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WHEN THE Everglades National Park was dedicated at Everglades, Florida, on December 6, 1947, by President Harry S. Truman, the ceremony was attended by a host of national and state officials and dignitaries and by more than 8,000 of the general public. Seated on the speaker’s platform among the honored guests was a woman whose involvement in the preservation of the Everglades went back more years than any other individual present. She was May Mann Jennings, widow of William Sherman Jennings, Florida’s eighteenth governor.

Mrs. Jennings, then seventy-four years of age, must have recalled many proud and satisfying memories as she waited for the cue signalling her participation in the ceremony. She remembered the long ago events that first had introduced her to that portion of the Everglades which had so long fired her imagination and energy and which had caused her to consecrate much of her life to the goal of preserving and conserving the area.

The small portion of Florida which had so captivated Mrs. Jennings was a hammock located on Paradise Key in Dade County some fifteen miles southwest of Homestead. It is one of the largest Everglades keys and is a treasure garden of tropical and exotic plant and animal life. Vines, ferns, and wild orchids grow there in abundance. Much of its plant life is found nowhere else in the United States. It has the largest native stand of royal palms in this country. These majestic and stately trees, which sometimes reach a height of over 100 feet, have always been much admired by scientists and nature lovers.

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Chapman, the noted writer, in 1943 described “the royal palms” as standing “out beyond the glades and above the forest like arboreal monuments.” The preservation of this key, later called Royal Palm Hammock, became one of Mrs. Jennings’s lifelong goals and set her upon a political, economic, and public relations struggle that spanned thirty-three years.

The story of the hammock begins in the last years of the nineteenth century and involves several early scientists, pioneers, and prominent citizens of south Florida. South-Florida was an undeveloped and unspoiled tropical paradise when Kirk and Mary Munroe settled in Coconut Grove in 1886. Journalist, editor, and avid outdoorsman, Kirk Munroe visited Florida in 1881, traveling some 1,600 miles in his canoe, the Psyche. Munroe and his wife were avid conservationists and members of many national and local organizations. She was a charter member of the Dade County Federation of Women’s Clubs, the organization through which she was to meet May Mann Jennings. Mary Munroe was also to play an important role in saving the hammock, and she was one of the first women to work on its behalf.

Other prominent people familiar with the hammock during the years around the turn of the century were the naturalists H. P. Rolfs of the University of Florida; N. L. Britton, director of the New York Botanical Garden; Charles Simpson, who operated a private botanical garden in Dade County; Edward Simmonds, chief botanist for the agriculture department in Dade County; James K. Small, curator of the New York Botanical Garden; David Fairchild, who headed the United States Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction which had been established at Coconut Grove in 1898; and John C. Gifford of Cornell University, who moved to Coconut Grove in 1905. Elizabeth Rothra states that “Gifford and Fairchild were part of a little band of men in South Florida who worked with true devotion to preserve the region’s natural beauty and resources. They had

4. Frank M. Chapman, “Everglades Islet, A glowing description of Royal Palm State Park—so far the only Everglade area to become a park,” Audubon Magazine, XLV (1943), 19.
a part in saving the rare stand of native royal palms on Paradise Key."\(^7\) John Gifford's wife, Edith, was a member of the Dade County Woman's Club, and she also came to work with Mrs. Jennings in securing Paradise Key.

Three other persons who were involved in the story of Royal Palm Hammock were Henry M. Flagler, his third wife, Mary Kenan Flagler, and his business associate, James E. Ingraham. The rapid urban development of South Florida was due almost entirely to the resources and energies of Henry Flagler. Prior to his interest in the area, development was so limited that only the Indians truly knew what lay south of Miami and in the Everglades. There were no roads into the interior of the Everglades at all; the road to Flamingo was not completed until 1916.

