs of the community until the early 1900s. Once elected trustee, Guy Metcalf used his position to influence many of the large land developers in the area to provide for educational needs. It has also been suspected that it was Metcalf who influenced Ellen Potter in 1907

to sell nine acres of land to the Dade County School Board for \$1,000 per acre for a "central school" for all the children of the area. Later Mrs. Potter donated an additional five acres of land to the school site.<sup>41</sup> This school was located at the end of Hibiscus Street in West Palm Beach. Behind the school was Freshwater Lake, a favorite fishing spot for local anglers.<sup>42</sup>

West Palm Beach pioneer Paul Majeski remembers: "Everyone connected with the [central] school was ostracized. No one wanted their child going to school way out there with the snakes and alligators." Truly, the school "away out in the woods," as it was commonly known, appeared at the time to be a real albatross.<sup>43</sup> Not only had it taken a great deal longer to build than originally anticipated, due in part to Mr. Metcalf, but its cost now far exceeded the original \$40,000 set aside in bonds to pay for it. Some estimates on the actual cost of the school on Hibiscus Street were as high as \$65,000.<sup>44</sup> This terribly tumultuous situation only served to deepen the hatred between Metcalf and his counterpart on the Dade County School Board, J.R. Anthony. Finally the school was finished. The date was January 1, 1909. As a side note, even though Metcalf was greatly ridiculed at the time for building such a large school, the structure was overcrowd-



Separated from Dade County in 1909, Palm Beach County originally encompassed all or part of today's Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach and Broward counties.

ed and an extension needed to be built within four years.

Even while struggling to complete the new school, Guy Metcalf was active in yet another political issue — the drive to create a new county from the northern portion of Dade. As southeastern Florida continued to grow, the huge county became more and more unwieldy, and differences between its two population centers at Lake Worth and at Biscayne Bay grew sharper. A 1937 article on Guy Metcalf from the files of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County reports that:

*According to all reports, Guy Metcalf was the first citizen to suggest the creation of Palm Beach county, and he also suggested the name of Palm Beach for the new county. At his instance, a meeting interested citizens of West Palm Beach and vicinity, a public meeting was called, and a new county committee was appointed, consisting of Max Sirkin, H.C. Hood, R.J. Chillingworth, Guy I. Metcalf, M.E. Gruber, J.C. Stowers, A.P. Anthony, L.W. Burkhardt. On this committee Guy Metcalf was one of the most active and useful members, and probably no private person contributed more of time, thought, energy and means according to ability than he to promote the creation of the county.<sup>45</sup>*

After an uphill struggle of over two years, Metcalf's efforts bore fruit on April 30, 1909, when the Florida Legislature created Palm Beach County. The new county stretched from the St. Lucie Inlet to a point corresponding approximately to Floranada Road in today's Oakland Park, and west to Lake Okeechobee.

Guy Metcalf continued in the office of trustee of Special Tax School District No. 1 until he resigned on June 11, 1912. Oddly enough, he had been reelected to his position for an additional two-year term just eight months prior, on October 9, 1911.<sup>46</sup> The question has to be asked, "Why did he and the two other trustees resign?" The answer may be found in the knowledge that Guy Metcalf's enemy, J.R. Anthony, was made editor of Metcalf's old newspaper, *The Tropical Sun*, on January 1, 1912.<sup>47</sup> It is possible that to prevent public scrutiny and scandal at the hands of his arch-rival, Metcalf simply quit.

Interestingly enough, Anthony resigned as editor of *The Tropical Sun* a little more than a year after he took on the job, and Guy Metcalf again ran for the office of school trustee on September 11, 1913.<sup>48</sup> This time, however, he was unsuccessful.

