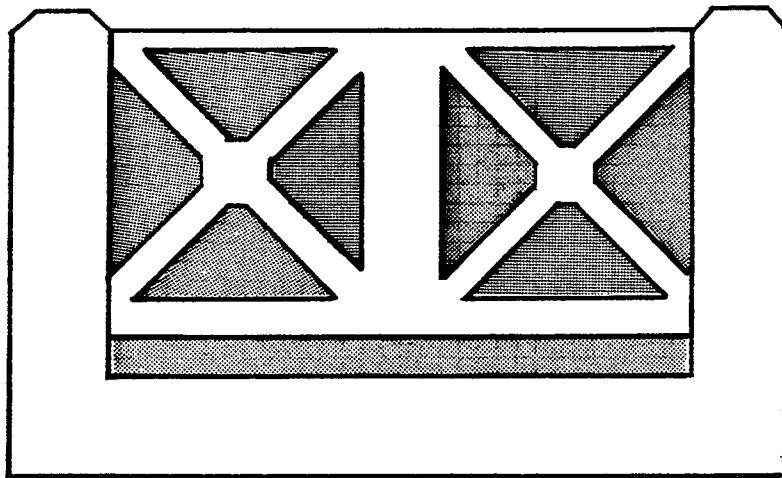


**VENETIAN CAUSEWAY
HISTORIC SITE
DESIGNATION REPORT**



CITY OF MIAMI BEACH PLANNING & ZONING DEPARTMENT

DECEMBER 1988

I. REQUEST

At its June 2, 1988 meeting, the Miami Beach Historic Preservation Board voted to nominate that portion of the Venetian Causeway within the corporate limits of Miami Beach for local Historic Preservation Site designation. The preliminary evaluation describing the nominated site's general conformance with the criteria for designation was presented to the Board on July 7, 1988. On October 6, 1988, the Board directed staff to proceed with the preparation of a designation report. The following report is submitted in compliance with that direction. The report was prepared with data submitted to the National Register of Historic Places by the Venetian Islands Association on May 16, 1988.

II. DESIGNATION PROCESS

The process of historic designation is described in Section 22-5(A) of the Miami Beach Zoning Ordinance. An outline of this process is provided below:

Step One: A request for designation is made either by the Historic Preservation Board, other agencies and organizations as listed in the Ordinance, or the property owners involved.

Step Two: The Planning and Zoning Department prepares a preliminary evaluation and recommendation for consideration by the Board.

Step Three: The Historic Preservation Board reviews the evaluation to determine compliance with the criteria for designation and then votes to direct the Planning and Zoning Department to prepare a designation report.

The designation report is a complete historical and architectural analysis of the proposed district or site. The report 1) serves as the basis for a recommendation for nomination by the Board; 2) describes review guidelines to be utilized by the Board when a Certificate of Appropriateness is requested; and, 3) will serve as an attachment to the Zoning Ordinance creating the new zoning district.

Step Four: The designation report is presented to the Board at a public hearing during a regularly scheduled meeting. If the Board determines that the proposed designation meets the intent and criteria set forth in the Ordinance, they transmit a recommendation to the Planning Board.

Step Five: The Planning Board processes the proposed designation as a Zoning Ordinance amendment.

As such, the Planning Board will hold a public hearing on the proposed designation and, subsequently, transmit its recommendation to the City Commission.

Step Six: The City Commission may, after two (2) public hearings, adopt the amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, which thereby designates the Historic Preservation District (or site).

III. PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Location: Commencing at the northwest corner of Lot 70, Nelson Villa Subdivision in the City of Miami, ending at the west line of Block 15, Island View Subdivision, in the City of Miami Beach, running in an eastwest direction (see Exhibit I).

Ownership: Metropolitan Dade County

Present Use: County road

2. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A. Historical

The Venetian Causeway, spanning Biscayne Bay, is the oldest causeway remaining in its original form, linking the mainland of Miami to the island of Miami Beach. The Venetian Causeway is located just north of downtown Miami, at N.E. 15th Street, and extends eastward across the bay to Dade Boulevard in Miami Beach. The causeway, approximately two and one half miles in length, is composed of twelve bridges, including two drawbridges, and roadway. The entrance to the causeway, which is at its western end, on the Miami side, is graced by simple geometric columns. All of the bridges along the causeway feature low, open, symmetrical railings over and through which the view of the bay is unobstructed. The Venetian Causeway crosses six islands the bridges occur intermittently between the islands. The islands, from west to east, are named Biscayne Island, San Marco, San Marino, Di Lido, Rivo Alto and Belle Isle. The Venetian Causeway was completed in 1926, shortly after the four central islands were created for residential development.

