

The Hotel Plant



Built in 1925, the Hotel Plant had 100 well-appointed, comfortably furnished rooms, each with a private bath. The inviting lobby greeted guests and visitors with the most desirable atmosphere for comfort and conversation. Lights beckoned with a welcome as many Plant Citians, and those from surrounding cities, showed up for a gala reception to celebrate the opening of the hotel, which cost over half a million dollars. Guests in formals or their Sunday “best” toured the structure and sipped punch. Plant City women were on all hotel floors serving as hostesses to showcase the sparkling rooms. The hotel, which opened on Armistice Day 1926, was a popular stopping place for both transient and resident guests. It was “Home Sweet Home” to Miss Martha Robinson, who lived there for 26 years, and Mrs. Lena Duyck, who resided there for 20 years. The Dining Room of the Hotel Plant served the choicest of seasonable foods throughout the year. The hotel’s kitchen, one of the most modern in the South, featured a complete breakfast menu, with orange, tomato, grapefruit, or prune juice. The guest’s evening meal could be finished in Plant City style, with a serving of strawberry shortcake with freshly made whipped cream.

Connie’s Ready to Wear, one of Plant City’s finest ladies' dress shops, was located on the ground floor, southeast corner. Martha’s Shoppe, Sardin’s Bible Book Store, and T. M. & W. L. Tying, Real Estate Brokers who sold homes, farms, and groves, also occupied rental space on the street front floors. After the 1929 stock market crash, the community hotel promoters were unable to pay the mortgage interest and faced foreclosure. An insurance company operated it until 1942 when it was bought by Plant Citians Mr. and Mrs. Ben Rawlins, her mother, Mrs. Susan Alice Hipp, and Mrs. Hipp’s son, C. H. Moorman. Among the VIP guests were U. S. Senator

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Park Trammell, Florida Governors Fred Cone, Fuller Warren, Dan McCarty, Millard Caldwell, and Spessard Holland, who also became a U. S. Senator. The hotel was a haven in times of disaster. During hurricanes, owner Ben Rawlins opened the doors to more than 300 families, filling all the rooms and using the lobby and halls as sleeping quarters. Free meals were served to the evacuees.

Tampa Electric Company hosted the annual reception during Strawberry Festival Week at their offices in the Hotel Plant until the company built a new office building on Haines Street (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard). The luncheon has become a very popular social event on parade day, and, due to increased attendance, it has moved to larger venues over the years. It is now hosted at the John R. Trinkle Center at Hillsborough College's Plant City Campus on Park Road.

The East Hillsborough Historical Society's Pioneer Museum includes an exhibit of the remnants of the Hotel Plant located in the 1914 Plant City High School Community Center. Photos, memorabilia, or remembrances of The Hotel Plant are welcome; please reach out to info@ehhsoc.org.

Sources: East Hillsborough Historical Society – Quintilla Geer Bruton Archives Center – printed books, newspapers, vertical files, photographs, and plat maps. For additional information, please contact info@ehhsoc.org