

1952



VICTORIA PARK AT THE CROSSROADS

today



Sitting at the edge of the prehistoric coastline atop a coral ridge, the Victoria Park neighborhood sits on relatively high and firm foundations when compared with low-lying areas that surround us. Vestiges of the coral ridge are visible in Annie Beck Park. This high ground, and our proximity to the New River, has put our neighborhood near a historic hub of transportation in South Florida.

According to legend, a river suddenly appeared after a night of strong winds and shaking ground (an earthquake possibly cracked an underground aquifer). The Seminoles named it Himmershee, “new water”, and it offered native populations a navigable waterway — and it also would serve later arrivals who would call it the New River. In the early 19th century, when most of south Florida was uninhabited by European settlers, one intrepid white family established a coontie (arrowroot) plantation along the New River, in what is today Colee Hammock Park (at 15th Avenue). Further north, Americans searching for new land pushed west from the original 13 states, disrupting the native populations. A series of battles, many led by Andrew Jackson, culminated in the forcible removal of many native tribes from the southeastern United States to “Indian lands” west of the Mississippi. Natives who resisted the “Trail of Tears”, could flee from the United States to Florida, which was Spanish (and for a short time, British) territory. In 1821, the United States purchased Florida and Jackson became the military governor of this new territory, with its capital at Jacksonville. This eliminated Florida as an avenue of escape for runaway natives and slaves.

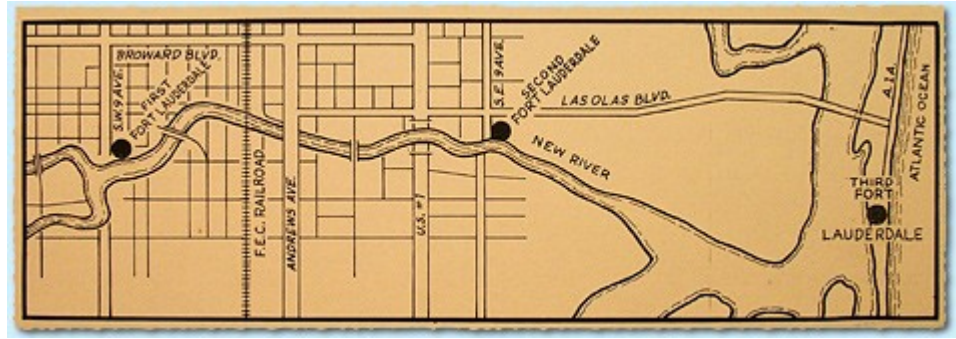
Soon, tensions between natives and white settlers in Florida boiled over — natives killed settlers across Florida, including the Cooley family on the New River in 1836 — and the Second Seminole War began. Jackson, now in the White House, aimed to complete the relocation of native population and sent federal troops to quell the native uprising using whatever means possible to rid Florida of its native tribes as well as newly arrived runaways (Seminoles) from the north. Most battles were fought in northern Florida, but US troops would push south in the cooler months and retreat back north during the “sicking season”. In 1838, volunteers from the Missouri militia fought and won the Battle of Loxahatchee near Lake Okeechobee and established Fort Jupiter on the coast. Following up on that victory Major William Lauderdale — Andrew Jackson’s quartermaster at the Battle of New Orleans — led a force of 200 mounted Tennessee volunteers south from Jupiter, heading for a large native settlement along the New River. They hacked a road through the wilderness (what is still called “Military Trail” in Palm Beach and northern Broward county).



Military Trail: The first overland route to South Florida.

© Copyright Historic Society of Palm Beach County.

Once they reached the river, troops built a fortified encampment where the river forks, near today's swingbridge in Sailboat Bend named and it after their commander, Fort Lauderdale .



Fort Lauderdale moves east. Troops built three successive fortified encampments along the New River during the Second Seminole War. © Fort Lauderdale History

They abandoned this fort after the fighting season and returned north, (Major Lauderdale died later that year en route home to Tennessee), but US troops returned the following year along Military Trail to build a second Fort Lauderdale, this time further east along the river (near today's SE 9th Ave) which they abandoned later that summer. They returned and rebuilt their fort, for a third time, on the beach near the present-day Bahia Mar. The Military Trail they built was the first permanent overland route into south Florida — and we sit near its southern terminus. While the exact route of this trail at its southern end isn't known, the high, dry ridge running under Victoria Park would be a prime candidate.

After the Cooley Massacre, most white settlers in the New River area fled to Fort Dallas (today's Miami), Key West or to Cuba. The fort on the beach was abandoned after the war in 1842, and for the rest of the 19th century, south Florida was left to the Seminoles who had avoided Jackson's forcible relocation. A house of refuge was established at the beach near the old fort to aid shipwrecked sailors in 1876.

In 1892, Dade County decided to build the "Bay Biscayne Hack Line", a rock road from Lantana to Lemon City (north Miami). The New River was too deep and too wide to cross with a bridge so the county decided to rely on a ferry crossing instead. Soon overnight accommodations were built to handle travelers at the ferry landing.



