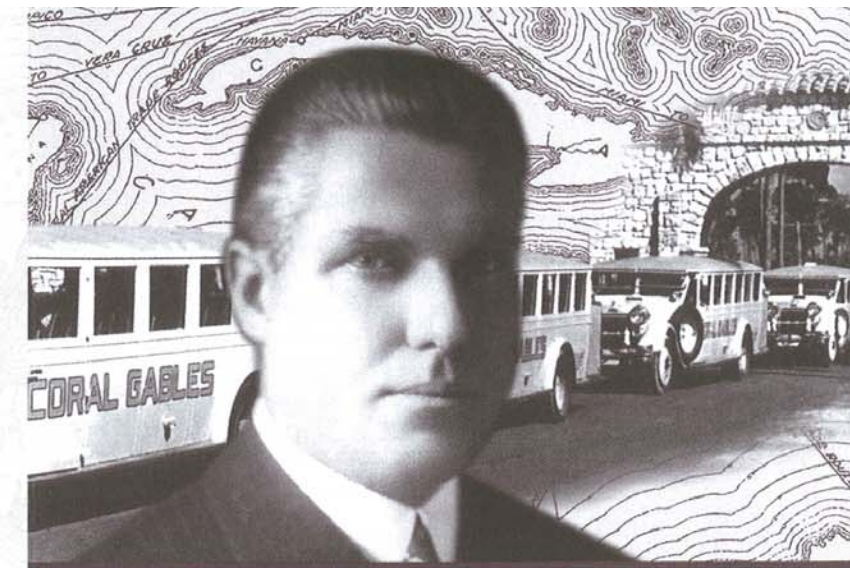
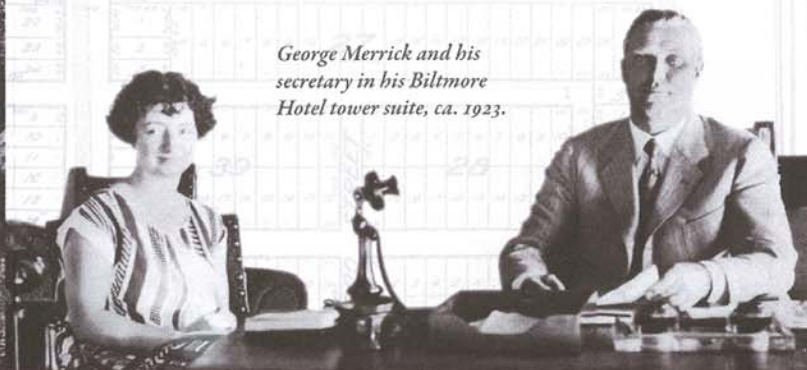


George Merrick is the visionary behind Coral Gables. His romantic notion of a Mediterranean village planted beside Miami emerged before the 1926 hurricane and continues to reinvent itself. He wrote in 1921, "Coral Gables is not a thing of the moment, of the year or even of the passing period, but a wonderful monument to the achievement of worthwhile perseverance in the creation of beauty and in the coming true of dreams that will as solidly endure and as beautifully and bountifully age as does the everlasting coral on which this master development is founded."

This publication can be made available in large print, tape cassette, or Braille upon request. The City of Coral Gables is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.

George Merrick and his secretary in his Biltmore Hotel tower suite, ca. 1923.



CORAL GABLES
Miami's Master Suburb
Merrick House
The HOME of CITY FOUNDER
GEORGE MERRICK

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE was home to the Reverend Solomon G. Merrick, Althea Fink Merrick, and their six children. George, the eldest son, founded and developed the City of Coral Gables, incorporated in 1925. Existing today much as it did in the 1920s, the house stands as a tribute to South Florida's history and the family's legacy. It showcases Merrick family art, books, photographs, furniture, and other belongings.

The residence and grounds had humble beginnings as the Gregory homestead. William H. and Sarah Gregory acquired the original 160-acre tract under the Homestead Act of 1862 by building a dwelling, cultivating the land, and living there for five years. In 1898, the Gregorlys received their patent,



Althea Fink Merrick (George's mother) relaxing on the enclosed porch of her home, known as Coral Gables, before her death in 1937.

signed by President William McKinley. At this time, the Merricks lived in Duxbury, Massachusetts, where Solomon was minister of the historic Pilgrim Congregational Church.

