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THE TAMPA BAY HOTEL—A TALE

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By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University Honors Program
University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

October 15, 2011

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“Architecture is frozen music.”

—Goethe
Introduction

At the mention of Florida, sunny beaches, lurking gators, and fresh-squeezed orange juice spring to mind. Yes, there is plenty of all that now, but how did Florida become Florida? Tampa played a large role in spreading the word about the Sunshine State and successfully lured countless tourists from all over the globe. World-wide wonder was evoked and curiosity shipped guests by the train load to a little fishing village entirely unknown a few years prior. What then attracted tourists? It was by no means the natural assets found on Florida’s gulf, but rather a response to the herculean efforts of a man who decided to throw a ball. Not just any ball – but the ball of a lifetime.

Tampa Bay Hotel’s opening was elaborately marked with an unforgettable grand ball. Such splendor was previously unheard of in the laid back, subtropical town of Tampa, but under the guidance of Henry B. Plant the unimaginable came to life: voracious mosquitoes made way for world-renowned personalities, candles were extinguished by the luminous glow of electric light, and orange juice was eclipsed by fine vintage and sparkling champagne.

A brief glimpse at Tampa’s past will reveal how a little fishing village of seven hundred carved its name on the map, and what it was that lured acclaimed celebrities and the best families from around the world to journey toward the muggy climates of Tampa Bay. With the help of a few fictionalized characters, we will go back to the end of the nineteenth century, or in the words of Charlotte Bronte, “late years – present years are dusty, sun-burnt, hot, arid; we will evade the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the mid-day in slumber, and dream of dawn.”
A Tampa Morning

1893. Sweet melodies ran down the long veranda on a soft Tampa morning. The sun streamed in under the projecting roof with beams so blaring that the gentleman occupying the rocking chair nearest the edge was obliged to put down his copy of Bourget’s *Cosmopolis*, with the complaint that the glare off of the white pages made it nearly impossible to read.

“How is it that the sun can scorch us here in this manner, while merely a train ride north will prove the same sun entirely powerless over the merciless heaps of snow,” he observed to his neighbor on the left. Charles Vanderlyne occupied the chair next to his, they were long time friends and it was upon Charles’ recommendation that Edmund had decided to spend a week in Tampa.

“A mystery indeed. Though I am glad that Henry had the sense to get us out of those merciless heaps. I rather like the sun during the winter season,” replied Charles Vanderlyne, who was glad to be interrupted just then from his own current of deliberations.

The book was quite forgotten by now, the turn of conversation peaked the gentleman’s interest enough to let it slip off his lap and go tumbling down to the smooth, concrete floor. He surveyed the scene before him while reaching for the book, then proceeded to wonder out loud, as he repositioned it on his lap. “Henry did have sense, but how did he ever conjure up this marvel in the middle of what must have been just a swamp. Do you know the story?”

“I pieced some bits together in passing. You know how that goes... a fact or two here, some gossip there, and set my imagination to work out the blanks.”
A spark of curiosity brightened Edmund’s eyes. “My attention is all yours,” he remarked while swaying back comfortably in his rocking chair. The movement caused the book to slip off of his lap again, but he was already much too absorbed in his friend’s narrative to notice.

**Tampa’s Fate Astir**

Problems are the rich soil of opportunity and though they are often painful to face, without them life would sail on undisturbed, unchallenged, and worst of all unchanged. One notably haunting problem brought many challenges to its nineteenth-century victims. It swept through home after home till it showed its gaunt face at Ellen Elizabeth Blackstone-Plant’s footsteps where it stung her with the life-draining symptoms of tuberculosis.

The illness was often called consumption as the degenerative process could not be stopped by physicians. The most promising treatment available was to seek comfort in the dewy climates of the South. Ellen’s doctors believed that the warm air would relieve her stifling cough and enliven her with a brief breath of health. In the fall of 1852, the invalid exchanged the harshening weather of New York for a mild winter in Florida. An unfortunate lot fell on Ellen, but through it Florida reaped an unprecedented fortune.

As winter dawned in the north, Ellen’s trunks were packed, corded and sent south. Ellen followed behind, though not alone – she was accompanied by the future benefactor of Tampa’s fate, her husband, Henry Bradley Plant. It was during their winter sojourn in Jacksonville that Florida’s untapped business potential was revealed to her husband’s enterprising mind. Henry had a keen eye for new business opportunities and fate resolved to thrust him into the hidden business pastures in slumbering Florida. Although unfortunate
circumstances brought him to Florida, Henry stayed vigilant and in due time helped to transform Tampa from a drowsy cracker village into a rather burgeoning metropolis (Grismer 170).

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The story came to a halt, “Edmund, are you acquainted with Henry?”

“Just his portrait,” he replied, thoughtfully, “He’s from Connecticut— if I’m not mistaken.”

“Precisely,” Charles continued…

**Henry Bradley Plant**

Henry Bradley Plant had a rich ancestry that traced back to the original founders of Branford, the picturesque town in which he was born on October 27, 1819. Since his early youth, Plant was eager to enter the business world. He steadily endured his school years at Gillett and Lowville Academies and finished at the Lancasterian School of New Haven without the interest to pursue higher education though opportunity did lend him that chance. His aunt imagined him as a clergyman and offered to patronize his tuition at Yale, but her kindly offer startled the young Plant and he ran off to join the workforce. At eighteen, he made his debut in the world of business by humbly beginning as a captain’s boy with the New Haven Steamboat Company serving on a direct line between New York and New Haven. A zealous young worker, Plant always paid due credit to his Puritan roots by conducting his work with great energy and thoroughness. His capacity for advancement was quickly noted and he was promoted to take charge of the steam and rail express business
between New York and New Haven. Soon after proving himself there his worthy reputation recommended him for a position with the Adams Express Company.

