

The Spanish River Papers

MAY, 1974

VOL. II No. 2

"I note that the Senate has validated the bonds and the Governor has signed the Bill for the deepening and widening of the Inland Waterway. This I consider the most important step forward that has ever happened to the East Coast of Florida, and particularly Boca Raton, which we hope to put on the map."

Included in a letter to Frank Chesebro
from C. H. Geist, April 24, 1929.

A report to the membership of

Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

P. O. Box 1113, Boca Raton, Florida 33432

from Mrs. Dorn Lee Redd, Mrs. Russell W. Fisher

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Newspaper Article, date and origin unknown
Boca Raton Historical Society Archives

REFEREE PUTS O.K. ON GEIST BOCA RATON BID

Millionaire's Offer for Mizner Properties Is Accepted

Sale of the Cloister inn, golf course and other properties of the defunct Mizner Development corporation at Boca Raton for \$71,500, plus assumption of debts, on a bid by Clarence H. Geist, millionaire utilities man, was confirmed this morning at Miami by L. Earl Curry, referee in bankruptcy, according to Miss Helen Eanes, his secretary.

Immediately following the sale Mr. Curry left his office and his secretary reported that he could not be reached in Miami before Monday morning.

The \$71,500 bid was made at a sale at Boca Raton on November 5 by G. W. Gedney, representative for the wealthy utilities man. A former offer of \$5,000, plus assumption of debt made by Geist's representative was refused by the referee as too low.

Following the opening of the sale November 15, Gedney stated that his client was negotiating for the hotel with a view of opening it about January 15. Other projects of the Mizner Development corporation would be carried out in an adjusted form, Gedney said.

Geist is the operator of the fashionable Sea View club of New Jersey, a sportsmen's club, along the lines of which he intends to operate the Cloister inn. He announced that the personnel of the newly acquired hotel, however, will be entirely different.

Mr. Geist's representative stated that his client is ready to go forward with improvements at Boca Raton and that the titles of property owners there will be protected.

MIZNER DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

November 22, 1927.

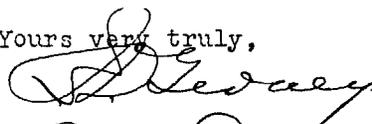
Mr. Frank H. Chesebro,
Boca Raton, Fla.

Dear Sir:

I have this date given you a check for \$8,000.00 for the assignment of the mortgage given to you by Mizner Development Corporation covering certain property in Section 32, Township 47 South, Range 43 East.

I am retaining the sum of \$1,000.00 and out of this sum will pay all back taxes on said property - the balance of said \$1,000.00, if any, after payment of said taxes, to be refunded to you.

Yours very truly,



Central Finance Trust Co.
Trust & Loan Co.

SPANISH RIVER LAND COMPANY
BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

CLARENCE H. GEIST
PRESIDENT
JEROME D. GEDNEY
VICE-PRESIDENT
HAROLD S. SCHUTT
TREASURER
RICHARD E. NORTON
SECRETARY

OFFICES
BOCA RATON
PHILADELPHIA, 1622 PACKARD BLDG
NEW YORK, 522 FIFTH AVE., SUITE 624

Philadelphia, Pa.,
April 24, 1929.

REGISTERED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Mr. Frank Chesebro,
Boca Raton, Fla.

Dear Mr. Chesebro:

Please find enclosed stock certificate No. 363 for 5 shares of stock of Spanish River Land Company made out in your name. This is in accordance with my promise to the permanent residents of Boca Raton at the dinner that I gave on April 11th.

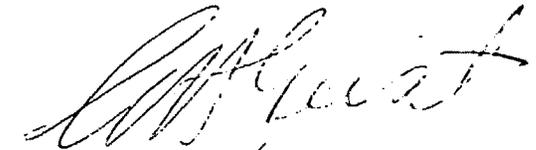
I feel sure, if you will hold this certificate for a reasonable period of time, that you will be able to realize a good sum of money for same. You will find attached to this certificate a receipt, which I would ask that you kindly sign and return in the enclosed envelope.

I note that the Senate has validated the bonds and the Governor has signed the Bill for the deepening and widening of the Inland Waterway. This I consider the most important step forward that has ever happened to the East Coast of Florida, and particularly Boca Raton, which we hope to put on the map.