The Bay Biscayne Improvement Company was responsible for the construction of the Venetian Islands and the Venetian Causeway. The company's officers were: Josiah F.

Chaille, President; F.C.B. Le Gro, Vice-President; and, Hugh M. Anderson, Secretary/Treasurer. These three men were involved in the real estate business. Chaille and Anderson had previously been associated in 1917, in the development of the Wynwood Park subdivision. Le Gro was responsible for opening the Highland Park subdivision in 1910. In addition, in 1916, Le Gro had been affiliated with John S. Collins in the development of Belle Isle, the easternmost island on the Venetian Causeway. Marshall Price and Colonel Frank B. Shutts, Directors of the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company, were both well-known attorneys. Shutts was the publisher of the Miami Herald.

Through the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company, these five prominent Miamians planned to create a residential development out of bay bottom. They envisioned the creation of a chain of islands across Biscayne Bay. The chosen location for their island-building venture was alongside the Collins Bridge.

Preparations for the purchase of the desired property were undertaken. The Internal Improvement Board in Tallahassee and the Corps of Engineers in Jacksonville were contacted in order to obtain the necessary approvals. John S. Collins, Miami Beach pioneer and owner of the Collins Bridge, was approached regarding the sale of the bridge. The Collins Bridge, a wooden structure, completed in 1913, was an essential part of the development plans of the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company.

The company's principals chose the name "Venetian Islands" for their planned island community. Their wish was that the project be associated with the City of Venice - a community of "villas" of Italian inspired architecture within a landscape of water. The company resolved to approach their development project in phases. Four islands were planned, to be constructed one at a time, beginning west of the existing island of Belle Isle.

Upon completion of the islands, the Biscayne Bay Improvement Company knew it would be necessary to replace the deteriorating Collins Bridge. However, access to the islands during the initial development period would be achieved via the old bridge. The Collins Bridge, thought to be the longest wood bridge in the world, was considered an engineering accomplishment for its time.

Plans proceeded smoothly. The Bay Biscayne Improvement Company obtained all the necessary permits and the purchase of the Collins Bridge. Island building immediately began. The Venetian Islands, bearing Italian

names were platted as follows: Rivo Alto in February, 1922; Di Lido in January, 1923; and, San Marino and San Marco in June, 1923. Whitney C. Bliss, the engineer of record, was responsible for preparing the layout of the islands.

The Venetian Islands would contain over 450 residential lots. Two sales offices were opened to market the development. One office was located in downtown Miami, another at the Miami side of the Collins Bridge. Lots, still underwater, were sold from the plats. Sales contracts specified that a purchaser would receive a lot on an island that had been dredged, filled and bulkheaded by a sea wall of one to three feet thick. The contract also stipulated that the island would be equipped with roadways, sidewalks, utilities and other amenities. Furthermore, the purchase agreement guaranteed that the Collins Bridge would be replaced. A toll would be charged for usage of the new access road. However, the toll would be waived for Venetian Islands residents.

The construction of the Venetian Islands and the sale of its lots swiftly progressed. In 1924, the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company began drawing up plans for the replacement of the Collins Bridge. The engineer in charge of submitting plans for a new access road to the Venetian Islands was Harvey Stanley. Several designs for the roadway were presented. The one that was chosen was estimated to cost two million dollars. The new structure would be made of concrete. Work began on the construction of the Venetian Causeway in February, 1925. The contractor chosen to undertake the project was the Raymond Concrete Pile Company of New York. James M. Thompson served as superintendent.

A description of how the Venetian Causeway was built, including statistical information, follows:

The causeway consisted of a combination of viaducts and fill. There were eighteen viaduct units, running a total of 4,200 linear feet, which were arranged to take account of tidal flow. The longest, on the Miami side, ran 1,340 linear feet. The project featured two modern bascule-type draw bridges, one at each side of the bay, which allowed for 12-foot clearances when closed. Fills ran an additional 4,005 linear feet, fills and viaducts totalling 8,205 linear feet. Fill for both the causeway and islands came to 3,000,000 cubic yards.

