



## Florida Pioneer Museum News, February 2010

### What's Happening at the Florida Pioneer Museum

The Florida Pioneer Museum finally reopened last December after being closed for over a year for repairs. During the time the building was closed we received a new roof, a new air conditioner, and some new light fixtures in the hallway and upstairs. The porch was rebuilt and painted, the electrical wiring was updated, and some plumbing leaks were taken care of. It sounds like a lot, but now that 1904 building has a lot more life in it. A big thank you to the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Florida City for financing the repairs.

If you haven't been to the museum yet this season, please come in and see our latest addition, a 1920s monitor-top refrigerator in the kitchen. One of my favorite features is the foot pedal that allows you to open the refrigerator door with your foot! (Why do you suppose they discontinued that practical feature?)

Visitors to the museum have definitely increased this year. That is great, of course, but as usual we are in desperate need of more volunteers to keep the doors open. If you can help, please let us know. We are open on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons from 1:00 - 5:00 PM. In addition, three of our members are working on getting a program together for school children, so we could use more volunteers for the days when a school class is scheduled to visit.

The other way you can help, of course, is to be a member. Your membership dues help us keep the doors open. A form for joining is at the bottom of this newsletter.

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### The 2010 Lecture Series

The 2010 Lecture Series is in full-swing. The remaining lectures are listed near the bottom of this newsletter. The lectures are held at the Old Town Hail Museum, 41 N. Krome Avenue, at 7:00 PM. (The doors open at 6:30 PM.) The lectures are free of charge and are open to the public. Refreshments are served at the end of each lecture, allowing time to get acquainted with the speakers and to socialize.

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## Bamboo Tavern; "The First Capri"

1938-1960s

Bob Jensen, Florida Pioneer Museum

The Bamboo Tavern was a favorite South Dade gathering spot from 1938 until the 1960s much like the Capri Restaurant in Florida City is today. It had one large table around which

community leaders such as Mayor Tom Harris, Luther Chandler, Harold Kendall, the Sottiles and others gathered for lunch, like at Tony's and the Capri. It was an important gathering spot during WWII for the folks assigned to Homestead Army Air Field and it gave them an opportunity to socialize with the civilian community. It was used by the first HAAF commanding officer to entertain the dignitaries who attended the opening of the base in the fall of 1942.

The Bamboo Tavern was constructed on North Flagler Avenue just south of the power plant and the water tower in Homestead on State Road 4, now US!, which ran right through Homestead on Flagler Avenue to Krome and then turned south. All traffic to and from Homestead and the Florida Keys passed the Bamboo Tavern.

It was constructed in 1938 on the southeast corner of North Flagler and NE 6th Drive by contractor J.D. "Joe" Connor for Thomas Edmonds and his wife Julia who was a school teacher who had taught at the Florida City School and minor partners Ray Voss and Harry Hainz. Captain's Car Wash is at the other end of this block now. The land under the Bamboo Tavern was leased from George Turner on a 30-year lease. J.D. Connor also constructed the Redland District Chamber of Commerce Fruit Festival Building nearby in 1939. The Bamboo Tavern building cost \$5,000 to construct. One early newspaper article said its seating capacity was 75 and another, that 120 patrons could be seated inside and outside at tables arranged in a "Parisian sidewalk café manner." Ray Voss remembers that they had four to six booths on one side across from the bar and about ten tables. The outside seating was added later by pouring a concrete slab in front of the building and covering it with a canopy. It took the contractor only 42 days to put the building up, but it had been two years in planning and six months were required to select and purchase fixtures and equipment. The furnishings were natural-colored bamboo; nearly everything was "almost entirely of bamboo with palm-leaf designs." The bamboo was grown locally; it was a constant termite problem. The building had a second story over a portion of the main floor and this small second story was living quarters for Ray Voss initially. It was probably rented later.

The earliest newspaper report said that the Bamboo Tavern was "owned by the same interests which operate the Whitman Hotel on Miami Beach" and that Thomas Edmonds, Harry Hainz and Ray Voss were in charge. Tom and Julia Edmonds and Ray Voss saved their earnings from the Whitman Hotel and other summer places such as Montak, NY to pay for the construction. Both men worked as bartenders and additionally at the Whitman they received part of the earnings of the three slot machines, "overage" the loose change after the receipts were rolled. Julia ran the cigarette and cigar stand at the Whitman and all three of them booked horses over the counter according to Ray.

