

Davis Development in Cocoa

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Real estate developers scoured Florida during the 1920s land boom. Pitchmen covered the state, focusing mainly on the still largely untapped coastal lands for which Florida is now famous. One such area was the City of Cocoa, located on the Indian River about 200 miles due north of Miami. Beginning in late 1923, David P. Davis, who was moving toward the end of his time in Miami, had an interest in Cocoa, specifically a development known as Carleton Terrace.

The Cocoa of Davis' time was a small city, with a population of around 1,500. The city was incorporated in 1895, but the area was first settled just before the Civil War. Nestled along the Indian River, Cocoa was in the middle of one of the best orange growing regions in the state, with some groves dating from the 1860s. As such, Cocoa served as a center for citrus shipments on Florida's east coast.

Word of Davis' involvement in a local real estate development was front-page news in the December 13, 1923 edition of the *Cocoa Tribune*. The main headline read, "Big Development is Started in North Cocoa, Carlton Terrace Name," with the subhead stating, "D. P. Davis of Miami Purchases Large Waterfront Tract for Highest Class Residential Section." The article reads like most from that time, and lists Davis' accomplishments in Miami and his plans for Cocoa. The article also mentions that Milton Davis, D. P.'s brother, would be a partner in the endeavor, and that the brothers' company, United Realty, had already purchased 100 acres of land for the new development.

Carleton Terrace, was designed and put to paper in March 1924 by the Miami engineering firm of Watson & Garris. The plat, filed in Brevard County the following month, on April 21, featured the hallmarks associated with Davis and other high-class developers of the period: broad, well-landscaped streets with exotic names situated close to a body of water. A small development, the neighborhood consisted of only fourteen streets, including the Dixie Highway (US 1), which ran north-south through the eastern portion of the subdivision.

Davis partnered with a local firm, Trafford Realty Company, on this project. A. R. Trafford, according to the *Cocoa Tribune*, had been working for over a year to get Davis to go to Cocoa and partner with him on the project. After the initial meetings and interviews, the main weight of the project would be borne by Milton Davis, not his older brother – D. P. had a much larger project in mind in 1924.

Carleton Terrace serves as an interesting bridge between Davis' work in Miami and Davis Islands. The streets in Carleton Terrace are not on a grid, but instead are curved or run at odd angles. Another characteristic of the development, its street names, demonstrates that Davis was at least partially involved in the development. The names Biltmore, Bellaire and Dade reflect his past experiences in Miami, as does Lucerne, a street name Carleton Terrace shares with Miami Beach and Davis Islands in Tampa. Another shared feature of the Davis developments in Miami, Cocoa and Tampa was Miami architect Martin Hampton, who designed homes for his projects in all three cities.

By 1925, D. P. was far too busy to spend much time with Carleton Terrace. Milton, too, was pressed into service for both Davis Islands and Davis Shores in St.

Augustine, thereby lessening his time spent with Carleton Terrace. Still, work progressed in Cocoa, with over eighty homes completed between 1924 and 1926.

Today, the neighborhood carries the same layout and, with few exceptions, the streets retain their original names. Additionally, twenty-two homes dating from the heady days of Florida's boom are still standing, another testament to the life of D. P. Davis.

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