

## Building Close to Nature: The Early Architecture of Dade County's Park System

ROCCO CEO

University of Miami



Miami Beach 1920's, courtesy of Historical Museum of S. Florida

"There was so much open country then. It did not seem possible that all that wonderful empty, pelican-haunted beach could ever be filled. Nobody thought then of parks and boulevards and plans. Although they insisted someday this was to be a great city and a countryside full of people, it was as if looking at all that emptiness they never really believed what they were saying . . . It would be years before that boulevard was moved back from the sea so that hotels could be built on the approach to the beach. Now, the sea is almost invisible there beyond a solid rampart of hotels and apartment houses. -Marjory Stoneman Douglas writing on Miami 1915-1917.

Before air-conditioning, people flocked to public parks at the waters edge to take advantage of the cool breezes and the distant views. If you could afford to stay at one of the larger seaside hotels, service for food, drinks and towels were there for the asking. But for the rest of the public a day at the beach meant potentially long lines in traffic and negotiating large crowds to find a small patch of sand on a coastline quickly being swallowed up by developers. Public Parks such as Lummus

Park and Surfside on Miami Beach, were some the last remaining public beachfronts along miles of shoreline rapidly giving ground to private development.

The demands on the waterfront created an environment where architecture and sand were in competition for space. The private hotels, often built to the edge of the beach, provided all the amenities needed for beachfront activities including cabanas, concession stands, lounge chairs and salt water and fresh water pools. The public beach, in order to maximize access and space for beachgoers initially could support little more than thatched canopies not much bigger or sturdier than beach umbrellas. The most permanent constructions were by necessity, barbecues, built to protect beachgoers who previously to their construction, often left embers of hot wood and coals behind, a hazard to the feet of unsuspecting adults or carefree children making their way to the waters edge.

As beachfront was given over to hotel development the public realized that without protest, little public waterfront would be left. The county electorate recognized this and soon began a concerted effort to acquire waterfront land to protect future residences, and the ever increasing throngs of tourists, place in the sun.

The earliest parks were lands acquired through donation. With the creative salesmanship of County Commissioner C.H. Crandon and Park Superintendent A.D. Barnes, the first parks were wrought from partnerships struck with local philanthropists such as A.O. Greynolds and W.J. Matheson and the National Park Service's program titled Emergency Conservation Work or ECW newly initiated

by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and approved on March 31, 1933.<sup>1</sup>

### **1933-1942: DADE COUNTY PARKS AND THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS.**

Matheson Hammock, Greynolds Park, Fairchild Tropical Garden, Homestead Bayfront Park are all projects of this era of conservation work and represent the earliest and one of the most important periods of building in the park system. Although Matheson Hammock Park was the first county park it was Greynolds Park that represents the first period of building.

The Emergency Conservation Work program was a New Deal initiative to build young men and restore their confidence through government employment during the Depression. At the time of the programs inception unemployment had risen from 3% to 25%.<sup>2</sup> The program put these young men to work protecting, and developing existing forests through prevention of soil erosion and the remaking of forests lost to years of neglect. Not bound by state lines, the program looked to improved forests on national, state and private lands. The program was organized by Director Robert Fechner a presidential appointment who oversaw an advisory council made up of one representative from four different government departments: Department of Labor, War Department, Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Interior.<sup>3</sup>

The Department of Labor established quotas and selected men. The War Department enrolled the men and was in charge of transporting outfitting and conditioning them. The Forest Service under the Department of Agriculture selected camp locations and projects for National Parks and furnished equipment and supervised the execution of the work. The National Park service under the Department of Interior provided the technical supervision of the work projects and handled the administrative work for the program.

The ECW officially became known as the Civilian Conservation Corps or CCC on June 28, 1937. By 1939 the CCC program had given employment to over 2,000,000 young men and war veterans, who had planted 1,480,500,000 trees.<sup>4</sup>

The camps were made up of a volunteer force of single men between the ages of 18 and 25 whose initial commitment would be six months. The

young men were given food, clothing, shelter and medical attention and paid \$30 a month of which \$22 would be an allotment sent home to help dependents. Life in the camp followed an eight hour work day with evenings and weekends set aside for education and the learning of a trade or occupation. These men were enrolled in camps of 200 supervised by superiors from both the military and the civilian ranks that could guide the work by offering professional expertise on a variety of vocations and jobs.<sup>5</sup>

Life in the camps was often lonely and adjustment to camp life away from family could be tough. Desertions were a problem as were injuries. The death toll was 2 per thousand of enrollees and with an average enrollment during its middle years at 250,000 young men the program as a whole still averaged one fatality a day.

