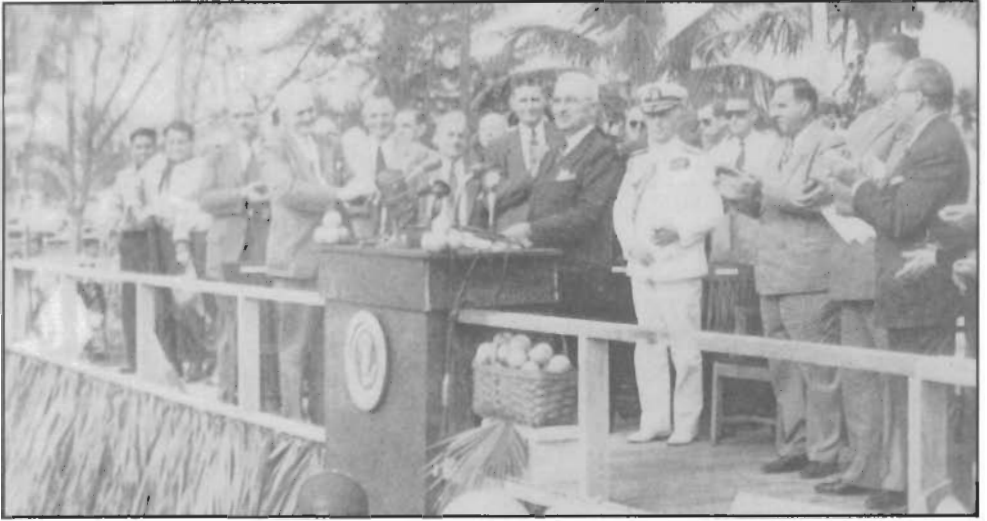


# TROPICAL TRAILS



*Your Nature Guide to South Florida*

Vol. 23 No. 1



CESAR BECERRA COLLECTION

**President Harry Truman, dedicating Everglades National Park in Everglades City at the airport runway on December 6, 1947. He dedicated the National Park for what he called “the enrichment of the human spirit”.**

## *The history of a dream*

# **Everglades National Park: for the “enrichment of the human spirit”**

**By Cesar A. Becerra**

The creation of Everglades National Park is a story of people moved by high ideals, honesty and a desire to preserve a **unique** ecosystem for future generations, pitted against greed, cruelty, procrastination and self-aggrandizement. The story **begins** with the murder of Guy Bradley, a 35-year-old warden of the National Audubon Society. Millinery fashions of the late 19th century encouraged poachers to kill egrets for their breeding plumage. By the late 1800’s the value of bird plumes per **ounce** was more than the price of gold. This **created** a “plume rush” at the breeding **grounds** and a crisis developed with the

depletion of the bird population. The National Audubon Society coordinated a campaign to correct the false stories of the millinery industry that hat plumes were taken from live birds which were later released unharmed.

The brutal facts **were** that millions of birds were **slaughtered** each year and the young left to die of starvation in their nests. By 1900 many of the Florida birds were disappearing. The State, lacking funds to hire wardens to enforce the laws, turned to the National Audubon Society for help. The Society employed four wardens to guard the rookeries. Based at Flamingo, these wardens roamed the ’glades and

Florida Bay waters, keeping an eye out for illegal hunters. Guy Bradley, who lived in Flamingo, was one of the men hired by the Society to become a warden of the area. On the evening of July 8, 1905 Bradley heard shots at a nearby key. He kissed his wife goodbye and then headed out toward the rookery to investigate. He never returned. His body was left adrift in his skiff while gunman Walter Smith sailed to Key West to turn himself in for the murder of Guy Bradley. Bradley's death made him a martyr and created nationwide indignation at the over-harvesting of bird plumes. Laws were created which strengthened bird protection and helped bring the significance of the Everglades to the American people.

The Everglades aroused interest in the minds of many as the South Florida area was developed. Florida was a frontier and

to her "ballads" came some of the people shunned elsewhere. Fiercely independent, they accepted regulation by no one. At the same time, individuals and groups who saw a "dollar yield per acre" pushed for a variety of drainage schemes. In the midst of the rush to vanquish and subdue Florida, conservation-minded groups began to speak up in favor of leaving a portion of the marsh-like bird paradise in its natural state. One of the most interesting areas in Everglades National Park is the Royal Palm area, known as Paradise Key. For many years it had attracted those who knew the beauty of the area. The year 1905 marked the first enthusiastic awareness of Paradise Key by J.E. Ingraham, who laid out the city of Miami and represented the interests of Henry Flagler, builder of the East Coast

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**The Anhinga Trail, seen here in 1952, is one of the park's early walking trails. It is one of the most popular in the park today.**





ALAN CROCKWELL COLLECTION

**This early park promotional post card was sponsored by the Florida Power and Light Company as part of their "Helping Build Florida" program.**

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Railroad. Ingraham began an outspoken campaign for the preservation of the hammock which gained the attention of Mrs. Kirk Munroe of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, who suggested that Paradise Key could be preserved as a park if the area were given to the Federation. Dr. David Fairchild, Dr. J.K. Small and other botanists joined the effort to preserve Paradise Key. Flagler's railroad company donated its land, which was combined with the State-owned land to make up the 1,920 acres of what was to become Royal Palm State Park. On Nov. 23, 1916 the largest conservation project in the state became the first state park in Florida: Royal Palm State Park. As early as 1916, Mrs. W. S. Jennings, president of the Federation and administrator of the park, believed the area possessed national significance. She gained a worthy ally for the battle to create a national park in Ernest F. Coe.