The roadway was eighty feet wide, curb-to-curb, with four-foot sidewalks on both sides. The road surface on the fill was laid over two feet of boulders which, in turn, lay over a mat built from planks

from the old wooden bridge. 278 white way street lights illuminated the roadway.

84,000 linear feet of concrete piling were featured in the project. 25,000 barrels of cement and 30,000 pounds of steel were required for the piers and abutments. The abutments were of the arch-girder type. 1

The completion of the Venetian Causeway was scheduled to take place towards the end of 1925. However, an embargo on the shipment of building supplies somewhat delayed this date. On February 28, 1926, a formal dedication ceremony took place at the entrance of the causeway. The developers of the Venetian Islands and the Venetian Causeway were praised for their significant accomplishments. The islands and causeway were considered engineering feats of both beauty and practicality.

Biscayne Island, the westernmost island on the Venetian Causeway was not part of the original Venetian Islands development. Biscayne Island Corporation's President was Lucy C.T. Magraw and its Secretary, Albert R. Smith. The engineer in charge of the layout of the island was William B. Garris, a principal in the firm of Watson & Garris Civil Engineers Inc.

Today, the islands located at both extremes of the Venetian Causeway - Biscayne Island to the west, and Belle Isle to the east - are primarily occupied by new, highrise condominiums and some older apartment buildings. The four original Venetian Islands located in the center of the Venetian Causeway - San Marco, San Marino, Di Lido and Rivo Alto - exclusively contain single family residences. Many of the early homes remain from the time of the islands' initial development phase and are of Mediterranean Revival style architecture. However, many other architectural styles are represented from later development periods. All of the islands are lushly landscaped, and as was the intention of their developers, water is a principal element of the landscape, rarely out of view.

As has been so eloquently expressed: "These graceful, symmetrical, gem-like islands and causeway, strung across the bay like pearls on a giant necklace, have come to be prize pieces of the majestic panorama which is the Greater Miami scene." 2

B. ARCHITECTURAL

The Venetian Causeway links the mainland of Miami and Miami Beach across Biscayne Bay. The causeway consists

of twelve bridges connecting six islands, spanning a distance of two and one half miles. The islands - from west to east - Biscayne Island, San Marco, San Marino, Di Lido, Rivo Alto and Belle Isle - are connected to N.E. 15 Street on the Miami side of the causeway, and to Dade Boulevard on the Miami Beach side of the causeway. The connectors are a series of viaducts, built of reinforced concrete, all of the same design and construction. The roadbeds are carried on shallow arched girders resting on square concrete piers anchored to the bay bottom. It is believed that the planks are embedded under the road surface on the landfill portions of the causeway. 3 The guardrails on the bridges, all of them fairly intact, are perhaps the most striking feature in the bridges' appearance. They are of reinforced concrete, in a pierced, ornamental geometric design that has central square units with radiating diagonals forming an "X" pattern. This basic theme is repeated to form a bold pattern that allows a view of the bay from all of the bridges. None of the original street light fixtures remain, other than the two masonry light fixtures at the Miami entrance to the causeway, as described below.

The distribution of the bridges of the Venetian Causeway, from west to east, is as follows:

Bridge 1 connects Miami with Biscayne Island. This is the longest bridge, approximately .4 miles long. At the western end, the causeway is approached from Miami through a pair of octagonal entrance towers topped by lights. The tapering vertical concrete towers are reminiscent of miniature lighthouses. The lights no longer function. On the walls of the towers are inscribed in bas relief the words "Short Way" on the north tower, and "Venetian Way" on the south tower. Toward the center point of the viaduct is a steel bascule type drawbridge. This and all of the other bridges are of very low rise, providing a clearance above the water of from 10 to 12 feet. At the east end of the viaduct, on the south side, is a small wood frame maintenance shed, built in utilitarian construction, it appears to be contemporary with the bridge. Just beyond is a more recently constructed toll booth stretching the full width of the road.

Bridge 2 connects Biscayne Island to San Marco Island. It is of the same design and materials, but of considerably shorter span, less than .1 miles long.

Bridges 3 and 4 span the bay between San Marco Island and San Marino Island. Rather than using a longer bridge, the span is achieved by two short bridges, which rest on a central landing, a small narrow piece of landfill landscaped with sea grape and palm trees.

The same scheme of double short bridges resting on a central islet is repeated between San Marino Island and Di Lido Island by Bridges 5 and 6, and again between Di Lido Island and Rivo Alto Island by Bridges 7, and 8.

