

Torch, Part 2

Written by Paul S. George, Special to the BT
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A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



Last month, Picture Story looked at Bayfront Park's Torch of Friendship, a downtown Miami landmark for more than 55 years, and the precedents for its creation. (See: "[Miami's Torch of Friendship](#)," February 2017.) Let's now look at the considerations leading to its construction, as the Miami of yesteryear was reaching out, through this monument, to the world around it.

In August 1960, the Miami City Commission, acting on a suggestion by then city manager Melvin L. Reese for the erection of a "Torch of Friendship" in Bayfront Park, voted to begin construction of the torch in the park as a monument to the city's "perpetual friendship" with Latin America.

"The Torch will be a new step in emphasizing our friendship with our Latin friends," announced Robert King High, Miami's energetic young mayor. High had already seen tens of thousands of Cuban refugees enter the city in the early stages of the Castro revolution. The Torch, he said, would "show that Miami is more than a geographical Gateway to the Americas. It is a symbol of

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wealth and cordiality. We hope it will have the significance that the Statue of Liberty now has.”

Reese presented a drawing of a concrete shaft topped by a continually burning flame, surrounded by a keystone patio. He explained that a wraparound wall would contain seals of each Latin American country.

During the brief construction phase, U.S. Sen. John F. Kennedy, then a candidate for president, delivered a campaign address in the park and, as seen in the accompanying photograph, held a rendering of the monument.

The completed Torch of Friendship was dedicated in October 1960. Sadly, three years later, President Kennedy was assassinated, and soon after, the Torch was dedicated in his honor.

The Torch has remained in the limelight since then as a venue for demonstrations of various kinds, especially with regard to issues involving national policies and actions.

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