

# A HISTORY OF BROWARD COUNTY

**In 4000 years, Man has  
turned a watery wasteland  
into an urban center**

By Bill McGoun

In less than a century, a land “unfit for human habitation” has been turned into the permanent home of nearly a million people, and the winter residence of tens of thousands more.

In earlier times, it could not have happened. Today’s Broward County is very much a product of the industrial age. The sun and sand and sea have been here for millenia, but the roads, railroads, and seaport are new additions which have vastly transformed the area’s landscape.

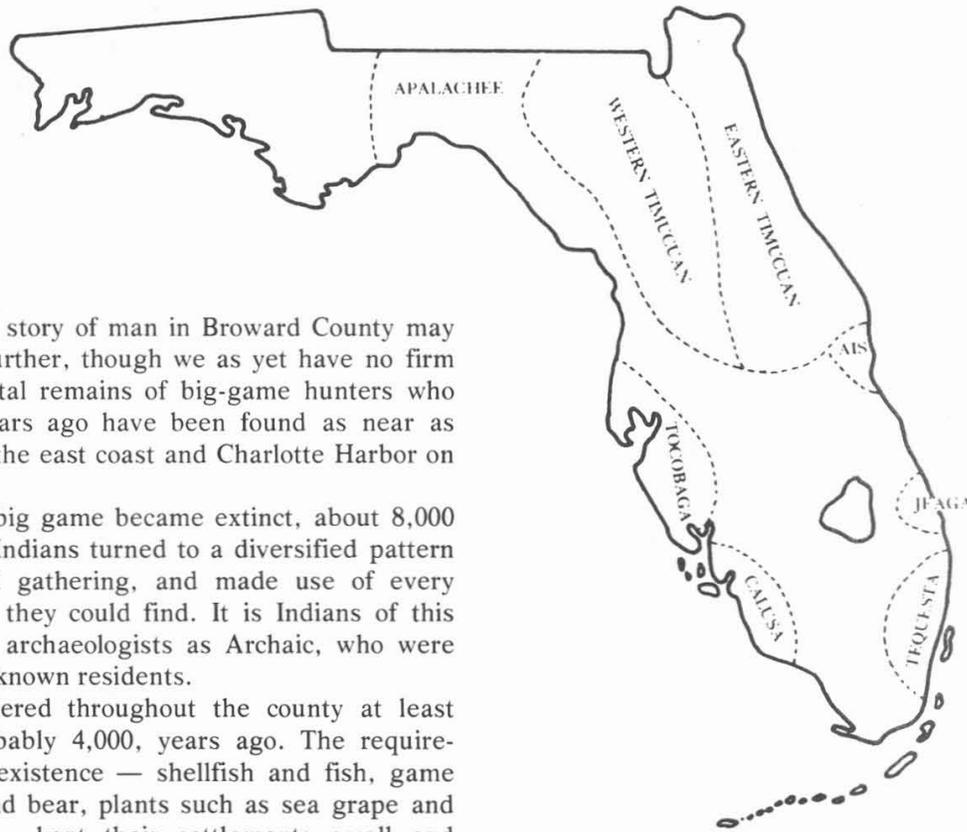
Until the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway was brought through in 1896 the area was accessible to only a hardy few. Until Everglades drainage was begun a decade later, only the coastal ridge and scattered spots of high ground to the west were habitable. Until Port Everglades was opened in the 1920s there was no dependable anchorage for large ships. This is not to say, however, that Broward is a totally new-made land. The opening quotation — from Dr. William Sears, professor of anthropology at Florida Atlantic University — is true only in terms of what today’s residents consider necessary. But prior to the modern era of settlement, small bands of Indians got along very nicely for perhaps 4,000 years.



Broward County Historical Commission

Beyond the canals and levees to the west still lies the Everglades, the swamp from which Broward County grew. As part of a delicately balanced ecosystem, the Everglades continues to make urban life possible in south Florida’s coastal region.

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In fact, the story of man in Broward County may go back even further, though we as yet have no firm evidence. Skeletal remains of big-game hunters who lived 10,000 years ago have been found as near as Vero Beach on the east coast and Charlotte Harbor on the west.

When the big game became extinct, about 8,000 years ago, the Indians turned to a diversified pattern of hunting and gathering, and made use of every edible resource they could find. It is Indians of this type, known to archaeologists as Archaic, who were Broward's first known residents.

They wandered throughout the county at least 2,000, and probably 4,000, years ago. The requirements of their existence — shellfish and fish, game such as deer and bear, plants such as sea grape and prickly pear — kept their settlements small and transitory. The major village of Tequesta, near the mouth of Miami River, probably was not more than a couple of centuries old when the Spanish visited it in 1567.

South Florida Indians had not, in the past, been hospitable to the Spanish — in 1521 the Calusa had fatally wounded Ponce de Leon at Charlotte Harbor — and the Tequesta, as the Spanish called the inhabitants of Dade and Broward counties, continued the pattern. A mission established on Miami River was abandoned within two years and never revived.

