



de Stolfe Journal

13.SPECIAL-1 : TROPICAIRE, 1949-1994



TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE

Part 1 of 2



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13.SPECIAL-1 : TROPICAIRE, 1949-1994

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ON THE COVER



The Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre in Miami, Florida opened in early 1949 and lasted in some form until late 1994. For me, it was where I called home from 1972 to early 1989. we lived on the second floor, you can see here, by external stairs that were added later. Read through this part one special issue to learn more. I'll include even more in the part two special issue later.



The Miami Herald. Tuesday, February 15, 1949. Page 24.

We live in the 2020s, not the 1920s! Wherever there is a web link like below, click it to go to the webpage it references! (Click it now!)

www.destolfe.com



COMMENTS BY RG

Tropicaire... Home!

At the time of this special issue release in late December of 2024, it will have been 30 years to the week since the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre was torn down to be replaced by a large outdoor “Key West style” shopping center. I was there on the day they had a catered ceremony of the start of the demolition.

The Tropicaire was literally my home from birth to February 1989 when Mom and I moved to Jacksonville, Florida. Many of you getting my de Stolfe Journal probably did not know that I am a native Floridian having been born in Miami. For that matter, Dad was also born in Miami in the early 1940s and had even more to do with the Tropicaire well before I was even born. Dad lived in Florida in the mid century when, as he put it, truly a “tropical paradise”. Dad originally lived in several places in central Florida, south Florida, and the Florida Keys, having moved several times in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

By the time I came around, the Tropicaire was already starting a transition where drive ins were not as popular as they once were as compared to seeing movies in a regular theater. What sustained the place was having weekend flea markets, originally called “swap meets”.

While I remember the night movies, I probably remember the flea markets even more. How can you not remember every weekend swelling up with thousands of people and cars everywhere to go to the flea market! The crowds, the noise, the overall craziness that for me defined the 1980s.

My elementary school was a few blocks away to the far side of the property, and I simply walked to school from late 1978 through 1985. For that matter, I even had to walk to a spot near the elementary school to catch the school bus to go to my junior high school, from 1985 to 1988. I also caught a school bus from in front of the Tropicaire to Coral Gables for high school, from the fall of 1988 to February 1989. I did start summer classes at the high school the summer of 1988 and took the city bus to the school as it was just a few miles straight down Bird Road.

By necessity, I have broken up this special issue into two parts to make the overall project manageable. I’ll plan to have the second half out as soon as possible.

RG



Palm tree from the Tropicaire.

TROPICAIRE

I have brought up this topic on various occasions throughout the years in my journals, and now is the time to give full discussion to it. I was born in Miami, Florida in 1972. At that time, my parents were living in quite the unusual place, the same

place where I would also live for the following 16+ years. We lived in a drive in theatre. Wait... what? Yes, quite literally in a drive in theatre. On these pages, I will provide a history of this theatre—and various other tangential things

relating to South Florida—in this special issue of the journal. This special issue comes out on the thirtieth anniversary, to the week, of when the theatre was torn down. At least half of the information in this issue is actually new to me as

I was researching to get my facts straight. I will include personal stories and thoughts as appropriate, but I want to give as much factual information as possible. So, let's go!

Otch, Owch, Owch...
whatever...



*This is me with our cat, Gator. I guess this was early 1980s. I was maybe ten years old and chubby. Gator was not impressed!
Photo by: Robert A. de Stolfe*



*This photo is from the later 1980s, maybe 1987 or 1988. Yes, I had bright red hair in the 70s and 80s! Also, horizontal stripes are never flattering!
Photo by: Robert A. de Stolfe*

These photos were taken from the second floor where we lived. On the left was where a Marines recruiting trailer was located next to the building. On the right shows a building that was last Mary's Carpets, and was previously a La-Z-Boy store. Across the street was Tropical Park.

NEW THEATRE



Photo by: Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre

NEW THEATRE

Building And Opening Of The New Drive In Theatre

The official gala opening of the new Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre was on Tuesday, February 15, 1949. It was located in southwest Miami on Bird Road and Palmetto Road across from the Tropical Park race track, with a formal address of 7751 Bird Road, or later also 7751 SW 40th Street. An article in the Miami Herald provides the best description.

Tropicaire, the drive-in theater in a garden, will open Tuesday night on Bird rd. at Palmetto, opposite the Tropical Park race track. Equipped with the most modern facilities, including 800 individual RCA in-car speakers, the theater consists of 14 paved, full vision ramps.

Surrounding the parking area are broad lawns and paved driveways

which are being landscaped with trees and shrubbery to give the appearance of a tropical garden surrounding an amphitheatre. A unique feature is the hanging gardens, exotic palm trees set high above the ground against the screen tower, a brilliant, living mural visible from Bird Road.

W. L. McComas, Wood Kirkpatrick, and D. K.

McComas are the officers of the corporation which has built and will operate the theatre.

A snack bar and soda fountain will prepare sandwiches and drinks to be consumed at the bar or be delivered to cars by attendants. Under the direction of Lloyd Cross, and [an] experienced concessionaire.

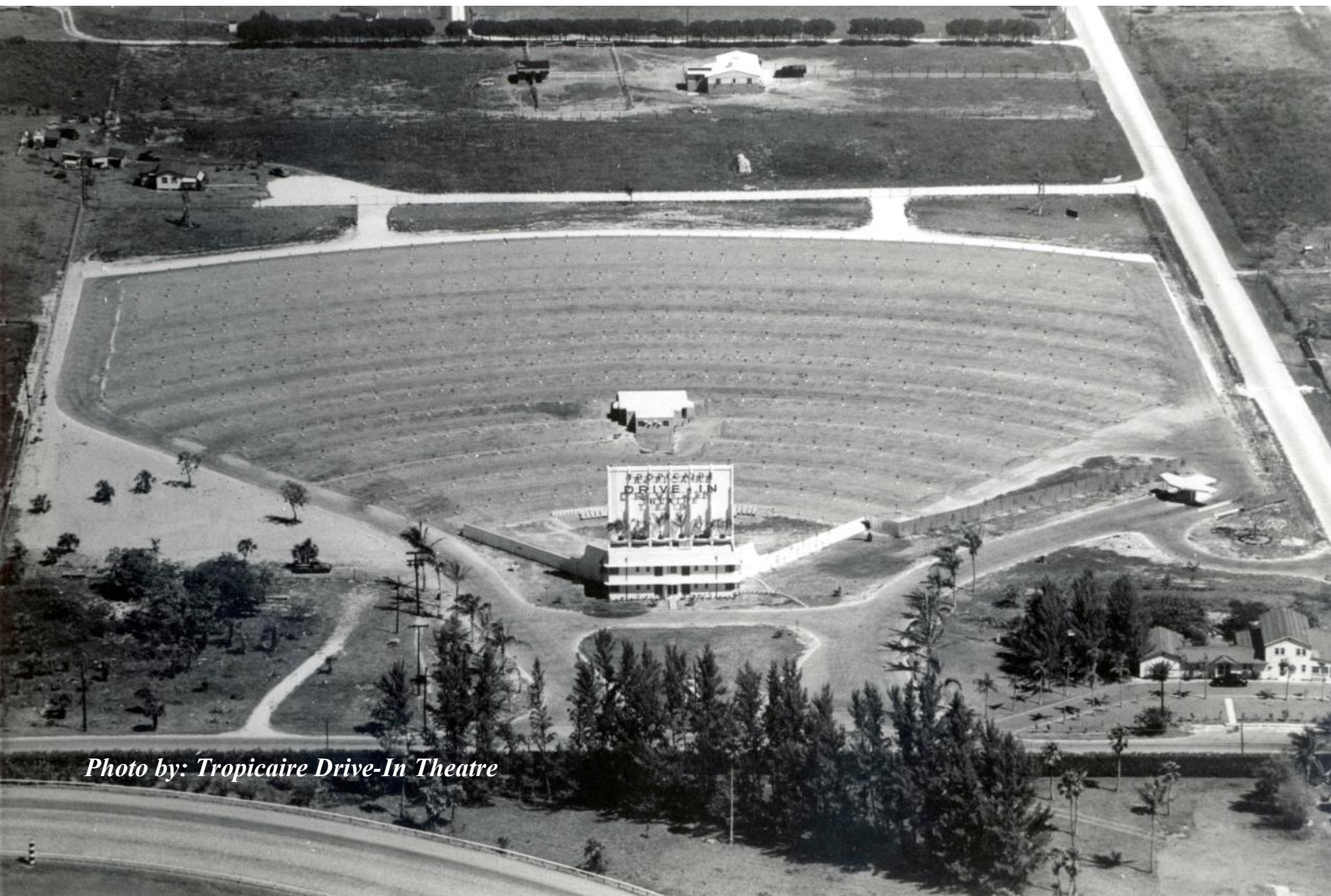


Photo by: Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre

NEW THEATRE

Not until recently did I even understand the name of the theatre! The name is a compound word of tropic and aire, referring to the tropical climate of South Florida! I had always wondered why it was spelled "...caire" instead of "...care"! (Talk about dense or clueless!) Elsewhere in Florida, there was an unrelated Tropic-Aire Motel. And to clear up the air, so to speak, "tropic air" simply means hot and humid! Also notice that the name is "Theatre" not "Theater"!

As part of the grand opening festivities, the main movie was If You Knew Susie featuring Eddie Cantor and Joan Davis, showing at 7:05 PM and 9:30 PM. Also included was Bet Your Life featuring Leon Errol, a comedy, and a "sensational aerial act" at 9:00 PM by the Sky King atop a swaying flagpole 168 feet high. They gave out souvenirs, gifts to the adults, and toys for the kids. I would really like to know what these things were and if any of them still exist!

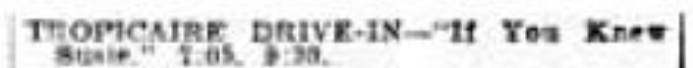
The construction of the building and screen were of cinder block and concrete, typical materials used in South Florida. On the ground, a two story long and narrow building was the base made in a Florida Art Déco style. The first floor of the building contained the offices while the second floor was basically a two bedroom apartment where the owner/manager lived. Internal stairs went from the first floor to the second floor with another set of stairs that went from the second floor to the almost flat roof hidden behind a high parapet. Between each floor and the roof were these flat, fairly wide concrete projections. More about those later in the journal. On the back wall of the building rose the screen way up into the sky. Unfortunately, I don't know the overall dimensions of the building nor of the screen. The screen had seven step tapered pilasters that went from the top of the screen well into the ground. Being South Florida, the whole structure had to be hurricane proof and was reinforced with very thick rebar (about 2" diameter) and poured



The Miami Herald. Tuesday, February 15, 1949. Page 24.



The Miami Herald. Wednesday, February 9, 1949. Page 25.



The Miami Herald. Tuesday, February 15, 1949. Page 24.

NEW THEATRE

concrete. The wider parts of the pilasters partly defined the rooms in the main building since they were wider at the bottom and step narrowed going to the top.

The back of the screen was completely flat and painted white, while the front of the screen was painted light green and the main building painted pink, a color scheme that remained until some point in the early 1980s. (I

personally remember that old color scheme before the entire structure was repainted sometime in the 1980s.) Above the roof parapet along the base of the street side of the screen was the “hanging gardens”, which were six built in curved “planter box” containers that originally held palm trees and various other tropical plants. Above that were three rows of channel lettering with neon lights showing “Tropicaire”, “Drive-

In”, and “Theatre”. The Tropicaire and Theatre words were the same size in green neon, while the Drive-In words were larger in orange neon. Also, the inside of the metal channel lettering was painted roughly to match the neon colors.

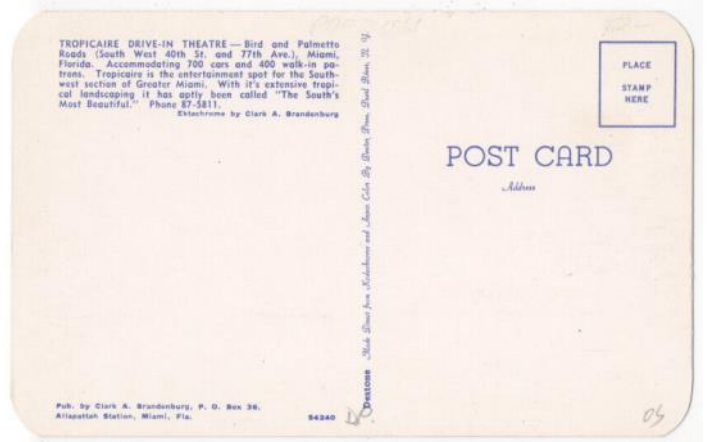
The main building had single pane metal windows and four larger sections in the middle of a textured glass block. These type of windows were all over Florida

and are still around on older buildings. Also the glass block was a core feature of Art Déco design that is also found all over Miami and especially South Beach. (Just watch old episodes of Miami Vice.) The entire structure was set back from the road a ways with driveways and large sections of grass and various plantings of trees, palm trees, and shrubs.



*The original neon sign within channel lettering on the front of the screen. The hanging garden was below originally containing palm trees and other tropical plants. Many of the palm trees were still there in the 1980s.
Photo by: Robert-George de Stolfe*

NEW THEATRE



*Postcard about the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre. (Found on eBay) The text shows:
"Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre—Bird and Palmetto Roads (South West 40th St. and 77th Ave.), Miami, Florida. Accommodating 700 cars and 400 walk-in patrons. Tropicaire is the entertainment spot for the Southwest section of Greater Miami. With it's extensive tropical landscaping it has aptly been called "The South's Most Beautiful". Phone 87-5811."*

The photo was taken with Ektachrome by Clark A. Brandenburg of Miami, Florida. Dextone postcard.