With kindest personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,

CHG.B



**ONCE UPON A TIME by Henry Kinney
Arvida Corporation Publication**

The Cloister Inn passed into the hands of its creditors, and for a time Charles G. Dawes, the former vice president of the United States, and his brother Rufus supervised the wreckage from Chicago. It was operated sporadically for the next two years, then in 1928 was acquired by Clarence H. Geist. He bought the hotel and its furnishings, the golf courses, tennis courts, and bathing beach for a reported one million dollars. Separately he acquired other large holdings in the vicinity, including 112 acres on the oceanfront for a casino and an airfield.

He owned a mansion in Palm Beach as well as one in Philadelphia, and it was from Palm Beach that his eye fell upon the Cloister Inn.

It seems incontestable that the palace which he attached to the comparatively modest Cloister cost three and one half million. As the architects, Geist hired Schultze and Weaver of New York, who designed the Breakers Hotel of Palm Beach. They added three hundred sleeping rooms, five patios, one of which is the magnificent Patio Royale of today, a wide rocking chair terrace, two swimming pools, sanitoria, a special dining room for children and another for the maids and chauffeurs of the guests.

Geist brought a landscape gardener from France to beautify the grounds, and purchased the entire stock of one plant nursery to embellish the patios . . . he established the Cabana Club on the beach, opened a channel from Lake Boca Raton to the ocean, cleared the lake of the islands upon which Addison Mizner had planned to build his castle.

The Boca Raton Club opened early in 1930, possibly the finest gentlemen's club in the world at that time. In order to join, one was required to purchase \$5,000 worth of stock in one of the development firms, the Spanish River Land Company; Geist intended that the members should share in the profits, if any, of the club, and the land company. Dues were but \$100 a year, but the charter provided that the membership should be limited to persons "distinguished in the public service, the learned professions or in business, or adapted in character and disposition to cooperate in promoting the general purposes of the club." In actual fact, Geist screened the applicants personally, and summarily rejected any upon whom he looked with disfavor-nor was he reluctant to eject a member who displeased him.

He was fond of calling the club his "secret paradise". Press and public were totally barred; members in residence were carefully shielded from any undesired contact with the world outside.

Geist planned to increase the membership stock purchase requirement to

\$10,000 the second year, and only the deepening of the national recession persuaded him to change his mind.

Geist died in 1938, at seventy-three, but so great was his fondness for the thing he had created that under his will, the club was subsidized to the extent of \$100,000 a year for the next five years.

Speech to the people of Boca Raton by Clarence Geist

Archives, Boca Raton Historical Society

KEEPING THE CITY CLEAN

There are just two pests we have to contend with in Boca Raton. The first is politics. I want to see politics wiped out of the city completely. The thing to do is for the people living in this Town to get together and talk things over, just like a City of Brotherly Love. Don't have any enemies at all. People who have enemies usually make their own enemies. The politician that talks about anyone is not fit to be a politician. He would not make a good officer. There is a lot of good in everyone. Always see the good, and whatever bad qualities your neighbor has, help him cure them. It is a disease. Little politicians never get anywhere in the world. You want to remember that a politician has but one idea in view and that is to help himself. I don't know of any politicians that have any idea of helping anyone else but themselves. And you want to remember, when a man is going around soliciting your vote, he is soliciting your vote for the purpose of helping himself not to help you. That begins with the highest office in the United States and goes down to the smallest office in the United States. Especially a community of this size should get together and have a good, plain, straight talk among themselves and pick out a good representative man and elect him to the office of the town without any salary. The only ones in the town that should draw any salary should be the Town Clerk that keeps the books, the man who runs the Waterworks and the Policeman.

