Olof Zetterlund

AND THE FOUNDING OF

Hallandale:

New Documents and Understanding

by JOE KNETSCH

Recently opened documents in the Richter Library Special Collections at the University of Miami have revealed previously unknown information regarding the development of early Hallandale and those who played significant roles in its initial years. The Model Land Company papers, mostly those of Frederick Morse, the company's largest local agent, expose Olof Zetterlund as more than just a casual investor or speculator in the community's growth. Added to the letters detailing the opening of the lands of the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company found in the A. P. Sawyer papers, located in the State Library of Florida at Tallahassee, these documents paint a much more complete and sophisticated picture of one of southeast Florida's early land developers. Combined with the earlier research of Bill McGoun and the recent studies of William R. Adams, they bring an important segment of Broward County history into sharper focus.

As early as February 15, 1896, agents of the land company were already in south Florida, looking for the arrival of Scandinavian colonists. James R. Ingraham, the representative of the Model Land Company as well as many other Flagler land businesses, and George F. Miles, a director in the Boston and Florida Atlantic Coast Land Company and engineer and officer with the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company, vigorously discussed the price of various types of land in the region. In a letter of this date, Ingraham asked Miles to reserve 3,000 acres in the area of what was soon to be called Hallandale for six months, with the prices of the land to be fixed at seventeen dollars per acre for pine land and 100 dollars per acre for muck lands.1

This same letter also notes that contracts were already pending on the sale of these lands. Although the price of this land may appear to be high, considering the economy of the

Although Olof Zetterlund was one of Hallandale's most influential individuals, and although he lived until 1945, he has remained a somewhat shadowy figure in the city's history. In this article, based on research conducted in the Model Land Company papers at the University of Miami, historian Joe Knetech details Zetterlund's land development activities in Hallandale from the 1890s to the 1910s, and, in the process, reveals new facets of this active and complex man.

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Letter from George F. Miles to A. P. Sawyer discussing land sale commissions in the "proposed settlements of Modelo and Holland"—Dania and Hallandale (from the Sawyer Papers, Florida State Archives).

United States in the 1890s, muck lands were in great demand, especially those near good transportation facilities, such as railroads and canals. Furthermore, these contracts apparently did not hold the price of land in "Hallandale" at the rates noted above, for we find Ingraham notifying Miles on September 18, 1896, that the land would be sold, up to December 15, for $13.75 per acre, and $37.50 for muck land. From Dec. 15th for one year, the price is to be $17. and $50. per acre." Ingraham's September letter also mentions the need for a drainage system and the placing of a road across the marsh from the east to the west so the settlers could have access to the muck lands to the west. More remarkably, Ingraham informed Miles that: "Under the agreement with the settlers, we agree to give each purchaser of land, one lot of 50 x 125 feet free in the town." Thus, at the very beginning, the agents of the companies had ample inducements for the early inhabitants of Hallandale.

On the following day, September 19, 1896, Miles expressed reservations about these arrangements to Albert P. Sawyer, president of the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation and Boston and Florida Atlantic Coast Land companies. His major worry was the commission due to "Mr. Linton," who was to receive twenty-five percent on all sales of the Boston and Florida company's land in "Holland" (Hallandale).^ Miles' main concern with Linton's share was the effect it would have on his own commission. As he wrote, "I dare say that under the circumstances 15% is rather more than I could expect, though I shall probably have more work looking after these sales than in the case of ordinary purchases." He asked for a letter giving him power of attorney to allow him to sign bonds for the titles of the lands sold to the Hallandale settlers. He also questioned Sawyer regarding an oral agreement between Henry Flagler and Sawyer providing for the donation of 10,000 acres by the Boston and Florida company to the Florida East Coast Railway, but did not press this issue and asked only for Sawyer's views to help him understand the complicated arrangements for the sale of company lands. Interestingly, he conceded that the agreement was beneficial to the company: "By joining in the colonies your Company gets the full benefit of the railroad privileges, viz. each settler gets back his fare from the R.R. Company, but we get the full price of the land." Regardless of Miles' reservations, the two companies went forward with the platting, draining, and road building that led to the settlement of Hallandale.

