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# *The Creation of* **Broward County**

*Almost half of this issue of Broward Legacy is devoted to chronicling the formation of Broward County. The first section of this compilation, "The Failure to Create Broward County: 1913," is a summary of a portion of an article entitled "The Road to the Failure to Create Broward County in 1913," by Broward County Historian Cooper Kirk, which will be published in a future issue of Broward Legacy. Analyzing the desire for home rule and convenient access to the seat of government which propelled leading citizens of Fort Lauderdale, in particular, to push for the creation of a new county in 1913, Dr. Kirk also addresses the question of prohibition which, according to legend, prompted Fort Lauderdale residents to ad-*

*vocate separation from Dade County.*

*The remaining sections of this compilation, reprinted from the Fort Lauderdale Sentinel, trace the events leading to and immediately following the creation of the county on October 1, 1915. These articles, probably written by the Sentinel's publisher, Colonel George G. Mathews, provide a detailed description of the contemporary social, political and economic situation, and the mechanics of creating a county. With the exception of parenthetical corrections to the Sentinel's often exaggerated figures, these articles are reprinted as they originally appeared.*

## **THE FAILURE TO CREATE BROWARD COUNTY: 1913**

*by Cooper Kirk*

During the early part of the twentieth century southeast Florida consisting of Palm Beach and Dade counties developed slowly as this area of 6,489 square miles had difficulty attracting settlers in sufficient numbers to clear and farm the land. For until the arrival of the great Florida land boom of the mid-1920s, agriculture fueled and drove the economic and social establishment of southeast Florida. And the

overwhelming influence on agriculture was the presence of the swamps and overflowed lands and environs known as the Florida Everglades. Agricultural pursuits would remain vulnerable and precarious until the enormous amount of water emanating from the Everglades could be permanently controlled and harnessed to the service of man through an adequate system of drainage and reclamation. Although

it is not possible to determine the exact population of Palm Beach and Dade counties in 1913, when the first effort to create Broward County from these two counties occurred, some idea of the scantiness of the population may be obtained by comparing the population figures of the two counties and some of their towns for the censuses of 1910 and 1915. In a comparison of the population figures of

the federal census of 1910 and the state census of 1915, it is evident that Palm Beach County did not grow as fast as Dade County, for the former grew from 5,577 to 9,669, while the latter spurted from 11,933 to 24,536. During the same five year period, Fort Lauderdale grew from 296 to 1,870; Dania, 283 to 512; Pompano, 350 to 484; and Deerfield and Hallandale which had a population of 287 and 245 respectively, grew at corresponding rates. Thus, the population of these various entities in 1913 may be estimated by striking a mid-figure between the census of 1910 and that of 1915. Although the populations of the enumerated communities were still relatively small in 1915, the percentage of increases were fairly large, and that of Fort Lauderdale was spectacular.

The movement for the creation of Broward County out of the southern portion of Palm Beach County and the northern section of Dade County began almost solely in Fort Lauderdale and was occasioned by Miami, with its magnificent Biscayne Bay, petitioning the Dade County Board of Commissioners for a referendum to vote up or down county bonds for the development of Miami harbor. On February 7, 1913, the commissioners voted to submit the matter of the referendum to the upcoming legislative session and, if approved by that body, to go ahead with the bond referendum. Although no monetary limit was ever set for the amount of bonded indebtedness to be incurred by voting the City of Miami enough money to build a first-class world harbor, the variously estimated figure ran from \$615,000 to \$815,000. Both these figures first startled and then angered the political power structure in Fort Lauderdale. For an indebtedness at the latter figure would mean that the people of Dade County had put themselves in debt to an amount which would be more than one-tenth of the total property valuation of Dade County.