The second greatest pest you have to deal with in this community is the mosquito. I, personally, was on the Mosquito Commission in Jersey for 6 years. I have just resigned because I could not give it enough attention. We found that in Atlantic County, New Jersey, the mosquito is the greatest pest there and the Commission has a man who goes around from house to house in the different sections and looks out for rain barrels, tin cans and little pools, and gets the people to bury their tin cans, because one tin can can breed 1,000 mosquitoes every day and a small pool might breed 1,000,000 mosquitoes in a day, and if the people will get together and watch the colored population and persuade them to bury their tin cans and keep their rain barrels covered, and if the whole

community will be inclined to watch the mosquito situation, I see no reason why this community should not be well rid of mosquitoes. If they don't do this, you are never going to make any money out of your town, because people are not going to come down here and be pestered with mosquitoes. You want to remember that this community is not worth \$1.00 only as a resort and you are not going to make any money in this community except through people coming here in the Winter to get the benefit of the splendid climate that this City affords, and I am here to say that Boca Raton, in my estimation, has the finest climate of any spot in Florida. It is way beyond Palm Beach. I cannot say the reason why, but it is a fact just the same. This being practically a virgin community, we have an opportunity here to make it the finest spot in all Florida. I am anxious to have a town built here that everyone will be proud of. Where people will be proud to have their children in later years say that they were born and reared in Boca Raton, Fla., the cleanest, nicest city in the State of Florida, which can be done if the people here will work shoulder to shoulder to accomplish this fact. There is no community that can thrive where people disagree among themselves. Where you have a bad actor in your community and you find that you cannot make this bad actor a good citizen, if you all let him alone for a while, he will soon get out of your community. He won't want to live among people that don't like him. Anyone that is disliked in a community, in 99 cases out of a hundred, brought the trouble on himself. I am anxious to see a strictly honest Government here, and the way to keep a Government strictly honest and straight is for the people of the community to watch the Government and see that it is kept strictly honest. Everyone should have to pay just as little taxes as possible. No money should be thrown away on any foolish improvements. The property here should be assessed at such a rate that it will pay everyone to pay their taxes each year and no delinquents, and if the property owners in the town of Boca Raton find out that it is going to pay them to pay their taxes and keep their property, they are going to put their best foot forward to do so. Then everyone will be paying so much money into the Treasury of the City, and if the people will see that the money is properly expended, you will always have money in the Treasury and you will have a good credit, so that you can always be able to finance your City, so that you will have no trouble in building any improvements that you may want.

Bring the people here for the Winter, get their money while they are here and you won't have to do a lot of work throughout the hot weather of the Summer, except get ready to get their money next season when they come here. People who come here are willing to be liberal and spend their money, if the people who live here the year round as permanent residents are nice to them and take good care of them. They will come back from year to year. You can always catch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar.

I don't want to run your political situation here one minute. I want you to run it yourselves, but if I go ahead and build a splendid community of houses and homes, it is going to be necessary for the people who live here to cooperate with me. If I do not get this cooperation, then we will go ahead and run the Boca Raton Club as a club and pay very little attention to building homes or the building of a City. We can always run the Boca Raton Club regardless of what the political situation is and regardless of what the people have to say or do, but when it comes to building homes for the people to live

in, that is a different proposition entirely, and I want you all to know that you can always come to me for any advice that I may be able to give you, and I will always give you the best advice I can, but it should be in every man's heart and every woman's heart to build up the community and assist in making it the best that there is in the State of Florida. This community can be made most beautiful. There is nothing in the North that can even have a "look-in" with Boca Raton as a beautiful city, because they do not have the climate to grow the flowers and the flowers are not good flowers unless the people who take care of them are good people.

My coming to Boca Raton does not mean that I came here to take anything away, because there is nothing here to take away. The sun, the ocean and the climate is something that no one can take away from this Town. They are here to stay. Everything that I do here must be bringing something to Boca Raton and leaving it here instead of taking it away.

But don't forget to get rid of the mosquito.

Another thing I want to mention is that my loaning the City of Boca Raton the money to build the waterworks is something that I take great pride in. Water is the foundation of every community, and without GOOD water, no one will ever come into this town. Now that we have the waterworks, we must all be interested in seeing that we keep good water. There is no City in the State of Florida or in the United States, in my estimation, that has a better water supply than we have here. In going through any town, if you will notice the houses that have been sprayed at the time of watering the flowers and lawn, if the water is bad water it will color the house brown, if the water is good water it will not effect the houses, and the same thing applies to the kidneys and stomach. There are three things that kill people - The first is bad water, the second bad whisky and the third good whisky.