A ferry across the New River, near the current tunnel, connected travelers along county's first road .

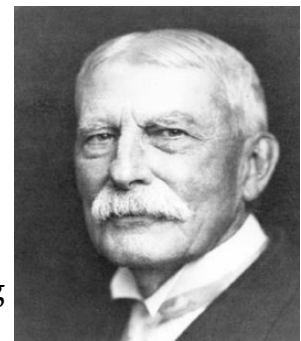
© Fort Lauderdale History Center



Frank Stranahan's trading post, photographed from the New River, circa 1896 — the genesis of the modern city of Fort Lauderdale © Fort Lauderdale History Center Stranahan Collection

In the 1893, Frank Stranahan arrived to operate the ferry. He established a trading post with the Seminoles on the New River near the location of the second Fort Lauderdale. His wife Ivey started the town's first school — and this location became the hub for a new town.

White pioneers moved into the area taking advantage of a year-round growing season — and used the New River to float their produce to market. But connections to the national market didn't exist until the late 1890's when Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway pushed its way south, hauling freight and passengers. Flagler became the father of Florida's tourism industry by building grand hotels near his railroad stations. By 1894 the railway reached Palm Beach.



Henry Flagler



Julia Tuttle

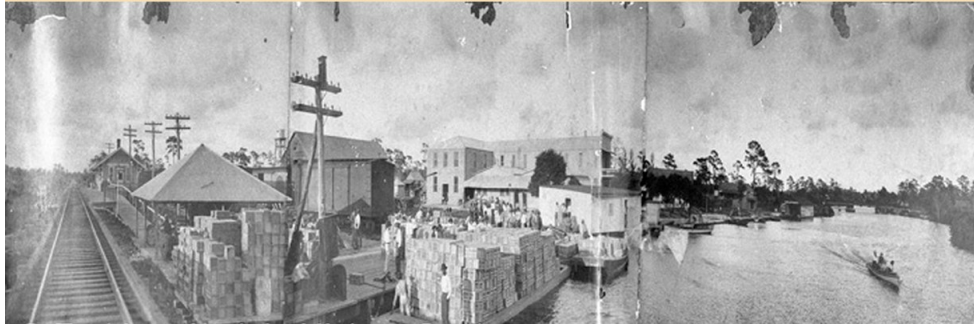
Mary Brickell



Two severe frosts in the winter of 1894/95 extended as far south as Palm Beach — wiping out almost all of the orange groves to our north. Julia Tuttle of Fort Dallas sent Flagler live orange blossoms to show that our area had escaped the frost — and could support a profitable freight operation year round. She offered to split her sizable landholdings with Flagler in return for railroad access. With additional donations of land and support by other local business leaders like William and Mary Brickell, the FEC laid tracks to Fort Dallas in 1896, where the residents offered to rename the city "Flagler". He declined and suggested they use the name of the river instead: Miama.

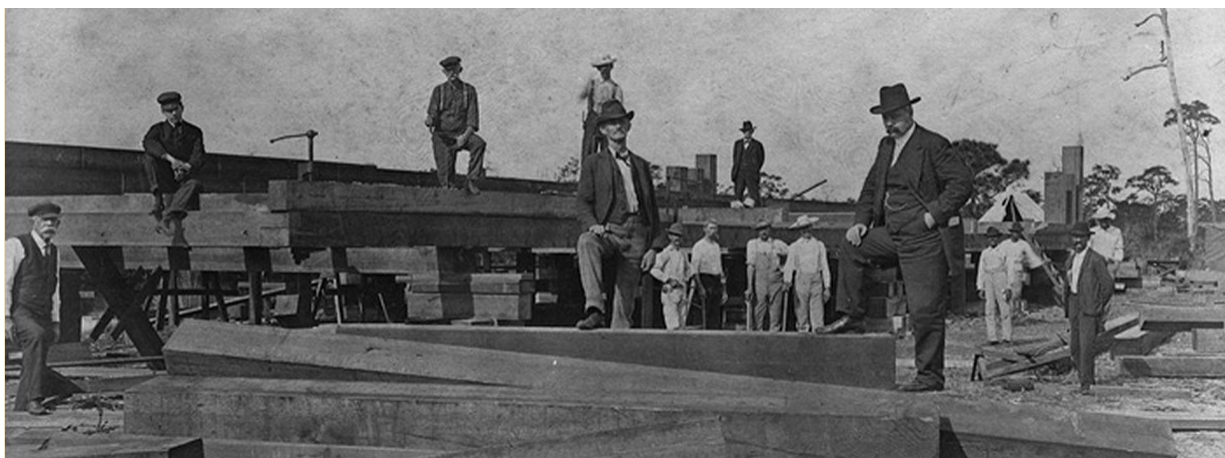
The FEC tracks run due south from Palm Beach toward Fort Lauderdale, but just north of the New River they bend about a mile to the west — eventually crossing the river west of Andrews Avenue. One explanation for that bend is that Julia Tuttle wanted to protect the oak hammock that sat upon the old coral ridge, so she had Flagler route his tracks around our neighborhood.

