

THE TAMPA BAY HOTEL: THE SYMBOL OF TAMPA

Senior Counsel Section

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In 1891, Henry B. Plant opened the Tampa Bay Hotel, a Moorish palace with 511 hotel rooms, as well as thirteen minarets, that have since become the symbol of Tampa. In an era when anything oriental was considered sophisticated, the Tampa Bay Hotel was all the rage. The hotel featured the latest technology, including Edison electric lights and even a telephone in every room.

So began the presentation of Cynthia Gandee Zinober, the executive director of the Henry B. Plant Museum, as she told the story of the Tampa Bay Hotel to dozens of judges and lawyers at the Senior Counsel luncheon in March.

All the guests at the Tampa Bay Hotel arrived by train on Henry Plant's railroad, which Plant brought to Tampa in 1884. There were spaces for fifteen private rail cars. With the arrival of the railroad, the cigar manufacturers, who had moved from Key West to Ybor City, were now able to ship cigars north. The Plant rail system covered Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida with over 5,000 miles of track.

Only a few years later, in 1898, the Tampa Bay Hotel was the gathering point for American



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forces during the Spanish-American War. Plant had used his influence to have Tampa named as the port of embarkment for soldiers and supplies shipping out to fight the Spanish in Cuba.

Cynthia remarked that the hotel welcomed many famous guests during the war. Although he stayed in camp with his fellow Rough Riders, Colonel Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt came to visit his wife at the hotel. Another guest, artist Frederic Remington, was employed by William Randolph Hearst to draw illustrations during the war. Clara Barton, pioneering nurse and founder of the American Red Cross, set up a hospital at the hotel.

In later years, other celebrities who stayed in the hotel included French actress Sara Bernhardt, who arrived in her own private railroad car. Russian prima ballerina Anna Pavlova danced in the hotel auditorium.

In 1905, the City of Tampa acquired the Tampa Bay Hotel, which continued to operate as a resort hotel until 1929. Then, in 1933, the city leased the buildings to the University of Tampa.

The Henry B. Plant Museum, established in 1933, is the portion of the Tampa Bay Hotel that retains its original form and character. Plaster detail, woodwork, and the floorplan remain as they were created in 1891. Most of the furnishings in the museum were purchased for the hotel by Henry Plant and his wife Margaret. They reflect the opulence and the lavish lifestyle of America's Gilded Age. The museum features a Spanish-American War exhibit and a special room displaying mementos and souvenirs from the Plant system of railways, steamship lines, and hotels.

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One of the Henry B. Plant Museum's signature events is the annual Victorian Christmas Stroll, where guests can experience the grandeur and splendor of

Christmas at the Tampa Bay Hotel in the 1890s. Vintage Christmas decorations are displayed throughout the museum. The Victorian Stroll is an event anticipated by the residents of Tampa every year.

The Senior Counsel Section enjoyed learning more about this Tampa icon at its luncheon, and thanks Zinober for speaking to the group.

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Florida Supreme Court Justice Speaks at Senior Counsel Section Luncheon

HCBA's Senior Counsel Section was honored to have Florida Supreme Court Justice R. Fred Lewis speak at its luncheon on January 31. A former Chief Justice, Justice Lewis was appointed to the Supreme Court of Florida on December 7, 1998, by the late Governor Lawton Chiles. While serving as Chief Justice, he founded Justice Teaching, an organization that now has over 4,000 volunteer lawyers and judges placed with and active in Florida public schools, which enhances civic and law-related education through the programs in all levels of Florida schools.