Photo by: Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre

NEW THEATRE



Found on Facebook



Found on Facebook

NEW THEATRE

Behind the screen along the ground was a walled area with grass and plantings, the tropical garden that the article described. Further back were many rows of humps (yes, that is a proper technical term) to allow a car to sit at an angle upwards facing the screen. About halfway back was the projection booth building and a concession stand behind that. The rows were in an arc spreading out wider and wider to the back. In the middle of the humps in between

every two cars were stands of a concrete base and metal pole each with two speakers on cords to hang on your car window, either the passenger side or the driver side depending on which side of the stand a car was. The speakers were basically mono just to be able to hear the movie. Much later on, the theater was set up to locally broadcast the movie sound on an AM radio channel.



Original glass blocks from the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre, originally installed in 1948-1949.



This speaker was made by Projected Sound of Plainfield, Indiana (southwest of Indianapolis). The factory was located at 469 Avon Avenue and is no longer in business. Similar speakers show to be cast aluminum.

Window speaker from the Tropicaire Drive-in Theatre. Each stand had two speakers, one for each car parked on either side of the stand.

NEW THEATRE



*These photos show the stands where the speakers were originally. The speakers were replaced with using an AM frequency to broadcast instead on vehicle radios.
By: RG de Stolfe*



Along the street, Bird Road, was the marquee that showed what movies were being shown each week. The first and original marquee was different,

resembling closely to the marquee at the Dixie Drive In Theatre (more about the Dixie later in this journal). But I suspect that they had to tear down that marquee

when Bird Road was widened, probably in the 1950s. The replacement marquee stood until Hurricane Andrew basically shredded that one in

1992. The marquee after that was a different type and only stayed for about two years until the theatre was torn down.



Original marquee



Circa 1950s



Summer of 1989? By: RG de Stolfe



*After Hurricane Andrew, 1992
Photo by: Robert A. de Stolfe*

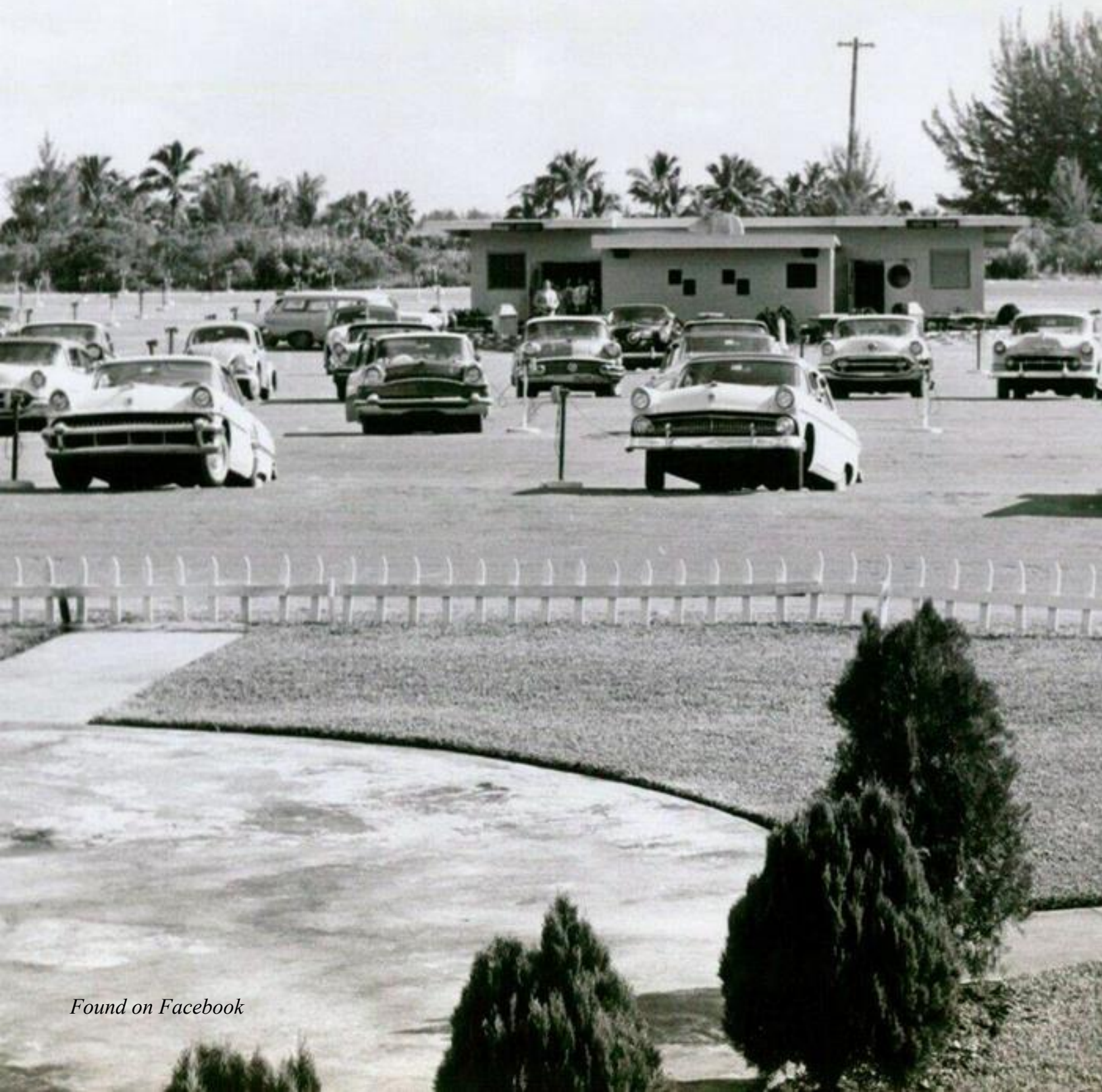


*December 1992
Photo by: Robert-George de Stolfe*



*Replacement marquee, 1993-1995
Photo by Robert-George de Stolfe*

FILM PRESENTATIONS



Found on Facebook

FILM PRESENTATIONS

The theatre typically showed two movies every night, a double feature, changing the movies basically every week. The group that owned the Tropicaire also owned and ran another drive-in further south in the county called the Dixie Drive-In Theatre. More about the Dixie later in this journal.

When the Tropicaire opened, the screen was only as wide to show films that were basically

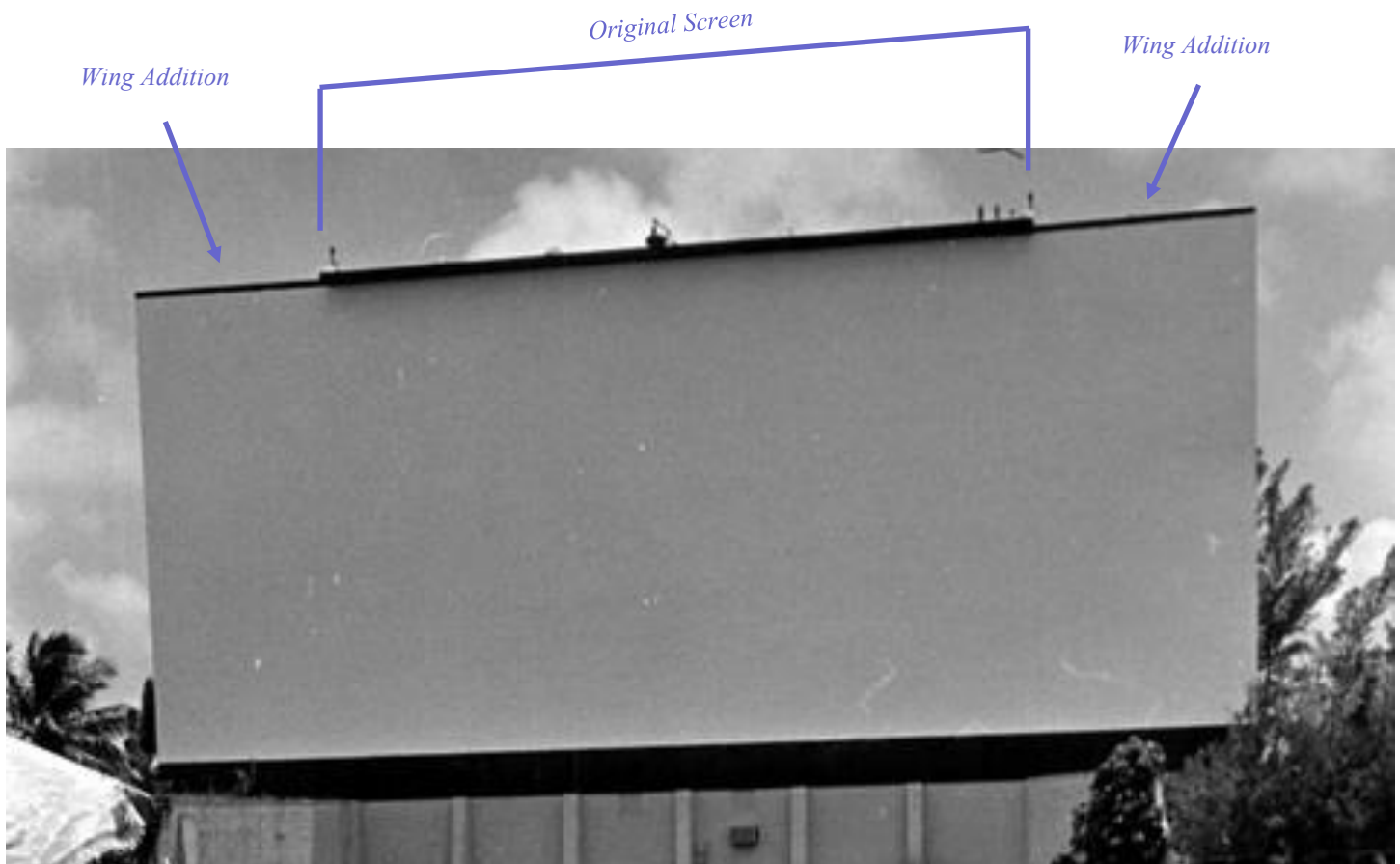
the same as a 35mm film proportion. (Dad was able to explain a whole lot better the various movie proportions and when they came out! I am not really sure what they were.) After Cinerama came out in the early 1950s, it established a newer standard in presenting films with its curved screen and three synced projectors. This specific type of presentation was only available at Cinerama

theatres. Later, a more simplified, but still wide screen format, soon would replace Cinerama and the shorter proportioned screen. By some point in the 1950s (I'm thinking possibly by 1954 as the theatre was showing CinemaScope films, but I'm not really sure), two sizable "wings" were added on each side to extend the screen area and shape to show the wider panoramic films. Also, these wings had to

be added in such a way as to also be hurricane proof like the main building and to show seamless on the presentation side.



Speaker stand with speakers.



*This photo from the 1960s shows the full width screen to show Panavision or CinemaScope films, among others.
Photo by: www.flashbackmiami.com (Miami Herald)*

FILM PRESENTATIONS

In the 1950s and 1960s, management created monthly pamphlets to promote what films would be shown and to give other news. One side was for the Tropicaire, while the

other side was for the Dixie. When I found these pamphlets on eBay, I never knew they even existed, but the information on them is fantastic. One major thing I was not aware of

was the continual messaging each month of going to church every Sunday! Another interesting thing I found in the newspapers was that the theatre had hosted Easter services.

One particular article in 1956 promoted Easter sunrise services starting at 6:00 AM, sponsored by 11 churches of varying denominations. I can only imagine what that was like.



*Birds eye view from the back of the property showing the screen, the snack bar, and rows.
Photo by: source unknown*



*Photo taken of the theatre after sunset with the neon sign lit up and additional spotlights on the palms.
This photo also shows the building interior lit.
Photo by: source unknown*

**SOUTHWEST
EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE**
Sunday, April 1st, 6 A.M.
AT
TROPICAIRE DRIVE IN
7751 BIRD RD.

