

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Two Florida Splendors**

Two outstanding experiences which we have enjoyed during our visit in Florida are visits to the Lake Mountain Sanctuary and Bell Tower and to Vizcaya, the Dade County Art Museum, in Miami. The beauty of each is almost beyond expression.

Edward W. Bok, late editor of the Ladies Home Journal, provided the means to build this bell tower and to acquire the 59 acres upon which it is built. It entirely comprises Iron Mountain which is one of the highest points of land in Florida.

It is of interest to note in the circular, which is presented to all visitors to the tower, Mr. Bok's reason for setting aside this sanctuary. He wrote: "The inspiration for the sanctuary and the tower came of stuff of which dreams are made. The two combined a dream to carry on the work of my grandfather, who a hundred years ago transformed a grim desert island in the North Sea, ten miles from the Netherlands mainland, into a bower of green venture and trees to which, came the birds which made the island famed.

"But an inspiration is of little value if it is not carried into realization, and I was fortunate to enlist the deep interest and sympathetic cooperation of two men who are responsible for what the visitor sees: Frederick Law Olmsted for the sanctuary and Milton B. Medary for the tower. Naturally, I could not have obtained two men more thoroughly fitted to give me what I wanted to present to the American people for visitation, and what has been often called "the Taj Mahal of America."

The name Frederick Law Olmsted is a familiar one on the Monterey Peninsula, for he was advisor for the State of California at the time when Point Lobos was taken over and added to the State Parks system. He made many visits to Monterey and gained many friends there during that time.

The summit where the Singing Tower now stands was once a sanctuary for the Indians of Central Florida. Each spring at the full of Easter Moon, the four tribes or gens here assembled for ceremonial fasting and wailing of misdeeds. The view of the surrounding country with the beautiful trees, the numerous lakes and low hills is a sight not soon to be forgotten, but the tower is the dominating feature. The recitals of the sanctuary bells

are announced for each carillon season from Dec. 1 to April 30. It is said that the carillon sings out as if the whole tower had burst into song.

Vizcaya, the Dade County Museum, should be a must to all visitors to Florida. The house and gardens were built by the late James Deering and acquired from his heirs in November 1952. They are operated as a self-sustaining project by the Board of Dade County Commissioners under the County Park Department.

Deering, of the Deering Harvester Co., opened this home as his Florida residence on Christmas Day, 1916. The following year he transferred his legal residence to Miami. He traveled extensively throughout the world. He was fond of the French people and French civilization, so for twenty years prior to the construction of Vizcaya, he started to collect many of the art treasures which went into its building and furnishing.

Like William Randolph Hearst at San Simeon, Derring did not hesitate to tear down and rebuild to acquire the perfection which he was striving for. Previous to his death in 1925, he willed Vizcaya to his nephews and nieces. Two of these, Manon Deering McCormick and Barbara Deering Danielsen, bought their brother's and their cousin's interests in the property from their respective estates, and it was they who made Vizcaya available to the public.

A large parking lot on the estate provides spaces for the hundreds of cars which bring guests of Vizcaya each day. A motor tram, much like those which were used for transportation on Treasure island during the Exposition, is used to transport the guests from the huge Italian gateway to the house proper, which faces the water. After entering the loggia of the house, the visitors are permitted to walk through most of the rooms, while others are open for a view front the doorway only. The entire tour takes about two hours and is a delight from start to finish.

We were told that an army of 1,000 artisans composed of Italian stonecutters, cabinetmakers, plasterers, painters, and gifted landscape gardeners, built Vizcaya, their labors extending over five years. Mr. Deering purchased nearby quarries from which came the rough coral, cut and carved on the spot, for the palace walls.

Although Vizcaya is Italian in spirit, the name is Spanish, after the same province of Biscay from which the Biscayne Bay takes its name.

All through our visit we thought of San Simeon and the Hearst castle and hoped that someday it too might belong to California and be opened to the public. Such an experience is educational as well as inspirational.