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Fantasy Land for a Gilded Age: Henry Bradley Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel

Lani Friend, *Independent Researcher*

After the Civil War, wealthy northerners boarded steamboats at Jacksonville alongside adventurers, inquisitive naturalists, plume-hunters, invalids, and land speculators "doing the St. Johns" in the first big wave of Florida tourism. But interest in the peninsula was sparked long before that when soldiers returning north from the Wars of Indian Removal brought glowing reports of its natural beauty and agricultural potential.

Early on, Florida's sunshine and mineral springs attracted health-seekers from the Northeast, the Midwest, and as far away as Europe. One of them was New Englander Ralph Waldo Emerson who in 1827 spent two lonely months moping around St. Augustine in hopes that the warm climate and sea air would cure his tuberculosis. With only "billiards and the sea-beach" for entertainment, he passed his days strolling the shore, exploring the Castillo, and interviewing Minorcans he met on the street and Indians selling venison (Richmond 1939, 75-78). Another traveler seeking remedy for congestion of the lungs was the wife of a New York transport company official—Mrs. Henry Bradley Plant.

In 1853 when Henry and Ellen Plant came south from New York, the journey required eight days and three steamships. Plant describes Jacksonville as a "settlement of a few shanties…with only one poor wharf and not a vehicle of any kind to carry passengers or baggage" (Smyth 1898, 47-49). The roads were mired in sand, beset by fleas and wild hogs. The house calling itself a hotel was so badly kept that Henry was cautioned not to enter, and had to seek lodging in the cabin of a settler seven or eight miles across the river. Plant's host sent for them in an immense dugout canoe rowed by a crew of uniformed slaves.

When Ellen's health improved, the Plants undertook the twenty-mile buggy trip to St. Augustine escorted through the first five miles of dense

flatwoods by the daughter of a Seminole chief who blazed a trail by marking trees. The rest of the journey followed the narrow, overgrown trail of the Old King's Road. On their return, they lost their way back to the cabin, and Henry was forced to scour the ground for wagon tracks and bent twigs in the dark. They were saved only when their host came searching for them when they did not return on time (Smyth 1898, 46-50). Appalled by Florida's primitive conditions and lack of transportation, Plant resolved to fill the void.

The next year Henry was made Superintendent of the Adams Express mail and cargo company in Augusta, Georgia. The Plants moved there thinking Ellen would benefit from the warm weather. They spent several years living in hotels in Augusta, although Henry spent much of his time traveling on business in his private railway car (Hole and Bodo 1989, 40).

Plant recognized the potential of the express business and developed extensive contacts throughout the South. "He was infallible in his far-sightedness" noted an associate (Brown 1999, 7). With a cartel of southern stockholders, Plant bought out Adams and created the Southern Express Company. When the Civil War erupted, he convinced Confederate President Jefferson Davis to designate Southern Express as the official agency to carry all Confederate monies including soldiers' pay (Brown 1999, 9).

In 1861 Ellen Blackstone Plant died of her disease. Following her death, Plant threw himself into his work, causing his own health to suffer. To recoup, he went on a world tour where he encountered a wide range of cultures, architectural styles, and hotel experiences. When he returned, he retook control of Southern Express, and, together with Henry Sanford, now president of Adams Express, he began obtaining land and railroads in the South. In 1873 he married Margaret Josephine Loughman of New York, and they made their home in a mansion on Millionaire's Row on Fifth Avenue (Lenfesty 1999, 4-5). Plant expanded his business, and by the end of the century, the Southern Express Company had almost three thousand agencies throughout the South (Braden 2002, 34).

The Plant System of Railroads, Steamships, and West Coast Hotels

Beginning in 1879, Henry Plant started buying up bankrupt railroad lines in the Southeast, developing a transportation network that expanded to fourteen railway companies (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.). His railways eventually linked central and west Florida to the rest of the country (Brotemarkle 2015). In 1882 he purchased a line of steamboats plying the Apalachicola Basin, one of the main entryways into the peninsula. He also acquired the steamer *Henry B. Plant* to operate on the St. Johns River between Jacksonville, another entryway to Florida, and Sanford (Johnson 1966, 122).

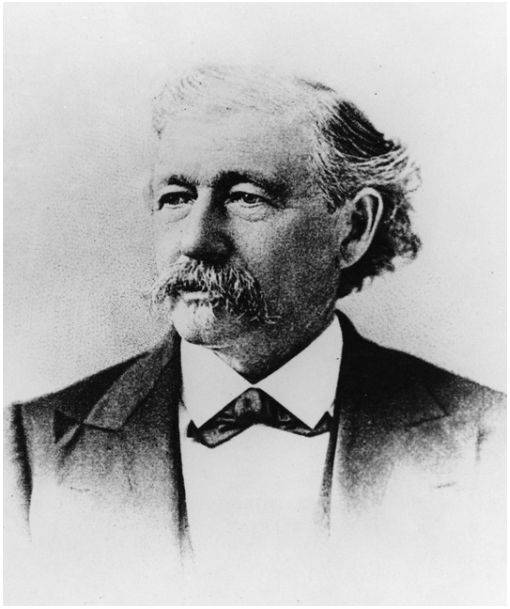

Figure 1. Henry Bradley Plant

In 1885 Plant's South Florida Railroad was extended to Port Tampa where fish and oyster companies needed fast transport to markets in the East and Midwest, and ice plants needed to supply ice for the 50,000 pounds of fish shipped daily to various points. Vicente Martinez-Ybor moved his cigar company from Key West to Tampa and soon established a dozen cigar factories and what would become the future Ybor City (Covington 1966, 3).