An account after the opening listed Eugene Lee as "in charge of the cuisine," Harry Hainz as "manager of food service" and Ray J. Voss as "steward." Tom Edmonds was the manager and he worked one shift at the Whitman Hotel on Miami Beach and another at the Bamboo Tavern. Tom Edmonds and Ray Voss had worked together at the Cincinnati Ohio Country Club and the Whitman Hotel on Miami Beach. Harry Hainz had also worked at the Whitman Hotel.

The hotel was officially The Whitman-by-the-Sea. It was a luxury hotel built by the Chicago family that owned the Whitman Publishing Co. To quote a photo book on the Whitman: "If one of America's famous hosts—one of the few possessed of sufficient means—were to have erected a magnificent tropical home in which to entertain 250 friends, he might well have built The Whitman-by-the-Sea. The lofty, tiled verandahs—the great cool lounges, spacious dining rooms and other public areas—were not designed to pay 'square foot revenue.' They were conceived to give our guests the rare luxury of uncrowded freedom—the relaxing comfort of 'elbow room.' Two entire floors are devoted to these large, beautifully-appointed public rooms, while the lobby floor is virtually surrounded by open and enclosed terraces." Peak season rates January 20 to March 20 were \$15 to \$24 per day. The hotel closed between April 20 and December 20. One of the sons of the owner – Dudley Whitman served at Homestead Army Air Field early in the war as a pilot. The same family now owns the Bal Harbour Shops in Miami Beach.

The grand opening took place on December 9 with a menu that featured broiled sirloin steak at \$1.25 as the top priced item, followed by fried spring chicken at \$1.00, lamb chops at \$.85, fried or broiled fish, \$.75 and grilled hamburger at \$.50. Ray Voss remembers the steak as a great chunk of beef ¾ inches thick. These meals came with French fried potatoes, a vegetable, salad, bread and butter and coffee, tea, milk or buttermilk included in the price. Specials were: Monday, broiled lamb chops, \$.65; Tuesday, corned beef and cabbage, \$.50; Wednesday, roast loin of pork with apple sauce, \$.60; Thursday, prime roast rib of beef, \$.65; Friday, fried fish dinner, \$.50 and Saturday, meat balls and spaghetti, \$.50. Another Saturday night special was hot roast turkey sandwich for \$.25, toasted \$.05 extra.

Ray Voss joined the Army and became an officer in the first Special Service Forces (now known as Special Operations) in November of 1941. The Edmonds bought out his share of the business with an agreement to sell it back to him after he returned. Ray returned in November of 1945 after being discharged as an Army captain and bought back in.

The Bamboo Tavern was famous for its chicken and for its Howard Johnson ice cream. Probably because of the latter, the roof was initially orange. Tom and Ray met Howard Johnson (the company founder) when Howard was a guest at the Whitman Hotel and they convinced him to permit them to sell his ice cream. The chickens were supplied by John C. and Helen Reed who owned a chicken farm on the west side of Roberts Road just north of Biscayne Drive; there is now a horse stable and training facility on the property. They also had a poultry shop at 205 N. Krome which they later moved to 78 NW 1<sup>st</sup> Street when a new building was constructed. Ray Voss also remembers buying chickens from James A. Hudson who had a poultry farm near the corner of Bauer Drive and Country Club and a poultry store on SW 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Homestead. Chicken was an item that was always on the Bamboo Tavern menu even during WWII when government regulations forced the owners to restrict the items on the menu and prices. The menus during WWII were dated, and gave the reason for the restricted menu. 1943 prices were lower than 1941 and 1942 prices, which were also shown.

The Bamboo Tavern served wine and beer until it received its Homestead city liquor license in 1943, becoming only the third establishment with such a license. Andy's Bar and the Bank Bar (later Simmons Bar) were likely the first two. A Redland District News editorial came

out strongly against citizens who complained that the City should not have issued it. The Bamboo Tavern was very popular with Army Air Force officers from the base and this may have contributed to the issuance of the third license by the city.

During a hurricane scare in October of 1943, HAAF evacuated its Women's Army Corps members from the base to the Chamber of Commerce Fruit Festival Building near the Bamboo Tavern. Tom Edmonds brought them an evening treat of Howard Johnson's ice cream and the WAC commanding officer 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Elaine C. Holman expressed her appreciation in a letter to Tom in which she wrote: "This Detachment wants to express its appreciation to "an old soldier who understands soldiers." Likewise the first two commanding officers of HAAF, Colonels William L. Plummer and Britnall H. Merchant sent Tom thank you letters on their departures from Homestead. Tom's personal records show repeated efforts to enlist in the armed forces despite his being over age. He had may have served in the armed forces of the United Kingdom before immigrating to the United States.