The Florida East Coast Railroad reached Miami in 1896, and Flagler took a great interest in the town's growth, and he became acquainted with its leaders. He donated much land and money for civic improvement, including property for the construction of the Miami Woman's Club. Miami was to have been the end of his line, but he reconsidered this decision, and by 1904 the road was extended another twenty-five miles south to the newly-established town of Homestead. Civilization was moving closer to Paradise Key. It was no longer known only to botanists, hunters, and Indians.

In 1902 Flagler began preparations for the Key West extension. His railroad already controlled large amounts of the surrounding land, including portions of Paradise Key, which he had acquired in 1896 through a quit-claim deed.\(^8\) Two surveys were made, one across the southern Glades region from Homestead to Cape Sable, and another over the lower keys from Key Largo to Key West. The first route, which later became a highway, passed directly through Paradise Key, and the second, which was chosen for the extension, eight miles east of it.

James E. Ingraham was no stranger to the Everglades. In March and April 1892 while employed by Henry B. Plant, he had made a grueling trek across the Everglades from Sarasota to

\(^7\) Gifford, On Preserving Tropical Florida, 31.
\(^8\) The quit-claim deeds are recorded in Florida, Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, Minutes of the Trustees, Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida. Volume VIII. From January 1, 1909, to December 31, 1910, With Financial Statement for the Two Years, Published Under Authority Of the Trustees. (Tallahassee, 1910), 416.
Miami to survey a possible rail route. He did not see Paradise Key then, but he visited Kirk Munroe in Miami, and the two men became lifelong friends—a friendship that would later benefit Paradise Key.

Shortly after his expedition, Ingraham was hired by Flagler, and he became his land commissioner and president of the Model Land Company. Ingraham was in an excellent position to know of the uniqueness of Paradise Key. In 1893 H. P. Rolf and N. L. Britton made a trip to Paradise Key. Believing that Flagler owned it, they approached Ingraham, asking that it be granted to the national government for preservation. The idea, however, was not pursued.

Proximity and friendship were not the only things that brought many of these people into contact with Paradise Key and with each other. They were all naturalists in varying degrees, even Flagler, and their common membership in the infant Florida Audubon Society only served to strengthen their ties. The Florida Audubon Society was organized at Maitland on March 2, 1900. The Munroes, Governor and Mrs. Jennings, Henry Flagler, and James E. Ingraham were among its first members.

Because of the railroad extensions and the opening up of the region, the concern for preserving Paradise Key increased. There were, however, no government officials or agencies interested in its preservation. The Audubon Society was overtaxed and the general public was apathetic to such action. What the key needed was a spokesman or group which would fight for it. The group came forward. It was the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs. At first it seemed unlikely that this weak organization could do anything, but persistence, and above all the leadership of May Mann Jennings, saved Paradise Key and created Royal Palm Hammock State Park.

The Florida Federation of Women's Clubs was organized February 21, 1895, at Green Cove Springs and was admitted to the General (national) Federation three years later. As the

May Mann Jennings.

From left to right: unidentified man, Thomas Harris, Dr. Charles Torrey Simpson, Dr. John Clayton Gifford, Edward Simmonds, Dr. David Fairchild. A photograph of the "Scientists Committee" of the Miami Community Council in 1922. From John C. Gifford, On Preserving Tropical Florida, comp. Elizabeth Ogren Rothra (Coral Gables, 1972).
Dedication of Everglades National Park, December 6, 1947.
Left to right: Admiral Leahy, President Truman, Secretary Krug, Senator Pepper, Mrs. Jennings, August Burghard. Courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Inc.

Members of Royal Palm State Park Board, ca. 1918. Mrs. Jennings is in second row, behind woman in dark dress. State Photographic Archives, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee.
confidence and horizons of the women expanded they began to confront the major social and political problems of the day. The state and national federations became major forces working for social improvement at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first decade of the organization witnessed rapid growth in Florida.\textsuperscript{13} Most of the members were women from affluent homes, many the wives of some of Florida's most prominent business and political leaders. The Florida Federation gradually grew into an organization of influence. By 1910 it was actively pursuing improvements in state health laws, public education, conservation, and beautification, and it was working for the establishment of libraries in every county.