In regard to the election of officers. There is one thing that is absolutely necessary if we get people to come down here and make their home in Boca Raton and if we build houses, and that is that the election be held about the third Tuesday in February. In other words, I want this election held so that the people who make their home here have the right to vote. If the election is held as it is now on the first of June, or any other month except February, it is going to be a hardship on the people who are going to spend their money in this community during the Winter months, so that if I build homes for the people here, the election must be held during the months that they live here, so that they can be representatives of this community.

*Talk about Federal Highway
Beauty our city with
flowers. Explain my new
Plan.*

*We want a new Defeat
we must look Prosperous.*

*We are going to fill in
the Spanish River and
all low places around here.*

The Boca Raton News, 16 April, 1964

Archives, Boca Raton Historical Society

OLD WATER PLANT WAS A 'FIRST' FOR BOCA RATON

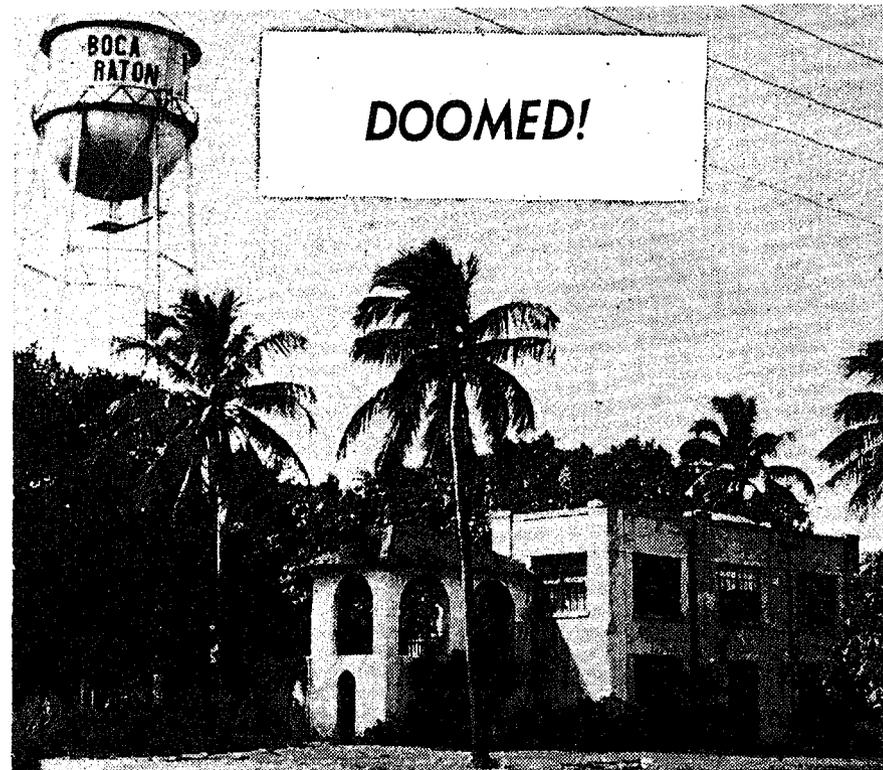
Demolition of a city landmark almost as old as Boca Raton itself was in full swing this week.

The city's first water treatment plant—and the first on Florida's coast between Miami and Palm Beach—is being wrecked to make way for other municipal improvements. Located immediately north of the new city hall building, the plant outlived its usefulness, although it was still treating water for Boca Raton residents as recently as early 1963.

Clarence Geist, the Pennsylvania utilities magnate and second owner of Addison Mizner's Cloister Inn, was responsible for construction of the plant. Looking for good-tasting, soft water for the inn's upper crust clientele Geist brought in William H. Crawford from his Philadelphia Suburban Water Co. in Bryn Mawr, Pa., to design the plant. Crosby Tappan of Boca Raton was engineer in charge of the construction job and served as consultant on the operation of the plant.

According to William Prendergast, the city's director of public works, Kline Platt was the plant's first operator followed by Maurice Stokes who stayed on the job for 20 years after it opened in 1929.

Prendergast and John LaMont, both longtime residents of Boca Raton, . . . said that prior to construction of the treatment plant, the town's water supply came from one well located on East Palmetto Park Road between Third and Fourth Avenues.



