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THE CUBAN CLUB

Parra by  
Armando Parra, Juan Borges, and Gabriel Gutierrez, 1976

Cabot

Amelia Cabot and Norma Renner interviewed these gentlemen, getting their stories recorded under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Mary Malone.

Parra

Mr. Armando Parra, began by telling his age of 79; he was born in Tampa. He came to Key West at the age of 7.

Mr. Juan Borges: 78 and born in Key West.

Mr. Gabriel Gutierrez: 77, and born in Tampa. Came to Key West at the age of 3.

Parra:

Mr. Parra: The first Cuban Club originated by was at 1317 Duval st. and the main purpose was to join together in harmony all residents—especially Cuban residents, and establish a fee quota of 25¢ a week which was to take care of doctor bills, medicine, and childbirth for the wife. The present building was inaugurated in October 1920

Sabas Baraia

The recreation department was downstairs and it was run by Mr. ....; it also had a bar but it did not have a gymnasium until it moved to the present location where one man became very famous as a boxer—a boxer who hit Broadway; his name was Pete Neidler, a Seminole Indian. He was the only man from Key West to ever reach Madison Square Garden.

Nebo

The club was a precursor of Medicare. When doctors stopped treating members for the small sums paid by the Club, the membership dropped to about 20. The building is a landmark and was sold in 1976. It is being remodeled to become a professional building.

Then came a Chess Champion, (names not understandable) and others who made moves to Tampa to become a pool shark.

The dances were very colorful and the women were so beautiful. In that group were beautiful Cuban girls with black eyes and black hair; there were also in that group beauties like the Peterson girl, the Lenninhan girl, and those American girls that were very beautiful.

There were 2000 members at that time; this has declined to 32 at the present time.

MR. GUTIERREZ: I remember when I used to dance over there; it was a little different than today. Everyone was dressed up; we'd start with the Grand March and then everybody would get their partner and start dancing. Before you would go in, though, you'd get a program with a tassle on it with the name of the Band. There were lines on this program numbered from one to maybe 20. So, you'd get lined up with all the girls you wanted to dance with you'd mark your tally, and the girl would mark hers on the same line; each time the band would stop, you'd know who you were going to dance with the next round.

We used to dance waltzes, two-steps, fox trots, things like that. The Club would have a dance once a month free of charge to the members; we'd have special dances too. Remember especially the flower dances; the hall would be all decorated inside with flowers—very beautiful. Mr. Para used to make a lot of the flowers for the decorations (he said he was taught to do that by his sister).

We used to pay 35 - 50¢ to get in to a dance. The girls mostly could not come without a chaperone. I remember their mothers used to sit around waiting and watching and when it was over, they'd take the girls home.

MR. BORGES: Told about moving the Cuban Club to its present location in 1918. They needed larger quarters. The present club is of two buildings put together.

The By-laws of the present Club—made in 1921 and were incorporated with the State of Florida. This was for protection/<sup>in case of</sup> the State troubles. It assured membership and stability and guarantee. The policies were the same in the new Club as were established in the Old Club.

The sick benefits for members were very economical; a member used to pay 25¢ a week for, doctor, medicine, and dentist. And, if the ladies paid 25¢, they were entitled to childbirth and medical care. The last doctor that we had was Dr. DePoo and Dr. Cobo was the last dentist. Dr. DePoo told me it was impossible to take care of all the members as well as his other clients. Some abuses were being made; some pretended to be sick when they weren't; they'd take the medicine to the family. The doctor knew this so he had to ask for his resignation to be accepted.

Socialized medicine was originated at the Cuban Club. Although other countries and cities claim that title, it is not true. I say that because I have made my own survey in different parts of the country.

In reading part of the by-laws, it says: "Members paying for receipt of \$25, and taken sick at the time, not being able to attend their daily work, will receive \$1.50 per day for 60 days, and \$1.00 per day thereafter until entirely recovered. Besides this benefit, they will be entitled to medical attention."

Mr. Juan Borges was a collector along with three others: Eddie Gomez, Jr., Juan Marcus, and Roger Bolita. Mr. Borges said: "We each had our routes-- about 300 members each; by the time I started collecting, the price had gone up to 60¢ a week. The benefits stayed at \$1.50 a day and we took the money to our members every day. Right now, we only have 32 members; they are charged \$3.00 a month but the only benefit we have today is the death benefit. That is \$300.

We believe now that we will lose the Cuban Club. Mr. Para added that in the State of Florida now, the Cuban Club is not able to get insurance.

Mr. Borges: In the past years while the Cuban Club has been declining in membership, the cigar makers have donated funds to assist in keeping it up. The ~~employees of the Cuban Club~~ donated a month's salary for its upkeep.

*cigar makers*

The cigar makers donated a cuban flag for the Cuban Club (for the revolution).

*Martí*

Mr. Para: ~~Martí~~ came to Key West in the search of cooperation and money to continue the revolution in Cuba. He did this in Key West, Tampa, Jacksonville, and to the cigar makers in New York. From there, he went to Washington and met Teddy Roosevelt in Washington. The friendship was made and Teddy Roosevelt guaranteed cooperation, in the revolution, which he honored. and eventually invaded Cuba with his rough riders, and beat the Spaniards out. In 1898, Cuba got its freedom. A Cuban flag was given to each cigarmaker by Martí himself, and each cigarmaker donated 10% of their salary to the cause of the revolution.

*Rosillo*

Mr. Borges: Mr. ~~Señor~~, tried to fly a plane from Key West to Cuba and stated if he was successful, he would donate \$200 to the Cuban Club. He was successful and flew back to Key West and donated his \$200. There is a monument dedicated to him at the Key West International Airport.

(About one minute at the end of the tape was not understandable).