The Federation's tenth annual meeting was held in Miami in 1905, and in the minutes appear the two following items: first, a call by the women for the appointment by the governor of a "Forestry Commission," and second, the introduction of a motion which read: "That the Federation endorse the proposal to make a Federal forest reservation of Paradise Key in the Everglades, in order to preserve the unique groups of Royal palms, this being the only spot in the United States where these palms are found growing naturally."\textsuperscript{14} Edith Gifford and Mary Munroe had been responsible for these motions.

Not unexpectedly, these proposals were ignored by the state legislature. Partly this was due to disinterest, but there was also confusion about the exact location and ownership of the key. None of the land had been patented, surveyed, or platted by the state. The requests of the Federation, however, could be no longer ignored after May Jennings became its president in 1914. She was a friend of Mary Munroe, Edith Gifford, and other women interested in conservation. Shortly after her election she was informed by Mrs. Munroe that a verbal commitment to donate Paradise Key acreage had been secured from Mrs. Flagler.\textsuperscript{15} Apparently Mary Munroe's longtime friendship with Mr. Ingraham was paying off, because it was he who conveyed the commitment, and it was he who relayed to Mrs. Munroe a brief

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 21.
history of Dr. Rolf's early interest in the key. Ingraham promised to work closely with the Federation to save the hammock.

The state at that time was preparing to surface and complete a road to Flamingo. The hammock was threatened with destruction as many palms and exotic plants were being carried off by vandals and road crews. Mrs. Jennings was asked to make the preservation of Royal Palm Hammock one of her administration's main goals. She readily agreed, motivated by the description of the key with its majestic trees, because of her husband's long involvement in Everglades preservation and reclamation (he himself owned some land nearby), and because Ingraham was a longtime personal friend.

Mrs. Jennings perceived at once the tremendous effort it would take to get such a proposal accepted by the state government. It would be difficult to persuade officials to accept responsibility for the creation and care of a park. Florida was expanding and growing, but conservation was not a popular issue. Florida did not have any state-owned recreational areas. For nine years the legislature had ignored the call by the women to save the key. A new approach was needed.

Mrs. Jennings developed a plan. She knew of Mrs. Flagler's offer of 960 acres of land, and she felt that the state might be persuaded to donate the remaining needed land, but only if it would not also have to maintain it. It was a bold idea and could only have been suggested by one who was confident of its success. Mrs. Jennings was just the one needed to implement such a scheme. She had both political experience and well-placed friends. The facts that she was a woman, who would be speaking for an organization composed of non-voting citizens, and who would have to deal with an all-male government, never bothered her. Times were changing. The suffrage movement was gaining strength. Women were becoming public leaders, and she was confident of her chances of securing the hammock, but she knew it would be a hard battle.

May Mann Jennings was born in Centerville, New Jersey, in 1872. Her parents, Austin and Elizabeth Mann, moved to Florida shortly after her birth and settled at Crystal River, where her father practiced law and cultivated one of the largest citrus groves in the area. In 1883 Austin Mann was elected state senator from Hernando County. He had a stormy but distinguished career in
the legislature, being a populist leader and a free-thinking progressive. He is remembered mainly as “the father of good roads” and as an ardent backer of the proposed cross-Florida barge canal.16

May Mann’s mother died when she was nine, and two years later she was sent to St. Joseph’s Convent in St. Augustine where she received the complete “southern style” finishing school education. It included instruction in the traditional academic subjects and in piano and voice, art, needlepoint, and French. Upon graduation in 1889 she was selected as class valedictorian.17 In all of May’s contacts with others she exuded an air of confidence, a sunny and gracious disposition, and a joyful outlook on life. In researching her papers, one is struck by her compassionate, warm nature, and by her sharp mind. Her energy was boundless. A letter to a friend might typically touch upon national politics, local civic problems, music, art, cooking recipes, gardening, advice on childrearing, club business, political strategy, and still include tender solicitude for her friend’s health and loved ones. Her letters are sprinkled with a goodly amount of dry wit and humor and portray her as a woman with a well-rounded personality.