Plant then opened his first hotel—the Inn at Port Tampa. Guests exited their train cars on the pier, in front of Plant's Inn and a later St. Elmo's Inn that was added in 1890. The Inn at Port Tampa was built on stilts a half a mile from the shore and was the only Plant hotel open year-round. Guests were able to fish out of their windows and have the hotel's cook serve it to them at lunch (Michaud, n.d.).

Travelers would arrive on Plant rail lines to stay at the hotels and resorts that Plant owned while they waited for Plant steamships to carry them to Cuba, Key West, Fort Myers, Jamaica, and Mobile, Alabama: this management of tourists' transportation and lodging came to be known as the Plant System (Michaud, n.d.). The Plant System of Railroads, Steamships, and West Coast hotels (Braden 2002, 13) would eventually include nine steamboat and steamship lines employing over 12,000 people (Covington 1966, 3) and eight luxury hotels. Within a few years of the railroad's arrival, Port Tampa was the busiest phosphate port in the world, and more tobacco was imported at this point than anywhere else in the country (Johnson 1966, 124). Plant's various rail routes gave him a monopoly on railroads on the west coast of Florida. After the railroad converted to standard gauge in 1886, it became possible to send a Pullman car all the way from New York to Tampa without changing trains (Johnson 1966, 124).

Plant's System was the most profitable transportation network of its time, partly because of its modern equipment and its ability to ship oranges and vegetables in good condition. It also offered comfortable passenger accommodations and excellent meals (Johnson 1966, 129).

When Plant arrived in Tampa in the early 1880s, only about 750 people lived there. By 1890 Tampa's population had risen to over 5,000 (Covington 1966, 4). Like the genie in the bottle, "Plant breathed into [the town] all the elements of push, progress, and success" transforming an isolated backwater into "The Queen City of the Gulf"—a dynamic hub of transportation and tourism in the Southeast (*New York Tribune* 1891, accessed June 2, 2019).

Henry Plant opened up and promoted new territory—specifically, the hinterlands of Florida. The railroads' immense impact was noted by journalist William Drysdale: "[The rail lines] laid their tracks out into the

wilderness…and made the towns and cities as they went along. It would be a question for a political economist…whether Florida has built up the railroads or whether the railroads have built up Florida" (Drysdale 1891, accessed June 2, 2019). According to historian Dudley S. Johnson, Plant was Florida's greatest 19th century railroad developer. Others invested more money and developed larger areas, but in the railroad business, no one surpassed Plant (Johnson 1966, 131). Indeed, Plant's railroads helped create modern Florida (Brotemarkle 2015).

A Stately Pleasure Dome

Like potentates dividing conquered lands, Plant and his friend and rival, railroad magnate Henry Flagler, flipped a coin, the story goes, to decide who would develop which coast. It was said that the two men made a deal to split Florida between them, and neither would build railroads in the other's territory. Flagler took the east coast all the way to Key West, and Plant claimed the west coast (Grismer 1950, 188). Flagler proceeded to construct the majestic Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, costing $2,000,000—at the time the most expensive hotel building in the world (Ayers 2005, 13). Plant determined to "out-Flagler Flagler" and create in Tampa the most extraordinary luxury resort ever seen (Covington 1966, 4).

For his motif it was said that Plant looked to Granada and the palace of the Alhambra—the last stronghold of the Moors in Spain. But the true source of inspiration for the design lies further east in the desert kingdoms of India, Persia, Egypt, and Arabia—in the arched colonnades of Delhi's Jama Masjid, the domed mosques of Isfahan, and the towering minarets of Cairo and Medina. "Plant's palace" would assimilate these elements in a style called Islamic Revival. But the design was really an artful apparition conjured by the Aladdin's lamp of the architect's imagination. Or it may have been based on Plant's youthful memory of viewing P. T. Barnum's palatial Connecticut home, Iranistan, with its onion domes and minarets. Built in an Indo-Moorish design, it was in imitation of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton which Plant could have visited in 1874 during his European honeymoon with Margaret (Hole and Bodo 1989, 15-16). Whatever the source, Henry Plant, like Kubla Khan, "a stately pleasure dome" decreed.

Pleasure palaces were the destinations of choice for the High Society of the Gilded Age—a Golden Era of capitalism when titans of industry like John Rockefeller, Jacob Astor, and Cornelius Vanderbilt amassed enormous wealth from businesses built largely on the backs of oppressed immigrants and poor American laborers. As industrialization increased after the Civil War, so did extremes of wealth and poverty. In the post-war decades, roughly three-quarters of America's private wealth belonged to the top 6% of households. At the same time, Americans could see signs of economic desperation, even starvation, all around them. In New York City, visitors were shocked by "the juxtaposition of luxury and homelessness" (Edwards 2006, 100).

A Fascination with Florida

A new class of multimillionaires arose, eager to participate in a trending ritual known as "vacationing" (Edwards, 51). Gilded Age elites vacationed in remote and alluring locales, of which Florida ranked first. As early as 1874, one travel writer observed "Florida…is yearly weaning great numbers of Americans from their annual journey to Europe…There is a fascination in the Floridian tour which cannot be overcome." The writer listed two benefits to coming south, the first of which suggests he never spent a summer here: "Summer without excess of heat, and society without the oppressive conventionalities of Saratoga…At St. Augustine, wealthy New Yorkers are erecting Winter palaces, and at Jacksonville the Bostonians are building Handsome mansions. Florida is the fashion" (*New York Times* 1874, 6).