The Rotary Club of Homestead met there during WWII. It moved its meetings in 1945 only because the Bamboo Tavern could not continue serving them due to the "labor situation." The Homestead Jr. Woman's Club held its Cabaret Nights there in the early years. Many wedding receptions were also held there.

The Edmonds and Ray Voss sold the Bamboo Tavern to a man and his wife from Miami, perhaps named Packer at the end 1946 when the Edmonds went into business in Marathon in the Keys. One of the conditions of the sale was that Ray Voss stay on for a year. This owner in turn sold to George and Herbert Turner after a short while and then the Turners sold it in 1954. George Turner owned the land on which the Bamboo Tavern was built and Herbert's wife Bobby had been a hostess there. A person who was in several photos with the Edmonds inside the Bamboo Tavern was Merle Dyal. It was resold several times in the 1960s and then purchased and turned into a night club called Kikos Disco in the 1970s. It burned in October of 1976, probably the result of arson. When the owners were unsuccessful in attempts to sell the property to the City of Homestead for the asking price of \$115,000 in December of 1976, they then had it razed the weekend of December 18-19, 1976.

After leaving the Bamboo Tavern in 1947, Ray Voss went into agriculture. He worked for the Ford tractor dealership owned by Herb Weiss, brother of Walter Weiss who owned the Ford automobile dealership. He then went to work for South Dade Farms, Inc. owned by the Sottiles. He operated their Buckeye ditcher cutting six foot deep and 36 inch wide drainage trenches in the East Glade. He ran the ditcher for twelve hours and then turned it over to Barney Godwin who operated it for twelve hours. Barney's father Ruel "Hob" Godwin was the chief mechanic for South Dade Farms and he kept the ditcher operating around the clock. Most of their work was south of the Florida City Canal. South Dade Farms office was on the southwest corner of Krome Avenue and Palm Drive in Florida City before Frank Basso's mother Mrs. Frank Liberty built the packing house there; it is now owned by Strano Farms. Ray also worked for Charlie Carpenter for 10 years when Charlie planted 8,000 acres.

Ray Voss was the first commanding office of the National Guard Company established here in 1948. The National Guard Company was activated March 10, 1948 as Company D, 211th

Infantry, 51st Division. In addition to Captain Ray Voss, Lt. Adolph Lopez, Lt. Spencer Morey and First Sgt. Billy Caves were its leaders. Ray worked with Councilman and then Mayor Wade Thompson to get the National Guard Armory constructed. Until then they met in the Chamber of Commerce Fruit Festival Building (now the city tennis courts) and at an abandoned building on the former Homestead Army Air Field. Ray reached Lieutenant Colonel before he retired.

## **HISTORIC TOWN HALL MUSEUM**

### **2010 Lecture Series**

*Sponsored by*

*Florida Pioneer Museum Association*

*Homestead Main Street, Inc.*

*Homestead Town Hall Museum*

**Lectures will be presented on Thursdays at Homestead's Old Town Hall Museum, 41 N. Krome Avenue, at 7:00 p.m. (doors will be open at 6:30p.m.). Refreshments will be served at the end of each lecture allowing time to get acquainted with the speakers. The lectures are free of charge and open to the public.**

**Feb 25      Bob Nauman**

**Come see and hear Edison's 1914 phonograph. The historic Homes of the Homestead area where they are supposed to be. Help locate them!**

**March 18    George Grunwell**

**The Romantic History of Area Roads and How they got their Names.**

**April 15    Larry Wiggins and Bob Jensen**

**Hurricane Andrew: a Look Back**

**May 20     Alan Scott**

**History of the last Missiles installed at the Nike Hercules Missile Site, now part of Everglades National Park after the Cuban Missile Crisis.**

**41 NORTH KROME AVENUE, HOMESTEAD, FL :33030   305 242 4463**

# Florida Pioneer Museum Membership Application

An all-volunteer non-profit Organization

**We need the support of people like you. Your membership helps the Florida Pioneer Museum preserve and share our South Dade heritage**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Phone</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>City, State, ZIP</b>	
<b>I would consider volunteering</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Individual</b>	\$15
<b>Couple</b>	\$25
<b>Family</b>	\$25
<b>Settler Contributor</b>	\$50
<b>Pioneer Donor</b>	\$100
<p><b>Mail your membership application to:</b>  <b>Florida Pioneer Museum</b>  <b>P. O. Box 343312</b>  <b>Florida City, FL 33034</b></p>	
<p><b>Located at 826 N. Krome Avenue</b>  <b>Florida City, FL</b></p>	