After graduation May accompanied her father to Tallahassee and spent the 1891 legislative session working as his assistant. She proved to be an able aide, but politics was not all that was on her mind; she was being courted by a handsome young judge from her home county. He was William Sherman Jennings and they were married in the spring of that year. Jennings’s alliance with May Mann was a fortunate choice, as she greatly aided his career. A contemporary wrote: “There is little doubt that the rise of young Jennings [the future governor] was promoted by his marriage to May Mann. . . . [In addition] . . . to being a young lady of great charm, [she] inherited much of her father’s political ability. She was just such a person as would impress all those who came in contact with her—just such a one as would prove a most fitting helpmeet [sic] to a husband who had both

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May's new husband was destined for a distinguished career in state government. He was Hernando County's state representative from 1893 to 1895, and was elected governor in 1900, serving from 1901 until 1905. Jennings's administration was constructive and progressive, receiving commendation for a decrease in state indebtedness, for improvements in the convict-lease system, for the recovery of swamplands from the Federal government, and for the promotion of the vast Everglades reclamation project. Mrs. Jennings, who had lived close to politics all her life, was intensely interested in the goals, proposals, and legislation of her husband's administration.

In 1905 at the close of his term of office, Jennings moved his family to Jacksonville, where he pursued his law practice and served as attorney for the trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. Mrs. Jennings became active in various civic organizations, but her primary efforts were being expended on behalf of the Jacksonville Woman's Club. In 1912 she became chairman of the State Federation's education department, and by the time she was elected Federation president in November 1914, she had accumulated much experience and was ideally suited to lead the fight to save Paradise Key.

On December 3, 1914, she wrote a letter to Federation officers describing the hammock, setting forth her plan to develop it as a park, and asking for opinions. If they approved she wanted them to accompany her to Tallahassee to speak to Governor Park Trammell and other state officials. She knew she would need the support of rank and file Federation members to succeed. Many agreed that the preservation of the hammock would be a fine civic gesture, but several of the ladies questioned the feasibility of the Federation assuming such a financial burden. This kind of opposition was to crop up several years later and to jeopardize seriously the project. Fortunately, the doubters were

few, and Mrs. Jennings proceeded with her plans, including a plea for a $1,000 annual state appropriation. When no one volunteered to accompany her to Tallahassee, she went alone.

Florence Cay, one of Mrs. Jennings's oldest friends and wife of a prominent Tallahassee businessman and legislator, telephoned Mrs. Park Trammell, as Mrs. Cay described it, to “touch upon the subject” of the hammock.21 Mrs. Trammell, herself a Federation member, was cautious but encouraging about what action the governor would take. This was just the first of many instances where Mrs. Jennings would make use of the Federation’s “old girl network” to assess attitudes and contact important people.

Mrs. Jennings proceeded with the planned visit to present the Federation’s request to Governor Trammell. She also scheduled a trip to South Florida to visit the hammock. As Mrs. Rose Lewis, Federation vice-president of the Miami area stated, Mrs. Jennings “did set a terrific pace!”22 During the second week in December 1914, she journeyed by train to Tallahassee where she apparently stayed at the Governor’s Mansion. The following social item appeared in the local paper: “Mrs. William S. Jennings, of Jacksonville, the brilliant wife of former Governor Jennings . . . is making a brief visit to the Capital city, and is being charmingly entertained at the Governor’s Mansion by Mrs. Park Trammell.”23