Still the program was a great success. Putting millions of young men to work, reinvigorating a sagging economy, the allotments sent home by years end in 1938 totaled 487.8 million.<sup>6</sup> Within the ranks of the CCC, the program helped eliminate illiteracy by providing general education, character and citizenship all which helped to turn young boys into men intellectually and physically. Enrollees on an average gained six pounds in weight in the first two months in the camp.<sup>7</sup>

The construction of park buildings was added to the initial focus of conservation and reclamation. To aid in this effort the U.S. Forest Service produced plan books that graphically illustrated all the built elements that one might encounter in the building of parks. Incinerators, picnic shelters, concession stands, pavilions, camp equipment, drinking fountains, and even walls and signs were all well illustrated. What made these books so seamless in their applications was the advocacy for adapting simple building types to local materials and methods of construction. In this way the CCC youth, many unskilled in construction, could learn their craft, putting aside issues of form, and instead concentrate on mastering the materials and methods of construction of their newly assigned region.

### **CAMP SP-2 GREYNOLDS PARK**

The official opening of Greynolds Park on March 29, 1936 coincided with the Centennial of Dade

County, founded just 100 years earlier in 1836. The program for the dedication included an afternoon of field events; organized races, contests, kayak races, stunts and water events. The last event of the day featured "A Pageant of Greynolds Park History" in four parts starting with Part I: The Seminole Trading Post and concluding with Part IV The Civilian Conservation Corps. This four part history titled "Coral Heritage" was followed by addresses by C. H. Crandon and A.D. Barnes with a dedicatory address by the CCC director Robert Fechner. The dedication concluded with a march to the summit of the new Observation mound where a commemorative plaque was unveiled.<sup>8</sup>

The pairing of the dedication of the park with Dade County Centennial was fortuitous as was the choice for the program title: "Coral Heritage," for it tied the future of the county park system with the founding of the County. In this way the dedication was a rediscovery of its past, celebrating new collaborations with old techniques of building on the land. The victorious climb to the summit of the man-made mound commemorated a time honored way of building in the landscape in which architecture returned to its vernacular origins at a time when America was celebrating a "Century of Progress."

The park was first under the supervision of Prentiss French a well known Landscape architect from San Francisco. Prentiss French left a short time after the project was started; the difficult work conditions were enough to discourage the most professional of the administrative structure of the CCC. Once the CCC youth were sworn in they could be shipped to any location in which they were needed. The first company of young men to arrive in South Florida was from Missoula Montana. To the CCC youth of Missoula Montana, cold winter work and the economic hardships of the depression must have made an abandoned quarry in warm southern skies almost look like paradise.

A former quarry for the Ojus Rock Company the site was burdened with mounds of rock, scattered machinery an old railroad spur set against open pinelands and one of two natural hammocks in existence in the northern part of Dade County. The land was part of an area originally known as "Ojus" the name given to the rock in the area and later to



Greynolds Park 1936, courtesy of Miami Dade Public Library

the rock company started by A.O. Greynolds. The company mined and crushed rock for road building supplying the increased demand for good roads into the landscape while unwittingly creating a site of future lagoons and man-made hills.

The original parcel of approximately 106 acres of land was deeded to Dade County by A. O. Greynolds owner of the Ojus Rock Company. An additional 65 acres of land was given by Palm Beach County and later a pristine section of river edged hammock of 57 acres by H.B. Graves.

The architecture of Greynolds appears to grow from the site and is meant to be seen as an extension of the site both in construction and in the way you view buildings in the landscape or view the landscape from the buildings. The siting of buildings takes advantage of the varied landscape and presence of water occupying the edges of the landscape as thresholds from land to water or open meadow to hammock edge. The architecture accommodates a variety of program while appearing to blend seamlessly with the landscape.

## OOLITE

*"The potentially most distinctive portions of Greynolds Park were worked-out quarry pits in the Ojus limerock, forming a series of ponds variously divided by strips of land. The pits, though mostly excavated below prevailing water levels, had been left with numerous shallows and with ridges and piles of waste material, some submerged, some rising above the water; and the entire quarry area was a jumble of heaps and drifts of similar quarry*

*strippings. Vegetation, returning onto the raw surfaces of the dumps and walls of the excavations, gave more than a hint of a possible picturesque rare in South Florida—which is as much as to say, unique—but the realization of the promised charm could require nothing less than the expenditure of many months of labor for many men, and not little money...<sup>9</sup>*

