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# Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



## SARASOTA'S ASOLO THEATRE IS ANCIENT

By HAMPTON DUNN

SARASOTA --- Some people say Sarasota is "culture-happy" and the town won't argue about that. One of the daintiest and most delightful contributions to this culture is the gem-like Asolo Theatre which decorates the grounds of the estate of the circus king John Ringling.

This is the only original 18th century Italian theatre in America. It was built in 1798 in the old castle of Catherine Cornaro in the hill town of Asolo, near Venice. The small, round auditorium spotlighted the most brilliant actors of all time during the more than a century its doors were opened at Asolo. Vacationers to the Venice playground packed the tiny theatre. Among them was Robert Browning who came again and again.

One of the greats who performed at Asolo was the lovely Italian actress, Eleonora Duse. Her role in the history of the theatre was recalled during a visit to the Ringling Museum and theatre in 1959 by Miss Katherine Cornell. She said Miss Duse was her inspiration and, standing there where Duse had played in her own youth, she felt "the continuing life of a tradition."

In 1950 the State of Florida, which owns and operates the Ringling Museum, purchased the Asolo Theatre from an antiquarian in Venice and had it shipped to Sarasota. The theatre had been dismantled in 1930 to make way for a modern movie house and it remained in storage until the Ringling Museum's director recommended its purchase to the Florida State Legislature.