Sponsoring Churches:

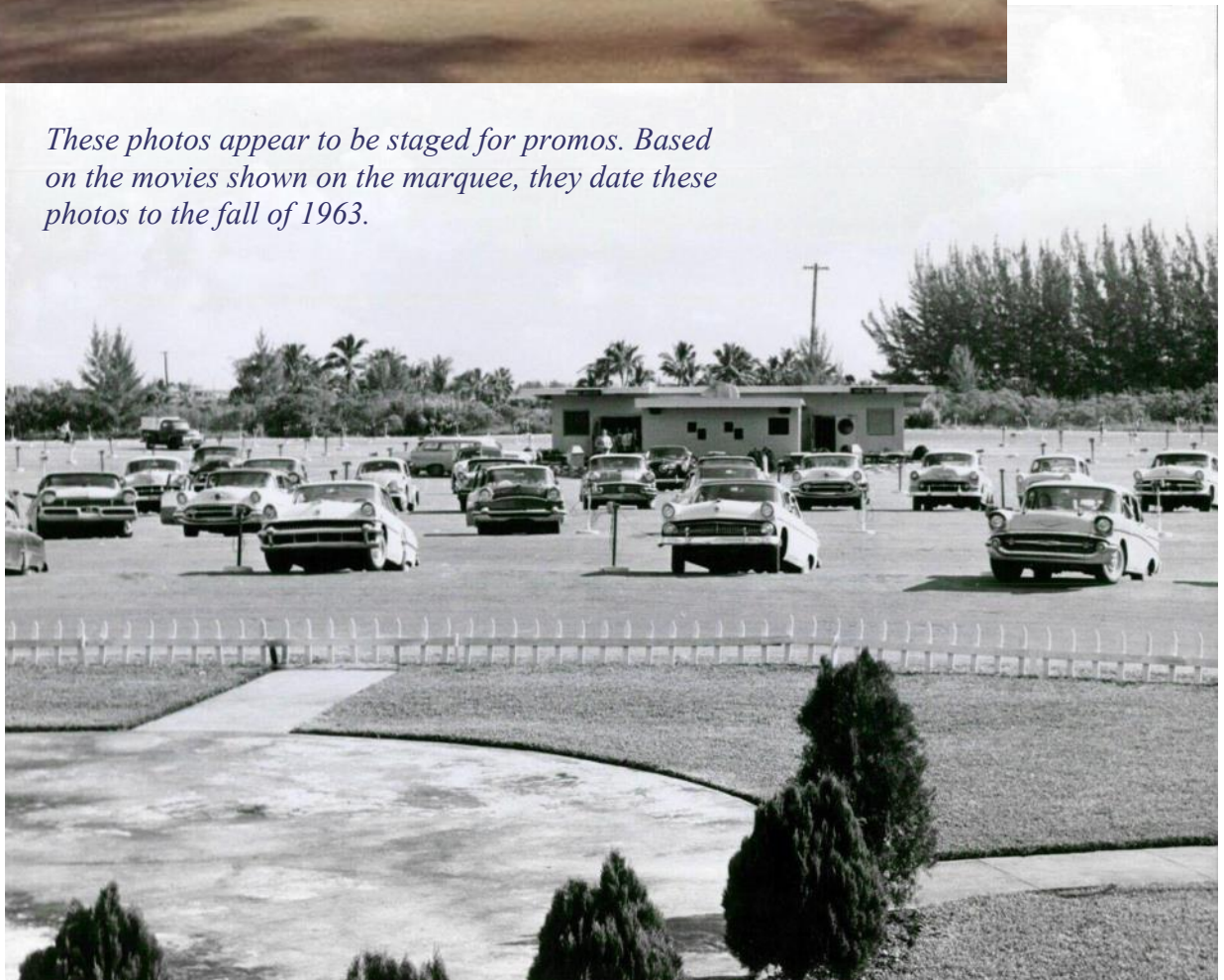
Faith Temple Assembly of God	Bird Road Baptist
Coral Villa Mission Baptist	Flagami Chapel Baptist
Coral Way Methodist	Olympia Heights Methodist
Southwest Methodist	Sweetwater Chapel Baptist
Coral Village Nazarene	Trinity Presbyterian
Calvary Fundamental Assembly of God	

*The Miami Herald. Saturday, March 31, 1956.
Page 13.*

FILM PRESENTATIONS



These photos appear to be staged for promos. Based on the movies shown on the marquee, they date these photos to the fall of 1963.



FILM PRESENTATIONS

TROPICAIRES
DRIVE-IN THEATRE
BIRD AND PALMETTO ROADS - MIAMI, FLA.
1953 SEPTEMBER 1953

Go to church, and thank God you are free to go to church.

SUN 13 MON 14 TUE 15 WED 16 THU 17 FRI 18 SAT 19

*** 2 BIG FEATURES ***

MARTIN-LEWIS
SCARED STIFF

ALSO CO-FEATURE

SIERRA PASSAGE

ALSO CO-FEATURE

WHISTLE STOP
RAFT

ALSO CO-FEATURE

POWELL
LEWIS AND SCOTT

ALSO CO-FEATURE

POTFALL

ALSO CO-FEATURE

SCHOOL DAYS ARE BACK. WATCH OUT FOR THE CHILDREN!

AGAIN THIS MONTH, WE TAKE GREAT PRIDE IN BRINGING YOU ANOTHER FULL MONTH OF TOP NOTCH MOTION PICTURES. EVERY ONE A GREAT PICTURE FOR YOURSELF! ENJOY, LOOK THEM OVER FOR YOURSELF! THE CHEAPEST ENTERTAINMENT IN THE WORLD!!!

FORGET YOUR WORRIES! GO TO A MOVIE TONIGHT!

SUN 20 MON 21 TUE 22 WED 23 THU 24 FRI 25 SAT 26

*** 2 BIG FEATURES ***

LET'S DO IT AGAIN
MILLAND

ALSO CO-FEATURE

MR ACE

ALSO CO-FEATURE

Salome
HAYWORTH, GRANGER, CHARLES LAUGHTON

ALSO CO-FEATURE

Passage West

ALSO CO-FEATURE

Partners in Time

ALSO CO-FEATURE

PROGRAM BY ARCADE LITHE CO., TAMPA, FLA.

Tropicaire—September 1953

TROPICAIRES
DRIVE-IN THEATRE
BIRD AND PALMETTO ROADS - MIAMI, FLA.
1959 OCTOBER 1959

*** NOTE *** THIS PROGRAM IS ALSO FOR THE DIXIE DRIVE-IN THEATRE PLEASE CHECK REVERSE SIDE

SUN 11 MON 12 TUE 13 WED 14 THUR 15 FRI 16 SAT 17

THIS EARTH IS MINE!

ALSO CO-FEATURE

The BEAT GENERATION

ALSO CO-FEATURE

TONKA

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE TALL MEN

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE BLUE ANGEL

ALSO CO-FEATURE

lost Innocence... "blue denim"

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE PROUD ONES

ALSO CO-FEATURE

Tomahawk Trail

ALSO CO-FEATURE

DAY OF OUTLAW

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE FRODO BAGGINS TRILOGY

ALSO CO-FEATURE

NATURAMA
SUPERSCOPE
CINEMASCOPE
TECHNIRAMA
VISTAVISION
REGALSCOPE

PROGRAM BY ARCADE LITHE CO., TAMPA, FLA.

Tropicaire—October 1959

TROPICAIRES
DRIVE-IN THEATRE
BIRD AND PALMETTO ROADS - MIAMI, FLA.
1955 MARCH 1955

*** NOTE *** THIS PROGRAM IS ALSO FOR THE DIXIE DRIVE-IN THEATRE PLEASE CHECK REVERSE SIDE

SUN 13 MON 14 TUE 15 WED 16 THU 17 FRI 18 SAT 19

*** 2 BIG FEATURES ***

THE BRIDGES AT TOKO-RI

ALSO CO-FEATURE

SECURITY RISK

ALSO CO-FEATURE

ROBINSON CRUSOE

ALSO CO-FEATURE

ANDROLES AND THE LION

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE DREAM TEAM!
DORIS DAY **FRANK SINATRA**
Young at Heart

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE SILVER CHALICE

ALSO CO-FEATURE

PECOS BILL

ALSO CO-FEATURE

THE DIAMOND QUEEN

ALSO CO-FEATURE

SPRINGFIELD RIFLE

ALSO CO-FEATURE

PROGRAM BY ARCADE LITHE CO., TAMPA, FLA.

Tropicaire—March 1955

TROPICAIRES
DRIVE-IN THEATRE
BIRD AND PALMETTO ROADS - MIAMI, FLA.
1960 MARCH 1960

*** NOTE *** THIS PROGRAM IS ALSO FOR THE DIXIE DRIVE-IN THEATRE PLEASE CHECK REVERSE SIDE

SUN 13 MON 14 TUE 15 WED 16 THUR 17 FRI 18 SAT 19

THE WRECK OF THE MARY DEARE

ALSO CO-FEATURE

tom thumb

ALSO CO-FEATURE

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

ALSO CO-FEATURE

BEND OF THE RIVER

ALSO CO-FEATURE

BATTLE HYMN

ALSO CO-FEATURE

TARNISHED ANGELS

ALSO CO-FEATURE

Samson and Delilah

ALSO CO-FEATURE

BE ENTERTAINED!
TAKE THE FAMILY OUT TO A MOVIE TONIGHT!

LET'S ALL GO TO THE MOVIE ON ST. PATRICKS DAY

PROGRAM BY ARCADE LITHE CO., TAMPA, FLA.

Tropicaire—March 1960

FILM PRESENTATIONS

FIRST MIAMI SHOWING
at these DRIVE-INS
 Filmed in Florida
 Follow that Swing! Follow that Song
 To that love-and-laugh
 hit that's got everything!



ELVIS PRESLEY SLIGHT INCREASE IN PRICES

FOLLOW THAT DREAM

with ARTHUR O'CONNELL, ANNE HELM, JAMES MOORE, JACK KRUSCHEN **COLOR** by DuLac

See Movie Timesheet for starting times and title of Co-feature

DIXIE
 South of U.S. 1
 LeJEUNE
 1200 N.W. 42nd Ave.
MIAMI
 N.W. 7th Ave.
 at 79th St.
 Tropicaire
 Palmetto X-Way
 and Bird Rd.

The Miami Herald. Wednesday, April 25, 1962. Page 56.

TROPICAIRE
The Spanish Most Beautiful
DRIVE-IN THEATRE

BIRD ROAD AT 77th AVENUE
 7:10 AND 10:44
 ★ **ELVIS PRESLEY** ★
CINEMASCOPE
"LOVE ME TENDER"
 Clark Gable "Call of the Wild"
 At 9:01

DIXIE DRIVE-IN
THEATRE

SOUTH OF SOUTH MIAMI ON U.S. HWY. 1
 7:02 AND 10:42
JACK PALANCE ★ **EDDIE ALBERT**
"ATTACK"
 AT 9:09 ★ **CLEO MOORE**
"OVER EXPOSED"

ONE FREE ELVIS PRESLEY PHOTO TO EACH CAR

AT TROPICAIRE ONLY ★ LAST NIGHT ★ DON'T MISS IT
 HELD OVER **"THE SKY KINGS"** IT'S THRILLING!
 ★ IN PERSON ★
 SEE TWO MEN CHANGE POLES 125 FEET IN THE AIR, 2 SHOWS 6:30 - 9:44

The Miami Herald. Sunday, January 13, 1957. Page 139.

TROPICAIRE
DRIVE IN THEATER
 Bird & Palmetto Roads
 Opp. Tropical Park Race Track

TWO BIG HITS
 A Funny Fiesta of
 Love - Lafts and Hit Tunes!
"HONEYMOON"
SHIRLEY TEMPLE
 FRANCHOT TONE
 GUY MADISON
 LINA ROMAY

ALSO

Songs On His Lips
 Guns On His Hips
EDDIE DEAN
 and His Horse
"BLACK HILLS"

COLOR CARTOON
 Starts Sunday
"Hills of Home"
 Technicolor
 Hill!

The Miami Herald. Saturday, March 5, 1949. Page 4.

TROPICAIRE
The Spanish Most Beautiful
DRIVE-IN THEATRE

Bird Rd. At 77th Avenue
 7:10 and 10:50
 STEPHEN McNALLY ★ THELMA RITTER
"CITY ACROSS THE RIVER"
 9:05 ★ JOYCE HOLDEN
"GIRLS IN THE NIGHT"
 12:20 ★ **COLOR** — TAB HUNTER
"Return To Treasure Island"

AT TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN
EASTER SUNRISE
SERVICES SUNDAY, APRIL 1st
 AT 8:00 A.M.
 SPONSORED BY CHURCHES IN S.W. DIST.

DIXIE DRIVE-IN
THEATRE

South of South Miami on U.S. Hwy. 1
 7:09 and 11:00
 GREGORY PECK ★ ANNE BAXTER
"YELLOW SKY"
 9:07 ★ Sherifon Hester ★ Technicolor
"NAKED JUNGLE"

The Miami Herald. Saturday, March 31, 1956. Page 18.

The 3 Masters!
BRUCE LEE
FRED WILLIAMSON
RON VAN CLIEF

FIST OF FEAR
TOUCH OF DEATH

Terry Lester presents
 an AQUARIUS
 RELEASING, INC.
 presentation of an
 AQUARIUS PROMOTIONS
 production
 Photo by TECHNICOLOR

NOW SHOWING
MIAMI BEACH
RIO
 322 NE 1 AV.
 371-6706

MIAMI BEACH
27TH AVE.
 DRIVE IN
 3700 NW 27TH ST.
 991-6934

TROPICAIRE
 DRIVE IN
 7751 BIRD ROAD
 304-8910

HIALEAH
 THEATRE
 799 PALM AVE.
 887-3746

MIAMI BEACH
ROXY
 THEATRE
 1517 WASHINGTON ST.
 521-6439

MIAMI BEACH
TRIANON
 DRIVE IN
 3725 N.W. 7th ST.
 CENTRAL SHOPPING PLAZA
 643-6120

The Miami Herald. Saturday, July 5, 1980. Page 30.

TROPICAIRE
 PALMETTO X-WAY & BIRD RD.
 Ph. CA 5-7331

2 IN COLOR!
"KRAKATOA"
 MAXWILLIAM SCHILL BRIAN KEITH
"BACK TRACK"
 JANE BRIDNEY
"SWAP MEET" ALL DAY SAT. SUN!

The Miami News. Friday, January 9, 1970. Page 18.

SWAP MEET

An aerial photograph of a large swap meet held at the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre. The scene is filled with hundreds of vintage cars, trucks, and trailers parked in neat rows across a large, open area. In the center, a prominent light blue building features the text 'TROPICAIRE DRIVE IN THEATRE' on its facade. The surrounding area includes green grass, trees, and additional parking spaces. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, well-organized outdoor event.

Photo by: Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre

SWAP MEET

Starting on Saturday, September 8 of 1962, the Tropicaire theatre hosted weekend “swap meets”. Today, we call them flea markets. All along the humps and even along the sides of the property were booths, simply rented allotments of space, for people to sell their stuff. The swap meets were basically meant for people to sell used stuff. However, over the decades, people would also sell new items. On Saturdays and Sundays from the early morning until the mid afternoon, the flea markets would go on. People then had to tear down their booths and clear out for the area to be ready for the movies after dark. The flea market had an admission fee for people to shop besides the vendors paying a fee for a booth to sell. People who came to shop would park all over the grass in the front or drive to the very back of the property where there were several dirt parking lots. Every weekend, auto congestion was constant, and the number of people were like ants scattering everywhere!