Just under the thin surface of top soil lay a geologic formation made of small spherules of carbonate lime resembling fish roe, containing as much as 95 per cent of calcium carbonate. This stone called "Miami Oolite" was named in 1909 by Samuel Sanford when writing on the topography and geology of Southern Florida for the Florida Geological Survey.<sup>10</sup> The stone is the primary material for most of the buildings at Greynolds and is different from the Coral Rock or Key Largo Limestone which is comprised of fossilized coral and is found only in a narrow area between Soldier Key and Bahia Honda Key on a thin 3 mile wide stretch of islands. In 1914 an article appeared in *The Tropic Magazine* by Prof. H. E. Van Deman titled: "The Miami Limestone: Native Rock of Dade County, Florida." In this article, Van Deman extolled the virtues of the local material commenting: "The rough and informal surfaces of these walls are picturesque in the extreme and the soft grey coloring is especially pleasing."<sup>11</sup> Van Deman stated that it is "...one of the most valuable assets of the country," and wonders why more architects, "have not oftener planned for nor insisted upon its use in the buildings they have designed."<sup>12</sup>

At Greynolds Park, "Miami Limestone," lay exposed and plentiful, the result of years of quarrying rock by the Ojus Rock Company. The leftover heaps of rock could not have been ignored and would need to be dealt with if anything was to be made of the site let alone its transformation into a park. Early reports indicated that the first acts of construction were to clean the site of debris and begin to transform the existing landscape by reconfiguring canals, removing shallows and ridgelines and using the excavated rock for roads and trails. It is testament to the work of the CCC, and the direction of William Lyman Phillips, Camp Superintendent, and Raymond C. Ward, Foreman and Engineer, who took full advantage of the native rock to transform a scarred landscape into a sylvan setting.



CCC Youth shaping oolitic stone 1934, Greynolds Park, courtesy of the National Archives

## WALLS

Massive stone piers, rounded at the corners, mark the southern entrance to the site creating an entry that combines local materials with a grand formal entry. Passing through these gates one is sheltered by an equally massive *Ficus* tree that commands the center of a shaded octagonal room. Driving around the *Ficus* one exits north onto a sun filled road terminated in the distance by a mound that appears like a stone rampart set against a backdrop of the sky. The mound, designed by the new park superintendent William Lyman Phillips, was a way of acknowledging French's efforts in designing the main entrance while also announcing a new order for the plan which would become more picturesque and less formal than his predecessor's.

The first buildings were built between 1934 and 1935 and consisted of the Tool and Work Shed (1934), and the Observation Mound, Caretaker's Residence, Lagoon Shelter and Restrooms (1935). The second phase of building took place after the park's dedication in 1936, between the years 1938 and 1940.

The oolitic rock Tool and Work Shed, and the Caretaker's House delineate the hammocks edge creating a clear threshold between the hammock and the open lawn at the base of the mound. The Tool and Work Shed, the largest of the three buildings, starts out as a completely enclosed hipped roof structure but soon extends into a building enclosed on only one side with an open



Greynolds Park Caretakers House 1934, courtesy of the National Archives

loggia to the courtyard. As the building stretches north its exterior wall continues as a freestanding wall gradually disintegrating into the hammock. The whole edifice unfolds, starting as an enclosed building only to become a semi-enclosed loggia, and finally a low wall, and eventually part of the land. Ultimately it is a wall building, defining the equipment yard at one moment and providing useful rooms at another moment. The wall runs east eventually punctuated by a gate reminiscent of the main entry, and then turns south to become the exterior elevation of the Caretaker's house.

The oolite wall is at once utility building, wall, gate and eventually a house for the caretaker. The all encompassing gesture of the oolite wall is more than physical enclosure but underscores the importance the native rock has to the history of the site and town and to its new roll as the material infrastructure for the creation of the park. At every turn one confronts the rock and finds a wealth of expression in its transition from ground to building.

The Caretaker's House like the wall, builds quietly from the wall of the Tool and Work Shed building. The Caretaker's House, with the eave of its gabled roof parallel to the wall, steps up and back from its central massing with doors and stairs pushed to the corners. The entry stair to the building is placed at a diagonal to suggest a physical connection between the workings of the Tool and Work Shed and the Caretakers House. The building is wonderfully crafted with cut oolitic rock walls, and its wood shingled roof. Camp inspection

reports were conducted regularly by the National Park Service for the ECW. In the district report by J. H. Gadsby of January 1, 1935 the building is mentioned: "The exterior of the caretaker's house has been completed and presents a great architectural achievement for a building of its kind. I understand that some of the Miami architects have been out on the location to study it."<sup>13</sup>