Nevertheless, the Tequesta were on the decline. Some blame it on disease introduced by the Spanish, others on warfare with the stronger Calusa, but whatever the cause there were only about eighty Indians in southeast Florida in 1763, and they left for Havana when the Spanish ceded Florida to Great Britain at the end of the French and Indian War.

The British held the area for only twenty years, ceding it back to Spain in the Treaty of Paris following the American revolution. Sometime after the re-establishment of Spanish rule, Broward's first non-Indian settlers arrived.

*Settlement on New River*

They were the Lewises, Surlie and Frankee and at least two children, and the Robbinses, Joseph and his wife and daughter. All were British except for Mrs. Robbins and all apparently had come from the

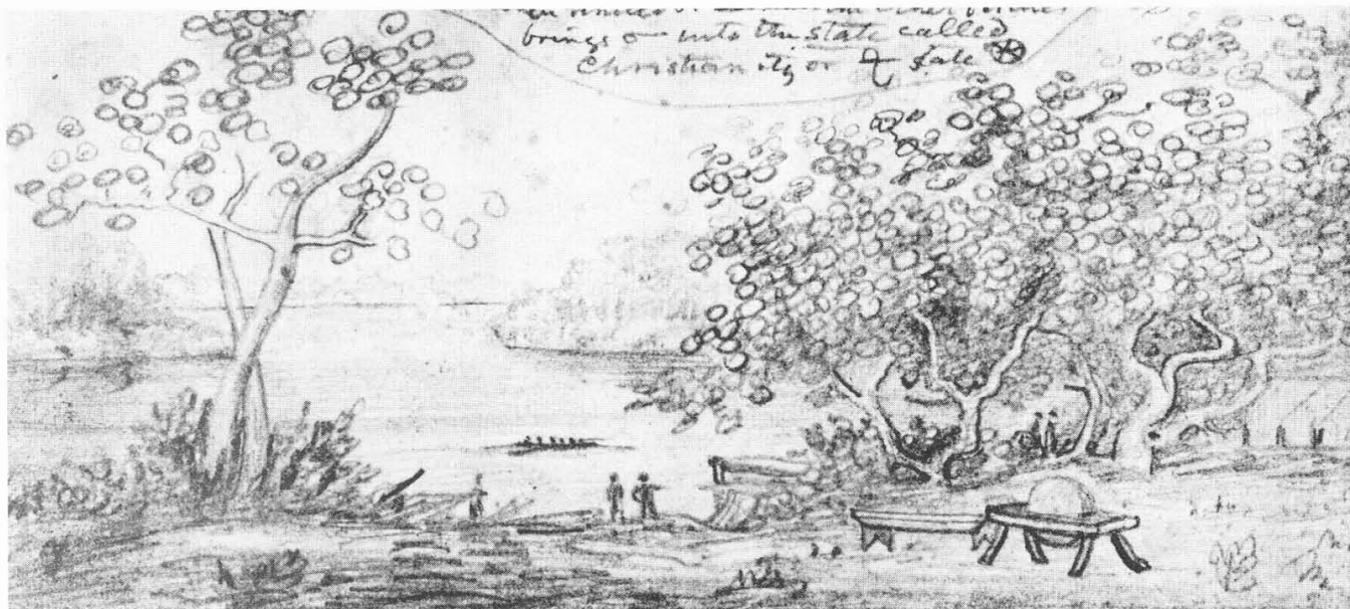
When the Spaniards arrived in Florida during the 16th and 17th centuries, they discovered a variety of tribes and cultures. The Tequesta Indians lived in modern-day Broward and Dade Counties.

Bahamas. They lived on the south side of New River, possibly just above the mouth of Tarpon River. Lewis farmed farther upstream.

The Spanish, fearing the settlers were a fifth column for possible British reoccupation of the peninsula, sent a supply ship on a spying trip in 1793. The visitors recommended that the settlers be removed, but the recommendation apparently was pushed aside as Spain prepared for war with France.

The United States obtained Florida from Spain in 1821. Colonel James Gadsden, who carried out the first survey of today's Broward County in 1825, was not impressed. A road would be impractical, he wrote, because "the population of the route will probably never be sufficient to contribute to [its maintenance], while the inducements to individuals to keep up the necessary ferries will scarcely every be adequate."

The Gadsden party reported the presence on New River of two families, headed by William Cooley and David Williams. Cooley raised vegetables for subsistence and processed coontie root into arrowroot starch for cash. Fortunately, the product was relatively imperishable, as navigation was a sometime thing through the shifting and shallow New River mouth.



Despite his peaceful and serene sketch, life on the New River during the Second Seminole Indian War was hard and violent for Ellis Hughes, an army surgeon at Fort Lauderdale. His journal (see March 1978 issue of *Broward Legacy*), from which this picture is taken, recounts the dangers and strife present at the frontier outpost.