![Figure 1: Portrait of Henry B. Plant](image)

Unlike the average youths of his age, who were typically reckless, Henry remained unaffected by their revelries and developed a reputation for his strong, incorruptible character. Thus he was deemed trustworthy and placed in the charge of transporting government money between the New York Custom House and the U.S. Mint. Even there he proved himself reliable; several other promotions within the business took Henry higher and higher until he found himself as president of the Southern Express Company (Stimson 120).

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“Sounds like he just smooth sailed straight up the *caste* system of the transportation world,” Edmund remarked with approval.
Charles shook his head. “He certainly sailed, but I am sure he passed through his share of storms and tempests. At least he was not spared the billowy path when his wife got ill. The thing about him, Edmund, is that rather than plunging into revolt with fate – he bartered with it.”

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During the retreat with his wife, Plant discerned that it was only a matter of time before the economic possibilities in the South would wind the United States into a whirlwind of business with Cuba and Central America. Naturally, he supposed that Florida’s location would make it the perfect intermediary between the north and south and as the prospect rubbed too near his industry to be ignored, he decided to look about. This he began straight away by hopping into a horse drawn buggy with the prospect of taking a trip from Jacksonville to St. Augustine.

It was that first trip that showed him that the current modes of Florida’s inner-state transportation would not support the projected business credibly. In fact, it would not support any kind of business at all. The trip possessed all the elements of good adventure, but proved a poor business venture as he later recalled. “In trying to reach the old town through the forests, after paddling through the St. Johns River in a dugout canoe, the guide lost his way, and the party was compelled to spend the night beneath the trees,” Henry later laughed over the memory (“Henry B. Plant”).

With fresh images of tropical forests and the vapory clouds that formed his shelter for the night, Plant’s voyage revealed the severe transport deficiency in Florida and he started musing over the prospect of extending his railroad empire to Florida’s Cedar Keys. He was a
man of action, but as determined as he was to start laying tracks, his aspiration sunk before it could take flight. Much of Cedar Keys was proudly owned by David Yulee, a politically powerful figure who had contrived his own plans for city development and refused to allow any outside interference. Plant’s intention to bring his railroad to Cedar Keys did not appeal to Yulee’s self interest and his proposal to purchase the necessary land was rudely denied. Their coarse refusal provoked Plant, “I’ll wipe Cedar Key off the map! Owls will hoot in your attics and hogs will wallow in your deserted streets!” he cried, as he turned his gaze further south toward Tampa (Grismer 171). At the time, due to limited land access, Tampa was isolated from the rest of the state and survived somewhat scantily on a cattle trade with Cuba. However, Plant saw potential in the Gulf Coast village and resolved to take his railroad to Tampa.

**The Railroad**

Railroad building was not always a successful enterprise. The South Florida Railroad was granted a charter from the state in 1879 to lay tracks from St. Johns River to the Gulf. The scheme was greatly anticipated. Even President and General Ulysses S. Grant thought it worth celebrating; he marked the beginning of the project by digging the first spadeful of dirt in Sanford, but the road only made it to Kissimmee before the company’s funds ran out. The story repeats for the JT&KW (Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad) whose tracks extended merely fifteen miles before the project was dropped for the same reason. The half construed attempts at creating reliable transport left the southern Florida seaboard about as accessible as the peak of Kilimanjaro, and yet the botched attempts only paved the way for the shrewd Connecticut Yankee (Furnas 784). Plant began by collecting railroads. He bought
the South Florida Railroad, snatched the coveted charter from the JT&KW, then launched his own construction on June 6, 1883, and carried it through to the last rail.

The Plant System did not generate large profit for years, but that was no reason to put any gray hairs on the head of Henry B. Plant. The railroad project was a win-win situation no matter how profits would flow. The state benefited by receiving the much needed railroad – and the Plant Investment Company benefited by receiving large stretches of state land.

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Edmund laughed, “Ah – there goes Henry, bartering with fate again.”

“Oh yes— in *that* lies his genius. Guess what he got out of the deal—”

Edmund looked perplexed and searched his mind blankly, “you will have to excuse me, Charles, such matters are entirely out of my line,” he finally gave in and pleaded with his companion to go on.

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Records claimed that his company was deeded 95,329 acres of state lands along with land grants from both the Florida Southern Railroad and the JT&KW which brought the land allotment to a handsome 2,655,482 acres of state property (Grismer 176). The generous land allotments made way for even greater ambitions as Plant did not rest on his laurels, but continued further development in Tampa. He established a steamship line between Tampa, Key West and Havana by bringing the new two hundred foot steamer *Mascotte*. The event was celebrated on Wednesday, March 31 in 1886. *The Tampa Tribune* reported, “Festivities continued until very late amid the popping of corks, the flowing of champagne . . . The whole
affair was a grand tribute to the enterprise and farsightedness of Tampa’s greatest benefactor” (Grismer 178). Tampa never forgot the significance of that day and embalmed the Mascotte into its city seal.

**Tampa Awakes**

All the commotion roused Tampa from her slumber, broke down her walls of obscurity, and turned the city into one of the nation’s most celebrated boom towns (Grismer 178). Land value skyrocketed from $10 per acre to about $250 per acre, and continued to bring a steady flow of newcomers. In 1882, the town was home to 722 people, but by December 1885, the population grew to 2376 – growing more in just three years, than it had in the past sixty since the establishment of Fort Brooke in 1824 (Grismer 179). Fishing was the first major industry to rise in Tampa, but many other businesses began to sprout.

The lively economic activity caught the attention John L. Marvin who came to town, followed by his 7000 pound safe. He was welcomed by the city to open its first bank, The Bank of Tampa. The institution proved a success, but the eight mules charged to haul his safe gave out before reaching their destination. Before long, the bank was renamed First National Bank and re-housed on the southwest corner of Franklin and Washington Street (Grismer 180).

