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A CYCLONE HITS MIAMI: CARRIE NATION'S VISIT TO "THE WICKED CITY"

by PAUL S. GEORGE *

WHEN CARRIE NATION visited Miami in March 1908, the crusade against alcohol had already met with great success in the South and in many other areas of the country. With national Prohibition still twelve years away, more than two-thirds of the counties in the eleven states of the old Confederacy had voted in local-option elections to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages in their communities. While many counties in Florida were in the dry column, Dade remained wet. Surprisingly, Miami, county seat of Dade, had, in its brief existence, already experienced both dry and wet eras. ¹

Before Miami's incorporation in 1896, Julia Tuttle and the Brickell family, the city's most prominent pioneers, had turned over to Henry M. Flagler, the millionaire railroad and hotel developer, land that comprised the community's original boundaries, with the stipulation that anti-liquor clauses must appear in the deeds to each lot sold. These clauses prohibited landowners from "buying, selling, or manufacturing" alcoholic drink at the risk of having their land revert to the original owners. ²

Although several entrepreneurs erected saloons less than twenty feet north of the city limits in North Miami, Miami itself remained dry until after the death of Julia Tuttle in 1898. Following her demise, Harry Tuttle, her son and executor of the estate, sold a lot to a prospective saloon keeper without the anti-liquor clause in its deed. Within months of the transaction a

* Mr. George, who received his doctorate in history from Florida State University, is a director of the Florida Historical Society.

1. James Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), 150.
2. Ruby Leach Carson, "Miami: 1896 to 1900," *Tequesta*, XVI (1956), 8; Helen Muir, *Miami, U. S. A.* (New York, 1953), 68; John Sewell, *John Sewell's Memoirs and History of Miami, Florida* (Miami, 1933), 139. The lone exception to this stricture was Flagler, who received permission from Mrs. Tuttle and the Brickells to serve drinks in the Royal Palm Hotel during the tourist season.

saloon opened on the property. After this action went uncontested, Harry Tuttle sold other lots without liquor clauses, some of which became sites of additional taverns. By 1908, Miami contained eight saloons which, according to one pioneer, engaged in "a thriving business."³

Although the saloon business was brisk, a strong temperance element began to surface. In its vanguard were local chapters of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Anti-Saloon League, numerous clergymen, and the *Miami Daily Metropolis*, the city's leading newspaper. As the prohibitionist forces grew, they prevailed upon the city council for more stringent liquor laws. Accordingly, the council enacted a series of laws prohibiting taverns in residential sections, increased significantly the fee on liquor licenses, limited the hours a bar could operate, and urged vigorous enforcement of a state law banning the sale of alcohol to Indians.⁴

Many liquor dealers ignored these strictures due in large measure to the inability of the area's understaffed police department to enforce them. Meanwhile, incidents of bootlegging and drunkenness rose sharply, resulting, according to the *Miami Metropolis*, in "many men reeling about Miami streets."⁵ On other occasions this journal complained of the rowdiness of Miami's saloons and the practice by many politicians of distributing free alcohol to voters on election day in return for their support. Joining the *Metropolis* was the Anti-Saloon League, which, in a 1907 resolution to the Florida legislature, complained of the ineffectiveness of the police in upholding the area's liquor laws and requested assistance in battling the evil.⁶

Shortly thereafter, the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU decided to place the issue of a wet or dry county before voters in a special local-option election. Held in October 1907, the contest

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3. *Minutes of the City Council* (hereinafter cited as *MCC*), III, July 2, 1908, 257; *Miami Metropolis*, July 24, 1908; Sewell, *John Sewell's Memoirs and History of Miami*, 141-42; *Official Directory of the City of Miami* (Miami, 1908), 227.
 4. *MCC*, I, December 5, 1901, 223, August 6, 1903, 321; II, November 16, 1905, 209, November 1, 1906, 368; III, September 19, 1907, 41-42; *Miami Metropolis*, June 4, August 14, 1909.
 5. *Miami Metropolis*, May 30, 1902.
 6. *Daily Miami Metropolis*, April 12, 1907; *Miami Metropolis*, May 14, 1906. Depending on the year, the *Miami Metropolis* was also known as the *Daily Miami Metropolis*, *Miami Daily Metropolis*, and, by the early 1920s, the *Miami Daily News and Metropolis*.