Just to note here, I was born in 1972. Mom and Dad had been living in the theatre for maybe a couple of years by this point. My bedroom was near the exit, and near the exit was a large booth that had tire service. Every weekend starting very early in the morning, there was a box truck parked upon a concrete slab where they would change tires on peoples’ cars. I can distinctly remember the popping sound when they break the tire off the rim with the pressurized air escaping. I can remember the rubber smell from the new tires. My bedroom window was right above where the work was. Also, right below my bedroom on the first floor was a storage room accessible from the outside where the marquee letters were stored.

It would turn out that the flea market would outlast the presenting of movies. Eventually, the management would allow flea market vendors to leave their booths set up for as long as they rented their

booths. Typically, they would take their items for sale home but leave their canopies, tables, etc. The flea market continued right up to the day the building was torn down.

**GRAND OPENING
FOR SWAP MEET**
SAT., SEPT. 8, 6 A.M. TO 4 P.M.
AT TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE
7751 BIRD ROAD
Bring Your Things — Buy, Sell or Trade
Attention Folks
If you want bargains this is the place. You
can buy anything here, new or used.
Furniture Appliances
Tools Boats
Tires Batteries
Auto Parts Radios
TV's Jewelry
Pottery
For Information Ph. 887-8428

*The Miami Herald. Thursday, September 6, 1962.
Page 50.*



SWAP MEET



Shoppers had to pay an admission fee for the flea market.

This is a view of the flea market from the back of the property. By this point, vendors were able to leave up their tents for as long as they rented the booths. Otherwise, they would have to clear out for another vendor.

#flashbacksouthflorida

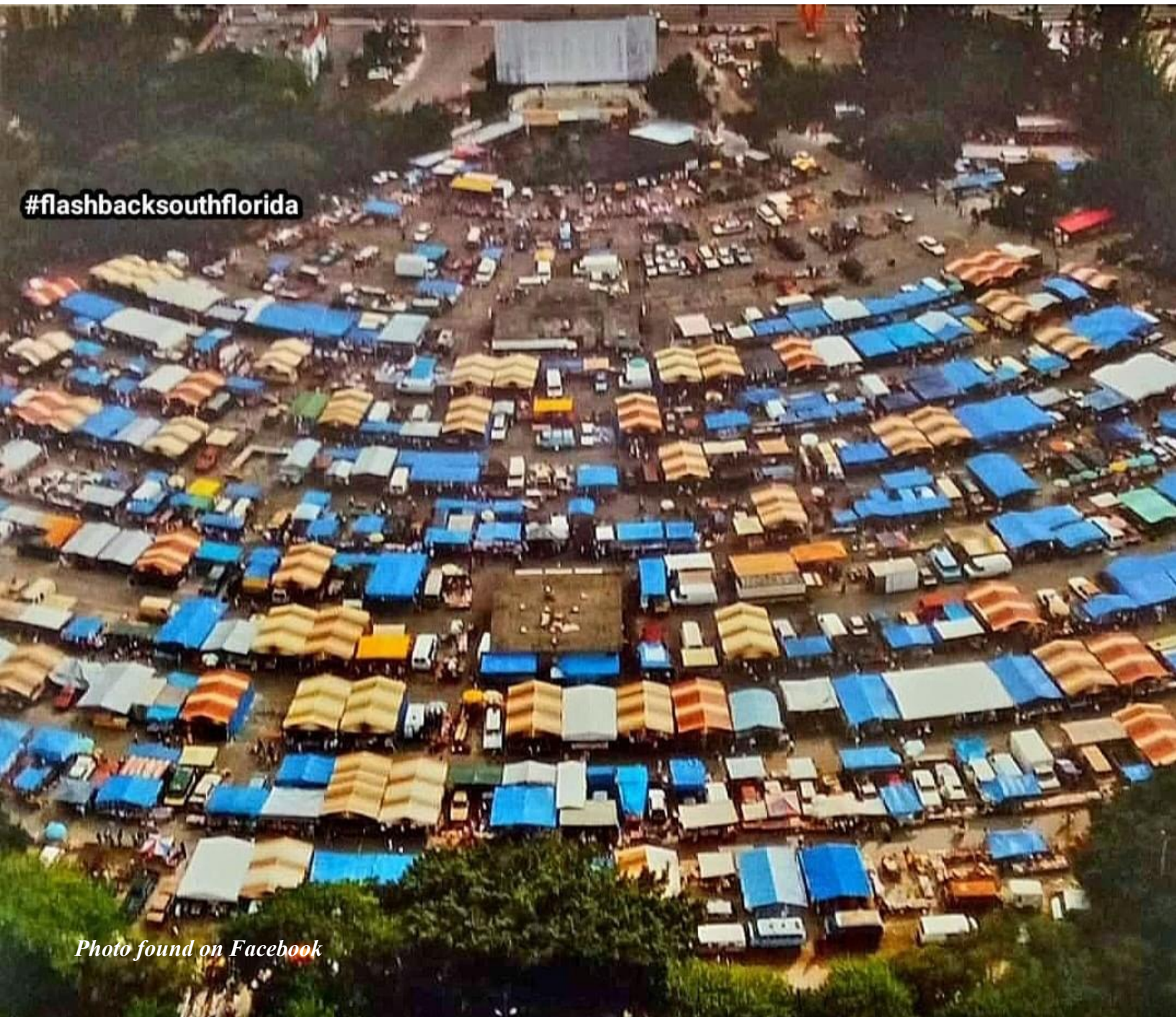


Photo found on Facebook

SWAP MEET

Emerson Elementary School

Palmetto Expressway



Tropical Park Racetrack
(horses)

Circa 1970s, Photo by: Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre

SWAP MEET



*Photo taken at the flea market on July 23, 1964 by Miami Herald.
How many of these items for sale do you remember?*

SWAP MEET



Photo by: Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre



*Circa 1970s
Photo by:
Tropicaire
Drive-In
Theatre*

*Circa summer 1989.
Photo by:
Robert-George de Stolfe*

SWAP MEET



On these pages are a series of photos of the flea market taken in the mid 1980s by Robert-George de Stolfe.



SWAP MEET



SWAP MEET



SWAP MEET



MOVIE WOES



Photo found on Facebook, Miami Herald

MOVIE WOES

By the time the 1970s came and went, drive-in theatres were just not as popular as they once were in the previous decades. The Tropicaire was no exception. By 1980, the theatre could no longer afford to show first release films like they did decades earlier and would show films many weeks or months after the first release in regular enclosed theatres. Also, the Tropicaire shortened the days to only show films Thursday through Sunday, instead of every night. The Tropicaire also resorted to showing more “skin flick” movies just to be able to get attendance, but even then very few. These skin flicks were more typical of the culture of the late 1970s, but they were probably less “scandalous” by today’s standards than in the 1970s and early 1980s. To answer your question that I know you are asking. No, we did not watch movies all the time! In fact, as I recall, we rarely watched movies there. Maybe once every year or two? We did watch movies in regular theatres though. And to be honest, by that point, there really were not many movies we had

even heard of let alone wanted to watch. We did get in free of course when we did go to watch a movie.

By the 1980s, enclosed theaters, what we would just call normal theaters, were just a much better place to go to watch movies, and the old nostalgia of drive ins just wasn’t there anymore. Also, the multiplex theaters showed many films at once, whereas the drive ins could only show one film at a time, even if they had a double feature like the Tropicaire did. The Tropicaire at least did have the flea market, which made a whole lot more money than the theater did by the 1970s and 1980s. In an article in the Miami Herald, Bill Buchholz, the manager in 1980, stated,

“If we didn’t have the flea market here, the movie business would not carry the property. I frankly think it would pay to close the theatre down, but we don’t want to. It would put people out of work.”

‘If we didn’t have the flea market here, the movie business would not carry the property. I frankly think it would pay to close the theater down, but we don’t want to. It would put people out of work.’

Bill Buchholz, Tropicaire Drive-In

The Miami Herald. Sunday, July 20, 1980. Page 163.

The owner, Keith McComas, stated in an article that the theatre “*would have 1500 to 2000 [people] on a good night. Now we are lucky if we get 200 people in there on a Friday or Saturday.*” Admission in 1987 was \$2.50 for adults with children under 12 admitted free.

By the early 1980s, inflation and low movie income made many

drive ins end up selling to developers as the properties were of more value to a developer for the land than for how the land was being previously used. The Dixie Drive-In ended up going that route and was torn down in 1979, and the Tropicaire would eventually go that route after about another decade, being a holdout until the 1990s, but with several twists!



This was a double feature shown at the Tropicaire in early 1979. I would call these movies smut!
The Miami Herald. Friday, January 12, 1979.

Page 185.

MOVIE WOES

cover story

The last picture shows?



Nelson Gonzalez, 19, doesn't have to fight crowds at Tropicaire Drive-in



Cashiers Betty Wells, left, and Mary Tucker have seen Tropicaire's audiences shrink.

Drive-ins lose families, face extinction

By STEPHEN REISS
Herald Staff Writer

The directions are simple. Head west on Bird Road, pass under the Palmetto Expressway and make a right turn into the past.

Once inside, the immense outdoor screen at the Tropicaire Drive-In still exerts its pull. The rows of posts with speakers hanging precariously on either side and the strange contours of the asphalt still make finding the "right spot" a challenge and an art.

The concession stand still sells a half-dozen items that you can't believe you ate and two dozen that you can't believe you bought.

For a moment, it feels just like that summer night 10 years, 20 years, 30 years back.

But there aren't many of those summer nights left. Drive-in theaters are a species on the edge of extinction, the victims of rising land costs and changing tastes. The few that remain have adapted to a harsh new environment, depending on flea markets and flesh films to survive.

Many people return from a current trip to the drive-in with a feeling of soiled memories, having hoped in vain to recapture the past before losing its humor or pathos.

But the parking areas are nearly deserted and the show is often so bad it isn't worth sneaking into, a far cry from the days when *Ben-Hur* played on the screen and *Romeo and*

Juliet was acted out behind the windshield.

The drive-in theater occupies a preeminent place among the mythical settings of American youth. The ice cream or pizza parlor, the football field, even the high school prom run a distant second.

In one's *Doctor Denton* days it was a place to snooze with only a vinyl roof between you and the stars. The mingled voices of parents and film stars were the best lullabies around.

Later, it was the setting for equally tender but somewhat more awkward moments of sexual exploration that led to a permanent prejudice against cars with bucket seats.

There used to be 20 drive-ins operating in the Miami area. Now there are only seven, and just two are south of Flagler Street — the Tropicaire at 7751 Bird Rd. and the Breezeway at U.S.1 and SW 304th Street.

Introduced into the suburban ecosystem in 1939, the drive-in population hit a nationwide peak of 5,100 in the early '60s and then began a slow decline. There were 3,600 drive-in screens operating last year, according to the National Association of Theater Owners.

Their future is uncertain at best. As the land they occupy becomes increasingly valuable, property taxes become less affordable. It's also difficult to compete with "hard-top" theaters for the money-making first-run films. Many theaters run flea markets on

weekends to bring in extra cash.

Today, few moviegoers want to sit in cramped, non-air conditioned discomfort and watch a movie in a rain storm, said Stanley Stern, Wometco's senior vice president for entertainment.

And few drive-in theater owners are willing to "sit too long on what could be a \$1-million property and let it show a small profit," he added. "Property values go up so much that drive-ins have to disappear."

The fate of two former South Dade drive-ins illustrates what's in store for those that remain.

The now-vacant Coral Way Drive-In opened in 1948, another statistic in the post-World War II building boom that saw the number of drive-ins across the country leap from 820 in 1948 to 3,300 in 1953.

Part of the Wometco chain, the Coral Way was one of the first in the area to offer air conditioning. For a quarter, the theater provided the customer with a flexible tube, connected to a central cooling shed, which could be hung inside the car window.

Wometco also produced a 60-page service manual for its employees that, among other things, told them how to handle the passionate pairs that flocked to the drive-in because it provided a legal place to park.

"When you notice a couple overdoing it,

Continued on page 15

MOVIE WOES

Staff photos
by Carol Guzy

Lone couple walks
to drive-in
concession stand.
Because of smaller
crowds, theater
owners say they
can't afford to
book first-run
films.



Flea markets and flesh films keep 2 S. Dade drive-ins open

Continued from page 14

walk by them and hesitate a moment, looking at them," the manual said. If the couple was too preoccupied to notice, the employe should "ask them to kindly change their positions."

But the manual isn't of much use now and there hasn't been a demand for air conditioning at the Coral Way for several years.

The ticket booth and the concession stands have been gutted by fire and six-foot-high weeds are bursting through the asphalt. A few kids play in the burned-out structures, but only a few. The mosquitoes are fierce and anything worth stealing has already been taken.

Wometco sold the theater to Futura Realty Inc. 1½ years ago. Salesman Jose Luis said construction will begin on a shopping center in six to eight months.

A similar future awaits the Dixie Drive-In, 14601 S. Dixie Highway. It opened in 1950, and was showing films as recently as last spring. The owners, who also operate the Tropicaire, weren't making enough to pay the property taxes on the land and sold it last July to Publix Super Markets.

Bill Buchholz, part owner and general manager of the Tropicaire, said he has no plans to sell that theater, even though it's losing money.