The span across the bay between Rivo Alto Island and Belle Isle is longer. The shorter bridges are still used, to continue the small, intimate character and scale of the Venetian styled bridges. Bridge 9 rests on the same type of small landing as the previous ones. Bridge 10, however, springing from the same landing, is slightly longer and contains the second bascule type steel drawbridge in its center span. The bridge lands again on a similar landfill islet as it's springing at the other end. From that second landing springs Bridge 11, similar to Bridge 9.

Bridge 12 is a single span, connecting Belle Isle with the Miami Beach mainland.

3. RELATION TO ORDINANCE CRITERIA

In accordance with Section 22-5(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, eligibility for designation is determined on the basis of compliance with listed criteria. There are two levels of criteria. The first level is referred to as a Mandatory Criteria, which is required of all nominated sites or districts. The second level is referred to as Review Criteria. Compliance with at least one of several listed criteria is required. The Venetian Causeway is eligible for designation as it complies with the criteria as outlined below.

A. Mandatory Criteria

Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and association.

Staff finds the nominated site to be in conformance with the mandatory criteria for the following reasons:

The Venetian Causeway has maintained integrity of location in that although alterations have occurred in roadway width, the placement of bridges and roadway has not been changed. The design of bridge profiles and railings have remained as originally constructed in 1925, although original light fixtures have been removed. The setting of the Causeway, with the exception of substantial changes in the use and character of Biscayne and Belle Islands, has also remained substantially the same. The materials and workmanship involved in the original engineering and construction of the islands and causeway are impressive for that time. The

details of bridge railings, while of a simple design, are ornamental in comparison to contemporary construction and are unique to this causeway. The Causeway has a strong association with the Collins Bridge constructed in 1913 as the first physical link from Miami to what would become Miami Beach. Development of this toll bridge, then believed to be the longest wooden bridge in the world, involved the most significant early developers of Miami Beach including John Collins and Carl Fisher. Construction of the County (now MacArthur) Causeway in 1920, which was both larger and free of charge, reduced the use of the Collins Bridge which was sold to the developers of the Venetian Islands and later demolished. The existing causeway is in close proximity to the original bridge. The causeway is also associated with the development of the Venetian Islands (although only the causeway and not the islands are the subject of the nomination).

B. Review Criteria

The designation of any individual site or district requires compliance with at least one (1) of the review criteria:

- 1) Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

The Venetian Causeway is associated with the earlier Collins Bridge, the first physical link between the City of Miami and what would become Miami Beach. This first bridge resulted in a significant advance in the development of Miami Beach. The causeway is associated with the Venetian Islands, an important early residential section of Miami Beach. The causeway is also significant as an important and frequently used connection from Miami Beach to the mainland.

- 2) Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.

The Bay Biscayne Improvement Company, developers of the Venetian Islands and Causeway included several prominent local citizens. Company officers, Josiah F. Chaille, F.C.B. Le Gro, and Hugh M. Anderson were all important local real estate developers. Directors Marshall Price and Co. Frank B. Shutts were well known local attorneys. Shutts was also the publisher of the Miami Herald.

3) Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.
The construction of the Venetian Causeway project was a major engineering accomplishment in 1924.

4) Possess high artistic values

The arched bridges, detailed railing design, and island setting give the Venetian Causeway a unique appearance with high aesthetic quality.

4. PLANNING CONTEXT

A. Present Trends and Conditions

The proposed Miami Beach Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance each indicate a continued single-family use of Rivo Alto, Di Lido, and San Marino Islands. The scale and design of the Causeway and bridges contribute to the character of the single-family area. Therefore, there is no pressing need to significantly alter the existing design of the Venetian Causeway. This does not affect the necessity of keeping the Causeway in good repair and capable of safely handling the traffic demands of an arterial road.

B. Conservation Objectives

It is the intent of Historic Preservation site designation to maintain and protect the historic resource for the continued enjoyment and enrichment of future generations. The designation of the Venetian Causeway will accomplish the following objectives:

1. Maintain the Causeway in its original form to protect this element which was important in the development of the City of Miami Beach;
2. Maintain the existing bridge design to preserve a unique and decorative element in appearance of the City of Miami Beach;
3. Maintain the existing Causeway profile to protect the single-family character and appearance of the Venetian Islands; and,
4. To inform the general public and the County and State agencies of the historic importance of the Venetian Causeway, the quality of its design, and the role it has played in the development of Miami Beach.

