



Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



BOCA GRANDE --- HIDEAWAY FOR THE RICH

By HAMPTON DUNN

BOCA GRANDE --- J. Pierpont Morgan discovered Boca Grande such a delightful place to live, he also chose it as a site to die.

The fabulous financier first came to Gasparilla Island, which is tucked away here on the Gulf Coast, many years ago in his beautiful yacht. In his later years he, like so many others of the wealthy class, stayed at the colorful and pleasing Gasparilla Inn. When he knew he was dying, J. P. Morgan came back here for his last days. He passed away on March 13, 1943. Morgan's partner, Tom Lamont, also died here.

Morgan's name isn't the only one of affluence to decorate the guest register at the Gasparilla Inn. It is studded with them, crammed with as many famed signatures as the Waldorf-Astoria. For this island in the sun has been the favorite hideaway for the wealthy for 50 years or more. Many of the exclusive Palm Beach set in an earlier day started coming to Boca Grande for the tarpon season, after closing out their mansions for the season.

Boca Grande, that's Spanish for "Big Mouth," was reached by railroad in the early 1900's. Vehicular traffic was brought here by ferry until the 1960's when a toll bridge was opened. It was not until 1966 that mainland water reached here, and the resort took on new hope. The island gets its name from the legendary pirate, Jose Gaspar.

The old historic Gasparilla Inn, a three-story frame structure, is a landmark of Florida's early development splurge. It was built in 1913 and thereby rates as the oldest, and largest public house operating on the island. The Inn has 80 rooms, 11 cottages, an 18-hole golf course, and just about any attraction a guest would desire.

The busiest season starts in April, with the sudden appearance of the silver kings. And the Gasparilla Inn is "the" place for the wealthy sportsmen to live while they engage in their fishing ventures. It's understood, of course, that no one drags a smelly fish back to the elegant old inn. The sporting thing to do is to remove one scale for mounting on the Inn's trophy board and turn the tarpon loose.