Two decades later, the assessment still held true: "Florida is and must ever continue to be the great Winter resort for Americans" declared William Drysdale (*New York Times* 1892, 12). Some 200,000 visitors a year traveled through Jacksonville into the peninsula. Since the resident population of the state was said to be less than 400,000 at the time, "the Northerner finds himself there surrounded by his own people, fed by Northern cooks, housed by Northern landlords, and clothed by tailors and dressmakers from Saratoga and Newport. As the best cargoes of tropical fruits always reach the big hotels by rail, I am inclined to think that they go down from New York, too…" (Drysdale, 12).

Plant and Flagler would compete to develop one luxury hotel after another, marketing them with brochures showing magnificent buildings in Spanish and Moorish design. Partly as a result of this publicity, notes Susan R. Braden in *The Architecture of Leisure: The Florida Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant*, "the whole state of Florida came to be viewed as exotic, tantalizing, and fantasy-evoking" (Braden 2002, 13). These winter resorts demonstrated the wealth of men who "have 'made their piles'" and "can afford to loaf at the busiest time in the year" (Ralph 1893, accessed April 7, 2019). "A long stay at a winter resort…implied vast wealth and enough free time to travel great distances" (Braden 2002, 15).

Since the first steamboats entered Florida, travelers had encountered a landscape that was foreign and otherworldly—towering cypress draped with Spanish moss; forests pierced by the shrieks of green parrots and piliated woodpeckers; poisonous snakes and alligators basking on the riverbanks; and colorful Crackers hawking their wares on the landings. The attraction of places like this, wild and unfamiliar, distant in space and time, would find parallel expression in the luxury winter resorts of Florida's east and west coasts.

Henry Flagler would fill the bill with his three Spanish-castle hotels in St. Augustine, a Mediterranean milieu close to home; Plant would deliver Swiss chalet ambience at his Belleview Hotel at Bellaire, Renaissance luxury in his Ocala House near the "Fairy Land" of Silver Springs, and Saracenic splendor at the Tampa Bay Hotel (Braden 2002, 76).

The Tampa Bay Hotel—the second of Florida's top five "luxury winter resorts" (Braden 2002, 11)—would embody the spirit if not the amenities of modern fantasy playgrounds, providing one of Florida's first all-in-one vacations for the entire family. The media of the time outdid themselves in promoting the hotel, the Plant System of transportation, and Florida itself as the new "American Riviera," (Ralph 1893, 490) doing as much to bring Gilded Age society to Florida as did the railroads. Plant's palace became a reflection of that society and the flagship of a fleet of hotels that set the stage for Florida's present-day theme resorts.

The Lure of the East

Increasing trade in the nineteenth century between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, encompassing most of the Near East and North Africa, stimulated popular interest in all things "Moorish." Britain, dependent on Egyptian cotton for its textile mills, declared Egypt a protectorate; France colonized Algeria; Marseilles established a monopoly on French trade with the Levant. Eastern culture soon became a subject of fascination for Europeans.

A century earlier, Mozart's opera *Abduction from the Seraglio* had seduced European audiences with the intrigues of a Turkish harem. Various translations of the Arabic *One Thousand Nights and a Night* regaled readers with tales of a cruel sultan and his doomed concubines, wily slaves, a magic lamp and carpet, and a genie in a jar.

The richly detailed paintings of the Orientalists such as *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834) by Eugene Delacroix and *The Lion Hunt* (1836) by Horace Vernet brought to life an alluring vision of the East. Erotic paintings of slave girls such as *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) and *The Turkish Bath* (1863) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres raised the art of the sensual to new levels.

New techniques in printing and illustration produced exciting travel guides and magazines like *Harper's Weekly* and *Scribner's* Monthly featuring art and ideas from cultures around the world. Washington Irving's T*ales of the Alhambra* (1832), Sir Richard Burton's translated version of the *Tales, The Arabian Nights* (1850), and Edward Fitzgerald's 1859 translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Braden 2002, 264-65) became bestsellers.

In the homes and buildings of the American Northeast, these themes found expression in Islamic Revival elements such as "Turkish corners" and John Rockefeller's "Moorish smoking room" (Braden 2002, 265). Separate male enclaves for smoking, drinking, and gaming became widely popular and were richly decorated with divans, ottomans, and curtains upholstered in silk Islamic weave.

A Trove of Treasures

Even before Tampa became a city in July 1887, local businessmen had formed the Tampa Hotel Company to plan and build a tourist hotel five hundred feet in length and three to five stories tall "of Moorish architecture" to be "furnished in the Spanish style" (*New York Hotel Register* 1887, 5). It would be "the only fire-proof hotel south of Baltimore," and would feature fresh vegetables brought from Cuba by the steamships of the Plant Line, "the time from Havana being less than 24 hours. This will be the only hotel in the United States that can set fresh vegetables before its guests every day of the year" (*New York Hotel Gazette* 1887, 3).

Plant agreed to build the hotel if the town built a new bridge across the Hillsborough River and gave him a significant tax break. He chose New York architect J. A. Wood because he was familiar with Wood's work in New York including hotels with Oriental and Eastern features (Covington 1991, 58-59). Work on the Tampa Bay Hotel began in 1888.

The next year, France invited the United States to send people and exhibits to the Paris Universal Exposition. The Plant Investment Company spent $15,000 to collect and display southern resources, "while the Great State of Florida, with all her boundless and undeveloped resources, refuses to make an appropriation of $500 to care for and call attention to the State's meager display at the same fair" (*The Tampa Journal* 1889).