"If we didn't have the flea market here, the movie business would not carry the property," he said. "I frankly think it would pay to close the theater down, but we don't

'I frankly think it would pay to close the theater down, but we don't want to ... You can't do anything to fight it. It's the trend of the times.'

— Bill Buchholz,
Tropicaire manager

want to. It would put people out of work."

Buchholz said he can't afford the \$6,000 to \$10,000 required to book first-run films and he's given up or trying to attract the family audience that used to dominate the drive-in crowd.

"What can you do?" Buchholz said. "You can't do anything to fight it. It's the trend of the times."

"It's a very marginal business at best today," said Alex Weinstock, president of Holiday Theatres Inc., which operates the Breezeway and five "hard-top" theaters in the area. "It's a sinking situation," he said.

"You're there. You're hoping tomorrow it'll be better."

After families stopped coming to the Breezeway about four years ago, the theater began showing X-rated films. Weinstock said he doesn't know why families no longer go to the drive-in.

"If I could answer that I'd be a zillionaire," he said. "All I know is that if you play to the family audience today in the drive-in, you're in trouble. We weren't doing any business with family-oriented pictures. We had to try something."

Competition from porno houses on U.S.1 is hurting business, Weinstock said. He is considering switching to R-rated and kung fu films this fall.

That's the main fare at the Tropicaire, which shows a G-rated film about once a year.

"When we do, they [families] stay away in droves," Buchholz said. "You do a hell of a concession stand business, but that's all."

Last week, the features were *17 and Anxious* and *Ready, Willing and Able*, two R-rated films so devoid of plot that it took late arrivals more than half an hour to figure out which one they were watching.

Buchholz has resigned himself to smaller audiences and poor films.

"The economics are just not there," he said.

When Holiday Theatres' lease on the Breezeway expires in 1990, the land will probably be converted to a shopping center, Weinstock said.

"I think 10 years from now, drive-ins will be extinct," he said.



Drivers used to jockey for the best positions in front of the drive-in screen. Now the last ramp for cars is rarely occupied at the Tropicaire.

MOVIE WOES



Cashiers Betty Wells, left, and Mary Tucker have seen Tropicaire's audiences shrink.

I remember these ladies! I did not necessarily know their names, but I would occasionally walk here and sort of hang out for a while. This was the drive up box office with glass block and neon. The Dixie Drive-In had an almost identical box office.

I can remember one time in the summer hanging out there and they had this coiled ring on a little metal holder that smoldered. It was burning a type of incense to repel mosquitoes, a big problem in south Florida!



*This is how I always remembered the marquee.
Photo by Robert-George de Stolfe*



This is the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre in its more rundown state in the 1980s, which is mainly how I remember the theatre. The lower building and the planters were repainted, something that Dad did in the early 1980s, as I recall. I was still rather young. The neon sign still shows Theatre, which would change by the late 1980s. Also by then, the upper part of the screen would be completely repainted, which ended the original green and pink color scheme of its earlier days. That part was professionally painted I think.

Photo by Robert-George de Stolfe

YO-YO PLANS

F2

Friday, July 10, 1987

The Miami Herald

Section C

Drive-in to show its last picture

By GEOFFREY TOMB
Herald Staff Writer

A lot of firsts happened in drive-in movies: First kisses. Baby's first night out. First swallows of beer. First scary movie.

Now you count lasts. Dade's next-to-last drive-in, the Tropicaire at Bird Road and the Palmetto Expressway, will be closing down. It was called the South's most modern drive-in when it opened in February 1949.

Gone will be the Americana of the Tropicaire's peeling green facade, pink and green neon and 10 palm trees poking out of planters behind the 40-foot screen. The palm fronds blow in the breeze as if summer nights are forever.

The Tropicaire will go the way of the Dixie (1979 for a Publix) and the Golden Glades (1981 for a warehouse).

Dade, which had 19 drive-ins 25 years ago, will be left with just the Turnpike Twin, at 12850 NW 27th Ave.

Thursday, the Metro Commission approved zoning changes that would allow developers to build a 287,000-square-foot shopping center on the 28-acre Tropicaire site, now used Thursday through Sunday nights for last-run, pre-video movies and on weekend days for a flea market.

"The flea market on Saturdays and Sundays was the only thing that really kept us going," said Keith McComas, Tropicaire's owner. He is 69.

"It used to be we would have 1,500 to 2,000 on a good night. Now we are lucky if we get 200 people in there on a Friday or Saturday."

There were 27 paid parked in the lot Thursday at 8:35 p.m. when *Three Amigos* flickered on. *Platoon* was the

second feature.

Some views on drive-ins from Tropicaire customers:

"It is just being out of doors in the evening when the sun goes down," said Arthur Brill. He drove from Homestead with his wife, Judy, and seven kids sitting in the bed of a blue Ford pickup.

"We can take all the neighbor's kids," said Judy Brill.

Kids under age 12 are free. Adults are \$2.50. For \$5 the Brills treated nine to a double feature show. No one at a drive-in calls them films.

"Drive-ins are as American as apple pie," said Jim Spittler of North Bay Village. "This one has the best corn dogs in Florida."

"You can dress casual, relax, kick off your shoes and prop up your feet," said Bill Freeland of South Carolina.

"It's a shame," said Terri Jaramillo of Homestead. "Now we will have to stay home and watch TV."

Her bumper sticker read "Too Many Boys. Not Enough Men."

"We will miss the place. There is enough shopping centers," said Donna Stomick of Kendall.

Bill Ogden, president of Brancroft Development, said the group hopes to build a "Key West-style" shopping plaza of about 50 stores and more than 1,100 parking spaces on the spot. It will be called Tropicaire Center. This will happen in six months, said theater owner McComas.

Dade Mayor Steve Clark had his own views on the new shopping center: "It will be an upgrading of the property."

Herald staff writer Ellen Livingston contributed to this report.



DEZSO SZURI / Miami Herald

Tropicaire will become a shopping center.

The Miami Herald. Friday, July 10, 1987. Page 33

The story and fate of the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre became more interesting as a series of events occurred starting in 1987. The Miami Herald reported that on Thursday, July 9 that "the Metro Commission approved zoning changes that would allow developers to build a 287,000 square foot shopping center on the 28 acre Tropicaire site, now used Thursday

through Sunday nights for last run pre video movies and on the weekend days for a flea market." The article stated later that Bill Ogden, who was the president of Brancroft Development, had hoped "to build a "Key West style" shopping plaza of about 50 stores and more than 1100 parking spaces... [and] be called Tropicaire Center. This will happen

in six months, said theatre owner McComas." Well, developers most always think progress happens at a rapid pace. But, they would soon find out some additional news that made the plans come to a screeching halt! Meanwhile, the movies and the flea markets continued as normal. Closer to the end of 1987, advertisements in

the paper provided coupons to get into the weekend flea markets free. The theatre did stop showing movies after the last weekend of 1987 with the last movie shown called Stakeout. After that, the Tropicaire no longer showed in the newspaper movie listings.

METRO DADE ZONING HEARINGS

4. TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE, INC. & DONALD K. McCOMAS, TRUSTEE (BZ-7-CG-1)

Location: The west side of the Palmetto Expressway, between S.W. 36th Street and S.W. 40th Street (Bird Road), Dade County, Florida. (29-614)-Address

Zone change from single family residential and special business districts to special business district, including requests to permit site plan approval of a proposed shopping center, unusual uses to permit an entrance feature and parking for the existing flea market in a residential district, and including accompanying non-vide variances.

The Miami Herald. Saturday, July 4, 1987. Page 151.

Dade Drive-Ins

TROPICAIRE: 7751 SW 40th St. (Bird Road),
Miami— *Three Amigos* (PG) 8:30, *Platoon* (R)
10:15

The Miami Herald. Sunday, July 12, 1987. Page 554.

Dade Drive-In

TROPICAIRE: 7751 SW 40th St. (Bird Road),
Miami— *Stakeout* (R) 7:30, 9:21

The Miami Herald. Sunday, December 27, 1987. Page 124.

YO-YO PLANS

**FREE
ADMISSION**
TO
TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET
and
TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE
7751 S.W. BIRD RD.
OPEN 'TIL 1989

SUMMER SPECIAL COUPONS

GET IN FREE WITH COUPON TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET OPEN SAT. & SUN. 6 AM TO 3:30 PM ONE PERSON FREE WITH COUPON	GET IN FREE WITH COUPON TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE OPEN THURS., FRI., SAT. & SUN. 8:30 PM NIGHTLY ONE PERSON FREE WITH COUPON
---	---

The Miami Herald. Thursday, August 6, 1987. Page 102.

**EARLY CHRISTMAS SHOPPERS
SAVE BUNDLES OF MONEY &
GET IN FREE**
TO
TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET
and
TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE
7751 S.W. BIRD RD.
NOW BIGGER & BETTER THAN EVER!

GET IN FREE WITH COUPON TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET OPEN SAT. & SUN. 7 AM TO 3:30 PM ONE PERSON FREE WITH COUPON (6)	GET IN FREE WITH COUPON TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATRE OPEN THURS., FRI., SAT. & SUN. 7:30 PM NIGHTLY ONE PERSON FREE WITH COUPON (6)
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The Miami Herald. Thursday, November 12, 1987. Page 124.

**AHORRE DINERO
HAGA SUS COMPRAS DE NAVIDAD
EN EL PULGUERO DE TROPICAIRE**

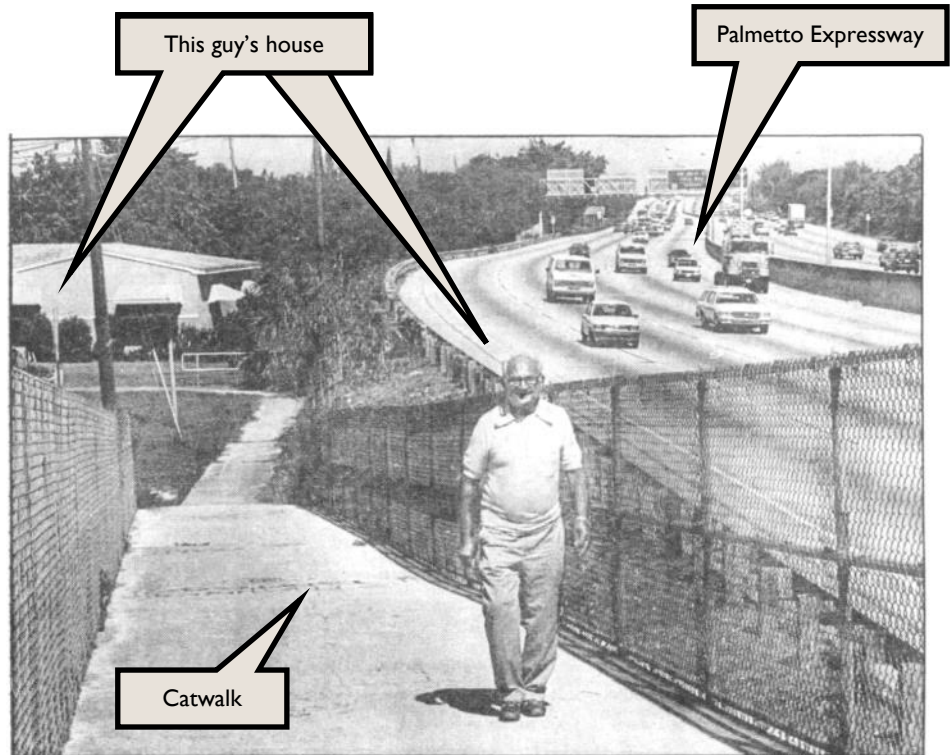
**ENTRADA
GRATIS**

**TAMBIEN ENTRE GRATIS AL
CINE TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN**
7751 SW BIRD RD.
MAS GRANDE Y
MEJOR QUE NUNCA

ENTRE GRATIS CON ESTE CUPON TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET ABIERTO SABADO Y DOMINGO 7 AM a 3:30 PM UNA PERSONA (1) GRATIS (9) CON ESTE CUPON	ENTRE GRATIS CON ESTE CUPON TROPICAIRE CINE DRIVE-IN ABIERTO DE VIERNES, SAB. & DOMINGO DOM. 7:30 PM TODAS LAS NOCHES UNA PERSONA (1) GRATIS (9) CON ESTE CUPON
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The Miami Herald. Tuesday, December 15, 1987. Page 169.

*I remember this guy! His house as on the way to my elementary school down the street and would walk past his house nearly every weekday. After school, I would sometimes stop at his house before going home. As I recall, he made wood musical instruments by hand.
More info about this catwalk later.*



Joe Sliauzis walks up the Palmetto overpass near his house, left. Plans to widen the road means his house must go.

Houses will fall to Palmetto

State's plan for widening road to deliver coup de grace

By JEFFREY L. KLEINMAN
Herald Staff Writer

In the late 1950s, the new Palmetto Expressway gobbled up 40 feet of Joseph Sliauzis' lawn. Now it has come back for his house.

Sliauzis is one of 35 homeowners living near Bird Road who would have to move if the Florida Department of Transportation follows through with improvements scheduled to begin in about two years.

The \$135 million plan for the expressway, also known as State Road 826, includes wider shoulders, additional lanes and rebuilt ramps on the 16½-mile stretch between South Dixie Highway and the big curve at Northwest 158th Street.

"This is my home, even though I've put up with all the traffic noise for years," said Sliauzis, 77, who lives on Southwest 36th Street. "Now I'll have to relocate, and that bothers me."

Margaret and Charles Sattler also would be forced to leave the home they bought on Southwest 37th Street in 1948 for \$7,000.

"This is the first and only house we have ever bought," said Margaret Sattler, 73, and confined to a wheelchair. "We raised our children here."

