By CHAUNCEY ROBERT CLARK, JR.

The City of Plantation began with a dream to exploit and profitably convert a watery wilderness into a site for human habitation.

Lying along the eastern border of the Everglades, this largely inaccessible tract eventually paid rich dividends to many of those bold enough to endure the hardships endemic to quasifrontier life. The first wave of entrepreneurs and settlers faced obstacles which crushed the spirit of the timid and compromising.

World War II was nearly ended, the bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, and my wife Betty and I were contemplating our return to Florida. Burt Cutler, a New York friend, met us in Washington where we took the “Champion” to Miami. For several days we considered various prospects between Key West and Palm Beach. Finally, we took State Road 7 north to a gravel turnoff leading to Peter’s Ranch. What we saw looked inviting.

Frederick C. Peters, who owned vast acreage in Goulds, Florida, and shipped thousands of carloads of potatoes, had decided to enter the cattle business. He purchased a fine herd of Hereford cattle, including an Iowa bull who cost $10,000, and grazed this cattle on his land in Goulds. His friend Stephan Zacher, who owned the Golden Shoes Ranch in Davie, was asked to come and inspect them. Cows with “pink eye” and a bull with fatal deer or horsefly bites were discovered. Zacher advised Peters to come up to Davie and look over his own or Mr. Bright’s ranch; he even would pay Peters a dollar a piece for any deer or horse flies that he could find! When Peters realized all that could be accomplished in this region, he started searching for land of his own.

Peters told us that, if we could devise a suitable plan of development, he would cooperate by giving us options on the land and by completing the drainage, dikes, and roads as needed. We passed some time appraising the ranch and then drove back to Miami. Subsequently, I returned to Washington and met with Sam Fretz, with whom I had worked in the Treasury Department.

Entrance to Plantation in 1948, located at the present site of the “Sunshine Turnpike” overpass at Broward Boulevard.
Sam had opened an office there and we spent the next several months formulating a prospectus for selling or developing the property. Our plan was to create a winter playground consisting of 40 acre ranches with an airfield, clubs, and golf courses for the small group of people who wanted to avoid the typical resort. We approached R.J. Reynolds and many other investors, but were unable to attract sufficient backing to undertake the project.

I returned to Miami. My father, Chauncey R. Clark, Sr., approached the problem from a different angle and came up with the idea of one acre lots with a home in front and an orchard in the rear. These structures would be pleasant, year-round residences for retired couples. Consequently, Robert Law Weed of Miami designed the first houses and assisted with the original layout of the development.

At that time, farm residences were limited to FHA mortgages of $3,500. By utilizing the description "Subsistence Homestead," the FHA was willing to approve regular home mortgage insurance. Dr. Walker and the board of First Federal Savings and Loan of Miami, presently known as AmeriFirst, approved the first mortgages; we were now able to proceed with the development. Peters agreed to complete the canals, dikes, and roads; construction started in March 1947.

The first property to be developed was the SE¼ of Section 2, bounded by Broward Boulevard to the south, the turnpike to the east, Sunrise Boulevard to the north, and the East Holloway Canal on the west. Divided into one acre lots, a warehouse and dormitory were erected in the southeast corner of the tract where the Village Shopping Center now stands. All materials were transported more than a mile across open fields from the ranch to the project. The ground was very dry and bulldozers were used to move the trucks through the field.

One-half mile east of State Road 7, road contractor Finley Smith started to lay Broward Boulevard to the East Holloway Canal. By late May, Smith was complaining about the quantity of water which he had to bring in for wetting down the lime rock and, therefore, announced that "I'm going to church tomorrow and pray for rain." Amazingly, on June second it started to rain and rain and rain. For ninety-three consecutive days rain fell. By this time, the road was under four to five feet of water; we could go any place on the property in an outboard boat!

