

# DAYS GONE BY

## History of Palm Bay

Monthly Article

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### ISLAND LUXURY HOTEL

A \$500,000 100-room luxury hotel and boat harbor on a manmade island in Tillman's Indian River--that was the highly publicized dream of the Payne-Brown Development Company during the land boom of 1925.

Melbourne Finance Company President Edward Roach took his idea to New York City capitalists for bankrolling while architects DeLoe and Tyler set about designing the Spanish-style hotel with private baths.

The grand hotel was to rise on a manmade island connected to Tillman's Dixie Highway by a 300 foot long, 100 foot wide causeway. The causeway itself would be lined with 500 parking slots and facilities for anchorage.

Most dramatic of all, developers promised to dig out a boat basin at the edge of the hotel and dredge deep channels in the shallow river leading up to that basin.

The idea: Large yachts could pull up directly to the island hotel and its roof garden, convention hall and various shops--all to be located just offshore Payne- Brown's Hiawatha (Gardens) Motor Camp and Apartment development on Dixie Highway.

On March 23, 1925, Payne-Brown had staged a grand opening for a 100 lot subdivision on US 1 at the Hiawatha development fronting the Indian River for 1,700 feet. The company bused in buyers from as far away as Fort Pierce and Orlando to munch barbequed meat and hear sales pitches about the "enchanted garden".

A reporter wrote: "Six fat porkers were done in a turn, and the manner in which they disappeared was rapid."

Although Miami businessman R. E. Boyle promised a local reporter that the luxury island hotel was an "assured fact", plans for it were eventually dropped.

Payne-Brown did \$100,000 worth of remodeling to turn ex-Indian fighter Dan Valentine's old frame house into a tourist-catering restaurant and night club. Developers enlarged the house as a restaurant, adding among other things a glass dining veranda looking out on a 1,000 foot long dock thrusting into the Indian River, where sailboat races had been organized before the turn of the century.

Despite official Prohibition, local bootleggers sold home brew to snowbirds staying in newly built cottages around the restaurant, where staff looked the other way when brown bagging diners showed up.

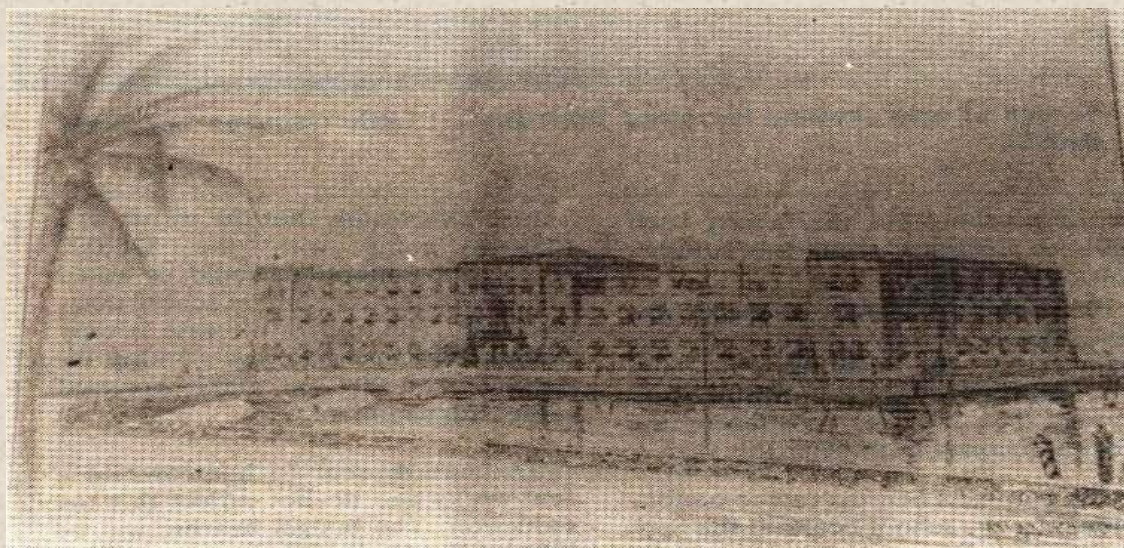
The Hiawatha Gardens restaurant cottage complex, today a mobile home park, greeted newcomers with a backlit fountain of 10 stone serpent heads spewing water.

Hard times came to Tillman and in February 1926 a fire ravaged the ambitious Hiawatha

Despite the fiery disaster next door and the arriving depression, the Hiawatha Motor Camp and Apartments grew into a palm-studded community of 27 Spanish-style cottages and apartments by September 1936.

A story in the Melbourne Times' "Yankee edition" noted that the cottages were equipped with "modern tile" bathrooms.

On the camp grounds, snowbirds and tourists could relax with shuffleboard, croquet or horseshoe-pitching.



**Artists rendering of 1925's proposed \$500,000 luxury island hotel as shown on the front page of the Melbourne Times.**

*(to be continued)*