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Whitehall, the Taj Mahal of North America

Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



WHITEHALL, THE TAJ MAHAL OF NORTH AMERICA

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PALM BEACH --- An aging Henry Morrison Flagler ordered his architects to "Build me the finest home you can think of" as a bridal gift to his third wife, a lady half his age. But later while living in the elegant Whitehall, Flagler confided to a friend, "I wish I could swap it for a little shack."

The multi-multi-millionaire railroad and hotel tycoon, who is probably Florida's greatest developer of all times, had this fabulous dream palace built for Mary Lily Kenan, a pretty North Carolina belle who loved fun and to give parties for their socialite friends. The couple was wed in August, 1901, after Flagler had obtained a divorce from his second wife on grounds of insanity. The architects Carrere and Hastings got busy right away, designed the splendid mansion, furnished it with prized possessions from across the world and it was ready to move in by 1902. It had cost two and a half million to build, another million and a half to furnish.

A reporter of the day noted "Pilgrims with poetic fancy will find in Whitehall beauties that are grouped nowhere else on earth. To go from room to room is to go from century to century." The home immediately was titled, "the Taj Mahal of North America."

Flagler died here in 1913. He had fallen on a marble step and became feeble. His death at 83 was attributed to old age and exhaustion. The young Mrs. Flagler survived him only to 1917, continuing to live in Whitehall. Eventually the estate became a swank hotel, but a granddaughter of Flagler's recovered it in 1959 and opened it as a museum.

