

The News Packet

Spring 2023



THE BARNACLE SOCIETY



Manager's Message

By Jessica Cabral

A resident of Coconut Grove for over forty years, Commodore Ralph Middleton Munroe witnessed a sea change in life on Biscayne Bay that began with the railroad's arrival in 1896. Until then, Miami was a small frontier town, but the shift in transportation from sail to rail brought with it growth so sudden and expansive it seemed to be conjured by sorcery. Miami, *the Magic City*, was born and Coconut Grove would never be the same.

Munroe waxed nostalgic in his 1930 memoir *The Commodore's Story: The Early Days on Biscayne Bay*: "...I suppose those who loved the old days would not actually turn back the clock even if

we could. But let no one think that this great change did not bring disadvantages as well. The charm of wide spaces and the simple life are gone, and they are blessings not to be despised and very difficult to replace."

It's remarkable that Munroe spoke those words nearly a century ago. How much more do they resonate now? How many of us also long for a time when the world was less complicated, and we felt safe and sure of our place in it?

Once described to me as "humble and magnificent all at once", Munroe's 1891 home, *The Barnacle*, harkens back to that simpler time. Built of wood salvaged from shipwrecks and raised up with railroad jacks to build a new first floor in 1908, the house is on the National Register of Historic Places and a gem of Florida vernacular architecture. While this was no captain of industry's palatial retreat, it is comfortable, even without air conditioning, and it's easy to imagine family life inside.

The grounds are an oasis of tranquil beauty in this bustling city. Only steps past the gate, moss-covered oaks arch overhead and traffic sounds fade away. A wooded path leads to the historic house and opens on a verdant stretch of lawn dotted with palms. Beyond that lies the sparkling bay. Birds glide overhead, foxes peek from between shrubs, and fish (joined by the occasional American crocodile) splash near shore.

Munroe's words remind us that such spaces and simplicity are rare gifts—even more so today than in his time. Come experience a little yesteryear at The Barnacle Historic State Park.



My View from the Porch

By John Palenchar, President

As the days get longer and we approach the Spring Equinox, the bay glistens and the Park sparkles. It's Spring and the musty smell of mango blossoms is in the air. The Mango Strut is behind us. The Park has a new (refurbished) electric "work cart" thanks to our Barnacle Society, the Washington's Birthday Regatta has taken place and we are hard at work planning our '60's-themed "Flower Power" Commodore's Birthday Party. (Tickets can be purchased on our website, thebarnacle.org.)

The Commodore's Birthday Party is also our Annual Membership Meeting, at which time we will introduce our Board of Directors for the upcoming year. And this brings me to the fact that this will be my last column as I step down as your President. It has been a privilege and honor to serve in this position for the past five years. I love The Barnacle as do you, our Barnacle Society members, and will continue to do what I can to support and preserve this beautiful historic property—especially the spectacular "view from the porch."

Struttin' on the Commodore Trail!

A five-mile network of roadway, wending its way from Cocoplum Circle to the Rickenbacker Causeway, has, for years, been designated "The Commodore Trail." Named for our own Commodore Ralph Middleton Munroe and passing in front of The Barnacle, this Recreational Trail is now on the City of Miami's "front burner", thanks to "The Friends of the Commodore Trail" (aka FCT), a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to make The Commodore Trail the safe, enjoyable recreational trail it should be.

As part of their promotional efforts, FCT participated in this year's "Mango Strut" and invited The Barnacle Society to join in as representatives of one of the "anchor" sites along the Trail, and, indeed, the historic home of the Trail's namesake. It was great fun and another opportunity to promote The Barnacle, which continues to be "discoverable" by locals who have lived here all their lives!



Barnacle Strut Participants (l to r) Olivier deLavalette, Amy Exum, Bill Tenney, John Palenchar, Henry Coords, Annie Coords, and Graham Coords with our "Barnaclemobile" in the background.

2023 Washington's Birthday Regatta



Winning Skippers (kneeling l-r) Fiona Rynne, Oscar Kramer, Justin Long. (standing l to r) John Long, Carlos Salabria, Skip Richeimer, "The Georges" (2), Jennifer Wirth, Bob Coleman. (back row) Danny Garcia, Juan Suarez.

The 27th Annual Washington's Birthday Regatta was held February 25th and was a huge success. We had 16 boats participate (the 1886 inaugural Regatta had 15) and, once again, our Ralph Middleton Munroe Chapter of the Traditional Small Craft Association (TSCA) organized the event.

Not only did we receive financial support from The Coconut Grove Sailing Club, Biscayne Bay yacht Club and Coral Reef Yacht Club, but, once again, CGSC provided the Race Committee and all that staging a Regatta entails, while Tom Septembre provided the beautiful Committee Boat, BELLE NOIR. Other local businesses supporting the event were the Coconut Grove Starbucks, the Madrugá Bakery and Glen Dock and Marine (floating dock for participating boats). Baked goods for our Skippers' Meeting and Cornbread, Cake, Chef Andre's delicious Fish Chowder, and Janice Pruet's scrumptious Veggie Chowder were also provided by the Regatta Team.