Rumor, being the swiftest of all the evils, decided to augment Tampa by spreading gossip of its countless, thriving guava trees. Gavino Gutierrez, a Spanish importer from New York City was sent to Tampa on this account. Upon his arrival Gutierrez realized the trick when the luscious forests of guava trees could not be found, but that did not dampen his enthusiasm for the city (Covington 3-4). He thought the climate would suit the cigar
industry and it was upon his recommendation that the firms of Ybor and Sanchez & Haya brought their Key West factories to town. In due time, the cigar industry became the financial backbone of Ybor as it reeled immigrants and revenues in ever increasing quantities (Mormino and Pozzetta 69).

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Edmund was entirely engaged in the story, his fallen book was forgotten till he noticed it from the corner of his eye and bent down to fetch it. The motion allowed Charles to pause for a moment. “We must take a trip to Ybor one afternoon,” he remarked, as he restored his full attention.

**Stroke of Misfortune**

For some time Tampa progressed with as much good health and robust ambition as any flourishing town could hope for, but it would have been too much like a dream if some unforeseen problem did not frustrate the swift current of progress. The problem came uninvited and anchored itself in the heart of the town. Physicians could not tell how yellow fever passed from one person to another, but theories circulated to explain what science could not. One popular theory deduced that the fever germs passed through the ground traveling at a steady rate of two miles per day. Another theory put the blame on the deadly miasmic vapors that incubated in swamps and marshes. The vapors were said to be responsible for spreading the disease and did the task most arduously after darkness fell, so it was considered dangerous to remain outdoors at night (Grismer 184). It was these miasmic vapors that carried misfortune into Tampa in the fall of 1887. At the height of Tampa’s boom, Yellow Fever let loose and the epidemic scoured the bustling town. The towns-folk tried to fight
their lousy fate by placing lit tar barrels on street corners in order to smoke the deadly germs, but the germs spread and continued to pester the meager population infecting 185 people with symptoms, and striking 79 with death.

Yellow Fever was an unwelcome blow. Businesses closed down and hundreds of people abandoned town, the *Tampa Tribune* cried out in despair, “Our city is desolate and distressfully quiet. Nearly all the business houses are closed and only a handful of our business men remain” (Grismer 185). At length, the storm did pass and relief came as the weather got colder though the town was left ravaged and the people distressed. Tampa was sulking in this state of depression when the good news from Henry B. Plant was announced. His plan arrived on the scene like some superhero, fresh-arrived to fight the rising odds – he intended to spend “a million dollars or more in developing Port Tampa on Old Tampa Bay and on the construction of a splendid hotel” (Grismer 186).

![Figure 2: Port of Tampa](image-url)
The Splendid Hotel

The idea for the “splendid new hotel” must have drifted over Henry’s mind like a blissful fairy dream during the construction of the railroad when he made his first trip to Tampa in a rickety buggy from Kissimmee. Upon his arrival he was royally entertained at Tampa’s Orange Grove Hotel. The Orange Grove was the best in town and surely did its best to provide all the comforts, but it was most likely that after one of those meager dinners, and during one of those sleepless humid nights that he resolved to give Tampa a proper hotel.

Again, Plant acted on his own motto, “It is easier to promise, than it is to perform,” and launched his projects quickly (Dickerman and Smyth 167). Port Tampa was an immense wharf built on piles and enhanced with a cozy little Inn “about a mile out in the bay, where the guests [could] amuse themselves by fishing from their chamber windows,” or by watching the “great pelicans… rise some thirty feet out of water… and then suddenly plunge into the sea like a dart upon some poor little fish” (Clayton 328). And once the great pelicans had their fill of poor little fish, entertainment continued just south of the docks where an amusement park called Picnic Island was developed. The crowning touch came June of 1888, when Plant’s steamers, Mascotte and Olivette began to dock at the new port.

The splendid hotel he promised would have been started right away too, but the project was to wait until Lafayette Street was extended half a mile west of the river, and a bridge was built to make the hotel site accessible. The bridge was indeed crucial as the site chosen for the hotel was a sixty acre tract of land located on the west side of the Hillsborough River, opposite of the populated east bank, and only accessible by way of an inept ferry laboriously operated by a ferryman and a team of overburdened horses (Jones 10).
Finally, on Thursday, July 26, 1888, a public holiday was declared, stores were closed, and practically the whole town came to witness as Mayor Herman Glogowski laid the cornerstone of Plant’s “splendid hotel” – this was huge. (Grismer188).

John A. Wood

An idea is just that until it is forced out of the imagination through elaborate planning and concentrated labor. Although Plant fostered the vision, he did not intend to bring it into being himself; instead he bestowed the honor upon architect John A. Wood of New York. Wood had a fairly impressive track record and a solid reputation, numbering among this country’s best architects. Despite his reputation, history kept poor records of him, leaving only a few scattered personal facts and a long trail of buildings. In his youth he devoted himself to the enhancement of society, by taking on social welfare projects and designing structures such as the Newburgh public library, the Kingston Armory, courthouses, alms houses, nearly fifty churches, an orphanage, and other such public quarters. Later in life he ventured toward a more lucrative branch of architecture and began to accept hotel commissions. By 1881 two resort hotels were completed under his guidance: The Mizzen Top and The Grand Hotel.

The Mizzen Top Hotel was a stately resort encased behind two hundred feet of delightful frontage on New York’s Quaker Hill. The hotel stood facing west and was built four stories high in the general areas that lowered to a spacious three-story primal area enhanced by sweeping porches around its three prominent sides. The hotel was equipped with all of the up-to-date conveniences: steam-heating, running water, and electric service bells to summon servants directly from the convenience of one of the one hundred-seventy
guest rooms. The spacious resort grounds incorporated lawn tennis, golf links, a bowling alley, and two exotic summerhouses: one being of Chinese design and the other fashioned in a Moorish style. The hotel must have been impressive in its heyday, but by 1933 only a stone was left to mark its spot. The inscription reads, “The Mizzentop Hotel was located on this site from 1880-1933” (Herrick).

