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Step back into the Middle Ages - In Florida!

Hampton Dunn
NORTH MIAMI --- Florida owes the noted publisher, William Randolph Hearst, a debt of gratitude for rescuing and bringing to America an ancient Spanish religious landmark which eventually found its way to this modern city.

It wasn't Hearst's idea for the Monastery of Saint Bernard, which dates back to the 12th century, to become a popular Florida attraction. He had spotted the historic structure in 1925 during his worldwide junkets looking for treasures for his magnificent estate at San Simeon, California.

Hearst purchased the colorful Spanish Monastery from an obscure farmer who had used the building for a storage barn, had it disassembled with east of the 36,000 stones being marked, and shipped it back to New York. About the time of its arrival, the Great Depression struck the country and Hearst never fetched his valuable keepsake. Finally, in 1951, right after Hearst's death, two Miami real estate developers acquired the Monastery for $60,000 and brought it south.

Re-erected here in North Miami, just off U.S. 1, it sits in a quiet, formal Spanish garden in all of its majestic, medieval splendor. The Monastery includes priceless treasures from the art, warfare and religious life of long-dead Middle Ages.

The story of the attraction goes back to some 351 years before Columbus' discovery of Florida. In the 12th Century, Alphonso VII, King of Leon, Castile and Galicia successfully drove the Moors from his kingdom. In gratitude to God, the King founded, in 1141 the Monasterio de San Berardo de Sacramenia in an isolated valley in the province of Segovia, Spain. It was operated by the Cisterian Order for 694 years. In 1835 it was confiscated by the Spanish Government and sold to a farmer, who used it to store grain. And thus it was forgotten until the alert William Randolph Hearst uncovered it in his journeys.

The architectural gem, now open to the public, is now owned by the Episcopal Diocese of South Florida.