Margaret Plant accompanied her husband to Europe where she consulted dealers and art collectors to obtain statues, paintings, tapestries, and furniture to decorate the hotel. "She spent two and a half years abroad, acquiring furnishings of a quality and diversity to please the most demanding and worldly guests the hotel might attract" relates Tampa cultural historian Maureen Patrick. The hotel's clientele included international diplomats, millionaires, celebrated artistes (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.) and a soon-to-be U.S. president.

Although the building proper was completed early in 1890, the opening was delayed, leaving Mrs. Plant time to amass a profusion of fashionable objets d'art (Grismer 1950, 189). While in Europe, Henry Plant bought over 30,000 yards of scarlet carpeting with black lions, a replica of a carpet of

Louis XIV. Other purchases included over a hundred carved mirrors from Florence and Venice, items from the Palace of Versailles, and objects reputed to have been owned by Louis XIV, Napoleon, Queen Victoria, and Mary Queen of Scots (Figure 2: Tampa Bay Hotel statue, mirror, and furnishings in lobby). In all, 41 train car loads of decorations and furnishings intended for the new hotel were brought to Tampa on Plant's steamships or by rail (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.).

The first guests registered on January 31, 1891. One of the early special events was a gala birthday party for Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant. Stephen Crane, correspondent for Joseph Pulitzer's New York World, used the events of the Spanish-American War as inspiration for his short story "The Price of the Harness" while a guest at the hotel. Famed evangelist Billy Sunday—"the most contagious individual that ever pounded the carpets of the halls of the Tampa Bay Hotel"—stayed there during his Tampa revival. William Jennings Bryan, thrice Democratic nominee for President of the United States, addressed a rally of well-off supporters at the hotel in 1900. He was accompanied by his cousin, William S. Jennings, who later became Governor of Florida (Dunn 1981, 9-10).

Figure 2. Tampa Bay Hotel statue, mirror, and furnishings in lobby

Alhambric Splendor

Evoking the grandeur and scale of the Alhambra, the Tampa Bay Hotel was "an enormous red brick castle" rising an impressive five stories and covering six acres. It contained over 500 rooms, among the first in Florida to have electric lights and room telephones (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.) . Wide stone steps led to verandas the size of city streets. The walk around it on the outside was exactly one mile (Parker 1891). Mosque-like curves adorned the hotel windows, and Moorish arches supported the balconies. Reflected in the river below, the hotel's silvery domes and thirteen tapered minarets topped with the crescent moons of the Islamic calendar shimmered like a mirage out of *The Arabian Nights*.

Plant himself, rather than investors, financed the hotel spending $2,500,000 on construction and another $500,000 for furnishings. Among the modern amenities were elevators, hot water heating, and a large mirror in the ceiling of each guest room with three light bulbs set below to throw light to all parts of the room (Covington 1991, 63). Special features included sixteen private suites each with double parlors, three bedrooms and two baths; bathrooms for each room on the lower floors and for every three rooms on the upper floors. This was an advantage over Flagler's Ponce de Leon Hotel which, when completed three years earlier, had only one private bathroom, for the owner (Hole and Bodo 1989, 18).

Figure 3. Tampa Bay Hotel looking across the Hillsborough River

Plant knew how to organize a modern resort. First, he provided direct and convenient rail service (Hole and Bodo 1989, 41). Guests arriving at the hotel by railroad pulled up just outside the galleries of the west entrance. Many came in their own private cars accompanied by retinues of servants and nannies. Train service could be accessed from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. Two Pullman Vestibule trains left New York morning and noon, arriving at the hotel the evening of the following day (*Florida Gulf Coast Series No. 1* 189?, 25).

Second, he provided his guests with an all-inclusive vacation experience with activities for the whole family. Without an urban setting to attract visitors, Florida's isolated resort hotels of the Gilded Age had to become destinations in their own right (Braden 2002, 13). "The great hotel and its surroundings are a world within themselves, and the diversity of the entertainments is sufficient to please the old and the young, the serious and the gay" (*Tampa Bay Hotel Brochure* 1897, 10). There were telegraph hook-ups for businessmen to keep in touch with New York headquarters; croquet and afternoon teas for the ladies; hunting and fishing trips for the sporting set; concerts on the piazzas; musical and theatrical performances in the Casino; and outings and games for the children.

In addition to an 18-hole golf course, there were tennis and croquet courts, a boathouse, hunting and fishing grounds, stables, racetrack, kennels, flower conservatory, spa facilities, cafes, billiard parlor, and card rooms. The Casino featured two bowling alleys, a shuffleboard court (Hole and Bodo 1989, 22), and a 2000-seat auditorium with a roll-away floor over a heated indoor swimming pool (Florida Frontiers 2015, accessed May 30, 2019). The Casino, located between the hotel and the Hillsborough River, was Tampa's first performing arts venue. Famous entertainers such as John Philip Sousa, Anna Pavlova, Booker T. Washington, Ignace Paderewski, and Sarah Bernhardt were among the celebrities who appeared there (*Sunland Tribune* 2018, 158).

Excursion boats whisked guests to Sulphur Springs, nearby islands, and out to sea on fishing expeditions. For the health conscious there was a Swedish massage parlor and a "hydro-therapeutic plant" offering the benefit of female beautification: "Rouge would be shamed by the rosy freshness and

clearness of the cheek" produced by the cold baths (*Florida Gulf Coast Series No. 1* 189?, 16-22).