Inland, other newcomers were arriving. They were Seminole Indians, pushed southward by settlers who coveted their rich north Florida pastures. As demands that they be removed to Oklahoma mounted, so did their resentment. On December 28, 1835, they struck, killing Major Francis L. Dade and 104 of his 107 officers and men in an ambush north of Tampa that set off the Second Seminole War.

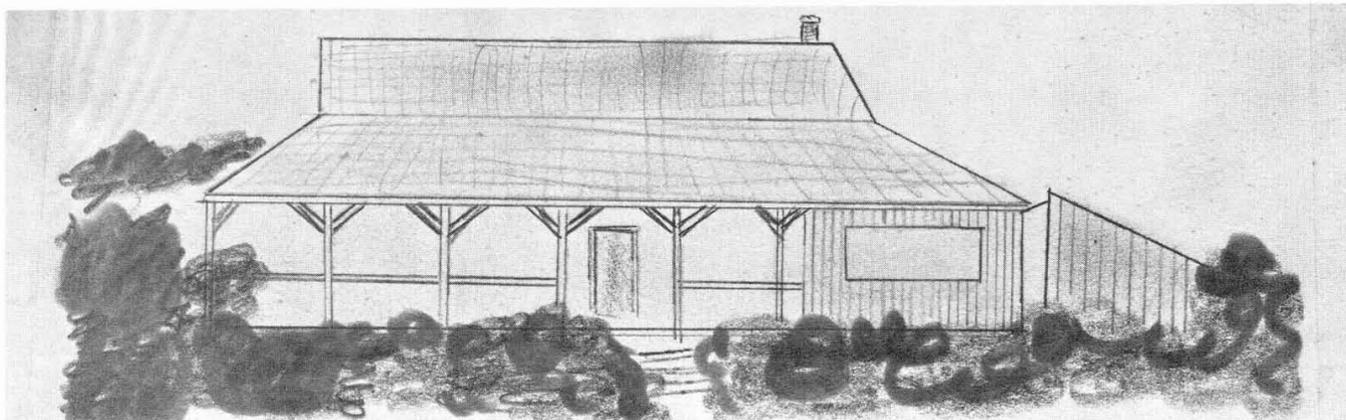
On January 6, 1836, a war party descended on the Cooley homestead, killing Mrs. Cooley, the three children and tutor Joseph Flinton. Hearing the victims' screams, the other settlers fled south by land and eventually reached Indian Key where Cooley, who had been on a salvage trip, joined them.

In March of 1838 a force of Tennessee volunteers and army regulars commanded by Major William Lauderdale established a stockade on New River. That fort, and a later one built on the beach, bore Lauderdale's name.

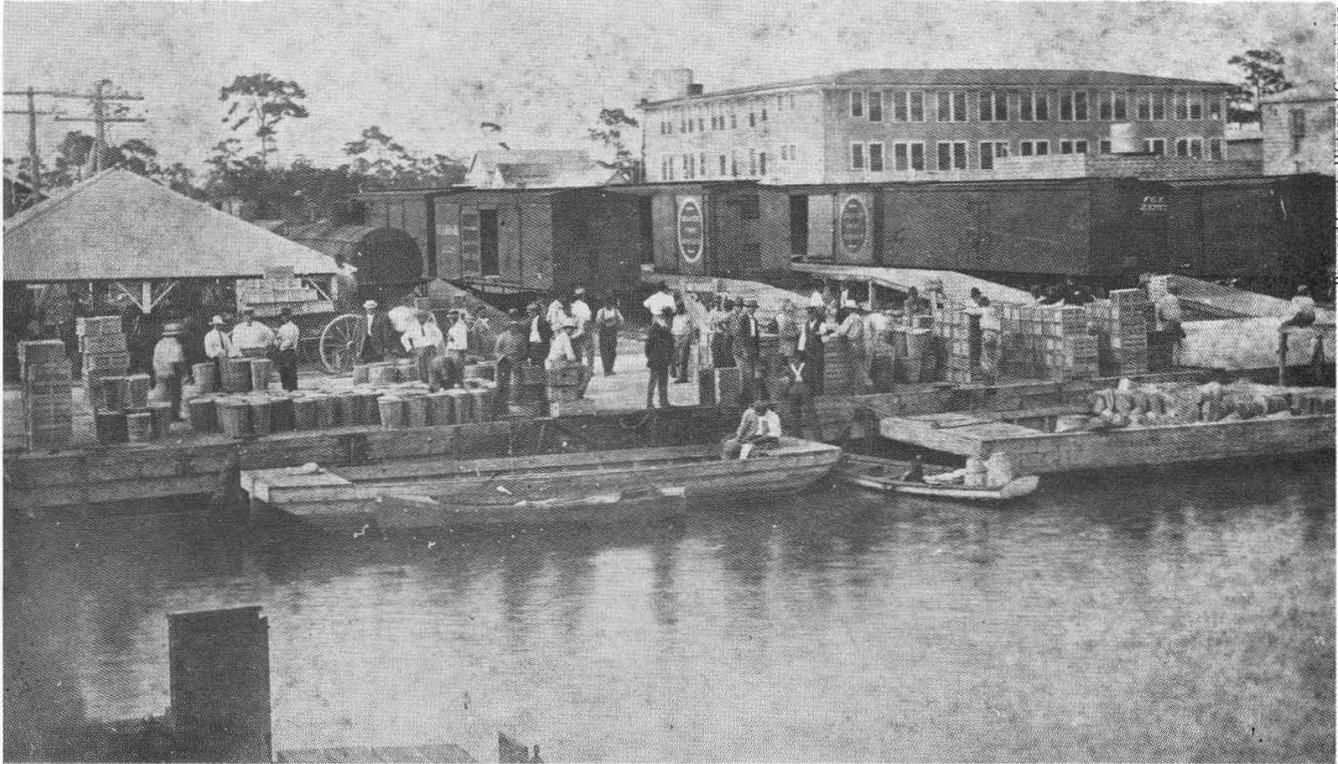
The war lasted until 1842, and the fear much longer. Those Seminoles who had escaped removal had the area pretty much to themselves for the next fifty years, with only an occasional hunting or exploring party to disturb their solitude. In 1882 the population center of Broward was Pine Island, west of present-day Davie, where twenty-five to thirty Seminole families cultivated gardens and from which they roamed the Everglades in search of game.