The Grand Hotel was built around the same time period, though made much more elaborate. It was perched 2,500 feet above sea level on the Catskill Mountains, portioned to outshine even the largest of the hotels already operating in New York’s retreat haven. It was designed in the Queen Anne style ornamented with enchanting towers projecting up, and sweeping piazzas extending out (Adams). The hotel began to operate under the name Summit Mountain House, but the shareholders deemed the name an understatement so they rechristened it, The Grand Hotel. The rooms were said to be “spacious, airy and elegant” and Plant was known to visit them frequently (Adams). Henry Plant’s many visits to these hotels articulate his approval; it is only natural that they would recommend their maker and land the Tampa commission for John A. Wood.

Figure 3: Mizzen Top Hotel Postcard, Quaker Hill, New York
“As a matter of fact,” interjected Edmund, “I clearly remember those towers and piazzas— and clearer still is the memory of the soft-pillowed bed in my sunlit room,” he said dreamily reclining his head on the high-backed rocking chair. “I had a remarkable time at the Grand Hotel last summer and I can see why Henry chose Wood for the job.”

“Remarkable,” Charles echoed as his eyes traced the curve of immaculately placed bricks arching the top of a large hotel window, “Wood has real genius and the most dogged work ethic to back it.”

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Plant ordered a “truly magnificent hotel” and the architect devoted himself entirely to the fulfillment of his orders. Wood was known to be a workhorse himself and expected no less from his recruits who considered him a fair, but hard task master. While working in
Tampa, he kept extensive hours often working from dusk to dawn. He was able to maintain his strenuous life style for two years until he labored himself into a severe fever and was ordered to return to New York in 1890 on account of his health (Castillo 48). Nevertheless, his time in Tampa was well spent and the construction that he set into motion continued untroubled by his impromptu departure. W.T. Cotter, designer of the Port Tampa Inn, was called back to resume the Tampa Bay Hotel project in Wood’s absence and finished constructing the dining room, servant housing, a laundry building and a power house (Covington 63).

The curiosity of Tampa locals heightened as construction progressed and a masterpiece arose to echo the splendors of some enchanted far-away world. It is little known whether Wood had ever actually seen the Alhambra, but it is often imagined that the hotel was modeled after that illustrious red fortress in Granada, Spain. The two cannot be too scrupulously compared in design, but both buildings parade man’s ability to make art out of the practical necessities of life. In Granada, the Nasrids reshaped their military fort into a jewel-like paradise, equipped it with every known refinement, and patrolled the country in grandeur; while in Tampa, the basic human need for food and shelter was met in beautified atmosphere and luxurious manner.

Wood’s vision of “true magnificence” must have sprung from the exotic tales of travelers such as Washington Irving, who documented the sumptuous details of Granada’s fortress, after some magical adventures led him throughout its airy halls. It may as well have been the well-circulated translation of One Thousand and One Nights that enchanted Wood, along with the rest of the English speaking world, with its depictions of genies, flying carpets
and grand vestibules. The compilation of stories that came to be called *Arabian Nights* powerfully influenced Victorian architecture, decorating motifs, and created an overall intrigue of anything that resembled the mysterious Middle East and its surrounding regions. Regardless of the specific influence, Wood’s creation was a product of a lively imagination: a unique, dark red castle of Arabic influence. The design was so new and exotic, describing it required fresh terminology: “Moorish, Spanish, Islamic, Arabic, Mohammedan, Saracenic, Byzantine, Persian… Oriental-Byzantine… Islamic Revival,” are some of the labels that evolved in attempt to capture the unusual style of architecture (Braden 260).

For this fantasy, reality was brushed aside, even in the calculation of measurements; therefore, what sprung into being was of outlandish proportions. A tremendous five-story building that spread over six acres, and measured 1,200 feet in length. Once the work was complete and the debris cleared away, a walk around the premises provided one mile worth of exercise and immeasurable aesthetic delight as sweeping verandas, Moorish arches and onion-topped pinnacles sprung into view. The building was laid with dark red brick imported from Cincinnati, and adorned with long running porches wide enough for a carriage to pass. The numerous windows were topped with mosque-like curves, while Moorish arches were implemented as supports for balconies. Above the building was a spectacular display of silvery domes and minarets topped with crescent moons; in all there were thirteen crescent moons, one crescent for each month in the Moslem calendar to represent a full lunar year (Grismer 188).

The construction project employed many locals, but a project of this scale required that hundreds of skilled craftsmen, bricklayers, carpenters, painters, plasterers, electricians
and plumbers be brought to Tampa. The local merchants prospered and the entire community came back to life after the bleak summer of yellow fever.

Another one of Plant’s stipulations was that the building must be entirely fireproof. To achieve this, the floors and ceilings were made of reinforced concrete using marine cables brought from Key West, and with countless tons of steel rails. The only piece of good news for environmentalists amid all the extravagance of the project was that the narrow-gauged rails were recycled after being cast off by the South Florida Railroad when they upgraded their tracks to standard gauge. The hotel walls were made with an impenetrable one foot thickness and aside from the wooden porches and furniture, hardly a thing inside the building could burn (Grismer 189).

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A pause ensued. The narrator seemed to be trying to recollect something with great eagerness. At last he interrupted his own broodings, “Did you attend the opening ball, Edmund? It was such a ruckus I can’t remember who was and who wasn’t here.”

“I was not so fortunate, but it was quite the party – as I was later informed by Rumor in her ever swift manner. You were here then?” Edmund inquired with added interest.

“It seemed the only place to be at the time. I’m surprised you weren’t dragged in by the crowd.”

“Ah, I suppose I would have been, but business took me to Europe – I was simply out of its reach,” he replied regretfully swaying back in his chair. “I am glad that you made it, and would be more glad still if you would relate it all.”
“All? You shall have plenty, at any rate,” he laughed and perused his memory for that night’s proceedings, which began to flow over his companion like a running river.