Whether that is true or simply an urban legend — perhaps this was a better route to a bridgeable location on the New River — the facts remain, the tracks do pass around our neighborhood, the oak hammock was saved, and downtown Fort Lauderdale began to develop along Brickell Avenue where the railroad crosses the river (site of today's Riverfront). With the coming of the railroad, the New River was finally bridged — and Fort Lauderdale began to develop as a transportation hub for the area: tomatoes and other produce headed to northern markets, tourists and new residents travelled the railroad south.

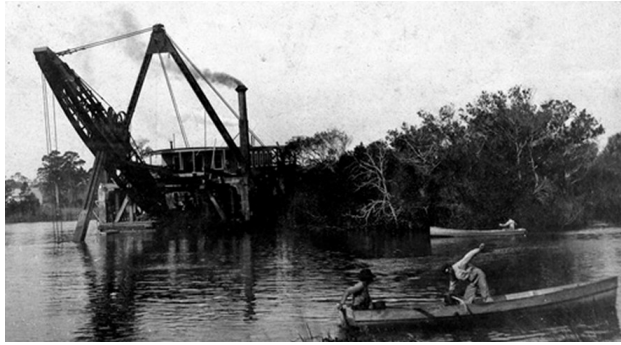


*The vegetable docks at the south end of Brickell Avenue, in 1908, showing Fort Lauderdale's economic progress. The view is from F.E.C. RR bridge over the New River. The first Andrews Avenue bridge, built 1905, is visible downriver.
© Fort Lauderdale History Center*

In 1893, dredging began on the Florida East Coast canal, now called the Intracoastal Waterway. When it was completed in 1912, it opened new shipping opportunities to Jacksonville and Miami. In 1905, Governor Napoleon Broward kicked off his Everglades drainage program with construction of the North New River Canal running from the south fork of the river across the Everglades to Fort Myers. Completed in 1913, freight and passengers could now cross the peninsula. By 1911, real estate mania had taken hold as thousands of speculators arrived to take part in a lottery for undrained swamp lands along the canal offered by the Florida Fruit Lands Company.

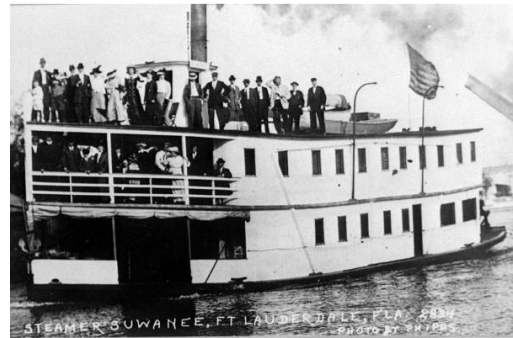


Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward (foreground) inspects construction of the barge Okeechobee in 1905, as it is being built in Sailboat Bend. The barge would dredge the North New River Canal to Fort Myers, and begin drainage of the Everglades. © Fort Lauderdale History Center



The barge Okeechobee dredging the New River Canal in 1912, promising to drain the Everglades and create thousands of acres of developable land — sparking a real estate boom.

© Fort Lauderdale History Center



The steamer Suwanee made regular trips between Fort Myers and Fort Lauderdale, traveling through the Caloosahatchee, Lake Okeechobee, and the North New River Canal. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, Phipps

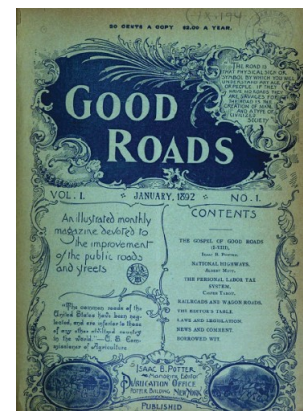
In 1911, Fort Lauderdale incorporated as a city. In 1912, a fire broke out on Brickell Avenue burning the entire downtown area, except for the Osceola Hotel, burned to the ground (the hotel would burn down the following year). The city promptly



One building that escaped Fort Lauderdale's 1912 fire was the Osceola Hotel, a converted packinghouse. The next year, however, the town's new fire department could do little more than watch as the Osceola burned on its own. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

bought a fire truck. In 1915, Broward County was formed from parts of Dade and Palm Beach County, with a recently rebuilt Fort Lauderdale as the new county seat.

At about the same time that Flagler was building his railroads, the “Good Roads Movement” was pushing to build paved streets and country roads. The movement advocated for government investment in road building and was supported by farmers, journalists, engineers, and no doubt road-building businessmen. But it was bicyclists in need of safe paved roads that provided the necessary numbers and political support to make a difference — and soon politicians sensed the multiple advantages of building paved public roads. The advent of the automobile in the early 20th century started a revolution in personal mobility and the auto industry became a major supporter the Good Road movement. Ironically, faster automobile traffic would eventually turn “good roads” into “unsafe roads” for bicyclists.