The Sattlers were poised to fight when they learned two weeks ago of their home's fate.

"After all these years, the trees, the bushes, the rose garden — everything will be wiped away," said Charles Sattler, 69, and legally blind. "We wanted to give them one

HERE'S HELP

■ **IF YOU NEED** information on the proposed Palmetto Expressway improvements, call Kevin MacNaughton, project manager, at 377-5195.

■ **TO FIND OUT** about property that the state plans to acquire, or get help in relocating, call 251-7005.

hell of fight."

They didn't. Since attending a public hearing on the project Wednesday night, the Sattlers feel a little better. DOT officials told them that the state and federal government would pay market value for their house and help them relocate to another one in the same neighborhood.

The state has budgeted \$48.3 million to \$52.1 million to acquire the 35 homes, five businesses and 52 vacant parcels.

Three of the five businesses that will be taken are in the path of what would be a new Bird Road flyover.

Under the plan, the state would acquire El Tio Pepe restaurant, 7711 Bird Rd.; the Tropicaire drive-in theater and flea market, 7751 Bird Rd.; and Mary's Carpets, 7775 Bird Rd.

The future of Tio Pepe, known for its garlicked baby eel, is up in the air.

"We don't have any idea of what is going to be," said Pedro Arriaga, one of the managers.

At the Tropicaire, the wrecking ball was scheduled to destroy the 39-year-old theater later this year to make room for a Key West-style shopping center. But under the DOT's plan, the 287,000-square-foot shopping center couldn't be built.

"Everything is on hold," said Jim Miller, Tropicaire manager. "Once the state expresses an interest, you can't really do much."

At Wednesday's hearing, commuters looked forward to fewer tie-ups.

"The Palmetto's real congested now," said Rod Rodriguez, a businessman who drives the expressway a few times a week. "If this plan alleviates traffic, I wouldn't hesitate to drive it more often."

Homeowners who already live with expressway noise have a different view. They expect to hear more noise and inhale more exhaust grime.

"I'm thinking about putting my house up for sale before they start," said Filomena Naegely, 55, who lives three houses away — soon to be two — from the Palmetto on Southwest 38th Street.

Carol Kahn — who lives on Southwest 18th Terrace across 77th Avenue from the expressway — described what her life would be like if the expressway is widened. "Picture a 16-wheeler 10 feet closer to your bedroom window," she said. "Especially when it blows its horn."

The Miami Herald. Sunday, February 28, 1988. Page 46.

YO-YO PLANS



Palmetto Expressway



Photos by Robert-George de Stolfe

YO-YO PLANS

By February 1988, more than six months after the rezoning of the Tropicaire land, another development sideswiped the shopping plaza plans! The Florida Department of Transportation made plans to make improvements to the Palmetto Expressway that would start in about two years, putting it at around 1990 at the point of the article. The Palmetto Expressway was a ten lane highway that was built in the late 1950s from Palmetto Road. It is also known as State Road 826. The article stated that “the wrecking ball was scheduled to destroy the 39 year old theatre later this year to make room for a Key West style shopping center.” But

with FDOT’s plans, the shopping center would not be built, and “everything is on hold” said Jim Miller, the Tropicaire manger. By early 1989, a news update noted “The 26 year old flea market will remain open until it is sold, said manager Jim Miller. At the present time, we have no plans. We’re just going to sit on our butts.” After a few months, the Tropicaire apparently rebranded the flea market as shown by new advertisements in the paper.

At this point, I need to make a personal note. In mid February of 1989, Mom and I and the cat, Gator, moved from the Tropicaire to Jacksonville, Florida. We moved to my Mom’s mother’s house, my grandmother’s house. I never again lived in the Tropicaire, but there were several times when I did go back to visit. More later in this journal.

A TOTALLY NEW CONCEPT IN OUTDOOR SHOPPING!



WIN A FREE MAGNAVOX 25" Color TV With Remote Control Plus Much More!
Drawing Held April 23rd

- LOW PRICES ... BIG PRIZES.
- 13 ACRES OF FREE PARKING
- QUALITY DOESN'T HAVE TO COST MORE.
- ASK FOR YOUR FREE RAFFLE TICKETS FROM YOUR FAVORITE VENDORS.
- A WEEKEND IN THE PARK KIND OF A DAY.
- SHOPPING CAN BE FUN.
- ENJOY OUR INTERNATIONAL FOODS
- WE HAVE TAKEN THE TIME TO MAKE SOMETHING GOOD EVEN BETTER
- 9 ACRES OF VENDORS AT YOUR SERVICE.
- YOU WANT IT NEW, YOU WANT IT USED, WE HAVE IT ALL!

TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET
7751 S.W. 40 STREET • MIAMI
264-1738
Open Saturday & Sunday 7:00 AM - 3:30 PM

The Miami Herald. Friday, April 21, 1989. Page 73.

A TOTALLY NEW CONCEPT IN OUTDOOR SHOPPING!

TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET

7751 SW 40 Street
OPEN SATURDAY & SUNDAY
7:00 AM - 3:30 PM




STOP BY OUR BOOTH AND RECIEVE A FREE GIFT!

THE MIAMI HERALD • EL NUEVO HERALD

The Miami Herald. Sunday, May 21, 1989. Page 542.

Drive-In



THE TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN FLEAMARKET WAS TO BE CLOSED IN 1989 FOR A KEY WEST-STYLE SHOPPING CENTER BUT THE PLANS HAD TO BE DROPPED WHEN THE D.O.T. (DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION) SAID THEY NEEDED TO IMPROVE THE PALMETTO EXPRESSWAY. THE DOT IS NEGOTIATING TO BUY THE FLEA MARKET WHICH IS AT 7751 BIRD ROAD . IMPROVEMENTS TO THE EXPRESSWAY INCLUDE WIDER SHOULDERS ADDITIONAL LANES AND NEW RAMPS AND OTHER STUFF ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN JULY, 1990. THE FLEA MARKET WHICH IS 26-YEARS OLD WILL REMAIN OPEN UNTIL IT'S SOLD. RIGHT NOW THEIR ARN'T ANY SCHEDULED PLANS EXCEPT THAT THE ADMISSION WAS RAISED FROM 25 TO 50 CENTS AND THE FLEA MARKET WAS EXPANDED. THE DRIVE-IN OPENED IN 1949 AND CLOSED LAST YEAR (CHRISTMAS 1987).
THE MIAMI HERALD JANUARY 2, 1989

de Stofle Journal,
April 1989.

HAVE A NICE DAY!



TROPICAIRE FLEA MARKET
7751 S.W. 40 STREET • MIAMI, FLORIDA 33155
PHONE: (305) 264-1738

A bumper sticker made by the retooled Tropicaire Flea Market.

YO-YO PLANS

So by mid 1989, FDOT found itself in a pickle of sorts. FDOT planned to expand the Palmetto Expressway in 1987 and to start roughly two years later. However, "budget cuts eliminated the money needed to buy land... and the agency already committed to buy the old drive-in — at a cost of \$18 million". The conflict here is that the agency was also going to build a \$17 million parking garage for the Metrorail ridership. The article stated that "one has a priority of 100 and the other has a priority of about one", basically stating that the garage has more priority to make the Metrorail users have a place to park their cars in order

to use the Metrorail. The article also notes that the budget was cut because "The state Legislature refused to let the transportation department borrow money for its work plan in the 1989-1990 budget."

Despite this, that didn't mean that everything was okay for the flea market! In the couple of years after the movies stopped, the flea market expanded aggressively. This meant more people, more noise, more traffic, and just more of everything. The residential neighbors took notice and made many complaints about the flea market. In addition, the flea market was seeking to expand

with additional features that also required zoning approval. However, the Dade County Zoning Appeals Board rejected plans to expand the flea market to include additional days and change hours, along with adding carnival rides. This proved to be a big win for the residents around

the flea market property. The driving force behind a lot of this was Bill Ogden, the developer who wanted to buy the theatre/flea market to build the Key West style shopping center. My Dad was still living in the Theatre during this time, and I recall him saying one time that he did not like

Garage at Metrorail put off because DOT must buy flea mart

By DAN HOLLY
Herald Staff Writer

Because of a legal and financial snafu, the state Department of Transportation will buy a flea market instead of building a long-awaited parking garage at the Dadeland North Metrorail station.

The state had been planning for two years to buy the old Tropicaire Drive-In on Bird Road, home to a flea market that stands in the way of widening the Palmetto Expressway, said Servando Parapar, director of planning and programs for the Department of Transportation district covering Dade and Monroe counties.

Budget cuts eliminated money needed to buy the land and widen the highway. But the agency had already committed to buy the old drive-in — at a cost of \$18 million, Parapar said.

When the state Legislature cut that \$18 million from the budget, the department chose to postpone the \$17 million garage for four years. Construction of the 2,000-car garage was supposed to start in the next 12 months, but it now won't begin until July 1993 at the earliest.

The flea market won't necessarily close. Parapar said the state probably will lease the land back to the operator until it can afford to widen the highway.

The postponement was a bad de-

cision and should be reversed, Metro commissioners told Parapar.

Of the two expenditures, "one has a priority of 100 and the other has a priority of about one," said Commissioner Harvey Ruvin.

A parking shortage discourages Metrorail ridership, said Commissioner Charles Dusseau.

"Unless you have a place for somebody to park their car, where are you going to put their car when they ride Metrorail?" Dusseau said. "You're costing Dade County hundreds of thousands of dollars a year by not letting this go through."

The state decided to postpone garage construction on July 1 — one of 12 changes in Dade dictated by budget cuts — but the commission did not have a chance to comment until Monday, when its Transportation Committee met.

The committee recommended the full commission at its meeting today adopt a resolution expressing concern over the postponement.

The department's budget was cut because the state Legislature refused to let the transportation department borrow money for its work plan in the 1989-90 budget.

Parapar told commissioners the work plan could be amended, but it would have to be approved by the Dade legislative delegation, the speaker of the House, the Senate president and the governor.

NEWS UPDATE

Tropicaire Flea Market to stay open till it's sold

The Tropicaire Flea Market, scheduled to be torn down this year for a shopping center, will live on, at least for a few more years.

Plans for a Key West-style shopping center were dropped when the Florida Department of Transportation announced it needed the site for improvements to the Palmetto Expressway.

The DOT is negotiating to buy the flea market, which is at 7751 Bird Rd., west of the expressway, and Mary's Carpets, 7775 Bird Rd. Improvements to the expressway — wider shoulders, additional lanes and new ramps — are scheduled to begin in July 1990.

The 26-year-old flea market will remain open until it is sold, said manager Jim Miller.

"At the present time, we have no plans," Miller said. "We're just going to sit on our butts."

In the meantime, the owners have raised admission from a quarter to 50 cents and expanded the flea market, using space that once belonged to the old Tropicaire Drive-in theater. The drive-in, opened in 1949, closed last year.

*The Miami Herald. Monday, January 2, 1989.
Page 23.*

The Miami Herald. Tuesday, July 11, 1989. Page 19.

YO-YO PLANS

Mr. Ogden. Ogden apparently tried again a few months later to get permission to partially expand the flea market after negotiation with the surrounding neighbors. The flea market request went up for a vote with the commissioners passing in favor with a 3-2 vote. One minor addition happened in December 1989 with the opening of a "Food and Plant Oasis" in the previous area of the theatre garden below the screen.

With the FDOT not buying the Tropicaire property, by 1991, Ogden sued FDOT for reneging on buying the property since the developer could not buy the property to build the shopping center. There is more to it than this, but another zoning hearing sought to make the flea market permanent. Some of the neighbors were fine

with the flea market, but many others did not like it. Back in 1987, the zoning approved to make the land into a shopping center, but the interest by FDOT to expand the Palmetto Expressway just made a weird yo-yo effect of what to do. An article noted "the owners have delayed construction of the stores because the state Department of

Transportation is planning an off-ramp for the site. If that exit ramp is to go forward, then we don't want to build a shopping center... when they take the right-of-way, there

wouldn't be much left." Well, people and government can make plans, but sometimes nature demands respect or perhaps attention! Something would blow in, in a big way!

METRO-DADE	ZONING HEARING
The below list contains zoning items which may be of interest to your immediate neighborhood.	
2. TROPICAIRE DRIVE-IN THEATER, INC., ET AL (89-8-17)	
Location: 7751 S.W. 40 St. (Bird Road) (28.61 Acres)	
The applicants are appealing the Zoning Appeals Board's decision of denial of requests to modify previous plans and resolution pertaining to the swap shop. Also included in this application are unusual use requests to permit carnival type rides and the expansion of the swap shop, a special exception to permit night lighting and accompanying non-use variances.	

The Miami Herald. Thursday, November 2, 1989. Page 105.

Deal reported in flea market flap

By PAUL SHUKOVSKY
Herald Staff Writer

A hotly contested proposal to expand Tropicaire Flea Market comes before Metro commissioners Thursday, when a reported compromise with disgruntled neighbors of the market will be presented.

The Metro zoning board in August denied permission for an expansion that included longer hours, night lighting, carnival rides and more parking.

Residents living near the flea market on the site of the old Tropicaire Drive-in Theater at 7751 Bird Rd. complained about the noise and traffic congestion the market brings. Their complaints helped persuade the Zoning Appeals Board to deny the request.

Tropicaire's appeal of that deci-

sion comes before the commission Thursday. This time, Tropicaire spokesman Bill Ogden expects the proposal to sail through without opposition from the neighbors.

In meetings with nearby residents, Ogden reports having hammered out a compromise that will bring neighbors to the Metro Commission chambers Thursday in support of his proposal.

The compromise includes scrapping a plan to operate carnival rides and staying open until 8 p.m. instead

of 10 p.m.