Metcalf's political strength along the entire east coast of Florida, as well as in

Palm Beach County, was always a factor in area elections. He was an ardent prohibitionist. One of the most spectacular political contests in Florida was waged in 1910, when Metcalf won the nomination in the Democratic primaries for the office of clerk of the circuit court of Palm Beach County. The office was denied him, however, in the general election in November, when he was defeated by Hutson B. Saunders, an independent. Two years later, Metcalf again ran for the office of clerk of the circuit court, but was defeated in the primaries by George O. Butler.<sup>49</sup>

Through the influence of Claude L'Engle, United States congressman at large, Metcalf was appointed postmaster at West Palm Beach on December 4, 1913.<sup>50</sup> In the following months, he worked very hard for the city, expanding the postal service to keep up with the ever-growing microcosm. Then, suddenly, the fickle finger of fate again pointed to Guy Metcalf, and he was removed from his position by the postmaster general. Paul Majeski remembers:

*It was during a time when the post office was very frugally run. All business transactions that occurred in the post office had to be strictly on a cash basis. One of the city's more prominent businessmen made a purchase from the post office. Unfortunately, this local merchant had no cash on him at the time, but because he was such an important local figure, Mr. Metcalf allowed him to write a business check for the purchase. As soon as the postmaster general saw the check in Mr. Metcalf's deposits, he immediately suspended Guy as postmaster.<sup>51</sup>*

The date was August 12, 1915.<sup>52</sup> Again, Guy Metcalf was the topic of much local gossip. He then retired to a life of reclusion.

Guy Metcalf was never one to stay inactive. In the Democratic primaries of 1916 he was nominated, and was subsequently elected to the office of school superintendent of Palm Beach County.<sup>53</sup> The following year, 1917, dawned in a flurry of political and cultural bedlam. Sidney J. Catts was sworn in as Florida's new governor on January 1, 1917, and, on the local level, Guy Metcalf was sworn in as school superintendent.<sup>54</sup> In April, the United States entered World War I. Every day, the newspapers were filled with the horrors of that conflict. The citizens of every community were putting their full attention to destroying the "German menace" in the "war to end all wars."

The Metcalfs' two sons, Lacey and Paul, both joined the coast guard and were stationed in Key West.<sup>55</sup> Naturally,

very little newspaper space was now devoted to anything as trivial as the affairs of the local school board. A small article in *The Palm Beach Post* in January 1918 acknowledged that Paul Metcalf had just been promoted to the rank of chief petty officer, making him, at nineteen, the youngest officer in the coast guard.<sup>56</sup> His parents were extremely proud. Other than local social events, virtually nothing appeared in the local newspapers concerning the Palm Beach County school system until February 7, 1918.

On that date, in the middle of the front page, a streamer read, "Guy Metcalf Arrested on Forgery Charge and His Suspension from Office Asked." The article began by rhetorically relating how the sheriff, Bob Baker, had gone to the Metcalf home on Datura Street at eight p.m., with a warrant sworn out by W.J. Dyer, chairman of the county school board. The sheriff found Metcalf in bed when he reached the house. After Metcalf was placed under arrest he was allowed to remain at home for the night on his own recognizance, to report to the sheriff's office at nine the next morning. Later, when interviewed by a reporter, Metcalf seemed flushed and very agitated. He told reporters that the incident was a mistake, and would be straightened out the next day.<sup>57</sup>

Chairman Dyer stated that the action against Superintendent Metcalf grew out of the fact that at the superintendent's request he had signed a warrant on January 19 for \$333.49, for the ostensible purpose of taking up a bill of lading for a shipment of domestic science equipment for the West Palm Beach schools. The chairman said that the board had authorized him to sign such a warrant, anticipating that the shipment would arrive between the monthly meetings of the board. Dyer went on to say that the matter was then dropped, but when he later inquired about the draft, which should have been turned in with the bill of lading, he found that no such draft had been received.<sup>58</sup>

The next day, the school board, checking over the warrants issued, found that there was no voucher for the warrant in question, and asked the superintendent where it was. Unable to produce this voucher, Metcalf stated that it must be at one of the banks. The board then requested that he go and get the voucher and bring it back to the board by three o'clock that afternoon. Dyer stated that the board waited well beyond three o'clock before calling the sheriff's office and swearing out a warrant for the superintendent's arrest. The board also directed a letter to Governor Catts, stating briefly the particulars of this distasteful situation and asking not only for the suspension of Guy Metcalf from



the office of superintendent, but also for an audit of all his books.<sup>59</sup>

That afternoon, Wednesday, February 6, 1918, Metcalf came home visibly perturbed. William Barrs, an attorney and a guest in the Metcalf home at the time, noticed Guy's unusual state and inquired as to its origin. Metcalf told him that things had been mixed and blurred in his mind for some time. He referred to the draft upon which he was alleged to have obtained money from the school board under false pretenses, and told Barrs that he had no recollection of having gotten the money, and that if he did get it, he did not know what he had done with it. Barrs later testified that Metcalf had told him about a month before that he believed his mind was affected. Metcalf had been ill for several weeks, and was left visibly shaken by all that had occurred that day.

