

# Miami Pioneers / Natives of Dade

celebrating and preserving the local history of Miami-Dade County, Florida

monthly meetings with historical programs • www.MPNOD.org • April, 2017

## Next Meeting Sunday, April 2 at 2:30pm

Central Christian Church  
222 Menores Ave, Coral Gables 33134

Enter the door at the south side of the building on Mendoza Ave. Parking in west lot is also available if you enter from Menores Ave. Street parking is also free on Sunday.

Please bring \$1 donation to cover the cost of the room. We very much appreciate those who can provide refreshments such as cookies, crackers, brownies, etc.

## Correspondence

Send to MP/NOD at:  
14900 SW 71 Ave  
Miami, FL 33158

MP/NOD Facebook Page  
<https://www.facebook.com/MPNOD/>

## Dues

Please bring your annual \$20 dues to the meeting, or mail your check made to MP/NOD to our Treasurer: Marlene B. Carlin, 14900 SW 71 Ave, Miami, FL 33158. If your envelope is marked, your dues are past. Please help by sending in your payment as soon as possible.

## 2016-17 Officers

our president is Jim Hartnett  
305-667-5733  
hartnettj@bellsouth.net

past president, Caesar Philips  
treasurer, Marlene B. Carlin  
corresponding secretary, Mary Pyle  
recording secretary, Cele Diaz  
sergeant at arms, Gerda Marchese  
parliamentarian, Linda Hertz

## April 2 Sunday Meeting

The next meeting of the Miami Pioneers and Natives of Dade will take place at the usual location at 2:30pm on Sunday, April 2.

## Robert Is Still Here

*with Robert Moehling*

This is the man who created one of the best and most famous tropical fruit stands in the world — Robert Is Here.

At six years old, Robert Moehling started out on the side of the road with a card table and a bunch of cucumbers.

Sales were disappointing on the first day, but this undetermined entrepreneur returned with a new marketing concept.

His father helped him make two large signs so customers would know he had produce for sale. The signs read simply, "Robert Is Here."

It worked. He sold all his cucumbers and launched a legacy business that spans six decades. Now, he's a father and grandfather employing more than 55 part time and full time staff members, including Robert's children and wife.

You can still find him there greeting people with a big friendly smile, offering tastes of fresh fruits and tropical delights while dispensing sage advice to tourists from around the world.

## In Memoriam

MP/NOD member Billie Wells passed away peacefully at her home Sunday, November 13, 2016. She was always an impeccably dressed, gracious lady and generous philanthropist. Her home was open to all and her hospitality unequalled. MP/NOD members send their heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Billie Wells.

MP/NOD member Betsy Hess Kaplan died at home on Monday, Feb. 27 of cancer at age 90. Betsy, a true public servant, spent 16 years as a member of the School Board. She was known for tireless advocacy for arts education before, during and following her time on the Board. MP/NOD members send their heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Betsy Hess Kaplan.

Robert is famous for his fabulous fresh fruit milkshakes (more than a thousand a day in the high season), his unique home-made condiments and sauces, his flavored honeys, his exotic local produce and much more.

In back of the fruit stand, Robert has a wonderful little zoo of sorts with farm animals, tortoises, ducks and geese for kids to enjoy.

Robert Moehling knows the Redland Homestead and farming region. Join us for a delightful presentation by Robert on his perspective and his memories of growing up in South Dade.



## April Birthdays

01 Martha Stockhausen  
03 Dorothy Farmer  
10 Louise Bennett  
10 Nancy Smith  
12 Harold Sherritt  
15 Shelley Adelman  
17 Dolores Dimitriou  
17 Judy Jureski  
19 Karen Leslie  
21 John Tomberlin  
24 Patricia Eaton  
27 Jill Gusko  
29 Barbara Givens  
30 Dinah Graham  
30 Wayne Whittlesey

## Save The Date: May 7

On the first Sunday in May we'll meet again.