IV. PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

1. SITE BOUNDARIES

That Portion of the Venetian Causeway within the Miami Beach City Limits, beginning at the east side of San Marco Island and ending at the western terminus of Dade Boulevard (complete legal description provided in Exhibit I, attached).

2. REVIEW STANDARDS

Staff recommends that any improvement, alteration or addition to the Venetian Causeway Historic Preservation site be jointly reviewed by the City of Miami Beach Design Review Board and Historic Preservation Board in accordance with Section 22-7 of the Zoning Ordinance. The joint review is recommended because of the additional engineering expertise available on the combined boards.

In accordance with Section 22-5(A)(3) of the Zoning Ordinance, staff recommends the following review standards:

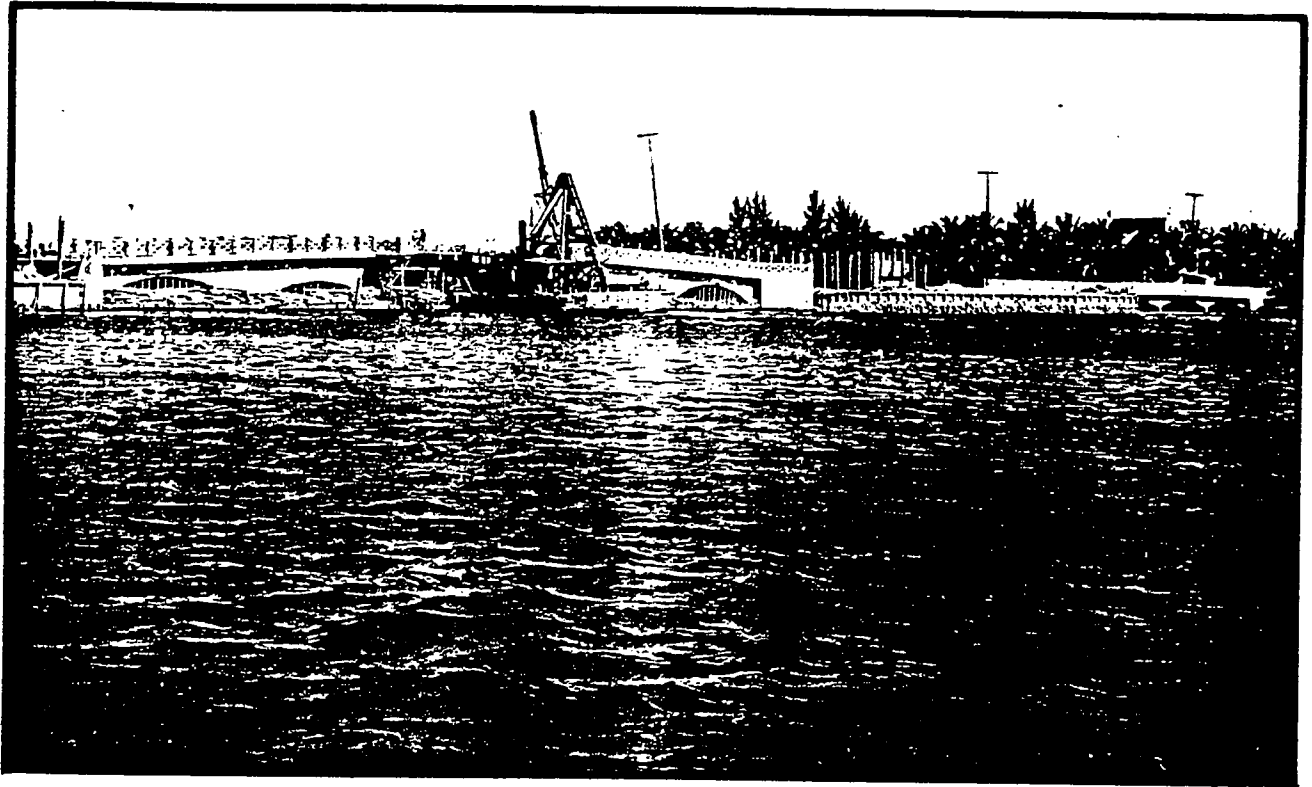
1. All alterations, improvements, and/or additions to the Venetian Causeway Historic Preservation site shall be subject to review in accordance with Section 22-7 of the Miami Beach Zoning Ordinance;
2. Every reasonable effort shall be made to retain and repair the existing bridges, bridge railings, and other design features of the Venetian Causeway;
3. If, for the health, safety, and welfare of the public, it is determined necessary to replace the existing bridges, bridge railings, and/or other design features of the Venetian Causeway, every reasonable effort shall be made to replicate the appearance of the item being replaced;
4. Change to the existing width of the roadway, and profiles of the bridges is not encouraged;
5. Replacement of missing original design features, such as light fixtures, is encouraged; and,
6. Periodic repair and/or resurfacing of the roadbed that does not affect the width of the road or bridge profile, and will not result in such alteration to the design features of the Causeway, such as bridge railings, shall be exempt from review by the Design Review Board/Historic Preservation Board.