Opening Night

The opening ball was marked for February 5, 1891 and thousands of invitations were sent to Plant’s friends and associates throughout the world. One invitation was sent to his heavily mustached friend, the “commandingly good-looking” Henry Flagler, who wired back jestingly: “Plan to attend with wife. One question, how will I find your hotel??” Plant replied: “How will you find the Tampa Bay Hotel upon arrival?? Just follow the crowds, Henry. Just follow the crowds” (Furnas 787). The crowds arrived as predicted and celebrities from everywhere started to fill the rooms.
At this point, the sluggish methods of Floridian transport, by way of buggies and dugout canoes, were already becoming historic. Travel time was compressed significantly and the previous hardships of the journey were replaced with ease and luxury. One traveler recollected his trip to Florida, “it was such a Southern night as I had dreamed of the only oddity was that we had come to it by so simple a process.” He began his journey in Georgia; “We had travelled indeed all day, but the process seemed simple when there was nothing of it, nothing to speak of, to remember, nothing that succeeded in getting over the footlights of the great moving proscenium of the Pullman” (James 433). Plant’s adventure of paddling through the St. Johns River was now but a warm memory for him alone to cherish, while his guests whizzed by train in the comfort of plush seats and tea service.

The leisure class of the Gilded Age was not expected to travel light: their maids, bull terriers, and oversized trunks had a separate entrance allowing them to bypass the hotel’s lobby with direct access to the guest rooms. The guests entering through the main doors passed under one of the three looming, terra cotta traced horseshoe arches and found themselves in the rotunda.
The rotunda was an imposing hall divided into two equal parts, and at the time was said to be the longest hall in America. The ceiling of the hall came to an opening at the center of the room where it stretched two stories high. The edge of the opening was wrapped with an elegant balcony providing a mezzanine style projection from the upper floor, from which snooping guests could keep an eye on bewildered newcomers. “It was bewildering. A few steps lead into the blinding light of the grand hall of the new hotel, a wilderness of all that is gorgeous” one guest was left with the most bedazzling first impression. He continues, “Countless examples of the most costly and superb art productions of the age, under a flood of light from a hundred electric bands; all this bursting on the gaze of the traveler at the end of his journey” (Dickerman and Smyth 185).

Sunlight filled the hall through lunettes and large open windows to illuminate the life-size, cast iron sculptures, dazzling with bronze patina finish. The enthralling sculpture of the “Spinning Girl from the South of France” welcomed guests entering from the east entrance; while the likeness of Esmeralda (the gypsy dancer from Victor Hugo’s *Hunchback*
of Notre Dame) greeted those stepping in from the west terrace. Nothing cheap, shabby or uncomfortable was permitted in the hotel, and that included exerting the travel-weary guests by having them walk down long corridors. To provide complete comfort, even for the “weak-kneed” lovers of leisure, the hotel was equipped with a fleet of rickshaws that would run the guests to and fro, along the extensive hallways (Tour).

At the approach of twilight, the shuffle of ladies’ silks could be heard along the winding staircase as they made their way toward the grand banqueting hall. The banqueting hall was transformed for the evening to hold the opening night ball. The affair was anticipated by all of Tampa, as nothing quite so spectacular had taken place in the town before. The dazzling guests were as elaborate as the grand, octagonal room where they were to dance. The room was finished in curly pine, rose ninety feet high, and expanded one hundred feet in diameter. The centerpiece of the room was located high above their heads, but did not go unnoticed as the design of the room captured the glance and thwarted the eye up and drew it higher and higher, toward the dazzling oculus of the dome.

That evening, the Albert Opera Company performed Faust. The choice of opera was remarkably fitting for the occasion, as during this period a performance of it was given yearly to begin the opera season in New York. Here too, the high lifting, sentimental, and satiric melodies were performed to kickoff the hotel’s first season.

Set in sixteenth-century Germany, Charles Gounod’s five act opera opens with the venerable Doctor Faust in his study. Sick of life the tormented doctor is about to end his with a sip of poison, but gets disturbed by the merry, youthful voices coming from his window.
He envies the happy youths outside and calls on Mephistopheles for help, who – in return for his soul – transforms him into a dashing young man.

The transformation arms him with a fresh zest for life and he goes forth to conquer the beautiful Marguerite, “O belle enfant! Je t’aime, je t’aime, je t’aime!” Some scenes later, he succeeds in tempting her which leaves her with child. Marguerite desperately tries to escape the consequences of their love by killing the child, for which she is sent to prison. In the tragic, moving and fatally beautiful finale, the penitent Marguerite is redeemed upon her death, while Faust is dragged down to his doom by Mephistopheles.

![Illustration of a scene from Faust.](image)

Figure 11: Illustration of a scene from Faust.

After the inaugural ball, the dining hall regained its original use and dances were held in the Music Room. Although smaller than the dining room, the music parlor could accommodate large crowds. The circular walls were lined with large windows specially designed to open from the floor up in order to provide an overflow area by making use of the
surrounding veranda outside. At four o’clock in the afternoon the room was set to serve low tea, but upon nightfall it came ablaze with music and dancing (Covington 11).

Lorenne Howard Turner was a local debutant who lived for many years, but never forgot the dances of her youth. Lorenne fondly remembers that “when the season was on, it was really the only lively place in town. In those days, dances were much lovelier, so formal, so polite, and so well mannered. There was no loud talk. There was no hip swinging. Just a beautiful waltz… and everyone had a good time” (Tampa Bay Hotel).

**The Concord of Sound**

And the night shall be filled with music,

And the cares that infest the day

Shall fold their tents like the Arabs

And as silently steal away.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Day Is Done*

Charles paused a moment as if trying to better absorb the sounds still permeating the open terrace space. “The Chinese philosopher Mencius,” he interrupted his own silence, “concluded that ‘if the King loves music, it is well with the land.”

Edmund turned the idea over in his mind “Ah yes, I see how that would be – and I suppose that the king of this palace holds a deep adoration for the concord of sweet sounds,” replied he, well pleased with the idea.