Carl Fisher, a bicycle enthusiast from Indiana and bike shop mechanic (like Henry Ford), invented the automobile headlight and became a major auto parts supplier. He promoted the new industry as the first auto dealer in the nation — and promoted auto racing through his Indianapolis Motor Speedway. By 1913, Fisher conceived the Lincoln Highway, a transcontinental auto route linking New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Highways in the early years of auto travel were promotional rather than physical. A highway or “auto trail” simply linked paved stretches of local roads with signs pointing the route from one city to the next. Promoters published road atlases to guide the way. Soon cities were paying highway promoters to be “put on the map” so that they could attract travelers and their dollars.



Carl Fisher

Fisher and other enterprising businessmen in the Midwest and South discussed a north-south route — and in 1915, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, the Dixie Highway was born. Initially planned as a single route from Indianapolis to Florida, it soon expanded into a network of routes linking many cities in the midwest and south, including Fort Lauderdale. Like Flagler, Fisher would move to Florida and turn his attention to real estate development. He became a leading figure in the Florida land rush of the 1920s, developing Fisher Island and other projects.

The red-and-white signs for the Dixie Highway in south Florida closely followed the FEC route as the train provided convenient transport for road building supplies. In Broward County, the Dixie Highway extends south along the west side of the FEC tracks from Boca Raton to the Five Points intersection in Wilton Manors and then through the Middle River Terrace neighborhood to the FEC tracks between today’s Searstown and Home Depot. From there it crosses the tracks and headed south to Hollywood and Miami generally following today’s US 1 on the east side of the railroad (with a few detours from today’s realigned highway).



With the backing of the auto industry and the Good Roads movement, the early auto trails such as the Dixie Highway eventually gave way to a more formal road system. Limited federal funding of roads began in 1916 and the federal Bureau of Public Roads was set up in 1921 to coordinate state road building efforts. Railroads alone had been unable to handle the country’s wartime needs during World War I. The Bureau asked General “Blackjack” Pershing to survey the country’s roadways. In 1922 he proposed

a national road system with an eye toward military needs. (One of his young lieutenants, Dwight Eisenhower would later found the Interstate Highway System.) Southern Florida was not a military priority, so it was not included in the Pershing Plan, but.....

In 1926, at a time before tropical storms had names, a massive hurricane ravaged Fort Lauderdale and south Florida. Martial law was declared in the disaster zone. Relief workers created a new route to truck in supplies. In many places they simply followed the existing Dixie Highway. But in central Broward County, a new route was blazed east of Dixie Highway, along the old coastal coral ridge.



A boat is tossed on land near the Andrews Avenue Bridge. The hurricane of 1926 destroyed City Hall and knocked down this newly installed electric sign advertising Maxwell's Arcade. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

This new route, Federal Highway, continued along that higher ground until it reached 10th Street (Sunrise Boulevard) where it turned due west for a mile to reconnect with Dixie Highway at today's Searstown. As with the FEC tracks a couple of decades earlier, Victoria Park was spared — traffic was routed around, instead of through, our neighborhood. And under the "new" federal highway numbering system, US 1 now marks our north and west boundaries.

The Florida land rush, which began with the drainage projects at the turn of the century, continued to gain steam into mid-1920s bringing many new faces to Fort Lauderdale: real estate developers, investors, speculators and those simply wanting to build a new home and life here. The first causeway to the beach — Las Olas — was built in 1917. Idlewyld was developed in the mangroves along the Intracoastal in 1919. By 1922, the finger isles along Las Olas and in Rio Vista were being dredged to create developable real estate. New subdivisions, made possible by the growing road system, began to spring up near downtown but away from the New River — essentially creating the "suburbs" of their day such as the Crossiant Park, Rio Vista and Victoria Park.

By 1925, the land rush was a frenzy. The FEC put a moratorium on shipping new building supplies into Florida, not because of lack of demand, but because there was no labor available to unload the trains and rail yards.... everyone was too busy getting rich in real estate. Parcels that cost \$200 in 1922 were going for ten times as much in 1925. Then, the hurricane hit in 1926 and the bubble burst.



Frank Croissant, a natural promotor from Chicago had a fleet of “stretch limos” in 1925 to ferry prospects around his new development on the south edge of town. He advertised his Croissant Park far and wide. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

This aerial photo, looking east from downtown, was taken in 1926 and shows the fast pace of development. The newly built Las Olas Causeway is the first road to connect the mainland and the barrier island in the distance. Finger isles are just beginning to appear along the south side of Las Olas. The interior portions of Rio Vista are being developed on the left, and Victoria Park is sprouting up on the right. Stranahan Field, the high school’s athletic field sits at the southwest corner of Federal Highway and Broward Boulevard. *State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/28584> Photo taken by William A. Fishbaugh*

Victoria Park

NE 15th Ave

Federal Hwy

Broward Blvd ↗

Andrews Ave →



SE 2nd St

Las Olas

New River

← *north* *south* →

Today's Victoria Park neighborhood includes 26 subdivision plats laid out by various developers at different times. The earliest subdivisions were along Broward Boulevard near downtown and Frank Stranahan's trading post. The city's hospital was built on East Broward Boulevard (where Pine Crest Village sits today). Alfred Kuhn laid out the original Victoria Park subdivision to the east and north of the hospital. Smaller subdivisions were platted over time to the north.