Only a few knew of her real reason for the visit. Mrs. Cay accompanied her when she met with the various cabinet members who were also trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. The ladies must have won over the governor because he promised to present their request at the next board meeting of the Internal Improvement trustees. At the December 23 meeting, the board approved a letter to be sent to W. J. Tweedell and E. J. Powers, Dade County commissioners, authorizing action to prevent trespassing on the hammock land owned by the state.24 The following day, the board voted to grant tentatively the Federation’s

22. Rose A. Lewis to May Mann Jennings, December 8, 1914, ibid.
request for the hammock land, subject to legislative approval. The trustees planned to visit South Florida the following month, and Mrs. Jennings, who was apprised of their action, was asked not to reveal the news to the public until after that time. Elated over the trustees' actions, she celebrated a joyous Christmas. In fact the trustees did not have to have legislative approval to grant and convey the land, but perhaps the unusual nature of the Federation's request made them more cautious than usual. Endorsement by the governor or the trustees was no guarantee that the lawmakers would give their approval. Only intense lobbying efforts would insure success.

The day after Christmas the Jennings family traveled to Miami for a round of official Federation visits. Much time was taken up with routine club business, but on Monday, December 28, accompanied by her husband and son and Mrs. R. B. Moore, Mrs. A. Leigh Monroe, and Mary Munroe, Mrs. Jennings journeyed to Paradise Key to see for herself the much talked-about royal palm hammock. The trip must have been a "bone-jarring" one, since the road out to the key was unpaved and little more than a boggy cow path, barely passable by auto. Pictures of the region during that period often show a stranded Model-T hub-high in mud with the occupants digging and pushing to get it unstuck. In a letter to Mrs. William Hocker, Mrs. Jennings referred to the trip: "The Hammock is entirely surrounded by water, the palms tower much above the other growth . . . . The women down in that part of the country are very enthusiastic over the Park subject."

After the trustees' visit to the key they notified Mrs. Jennings that they approved of the resolution granting the property to the Federation, and the news was publicly released. It was an important moment in the history of Florida conservation because with this action Tallahassee recorded a quiet but dramatic change in policy. No matter that the trustees somewhat grudgingly did it, or that they were reluctant to assume any of the care of the proposed park, or that, as some said, the only reason they approved the request was because the land was unfit for anything else. For once, a motive other than gain and exploitation was expressed about state lands. The decision was ultimately to bene-

fit all of the people, and the hammock would become Florida's first state park. The park was to be an important step in the establishment of the Everglades National Park.

After Mrs. Jennings received notification of the approval she began mobilizing the Federation. Governor Jennings drafted a bill to be presented to the legislature, calling for the state to deed to the Federation 960 acres to supplement the 960 Flagler acres. It also provided $1,000 for park maintenance. The bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator Herbert J. Drane of Lake-land, who boarded at the Cay residence when in Tallahassee, and by Representative Harry Goldstein of Fernandina. The bill received little attention from state lawmakers, and several times it almost died in committee. Chances for approval looked bleak, and hope for its passage was all but given up. Mrs. Jennings worked hard though, traveling several times to Tallahassee to lobby for the bill. A pamphlet extolling the virtues of the hammock was printed and distributed to every lawmaker. The 6,000 ladies of the Federation were urged to write their legislative delegations. Numerous talks around the state were presented to increase public support for the bill.

In the last hours, when the outcome seemed dismal, Governor Jennings and their son Bryan, a Stetson University law student, were pressed into emergency lobbying duty. Not only was it a race against the legislature's recess, but because of publicity given the hammock, vandals and road crews were digging up even more palms and exotic plants. The hammock was being imperiled.

