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## dreamer of South Florida

Hampton Dunn

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# Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



## THE DREAMER OF SOUTH FLORIDA

By HAMPTON DUNN

CORAL GABLES --- Rex Beach, one of Florida's greatest and most colorful writers, sized up George Edgar Merrick, the boom-time developer who gave us this lovely city, like this:

"At heart he (Merrick) was a writer, a poet, an artist, but fate with curious perversity decreed that he should write in wood and steel and stone and paint his pictures upon a canvas of spacious fields, cool groves and smiling waterways ...."

Derrick was indeed a dreamer, but --- again, according to his pal Rex Beach --- "a man who beheld a stately vision and caused it to become a reality."

This son of a Congregational minister, whose father died before George could finish law school, put together an ideal community, one with long-range planning, one that truly was "The City Beautiful."

He promoted it with all the flamboyance of the Florida real estate promoters bringing in the champion himself to give the sales spiel. That was William Jennings Bryan, the mighty orator, whom Merrick paid \$50,000 a year to stand beside the Venetian Pool (called "the world's most beautiful swimmin' hole") and make such claims as this: "You can wake up in the morning and tell the biggest lie you can think of about the future of Coral Gables --- and before you go to bed at night, you will be ashamed of your modesty!"

Merrick's own "mansion" --- Merrick Manor --- is still standing at 907 Coral Way, off Granada Boulevard. It featured coral rock, a material that made Coral Gables famous and a gabled roof. The developer was fussy about the style of architecture of his subdivision. He insisted on what he called a modified "Mediterranean" style. It was neither pure Spanish nor Italian but a combination of what seemed best of each.

Derrick died on March 26, 1942.