One very large subdivision, Progresso, stretched from 6th Street north to the south fork of the Middle River, from North Federal Highway to what is Powerline Road today. Originally conceived as a distinct city midway between Fort Lauderdale and Wilton Manors (another "planned community") it had its own train station on Progresso Drive just south of Sunrise

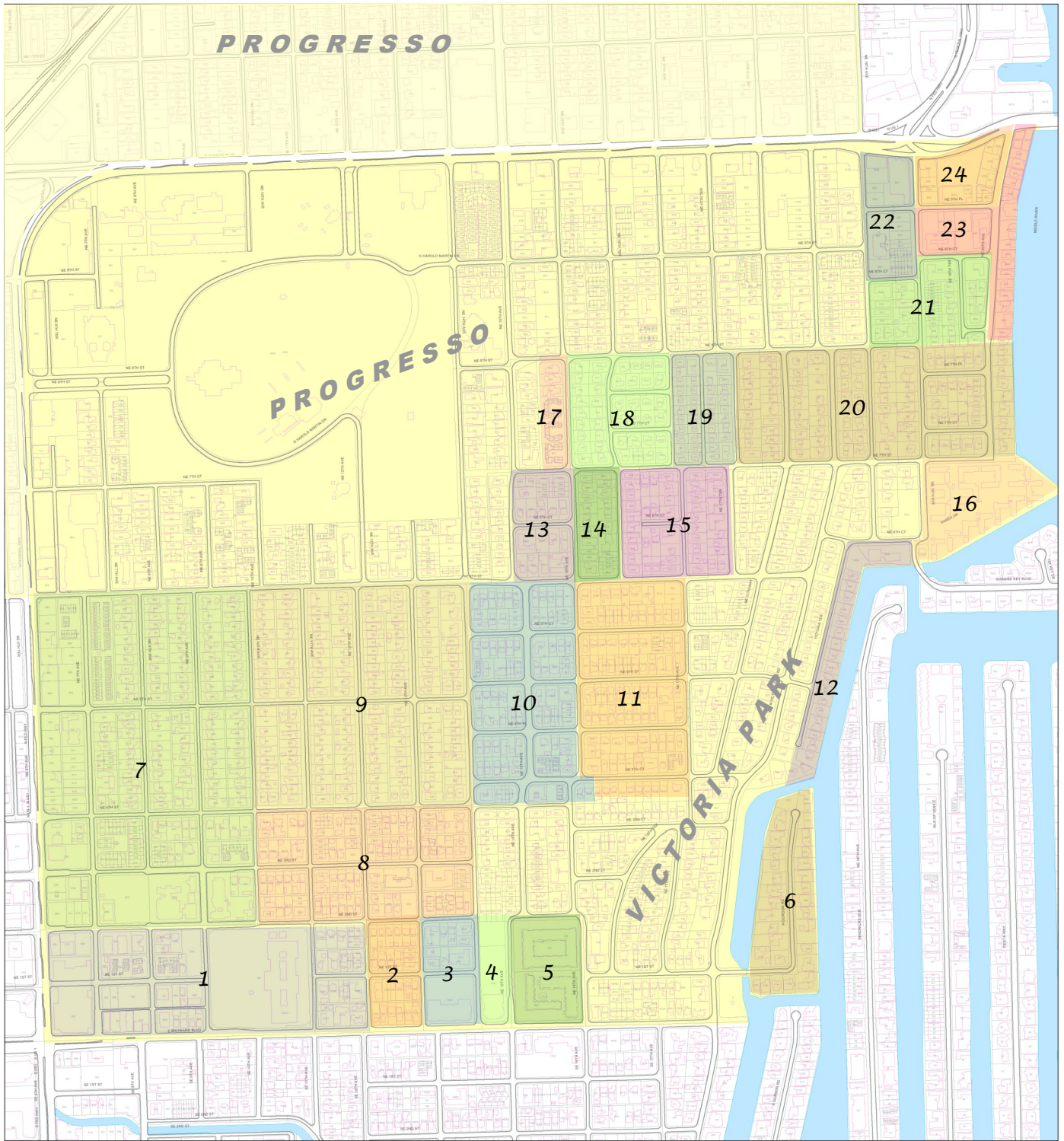


The original Progresso train station sits where NE 3rd and 4th Avenues bend over the railroad track behind Searstown.

Boulevard. Those grand plans fell through when the first Florida housing bubble burst in the late 1920s — Progresso was annexed into Fort Lauderdale and eventually developed into a number of separate neighborhoods, including the northern parts of Victoria Park.

Our neighborhood's quirky street grid, differing parcel and block sizes, the presence or absence of alleyways and sidewalks are a reflection of those original developers' vision (or lack thereof). For better or worse, we are still living with their legacy today.