The legislature was scheduled to recess on June 3, 1915, and it would not meet again for two years. Time was critical. Mrs. Jennings planned to be in Tallahassee right up to the last moment working for the bill, but illness brought on by severe exhaustion confined her to her home in Jacksonville. As she anxiously awaited the outcome her husband and son remained at the Capital to push the legislation. Finally on June 2 she received a telegram from Bryan: "House passed Park Bill." The next day her husband telegraphed: "Park Bill passed Senate midnight." 26 Midnight was the time of the recess. The bill had

26. Telegrams, Bryan Jennings to May Mann Jennings, June 2, 1915; W. S. Jennings to May Mann Jennings, June 3, 1915, both in folder "June 1915," Box 6, ibid.
been left to the very last minute. The Royal Palm State Park was now a reality.

Mrs. Jennings was overjoyed; the Federation now owned the hammock. Unfortunately, however, the appropriation had been cut out of the bill. Those in the Senate who had opposed the park had resorted to a common legislative tactic. For all practical purposes the park was doomed. How was the Federation to develop a state park for public purposes without funds to do so? Mrs. Jennings, both grateful and yet heartsick, dutifully sent letters of appreciation to all legislators who had voted for the bill.

Trying to boost everyone’s fallen spirits, Mrs. Jennings wrote to Federation members that the paths, lodge, and pavilions envisioned for the park could still be built. The Federation would have to rise to the occasion; funds could be found. In truth, she had no idea where money would come from, but the importance of the project sustained her, and she began to make plans.

Besides money, she needed public support for the project. Mrs. Jennings never let up in her campaign to publicize the hammock. To secure money she wrote every newspaper, organization, and individual that might be interested in helping the Federation. Philanthropists such as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Charles Deering were solicited for funds. Thomas A. Edison, a winter resident of Fort Myers, sent $50.00. Gradually small amounts of money began to trickle in to aid the park, but it was not enough. Mrs. Flagler’s 960-acre endowment was secured, and some of the land was rented out to area farmers, which earned several hundred dollars. A statewide “mile-of-dimes” campaign was launched by the Federation. Cardboard folders, one foot in length and having slots for twelve dimes, were distributed. The hope was that the folders laid end to end for one mile would bring in over $6,000. The campaign was a catchy idea, but it was not successful; less than $1,000 was raised. However, the Federation was able to secure the services of Charles Mosier as caretaker, and he began making improvements in the park. He had worked on Viscaya, Charles Deering’s Miami estate, and was knowledgeable about the hammock region, having explored it with Drs. Small and Fairchild. In March 1916, the Mosier family moved to the park and set up housekeeping in a tent. His letters to Mrs. Jennings are filled with accounts of
bouts with mosquitoes, poisonous snakes, torrential rains, scorching heat, and grassfires. Only a hearty soul who liked what he was doing could have endured such trials.

During the spring of 1916, work was begun on the lodge; paths were cut, picnic tables constructed, and other improvements made. The work was constantly delayed by slowness in the paving of the Flamingo highway and by lack of funds. Local Federation ladies succeeded in securing from the Dade County commissioners a one-year $1,200 appropriation. With these funds and by borrowing from Federation money designated for other purposes the lodge and other improvements were completed.

The Federation’s twenty-second annual convention was held at Miami in November 1916. The major event of the convention was the formal dedication of the park. On November 23, a motorcade of 168 cars, “Fords, Cadillacs, Maxwells, Overlands and every other kind,” left Miami’s Halcyon Hotel for Royal Palm State Park.²⁷ Over 1,000 persons attended. Mrs. Jennings presided. After introductions and a dedication prayer, the Federation’s park committee’s official report was given. Then, James Ingraham, who was also honored by having the Homestead-Flamingo road named after him, made a short, informal speech. As reported by the Miami Herald, “Mr. Ingraham made a most delightful speech, telling in intimate conversational terms first of his early discovery of Paradise Key, of his talk with both Mr. and Mrs. Flagler on the subject, of the title claim made by the railroad and then most whimsically of Mrs. Jennings’ first attempt to have a bill put through the legislature. . . . Mrs. Jennings’ difficulties in this line were depicted, her first illusions about the promises of legislators, the consultation with ‘the wise old lawyer’ (Governor Jennings) who finally drew up a new bill and her latest indefatigable efforts which resulted in the land being given, but not the money. Mr. Ingraham closed his very charming speech congratulating the president and the Federation members.”²⁸ The keynote address was given by Mrs. John D. Sherman of the National Federation. She was followed by Dr. Simpson, who had identified and tagged the trees, who described the botanical nature of the park. Then Mrs. Jennings rose and

²⁸. Ibid.
dedicated the park with the simple words, “With the power in me vested as president of the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs I hereby dedicate this Royal Palm Park to the people of Florida and their children forever.” A benediction closed the ceremony.