Though the agents were in place by February 1896 and contracts seemingly drawn up by September of that year, no final sales of land in Hallandale appear to have been made by the end of November. In a revealing letter of November 24, Ingraham informed Miles,

No sales have been made at the Hallandale Colony yet, as we are awaiting the completion of the survey and the ditches, so that an accurate map can be made. I am advised that a number of prospective settlers for this place are ready to remit payment soon as maps are finished. As the Boston Co. owns most of the muck and pine nearest to this settlement, that company's land will naturally be selected first. The best muck or
that which will be first drained, lies in section 27.\textsuperscript{5} Four days later, Miles enclosed a copy of this letter to Sawyer and promised to keep him abreast of developments.\textsuperscript{6} The developments, from Miles' point of view, were very slow in coming, as he expressed to Sawyer in early 1897:

Mr. Ingraham is daily expecting to receive applications from the Holland people, but they seem to be exceedingly slow about sending in their first payments. I am not sure that he has selected a very good location for the Holland Colony as it is necessary to cut some main drains through marsh in order to make the land available for cultivation, but until we have a transportation line of our own we have to accept the situation and take our chances of success or failure with the Railroad Company.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, the settlement did not get off to the start anticipated by the canal company executives who were prevented from taking settlers to their lands because they had not finished their own canal, the construction of which had given them title to these very lands from the state as grants from the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund.

Olof Zetterlund first appears in the Sawyer Papers in a letter dated February 2, 1897. On a piece of paper with the canal company's letterhead, the Reverend F. Jacobson wrote to Ingraham that, "...Mr. Zetterlund is now out in the field to solicit partakers in the same [an excursion to Hallandale]. But I fear that very few will partake if the old prices on land are not still good." The discussion then turned to Zetterlund's commission:

The company ventured to engage Mr. Zetterlund on the basis of your promise to me that 10% of the total sale price be paid us out of the first payment and on a 25% commission. We are naming paying him 10% and traveling expenses. Of course we do not expect this 10% on sales made up to date, but only on those made by Mr. Zetterlund and Rev. C. A. Blomgren, whose I also mentioned to you in Mr. Flagler's office.

Zetterlund's commission was fair, if those noted above are an indication of the general trend of that day, and offered strong inducement to seek out potential settlers.\textsuperscript{8} Two days later, Miles notified Sawyer of the plans for the excursion from New York City, stating that there had already been a sale of nearly 150 acres in the Hallandale settlement at $37.50 per acre. He also informed the canal company president that most of the land sold had been among the holdings of the company's land subsidiary. In a particularly revealing statement, Miles noted that "Dr. Jacobson" was a very important man: "He is the organizer of the colony and I wish to particularly call your attention to his opinion of the existing freight rates. You will see my anxiety to get another transportation line established.\textsuperscript{9}"