Footnotes - Venetian Causeway - Page

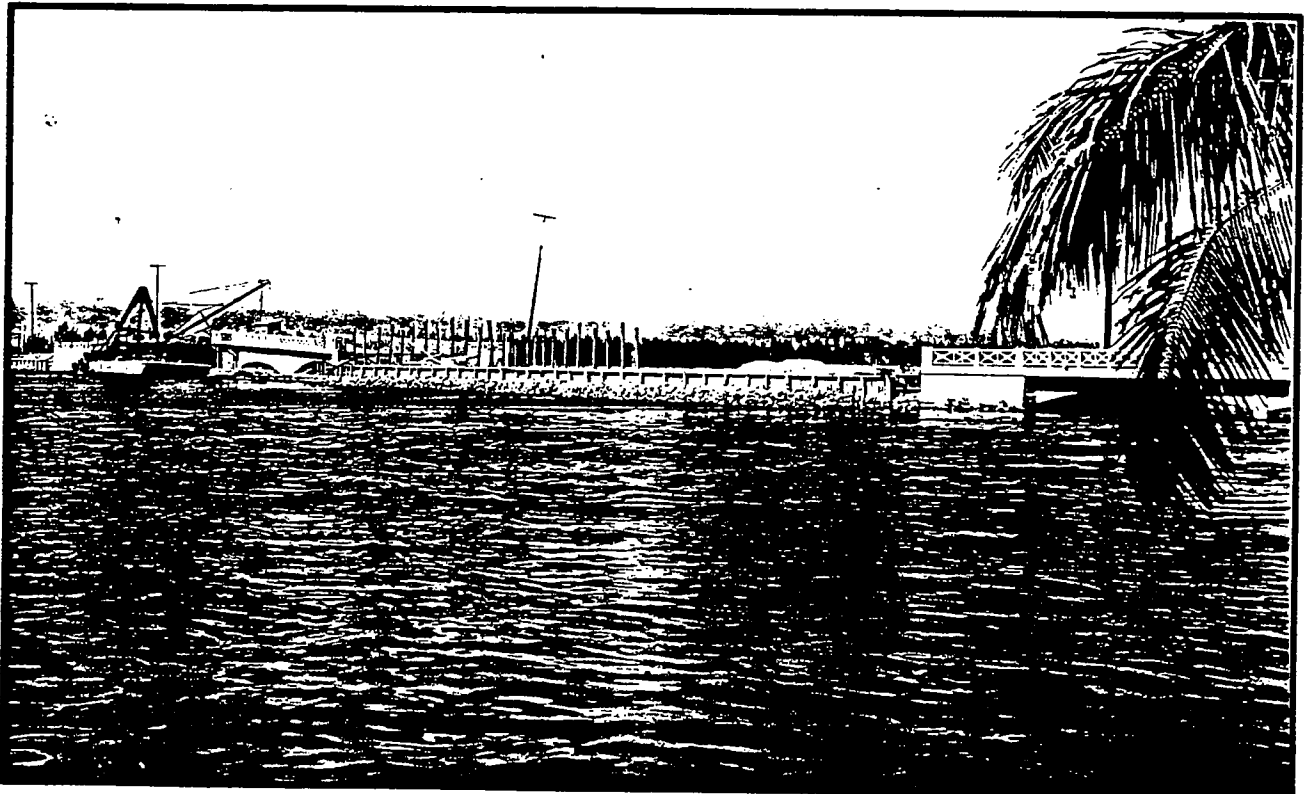
- 1 Manuscript, Spears/Harris Papers, (Miami Shores, FL.),
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- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., p. 2-2.