On February 21, 1913, the *Fort Lauderdale Herald* created a sensation when it carried an article stating that Representative George A. Worley of Miami would introduce a bill in the upcoming legislative session to create a new county from the southern portion of Palm Beach County and the northern section of Dade County. The first name selected for the new county was Everglades, but later the name was changed to Broward in honor of ex-governor Napoleon B. Broward, during whose administration the drainage and reclamation of the Everglades had begun in 1905. Editor William Heine minced no words as he com-

mented on the "arrogance" of Miami in wanting to bond the entire county in order to finance the construction of a world harbor for itself. When a new county came into existence, asserted Heine, Fort Lauderdale would bond itself for \$200,000 and construct its own world harbor near New River Inlet. This world harbor was needed, for Fort Lauderdale, as everyone acknowledged, was "The Gateway to the Everglades," and the richest and most accessible part of the Everglades, then being drained by the State of Florida, lay nearest to this town. Backers of the division of Palm Beach and Dade counties to create Broward County asserted Fort Lauderdale with a world harbor would become world famous and its citizens immensely wealthy.

The very influential *Miami Metropolis* avidly supported division, and State Senator Fred M. Hudson, representing St. Lucie, Palm Beach and Dade counties, joined Representative Worley in support of division. Worley introduced the local bill to create Broward County, and normally local bills passed with little or no opposition. So, the Fort Lauderdale power structure rejoiced that soon their town would be the county seat, and that county officials and county jobs would be a patronage well worth presiding over.

But a snag soon developed. The almost 500 member Miami Board of Trade belatedly went into action to oppose division when some of its more astute members saw not only lucrative political plums but also the county retail trade, which centered in Miami, being transferred to Fort Lauderdale. They wired Worley and Hudson, particularly the latter, to oppose the county division bill. They argued among other things that the population of the proposed county, which would include Deerfield on the north and Hallandale on the south, was too small to support simultaneously the organs of government and the necessary internal improvements. The division, further argued the board, was almost unanimously opposed by Dania and Hallandale residents, and democracy rested upon the consent of the governed.

Worley took no notice of the opposition by the Miami Board of Trade, and the bill to create Broward County passed the House handily, but it did experience ineffectual opposition by Representative H. E. Bussey of Palm Beach County. The board then concentrated on trying to persuade Senator Hudson to have the division bill killed in the senate. Repeatedly, Hudson asked the board to present substantive arguments against division,

not just sentiment. This he never received.

Meanwhile, an opposition lobby from Dania and Hallandale went to Tallahassee to kill the division bill. From the two towns themselves a number of telegrams were sent in opposition. Pompano and Deerfield residents made little effort either to stay in Palm Beach County or to go with the new county. In Tallahassee, Hudson found himself torn between the pro and con arguments emanating from Fort Lauderdale, Dania and Hallandale. Because of the strong opposition from Dania and Hallandale, combined with the stern opposition from Representative Bussey of Palm Beach County of having Deerfield and Pompano included in the new Broward County, Hudson changed the housed-passed bill which included the two Palm Beach County towns. First, he limited the northern boundary of Broward County to Fort Lauderdale, and he inserted provisions for a referendum to be held in the truncated county which extended south to Hallandale. Second, Hudson divided the proposed county into two districts, with Fort Lauderdale composing one district and Dania and Hallandale composing the other. Both districts would have to approve the creation of the new county. Despite tremendous vocal and written opposition from powerful men in Fort Lauderdale, the division bill passed both the senate and the house in this form.