Narrative reports by the National Park Service at the district and regional level were frequent and assisted in monitoring the quality and pace of construction across the country. Added to these reports were the monthly reports of the superintendent and foreman of the individual camps who reported on the day to day work in the camp often filled out with attached photographs of the youth at work. These reports suggest that the work was not only scrutinized in terms of pace and quality of construction but was judged as to its aesthetic contributions to the ECW as a whole with the reports building ongoing support for the program. Phillips' reports are often full of insight as to the operation and character of the camps and their crew:

*"Whether or not the improvement has come about through the influence of the work on the man, our Camp has settled down to being a fine working outfit. We are little troubled, once pay-day is a few days behind, with disciplinary cases. The old cry, "Goldbricker", which once was banded back and forth a hundred times a day, is no longer heard. We no longer have to round up stragglers, or to be forever exhorting the laggard. This, we feel, should be known of our Camp. And we wish the Washington Crowd could share our satisfaction and pleasure in watching these strong, all-but-nude youths, browned like Indians, vigorously silhouetted atop the Mound against the intense Florida summer sky, briskly sledging at drills in the white glare and heat of the rock pit-."*<sup>14</sup>

## MOUND

The front elevation of the house aligns with a path on top of a grassy ridge that extends to the middle stair of the mound. The central location of the house provides commanding views to most of the buildings and roads in the park. The only feature with a more commanding view of the site is the "Mound." The mound because of its dominant height allows visitors to look over the top of the tree canopy to the bay and when the site was first constructed it could be seen from many areas in the park.

The Observation Mound is the centerpiece of the site providing views across the site while commanding the end of the primary axis from the southern entrance to the site. Initially one would recognize the mound as being more about the site than architecture until one realizes that it is completely man-made. The mound is purported to cover the remnants of machinery left over from earlier quarrying operations and then capped by a stone construction that spirals around to culminate in a flat observation platform mounted by flag pole. A perfect place to get a panoramic view of the site.

The design intent of the mound is well explained by Joanna Lombard in "Historic Landscapes of Florida," who astutely observes that the mound allows the visitor to visually engage the site while also protecting it, providing visual access to vast areas of the site. Lombard thus reveals that the mound solved one of the great design challenges of the park- that its architects had to strike a balance between active recreation and preservation of the sites unique and fragile natural areas.

The architecture of the mound is also a tour-de-force of building starting out as a careful setting of massive oolite stone boulders that terrace their way to the summit becoming gradually smaller and more carefully dressed to become the finished balustrade at the mounds summit. The approaches are equally well conceived with a long ramp extending the visual axis from the south and a second switchback stair from the Main Boathouse. The ramp and stair meet at a landing to melt into a ramp/stair that leads one to the final ascent. A third ascent can be witnessed most afternoons by watching children climb rock to rock in an unmapped way up the face of the mound to access the stairs or ramp. The mound commands the site and in its construction is the site's Rosetta Stone, representative of the details and techniques found throughout the architecture of the site.

### TERRACE

If the mound is a gradual culmination of the site in the way it gathers paths to its summit, the Main Boathouse is about encouraging exploration of the site and system of lagoons and creeks. This building follows the original boathouse of more modest dimensions that flanks the main axis to the

mound. The original building flanked the main entrance drive and perched on the lagoon edge taking advantage of the change in elevation from the main road to the lagoon shoreline. The program consisted of a picnic pavilion accessible from the road and above a boat storage area on the lower level. This building inspired a similar program with the later building that also features a two story structure with decks above rooms for boat storage but unlike the early boathouse this building is much larger and acts as a gate to the lagoon providing a long vista to the southeast of the site.

The first thing one sees upon approach to the new Boathouse is its roof. Supported by massive log rafters, the roof dips low in the center and cantilevers overhead nearly seven feet from the building wall. The roof steps up on either side of the entry to second level decks at either end of the building. The roof is supported by a center column at the entry that demands that visitors move to the edges of the entry, closer to the concession stand and ticket office line the edges of the entry. From here the tall, shaded space, opens to the light filled terrace beyond and a long view of the lagoon. This terraced entry, flanked by a heavily forested shoreline, effortlessly provides entry and a wonderful vista while continuously funneling breezes through the entrance.

From the terrace four runs of stairs appear, two of which take the visitor up under the roof to the flanking decks and two that deposit the visitor at the waters edge. The decks are built over rooms for kayak storage the primary program for the building and the ideal vehicle for exploring the lagoons and creeks throughout the site.