In addition to being all-inclusive, Florida's winter resort hotels were also self-sufficient. Not wanting to rely on local government, businesses, or services, Plant made the Tampa Bay Hotel an independent utility, maintaining its own power plant, water supply, and sewage system. Only the telephone system was supplied by the city (Covington 1991, 70). Plant's railroad brought in guests, staff, supplies, and food from the north or from other Florida cities (Braden 2002, 13). From 400 to 600 skilled staff recruited from the hotels of New York and New England coastal resorts attended to guests' every need (Hole and Bodo 1989, 22). They had their own housing on site in a large two-story building behind the kitchen (Covington 1991, 62). Some staff came from the immediate or local areas.

The grounds of the hotel, spanning 150 acres, were as extraordinary as the hotel itself. Designed by Anton Fiehe, a German-born immigrant known as the foremost landscape gardener in the world, the hotel grounds ranked with those of the grand hotels of the country (Pizzo 1932). At one time, Fiehe was sent all the way to the Bahamas to obtain a boatload of tropical plants for the hotel. His published 1894 catalogue lists over 150 varieties of cultivated plants including 20 types of palms, 13 ferns, 12 varieties of orchids (Hole and Bodo 1989, 20), and orange, lemon, lime, and tangerine trees (Pizzo 1932).

Visitors from the city side of the river could approach the hotel by a paved street leading up to the main gateway. From here, broad walks led to the center of the buildings and spread out across the grounds past flower beds, fountains, palms, "banana plantations," and beds of pineapples. Near the top of a rise, a bubbling spring ran to the river in a stream lined with palms, banana plants, flowers, and ferns. Immense beds of violets, pansies, roses in Victorian designs, and collections of fruit trees and tropical flowers occupied the spaces between the walks (Drysdale 1892, 20).

A Bewilderment of Beauty

Henry Parker described the effect of first entering the hotel's "broad and inviting portals" as "one of astonishment and delight" (Smythe 1898, 187). The Grand Parlor or drawing room, he continued " is a museum of beautiful things…Here there is an inlaid table that once graced the Tuileries as did three ebony and gold cabinets. On the table is a rare bit of sculpture, *The Sleeping Beauty of Carrara* marble." There was furniture owned by Marie Antoinette and Louis Philippe…and French and Japanese cabinets under dazzling crystal mirrors (Smythe 1898, 188).

The Grand Parlor featured "a dozen or twenty sets of furniture, all different in color and design…statues and statuettes, reclining marble figures, and vases and curtains…everything the mind could imagine and more" (Drysdale 1892, 20). There were "cabinets from Spain and France, vases from India and Japan, mirrors from fair Venice, and bronzes from Italy, and even from Peru. You may even sit…at Napoleon's table, while you marvel at the bewilderment of beauty before you" (*Florida Gulf Coast Series No. 1* 189?, 9-10).

Not everyone, however, was impressed. In 1902 Alice Browne traveled throughout Florida, staying at many of the Flagler and Plant hotels, including the Tampa Bay. "The effect was rather that of a furniture store displaying its goods and did not compare with the drawing rooms at the Ponce de Leon which looked as if they might find a place in the palace of a king" (Browne 1902, 41).

Public Spaces: To be Seen or not to be Seen

The rotunda was the social hub of the hotel. Nearby were a newsstand, flower shop, telegraph office, and railway offices. "With its polished floors, rich carpets and hangings, antique vases… and luxurious lounges," wrote Parker, it was…

> as little like a hotel office as the East Room of the White House is like a railway station. The massive doors are of Spanish mahogany… Thirteen marble columns support a balcony over the second floor… Mirrors and antique frames rich in gilded carvings are on the walls, massive doors in beveled glass lead to parlors, halls, libraries and writing rooms—electric lights are imbedded [sic] in the ceilings and walls and hang down in chandeliers (Parker 1891, 29).

Figure 4. Tampa Bay Hotel Parlor

Life-size bronze Indian maidens served as light fixtures on the steps to the second floor (Covington 1991).

A room like the rotunda—unrestricted by gender—was a novelty at the time noted Drysdale:

> This is a new feature in American hotels, and one that I hope may soon be copied in other places. It recognizes the fact that men and women like to be together…as freely and comfortably as they may in their own libraries after dinner…It recognizes, too, that man is an animal who smokes…and need not flee to the bar or reading room to do so, but may with propriety sit down by his wife or perhaps by somebody else's wife…and smoke to his heart's content (Drysdale 1892, 20).

And the ultimate criterion, "Given a man with a cigar or no man at all, which will woman choose?" asked Drysdale. "It leaves absolutely no excuse for a man's sneaking off by himself to regions where woman may not go." Women still lacked access to hotels' grand spaces unless accompanied by a man. Unescorted women found it difficult to even register at a hotel (Braden 2002, 15).

Figure 5. People sitting in the Tampa Bay Hotel lobby

The Plant and Flagler resorts catered to upper-class women since they chose the vacation resorts for their families. Hotels were designed for feminine tastes with an emphasis on domesticity and warmth. Furnishings were stylish, accented with classical art. The overall impression was one of elegance and grace. Women outnumbered men at these resorts three to one, but were always escorted (Braden 2002, 115).

Gender-restricted public spaces were intended to appeal to women's need for comfort and privacy from men's gaze. These included ladies' entries, ladies' parlors, private dining rooms, ladies' shuffleboard, billiards, and café facilities (Braden 2002, 15).

Nonetheless, leisure-class women felt freer in these remote vacation destinations to be seen in public venues than they felt at home. They participated in men's traditional pastimes such as bicycling, motoring, and tennis, and they enjoyed the independence of strolling the grounds and attending teas, plays, and concerts without a male escort (Braden 2002, 115-116).