To meet the neighbors' concerns about traffic congestion on residential Southwest 79th Avenue, Ogden has promised to eliminate plans for curb cuts on that street. All traffic will be diverted to Bird Road.

The flea market will retain its request to expand operation to a Thursday-through-Monday schedule. The market now is open only on weekends. But Ogden says there are no plans to actually operate on all five days.

The Miami Herald. Thursday, November 5, 1989. Page 17.

Compromise on flea market expected

Noise, traffic complaints at issue

By PAUL SHUKOVSKY
Herald Staff Writer

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said.

The flea market will retain its request to expand operation to a Thursday-through-Monday schedule. The market now is open only on weekends. But Ogden says there are no plans to actually operate on all five days. He said Tropicaire simply wants the flexibility to open on the other days.

Dallas Bailey, a leader of the ad hoc neighborhood group that negotiated with Ogden, could not be reached for comment either at home or at his work place.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

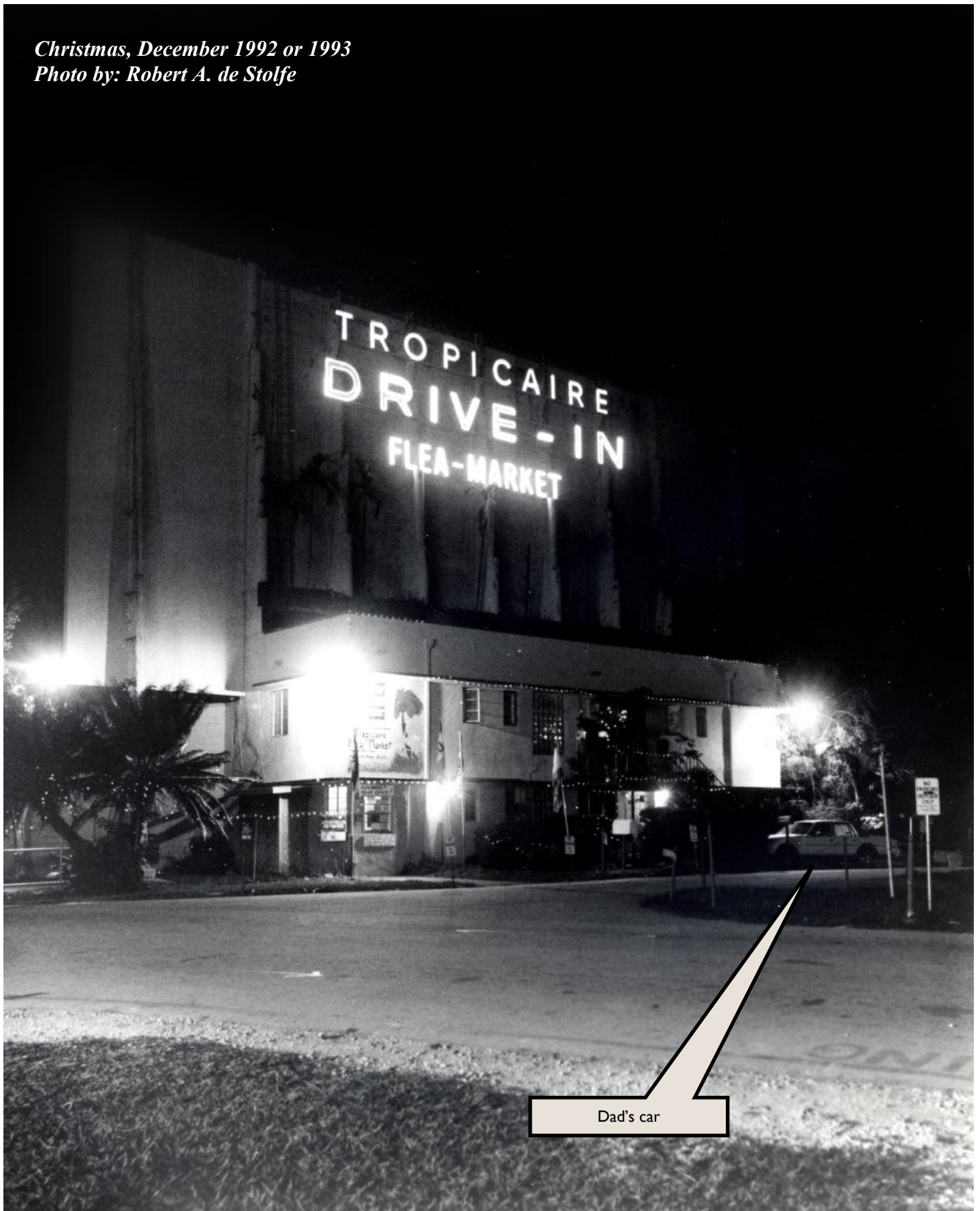
Tropicaire Flea Market charges a parking fee of 50 cents per person, and its space rental rates range from \$7 to \$35. The fees were incorrectly reported in a story last week.

The Miami Herald. Friday, July 20, 1990. Page 190.

The Miami Herald. Thursday, November 5, 1989. Page 90.