A picnic luncheon with a cola called Pinapola was served. It was a happy crowd that walked the newly-cut paths that day. Most state officials had been invited to the ceremony, but none attended. Present, however, were many of the loyalists who had supported the park from the beginning, including Mary Munroe, Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Tweedell, Mr. and Mrs. Bion H. Barnett, Jr., Governor Jennings and Bryan, Mrs. Frank Stranahan, Lucy Blackman, and Mrs. Napoleon Bonaparte Broward.

With the dedication over, the park was now faced with the need for operating funds. The Dade County Commissioners refused to pledge long-term support, and a small but vocal element within the Federation began to criticize the park and Mrs. Jennings. They accused her of devoting too much time and spending too much of the organization’s money on the project. It was one of the park’s most critical periods. Only Mrs. Jennings’s willpower and prodigious work kept it operating.

In the spring of 1917 she submitted to the new Florida legislature a bill which again requested state funds. She worked hard for its passage and wrote to a friend at that time: “Have just returned this morning from Tallahassee, and I am worn completely out; have been before two committees on appropriations, and before the Forestry Committee.” The bill died on the calendar. A disconsolate Mrs. Jennings faced another two-year struggle to keep the park functioning. A steady stream of scientific visitors was using it, articles about it were being published, and word of its beauty and pleasures was spreading, but little money was coming in.

29. Ibid.
32. These include: Charles T. Simpson, Out of Doors in Florida; The Adventures of a Naturalist (Miami, 1924); C. B. Reynolds, “Royal Palm State Park,” Mr. Foster’s Travel Magazine (January 1919), n.p.; Arthur H. Howell, “A List of the Birds of Royal Palm Hammock, Florida,” The Auk, XXXVIII (April 1921), 251-63; W. E. Safford, “Natural History of
In June 1918, Mrs. Jennings having served her term as president and now as the Federation’s conservation chairman, requested additional lands from the Internal Improvement trustees to even out the park’s awkward boundaries. The request, along with the perennial request for funds, was denied. The park continued to scrape by on nickels and dimes. In 1919 a third legislative blitz was undertaken. Even an array of distinguished spokesmen and very considerable doses of political pressure failed to help the bill. Again it died on the calendar. Drastic economy measures were applied in the park, and a new warden was hired.

After so much disappointment and defeat only Mrs. Jennings and a handful of supporters continued to work for the park. Governor Jennings died in February 1920, and a grief-stricken and tired committee chairlady almost gave up the fight. Grieving over her husband’s death, May Jennings spent the next year quietly at home. By 1921 she had sufficiently recovered to solicit the new legislature for help. Perhaps because of the governor’s death, or because the park had become popular, or through sheer exasperation, the legislature finally approved a $2,500 per annum appropriation. Mrs. Jennings’s dream had at last become a reality.

Now fifty-eight years old, Mrs. Jennings continued her work on behalf of the park. New trails were cut, and a small deer pen was constructed. The great hurricane of 1926 and several fires the next year caused the legislature to appropriate $10,000 for restoration. In 1929 Mrs. Jennings formally offered Royal Palm Hammock to the proposed National Everglades Park if ever it should be created. Because of her park work and leadership to secure the passage of a law creating Florida’s first Board of Forestry, Mrs. Jennings was recognized as Florida’s leading conservationist, and she came to be called the “Mother of Forestry.” In 1931, Stetson University conferred upon her the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. At the ceremony she was referred to as one who had “doctored more laws than anyone..."
It was an accurate assessment of her achievements.