The dining room was topped with a great dome, and around the interior ran a gallery featuring carved mahogany Moorish-style facing "from which the comfortable scene of 800 people eating their dinners may be enjoyed" (Drysdale 1891, 17). In the words of Alex Browning, assistant to the architect, Mr. Wood, "…the gallery above the dining tables was following out the idea that the women of the harem should look down on their lords while eating without being seen themselves—a little far-fetched for Tampa, but quite effective architecturally" (North 2018, 9).

Even the food served at the Tampa Bay Hotel was extraordinary. "The waiters…gained their knowledge and their courtesy in the leading hotels and clubs of New York," extolled Henry Parker. "The celebrated chef…has fourteen first-class assistants, besides a dozen others in his kitchen, which is the largest, most thoroughly equipped and most convenient to be found in the United States…Meats are shipped in a refrigerator car from New York, while game comes from Baltimore" or local sources, and fish was brought in from South Florida. The pastry cook had "enjoyed a remarkable fame in New York at Delmonico's" as had the baker at the Manhattan Club (Parker 1891).

William Prime, Egyptophile and world traveler, was impressed with the dining room's tableware:

> There is no more striking feature of the furniture than the table porcelains. The plates are of infinite variety. You may have your beef on a very charming bit of French porcelain, your salad on a reproduction of an old Vienna plate of semi-Saracenic pattern, your ice on one of the little plates designed by Moritz Fischer…your coffee in a perfect repetition of one of Wedgewood's simple and lovely bordered cups…The table is of the very best class, and equal to that of any hotel in the world (Smythe 1898, 185)

African-American Staffs at Resort Hotels

The idyllic and conspicuous leisure enjoyed by the privileged at Florida resorts was made possible by both black and white employees. Segregation and strict hierarchies kept these employees separated by class, gender, and race (Braden, 129). Maureen Patrick notes that the Tampa Bay Hotel required workers with a wide range of skills to operate in the efficient manner

its owners and clientele demanded. These included gardeners, hunting guides, laundresses, cooks, tennis and golf coaches, waiters, and telegraph operators (PlantMuseum.com n.d.).

Racial segregation was commonly accepted throughout the South during the Gilded Age. By the mid-1880s, hotels, restaurants, theaters, schools, churches, and other public spaces either excluded blacks or relegated them to separate facilities. Black workers filled most of the low-paying hotel jobs. Black women worked in the laundries, and black men drove carriages, taxis, and bicycle chairs. African-American boys worked as caddies. At the Tampa Bay Hotel, rickshaws pulled by young African-American men in uniforms ferried guests around the grounds.

Space for living quarters at the resorts was determined by job importance, sex, race, and even nationality. Black workers typically lived in separate buildings and barracks owned by the hotels or the railroads. At Flagler's Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, white hotel officers and staff lived in a building constructed for them within the hotel complex while black men and women had separate living quarters in the city. Black men were housed in "colored barracks," and the black women lived in a laundry building near the railroad (Braden 2002, 128). Staff-only dining areas were set aside for the workers at these resorts, and separate kitchen facilities prepared basic meals.

Blacks and whites in the hotel industry shared common goals. Tourism was a mainstay of the economy, and it was to the benefit of all employees to create a positive vacation experience for guests. Nonetheless, black workers were expected to project an image that was stereotypical and degrading. Carriage drivers were "great raconteurs," while black women were often cast as fortune-tellers. Black waiters and porters were required to amuse guests by singing gospel songs, performing musical and dance routines, and playing exhibition baseball (Braden 2002, 130).

The success of the tourist industry and the hotels relied on the contributions of black business owners and entrepreneurs who managed hotel concessions and operated their own supporting services. Florence Gaskins ran a thriving business picking up and cleaning fine resort wear and "Palm Beach suits" for guests at Flagler's Hotel Royal Palm in Miami (Braden 2002, 132).

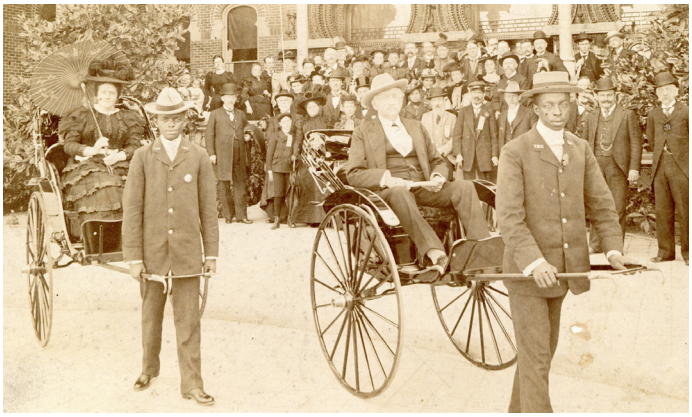

Figure 6. Mr. and Mrs. Plant in Rickshaws

The Rocking Chair War

The glory days of the Tampa Bay Hotel came during the Spanish-American War when it served as headquarters to American forces preparing to invade Cuba. The conflict termed "a splendid little war" by United States ambassador to England John Hay would trumpet the name of Tampa across the front pages of newspapers throughout the nation, making it one of the most famous hotels in the world.