The freight rates Miles referred to appear to be those cited by Jacobson in his letter to Ingraham, which noted that it cost twenty dollars to ship from Jacksonville to Hallandale a few pieces of furniture which only cost thirty-seven dollars in a "first class furniture store." Rates this high may have discouraged some settlers from moving to southern Florida, a matter of some concern to the land agents there.\textsuperscript{10} In what must be admitted as a frustrating gap in our knowledge, there is no evidence as to the amount of lands sold as a result of the expedition led by Zetterlund. Dr. Adams, in his article "Historic Hallandale," correctly states that 600 acres had been sold within two months of the excursion; however, exactly how many of these sales can be attributed to Zetterlund's efforts remains to be seen. As noted previously, 150 acres were sold just prior to the excursion to other settlers/investors, a fact which should caution anyone from claiming that sale of the entire 600 acres was the result of any person's negotiations. Bill McGoun, too, is properly cautious about attributing any number of settlers to Zetterlund's promotions. Until the books of the various land companies are found and examined, it is impossible to speculate with any degree of accuracy on the success or failure of this excursion.\textsuperscript{11} By May of 1897, land sales in Hallandale were still rather slow, and the process of ditching and draining had become the subject of minor controversy between the land companies. Miles informed Sawyer that the major problem was deciding how much of each company's land had already been drained by the ditches and how much each company would be liable for in paying for drainage.\textsuperscript{12} The tone of Miles' letter indicates that he was not satisfied with the progress of land sales and expected to send only a few "Bonds-for-Title" in a "few days." No sense of urgency, which had characterized his earlier letters, seemed to have taken hold of George Miles during this lull in activity.\textsuperscript{13} Zetterlund virtually disappears from the Sawyer Papers after the February excursion from New York. However, as Bill McGoun found, Zetterlund invested in the Hallandale colony and owned a great deal of land along Hallandale Beach Boulevard and the beach itself. To quote McGoun, "His holdings at one time included everything east of the Intracoastal from Golden Beach north to Moffett Street, plus extensive holdings further west on both sides of Hallandale Beach Boulevard and at least two city blocks along the tracks, in what was then the center of town."\textsuperscript{14} McGoun goes on to state that Zetterlund continued to work out of New York with occasional trips to Florida to oversee his investments. From the letterhead of letters found in the Model Land Company holdings at the University of Miami, it can now be stated that Zetterlund lived on Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Estates, Jamaica, New York, and worked from an office at 15 Broad Street in New York City. His business letterhead declares that he was involved, in 1916, in "Investment Securities," which may have included real estate. This source also discloses that Zetterlund was actively buying, leasing, renting, and selling land in Hallandale during the 1916-18 period.\textsuperscript{15} The disappointment to the historian is that neither of
these major sources, the Sawyer Papers or the Model Land Company Papers, indicate what Zetterlund did in the period between 1896 and 1916. The Model Land Company Papers, however, reveal Zetterlund as a very active man who had investments in Cuba, Mexican mines, and a securities firm that kept him very occupied. He was also described as actively planning out the development of his beachfront property, planting trees along the private road there, and along a ten-foot wide cement walkway which lined his beach frontage. His interest in trees is also shown in his plans to plant Australian pines along the roads on his property south of the packing houses near the railroad tracks and to place "two rows of cocoanut palms" along the cement walkway. On all other streets running through his properties, he intended to plant Eucalyptus trees. Zetterlund was also involved with ditching land and leasing it to local farmers at the rate of about ten dollars per year per acre, a proposition which allowed him to recover much of the cost of ditching within the first year or two after drainage. This amount of activity indicates a man of vast energy and the ability to organize numerous, complicated affairs with sharp attention to detail.

Zetterlund’s first letter in the Model Land Company Papers is dated July 24, 1916, and is addressed to Frederick S. Morse, the real estate agency head who handled the accounts for the land company and the land agencies of the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company. A simple letter, it states that Zetterlund was on his way to Cuba and wished to meet Morse to discuss the possibility of building a road from the beach westward, through lands owned by one of Morse’s clients. In the event this was not possible, Zetterlund inquired if Morse could find a way for him to get title to the land. He also expressed an interest in acquiring any "large body of land in the Everglades suitable for general farming." Although not a farmer himself, he was willing to invest in lands that could be drained and then leased or sold. Like other investors in land in southern Florida, e.g. Hugh Taylor Birch, he wanted to dabble in constructing his own vision of paradise, and was interested in land on which to build or trade for more desirable property.