Henry Plant’s most beloved possession in the hotel was the $10,000 orchestral organ, crafted in Europe and installed in 1893 by a renowned musician. Henry even thought it
worth coming to Tampa just to hear the organ play. The organ was only one of the musical enchantments that were heard resounding down the long hotel corridors.

While the rest of the world awoke to the sound of birds chirping and roosters crowing, the guests of Tampa Bay Hotel opened their eyes to the melodies created by the hotel orchestra under the conductorship of Henry Stubbleline (Covington 11). Every morning concerts were given on the west piazza. The outdoor concert area became a favorite with the guests as it was comfortably stocked with swaying rocking chairs that allowed them to indulge in symphonic cadence and savor the divinely soft Tampa air. “The inspiring strains of music from the band, charmed us beyond description,” reminisced a highly moved passerby adding, “The whole scene was like a beautiful poem or a dream. The building gives you the impression that you are in the Old World” (Sayer Cobb 98). Better still were the harmonies enjoyed in private, as a simple ring to the front desk would convey a piano, along with a seasoned pianist directly to the guest’s private suite (Chidgey 12).

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The narrator broke off as his wife approached to reclaim him. “Ah – there you are, darling,” he rose to greet her. After exchanging a few words with her husband Mrs. Vanderlyne extended her hand to Edmund who was also rising from his seat.

“Mr. Benedick, shall we save a seat for you at our luncheon table?”

He smiled in assent to the proposal, “Certainly, if you can spare one.”

Charles was glad that he would join them and told him so, before excusing himself inorder to join his wife for a walk around the garden.
The couple descended down the stairs while Edmund sank back into his chair delectably to muse over the his friend’s narrative. The brief history gave him the impression that he was just introduced to a stranger whom he has seen a countless number of times, but remained entirely ignorant of. He looked up at the tremendous building warmly as if it had a real character which was finally beginning to open up to him. Then like a mist over his mind, Kipling’s “Five W’s” drifted out of his memory,

I keep six honest serving-men,

They taught me all I knew;

Their names are What and Why and When

And How and Where and Who.

He was amused by his growing curiosity about the place. Rising from his chair, he secured his book in his pocket and sauntered down the trail to wherever chance might lead.
Horticulture

The trees, plants and shrubs were planted long before construction began, in order that the hotel may debut to its full advantage, in the midst of long garden walks and delightful views rolling out in every direction.

A winding stroll through the flower beds in the central garden exposed a flourishing wonder at every step. Perpetual varieties of carnations peered out from the stringy petals of dangling mist flowers. Vibrant azalea shrubs along the garden walks led toward the shady xystus, lined with slender royal palms. The path continued past sweeping sea-grape leaves to reveal the *Southwest Corner Garden*— more delight for the senses as succulent small mandarins, tangerines and giant sun-warmed oranges lured the wandering guests with the glow of their tropical radiance. The rest of the lawn “not occupied with flower beds, [was] carpeted by a sward of rich green grass, kept nicely clipped… something new in Florida, as green grass [was] seldom seen,” one wandering guest observed (Clayton 342).

The design of the hotel’s terra firma was placed under the supervision of the French *savant*, Anton Fiche, whose respect for the local species paired with Henry Plant’s love for the exotic, resulted in a landscape of the most extravagant verdancy.

Fiche carried out his role as head gardener with all the French expertise one could wish for. He somehow formed the unruly mixture of more than one hindered and fifty plant varieties, collected from around the world, into a harmonious exotic paradise. Banana shrubs, holly olives, Chinese hawthorns, cacao and Arabian coffee trees were shipped from their native lands to arrest the attention of all who wandered the vistas and avenues of the Tampa Bay Hotel.
Edmund rambled along the garden walk noting the bed of white camellias spread out before him. He was instantly reminded of his favorite opera, *Camille* (also known as *La Traviata*). He remembered the last time he saw it performed at the Academy of Music in New York and mused over the heroine, Marguerite Gautier for a moment. She seems to have put an irrevocable claim on this infamous flower. The story came back to him and he remembered that Henry’s wife was stricken with the same disease as the *Lady of the Camellias*. A shiver ran down his spine and sincerely hoped that Mrs. Ellen Plant had better luck at regaining her health.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of a crowd gracefully protruding toward the dining hall. He took this to mean that the lunch hour had now approached and was determined not to keep his party waiting, so he immediately started back toward the hotel.
Luncheon

Quality meals were a complicated affair that took many hands to serve as well as to prepare, but first-class dining was of utmost importance. Mr. Plant gave into the idea that a good cook serves as the best introduction to society and made sure that his cuisine was prepared by the most capable hands (Wharton 181). Thus he secured Giovanni Caretta, who had held a fifteen-year post with one of the most respectable establishments, New York’s “Autocrat of Drawing-Rooms,” Delmonico’s. The Manhattan Club housed another one of New York’s highly praised kitchens that boasted of hiring the best chefs of the time and town, and that is where Plant snatched the savvy baker, Antonio Rossi for a season.

The Wedgwood, French porcelain and Vienna china was ushered out of the kitchen containing all kinds of sumptuous delicacies. “The table porcelains… are exquisite works of ceramic art. The plates are of infinite variety,” remarked one highly impressed aesthete (Dickerman and Smyth).

A typical Friday luncheon, such as the one held on March 16, 1900, began with a bowl of Bouillon en Tasse,
Clam Chowder a la Bosteienne, or the highly regarded Cold Jellied Consommé, whose brilliant clarity is one of the defining triumphs of a quality chef.

Fish followed the soup course. This Friday, Planked Shad was offered. The American dish traditionally eaten outdoors by a camp fire or on the river bank was presented in the grand banqueting hall under a creamy covering of a la maitre d’hôtel sauce (butter creamed with chopped parsley, lemon juice, and a touch of cayenne), with a neat arrangement of tender-ripened, sliced tomatoes at its side (Whitehead 245).

Another option was Golden Buck, the British dish made by melting cheese with seasoning, beer, milk, or ale, adding Worchester sauce and spreading the mixture over sliced bread to broil. After reaching a nice toast-like firmness, the bread was topped with a runny poached egg, and served.

