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Florida mecca for millionaires

Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



FLORIDA MECCA FOR MILLIONAIRES

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA --- Railroad magnate Henry B. Plant, builder of the elegant Tampa Bay hotel, wired an invitation to rival railroad magnate Henry Flagler, who'd built plus hotels on the Florida East Coast.

"Where's the Tampa Bay?" coyly replied Flagler. "Follow the crowds," shot back Plant.

This was in 1891 and in the era following, the Tampa Bay became the mecca for Presidents, Cabinet members, legislators, European royalty, dozens of millionaires and many others from the international set.

The first housekeeper recalled in an interview years later:

"They came from all corners of the world in private cars and special trains to visit the Tampa Bay which was famed on two continents for its beauty, service and fine liquors...One large table in the dining room was reserved for 20 multi-millionaires...European royalty, including counts and countesses, often ate at one table..."

The Tampa Bay, now occupied by the University of Tampa, was Plant's hobby. He spent \$3 million building it and nearly another million in furnishings. He sent Mrs. Plant to Europe with an unlimited drawing account to go on a shopping spree for furnishings.

The red brick structure, modeled after the Alhambra in Granada, Spain, is of Moorish architecture, two blocks long, four stories high, 500 rooms, and spread over an area of six acres.

(In 1963, Holiday magazine called it an "eyesore;" a short time later, State Rep. Robert Mann, of Tampa, complained about it being "an ugly view.")

Plant died in 1899. The hotel was sold to the city of Tampa in 1905 and was operated until 1929. It became the university in 1933. The building was Teddy Roosevelt's headquarters during the Spanish-American War.