In a rather blunt letter of August 30, 1916, Fred Morse indicated a possible reason why Zetterlund did not settle in Hallandale in its early years. In describing the Swedish native to Frank Pepper, who later took over the accounts of the Morse agency, Morse stated, "Mr. Z. used to sell land at Hallandale, he was formerly with Jacobson, whom he says is a preacher and dishonest financially." This bold statement seems to indicate that, from Zetterlund’s point of view, he had been cheated by Jacobson and that this incident may have soured him on any immediate plans to settle where Jacobson was likely to show. Morse noted that he had met with Zetterlund "a good many times" and felt "pretty well acquainted with him." He additionally revealed that Zetterlund’s accent made him difficult to under-

Zetterlund letter to Morse, 1916 (courtesy of Model Land Company Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami).
Zetterlund's straightforward statements, if accurately recorded by Morse, gives an insight into his character and the reason why he did not settle in Hallandale earlier than he did.

In reading Zetterlund's correspondence to Morse, one is struck by the relative awareness that he had of land law and investment opportunities in southern Florida. A letter of March 21, 1917, illustrates this point. This letter asks Morse if he had deducted the amount of the canal company's right-of-way from the total acreage of the land Zetterlund was interested in purchasing. Zetterlund had noticed in reading the survey by the Biscayne Engineering Company that the canal company had reserved a right-of-way of 200 feet in width and that sixty-five feet of the land he wanted to acquire along the canal would be in this area. This would materially alter some of his plans for the property, and, hopefully, also reduce the price of the land to below the twenty dollars per acre then being asked. Zetterlund subsequently offered $405 for the entire parcel—the initial price of the land, reduced by the deduction of the right-of-way. The frustrating fact about this interesting letter is that Morse's answer is not directly found in the correspondence, although it is known that Zetterlund did purchase the land in question, located across the Intracoastal Waterway from today's Lake Villas property, which is also land once owned by Zetterlund.

Zetterlund's plan for the development of his Hallandale property is made clear in a letter of February 11, 1918. In this document, he explains that the prairie land east of the canal was often overflowed, especially when a strong easterly wind blew, and that only diking and pumping would solve the problem. He saw clearly that a natural flow of fresh water, via seepage, passed through the eastern prairie and made for a sub-irrigation system except near the canal, where salt water made the land "useless" but for growing the native mangroves. Properly diked and pumped, this eastern prairie would be very productive land. As Zetterlund speculated to Morse:

The subsoil is excellent for intensive farming. Owing to a flow of fresh water close to the surface furnishing moisture to the plants, crop failure would be impossible; less liable to occur. It is near the railroad station, close to the canal and city of Miami. It ought to be very valuable land should it be possible to bring it under cultivation.

It would be well to notice that Zetterlund, like many early investors in Hallandale, did not foresee the urban growth that has engulfed the city and concentrated his efforts almost totally toward agricultural development of the land.

According to the same letter, the western portion of this property would also receive extensive diking, pumping, and ditching. Zetterlund's long-range plan involved the filling in of the lands in and around "Silver Lagoon" (Lake Villas) and raising them to about four feet above the high tide level of the adjoining canal. This, however, was in the far future; what he proposed in his plan for the present was to drain the prairie lands west of the canal and open them for cultivation by capable tenants. In priority order, he stated his plans: "My intention is to fill up and improve the land east of the canal, fronting on the ocean, and also to improve certain lots in the town of Hallandale at an earlier date, in the meantime the prairie land, referred to above and situated west of the canal, could be put into good use by means of an effective drainage system, something on the order I have already suggested." The costs of labor, repair of the pumping stations and power plant (which was only to offer power to the pumps) and construction of the ditches and floodgates, he figured, would force him to ask for rent of about twenty dollars per acre per annum, a fairly high rate for agricultural land at that time. Exactly how successful Zetterlund was with this plan is not known; however, given his track record for rewarding speculation, one may venture to assume some financial rewards were realized.
Bill McGoun has given us a thumbnail sketch of Zetterlund’s later life that, at the very least, demonstrates his success as a real estate investor. McGoun notes Zetterlund’s ability to make money, even in the face of a national financial collapse, and points out the fact that he amassed a sizable estate that became the center of a major court battle among the heirs.