The meat entrée consisted of several red meat choices brought out of the kitchen on charming bits of French porcelain. Small Tenderloin Steak Sans Gene (without embarrassment) accompanied by rice, stewed tomatoes, and tender green peas, competed with the Roast Lamb avec Mint Sauce (a cold sauce of finely chopped green mint, sugar and vinegar) which was substantiated by a choice of mashed potatoes, tender new potatoes, or fried sweet potatoes.

The menu also included a devious little selection of cold meats: smoked beef tongue, pickled lambs tongue, soused pig’s feet, sardines, pig’s headcheese charcutière, Terrine de Foie Gras a la Gelee, and Saucisson de Lyon, among other carnivorous delights. The acclaimed Gilded Age restaurateur Louis Sherry once noted that women guests in his deluxe Fifth
Avenue restaurant did not like to draw blood so they avoided red meat and game. With this in view the menu integrated a more elegant meat entrée: Mayonnaise of Chicken.

Mayonnaise of Chicken was a popular turn-of-the-century dish of cooked chicken that has been chilled, pressed, cut into either oblongs or parallelograms, and coated with a mayonnaise sauce of thick mayonnaise and aspic jelly. The chicken was laid on a bed of chopped greens and dabbed at the sides with a deep red mixture of minced pickled beets and egg yolks, and carried out on a platter with a slice of lemon at each end (Whitehead 202). Madame Pratolungo elaborates, “a Mayonnaise of chicken… on the luncheon-table, as a work of Art, was simply adorable – I say no more” (Collins 209).

A light lettuce or celery salad tossed onto an old Vienna plate of semi-Saracenic pattern, would bring the meal to dessert. Bread pudding in cream sauce, warm apple pie, pear tarts, a selection of cakes, ginger bread, preserved peaches, or some lemon water ice “on one of the little plates designed by Mortiz Fisher” prepared the palate for the cheese course.

Saltine and toasted water crackers accompanied a savory selection of cheeses. A guest could choose from the neat squares of American Cheddar, Dutch Edam, or the pride of the French: Roquefort.

Hard cheeses become more complex with age, so the cheddar presented on the cheese platter could have been either buttery and mild, or crumbly and intense if it lingered in the cellar until full maturity.

Edam is a rich semi-soft cheese made of fresh cow milk. This mild sweet cheese was favored by Dutch sailors and inadvertently took its name after the harbor from which they ported. It is said to be best when made in the spring from cows just turning to pasture; the
fresh milk is strained, curdled, pressed into moulds, and taken through a long process of
washing and drying until it achieves a smooth, firm texture. Soaking it in new beer was the
old trick of obtaining the pale yellow color on the inside, while rubbing the rind with
tournesol extract continues to be the classic way of attaining the glowing red color of the
outside (Flint and Horsfall 353).
The superior aged, French blue-cheese, Roquefort, was added to cast a noble light on the cheese tray: *le roi des fromages et le fromage des rois* (the king of cheeses and the cheese of kings). The ivory color of the cheese can only be attained by using the thick milk derived from the Lacune ewes grazing in the Averyron regions of southern France; while the deep-blue veins are developed during a delicate ripening process that takes place naturally when the cheese is aged in the drafty, limestone caves of Cambalou. The cheese’s marble like appearance dissolves into butter-like softness in the mouth and draws the meal to its climax.

Luncheon concluded by sipping on hot tea, fresh-ground coffee, or creamy chocolate from one of “Wedgwood’s simple and lovely bordered cups.” Given this handsome lunch, the visiting epicureans could hardly be expected to tolerate anything less for supper; therefore, something a little more elaborate was repeated in the evening at six.

**The Grand Solarium**

After the Wedgwood cups were emptied of their steaming contents, the satisfied party rose from the table and made its way down the long, carpeted center aisle. They continued out of the dining hall to act on Cornelia Vanderlyne’s preposition of lounging in the solarium for an hour or two.
A stroll down the northern corridor revealed the Grand Solarium, so abundantly stocked with wicker furniture that they jokingly bequeathed it the Wicker Room. Palm trees, tropical plants and a waterfront view turned the room into a tropical paradise conveniently cloaked from the threat of showers, winds, and other natural episodes that force people to fly for shelter. It served as a dignified lounge where guests could catch up on the latest gossip, discuss the most recent headlines from the New York and London papers or relish puffs of a local Havana while perusing the freshest work from their favorite contemporary novelists like Henry James or Thomas Hardy.

The party planted itself near a large window, each settling comfortably in one of the many woven wicker chairs. The choice of furniture suited the room remarkably giving it a cheerful outdoor atmosphere, and although Edmund did not generally extol wicker, he was pleasantly surprised to see how well that style synthesized with the general atmosphere of the solarium. A subtle scent of coconut and cocoa pervaded the room making him feel as if he had travelled to some tropical region south of the equator; it struck him to think that by the mere use of a few decorating tricks and skillful positioning of furnishings, the room was transformed into something so remote and exotic.

“Yes, the furniture is very tastefully arranged here and everywhere else throughout the hotel,” agreed Mr. Vanderlyne, “but have you examined the other rooms?”

“I’ve been pleased with the variety. Henry must have good taste. Did Mrs. Plant lend a hand?”

“Yes, but probably not the one you are thinking of,” his companion replied gravely.
Furnishings and Décor

Figure 19: “Spinning Girl from the South of France” sculpture.

Unfortunately, the original Mrs. Plant never lived to see the grand flourish she helped set into motion on Florida’s quiescent gulf. The gentle, gradual force of her illness took her away a few months after the beginning of the Civil War. She died on February 28, 1862, leaving behind her husband and their son, Morton Freeman Plant. Henry Plant remained a widower for twelve years until 1873, when he married the renowned beauty, Margaret Josephine Loughman. The new Mrs. Plant displayed a rather energetic disposition, evident in the fine collection of treasures that illuminated the Moorish Palace. The building was completed in 1890, but doors remained closed to guests while Mrs. Plant, “combed the art centers of Europe and the Orient for rich furniture of ebony and gold, velvets, tapestries, carpets, gorgeous vases of porcelain, massive statues of bronze and stone, oil paintings done by masters, and one-time prized possessions of the crowned heads of nations” (Braden 189).
More than $500,000 dollars were spent on the unique fittings and ornamentations carefully gathered from around the globe.