#### *After the Seminole wars*

The first known postwar non-Indian settlers were Washington Jenkins, keeper of the House of Refuge for shipwrecked sailors that was built in the Birch State Park area in 1876, and John J. Brown, a pig farmer who won a tainted legislative election that same year and departed for Tallahassee, never to return.

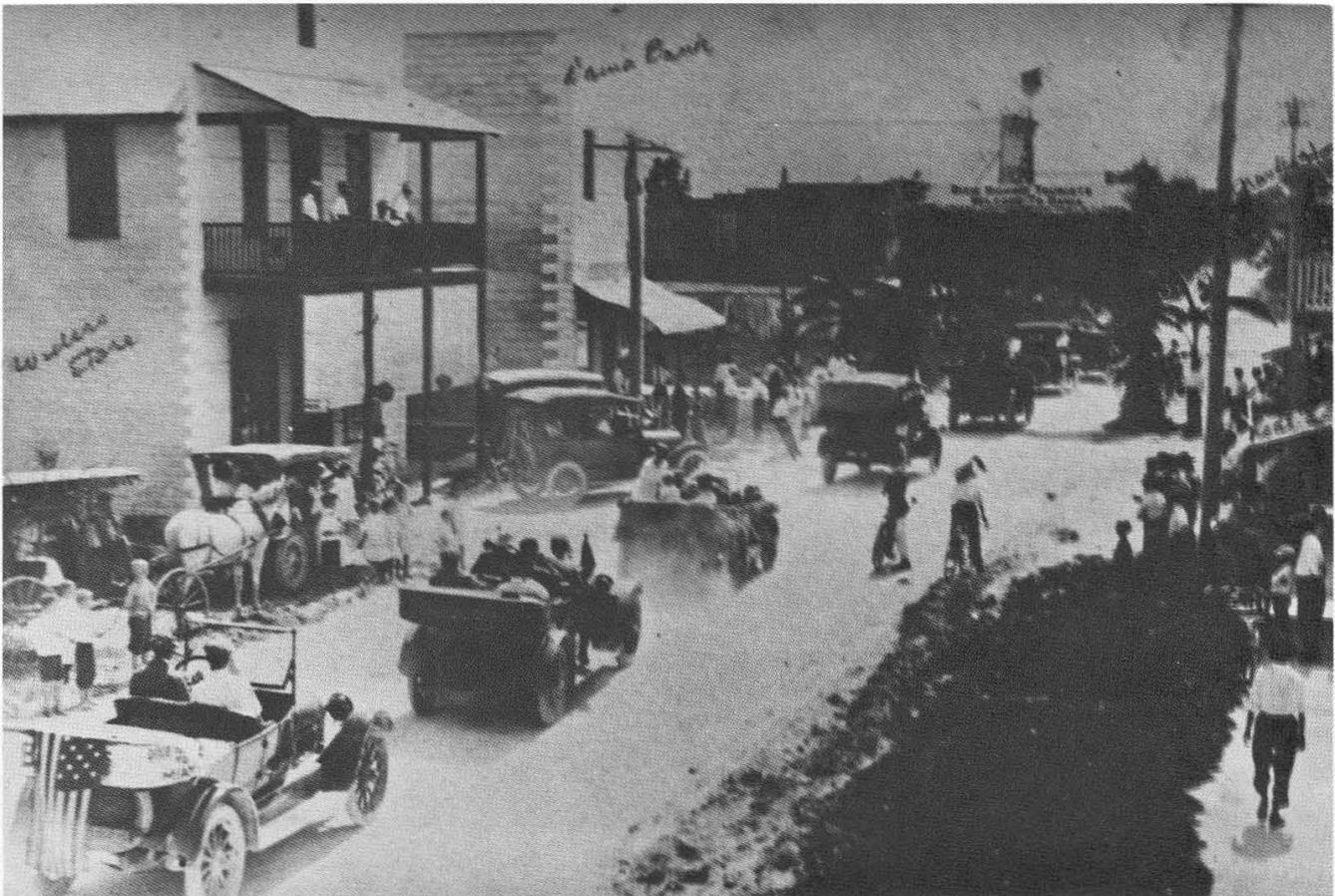


Life-saving Station No. 4 brought a degree of permanence to life in the region when it was established in 1876. First located near Birch State Park, it was later moved to the site of present-day Bahia Mar.



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The availability of swift, economical transportation radically changed the landscape of south Florida. Fort Lauderdale (above), where Henry Flagler's railroad crossed the New River, became an important shipping center for produce brought in from the western farm lands. Dania (below), had been a thriving community for over a decade when Dixie Highway was ceremonially opened in 1915. Today, Dania's commercial center has become inexorably tied to U.S. 1.



Broward County Historical Commission

By 1891 there were enough settlers to justify a post office, and two years later came the first of those man-made links with the outside world that would allow Broward to grow. It was the Bay Biscayne Stage Line, operating over a shell-rock road between Hypoluxo, at the south end of Lake Worth, and Lemon City, now part of Miami. Passengers on the two-day trip stopped overnight at New River. An Ohioan named Frank Stranahan arrived to run both the overnight camp and the New River ferry.

The coming of the stages also brought to an end the era of the legendary Barefoot Mailmen, who had for seven years carried the mail from Hypoluxo to Miami by walking along the beach. For five dollars a head, they would let others walk with them.

But the stages were to be even more short-lived. When Henry M. Flagler learned that Miami was unaffected by the great freeze of February 1895, he decided to extend the FEC south from Palm Beach. On February 22, 1896, the first train reached New River.



