1-1-1960

Who was Jefferson Bell?

Hampton Dunn

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MIAI MI --- The neat little white frame house hidden underneath those lush coconut palms near an expressway caught the eye of a Miami decorator whose offices were nearby. So it was, C. Robert loss, sometimes called Charlie Ross, looked up the owners of the then vacant house at 3630 N.E. 1st Ct., and learned that it once was owned by Jefferson Bell.

Jefferson who? Actually, it was Jeff Bell, for short. And Jeff Bell was the top society columnist for The Miami Herald at the height of the Florida real estate boom when America's most famous socialites were discovering Miami and were making news for Jeff's column.

Jeff, by the way, was a woman, and an outstanding journalist not just as a society gossiper. At one time she covered the Florida Legislature for the Associated Press.

She turned to keeping tabs of the great and near great and wrote "society" for The Herald when the news was being made by William Jennings Bryan. Harvey Firestone, Peggy Hopkins Joyce, President Warren G. Harding and Al Capone. Also much in evidence at the time were the developers Carl G. Fisher and George Merrick, among others.

Jefferson Bell's cute home, the scene of parties and social events too, was built originally for an Elizabeth Newton on a land grant of 40 acres given to William Smith in 1892 before Flagler brought his railroad to Miami. The house is steeped-roofed, has double-hung windows, portico and all. Jeff Bell quit the newspaper "game" after 25 years and returned to her home town of Ocala because of ill health. She died there in 1944. She left behind a valuable collection of letters and post cards from all those famous people she'd written about.