resulted in a narrow defeat for the dries. The strong showing of the temperance forces, however, only stiffened their resolve for a dry county.⁷

Accordingly, a second referendum followed two years of intense campaigning by prohibitionists. Their strategy centered on the recruitment of new members. To achieve this goal, temperance elements, led by the WCTU, launched a series of recruiting drives highlighted by impassioned orators who spoke before large audiences. The high point of the campaign came with the appearance in Miami of Carrie Nation, one of the country's most influential and impassioned temperance advocates.⁸

At the time of her appearance in Miami, Nation was sixty-one years of age and in the twilight years of her stormy career. Tall and muscular, she was a woman of commanding presence, but a tragic life had left her singularly unhappy. Carrie's mother, Mary Moore, suffered from the grandiose delusion that she was Queen Victoria, and she spent her final years in an insane asylum. Dr. Charles Gloyd, Carrie's first husband, was an alcoholic who died two years after their marriage in 1867, leaving a young widow and a child affected with mental disorders. David Nation, her second husband, was a failure at nearly everything he attempted, causing his spouse further anguish. The marriage eventually ended in divorce.⁹

Mrs. Nation's interest in prohibition began with her attempt to break her first husband of his drinking habit. During this period she purportedly received a "command from God to go out and smash saloons."¹⁰ Carrie did not respond to this command, however, until thirty years later in 1900. By then she was living in Kansas, which was attempting with little success to enforce prohibition. Disappointed with the ineffectiveness of prohibition

7. *Minutes of the County Commission*, II, October 19, 1907, 321; *Miami Metropolis*, October 16, 1907; Isidor Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami, Florida* (Miami, 1925), 57.

8. *Miami Herald*, August 20, 1916; *Miami Metropolis*, March 7, 8, 1908; Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami*, 59; Alfred Hanna and Kathryn Hanna, *Florida's Golden Sands* (Indianapolis, 1950), 280.

9. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908; Stewart H. Holbrook, "Bonnet, Book, and Hatchet," *American Heritage*, IX (December 1957), 53-55, 120-21; Carlton Beals, *Cyclone Carry: The Story of Carry Nation* (Philadelphia, 1962), 10-12, 42-50, 52-59; Carry Nation, *The Use and Need of the Life of Carry A. Nation* (Topeka, 1905), 34-40; Robert Taylor, *Vessel of Wrath* (New York, 1966), 18, 51-53, 59, 61.

10. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908. The *Morning News-Record* became the *Miami Herald* in 1911.

in Kansas, Nation directed futile appeals to state officials for stricter enforcement.¹¹

The failure of these entreaties moved her to embark on a more forceful approach. Armed with a hatchet, bricks, and a Bible, Carrie Nation assaulted her first saloon in Kiowa, Kansas, in June 1900. The damage she inflicted was extensive, with windows, bottles, and mirrors succumbing to her deadly missiles. "I hit everything I threw at," she later explained.¹² Inspired by this success, Mrs. Nation decided to take her campaign to other areas of the state.¹³

After numerous saloon smashings in Kansas, Carrie embarked upon a nationwide tour and broadened her list of targets to include tobacco, fraternal lodges, sexual immorality, and even President Theodore Roosevelt, who incurred her wrath not only for his opposition to prohibition, but also for his failure to break his brash daughter, Alice, of her nicotine habit. For years Mrs. Nation toured the country in her war against these evils. Lecture fees, which sometimes reached \$300 for a week of appearances, along with the sale of souvenir hatchets, copies of her autobiography, *The Use and Need of the Life of Carry A. Nation*, and a weekly publication, *The Hatchet*, sustained her temperance crusade.¹⁴

Carrie's *modus operandi* included an address containing a liberal sprinkling of quotations from scripture on the evils of alcohol mixed with harsh words for local politicians and saloon keepers and their patrons. Following her speech, Carrie sometimes repaired to the town's saloon area, entered a tavern, and boldly flailed away at everything within reach with a hatchet. On other occasions, "Cyclone Carrie," as she was sometimes called, hurled bricks about the property. Usually she waved them while severely scolding the startled patrons, imploring them to forsake drink and return to their families. For her efforts, Mrs. Nation was jailed more than thirty times and sustained many injuries. But her

11. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908; Holbrook, "Bonnet, Book, and Hatchet," 53.

12. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908.

13. *Ibid.*; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908; Holbrook, "Bonnet, Book and Hatchet," 53-54.

14. *Miami Metropolis*, March 5, 10, 11, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908; Holbrook, "Bonnet, Book, and Hatchet," 120.

indomitable spirit brought increasing attention to one of the most controversial issues of the day.¹⁵

Mrs. Nation came to Miami in 1908 at the invitation of the local chapter of the WCTU, following visits to several other Florida cities. She arrived on Monday, March 2, one week prior to her scheduled meetings. She wanted time for "resting and recuperating," revising her new book, and visiting taverns to "warn saloon men of their peril."¹⁶

Two days after her arrival, Carrie appeared at a religious meeting in the Gospel Tent opposite the county courthouse in downtown Miami. Before a large, enthusiastic audience, she told of her mission and outlined plans for the following week. She averred that "her work was in defence [*sic*] of men, women and children and all that she has done was for the protection of the family."¹⁷ She insisted that this mission was "very dirty" and not of her "choosing," but "the same God that put a staff in Moses['] hand[,] a jawbone, in Sampson's [*sic*] hand, a sling in David's hand, put a hatchet in Carrie Nation's hand."¹⁸ Mrs. Nation admitted, however, that she was abandoning the hatchet as a weapon "for I have learned that I must go to the source of the trouble."¹⁹ "My cry," she proclaimed "is 'on to Washington.'" The country's lawmakers had it within their power to "close up saloons."²⁰ Carrie exhorted her audience to "write to your representatives and ask them to vote right."²¹

Echoing the feelings of many temperance supporters, the *Metropolis* applauded Carrie's "warmup" appearance, and maintained that many "disinterested persons" who "thought Mrs. Nation simply a sufferer from a certain form of dementia Americana . . . are daily changing their opinions."²² The *Metropolis* also informed its readers of the crusader's desire for information from all persons with knowledge of corruption and vice in the

15. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March II, 1908; Holbrook, "Bonnet, Book, and Hatchet," 120.

16. *Miami Metropolis*, March 3, 5, 7, 1908; Samuel Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward: Florida's Fighting Governor* (Gainesville, 1950), 280-81.

17. *Miami Metropolis*, March 5, 1908.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, March 7, 1908.

area. On Saturday night, Carrie and two of her hostesses from the WCTU embarked on their own reconnaissance mission.²³

The trio visited several bistros where they witnessed gambling, as well as men *and* women drinking. The tour went without incident until the "investigators" entered Lassiter's, near the center of Miami's business district. There a patron grabbed Mrs. Nation amid shouts of "put her out," but when she threatened retaliation, her assaulter decided to leave her alone.²⁴ Carrie and her escorts then ascended to the second floor of the saloon and walked into a "gambling game."²⁵ Their surprising presence sent some of the participants scurrying from the room "with cards and chips in their hands."²⁶

The party's last stop was North Miami, a community of saloons, gambling dens, and brothels. Entering a brothel, Nation "found a number of women lounging around in loose attire, smoking and using profane and vulgar language."²⁷ Further examination of the establishment revealed a couple in a "darkened room." Carrie managed to "trick" its startled occupants into admitting that they were not married to each other. According to the newspaper account, "One of the women with a man in her room said that the man was her husband. 'What is your name?' asked Mrs. Nation. 'Smith,' was the answer. Quick as a flash Mrs. Nation darted into the room and asked the man. 'Johnson,' was the answer."²⁸ This tour satisfied Mrs. Nation that there was "crime and corruption in plenty in Miami."²⁹

One of the persons interested in these findings was County Solicitor H. Pierre Branning, who subpoenaed the trio to learn more about "just what crimes (they) saw on Saturday night."³⁰ Their testimony, given on Monday, March 9, led to issuance of additional subpoenas on the following day to elements of Miami's "sporting crowd," as the investigation of gambling and other illegal activities broadened.³¹

Several hours after her meeting with Branning, Carrie ad-

23. *Ibid.*, March 7, 9, 1908.

