

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MEASURED in terms of hope, the crash of the dream city of Addison Mizner's Boca Raton was perhaps the greatest tragedy of the 1925 Florida boom.

Addison Mizner, architect, artist and creator, was one of the few to inject true poetry of color and line into Florida building. He started to do for a city on the ocean's edge at Boca Raton what he had accomplished as an architect in Palm Beach on the beautiful Everglades club, on the palatial villa of Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Stotesbury, on the equally gorgeous Cosden villa, the mansions of Vanderbilt, Wanamaker and 80 others.

Only one of the incredible Mizners could have laid out Boca Raton. Had he started a year before, we might have there another Coral Gables, but unfortunately Boca Raton went on the market in June, 1925, sold \$9,000,000 in lots in as many weeks, and gently subsided before the great Ritz-Carlton Hotel could be built, or the dozens of millionaire stockholders could begin to line its Camino Real with their estates.

Not long ago, a paragraph in the newspapers told of the federal court here approving a plan of reorganization of Addison Mizner, Inc., involving refinancing to the extent of \$130,000. The Cloister, which Mizner built as a sort of warming-up exercise and administration building while his bigger plans gained momentum, was bought several years ago by Clarence H. Geist, Philadelphia public utilities owner, and made into the exclusive Boca Raton club. It was opened in February, 1926, and cost \$10,000 a room. The remainder of Boca Raton is modestly catching hold again, like so many south Florida communities in the last three years.

Addison Mizner came to Florida in 1918, after association with Stanford White in New York, and was famous in his own right long before the boom. Seeing others make whole cities out of their dreams, he became restless and in April, 1925, bought two miles of ocean front and 16,000 acres from the Southeast Coast Land Company, back of what then was Boca Ratone. The "e" was soon dropped. Associated with him were many of the best names in Palm Beach, England or Paris. Chairman of the board of directors of the Mizner Development Corporation was T. Coleman duPont, United States senator from Delaware. Jesse Livermore, famous Wall Street operator, was chairman of the finance committee. The youngest Mizner, Wilson, world-famous wit and author, pitched in as secretary-treasurer and chief ballyhoo artist.

"Pioneering with men of affairs" was the Mizner motto, carried in a series of advertisements which truly were classics of the boom. While Addison was tracing out the Utopia, his brother Wilson "stood toe to toe with the loudest liars available and out-predicted them," as he declares in his biographical recitals of Florida days. "It was good fun while it lasted," he adds. "I learned

with thousands of others that braying alone will make an ass hoarse."

Miami began to look upon Addison Mizner as one of the real he-men of the boom when he came to Flagler street and leased Ye Wayside Inn, west of the Halcyon Arcade, from Mary Dodson Swift, on a valuation of \$1,500,000 and began talking about an 18-story building there for 1926.

Next to the vibrant Shoreland Company offices, which now contain the Duval Jewelry Company, Jules' and the Seaboard offices, Addison Mizner erected his Flagler street offices right over the heads of his buzzing sales force. The Mizner office was put up without interruption of the sales work, and the only pause in the banging of hammers and cries of the workmen came when the salesmen had their 15-minute daily pep talk, or when some impetuous buyer called in by long distance. It is recounted that when the carpenters saw the aged doors from some Spanish castle being unloaded, they thought Mr. Mizner was playing a prank on them. But they quickly learned Mizner was not joking. Even the patrons of Child's restaurant today, if they take time out from their soup or cocktail to look around them in the former Boca Raton sales-room, can discover that Addison Mizner was the peer of any designer in Florida.

Boca Raton picked up headway quickly. In August construction was started on The Cloister and in September Mizner let \$7,000,000 in contracts for the Boca Raton Ritz-Carlton Hotel he had designed, and for a bridge over the East Coast canal to connect the seashore with the 160-foot wide Camino Real, to stretch six miles across the Dixie highway and into the Everglades. For the Mizners were not building on millionaires alone. They looked toward the muck lands of the Everglades for sustaining agriculture to give their seaside Olympus an earthy backbone. "The citrus farming outlook was equipped with rose-colored lemons suitable for all-day suckers," comments Wilson in retrospect.

"Right up to January, 1926, it was only necessary to point carelessly to a mudhole and tell a prospect that there was his fortune," goes on this veteran of a thousand fortune hunts. "He could not deny it, and even the salesman was in deadly fear that he spoke the truth. For Florida had something to sell, at that. Something priceless, however scandalous the actual sound of prices might have been after various acts of God and man placed a cosmic pin into one of the most perfectly gassed realty balloons of all time."

The work of Addison Mizner in Palm Beach is timeless and unique. That he could not rear even loftier mansions in Boca Raton and give to the world that further expression of his great mind is truly a tragedy of the boom. But at least, as his inimitable brother declares, Addison Mizner "saved this beautiful area from Middle West Queen Anne houses and stark New England architecture," which entitles him to one of the front seats in the Florida halls of fame.

While Paris Singer was far from being in the Mizner class, the two names were linked so often in those times that it is not inappropriate to tell here about "Singer's Folly" and other experiences of this heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune.

In the hero-worshipping haze of boom times, Paris Singer came into public notice with the financing of the Everglades club, which Addison Mizner created. A few months ago this club was sold by the bondholders for \$450,000, a fraction of its cost, and the older Beach aristocracy which again controls it hopes to restore within its sacred walls some of the social refinements of other days in Palm Beach.

Paris Singer also built the massive display rooms and gallery at the Palm Beach end of the viaduct, but his best-known exploit was at Palm Beach Ocean, where he put up the Blue Heron Hotel, most magnificent wreck of the entire postboom period.

Palm Beach Ocean was a subdivision extending along the seashore for a mile north of Lake Worth inlet, which separated it from the northern part of Palm Beach. Practically every lot was sold and \$2,000,000 had been poured into the Blue Heron, "Singer's Folly," before his money ran out. Workmen were installing the furnishings and soon it would have been finished, but there was nothing he could use for money at the end. Two hurricanes virtually ruined the Blue Heron, but it still is being worried by creditors, who hope, faintly by this time, to get something out of their investment.

Not a house was built on Palm Beach Ocean. But it has one of the finest sand beaches on the East Coast, and a causeway built this year gives Kelsey City and Riviera access to it. So there is every prospect that when and if the tangled titles to the lots are unraveled, Palm Beach Ocean may blossom with homes to replace the barren wastes which for so long have served as a background for the lonely majesty of the Blue Heron.