During the 1930s she was appointed by Governor David Sholtz to the newly-formed state Everglades National Park Commission. In 1937 the commission elected Mrs. Jennings to lobby for an $87,000 appropriation for its work. Governor Fred Cone, opposed to the commission, agreed to accept the bill only if the entire commission would resign. This demand was acceded to, and when the governor finally signed the bill, he appointed a friend, G. O. Palmer, as commission chairman. The commission remained inactive, and the funds were squandered. Thereafter, work for an Everglades National Park was mainly supported by a citizens group headed by Ernest F. Coe of Miami. Mrs. Jennings was aligned with this group. Throughout the period, she continued working for Royal Palm State Park, and in 1934-1935 she was able to secure a brigade of men from the Civilian Conservation Corps to make extensive improvements in the facility.

After World War II, Governor Millard Caldwell revived the state Everglades Park Commission, and Mrs. Jennings was again appointed as a member. The new commission was led by August Burghard of Fort Lauderdale and John D. Pennekamp of Miami. Mrs. Jennings, who still owned her husband's land near Flamingo, was appointed to the commission to represent the landowners. A fellow commission member remembered her as "a most loyal commission member, [who] attended every meeting, took little or no part in the discussion, but invariably voted approval of all proposals."

When the Everglades National Park became a reality in the spring of 1947, the old lodge at Royal Palm State Park was utilized as the first visitor's center. This must have pleased Mrs. Jennings; she remembered the struggle to get the lodge constructed. December 6, 1947, was an exciting day in conservation history. Ceremonies were held at Everglades, Florida, dedicating the new national park. The ceremony was presided over by John Pennekamp and short speeches were given by Ernest F. Coe, August Burghard, Senators Claude Pepper and Spessard Holland, Governor Caldwell, and Secretary of the Interior Julius A. Krug.

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38. Miami Herald, April 5, 1946.
President Harry S. Truman delivered the keynote address. On the program, preceding the speeches, was Mrs. Jennings. She and Mrs. L. J. McCaffrey, then Federation president, presented a plaque to Newton Drury, director of the National Park Service. The presentation was a symbolic act giving Royal Palm State Park to the federal government. It culminated the thirty-three year fight Mrs. Jennings had led to preserve the beauty and uniqueness of Paradise Key. It was a sweet victory.

The Florida Times-Union that day published a long editorial summing up Mrs. Jennings's life's work:

Everglades National Park was a permanent monument to the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs, for to this energetic organization must go most of the credit for the long and much of the time trying struggle that resulted in setting aside that portion of the Everglades area that now becomes Everglades National Park . . . the part played by the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs is recognized by the Government, as indicated by a letter received by Mrs. W. S. Jennings . . . from Newton B. Drury, director of the National Park Service. 'The donation by the Federation constitutes a major step toward the ultimate goal . . . the State Park area has been properly guarded from depredation and perpetually kept for Park purposes by the Federation as you pledged it would be in your speech of dedication on November 23, 1916'. . . . All who are familiar with the work of Mrs. Jennings will agree that a large measure of credit is due her for determination and persistence which at times bridged wide gaps of disappointment in the progress of the program. Today Mrs. Jennings, who is attending the dedication at Everglades City, declared that 'it has been a long hard fight, but the final outcome very gratifying'; with that there will be general agreement.

Mrs. Jennings died on April 24, 1963, at the age of ninety-one. Upon her death, many editorials and news articles noted her passing. Of the numerous honors and memorials to her for services rendered the state, including the naming of Jennings Hall, a dormitory on the University of Florida campus, none was more fitting than the creation of Royal Palm State Park and its use and enjoyment by countless thousands of American and foreign visitors.

42. Ibid., April 25, 1963.