Fort Lauderdale politicians such as Reed A. Bryan, William H. Marshall, W.O. Berryhill, Mayor George G. Mathews and Colonel Robert Reute butted heads with the equally astute politicians from Dania and Hallandale such as A. C. Frost, S. M. Alsbrook, James M. Holding, H. T. Geiger and Charles Ericson, in the struggle over the new county which had been created but which could be uncreated by an adverse vote in the July 8, 1913, referendum. In the referendum, Fort Lauderdale voted 208 to 3 in favor of the new county, but Dania and Hallandale voted against the new county by a vote of 54 to 16 and 29 to 10 respectively. Although the creation of the new county of Broward won by a vote of 234 to 86, the bill to create the county lost because only one of the two districts into which the county had been divided for the referendum voted in favor of the new county. A tremendous amount of grumbling took place in Fort Lauderdale because a minority of votes had thwarted the will of a very large majority. Those in favor of the division of Palm Beach and Dade counties, most of whom were from Fort Lauderdale, vowed they would get even with Miami,



Downtown Fort Lauderdale, 1913, looking south from the city water tower. New River runs horizontally through the center of the photo. The road to the left is Andrews Avenue.

even though the people of Miami had not voted in the referendum. But many influential Miamians, including the mayor, had sown seeds of discord in each of the three towns which would have composed the new county of Broward. Favorers of Broward County warned that they controlled the balance of power in Dade County, and in a referendum for bonds for the Miami world harbor they flatly stated they would defeat the bond issue. Miamians, even though the measure passed the legislature to permit the bond referendum, feared to put the matter to a test, and the referendum was never held.

Prohibition heated the emotions of Americans during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Local referendums determined whether a county or a city became "dry" or stayed "wet." Both in 1907 and 1909, the wets in Dade County had won narrow victories, the first by a twenty-five vote majority. Both sides girded for another referendum in late October 1913. The dry forces had powerful allies in Senator Hudson and *The Miami Metropolis* editor S. Bobo Dean, both fiery members of the anti-saloon league of the county. And, very importantly, the dries had in their corner the great majority of Fort Lauderdaleians who, at the same time, favored county division. Speeches, letters, person-to-person persuasion, penetrating editorials and above all the emotionally-conducted anti-saloon meetings worked powerfully on the electorate.

Election day, October 30, was a day of extremely high winds and torrents of rain fell, which probably cut down on voting. But at the end of the day the dries had won a glorious victory. For the first time since its creation in 1836, Dade County was dry, and wets had to go to Palm Beach County to get alcoholic beverages and that on the sly. The dry forces in that section of Dade County which would have been Broward County had the July referendum passed, provided the margin of victory. Fort Lauderdale went dry 138 to 31, Dania 51 to 40 and Hallandale 23 to 9, or a dry margin from the northern section of Dade County of 130. Miami, on the other hand, went wet 453 to 264, or a wet majority of 189. When the votes of the county's twenty precincts were counted, the dries won 978 to 863, a 115 vote majority.

The wet forces in Miami and Dania argued that the wets had won the referendum. Their reasoning went as follows. Broward County had been created by the 1913 legislature. The bill which created the county contained an unconstitutional provision in that the bill gave legislative power to the people who lived in Fort Lauderdale, Dania and Hallandale, but the state constitution delegated legislative power solely to the legislature. This belated argument by the wets, who had said nothing about the unconstitutionality of the division bill at the time of the July referendum, struck

many as self-serving, although it is only just to point out that some Miami lawyers before the referendum had argued the referendum provision of the bill was unconstitutional but the other provisions of the bill were legal, and, ipso facto, Broward County was a reality.

Six times the wet forces through their legal counsel tried to have various courts declare that Broward County was legally created by the legislature, and thus Dade County, minus Broward County, the latter being composed of Fort Lauderdale, Dania and Hallandale, had voted wet in the October 30th referendum by a majority of fifteen votes when the votes from the three Broward County towns were disallowed.

In each of the six instances the courts rejected the arguments of the wet forces, and Dade County remained dry. Indeed, Fort Lauderdale had exhibited, as its citizens had declared after the July county division referendum, its ability to control elections, or at least close ones, in Dade County. Hereafter, the wet forces and the favorers of the creation of Broward County both united to support the new county. Strange bedfellows, the wets and dries! They both realized their ambition in 1915 with the creation of the new county, but one which included the southern portion of Palm Beach County to go with the northern portion of Dade County.