

Fisher Island: A Biography

Written by Paul George, BT Contributor
February 2020

A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami

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With its stunning vistas emanating from the Brickell-Downtown-Edgewater skyline, Miami is indeed the Magic City its champions have dubbed it since its beginnings. Yet a worthy rival is the vista afforded residents of Fisher Island, where one can glance north toward South Beach and beyond; east to the glistening waters of the Atlantic Ocean; and west to the magical Miami skyline.

Fisher Island can claim many other laurels, from the beautiful Vanderbilt Estate to the island's manicured lawns, and to its zip code, which is reportedly the wealthiest in the United States. It was not always that way, however, for the northern portion of this 216 acre island was, until the early 1900s, the southern segment of today's Miami Beach.

The desire for a deep-water channel stretching from the city of Miami's waterfront through shallow Biscayne Bay to the Atlantic Ocean prompted the creation of the Government Cut, and the consequent severing of a narrow strip at the edge of today's Miami Beach. Over time, the land south of the cut was enhanced to its present scale. In the meantime, eager purchasers of

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the island with big dreams for it, claimed it for little money.

Herman Walker, who purchased the island, then consisting of about 50 acres, in 1915 for \$15,000, sold it in 1918, to Dana A. Dorsey, an early black millionaire and philanthropist, for \$25,000. Dorsey, who made his fortune in Miami real estate, as well as property elsewhere, planned to convert it into a “high-class black resort and subdivision with a hotel, cottages for well-to-do men of his own race, and boats to convey them back and forth between the mainland and the island.” Dorsey held it for just a year, and though there is mention in Miami’s newspapers of black visitors on the island, Dorsey abandoned his plan for it, selling the property to Carl Fisher, who became its namesake, for an unknown amount of money in 1919.

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