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Dec. 15, 1925



Dec. 15, 1925

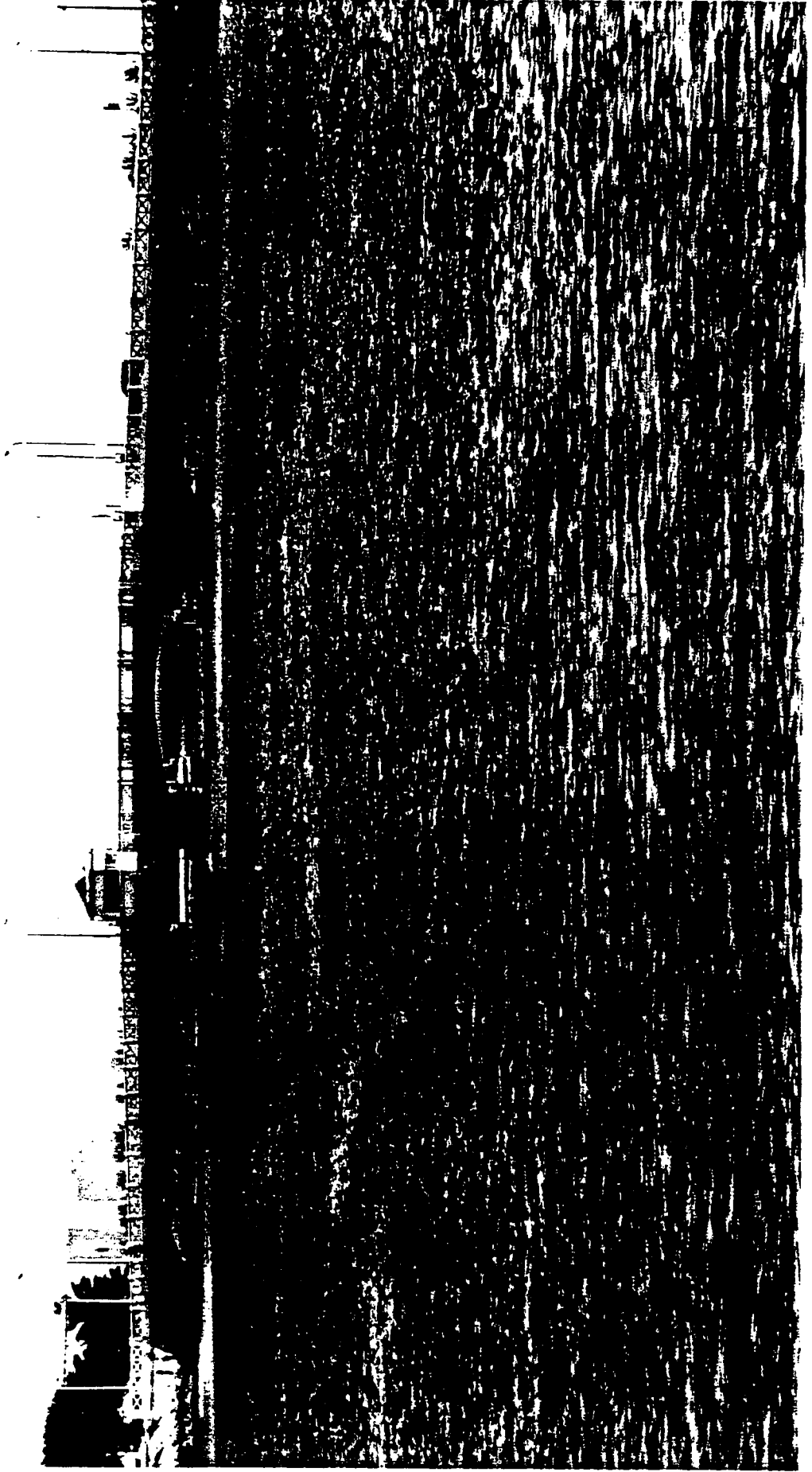


Dedication of the Venetian Causeway 1926

**T.J. Pancoast, J. Collins, J.K. Chaille,
F.C. Bhegro, Major Brown, Harold Wilson,
J.H. Stanley, Lonworth Crow**



Roadway view of the Venetian Causeway



Venetian Causeway Bridge #10

PHOTO BY RICK K. POLEY



Typical view of side railing

PHOTO BY RICK K. POLEY