In early 1899, tragedy struck the young Merrick family. Four year-old daughter Ruth, Helen's twin, died of diphtheria. Her death, coupled with other family members' chronic illnesses aggravated by harsh winters, changed the course of their lives.

After the funeral, a friend told of his visit to an infant city of perpetual sunshine called Miami. This vision of warm tropics propelled Solomon and Althea to make a momentous decision. They would start over in South Florida.

We invite you to visit Coral Gables Merrick House, open Wednesday and Sunday afternoons to individuals and at arranged times for groups. Docent-guided tours last approximately one hour.

CORAL GABLES MERRICK HOUSE
907 Coral Way | Coral Gables, Florida 33134

Adults: \$5.00
Students/Seniors/Group Members: \$3.00
Children ages 6 through 12: \$1.00
Children ages 5 and under: Free

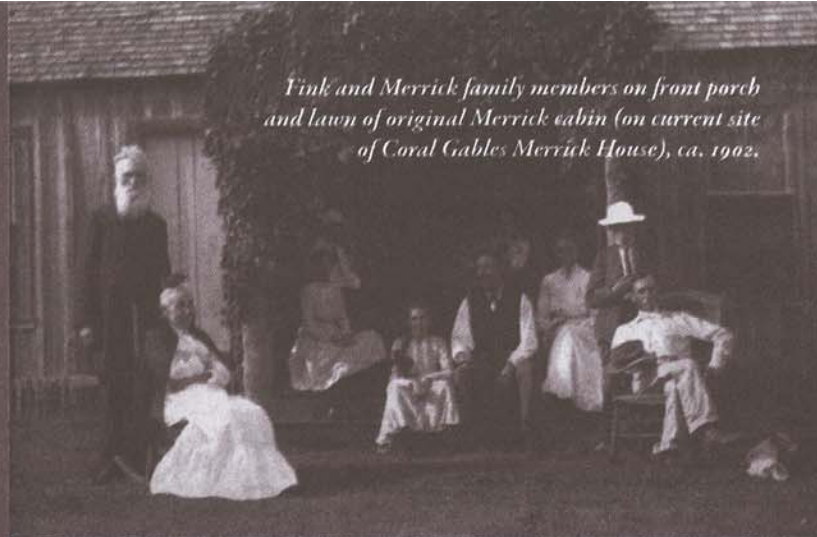
For information, contact Coral Gables Historical Resources or find us on the Web:
305.460.5361
historicalresources@coralgables.com
www.CoralGables.com



Solomon found the name of James Bolton, minister of Union Chapel (now Plymouth Congregational Church) in Coconut Grove, in a church directory and wrote to him about available land. Reverend Bolton responded that the Gregory homestead in “backwoods Miami” was for sale for \$1,100. Merrick withdrew his life savings and, on July 11, 1899, purchased the homestead, sight unseen.

The Merrick family left Duxbury in October 1899. Althea and the young children went to Springdale, Pennsylvania, to stay with her family, the Finks. Solomon and George (almost thirteen years old) continued to Florida to ready their new homestead.

When Solomon and George arrived, Miami was under a yellow fever quarantine. Finally able to reach the homestead, Solomon was disheartened to discover he had purchased a rocky, partially cleared tract with scattered guava trees, a barrel-stave barn, and a crude wood cabin. With only \$300 left to begin anew, this Yale-educated minister had no choice but to get to work and make the best of a bad situation.



Fink and Merrick family members on front porch and lawn of original Merrick cabin (on current site of Coral Gables Merrick House), ca. 1902.

Althea and the other children came in January 1900. The early years were difficult for the Merricks as George and his father, aided by Bahamian workers who lived in Coconut Grove, grubbed out pine and palmetto and planted grapefruit trees. Until the groves began to bear, the family grew okra, beans, eggplant, and other fruit and vegetables that George peddled by mule-cart around Miami. In 1901, Solomon succeeded Bolton as minister of Union Chapel. In 1903, Richard (last of the Merrick children) was born.