In 1927, a second railroad, the Seaboard Air Line, arrived in town (the current TriRail/Amtrak tracks). In 1928, Port Everglades opened, connecting the Intracoastal, New River and its canals to the Atlantic Ocean. In 1929, Merle Fogg Field opened on a former golf course, and during World War II it was pressed into wartime service as a Naval Air Station — to become Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport after the war. Other decommissioned facilities were repurposed in the late 1940's including a naval airstrip that became the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport and a Coast Guard station, near the third "original" Fort Lauderdale, converted into the Bahia Mar marina.



Victoria Park Neighborhood

SUBDIVISIONS

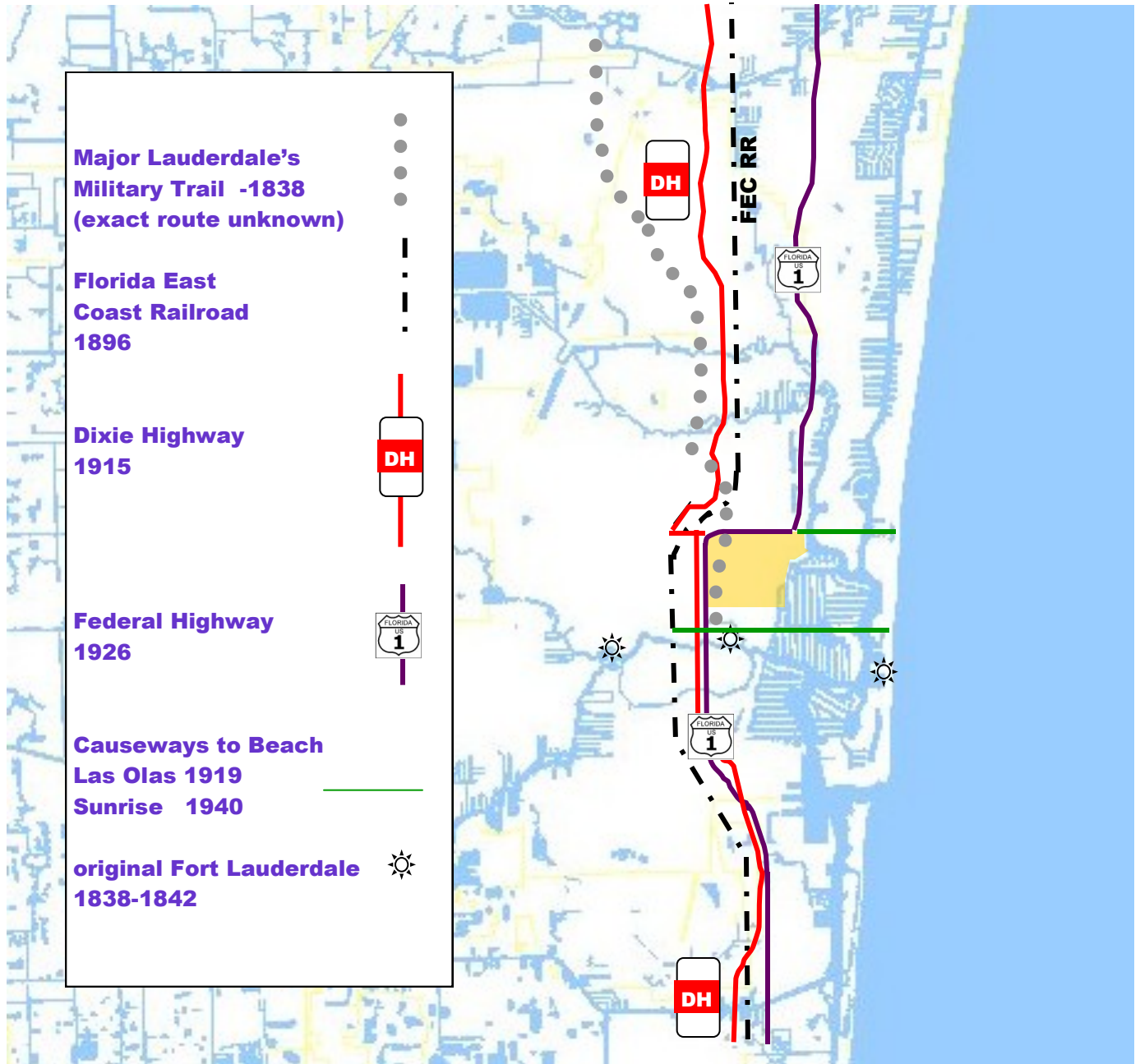


1 inch = 200 feet



- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. WORK'S RESUB | 10. LAS OLAS PARK | 19. VICTORIA COURTS |
| 2. DAMES & YOUNG'S RESUB | 11. MIDDLE RIVER PARK | 20. VICTORIA HIGHLANDS AMENDED |
| 3. CALDER'S RESUB | 12. VICTORIA PARK REAMENDED | 21. GATEWAY PARK |
| 4. BMB PLAT | 13. GRACELAND PARK | 22. RESUB OF GATEWAY |
| 5. STRANAHAN'S HOSPITAL | 14. GREEN'S SUB | 23. GATEWAY |
| 6. VICTORIA ISLES | 15. CENTRAL PARK | 24. REPLAT GATEWAY |
| 7. HOLMBERG & MCKEE'S | 16. STRANAHAN'S POINT | |
| 8. STRANAHAN'S SUB | 17. PARKER SUB | |
| 9. HALL'S ADDITION | 18. MAC ARTHUR PARK | |

