

The Lure of the Grove

Written by Paul S. George, BT Contributor
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A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



Just 125 years ago, Greater Miami was a vast wilderness with small clusters of hardy settlers living along or near Biscayne Bay. Of the region's communities, Coconut Grove was arguably the most dynamic, progressive, and independent-minded.

The Grove's natural setting is unrivaled, as it looks out from behind lush subtropical foliage toward the turquoise waters of Biscayne Bay. The province of Tequesta Indians for millennia, the Grove's modern incarnation began in the late 19th century with the presence of a small number of homesteaders and a short-lived post office, which presented the community its name, Coconut Grove (later Coconut).

In 1882, the Bay View Inn, later known as the Peacock Inn, opened in today's Peacock Park. Owned and managed by Charles and Isabella Peacock, who hailed from England, the inn became a magnet for many accomplished and eccentric visitors.

The guests included the titled Counts Jean D'Hedouville and James Nugent; Charles E. Stowe, son of author Harriett Beecher Stowe; Kirk Munroe, a renowned author of boys stories and his wife, Mary Barr Munroe, a noted environmentalist and civic activist; Flora McFarlane, the first woman homesteader and schoolteacher, and the guiding light behind the founding of St. Stephens Episcopal Church; and Ralph Munroe, the community's version of a renaissance

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man.

Ralph Munroe possessed a camera that he put to good use with insightful photographs of the frontier that was southeast Florida. The photograph shown here is extremely rare, depicting the historic heart of the Grove circa 1890.

On the right is the Coconut Grove Pavilion, a community gathering place. The flat-roofed building behind it housed Charles Peacock and Son General Store. Evidence of a developing community would soon appear: a house of worship, library, woman's clubhouse, men's club, school, and small businesses as the Grove became a leading southeast Florida settlement.

Paul George is historian at HistoryMiami Museum. To order a copy of this photo, contact HistoryMiami archives manager Ashley Trujillo at 305-375-1623, atrujillo@historymiami.org.

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