After the arrival of the sheriff and the reporters at the Metcalf home, Guy reportedly could not sleep. He arose at three o'clock in the morning and told his wife that he was going to his office to work on the books. He told her that he would be home for breakfast.<sup>60</sup>

The day dawned, a cool, clear February morning in West Palm Beach. A man named Fenno was on his way to the railway station to pick up relatives when he passed the courthouse on Poinsettia Street between 3:30 and 3:45 a.m., and noticed the superintendent sitting in his office. Mr. Fenno was the last person to see Guy Metcalf alive.<sup>61</sup>

Henry Horton, a Negro janitor, was the first person to enter the courthouse that morning, at approximately 5:30. When Horton entered Metcalf's office at approximately six a.m., to perform his morning duties, he noticed that the vault was open and the light was burning. This was not an unusual occurrence since the superintendent often came in very early to work on his books. Drawing closer, Horton observed the superintendent seated in a chair. His head was thrown slightly back, and his feet rested upon a box.<sup>62</sup>

The janitor called to Metcalf, but the superintendent appeared to be asleep. Drawing closer to the quiet figure, Horton saw a quantity of blood on the floor. Thinking that the superintendent had suffered a hemorrhage, Horton at once notified the head janitor, Mr. Taylor. It was then that it was discovered that the school superintendent was dead and that he had killed himself. Blood oozed from a bullet wound in his head, and his right hand tightly clasped a .32 Colt revolver. Apparently death had been instantaneous, as there was no evidence of the slightest struggle. The revolver had been placed on the right ear, and the bullet had pierced the brain, lodging in the head. There had

been profuse bleeding from the wound and light bleeding from the mouth.<sup>63</sup>

The superintendent had removed his collar and coat, and had loosened his shirt at the neck. His watch lay on the desk, as did four letters, addressed to his wife, to his sons Lacey and Paul, and to Governor Charles S. Whitman of New York, who had been Metcalf's schoolmate in Ohio.<sup>64</sup>

Guy Irwin Metcalf was fifty-two years old when he ended his own life. He was survived by his father, Judge William I. Metcalf; one brother, Charles P. Metcalf; a sister, Mrs. James E. Chambers; his wife, Edith; and his two sons, Lacey, age twenty-three, and Paul, age nineteen. At a coroner's inquest dealing with the superintendent's death, Mr. Barrs, the guest in the Metcalf home, read to the inquiry board a letter written to him by Metcalf just prior to his death. In the letter, Guy asked Barrs to advise Mrs. Metcalf in the selling of their home and properties. He also asked Barrs to help his family with all financial matters.<sup>65</sup>

Records show that the Metcalf home at 411 Datura Street in West Palm Beach

was sold shortly after Guy's death.<sup>66</sup> Apparently Mrs. Metcalf moved from the area; the West Palm Beach city directory for 1920 does not list her. Following her death in 1925, however, Mrs. Metcalf was buried next to her husband in West Palm Beach's Woodlawn Cemetery.<sup>67</sup> Paul and Lacey Metcalf both returned to West Palm Beach after the war, and both became clerks in the courthouse. For a short time they lived in the 800 block of Rosemary Avenue. Lacey continued to work as a clerk of the Circuit Court in West Palm Beach until his retirement and death in 1969. Paul Metcalf, on the other hand, returned to the navy in World War II and, upon his return, served as a police officer in West Palm Beach until the late 1950s.<sup>68</sup> He died in 1979, and his son, Paul Metcalf, Jr., died the following year.<sup>69</sup>

On the day of Guy Metcalf's funeral, February 9, 1918, a profusion of flowers and throngs of people filled the Metcalf home and front lawn to pay homage to this man of action, tribulation, and vision.<sup>70</sup> It was ironic, considering the problems he had encountered during his



Guy I. Metcalf as superintendent of schools of Palm Beach County, c. 1917 (photo courtesy of Palm Beach County school board).

life and the not always judicious way in which he handled them. Perhaps, with the advent of his death came the realization that, although he was doubtless an opportunist, he had been a pioneering spirit who had fulfilled his destiny.