24. *Ibid.*, March 9, 1908.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, March 11, 13, 1908.

dressed an audience in excess of 2,000, the "largest crowd in the history of Miami," in the Gospel Tent.³² Accompanying her on the platform were members of the WCTU and several local ministers. The first two rows of seating across from the platform were occupied by young girls, "the future women, wives, and mothers of our city and country," who, on signal, "marched to the platform and filled the air with the sweet words and strains" of a temperance song.³³ In her address, Carrie quoted from scripture on the evils of drink, reviewed her career as a temperance advocate, and blamed the local authorities for the area's liquor traffic, insisting that Miami had a far-reaching reputation for wickedness owing to official corruption.³⁴

At the conclusion of the talk, Solicitor Branning, "in thunderous tone and voice filled with apparent excitement and extreme anger," denounced Mrs. Nation's charge that Miami officials had shirked their responsibilities after accepting bribes. He challenged Mrs. Nation to produce evidence for her assertion.³⁵ Pulling two bottles of whiskey from the "mysterious confines of her dress," Carrie thundered: "these were purchased from North Miami on Sunday," in contravention of state law.³⁶ Pandemonium "reigned for the next several minutes."³⁷ After the audience quieted down a bit, Branning began to speak on the "brutality of woman against man," but his words became quickly inaudible by the loud peals of the organ, reinforced by the "joyful voices" of the crowd singing "Onward Christian Soldiers."³⁸ Although the meeting was over, Mrs. Nation was not finished. After leaving the tent, she saw some men smoking, and promptly pounced on them, knock-

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32. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908; Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population*, II (Washington, 1913), 66. This figure represented a sizable percentage of Miami's population, for the census figures of 1910, the closest year for which data exists, show that the city contained 5,471 inhabitants.
33. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*; Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami*, 61; Hanna and Hanna, *Florida's Golden Sands*, 280.
36. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908.
37. *Ibid.*; Hanna and Hanna, *Florida's Golden Sands*, 280.
38. *Ibid.*; *Miami Herald*, August 20, 1916; Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami*, 60.

ing cigars from their mouths, while screaming, "you tobacco-saturated loafers, why don't you go home to your wives?"³⁹

Coverage of Carrie's address reflected the division of the city's two news dailies over the issue of prohibition. The *Metropolis* praised her "commonsense, logical talk," maintaining that "scripture is taken as the foundation for the war she is waging on the liquor traffic."⁴⁰ But the *Miami Morning News-Record* believed "it did not seem to matter last night that the chapter which (Nation) chose for her text had not the remotest connection with present day conditions."⁴¹ The *Morning News-Record* also questioned Mrs. Nation's "triumph" over Solicitor Branning, since "she failed to state by whom" the whiskey was purchased.⁴²

Mrs. Nation's subsequent addresses before large Miami audiences lacked the excitement of the opening speech. She continued to denounce local officials in harsh tones, accusing them, in the words of the *Morning News-Record*, "of all awful things which she claims to have discovered are rampant here."⁴³ On one occasion, Mrs. Nation attempted to substantiate her allegations by reading from a letter containing a list of "corrupt places" in the area.⁴⁴ But as the *Morning News-Record* saw it, the "mountebank lecturer's" expose "was about the same rambling, disconnected, illogical talk as the preceding evenings."⁴⁵ Even the *Metropolis* questioned the accuracy of some of her information. The *News-Record*, however, had the final word here, suggesting, with a hint of sarcasm, that Mrs. Nation had "satisfied herself that she is exactly and infallibly right."⁴⁶

Joining the *News-Record* in its attacks on Carrie was the *Tampa Tribune*, which maintained that "Miami seems to be taking Carrie Nation seriously with the aid of its disreputable daily the *Metropolis*."⁴⁷ Later, the *Tribune* would insist that

39. *Miami Herald*, August 20, 1916; Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami*, 61.

40. *Miami Metropolis*, March 10, 1908.

41. *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 10, 1908.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1908.

44. *Miami Metropolis*, March 13, 1908.

45. *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 13, 21, 1908.

46. *Miami Metropolis*, March 13, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 13, 1908.