Although financial success alone does not make Zetterlund a significant figure in Broward County’s history, the fact that his wealth was inseparably connected with his physical alteration of the landscape, recruitment of settlers, and some political involvement warrants more intensive research into his life.

Olof Zetterlund’s contributions to Hallandale’s growth in its formative years is now better understood than before, but additional research is needed on him, and other Hallandale leaders, before a clear picture of the founders can said to have been drawn. A city as proud and vibrant as Hallandale needs to be presented in a bold historical light, and, with the opening of the Model Land Company Papers and other source materials, an important opportunity to do just that can begin.

Drawing of the Hallandale area from a 1921 real estate advertisement, showing much of the property owned and developed by Zetterlund.

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Notes

1 James E. Ingraham to George F. Miles, February 15, 1896, A. P. Sawyer Papers, Folder 6 (January-June 1896), Dodd Room of Florida History, State Library of Florida, Tallahassee (hereafter cited as Sawyer Papers, folder number, and date).

2 Ingraham to Miles, September 18, 1896, Sawyer Papers, folder 7.

3 “Mr. Linton” is probably the same William S. Linton who founded Delray Beach and for whom Linton Boulevard there is named. The town was originally called Linton after him, and it was he who recruited the community’s first settlers, mostly from Michigan. See Cecil W. and Margann Farrar, Incomparable Delray Beach—Its Early Life and Lore (Boynton Beach: Star Publishing Company, Inc., 1974).

4 Miles to Sawyer, September 19, 1896, Sawyer Papers, Folder 7.

5 Ingraham to Miles, November 24, 1896, Sawyer Papers, Folder 7.

6 Miles to Sawyer, November 28, 1896, Sawyer Papers, Folder 7.

7 Miles to Sawyer, January 28, 1897, Sawyer Papers, Folder 8.

8 P. Jacobson to Ingraham, February 2, 1897, Sawyer Papers, Folder 8. It may be noted that the commission rate of ten percent is higher than that set in many real estate markets today, which normally average about six percent. This information is taken from discussions between the author and knowledgeable people in today’s real estate business, and may not reflect the normal range of commissions at the close of the nineteenth century.

9 Miles to Sawyer, February 4, 1897, Sawyer Papers, Folder 8. Miles also noted that the dredge Biscayne, which did much of the dredging of the canal in south Florida, was being towed from Jupiter to New River by the tug Three Friends. This little detail adds something to our understanding of why and how Governor Broward, the builder and investor in the tug, came to have such intimate knowledge of the New River area.

10 Jacobson to Ingraham, February 2, 1897, Sawyer Papers, Folder 8.


12 Miles to Sawyer, May 11, 1897, Sawyer Papers, Folder 9.

13 Ibid.

14 McGoun, Hallandale, 118.

15 Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 352-353, “Olof Zetterlund.” The catalog to this collection, put together under the direction of William Brown, is an excellent example of the archivist’s art. It is logical, clear, and very “user-friendly.” The staff of the Richter Library Special Collection has done all historians of southern Florida a tremendous favor in putting together this guide to the Model Land Company Papers.

16 Zetterlund to Frederick S. Morse, January 17, 1918, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 353.

17 Frank Pepper to file, memorandum, January 14, 1918, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 353.

18 Zetterlund to Morse, July 24, 1916, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 352.

19 Morse to Pepper, August 30, 1918, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 352.

20 Zetterlund to Morse, March 21, 1917, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 352. The author’s knowledge of the Lake Villas property comes from extensive research into this land because of recent litigation.

21 Zetterlund to Morse, February 11, 1918, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 353.


23 Zetterlund to Morse, February 11, 1918, Model Land Company Papers, Box 12, Folder 353.

24 McGoun, Hallandale, 117-121.