Built in 1939, nearly four years after the CCC left to work at Matheson Hammock, the building nevertheless shares many of the building values initiated by the CCC. The new building is of concrete and log construction with the oolite rock used to face the exterior walls and detail the building rather than act as the primary load bearing material. The building's massive stone base appears to grow out of the ground much like walls of the mound but unlike the mound which draws people to the center the boathouse disperses visitors to its edges, terraces and decks encouraging one to explore the lagoon and surrounding park. Although very much of the style of park architecture of the period, it acknowledges the use of new materials with its employment of

concrete and details such as the wood accordion doors to the kayak storage rooms.

The architecture of Greynolds is of its place, a creative tour-de-force in its knitting together of landscape and architecture into a cohesive whole. Foot bridges, picnic shelters and even picnic tables were also made of oolitic rock and appear as natural outcroppings that recover and invent notions of beauty in a site originally so heavily transformed by the hand of man. In Phillips' narrative report of July 1934 we get a glimpse of the significance of this construction and its reason for being: "The work with stone, has, to be sure, turned out to be more of a task than we thought it would be, it has occupied labor which at times we could have wished were available for something else. On the mound, it has caused a sad over-run in our man-month estimate. But the results are justifying our judgment. These are not shoddy ten or twenty-year buildings; they should last indefinitely, the work is honest and thorough, done in the manner of things built before the machine age--."15

#### MATHESON HAMMOCK

"Soon the people will be saying to the winter visitors: 'If you haven't been to Matheson Park, Mister, you haven't seen South Florida.'"16

If Greynolds Park represents the skilled transformation of a scarred landscape into a sylvan park, it was Matheson Hammock that best represents an attitude of the careful balance of how to preserve the native landscape while making it accessible to the public. The site is a long cross section that cuts through some of South Florida's best native landscapes. Starting with Pine Rockland the site extends east through hardwood hammocks to open coastal marsh and through the dense mangrove forest while skirting solution holes to arrive at the bay. It is in this setting that after the hurricane of 1935 the CCC would continue building parks for the county.

The first architecture in the park was made to provide basic amenities prior to the CCC, so the site could be opened to the public soon after its acquisition in 1930. After minimal site clearing the first buildings and site amenities were built between 1932 and 1934 by the County Parks Department. Given that the site was also occupied prior to its acquisition pre-existing structures such as the Caretakers House, Tool House and equip-

ment shed would be remodeled and put to use to fit their new program.

The new structures were two ten foot by twenty foot, open, thatched roof picnic structures (1932) a latrine (1933) and concrete grills (1934). The first shelters were designed and built by parks staff. These structures carried on the tradition of tropical shelters reminiscent of today's Chickee which is still built and in use by the Miccosukees and Seminole Indians. Like the Chickees the structures were constructed of solid wood poles, rectangular in plan with a simple pitched thatched roof of palm fronds. These structures provided a place for a picnic table and chairs and offered the simplest protection from the elements.

Second in priority for the public were public restrooms. The latrine building although also having a thatched roof had walls of locally quarried stone called "Miami limestone" was built by the newly acquired workforce.

The latrine building would be the first building built of this material, more substantial than earlier shelters; it would nevertheless be torn down in 1938 to make way for a larger building of the same program. The latrine building would however give early visitors to the site, a glimpse of things to come in the form of more substantial buildings that although built by a workforce often seen as outsiders, would go on to make an architecture that was profoundly of the place and would remain so even to this day.

The architecture of Matheson Hammock is however distinctively different that Greynolds Park and is more contrasting in form and detail although still made of native rock quarried from the site.

Gone are the rough boulders and sloping watercourses of the walls commonly found at Greynolds. Here the architecture although carefully sited and modest in scale, stands against the landscape as a challenge, a challenge it would later endure in surviving future hurricanes.

This attitude of contrast can best be seen in the observation of William Lyman Phillips when reporting to the national park service on his progress in building of an access road in the park:

"A road of this sort. carried into a territory where no vehicle could move, where travel afoot was

a feat but not a pleasure is, briefly at least, a marvel to those who build it. Every yard added to the end is a yard gained in the game, and all the participants, from the drillers in the pit to the superintendent are sustained by a sense of accomplishment. To the outsider, to those who later use the road, there is presumably nothing marvelous about it at all--there are so many miles of road in Florida built through marsh and swamp lands that the thing is commonplace. We never supposed, to be sure, that the road in itself would be of any great interest; there was a recreationally valuable spot to be reached at the end of it, and that was sufficient justification. But if it happens in a case like this that qualities of scenery somewhat commonplace have nevertheless aesthetic significance of a definite nature, though not obvious to everyone, it is worth while to call particular attention to them."<sup>17</sup>

Phillips elaborates in great detail the kinds of contrast that occur with the different landscapes in terms of light, texture of the landscape and even the acoustic dimension of the sound of palms in the breeze and lapping waves.