VICTORIA PARK AT THE CROSSROADS





Looking north in the 1950s, the new Sunrise Causeway crosses the Middle River (left) and Intracoastal (right). The large vacant area would become the Galleria. Coral Ridge is starting to expand north past the yacht club. Gateway Shopping Center can be seen on the right. Notice that Sunrise Key is still two separate islands. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

In 1940, the 10th Street Causeway opened a second land route to the barrier island — and was renamed Sunrise Boulevard. That same year, Clyde Beatty, a circus promoter, purchased a lion farm operating in an old rock pit near Sunrise Boulevard and the Middle River, creating the city's first tourist attraction, the Clyde Beatty Jungle Zoo in Victoria Park's northeast corner. Some long-time residents of Victoria Park still recall hearing an occasional lion roar from the rock pits.



Lions being unloaded into the McKillip Lion Farm. In 1940, Clyde Beatty purchased the lion farm and made the site the winter headquarters for his circus and opened the Clyde Beatty Jungle Zoo as a roadside attraction where the Gateway Shopping Center is located today. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

After the war, Fort Lauderdale was one of the fastest growing cities in the county — more than tripling in size from 1930 to 1950. Spurred by air conditioning and post-war prosperity, the real estate market revived. All of those new homes, driveways, roads and parking lots covered land that had long filtered our subtropical downpours back to the groundwater supply — and as a result the city flooded periodically. A particularly wet summer in 1947 caused widespread flood damage and led to the creation of the South Florida Water Management District. Finally, those parcels in western Broward County that had been auctioned off during the first land rush could be developed, and Fort Lauderdale soon had many new cities neighboring us to the west.



Andrews Avenue in 1947. Periodic flooding led to the creation of the South Florida Water Management District. Inexpensive, developable land in western Broward County would shift growth away from the city and sounded the death knell for downtown Fort Lauderdale's shopping areas. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

Retail establishments began to move away from the old downtown shopping areas when new developments such as Coral Ridge and Galt Ocean Mile were platted in the late 1940s — and western suburbs popped up in the '50s, '60s and '70s.

In 1950, the Clyde Beatty zoo was redeveloped into the Gateway Shopping Center at what many considered to be the north edge of the city — and in 1954, a little further east, the Sunrise Shopping Center was built. Searstown followed the next year on our northwest boundary. The 17th Street Causeway opened in 1956, and The Galleria spurred the exodus of Burdines, the downtown's last major retailer, in 1980.



Above, a shopping frenzy in the new Searstown. Below: Burdines, the last major downtown retailer. The building would become the Broward County Government Center on Andrews Avenue. © Fort Lauderdale History Center

By 1977, I-95 was completed through Broward County, and in 1989, I-595 connected Port Everglades to I-75. All of these changes contributed to a shift from a central downtown to decentralized shopping centers, supermarkets and other auto-oriented development as the county's population spread out from the city. That sprawl continues to have a major impact on our transportation systems today — and the population shift, in part, can be blamed for the stagnation and blight on Victoria Park's western border.



Through the years, numerous bridges across the New River and to the beach were built and rebuilt as the city grew. The Federal Highway drawbridge, which replaced

Frank Stranahan's ferry, was in turn replaced by a tunnel under the New River in 1960. For more than 50 years this was the only roadway tunnel in Florida — a distinction soon to be lost when a tunnel opens at the Port of Miami in 2014. The decision to build a tunnel was a controversial one. Henry Kinney, editor of the Miami Herald was a vocal supporter of the tunnel as an alternative to another bridge. His counterpart at the Lauderdale News, Governor Gore, was not. (Guess who's name adorns the tunnel today?) A new Andrews Avenue drawbridge opened in 1974. And in 2002, the E. Clay Shaw Bridge on the 17th Street Causeway replaced the original 1956 drawbridge — after some discussion to build a tunnel instead.

There have been many plans and projects to revitalize the original downtown area to our southwest: Riverwalk (1993) and the Riverfront complex (1998), college towers (1987), the Museum of Science and Discovery, Broward Performing Art Center (1991), a new Main Library (1984). These projects and more pro-development zoning spurred new residential projects along the New River in the early 2000s. A new Wave streetcar (slated for completion in 2015) has the potential to revive the blighted areas west of Federal Highway by supporting a more densely populated urban core. And we are starting to see new residents returning back to the historic center of the city. As they return, they create new opportunities for upgraded businesses in our area, but also pose challenges by putting additional pressure on our existing roads and the ecosystem.

If the next 100 years are as eventful as the past century, our neighborhood is in for a lot of changes.