The most persistent advocate of having the Everglades set aside as a national park, Ernest Coe fought for the Park through five governors of Florida and three presidents and their administrations before his goal was realized. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, author and preservation activist, writes of Coe: "He was certainly the prophet, and unmistakably the founder, but what more he was is hard to define. Ernest F. Coe, the six-foot-tall, spare, courtly gentleman without whose startling vision, slow-burning passion, steely endurance, and indomitable will, there would be no Everglades National Park today. And probably no Everglades." Ernest Coe came to Miami in 1925 as a landscape architect and was introduced to the Everglades on a trip to the Royal Palm State Park with ornithologist, Harold H. Bailey. Coe immediately saw the beauty of the tropical wilderness and spent a great deal of time there. The more he came to understand the unique

ecosystem of the 'glades, the more his enthusiasm grew, the more determined he became that he must devote his time, energy and resources to making his dream of an Everglades National Park a reality.

In 1928 Coe and a group of other Floridians formed the Tropical Everglades National Park Association, dedicated to the purpose of having Royal Palm State Park recognized as an area of national significance. Others who joined in the movement were Dr. David Fairchild, well-known botanist; Tom Pancoast, developer of Miami Beach; and forester, Dr. John C. Gifford of the University of Miami. After months of surveying, photographing, letter-writing and talking to groups, Coe pre-

sented a plan to the Federal Government in 1929, recommending the Everglades for inclusion in the National Park Service.

His well-prepared and enthusiastically-presented plan was favorably received and on Feb. 11, 1930, a group of senators from the Everglades National Park Commission arrived in the Everglades for a three-day tour. The commission examined the southern edge of the Everglades by automobile, motor boat, small boat, blimp and airplane. Their trip concluded with a lunch prepared by Marjory Stoneman Douglas at the Kampong (Dr. Fairchild's Indonesian-style home) in Coconut Grove. The senators agreed on the unusual beauty of the area

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CESAR BECERRA COLLECTION

**This vintage photograph shows the commemorative stamp designed for the park's dedication by Garnett Megee receiving a first day issue cancellation.**

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and accepted the concept of a national park on the condition that the land would be a gift since Federal funds were not available to purchase the land.

On May 30, 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Act of Congress authorizing the establishment of a national park provided that private and state-owned property were donated to the Federal Government. Earning the money for the park would take another thirteen years. Now the real test of Ernest Coe's inspiration and determination began. Heading the Tropical Everglades National Park Association, Coe set out to win local friends and financial support for his work. He wanted two million acres of the Everglades region

to be inside the Park boundaries, which were to include Big Cypress, the Keys and much of the offshore reef territory. Coe's many letters went out in all directions. He dedicated his life and his finances toward saving the unique ecosystem of Everglades as a national park. However, Coe stepped on many toes as game hunters, bird shooters, commercial orchid merchants, fishermen, tourist manipulators, oil developers and real estate promoters saw that the park would mean curtailment or the end to their personal pleasure and employment.

John D. Pennekamp, editor of *The Miami Herald*, joined the forces in favor of having the Everglades become part of the National Park Service by providing continuous publicity in his newspaper. Not only did the

newspaper support the Park plan, but Pennekamp made many speeches to service clubs and other groups throughout Florida. His dynamism and resourcefulness were a great help to the Park Commission of which he was a member. Florida Power and Light furnished a most able and cooperative attorney, Mr. Will M. Preston and the *Herald's* publisher, John Knight,

financed luncheons, travel expenses and the creation of a three-dimensional replica of the proposed Park which was displayed at five fairs and expositions. Finally, some of the potentially hostile forces were made to realize that the Park would increase, rather than decrease, the value of their lands and the abundance of game.

During the Second World War, state

funds accumulated, unspendable during the crisis. In 1945, Gov. Millard F. Caldwell reactivated the Everglades National Park Commission, which had gone out of existence during the war. The Commission, headed by August Burghard of Ft. Lauderdale, was able to get two million dollars from the State of Florida to purchase private lands to add to the State's holdings in the 'glades area. This was the largest sum of money ever given by any single state for the establishment of a national park. However, it was not enough money to purchase all of the land which Coe had wanted in the Park, and so Senator Spessard Holland, former governor of Florida and longtime supporter of the Everglades National Park idea, urged that a compro-

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mise on the original concept of the area would increase the chances of establishing a park. After establishment, it was felt, more lands could be added as the funds became available and local resistance subsided. Senator Holland set new boundaries that excluded 4,000 private land owners whose property was in litigation.

The acreage within the new park boundaries included 385,693 acres of land and 461,482 acres of water. Coe was unwilling

to compromise and accept a plan for a park containing less than the two million acres he felt should be included. Coe resigned from the project. He watched from the sidelines as a diminished area of the Everglades became a national park. Today, much of the area Coe had wanted in the original park has also become Park lands. It includes Big Cypress National Preserve, Biscayne National Park and John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. On June 20, 1947,

Everglades National Park became part of the National Park Service when President Harry S. Truman signed, in Washington, D.C., the bill that realized the dream.

Preceding the dedication of the Park, the United States Postal Service issued an official Everglades National Park three-cent postage stamp to commemorate the event.

Seven thousand people joined President Truman at Everglades City for the celebration and dedication of Everglades National Park on Dec. 6, 1947.

Daniel B. Beard was named the first superintendent of the park by Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug. Beard's background as a naturalist, businessman and administrator made this appointment an assurance of a firm and progressive park administration. He created the park as we know it today.

As Beard said, "the Park is a wet and lonely wilderness, and so it must remain forever."

*Cesar Becerra is publisher of The Everglade Magazine.*



ECHOES OF SOUTH FLORIDA

**The Everglade Magazine first appeared in 1912 as a real estate newsletter. The Roseate Spoonbill on the cover was painted in 1919 by Smithsonian artist W.E. Safford.**

**INTERPRETIVE SECTION**

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