Despite the flood, some work progressed. A dike was built around the warehouse where pre-cast floor slabs were poured for the first houses. By the time the two fall hurricanes had passed and the rain had ceased, fifteen houses were under construction. Not surprisingly, my home was the first one finished. Located at 19 East Acre Drive, the address was changed to 75 East Acre and, finally, to 108 East Acre Drive. My wife Betty, daughter Pamela, son Chauncey Robert III, and I moved into the house in February 1948. My youngest daughter Elisabeth was born while we were living here.

Following the 1947 flood we had difficulty with financing. One day Dr. Walker drove up from Miami and I escorted him around the property. While surveying the dreary landscape, I worried that he was not too impressed until we began discussing the advantages of living in this area. I said, "You know, it's nice to be able to go out into your back yard and catch enough bass in fifteen to twenty minutes for dinner." He looked at me as though I were kidding him. So, I took a rod from the trunk of my car and hooked a three pound bass on the first cast. Walker was so excited! I think that my catch had a lot to do with his decision to continue the financing.

In 1948 construction was fully underway. We had our own sales organization. Houses were built and sold at the rate of about three per week; soon, thirty families were living in Plantation. Work proceeded on the dikes and a pumping station was built on the East Holloway Canal at New River. The 40/41 range-line dike construction, however, was slower than originally scheduled. Nevertheless, we believed that the dike adequately would retain...
any heavy rain. In September and October of 1948 we had two more hurricanes; more than twenty inches of rain fell in a twenty-four hour period. Engineer Jack Brendla, a small group of workmen, and I were standing on the 40/41 dike in the midst of the second hurricane when 150 feet of it washed out. In less than twenty-four hours, the second flooding of Plantation began.

At this time there were houses only in the SE 1/4 of Section 2. All that could be done to prevent a recurrence of last year's events, when flood water lingered for weeks, was to construct a dike around the 1/4 section and then a half mile west to the Holloway Canal. Thus, three miles of dike were erected or repaired within seventy-two hours. Once pumping began, no water remained in any of the homes twelve hours later. To close the last section of the dike at the corner of Palm Tree and East Acre Drives, coffer dams were erected after washing out two or three times. Finally, we were restraining quite a head of water. Much physical exertion and human intervention was necessary to get the dike to hold. A group of us stood in water up to our chests and linked our arms in order to help retain the sand as it dropped from the dragline and completed the dike. When the pump was running at East Holloway, it often would jam with logs or other debris. We then would swim inside the pump and pull out the junk instead of hauling out the pump to clean it.

During this drainage episode, most of Plantation's women and children moved to Fort Lauderdale. Claude Carter, Winslow Freeman, Frank Desmond, Gil Voth, Les Bitting, and Ed Doll were some of the many men who stayed and helped on the dikes. By November most of the houses and shrubs were back in good shape and the majority of residents seemed happy with conditions.

The sale of new houses, however, was quite another story. With a reputation of being flooded two years in succession, we were unable to sell any houses during the next thirteen months. Every possible action was taken to stimulate sales. While Red Lawrence designed the Plantation Golf Club, work continued on the roads, dikes, and new houses. But after a year, Plantation Homes, Inc. was dissolved and the assets were assigned to Fred C. Peters.

Our life in Plantation with many of its original residents has been a happy one. Although our children now live in Wisconsin, Texas, and North Carolina, they enjoy returning to Plantation. Broward County is more densely populated than any of us dreamed it would be back in 1947 at the start of the venture. At that time, David Breinin of American Title and Insurance Company pointed to an office map of Palm Beach, Broward and Dade Counties, selected a spot approximately at the intersection of Broward Boulevard and University Drive, and prophesized, "Some day this is going to be the center of the Megalopolis of South Florida!"

Chauncey Robert Clark, Jr., in 1947 when he was Vice-President of Plantation Homes, Inc. Mr. Clark was a native of Grand Haven, Michigan, who became a Miami Beach resident in 1922. There he attended grammar and high school until he went to Duke University, Class of 1935. Clark was manager of the Architect's Samples Bureau, Miami Beach, until 1942 when he went to Washington as head of the Non-Metallic Section, Building Materials Division of the War Production Board.