The architecture is solidly built and sited to be seen against the landscape - the designer conscious of the difficulty of building in this fragile but unforgiving landscape. The building of the road to the bay was not unlike the construction of the early causeway to Miami Beach or even the Overseas Highway, which was measured in yards due to the difficulty of clearing land and providing a suitable surface for a road.

## GATES

*"Sad farewell to the hundreds of storm dead in the Florida Keys was signaled today by wisps of smoke that curled into once more smiling skies as funeral pyres were lit to banish danger of pestilence."*<sup>18</sup>

After the horrible hurricane of September 2, 1935 building work at Matheson Hammock took on a new seriousness and form. Having been called from the southern most camps to the keys to aid in the recovery of those killed by the storm, many young CCC enrollees must have carried the memory of how devastating a hurricane can be to life and property.<sup>19</sup> Where so many World War I veterans had worked and camped just days before, now lay a wasteland of wrecked train cars and flotsam baking in a leafless landscape devastated by high winds and a tidal surge that knocked the train from its tracks. Bodies were pulled from mangroves and shallow ditches, with many washed into the Florida Bay never to be recovered. The death toll,

although constantly changing, by September 12 would reach 446, of which 327 were veterans and 119 civilians. Only 116 veterans would later be taken to the Woodlawn Cemetery in Miami for burial. Some would be buried at lower Matecumbe Key while the majority, unidentified, would simply be put into pine boxes, stacked with driftwood, and burned in funeral pyres.<sup>20</sup> This would be the memory the CCC youths, no older than 25, would take back to the camps or if not aiding in the rescue efforts, could readily see in graphic photographs published in *The Miami Daily News*.

The buildings built in 1936 reflect the new knowledge of this experience and are more solidly built, no longer employing thatched roofs or lightweight construction. During this period the CCC built four primary structures on the upland side of Matheson Hammock; the Contact Station along Ingraham Highway, a new masonry picnic shelter, a stone incinerator and west of the hammock a new stone and wood slat shed for growing plants. The new buildings were also of oolitic rock quarried from the site but they also reflected a newfound appreciation for the landscape.

The first building built after 1935 was the Contact Station, it would be the first point of contact to anyone arriving at the site along main highway. Today one can see the building roofed with ferns, and tucked away in the hammock just off the road on the southbound side of the highway.

When the building was first built it was visible to the majority of travelers who came primarily from the north and who were just as anxious to explore the jungle like depths of the hammock as the shoreline of the bay. The buildings program was simple; provide a place for a park attendant to offer directions, first aid if needed and information about the hammock. Later it was used to house a herbarium collection put together by A.W. Gilbert and George Merrick. Today one can easily forget that half of the park lay to the east of the highway and contains a landscape rich in gigantic hammock trees and rare ferns.

The nearly square, (13'x14') building was built of solid oolitic rock with two windows and a door. The east window faced the street and park to the bay, the west window the interior of the hammock and the inside of the gate. The door was framed by engaged carved piers topped by a real stone arch.

The whole of which was topped by a pyramidal roof with cypress shingles. The building was both marker and pier with its west corner providing the support for a rustic gate that allowed access to the dark and cool hammock beyond where one could find exotic trees labeled for identification. The building, with the floor as the only concrete surface in the building, stands in contrast to the entry sequence at Greynolds where massive walls and round piers announce vehicular entry as the primary means of entering the site. The pedestrian entry at Matheson is by contrast protective and through its small scale and wood gates more about preservation.

### THE BLUFF

Built during the hot humid summer months, the builders of the contact station no doubt benefited from the shade of the hammock. By October the hurricane season came closer to an end, CCC boys could start building on the then open bluff above the Silver Buttonwood prairie overlooking the mangrove hammock adjacent to the bay.

Originally all structures built in this area were roofed with hipped or gabled roofs finished with thatch below, all under the sheltering limbs of the Live Oak that occupied the more open eastern edge of the Hammock. The building of the picnic shelter inaugurated a new type of structure that used the roof as both protection and deck, taking advantage of the natural gain in height afforded by being on the bluff. This building was built as a permanent place to cook and eat out-or-doors while also using the roof as a second dining area or observation deck with views over the land.