# Sweetwater's Colorful History features Russian Midgets

The little town of Sweetwater, located on the edge of the Everglades along the Tamiami Trail, is known as a place that floods often. Did you know it was Russian midgets that first settled the area?

The history of Sweetwater actually began during the Florida land boom of the 1920s when the Miami-Pittsburgh Land Company purchased acreage and laid out the original plat of "Sweetwater Groves." However, the 1926 Hurricane and subsequent South Florida real estate "bust" put an abrupt end to the development venture.

In 1938, Clyde Andrews acquired most of the "Sweetwater Groves" tract and began to market lots. Among his buyers was a troupe of Russian midgets seeking a place to retire after a career with the circus. They built several mini-scaled homes suited to their needs. For years, Sweetwater was known as the "midget" community.

According to a story in the Miami Herald: A colony of Russian-born circus midgets heading out of Miami, after a show in 1939, drove a few miles along the Tamiami Trail then abruptly hit the brakes. The mile-long strip of land they admired would soon be their new home.

The "Royal Russian Midgets" bought the land advertised as "Sweetwater Groves" in 1940 from developer Clyde H. Anderson. The circus performers had big plans, including creating a tourist attraction on the 100-acre plot, but their plans fizzled as World War II approached.



From that inauspicious start, Sweetwater, which sits just north of Florida International University's main campus off Southwest Eighth Street, has blossomed into a small city in western Miami Dade, with 19,000 residents, 14 shopping centers, including the Dolphin Mall, and more than 600 businesses. About 94 percent of the population is Hispanic, with the biggest concentration belonging to the Nicaraguan community.

The growth, however, has been tempered with problems at City Hall.



The city's former mayor, Manuel Maroño, was sentenced to more than three years in prison by a federal judge who admonished him for accepting bribes as the mayor of Sweetwater. His right-hand man, Jorge Luis Forte, was sentenced to one year in prison. The two had pleaded guilty to fraud charges involving \$60,000 in kickback payments, stemming from an FBI sting that revolved around a "sham" federal grant program that prosecutors say was designed to line the pockets of Maroño, Forte and others.

"The arrest coincided with a number of investigations in the city that frankly kept Sweetwater in the news in an unflattering manner," said Mayor Jose M. Diaz. "It was a shock to the residents and the city in general."

When asked what he and the commissioners are doing to restore the city's name, Diaz said, "I personally have been working to bring greater transparency and fiscal responsibility to our city government. Good government and good policies are key factors in restoring faith in government regardless of size and budget."

Sweetwater incorporated as a city in 1941 with a population of 25 people. Miami is the Seminole Indian word for "sweet water."

The new town's first mayor was Joe Sanderlin, the midgets' guardian and manager. By 1959 Sweetwater had attracted 500 residents and contained a town hall, church, grocery store, service station and 183 homes. It also had a two-man police force and a volunteer fire department. In 1970, Sweetwater was still a relatively small community of about 3,000 residents.

During the 1970's, however, several events were to happen which would dramatically change the hitherto "sleepy little country town" of Sweetwater forever. These events included the establishment of a major new state university to the south, the construction of the two major expressways to the north and west, and the discovery of Sweetwater

by Dade County's Hispanic community.

The growth and development which was precipitated by these occurrences caused Sweetwater to more than double in population and lead all other Dade cities in growth during the 1970s.

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## Importance of Participation

Please remember to attend the monthly meetings to see your fellow members, stay abreast of news and updates to your historical society and so that our guest speakers receive the type of reception that they deserve.

Bring a friend, invite a neighbor, reach out to family members that you know will enjoy our wonderful presentations on local history.

## Snail Mail or Email?

The cost of printing, stuffing and mailing our monthly newsletter—our largest annual expense—continues to rise.

If you'd prefer to receive your monthly MP/NOD newsletter via email, and save your club the increasing cost of printing and postage, please let us know.