In his final letter to his attorney and friend, William Barrs, Guy Metcalf wrote, "I hope my friends will consider my act charitably, while my enemies are welcome to the pleasure they will have in my removal from the field of further activities."<sup>77</sup> Broken and reduced to the point of suicide by circumstances which he, himself, helped to create, here was a man, nonetheless, who, through his enormous foresight and energy, literally helped to shape the face of most of Florida's southeast coast. He was one of a group of forgotten pioneers — those early visionaries who gave Florida its push forward — without whom the foundations of the east coast would have been greatly lacking.



A simple marble stone in West Palm Beach's Woodlawn Cemetery marks Guy Metcalf's final resting place.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Historical Society of Palm Beach County, Palm Beach, miscellaneous documents on file.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Charles W. Pierce, *Pioneer Life in Southeast Florida*, ed. by Donald Walter Carl (Miami, 1970), 83.

<sup>4</sup>*The Tropical Sun*, various issues, 1893.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 1891-1900.

<sup>6</sup>Bessie Wilson DuBois, *A History of Juno Beach and Juno, Florida* (Juno, 1978), 7-8.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Thelma Peters, "The First County Road," *Update*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (October 1973), 3-5.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Pierce, *Pioneer Life*, 234; Bill McGoun, *A Biographic History of Broward County* (Miami, 1972), 58.

<sup>15</sup>Georgiana Greene Kjerulff, *Tales of Old Brevard* (Melbourne, 1972), 48; notes from Professor Harry A. Kersey, Jr., Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton.

<sup>16</sup>Stranahan Papers, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society archives.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*; "Guy Metcalf Founder and First Editor of the Sun Was Progressive Citizen," newspaper clipping dated February 26, 1937, in files of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

<sup>19</sup>Stranahan Papers.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>Historical Society of Palm Beach County, miscellaneous documents.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>DuBois, *History of Juno Beach*, 7-8.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>Historical Society of Palm Beach County, miscellaneous documents.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Notes from Professor Harry A. Kersey, Jr.

<sup>29</sup>Historical Society of Palm Beach County, miscellaneous documents.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>School Board Minutes of Dade County, 1883 to 1909, housed at the Palm Beach County School Board office, West Palm Beach.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>Affidavit dated January 3, 1914, in Dade County School Board Minutes.

<sup>36</sup>Dade County School Board Minutes.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>James R. Knott, "Our First Schools," *Palm Beach Post-Times* "Brown Wrapper," undated.

<sup>39</sup>Dade County School Board Minutes, May 12, 1894.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>James R. Knott, "The Early Days," *Palm Beach Post-Times* "Brown Wrapper," undated.

<sup>43</sup>Interview with Paul Majeski, St. Andrews Residence, West Palm Beach.

<sup>44</sup>Dade County School Board Minutes.

<sup>45</sup>"Guy Metcalf, Founder and First Editor of the Sun Was Progressive Citizen."

<sup>46</sup>Palm Beach County School Board Minutes.

<sup>47</sup>Historical Society of Palm Beach County, miscellaneous documents.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*; Palm Beach County School Board Minutes.

<sup>49</sup>Historical Society of Palm Beach County, miscellaneous documents.

<sup>50</sup>*Palm Beach Post*, February 8, 1918.

<sup>51</sup>Interview with Paul Majeski.

<sup>52</sup>Archives of the *Palm Beach Post-Times*, West Palm Beach.

<sup>53</sup>*Palm Beach Post*, February 8, 1918.

<sup>54</sup>Archives of the *Palm Beach Post-Times*.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>*Palm Beach Post*, February 8, 1918.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>Palm Beach County Records.

<sup>67</sup>Woodlawn Cemetery Records, City of West Palm Beach.

<sup>68</sup>Palm Beach County Records.

<sup>69</sup>Interview with Mrs. Paul Metcalf, Jr.

<sup>70</sup>Archives of the *Palm Beach Post-Times*.

<sup>71</sup>*Palm Beach Post*, February 8, 1918.