Photo, Sun-Sentinel, Oct. 23, 1963

History of Boca Raton, real estate promotion publication

Harley Gates, Boca Raton, Pioneer

In January, 1926, nearly 3,500 men were working at Boca Raton to build a modern city and the payroll was in excess of \$1,000,000.00 a month.

C. H. Geist, a utility capitalist from Philadelphia, purchased the entire assets of the bankrupt coporation and converted the Cloister Inn into the Boca Raton Club with the addition of some 400 rooms. He rebuilt the golf course, improved the inlet and constructed jetties during the summer of 1928 to provide salt water in the lake and easy entrance to the fishing grounds. A new draw bridge was built over the inland waterway near the Boca Raton Club grounds in the summer of 1928.

The new railroad station was completed in 1928 replacing the old wooden station at the corner of Palmetto Park Road and the Dixie Highway. Until this new station was built Boca Raton had only a freight station and no provision was made for passengers.

BOCA RATON NEWS - 1966

Boca Raton Historical Society Archives

ELEGANT OLD LADY HAS TATTERED SKIRTS

Boca Raton Railroad Station, once the pride of the Florida East Coast Railroad Co., and Clarence H. Geist, has now taken the role of the proverbial football.

Everyone wants to have something to say about the poor railroad station; some want to tear it down, others want to renovate it. So far no one has done anything.

In 1925 when the railroad was extended all the way from Jacksonville to Miami, Addison Mizner was beginning to shape his Boca Raton.

However Mizner did go bankrupt and his dream toppled. Then along came Clarence H. Geist, who purchased the Ritz Carlton Cloisters, enlarged the building and decided Boca Raton needed a railroad station in keeping with the architecture of what he called the Boca Raton Club.

Geist made a deal with the FEC. "You build me a railroad station to my specifications and I'll purchase \$200,000 worth of railroad bonds."

FEC accepted the deal and in 1927 Geist had his railroad station.

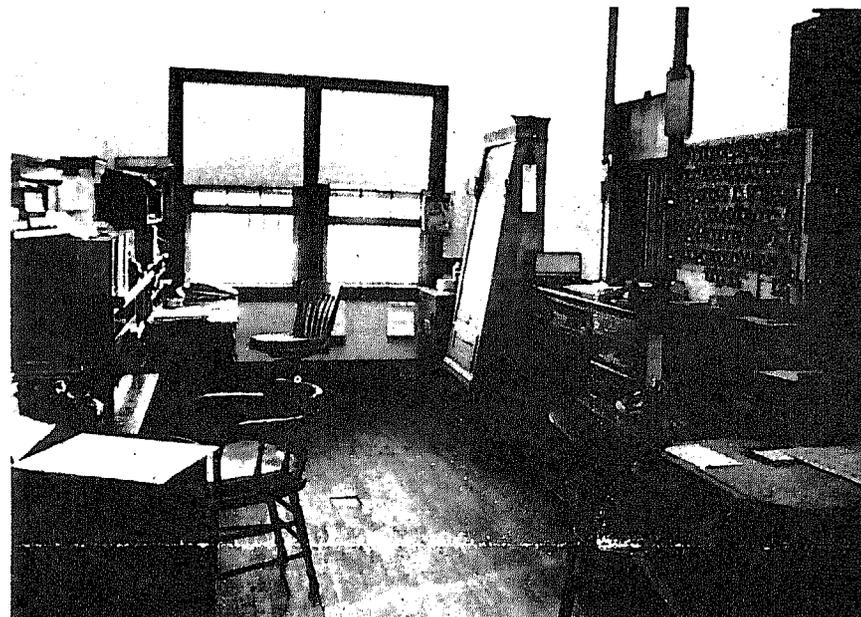
Geist had his private railroad car too. The club opened after New Years and closed the week before Easter.

The first few years Geist was met at the station by a band playing the popular tunes of the 1920's and 30's.

During those years the little railroad station, dressed in all its Spanish elegance, saw such celebrities as Marie Dressler, Al Smith, Roosevelt's Secretary of State, and the Governor of Indiana.

The station also saw many tragic-comedy scenes like the time the banks closed and multi-millionaires had to borrow money from their chauffeurs in order to get out of town.

Now the little station is a tragic sight itself



Photos, Boca Raton News - 1966