Hollywood Historical Society

Blasted by storms and economic collapse, J. W. Young's dream of a complete community for everyone survived as the city of Hollywood. Its distinctive architectural style and careful urban plan, shown here in the 1940s, can still be seen today.

Besides making it possible for more settlers to reach Broward, the railroad also made it necessary. If Flagler was to reap any return on the state and private land he had been given in return for laying the rails, it was absolutely necessary that he find prospective buyers. His land companies sought immigrants both in the North and in the South.

They were not hard to find. Swedes from the Northeast formed the nucleus of Hallandale and Danes from the Midwest founded Dania. Southern farmers, lured by better land and milder winters, joined the Danes and Swedes, and founded Pompano and Deerfield besides. Much of the field work was done by blacks from either the South or the Bahamas.

Dania became the area's first incorporated community in 1904, followed by Pompano in 1908 and Fort Lauderdale in 1911. All three predate Broward County itself, which was formed from portions of Dade and Palm Beach counties in 1915 and named for former Florida Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward.



Deerfield Beach Historical Society

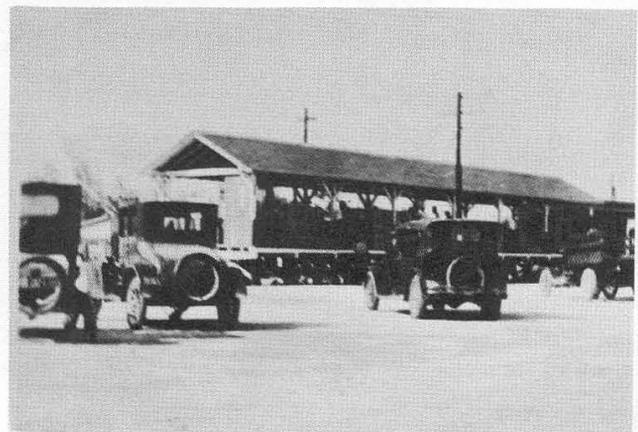
Deerfield Beach was more than a decade away from incorporation when this photograph of the main business district was taken in 1912.

The choice was logical. During his term as governor (1905-09), Broward championed Everglades drainage and got the dredges working on the south and north New River canals. While results in the Everglades were mixed, the drainage opened up much of today's urban Broward for development, first as agricultural land, and later as residential.

The fruits of this work would come later. With the exception of a flurry in Fort Lauderdale's Progresso area in connection with a 1911 land drawing, growth was slow and steady until the prosperity and optimism that followed World War I set off the first of Broward's two great booms.

