

The Rest of the Story

Written by Margaret Griffis, BT Contributor
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Race plays a starring role in Lummus Park history



In the quiet Spring Garden neighborhood, just west of downtown Miami, multimedia visual artist William Keddell works on his latest stereogram. But his focus often turns to Lummus Park, where history, he feels, has been rewritten to assuage prejudiced sensibilities.

In 1999, Keddell moved to a house on NW 4th Street, just around the corner from Lummus Park (404 NW 3rd St.). The New Zealand native had arrived in Miami from New York City in 1989, following his Dominican wife (now ex-), who wanted to move closer to family here. He became enchanted by the park while on his daily dog walks and recognized the rich history of the buildings, particularly the building designated as Fort Dallas, a 95-by-17-foot, one-story “longhouse” made of oolitic limestone.

While researching the historic buildings, he was surprised to learn of the longhouse’s connection to slavery and an interracial marriage connected to the nearby historic Wagner House. Keddell tells *Biscayne Times* he feels the buildings’ true origins have been whitewashed through the years.

“I just want the truth, not this current, dented history,” he says. “The problem goes back to when Julia Tuttle bought the property. She referred to her home as a former military officer’s building and the other as a barracks. But they were both there before the Army used those buildings.”

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Tuttle was likely following local convention. After the last Army occupation, the property was commonly known as Fort Dallas, as evidenced by a brief mention in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1871: "The old garrison of Fort Dallas is in full view as we approach. The neat cottage-barracks, with broad verandahs, arranged pleasingly around a fine sloping parade -- tall cocoas, lime-trees and rich groupings of poincianas and elders loaded with their brilliant blossoms -- altogether form a cheerful scene of much beauty."

Charged with a passion to bring awareness to another side of history -- and one that may have been seen as so distasteful to previous generations that they tried to revise it -- Keddell sought help. In 2004 he obtained a "Learn & Serve" grant from the Florida Department of Education to develop "Love & Slavery in Miami," a project he implemented with the assistance of Troy Community Academy. The Academy serves Miami youths who are involved in the juvenile justice system and are at risk of failing in a traditional school setting. The group worked on creating visual aids and performances based on a corrected history.

So what's the story? In a 1961 issue of the University of Miami's historical journal, *Tequesta*, history professor Nathan Shappee wrote an extensive history titled "Fort Dallas and the Naval Depot on Key Biscayne, 1836-1926." He discovered that the U.S. Navy had been tasked to prevent trade between the Seminole Indians and the West Indies after the Second Seminole War began in 1835.

Shortly after the Cape Florida Lighthouse was attacked in 1836, the Navy established Fort Dallas as a depot on Key Biscayne and named it after Commodore Alexander J. Dallas. Soon it moved across Biscayne Bay to property at the mouth of the Miami River, first on the south bank and later on the north. Both parcels were owned by Richard Fitzpatrick.

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letters@biscaynetimes.com