The History of *Neva*

By Bill Tenney

Neva was a 21' gaff-rigged, Cape Cod style Catboat. She had a galley, a head, and slept two in sperate bunks in the bow. She was powered by an "Atomic 4" inboard, had a Florida Pine tree for a mast, and a rudder "as big as a barndoor." *Neva* was named for the owner's wife, and the name is also that of a river in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Neva's owner was Robert Collins, an architect who did well specializing in movie theaters during the Depression. He had *Neva* built at the Miami Edison High School Boatbuilding class, and the agreement was that he would supply the wood. When I owned *Neva*, I had more than one man see her, and inform



me that he had worked on her when he attended Edison.

Mr. Collins was a personal friend of Wirth and Mary Munroe whose home was the Barnacle. They allowed him to keep *Neva* on a mooring in front of the property. As Mr. Collins was elderly, I was recruited to help him sail the boat. We had one delightful sail down to Tavernier before he died sometime after of a heart attack.



I bought *Neva* from the estate, and the Munroe's very generously allowed me to keep *Neva* at her mooring. I became a regular at the Barnacle, including on the sad day that Mr. Munroe died. The weekend after the assassination of President Kennedy, I sailed *Neva* solo down to Billy's Point on Elliot Key. My wife and I first met and then honeymooned on *Neva* down to Islamorada and back.

When Nora and I moved to Washington D.C. in 1971, we sold *Neva* to an airlines pilot. On a return visit to Miami, we learned from him that he sold *Neva* to some young people. They took her out of the water at Merrill-Stevens Boatyard, but they kept her out so long that when they put her back in the water, she sank. On a subsequent visit to Miami, I had the distressing experience of seeing *Neva* washed up on the beach at the south end of the small island that protects the CGSC mooring field. Fittingly, she was within sight of her home, the Barnacle.

A Brief History of the Park

By Jonathan Axler

On February 28, 2023. The Barnacle Historic State Park's Park Service Specialist, Jonathan Axler, interviewed the grandson of Ralph Middleton Munroe, William "Bill" Munroe. The interview was part of an oral history project, that Jonathan is doing for his master's degree in History at Florida Atlantic University. The project will also benefit The Barnacle, for it is part of an ongoing oral history program the Park is doing for its 50th Anniversary as a State Park.

The interview was to learn the story of not only the Commodore, but also Bill, who lived at The Barnacle for over thirty years. Jonathan asked numerous questions about Bill's life, his family, and of course his grandfather. Although Bill was born after the Commodore's death, he has heard numerous of stories about his grandfather. May it be stories of his encounters with early settlers in Coconut Grove, or his various sailing adventures.

Bill followed in his grandfather's footsteps and became a professional boat builder. Throughout the interview, Bill discussed his career as a boatbuilder as well as his educational background as both a student at Ransom School, and the University of Miami. Speaking of school, Bill also shared some amusing stories. One such story was that the Boathouse was apparently the party hotspot when Bill was in school.

Perhaps the most poignant questions during the interview, was regarding the transition from family home to state park. When The Barnacle was sold to that State in 1973, it elicited mixed feelings from the family. Although the family agreed that the property needed to be sold, they were nevertheless saddened to leave their property.

Nevertheless, Bill was happy that the property was sold to the State, and not to a developer. Bill hopes, that guests enjoy their time at the Park, and hopes people will read his family's story from his grandfather's memoirs *The Commodore's Story*. As well as his photobook *The Forgotten Frontier*. Once the project is over, Jonathan plans to donate the footage and transcripts of the interview to the State and Florida Atlantic University for posterity.



THE BARNACLE SOCIETY

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** Dual, Two Adults at same address *** Two Adults and minors under 18

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Hand in the completed form at the Gift Shop at The Barnacle or mail or fax it to:

The Barnacle Society, Inc., **3485 Main Highway**, Coconut Grove, Florida 33133 Phone 305-442-6866 ~ Fax 305-442-6872

Or join online: Click "Join Now" at www.TheBarnacle.org. **We look forward to having you in the Barnacle Society.**

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About This Newsletter

The News Packet was created to inform members and public about The Barnacle Society, The Barnacle Historic State Park, and events and activities there. Published quarterly by The Barnacle Society, it is part of our continuing program to support and preserve the home of Commodore Ralph Middleton Munroe. **The News Packet** represents the method of mail and news delivery before the turn of the 20th century. A small boat sailed to Fowey Rocks Light and received a "packet" of newspapers and mail from passing coastal ships bound for Key West or Jacksonville.

Sheryl Weir-Thompson, Editor

Mission Statement

The Barnacle Society, Inc. is a volunteer non-profit, citizen-supported organization created to generate public awareness, education, and financial support for the preservation and maintenance of **The Barnacle Historic State Park**.

305-442-6866

www.floridastateparks.org