By 1907 the groves had begun to bear, and George entered Rollins College in Winter Park, even though he had not attended school since arriving in Florida. The Merricks began construction of an extensive addition to their cabin. Designed by Althea, the addition adapted features of New England homes and an exterior of native “coral rock” (oolitic limestone), quarried from what became Venetian Pool. Unfortunately, construction stopped when the Bank of Fort Dallas failed, and the Merricks lost their savings. In 1909, George continued his education at New York Law School in Manhattan but was called home after one year when his father’s heart condition worsened. Upon the home’s completion

Founder George Merrick (second from left in front of trolley) with the first City of Coral Gables Commission, ca. 1925.



in 1910, the Merricks named it “Coral Gables” and the surrounding groves the “Coral Gables Plantation.”

After Solomon’s death in 1911, George managed the groves. He expanded the grapefruit, avocado, and vegetable enterprise and continued shipping grapefruit to northern markets. By 1913, Coral Gables Plantation was the largest agricultural enterprise in South Florida.

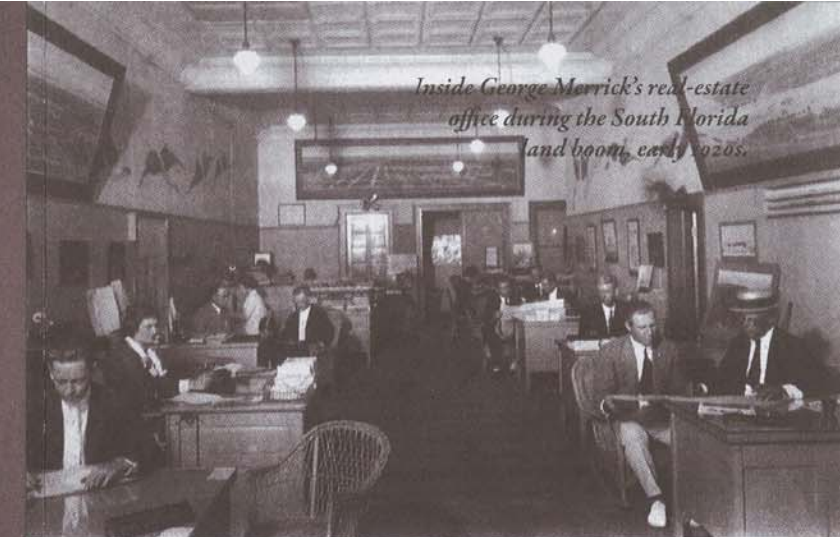
In 1916, George married Eunice Peacock of Coconut Grove. They moved into their coral rock honeymoon cottage, “Poinciana Place,” not far from his mother’s home. As Merrick dreamed of a planned subdivision on the family plantation, he entered Miami real estate. Between 1913 and 1921, George was involved in developing more than twenty South Florida subdivisions.

To assist in planning his new development, George enlisted his uncle, artist Denman Fink; his cousin, architect H. George Fink; and landscape architect Frank Button. Merrick based his “Master Suburb” on centuries-old

Mediterranean prototypes. Before the first lots were sold in November 1921, Coral Gables had wide boulevards, lush landscaping, and impressive plazas and entrances under construction.

As Coral Gables flourished, George Merrick’s dreams became reality. But it was not to last. The September 1926 hurricane and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 killed real-estate ventures and dashed George’s dreams.

Never protecting his assets, George



Inside George Merrick’s real-estate office during the South Florida land boom, early 1920s.

funneled his personal fortune back into the City of Coral Gables, trying to keep it alive. When South Florida’s land boom went bust, he lost everything except Althea’s house, where she lived with George’s sister Ethel. After 1935, they turned the family home into “Merrick Manor,” a boarding house. Althea died in 1937, leaving the house to her children, who gifted their shares to Ethel. She continued to run Merrick Manor until her death in 1961. In 1954, Ethel tried unsuccessfully to donate the property to the City of Coral Gables as a memorial to her brother George. The property was left to her nephews and eventually sold to William L. Philbrick, who formed the Merrick Manor Foundation to care for it.

In 1976, the City of Coral Gables finally acquired the house and restored it to its 1925 appearance, a period most representational of the Merrick family’s lifestyle.