The building is elemental in form, made of a handful of elements simply composed. The plan consisted of a perimeter of limestone piers supporting a poured concrete roof slab which protects the U-shaped picnic table and benches, designed to seat 50 people. At the northwest end of this is the stone barbecues and tap for preparing food and on the outside of the same chimney, a place for a out door fire. On the western edge are a straight run of stairs that take you to the roof and a view of the distant bay. In a compact way the building unites the three primary elements of fire, water, and air while visually connecting the edge of the hammock at the bluff with the distant bay to the east. Built of oolitic rock and concrete the building

is in sharp material contrast to the earlier rustic structures made of wood poles and thatch roof.

### FIRE

If one were to travel south along the edge of the bluff one would encounter a chimney like ziggurat of oolitic rock called the incinerator. Given the popularity of parks just about all CCC parks from this period had an incinerator to control the accumulation of refuse. The incinerator was used to burn garbage while controlling sparks and flying ash that otherwise might result in forest fires. At Matheson the incinerator marks the natural change in elevation from the bluff to the lowlands taking advantage of this transition in section and distance from the picnic areas as the logical place for a structure that needs both an uphill loading chute and downhill opening for its function, (one to feed debris into the fire, and an ash cleanout below on the downhill side.) The incinerator's 21 foot tall totemic form steps up in stages, a more elaborate version than what was built at Greynolds Park. Located on the bluff to the south of the property its form stands as an eerie reminder of what transpired to the south in the keys less than a year earlier.

Also during this period is a frequently seen but little understood oolite wall that bisects the park and lines both sides of Ingraham Highway. The walls were built as a "fire hazard reduction wall" by the CCC when the landscape to the southwest supported more pineland than it does today. A documented fire that burned 60 acres of woodland to the southwest of the park, necessitated the need to consider a fire break. On May 19, 1931 The Miami Herald described how the park was saved from fire by "Bucket brigades of negro convicts (who) carried water from Snapper Creek to the fireman," to save the park after four hours of fire fighting.<sup>21</sup>

Matheson Hammock Firebreak wall 1935, courtesy of the National Archives

The land for the park was donated by Matheson so "that this wild and natural growth may be preserved and perpetuated."<sup>22</sup> The subtle way the wall defers to the presence of pre-existing trees as it winds its way down the road is one of the best reminders of Matheson's early stipulations "that the vegetation not be harmed." The walls are also a reminder to travelers that they are



passing *through* Matheson Hammock, every time they ride along the highway. Today the county's citizens who commute to work along Old Cutler Road unwittingly visit the park everyday.

### SHADE

Even parks endowed with a wealth of native plant material such as Matheson soon would need new plants to replace material lost to hurricanes or to add plants to parts to the park where new construction disturbed the existing vegetation. This need would require the construction of shade to protect seedlings from the withering effects of the tropical sun. New parks often contained these utilitarian structures to provide the necessary protection for new plant material until the plants size and need allowed for transfer to the ground.

The slat shed and nursery building located west of the Hammock near the site of the original caretaker's house was one of the best of its type for the time. Typically slat sheds were little more than a network of wood slats evenly spaced to provide about 50% shade and 50% direct sun light for the plants below. The slat shed at Matheson hammock employed such a roof but was unconventionally sheltered behind a substantial oolite rock building with an arched entry and dignified proportions. The slat shed and nursery building also boasted raised masonry benches for plants and a second closed roofed portion to work outdoors and prepare plants for shipping to other parks.

The slat shed and nursery also underscore that the CCC was also about training individuals with planned instruction in over 150 jobs. The slat shed and nursery was an ideal setting for offering CCC enrollees training in planting, pruning, seeding and sodding, identifying and selecting plants and shrubs. These work activities could help an

enrollee find a future job in forestry, horticulture or agriculture.<sup>23</sup>

### BREAKWATER

"We look forward to receiving your memorandum on your New York Trip, and also as to the effects of the hurricane, relative to its bearing on our future plans. I will appreciate it if you will invite Wallace Baxter to go with you to Matheson Hammock Park immediately, so he can see the effects of this storm. The buildings that were erected there to withstand wind and water have stood the test in a splendid way."<sup>24</sup>

Commissioner Crandon's letter to Phillips is a request for his report on his recent trip to Jones's Beach in New York, a trip to gather information in preparation for the design of Haulover Park and Crandon Park, soon to be the county's largest and most frequented parks. The letter also chronicles how the current buildings at Matheson Hammock performed in the latest hurricane. The buildings built between 1937 and the early 1940's for Matheson Hammock were built down near the atoll beach just above sea level and withstood the ten to twelve foot tidal surge of the 1945 hurricane.