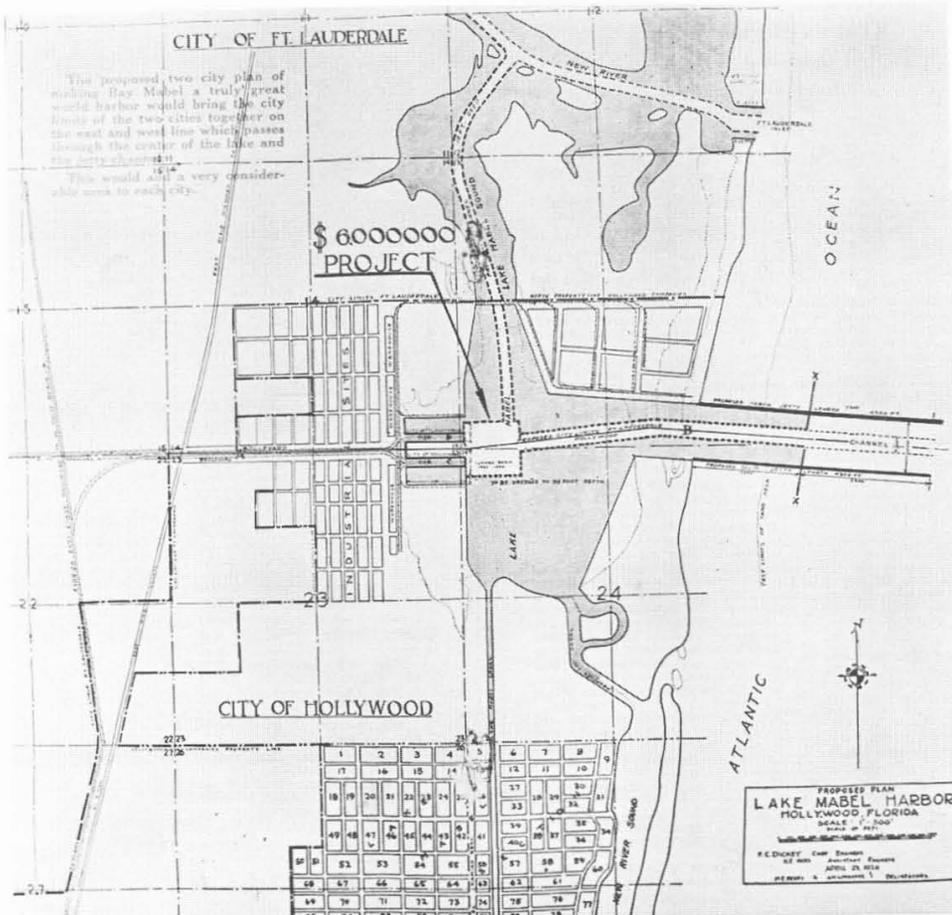
In numbers, this boom pales in comparison to the greater one that followed World War II. While the county's population went from 5,135 to 14,242 between 1920 and 1925, for a gain of 9,107, the average gain per year between 1950 and 1970 was 26,808, as population soared from 83,933 to 620,100.

But numbers are not everything. The 1920s boom set the pattern that prevails to this day in two important ways. First, it marked the advent of the developer city, in which a single plan would encompass an entire community rather than a single neighborhood.



Pompano Beach Historical Society

Much smaller than the present structure, the first Pompano Beach Farmer's Market provided a needed shipping center for north Broward's agricultural produce in the 1920s.



Hollywood Historical Society

Port Everglades was carved out of the mangrove swamp surrounding Lake Mabel. Originally envisioned as a solution to south Florida's shipping bottlenecks, the port was not opened for business until after the boom collapsed. The investment, however, proved to be a wise one: today it is one of the East Coast's major ports.

Beyond that, it changed the nature of the county's economy. Before 1920 most settlers were farmers, but the newcomers were urban people, many of them retirees. Also, the 1920s witnessed the emergence of tourism as a major facet of the Broward economy.

The grandest of the 1920s developers was Joseph W. Young, who turned a low-lying tract between Hallandale and Dania into his dream city of Hollywood-by-the-Sea. The lakes, the broad boulevard, the eastern golf course, the traffic circle — all were part of Young's master plan. While there have been many developer cities since, none of them, with the possible exception of Coral Springs, started from a plan as grand as Young's.

To draw residents he advertised throughout the eastern United States. He brought prospects in by bus, train and ship, and treated them to lunch and tours of the city. Then he put on the "hard sell," occasionally by use of "sweat rooms" where the customer was bombarded by a high-pressure salesman.

By 1925 the new city was ready for incorporation. That same year charters were granted to Deerfield, Davie and Floranada, the latter north of Fort Lauderdale. Early in 1926 Hollywood absorbed both Dania and the unincorporated Hallandale community.

But the boom already had crested, and rough days were ahead. Once more, access to the outside world would be a major problem. With the spate of new settlement, there was a tremendous need for importation of both food and building material, most of which had to be brought over the single-track FEC. Many recognized the problem. Flagler's successors made plans to double-track the FEC, and a second railroad — today's Seaboard Coast Line — was extended southward toward Miami. Young and others moved toward creation of Port Everglades.

