

January 1960

Boca Raton Hotel a legend in its time

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Dunn, Hampton, "Boca Raton Hotel a legend in its time" (1960). *Hampton Dunn Phototouring Florida Collection*. 184.

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



BOCA RATON HOTEL A LEGEND IN ITS TIME

By HAMPTON DUNN

BOCA RATON --- Few resorts in the United States, perhaps in all the world, are so richly endowed with a flamboyant past to equal that of the incomparable Boca Raton Hotel & Club.

That's the way a biographer of the swank East Coast hostelry begins a history of the place. And there's no end to the exciting and colorful stories that can be told about it.

Briefly, the resort was designed as a hotel by Addison Mizner, more widely remembered as a wit and dilettante than as a superb artist and maybe even a genius. Someone has dubbed him, he might have done it himself since he was a brilliant promoter, as "the poet of architects."

This structure, first called the Cloister Inn, was one of Mizner's greatest creations. The 100-room Inn was built at a cost of \$1.2 million, and the designer had a field day treating the Spanish-Gothic architecture in the Mizner manner.

The elegant Inn was in keeping with the carefree, happy days of the 1920's and opening night, Feb. 6, 1926, at the height of the Florida real estate "boom," saw royalty, film stars, the world's wealthiest people, arrive in their most luxurious cars---Dusenbergs, Pierce Arrows, Packards and Cadilacs. Some of the big names there that night, who dined in the gracious Cathedral Dining Room, were former Heavyweight Champion John L. Sullivan, Film Star Marie Dressier, Al Jolson, Mrs. Vincent Astor, Irene Castle McLaughlin, Countess Salm, Myron Taylor and numerous others.

The bubble burst. Florida's Dazzling real estate boom collapsed. And so did the mighty Mizer empire. Addison went back to Palm Beach and earned a living as an architect. He died in 1933. Creditors took over the Cloister Inn.

In 1928 Clarence H. Geist, an Indiana farm boy who made \$54 million in public utilities, bought the Cloister Inn, expanded it into the fabulous Boca Raton Hotel & Club. He died in 1938. It is now owned by the Arvida Corporation.