Above: Northbound traffic backs up at the old Federal Highway drawbridge in 1957. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, Below: The Henry Kinney tunnel under construction in 1960. St Anthony's Church and Victoria Park is visible in the upper right. © Fort Lauderdale History Center



1952



2011



Sunrise Boulevard looking west at NE 15th Avenue. The intersection in the foreground is 14th Avenue, beyond it on the left is Holiday Park. Lots of changes, but gas is still available here, and the clouds look the same.

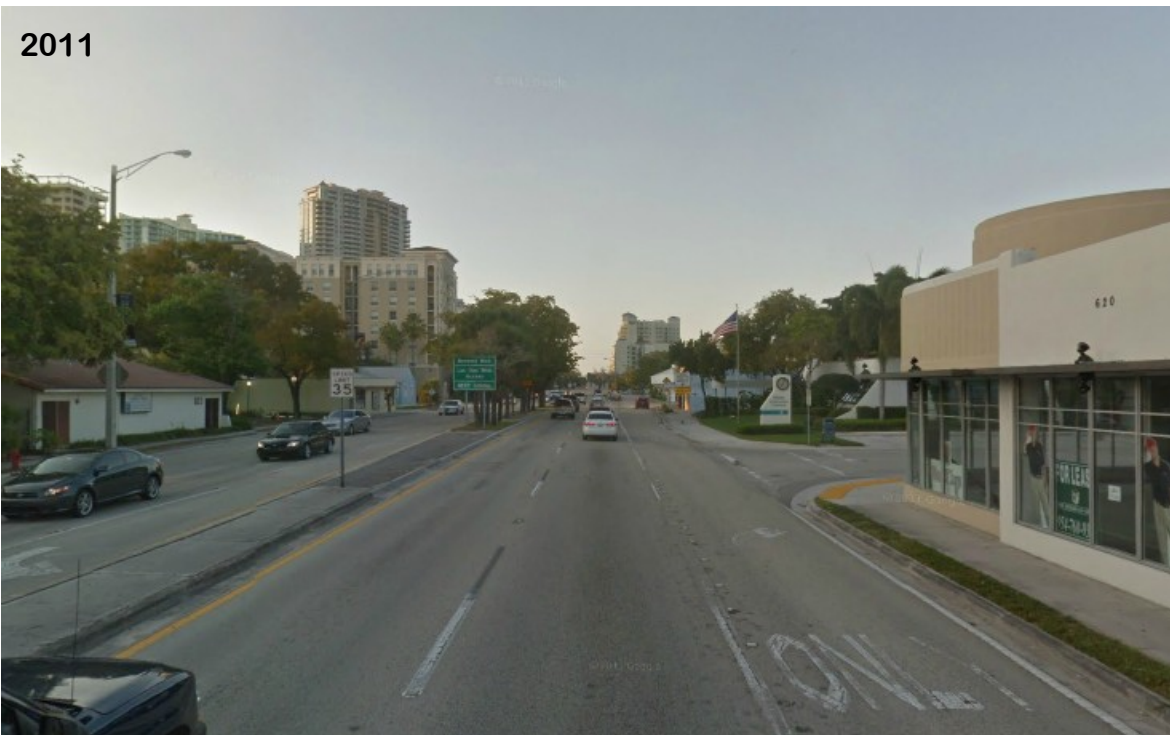
Above: 1952 © Fort Lauderdale History Center

Below: 2011 Google Streetview

1956



2011



Federal Highway looking north from SE 6th Street.

Above: 1956 State Archives of Florida, *Florida Memory*, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/104245>

Below: 2011 Google Streetview

1953



2011



Federal Highway looking north from Gateway

Above: 1953 State Archives of Florida, *Florida Memory*, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/104230>

Below: 2011 Google Streetview

The motel on the left has been renovated as Sunrise Hall, a dormitory for the Art Institute today. The speed limit remains at 35 mph.

1952



2011



Federal Highway looking east at Gateway

Above: 1952 State Archives of Florida, *Florida Memory*, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/104249>

Below: 2011 Google Streetview

The Gateway pylon sign (at the far right) has been incorporated into the Gateway Theatre building. Neon letters face southbound Federal Highway traffic today.



A panoramic photo of the mural on the north face of the Broward County Government Center parking garage. Compare the pose of Governor Broward in the center with the photograph on page 4. Stranahan's trading post is in the lower left. A steamer plying the New River is in upper left. An early scene of downtown Fort Lauderdale (probably Andrews or Brickell Avenue) is in lower right, and oranges remind us of why Henry Flagler extended his railroad into town.

Google Streetview Panoramio <https://ssl.panoramio.com/user/1193426>



Made famous by the movie *“Where the Boys Are”*, Spring Break brought thousands of college students to Fort Lauderdale in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The movie's world premiere was at the Gateway Theater in 1960.

Community fundraising in 1950 made the War Memorial Auditorium in Holiday Park possible, providing the city with a venue for opera and concerts.

© Fort Lauderdale History Center

