

HOLLYWOOD during the DEPRESSION

by Wilma Williams

Wilma Williams, a Hollywood resident since 1933, was one of the three founders of the Broward County Archaeological Society, Inc., and was president for 13 years. In 1976 Mrs. Williams became state president of the Florida Anthropological Society, Inc. In addition to publishing several articles, Mrs. Williams has developed slide programs with continuity for four Broward sites.

Hollywood, Joseph W. Young's dream city, was well on its way financially prior to the 1930s. Suddenly, however, it was just another small town struck by the Great Depression. But, Hollywood was never a depressed town.

Its people were united by necessity and frugality borne of man-made economic failure and the natural violence and destruction resulting from the 1926 Hurricane. Hollywood residents demonstrated an exalted sense of optimism which would see them through the decade. Although the money was gone, marbles and chalk were available for trading purposes. Solicitude and generosity were the way of life. No one was a stranger.

Young's master plan worked so well that the professionals essential to a functioning city were already there. Early publicity in the northern states had attracted physicians, dentists, lawyers, tradesmen, businessmen and farmers. Each was the nucleus of a growth sector for the town. At the time, most newcomers shared a common goal: to find work. Many local homeowners rented out their spare rooms to augment their incomes. Rents were low. Whatever their methods, the real estate entrepreneurs were among the actual builders of Hollywood and could be cast in the role of early heroes. In those early years, bananas were 3 pounds for 11 cents; a pair of dungarees at HENRY'S cost a maximum of three dollars; and the prices for cotton dress material ranged

from 29 to 49 cents a yard. While a picture show at the RITZ cost only a quarter, nobody cared if the patron sat through it two or three times. The projectionist ran the film at night and operated a bulldozer by day.

Small town pleasures and entertainment were on the simpler side. Family participation was the custom. Various departments of the city government sponsored many civic events. The Fire Department doubled for the Easter rabbit at its annual children's egg hunt at Dowdy Field on Dixie Highway at Johnson Street. Firemen's wives helped to cook and dye the eggs for those hunts. There, the diamond ballgames also were played.

The Police Department staged Halloween costume contests in Dowdy field for the town's young people. Once in a while, businessman sponsored donkey baseball games.

The gambling activities that invaded Hollywood in the '30s, did not fare too well. The mayor, Dr. A.W. Kellner, who was also the judge, would not jail the offenders. Instead, he fined them heavily each time when they were brought to court. This happened so frequently that gambling soon became a costly, discouraging pastime.

The 1934 founding of the Hollywood Federal Savings & Loan Association heralded an unscheduled upswing in the economy. Money could be borrowed; homes could be erected. It was a great boost for

a small town and meant work for all the building trades.

Construction progressed. The town prospered. Then, the November Hurricane of 1935, with its massive water intrusion, hit on the lower peninsula. But, the townspeople were prepared. Many boarded their homes and businesses. Others left the area. Refuge was any dry area. Once again, the by-words during the disaster were "help thy neighbor."

The Red Cross moved in and assisted the blacks who lived in Liberia, a small settlement between Hollywood and Dania. The Red Cross later helped them re-build their homes, which had collapsed in the storm. During the next few years, sever-

al blocks of houses were erected in the northern part of Hollywood, between Taft and Scott streets. This was the first full-scale attempt to build multiple dwelling units.

One beneficial consequence of the hurricanes was an improved building code, amended to make structures safer. By June 1937, the South Florida Building Code, as published by Dade County and reviewed by Broward and Martin counties, was adopted by the Tri-County Board.

The 1930s was a good decade, to be remembered because it brought out the best in people. Although economic recovery was not realized until the 1940s, Hollywood was the optimistic survivor!



Hollywood Boulevard, 1934, looking eastward from the 2000 block. Center parking was in effect but parking meters had not yet been installed. (Courtesy of the Hollywood Historical Society)