Story of a lonely, elderly 'princess'

Hampton Dunn
LAKE WALES --- Once upon a time there was a wealthy Minneapolis banker, named Irwin A. Yarnell. He came to Florida in the early 1920s and developed Highlands Park and Crooked Lake subdivisions here.

With him came his wife, Josephine, who became one of Florida’s most socially prominent women. She was a princess in the eyes of her rich husband who built her a castle of Mediterranean style architecture high on a hill overlooking a lake in Highland Park. It was named Casa de Josefina, "The House of Josephine," in her honor.

The casa was one of Florida’s showplaces. Centered on a 26-acre estate, it had one of the most complete botanical gardens anywhere. Every specie of palm tree known was planted there.

The Princess and her husband toured the world to fill their home with priceless antiques, such as chairs from the time of Caesar, tapestries and rugs from Moslem harems and paintings by the Old Masters.

But the boom bubble burst. Mr. Yarnell lost millions, but managed to retain the Casa. The couple continued to live there and reared their family of three daughters. Mr. Yarnell died in 1936. The children married and left. The Princess was alone in her castle.

The story skips to 1954 when local tongues began wagging. Widow Yarnell, then 68, was marrying a young Prince Charming. The bridegroom was Clarence J. Tibado, 33, a native of Lake Wales and a promising artist. During World War II, he served on the USS Pensacola and men on the ship commissioned him to paint 15 major battles in which the ship participated. He came back to Lake Wales. His casual acquaintance with Mrs. Yarnell blossomed into a full romance, and they were wed.