During the mid-1890s, according to historian Karl Grismer in *The History of the City of Tampa and the Region of Tampa Bay*, Tampa residents were enthralled by the courageous fight being waged by Cuban insurgents to win freedom from Spanish rule. Hundreds of Tampa citizens, born in Cuba, had fled the island because of the tyranny of the Spanish authorities. Letters received from friends and relatives they left behind told of the suffering of their countrymen. Jose Marti, the Cuban national hero, was welcomed with wild enthusiasm when he came to Tampa and pleaded for funds to continue the fight. Ybor City cigar makers pledged a day's pay each week to show sympathy for the Cuban cause. Latin-American business and professional men made liberal contributions. For a large part of the population, Grismer relates, the Cuban war was Tampa's war (Grismer 1950, 206).

Tampa became one of the main ports shipping arms and ammunition to the insurgents. To stop the flow, a Spanish general declared an embargo on Cuban tobacco exports to the United States, hoping to shut down Tampa's cigar factories. Vicente Martinez Ybor and other leading manufacturers persuaded Henry Plant to send his steamers, the Olivette and Mascotte, to Havana before the embargo deadline and bring back enough tobacco to keep their factories running. The ships returned piled high with Havana leaf, even in their staterooms, and the cigar industry was saved (Grismer 1950, 206).

Then, on the night of February 15, 1898, the battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor. Even before Congress officially declared war in April, Tampa was selected as a principal embarkation point for troops which would invade the island. The location was chosen primarily because it was the city nearest to Cuba which offered both rail and port facilities. In addition, Tampa's subtropical weather would be ideal for acclimating the soldiers. Moreover, the Tampa Bay Hotel would provide luxurious quarters for all the "brass" accompanying the expedition (Grismer 1950, 206-207). The Tampa Bay Hotel, closed for the season, was reopened as a military headquarters and served visitors, military families, and civilians. Plant's ships were kept busy ferrying American citizens back from Cuba and Spanish residents from Ybor City returning to Cuba (Covington 1991, 72-77).

Figure 7. With the regulars at Port Tampa, Florida

War correspondents such as Richard Harding Davis and Stephen Crane reported on the events at the hotel as Frederic Remington sketched scenes of preparations for war. Clara Barton, who had tended to the wounded from the explosion of the Maine, gathered supplies for the Red Cross and frequented the hotel. Thirty thousand enlisted men camped in tents around Tampa and as far east as Lakeland (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.).

Teddy Roosevelt camped nearby with his Rough Riders, while Mrs. Roosevelt enjoyed the amenities of the hotel. Richard Harding Davis called it the "rocking chair period" of the war because military officials gathered on the wide verandas where "they talked and argued and rocked and drank gallons of iced tea, and the hot days wore into weeks" (Davis 1898, 49-50). Set within a city "of derelict wooden houses drifting in an ocean of sand," he related, the hotel was "the real oasis in the real desert" (Davis 1898, 46).

Figure 8. The Mascot of the Rough Riders

Every night, relates Davis, officers, women from the Red Cross or Salvation Army, and Cuban refugee women gathered in the rotunda to listen to the band or danced in the ballroom. One officer holding an iced drink and a cigar between his teeth "gazed at the colored electric lights, the palm trees, the whirling figures in the ballroom and remarked sententiously, 'Gentlemen, as General Sherman truly said, 'War is hell.' Four miles outside this hotel, sleeping under the pines and in three inches of dirty sand, there were at first ten thousand, then twenty-five thousand men" (Davis 1898, 60) both Regulars and Volunteers.

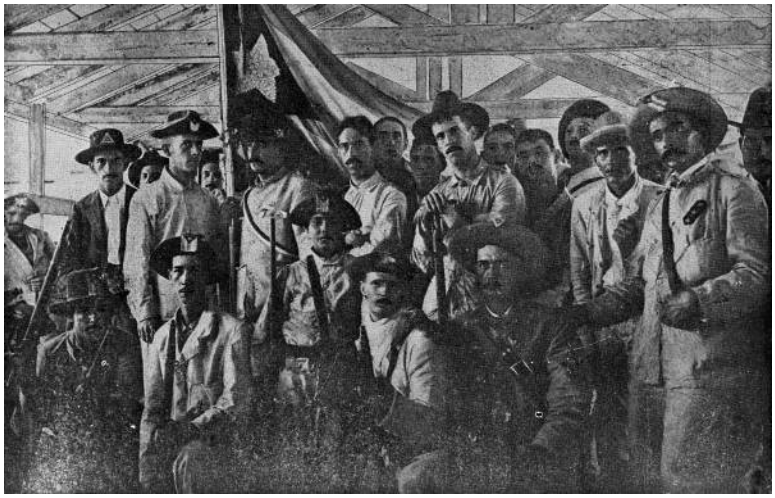

Figure 9. Cuban Volunteers

Maureen Patrick provides insight into what life in the camps was like for the troops: "Teddy Roosevelt, then a colonel in the U.S. Expeditionary Force headed for Cuba, spent only four days at the Tampa Bay Hotel. Roosevelt—who billeted with his men in Port Tampa—risked his military career by complaining regularly and bitterly about his troops' housing and food. Living in tents, sweltering in the summer heat, bitten by mosquitoes, the men foraged for food in the scrub land around the Port and accepted hand-outs from local families. Predictably, disease settled into the camp. The majority of casualties in the Spanish-American War were due not to military engagement but to cholera, typhus, dysentery, and yellow fever" (Patrick 2006, email correspondence).

The army embarked for Cuba in May in a disorderly process that jammed up the rail spur to Port Tampa. Plant remained in Tampa throughout June. The next year he died from a heart attack at his home on Fifth Avenue in New York City (Hole and Bodo 1989, 24).

