

Boom Bust Boom

Written by Paul George, BT Contributor
March 2019

A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



From its beginnings in 1896 through much of the 1960s, downtown Miami was the center of seemingly everything in the region. It offered many of the city and county's most important houses of worship, movie theaters, lavish nightclubs, popular restaurants, grand retail venues, banks, business offices, restaurants, hotels, New Year's Eve and Shriners' parades, the main library facility in Bayfront Park (the city's "front porch"), and numerous unique businesses and characters.

It was also the seat of government for both the city and county, as well as the venue for an expansive court system that included the bustling 11th Circuit Court and a federal district court.

In its 1950s heyday, downtown offered nine movie houses headed by the lavish Olympia and the Art Deco-styled Miami theaters. Burdines, Richards, Byron's, and Hartley's department stores remained open into the nighttime hours. On just one block of East Flagler Street stood four five-and-dime stores. Worshippers flocked to Gesu Catholic Church, to either of two Methodist churches, and Central Baptist Church for services on Sunday, and then dined afterward in nearby restaurants, including the Seven Seas, Davis Cafeteria, the Rosedale

Boom Bust Boom

Written by Paul George, BT Contributor
March 2019

Delicatessen, and the pleasant lunch counters of McCrory's and Woolworth's.

But the postwar flight to suburbia, which intensified in the 1960s, pulled many residents, and the businesses and institutions catering to them, away from the downtown core. Additionally, the rise in crime, as well as in homelessness, in the city center, along with the concomitant perception that it had become a dangerous place, contributed to its late 20th-century decline.

However, with the recent explosion in the number of downtown residents and the appearances of exciting institutions and businesses on its periphery, downtown Miami's comeback is well under way. This development is part of a national trend, and one that has already swept through such center-city Miami neighborhoods as Wynwood, Little Havana, and the Design District/Buena Vista, each of which has experienced a transformational renaissance.

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.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com