

DOWNTOWN MIAMI

Miami pioneer Julia Tuttle's legacy shines in bronze

BY TANIA VALDEMORO APRIL 8, 2010

Maj. William Lauderdale has one. George Merrick has one. And now, Julia Tuttle, the founder of Miami, is getting her very own statue.

Organizers hope to unveil the 10-foot bronze figure of Tuttle at Bayfront Park on July 28 -- the 114th anniversary of Miami's incorporation as a city.

"Miami would not exist if she did not bring [Henry] Flagler to Miami and convince him to extend his railroad from West Palm Beach to Miami," said Allyson Warren, chairwoman of Miami's Commission on the Status of Women.

The commission has been the driving force behind the decades-long effort to burnish Tuttle's image in bronze.

Tuttle, the wife of a Cleveland ironworks magnate, first came to South Florida in 1875 to visit her parents, whose homestead was in what is now Miami Shores.

When Frederick Tuttle died of consumption in 1886, he left Julia the iron foundry. She sold it and bought more than 600 acres owned by the Biscayne Bay Company at the north bank of the Miami River -- where the city is now located. When her father Ephraim Sturtevant died in 1891, Tuttle decided to move to Biscayne Bay. She came by barge with her son Harry and daughter Fanny.

Soon after, she lobbied railroad magnate Henry Plant to connect his railroad to Miami. When he decided not to, she turned to Henry Flagler, his rival. Flagler ignored her for years, but when the freeze destroyed citrus crops in 1894-95 in North and Central Florida, she gave Robert Ingraham, Flagler's representative, orange blossoms to show that Miami was not affected. Flagler extended his railroad from West Palm Beach to Miami in 1896.

Paul George, a history professor at Miami Dade College, said Tuttle is Miami's founder and the only woman who established a major American city.

"She knew early on this place had potential -- think of its weather -- but that it was isolated," George said.

"She convinced Flagler to move his railroad to Miami. In 1895, there were only nine people, including Tuttle and her children, living on the Miami River."

LABOR OF LOVE

It has been a long labor of love to burnish Tuttle's legacy into its new gilded form. During the Miami centennial in 1996, the women's commission raised \$30,000 for a statue. But the money sat in a private bank account for years. And the commission, which advises city leaders on women's issues, went through its own ups and downs.

The Tuttle statue came back into focus in 2005, Warren said, when the Miami-Dade County Commission for Women partnered with them to revive the project. "Julia was a major landowner here and she was the visionary who had big dreams for the city," said Laura Morilla, executive director of the Miami-Dade Commission for Women.

Together, the two commissions raised a little more than \$200,000. Money came from Miami, Miami-Dade County and private donors. They launched a national call to artists, choosing sculptors Eugene Daub and Rob Firmin, of California, for the job.

Daub & Firmin Studios is known for creating noteworthy public monuments, such as a sculpture of Thomas Jefferson founding the University of Virginia and a childlike Abraham Lincoln at his birthplace for the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

In December, they won a national competition to create the Rosa Parks sculpture for the National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol.

They impressed the women with their relief work on Tuttle's skirt, Warren said.

HISTORIC MIAMI

The skirt depicts various scenes from 1891 to 1898 -- the seven years Tuttle spent in Miami, said local historian Arva Moore Parks, author of *Miami: The Magic City*.

Images include: troops staying in Miami during the Spanish American War; the orange blossoms Tuttle gave to Ingraham; Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway in Miami; and his Royal Palm Hotel, built in 1897.

There is still work to be done, such as the lighting and landscaping for the Bayfront Park site. The statue is now at a foundry in California, where it is being cast in bronze.

Warren said she is ecstatic the mother of Miami will finally get the homage she deserves.

``I wasn't sure we were going to see this in my lifetime," she said. ``The statue is a monument to a visionary woman and to the city of Miami itself."