But none of this could be done quickly enough, and the backlog of goods at Jacksonville became so critical that, on October 29, 1925, the FEC had to embargo everything except food or items for which special permits had been obtained.

### *Busting the boom*

The effect on construction was catastrophic, and this was soon followed by a drying up of credit. Northern banks had long felt the boom — with its paper-thin operating margins and spiraling prices fed by speculative trading of both property and options to buy property — was too giddy to last and, by early 1926, they were getting very cautious with their money.



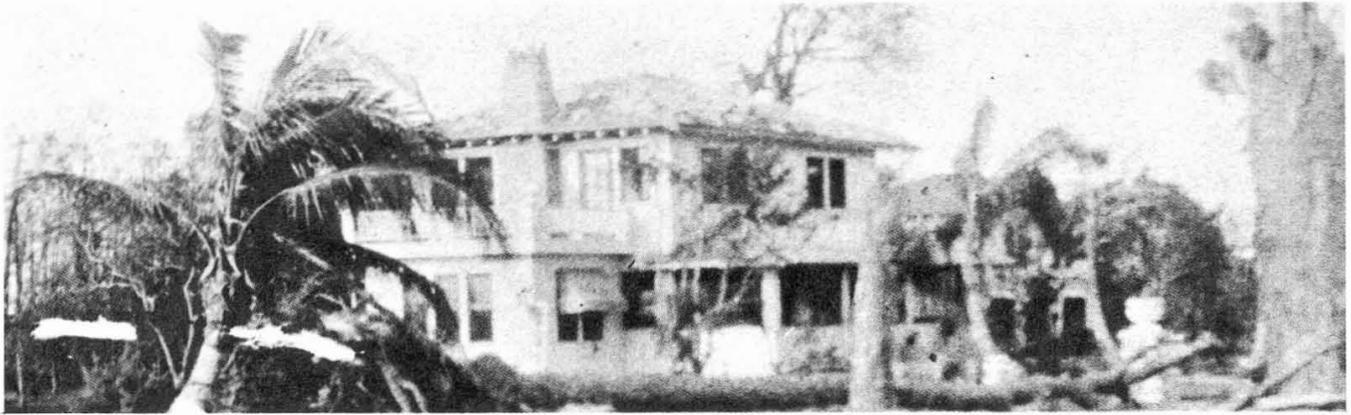
Sketch of the Southern part of FLORIDA.  
 Exhibiting the routes of the detachments that penetrated the Bay Cypress in Dec. 1841 and July 1842, also routes across the Everglades and from Fort Lauderdale to Lake Worth and the Everglades.

Broward County Historical Commission



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The urbanization of south Florida has taken place with amazing speed during the last century. In the G & W Endicott lithograph on the left, the area is primarily a swampy wilderness, sparsely dotted with settlements. The New River region and Fort Lauderdale are clearly identified. On the right is a modern map of the same area, now home to nearly four million people.



Wilton Manors Historical Society

The 1926 hurricane destroyed many people's dreams. The Willingham house in Wilton Manors was the home of one of the city's pioneer developers.

The most speculative developers were wiped out then and there. Others, including Young, might have been able to weather the down-turn — but they could not weather the great hurricane that roared out of the Caribbean and smashed squarely into south Broward on September 17 and 18, 1926.

Much of Hollywood was flattened or flooded, or both; there were thirty-four verified deaths and observers insisted the real toll was much higher. In Fort Lauderdale damage was less, but still considerable, and fifteen were dead. North Broward, which had both fewer people and lighter winds, had no deaths and only minor damage.

In the long run, however, the worst damage was done by the black headlines in northern newspapers that scared away potential replacements for those who had either died or fled. For South Florida the Depression began three years before it hit the rest of the nation.

In 1927 Dania and Hallandale regained their independence, the latter to be its own city for the first time. Davie's charter lapsed, not to be renewed for thirty-five years, and Floranada, shorn of much of its territory, was reincorporated as Oakland Park. Yet the collapse was not as total as commonly believed. While the 1930s were not the best of times in Broward, they were not the worst, either. And growth had not

