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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



TAMPA TOWN' WAS LAUNCHING PAD FOR JULES VERNE

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA -- A passage from Jules Verne's "From the Earth to the Moon," published in 1835, reads:

"The Frenchman and two Americans entered the enclosure reserved in the center of the multitude...Ten o'clock struck. The moment had arrived for taking their places in the projectile...thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty!!! Instantly, Murchison pressed the key...An appalling, unearthly report followed...An immense spout of fire shot up from the bowels of the earth...The earth heaved up...spectators obtained a momentary glimpse of the projectile cleaving the air in the midst of fiery vapors...The glare of the flames lit up the whole of Florida..."

A hundred years after the prophetic author who never left France wrote those lines, U.S. space projects were being launched regularly from Florida, not too far away from what Verne called "Tampa Town." There were many curious parallels between his story and the actual moon shots of today.

Jules Verne is not a prophet without honor in Tampa Town. An official marker at the approach of the Ballast Point Pier tells of the park at this scenic point being named Jules Verne Park in honor of the French writer who did so much to publicize Tampa.

It was thus named by Mrs. Chester W. Chapin, controlling owner of the Tampa Suburban Co. which operated the city's first electric trolley cars. The line carried picnickers to the park for gala outings. Many romances blossomed under the moonlight as dancers partied on the handsome pavilion at the pier. Mrs. Chapin's company went broke in 1899 and was sold to the Tampa Electric Co. This event caused the loss of one of the city's most unusual sights: the private trolley car of Mrs. Chapin. She had used the private car to sally forth to do her shopping, visit friends and run other errands; now this privilege was denied her. The Chapins soon moved from Tampa.

