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***Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida* by David Nolan**

Hampton Dunn

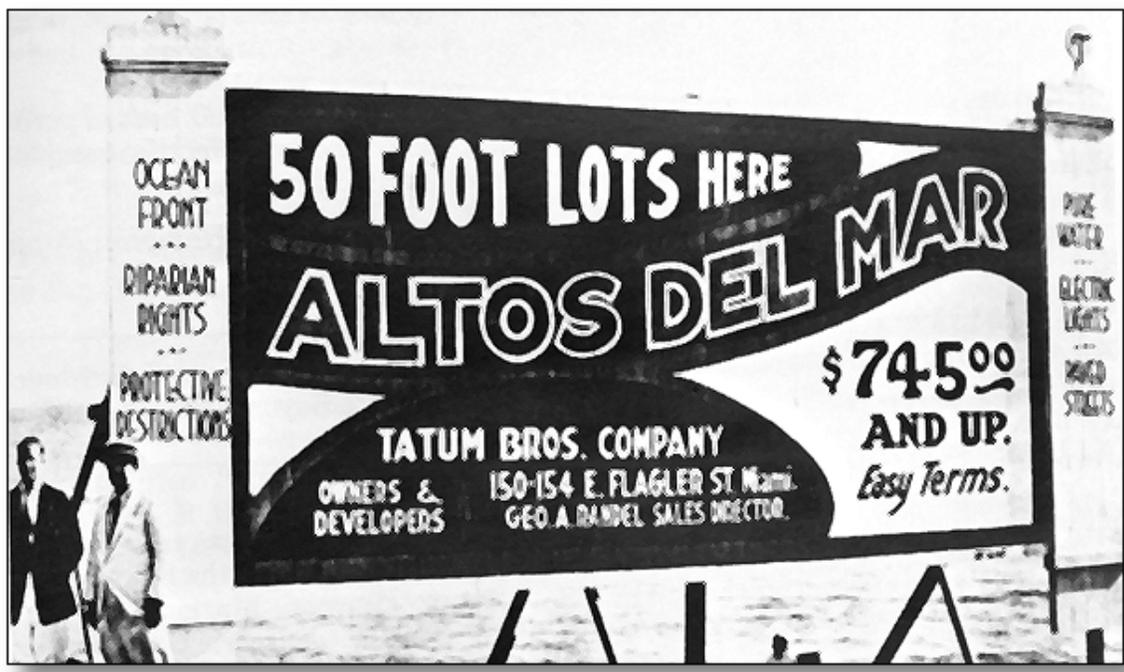
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Salesmen prepared to sell “50 feet in paradise” during the 1920s, from *Fifty Feet in Paradise*.

It was a pleasure to read this book, and I recommend it to those who would learn more about our area, its pioneers and continuing achievers. After all, where else could you learn the number of the railroad car which brought the Benoist to St. Petersburg from Paducah? Or find out that J. D. Smith stayed at the Hillsboro Hotel on a visit to Tampa in 1918?

Wayne Bevis

Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida. By David Nolan. New York, 1984. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Publishers. Illustrations, Bibliography. Pp. ix, 324. Cloth. \$15.95.

“Tracking down (D.P) Davis’s career is a little like trying to nail jello to a tree. . . .” Such descriptive phrases as this about a colorful character in a colorful era of Florida’s history make Nolan’s fresh approach to an old subject most readable, exciting and informative. The author has done monumental research on this state’s background from the days of Andrew Jackson up through the dazzling Florida real estate boom of the 1920s. It was from the latter period that *Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida* got its charming title. It refers, of course, to owning a little plot in the sun—fifty feet in paradise—as part of the American dream. The grand peninsula of Florida was subdivided into these bits of paradise and auctioned off during the helter-skelter days of the “Roaring Twenties.”

Nolan, a thirty-eight-year-old St. Augustine resident, is making his debut as an up-and-coming historical author with this volume. It is appropriate that his book is the first offering by the

distinguished publishing house Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich since moving much of its operation to Orlando.

Nolan tells history the way it should be told. He looks for the people who make history and writes about them and how they did what they did. Florida has an overabundance of interesting characters and superior developers. This historian plows up new anecdotes about our early heroes including Henry Flagler and Henry Plant and moves rapidly along to tip his hat to the real hey day of the Sunshine State's exploitation during the boom. He touches all bases reporting on Julia Tuttle, George Merrick, Carl Fisher, Addison Mizner, John Ringling, Mrs. Potter Palmer, an all-star cast of legendary promoters and builders.

D. P. Davis, Nolan writes, was the quintessential boomer. "Floridians took special pride in 'Doc' Davis because he rose higher and faster and became richer, than any other native son during the Roaring Twenties," he notes. This remarkable entrepreneur came to Tampa from Green Cove Springs as a boy, hawked the *Tampa Daily Times* on the streets during the Spanish-American War, and learned his first lessons in salesmanship. He struck it rich during the boom dredging up the bay to build on several grassy keys and turning them into the exclusive Davis Islands residential section. (Today, he would have been stopped cold by the environmentalists for disturbing the sensitive wetlands). Davis was busy starting a new development in St. Augustine when the boom went bust. Davis after that went abroad on a steamship and was mysteriously lost at sea.

Such are the tales Nolan has spun so well in this excellent panorama of paradise. The book is enriched with an expert selection of photographs that complement Nolan's picturesque writing.

Hampton Dunn

An Annotated Bibliography of Florida Fiction, 1801-1980. By Janette C. Gardner. Preface by James A. Servies. St. Petersburg. 1983. Little Bayon Press. Index. Pp. xv, 220. Cloth. \$25.00.

Florida, long known for its bilious retirees and its belicose tourists, is less recognized for its *belles-lettres*. While the literary *cognoscenti* know of the Florida contributions of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Zora Neale Hurston, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and John D. MacDonald, the state has provided a rich setting for hundreds of other authors. Key West, for example, has attracted scores of literary illuminati to its haven on earth, including Zane Grey, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, Tennessee Williams, Ralph Ellison, John Hersey, Joseph Lash and Philip Caputo.

Research librarians and bibliophiles of Floridiana are indebted to Janette C. Gardner for her exhaustive *An Annotated Bibliography of Florida Fiction, 1801-1980*. Gardner has amassed 1,101 works of fictional nature with a setting in some part of Florida. The books range from gothic romances set in Florida castles that never were to science fiction novels that were to be. A brief annotation follows each listing.