Crandon's letter underscored how the performance of the buildings at Matheson would become the model for future buildings slated for Haulover Beach and Crandon Park. Crandon went on to suggest that the buildings at the proposed parks be "built at an elevation of ten feet" on "creosoted pilings, and everything of solid concrete."<sup>25</sup>

Matheson Hammock's north beach latrine, harbor masters house, concession stand, harbor front levees, and bridges were built during this period. Of these the concession building deserves special mention.

The concession building was one of the first buildings built by Dade county Parks specifically for the beach. Under the direction of Raymond C. Ward, Project Superintendent for the CCC and an engineer and contractor by trade, the building was heralded as the "largest structure of its kind in any park in the entire south."<sup>26</sup> The long oolitic rock faced building boasted a "modernistic soda fountain, dining terrace, kitchen, first aid quarters and lifeguard quarters." Some of the more inventive features of the building included a dumbwaiter to bring meals to the second floor roof terrace. The roof terrace was large enough

for dinner and dancing under the stars and made the structure one of the best of its time.

Equal to the impressive array of programs the building accommodated was its construction. The building was supported by 109 individual concrete piles. The ground floor had breezeways that would allow water to pass through the building and the building was oriented with its shortest end facing the bay with a stair acting as a kind of breakwater presenting a sloped surface toward the bay.

These early buildings at Matheson sit on the site in a contrasting way, located in clearings to mark places of public gathering or anchored to withstand the devastating effects from storms along the bay. One can also see these buildings as the respectful inhabitants of the different plant communities they serve, standing by as silent witnesses to nature's inevitable change and at times standing against its fury.

The importance of the landscape and its buildings was underscored when a portion of Matheson Hammock was reconstructed in a plaster and wax model for inclusion in an exhibition of natural areas at the Carnegie Institute of Natural History in Pittsburgh. Coupled with an exhibit of timber growth of Mount Ranier, the native landscape of Pittsburgh and a portion of the Arizona Desert was Matheson Hammock Park, representing "tropical Florida."<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The architecture of Greynolds Park and Matheson Hammock set the standard for the parks and architecture that followed. One can see in the Horticultural & Palm products museum by Robert Fitch Smith at Fairchild Tropical Garden the making of rustic tropical architecture that carries the simple forms generated from the CCC architecture of Geynolds and Matheson Hammock into a style of building that employs early modern ornament. The long thin cabanas at Crandon Park owe much to the simple detailing and breakwater building forms of Matheson Hammock.

The architecture of Haulover Beach designed mostly by the leading early modern architects of the time, also carry on the tradition of these early ideals. The Buildings at Haulover Beach have low compressed building heights and nautical detailing

that respond to the thin, flatness of the Haulover beachfront landscape and the continual presence of boating. The architecture of all the early parks is at all times contextual whether attempting to blend into the landscape or by using the landscape as a foil or backdrop, but never at the expense of upstaging the natural beauty of the tropical landscape. Park Director A.D. Barnes said it best in an interview with the Miami Herald in 1957: "...our approach has been to supplement what nature has provided only in such a way that the rustic atmosphere and natural beauty is preserved."<sup>28</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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3. National Emergency Conservation Work. United States Department of Labor, Washington D.C., Bulletin No. 2, April 20, 1933. The National Archives.
4. Civilian Conservation Corps, Office of the Director, Washington D.C., 23 February 1939. The National Archives.
5. There were three camps in Dade County; Camp No. SP-1 in Homestead, building Royal Palm State Park (4,000 acres), Camp No. SP-12 in North Miami, building Greynolds Park (245 acres) and Camp No. SP-9, CP-1 in South Miami, building Matheson Hammock Park (400 acres).
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8. "Ceremonies Mark Dedication of Park," The Miami Herald 30 March 1936: 1, 10-A.
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12. Van Denman, Miami Limestone.
13. Report of J. H. Gadsby, District Inspector U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service State Park Emergency Conservation Work, January 1, 1935.

P.2-3. National Archive. J. H. Gadsby worked for the City of Miami Parks Department before the National Park Service and was probably hired for his local experience.

14. William Lyman Phillips, Greynolds Narrative Report, Florida SP-2, Month of July, 1934, p. 2.

15. Greynolds Park Narrative Report, Month of July, 1934, William Lyman Phillips. The National Archives.

16. Christina Wilkinson, "An Appreciation," Miami Daily News 21 April 1940.

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25. C.H. Crandon to W.L. Phillips, 24 September 1945. HMSF.

26. "Matheson Hammock Pavilion Opened," Miami Daily News 11 January 1942.

27. "Matheson Hammock Replica is Prepared," The Miami Herald 1931.

28. Joy Reese, "Dade Parks Called Best In Nation—But Will They Stay Up There?" The Miami Herald 29 April 1957.