Symbol for a City

Unfortunately, Henry Plant was never able to attract enough upper class clientele to his hotel to keep it solvent, and only his goal of competing with Flagler had kept it open. Although it was on the winter resort circuit, registration numbers never equaled those of the first season. According to one source, the hotel was never more than half full, probably due to its location and competition from Flagler's hotels at Palm Beach, now the "The Newport of the South," and from Plant's own new Belleview Hotel at Bellaire (Hole and Bodo 1989, 24). Other luxury hotels were being built in Florida causing the Tampa Bay Hotel to operate at a loss.

Upon his death in 1899, the total worth of Plant's estate was nearly $17.5 million. He left his entire estate in trust for his four-year-old grandson and namesake, but his will was contested by Margaret Plant and their son Morgan. After a long legal battle, Plant's estate was divided between them. While the will was in dispute, the hotel continued to operate as a hotel (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.).

In 1905 the City of Tampa bought the hotel and 150 acres of surrounding land for $125,000.00 (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.). Over the next two decades, various management companies tried different strategies to turn a profit. Room rates were reduced, local citizens were offered season cards for social events, and the grand rooms were booked by the public for proms, teas, and banquets, "making the hotel an integral part of the city's social life" (Hole and Bodo 1989, 25).

The collapse of the Florida land boom in 1925 followed by a devastating hurricane the next year sent the state into a depression a few years before the 1929 stock market crash (Florida Center for Instructional Technology 2002). The hotel management companies went under, and the City had to seek other options to maintain Plant's hotel. In 1933 the City voted to

lease the building to the new University of Tampa for $1.00 per year (Hole and Bodo 1989, 25). The Tampa Municipal Museum was established in one wing of the first floor, and the university leased the rest of the building (PlantMuseum.com, n.d.). In 1974 the museum was renamed the Henry B. Plant Museum to reflect its new focus.

The impact of the Tampa Bay Hotel on the city was "immeasurable." Its exotic architecture and immense size captivated the national press, focusing attention on Tampa and Florida's Gulf Coast long before Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders made it famous. It revived a lagging building industry and "brought Tampa into the mainstream of Victorian design and social life" (Hole and Bodo 1989, 28).

Although the hotel was never a profit-maker for either Henry Plant or the City of Tampa, it was a catalyst for the growth of the city. The hotel was reborn as a civic and cultural center for clubs, meetings, weddings, celebrations, and the first Gasparilla Ball. The Chicago Cubs used it as their base for spring training. In 1919, Ruth hit his longest home run during a training game at Plant Field, adjacent to the hotel (EclipseBuildingCorp.com 2018). Exhibition games were played in the nearby South Florida Fairgrounds, and the South Florida Fair eventually grew into the Florida State Fair. In terms of its economic and cultural roles in the history of the city, Henry B. Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel was an outstanding success (Covington 1991, 77-79).

Today the hotel is a National Historic Landmark and home to the University of Tampa and the Henry B. Plant Museum. It is significant as a rare and outstanding example of Moorish Revival architecture in the United States and survives as the only such hotel in the nation. Built of brick, it is also one of the earliest examples of reinforced concrete construction in Florida (Hole and Bodo 1989, 10).

The hotel's enormous appeal to visitors of the time and its embodiment of the ultimate Gilded Age getaway was best portrayed by Henry Parker on its Grand Opening in February 1891:

> The arched and towered façade, the silvered dome, again silvered by the moon's rays lifted up more brightly against the star-lit sky, the

> crested minarets…the lights from a hundred windows, the soft patter of the water in the fountains falling on the lily pads, the perfume of the flowers, the splash of an oar and the half-murmur of a love song from him who splashed the oar—the soft melody of the music that came from within and floated on the almost summer air…Think you this is not an Alhambric picture? Then you have not read of the Alhambra nor seen Tampa Bay (Smythe 1898, 203).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: *Portrait of Henry B. Plant*. 19--. Black & white photoprint, 10 x 8 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/29623>, accessed 30 June 2019.

Figure 2: *Tampa Bay Hotel statue, mirror, and furnishing in lobby*, Burgert Brothers Photographic Collection, Courtesy, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System. http://digitalcollections.hcplc.org/digital/collection/p15391coll1/id/2139/rec/1 [Accessed 30 June 2019].

Figure 3: *Tampa Bay Hotel looking across the Hillsborough River towards north wing and outer buildings*, Burgert Brothers Photographic Collection, Courtesy, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System. http://digitalcollections.hcplc.org/digital/collection/p15391coll1/id/2088/rec/3 {Accessed 30 June 2019].

Figure 4: Griffith, George W. *Tampa Bay Hotel parlor - Tampa, Florida*. 1903. Black & white photoprint, 10 x 8 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/33377>, accessed 2 July 2019.

Figure 5: *People sitting in the Tampa Bay Hotel lobby* - Tampa, Florida. ca 1898. Black & white photoprint, 8 x 10 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/41883>, accessed 30 June 2019.

Figure 6: *Mr. and Mrs. Plant in Rickshaws*, Henry B. Plant Museum, Tampa, FL

Figure 7: *With the regulars at Port Tampa, Florida, Ninth United States Cavalry skirmishing through the pines* by Frederic Remington, Courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System. http://digitalcollections.hcplc.org/digital/collection/p15391vra/id/96/rec/1 [Accessed 30 June 2019].

Figure 8: *The Mascot of the "Rough Riders" - to be loosed on the Spaniards*. 1898. Black & white photonegative, 3 x 5 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/8672>, accessed 1 July 2019.

Figure 9: Willets, Gilson. *Cuban volunteers in the barracks*. 1898. Black & white photonegative, 4 x 5 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/149395>, accessed 1 July 2019.