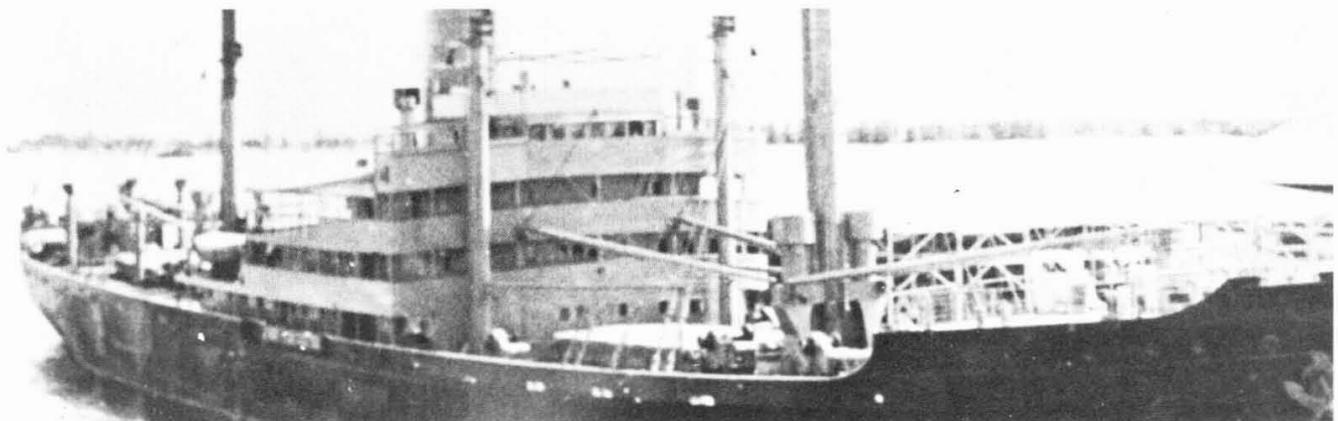
stopped; it had merely paused. Population went from the 14,242 of 1925 to 20,094 in 1930 and 39,794 in 1940.

If the Depression came early to Broward so did World War II. On December 19, 1939, the British cruiser *Orion* chased the German freighter *Arauca* into Port Everglades, where she remained until seized by the United States in 1941.

The closest the area came to combat was in the week beginning May 4, 1942, when German submarines off southeast Florida torpedoed seven ships, one of which limped into Port Everglades. That, and the landing of four Germans near Jacksonville two months later, led to several countermeasures.

Watch towers were set up along the ocean. The beaches were closed at night and patrolled by mounted Coast Guardsmen with attack dogs. The tops of headlights were blacked out and streetlights hooded. Boaters and Civil Air Patrol pilots searched for U-boats.

As far as Broward's future was concerned, however, the most significant thing about the war was the plethora of training bases that were set up. Every airfield in the county, plus the site of Broward Community College's central campus, was a World War II training facility.



Broward County Historical Commission

World War II arrived in Broward County by way of the German freighter *Arauca*, which was forced into Port Everglades in 1939.

When peace came, thousands of servicemen recalled how nice it had been in Broward. With their families, they returned. Thousands of others joined them, and the greatest boom was on.

Even in these days of trillion-dollar gross national products, the figures are sobering. In the thirty years from 1940 to 1970, Fort Lauderdale's population shot from 17,996 to 139,590. Hollywood went from 6,239 to 106,873, Pompano Beach from 4,427 to 38,587 and Hallandale from 1,827 to 23,849. Plantation, which was just getting started in 1950, had grown to 23,523 population by 1970.

New cities came into being everywhere and old ones grew. In 1945 the county still had only the seven active municipalities of 1929 (Hillsboro Beach had been chartered in 1939, but was not active until 1947). Hacienda Village was added in 1946 and Wilton Manors in 1947, but the explosion was still to come in the next two decades. Lauderdale-by-the-Sea started it off in 1951, followed by Plantation, 1953; Lazy Lake and Miramar, 1955; Lighthouse Point, 1956; Pembroke Park, 1957; Lauderdale, Cooper City, and Sea Ranch Lakes, 1959; Pembroke Pines, 1960; Margate, Sunrise, Davie, and Lauderdale Lakes, 1961; North Lauderdale, Coral Springs, Parkland, and Tamarac, 1964; and Coconut Creek, 1967.

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As the county's population soared toward a million, a few of the developers became overextended, or came under criticism because of the close ties between their firms and the cities they had created. Also, a growing number of newcomers feared that too-rapid growth would bring to their new homes the problems they had left their old ones to escape. As the 1970s dawned, they began demanding that their cities opt for slower growth and lower limits on the number of residences per acre. Gradually, governments began to respond.

Yet, when the growth finally paused, in 1974, it was not as a result of municipal action. Instead, south Florida was just one more victim of a recession which swept the nation. It was not the inability to build, but the inability to sell, that cooled the boom. At one point, there were an estimated 50,000 unsold condominium apartments in the area.

By 1976 the building industry began to revive and with it came a concern that the uncontrolled and sometimes unwise growth that characterized the past would not be repeated. A new county charter gave Broward's government broad powers to monitor and improve the quality of life and the environment. The passage of the 1977 Land Use Plan was a major step toward limiting urban sprawl and insuring that the area's resources — natural, economic, and social — would be put to their best use. In short, citizens and leaders had allied in their desire to see that the land once "unfit for human habitation," would not become uninhabitable again.



The tremendous growth of Broward County in the last few decades is well symbolized by Fort Lauderdale's Landmark Bank building and the hi-rise apartments along the Galt Ocean Mile. Fewer than 40% of the buildings standing today were present in 1964.