47. Cited in the *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 19, 1908.

"what Carrie did to mess up the nerves of that pretty East Coast community [would be] a good study for psychologists."⁴⁸

Mrs. Nation's harangues also contained criticism of the federal government, especially President Roosevelt, who she called a "beer guzzling Dutchman," for failure to heed her appeals for prohibition. She described the "tortures" of her frequent incarcerations, spoke on "the women's mission from the standpoint of the Bible," and condemned the Masons and other secret orders whom, she insisted, were "conceived in hell and the devil were [sic] the daddy of them."⁴⁹ During one of her final sessions in Miami, Florida Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward joined her on the platform, and according to the *News-Record*, "proceeded for a time to deliver a fair imitation of a prohibition speech."⁵⁰

Carrie also spoke in the afternoon to mixed, as well as segregated audiences of men and women. These sessions were devoted to prayer and testimony and discussions on sexual purity. Despite her heavy schedule, Mrs. Nation managed to sell many personal items, including an estimated \$300 worth of hatchets.⁵¹

Shortly after the conclusion of her lectures in Miami, Mrs. Nation took her crusade to other parts of Florida. Although the *News-Record* maintained that in spite of the crusader's efforts "people here will continue to be almost as good as ever-and no better," her impact on Miami was significant.⁵² For the first time in anyone's memory, local and county officials were arresting numerous violaters of the Sunday liquor laws. In some cases, the police received tips on transgressors from concerned citizens. Although data is unavailable on the size of temperance groups in Miami during this period, a new organization, the Dade County Civic Association, designed "to promote and encourage good morals, good government, temperance and civic righteousness," was organized soon after Carrie's visit.⁵³

The city council also showed the effects of Carrie's appear-

48. Cited in *ibid.*, March 26, 1908.

49. *Miami Metropolis*, March 11, 13, 1908.

50. *Miami Metropolis*, March 14, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 15, 1908; Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 281.

51. *Miami Metropolis*, March 7, 10, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 13, 22, 1908.

52. *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 18, 1908.

53. *Miami Metropolis*, March 26, 31, August 29, 1908; *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 31, 1908.

ances. In May, it passed a tough saloon ordinance which reduced operating hours, placed restrictions on the size of the saloon district, called for the removal of any screen, frosted glass, or obstruction which prevented passers-by from seeing into saloons, banned women and children from bar premises, ordered saloons to close at ten o'clock on weeknights and midnight on Saturdays, and made it an offense to sell liquor to a drunkard or a person already intoxicated.⁵⁴ Following passage of this legislation, the Miami Police Department instituted periodic inspections of saloons and intensified the campaign against drunkenness. Meanwhile, much of the attention of the area's other law enforcement agency was riveted on the race for sheriff. One candidate, M. W. Goode, was running on an unprecedented anti-vice platform. Goode promised as sheriff to "use every means within my power to break up the gambling evil in this county and the illegal selling of liquor."⁵⁵ Surprisingly, the *News-Record* adopted a similar view. In late March 1908, the journal announced that "many Miamians were anxious for a cleanup," and it called for a campaign to "rid the city of vice" and "bad saloons."⁵⁶

Despite these developments, Dade County prohibition came only after additional difficulties and renewed efforts by the dry elements. For the temperance cause suffered another setback in a local-option election in 1909, and was forced to campaign for several more years in pursuit of its goal. Finally, in 1913, prohibitionists prevailed in another local-option contest, and Dade joined the other dry counties in Florida.⁵⁷

Ironically, prohibition, especially its national phase, lent additional credence to Mrs. Nation's insistence on the wickedness of Miami. For the city not only flouted prohibition as brazenly as any community in the country, but its proximity to the liquor smuggling Bahama Islands enabled it to become one of the chief purveyors of drink during the Prohibition Era of the 1920s. In the process, Miami attracted a gangster element anxious to exploit the opportunities for great wealth through illicit traffic in liquor, thereby ensuring its image of a "wide-open" city.

54. *Miami Metropolis*, April 17, 1908.

55. *Ibid.*, March 17, 20, April 17, 18, 20, May 8, July 24, October 21, 1908. Although the council passed the saloon ordinance in April, a technicality prevented it from becoming law until May.

56. *Miami Morning News-Record*, March 21, 22, 24, 1908.

57. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, November 8, 1909, October 31, November 4, 1913; *Miami Herald*, November 5, 1913.