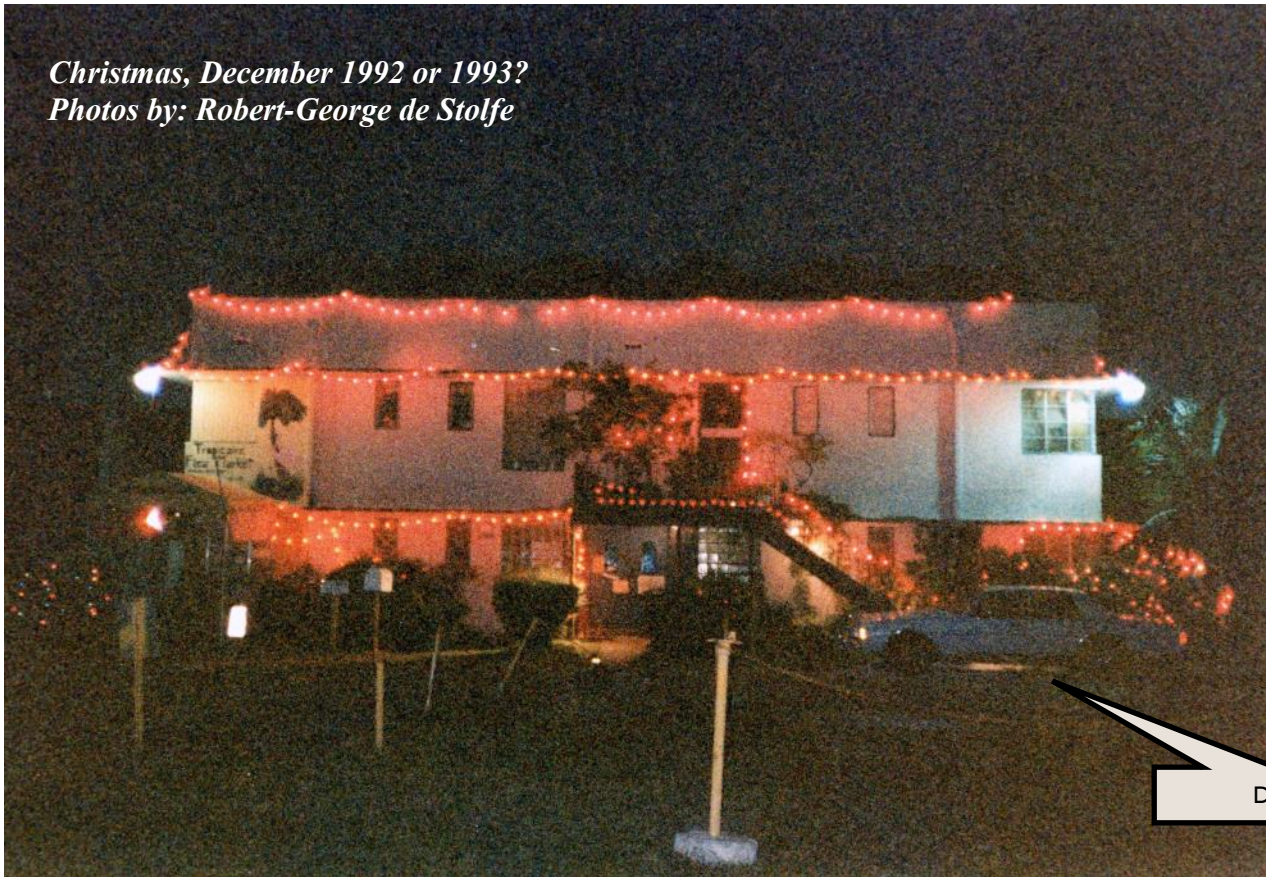
YO-YO PLANS

*Christmas, December 1992 or 1993
Photo by: Robert A. de Stolfe*

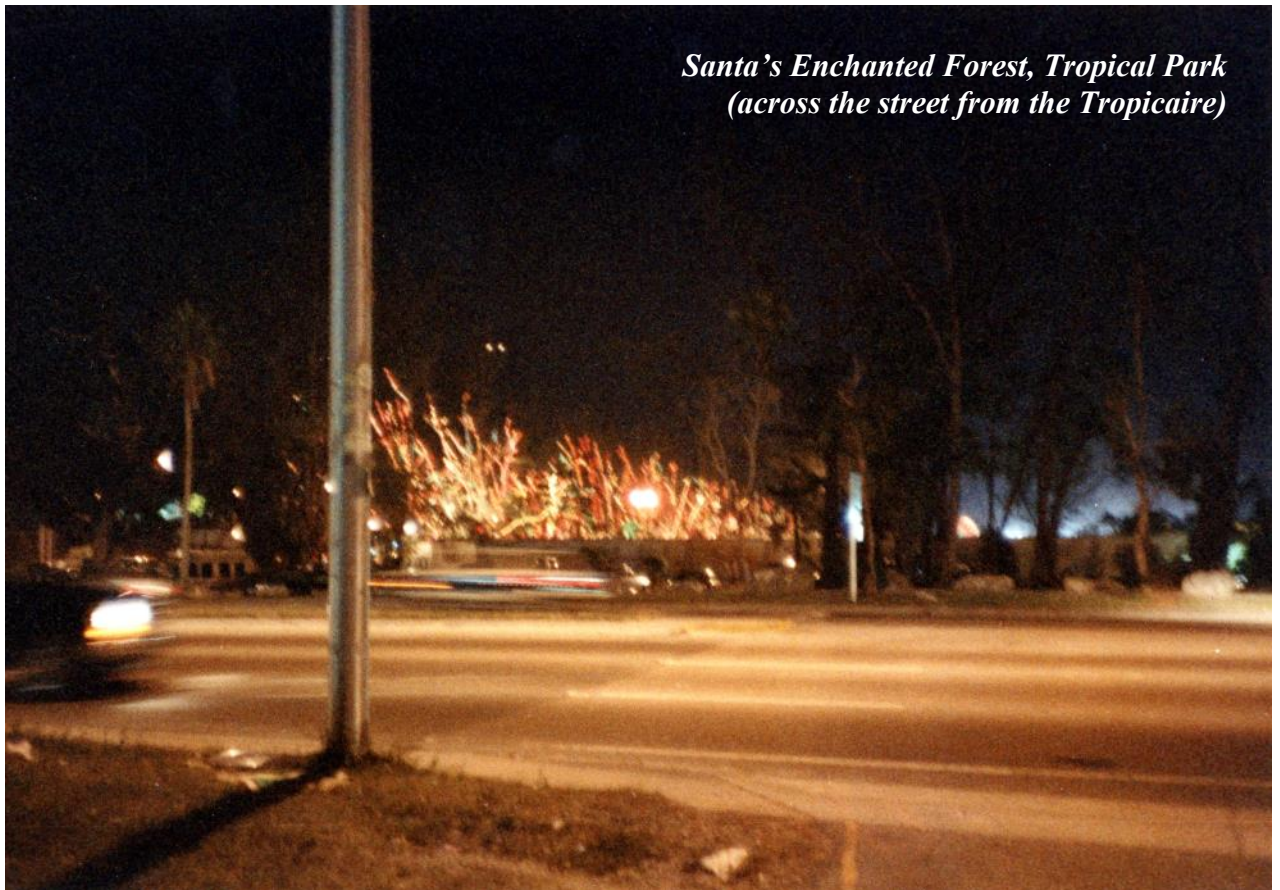


YO-YO PLANS

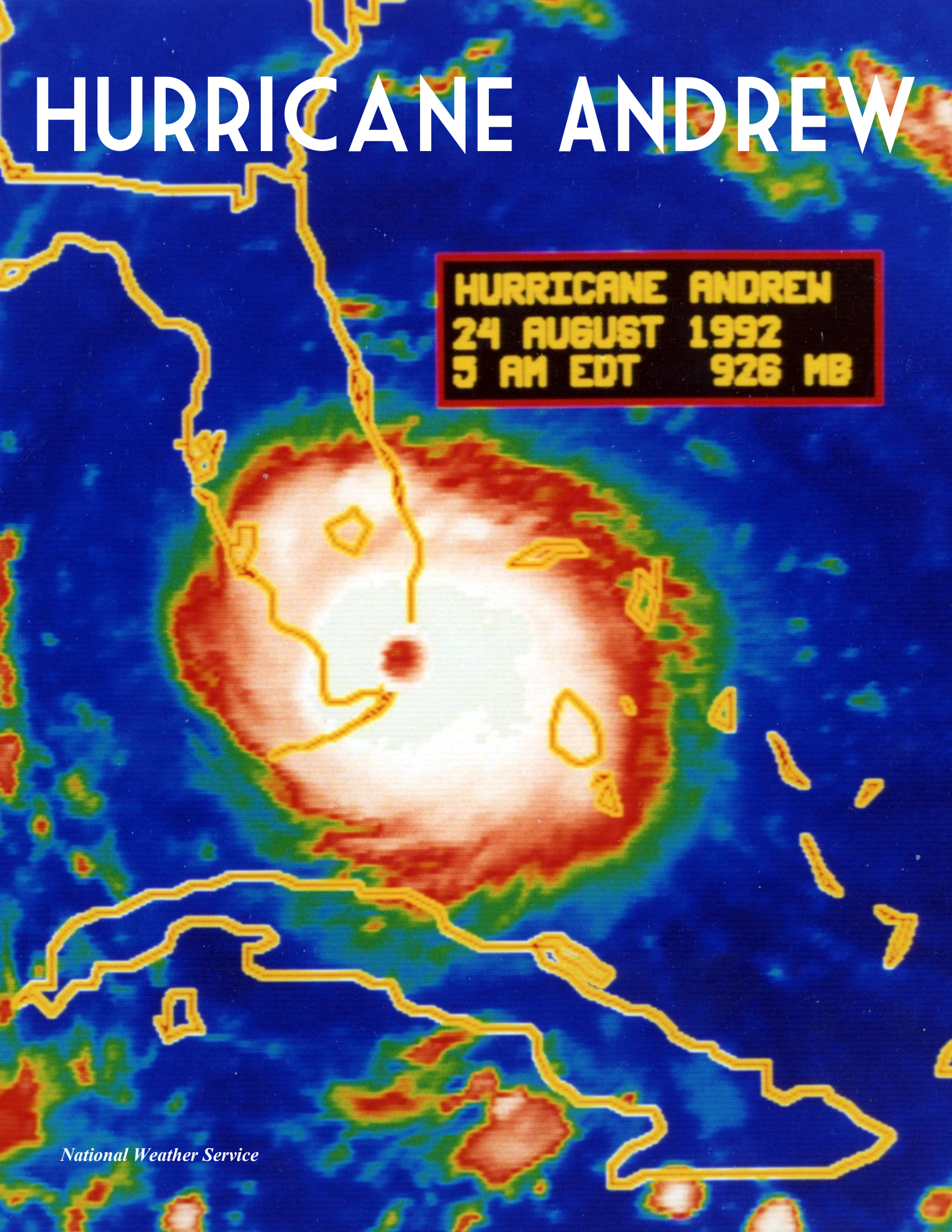
*Christmas, December 1992 or 1993?
Photos by: Robert-George de Stolfe*



*Santa's Enchanted Forest, Tropical Park
(across the street from the Tropicaire)*



HURRICANE ANDREW



HURRICANE ANDREW
24 AUGUST 1992
5 AM EDT 926 MB

HURRICANE ANDREW

The eye wall of Hurricane Andrew as a category 5 hit South Florida at about 5:00 AM on Monday, August 24, 1992. The hardest hit area of Florida was Homestead, a city about 30 miles southwest of Miami proper, but the entire southern half of Florida, especially south of Lake Okechobee was severely affected. The hurricane would continue through the Gulf of Mexico and hit New Orleans and go through Louisiana and Alabama. With nowhere really to go, Dad stayed put inside the drive-in theatre. Beforehand, he got gas for the car and

parked the car in the back storage areas below the screen. He also prepped the front porch of the plants that were there and put the familiar duct tape on the windows in an X pattern as with previous years. One running joke for years later was to never try to cut cord again with a dull steak knife! (I'll let you figure out the rest!) From what little I remember about what Dad said about going through the hurricane was that the entire building shook really hard, after all the high screen was like a giant sail! I did say at the beginning that the

building and screen were built to withstand strong hurricanes! The building itself survived with no issues to speak of, but most everything around the building was quite trashed. Dad's car also survived with no apparent damage, or at least very minor damage. He kept driving the car at least to 2000. With how the electrical service was set up, the theatre had no electricity for about two weeks, even though there was electricity in surrounding areas. During this down time, Dad did help to take supplies that he was able to get to areas

where it was needed. I think most people there tried to do that in the days after the hurricane passed. On interesting thing to note here is during the downtime of having no electricity, Dad read through the de Stolfe Journal, issue #14 Summer 1992. I think I mailed it out just prior to the hurricane hitting!

Dad took these black and white photos after the hurricane passed. I do not have the negatives, so I had to scan the proof sheet I did have of the negatives, which is why it is contrasty.



HURRICANE SPECIAL / ANDREW'S AFTERMATH

Andrew wiped away familiar face of South Dade

I thought I knew every landmark in this town. The problem is, there are no landmarks left.



BEA MOSS

No street signs, no familiar trees, no mailboxes. We've lived in the Westchester area since the mid-1950s and our family has been through hurricanes since small and large. Most notable were Donna in 1960, Cleo in 1964 and Betsy in 1965. They all tore up our yard and our neighbors' yards pretty good.

Forget those babies. We never went through a hurricane before. I've always been proud of my family's self-sufficiency, preparedness, take-charge attitude. For Andrew's expected arrival, we prepared as we always do: We bought canned goods, had bottled water, got out the camp

stove and put up our trusty old plywood shutters.

We thought we were ready. We weren't. In previous storms, we never were without electricity for more than 45 minutes. We are powerless still as I write this Friday. But even though the power is out, the microwave clock miraculously is still lit and it reads 4:04, the hour the power failed the morning of Aug. 24.

Lucky, in comparison

Although plants and trees nourished for decades are now in shreds, we had minor home damage. Our pool screening was ripped out, some roof tiles are missing, a neighbors storage shed ended up in our back yard and is wedged against the house, and our pool is now a swamp.

And so much for storm shutters. Andrew ripped one house's metal shutters off the windows and hurled them around the neighborhood. I'll stick to plywood.

The sweet songs of birds have stopped; in their place we hear the grating sound of portable

generators.

But to all my friends in South Dade who fared far worse, my heart goes out.

In my travels last week, I saw sights I never want to see again. First, it was the dazed looks on peoples' faces.

Then it was the chaos, the confusion, the devastation.

On Galloway Road near Killian Drive, long rows of wooden power poles hovered over the road like a precision dance line.

Troops move in

National Guard trucks rolled down South Dixie Highway. Bloomingdale's, which I help support from time to time, had gaping holes in its side.

In the Perrine area of South Dade, the 124th Infantry of the National Guard from Orlando kept watch because of downed power lines and trees. Nobody could pass in or out. I felt like a stranger myself and lost my bearings because the landscape had changed completely.

In the Redland, people made their own roads through fields and groves to dodge downed

power lines.

Familiar is unfamiliar

On what I hoped was Silver Palm Drive, I stopped a woman driving in the same direction, to ask directions.

Realtor Vera Quigley was headed for the home of a client, Patti Dobbs, at 20400 SW 218th St.

She had promised to look after the woman's two dogs while she was in Orlando.

I followed her to the house at Southwest 217th Avenue and 232nd Street — she offered to lead the way. We drove through fields and plant nurseries where hundreds of seedling palms were strewn far and wide, around vast expanses of fallen trees, into yards.

Quigley explained why she was making this effort: "I feel I should help," she said.

In her own Redland home, she was housing her family plus five other people who had lost their homes.

When we got to the house, set way back on a large piece of property, we left our cars and walked in. Half the roof was gone. Family heirlooms, a grandfather clock, pictures, were all destroyed and covered with dirt

and slime.

I'm thankful my daughter, her husband and children are safe; that my son and his wife are safe even though rain poured through their shattered apartment roof. That my husband stocked up on batteries — and now — I'm even glad he had the Norfolk Island pine we grew from a seedling chopped down two years ago when Hugo threatened.

As South Dade begins to recover — and I again smell the welcome aroma of *cafe con leche* from Cuban cafeterias reopening in my neighborhood — these images remain with me:

■ A blond woman in white slacks and a beige short-sleeve shirt, gallantly directing traffic at Bird and Galloway roads Monday afternoon after the storm.

■ A faithful camp stove and bottled gas.

■ The polite National Guard troops.

■ The Tropicaire Drive-In Theater wall and sign that still stands.

And I think of the lines from a song by James Taylor: *I've seen fire and I've seen rain, I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end; but I always thought that I'd see you again.*

HURRICANE ANDREW

These are photos taken by Dad in the days after Hurricane Andrew. I did not have the original negatives, so I had to scan the proof sheet, which is why they are slightly blurry and contrasty.



HURRICANE ANDREW



HURRICANE ANDREW



Dad's car



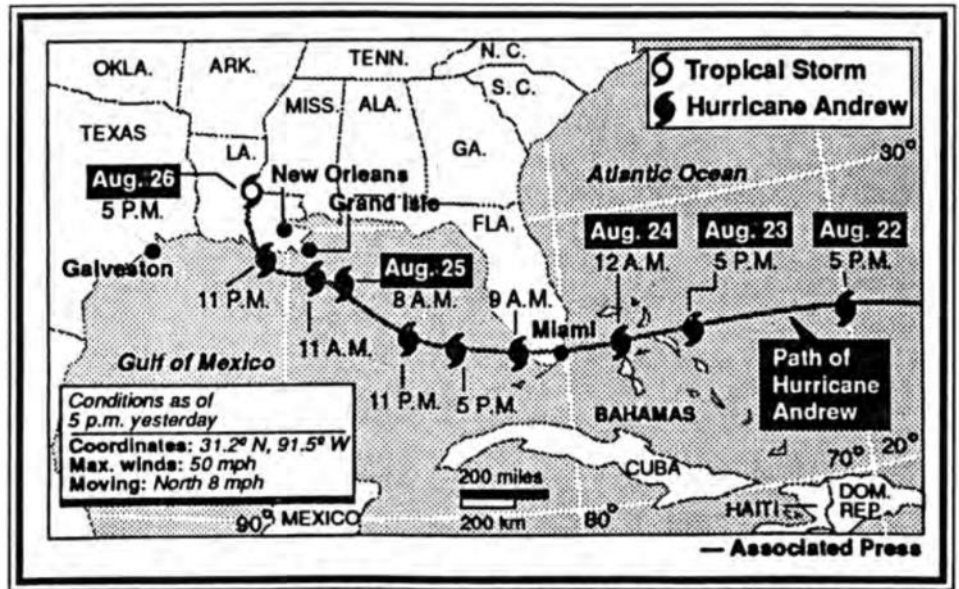
HURRICANE ANDREW

HURRICANES



SO FAR THE 90'S SEEM TO BE THE YEARS FOR HURRICANES. IN 1989, HURRICANE HUGO SLAMMED INTO SOUTH CAROLINA AND CHARLESTON. HUGO LEFT MILLIONS MAYBE EVEN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN DAMAGE. IN 1992, HURRICANE ANDREW BASHED INTO SOUTH FLORIDA AND LOUISIANA. THEN JUST AFTER, HURRICANE INIKI RAMMED INTO HAWAII. ALL THREE CAUSED MUCH DAMAGE. THERE ARE ALSO COUNTLESS OTHER HURRICANES/TYPHOONS THAT HIT PLACES AROUND THE GLOBE. FOR RELATED STORIES, LOOK ELSE WHERE IN THE JOURNAL, ALSO SEE MAP ON 5.

These are items from the de Stolfe Journal about Hurricane Andrew.



From de Stolfe Journal, Winter 1992

From de Stolfe Journal, Winter 1992

MIAMI METRO ZOO

HURRICANE ANDREW CAUSED SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE IN SOUTH FLORIDA. THE MIAMI METRO ZOO IN MIAMI HAD QUITE A FEW LOSSES BECAUSE OF THE HURRICANE. THE DAMAGE WAS ESTIMATED AROUND 20 MILLION. THERE WAS NOT A LOT THAT THE ZOO COULD HAVE DONE AND UNFORTUNATELY, THERE WERE SEVERAL ANIMALS KILLED. SOME OF THE ANIMALS WERE SENT FOR SPECIAL CARE AT OTHER PLACES. MANY OF THE ANIMALS WERE NOT HURT, OR VERY LITTLE, BUT WERE ROAMING THE STREETS, INCLUDING AN ELEPHANT AND MANY BABOONS. THE DAMAGE WAS GREAT, BUT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN SOUTH FLORIDA, THEY WILL RECOVER FROM IT.
-FLORIDA TIMES UNION

In 1992, to protect them from Hurricane Andrew, 30 flamingos were moved to the Miami Zoo's bathroom, resulting in an iconic photograph.



From de Stolfe Journal, Winter 1992

From de Stolfe Journal, Spring 2024

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Because there is so much to cover about the Tropicaire, I needed to break up this special issue into two parts for quality and to be as thorough as possible!

The next part of the Tropicaire story is the final demise of the building and the moving of the flea market. Also, I will cover the finished shopping center and include some tangential things about South Florida. In addition, I will cover a related drive in called the Dixie Drive-In Theatre.



FINAL THOUGHT

Dixie Drive-In Theatre

Related to the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre is another theater called the Dixie Drive-In Theatre which opened in 1950. It would appear that they were formed within a year or two of each other. The next issue will cover in a little more depth about this theatre and about the de Stolfe relation to it.



You can see the similarity between the Tropicaire Drive-In Theatre and the Dixie Drive-In Theatre, especially in the early days.



The [de Stolfe Journal](#) is a publication made by Robert-George de Stolfe. The first issue was published in March 1986 as the de Stolfe Journal and published irregularly until 1998 (17 issues total). The *Candid* version of the Journal started in July 2012 through December 2018 (over 60 regular and special issues). Now back to the original name starting in 2019, archives of all issues—including the original ones (1980s-1990s)—are available on the website: www.destolfe.com

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