The furnishings were arranged in harlequin style, as it was thought to be the most pleasing method for such a varied mass of visitors. Mrs. Plant’s recherché taste was noticed by the critical eyes that continually ran down hotel corridors. “Each work of art (of which there are hundreds and hundreds) is chosen by someone who has exercised taste of high order,” remarked one perceptive guest, as he marveled over the hotel’s fine relics. “The objects are good, each worth examination, the large tapestries were noticeably costly and fine works, and the paintings were of extraordinary rank” (Dickerman and Smyth 185).

The European shopping reeled in all of the materials necessary to form the crowning touch to the completed edifice. Every corner was embellished, even the walls sprung to life with mythological tales and dreamy legends colorfully woven into vast, hanging tapestries. Arm chairs and window seats of every age scattered the premises making it possible for guests to recline at their ease on Marie Antoinette’s commodious circular divan, or unwind on one of the four chairs that had previously charmed the quarters of Louis Philippe. An original piece of furniture is as rare and difficult to find as any other exquisite rarity; still the Plants
amassed their articles with great skill and judgment. Curious inventions like the “courting chairs” were brought; it is a mystery where this chair was chanced upon, but its addition evinced a peculiarly exquisite charm. The cushioned double-chair was designed in an s-curve with the tête-à-tête in mind, allowing couples to enjoy an easy face-to-face conversation without even having to strain their necks. Well-crafted bureaus and desks were appointed with tasteful precision amid the more evocative finds, such as the collector’s cabinet from the palace of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, and another from the rooms of Mary Queen of Scots. The Plants strove to oblige all of the common vanities and purchased one hundred-ten elaborately carved mirrors from the artesian collections of Florence and Venice. The carved gilt wood, gesso pier, crested convex, framed cheval and other styles of mirrors were so numerous that guests were amazed to see that every turn would reflect their own image and duplicate the delightful scenery all around them (Clayton 342).

“While in London,” interjected Cornelia, “the Plants chanced to place the winning bid on a rather remarkable item at Christie’s Auction House: thirty thousand square yards of the most exquisite red line carpet. I heard that the rug was originally ordered by English Royalty, but upon seeing the blue dragons that lined the carpet sides, they refused to accept the delivery.”

“And what of the dragons?” asked Edmund a little perplexed, looking as if he had just missed the punch line of a joke.

“Ah— the dragons. They were alarmed by the poor creatures because they held such a conspicuous resemblance to their emblematic British lion— the beast whom the loyal
subjects dare not tread upon.” She turned her gaze toward the window, “how charmingly patriotic, they are,” she added with a slight yawn.

“They are indeed— but we can’t be accused of that. I think we tread upon those forbidden beasts while exiting the dining hall— that must have been the very carpet rolled out in the center aisle,” observed Edmund.

“For shame,” she retorted jestingly with her eyes still fixed on something amusing outside of the window “but enough about them— look at those lovely boats glittering in the river, would anyone object to taking a boat this afternoon?”

There was no reason in the world that anyone should object when the weather was custom made for such a scheme. The group evacuated their wicker chairs and strolled into the direction of the boat house.

**Surrounding Grounds**

Guests were not merely confined to the one-foot thick, fireproof walls of the hotel, a vast space of one hundred-fifty acres stretched around the hotel for their leisure. A wandering guest could rest assured that the grounds would offer the complete satisfaction to any whim. A fine weathered day gave way to a whole spectrum of outdoor amusements; sports-minded lodgers exerted their energies with racquets in hand, on the tennis courts, or joined in a leisurely game of croquet on the front lawn. Low humidity, a cloudless sky, and the enticing shimmer would lead guests to the boathouse, fully stocked with canoes to paddle out in, and sailboats to drift around in.

Hunting expeditions were conducted under the guidance of Arthur Schleman and his associate, John Gallie. At the time, Hillsborough and Manatee counties were richly stocked
with game and provided plenty of sport for hunting parties. Schleman led the assembly into the woods to prey on deer, alligators, wild turkeys, quail and snipe, which they pursued with great amusement. The trick of the game was to always remain glued to the horsebacks, or stay safely tucked inside buggies, for a daunting fear of rattlesnakes pervaded amongst the otherwise fearsome hunters.

Guests in pursuit of less strenuous diversions could relax with fishing poles, or display their putting skills on the nine-hole golf course, laid out by the kilt-wearing golf enthusiast from Scotland, John Hamilton Gillespie (Covington 11). Those in search of a supine pastime retired among the lilies and camellias at the flower conservatory—while those interested in action found it on Plant Field.

In order to provide an adequate variety of diversions, Plant built Tampa’s first major athletic stadium where horse racing and baseball games could be watched. The stadium was a big hit with locals and guests alike as it hosted Tampa’s first professional football games, spring training games, political rallies, and other exciting public events.
Diversions

Figures 23-24: The Tampa Bay Hotel Casino

Boating is one thing, but what would a winter retreat in Florida be without a swim? That, too, was forethought when the heated indoor swimming pool was constructed alongside the superlative spa facilities, and mineral water baths. Once the guests were dry, they could further amuse themselves with shuffleboard, ten-pin in the bowling alley, or a round of eight-ball in the billiard room while lingering over swigs of “the best sherry cobblers, gin fizzes and whiskey sours” that one Englishman had ever tasted (Covington 15). Card rooms scattered the premises for guests to enjoy a pleasant game of bridge, and if the day’s luck was exceptional, guests had the opportunity to further their prospects at the casino. If the slither of cards and click of the dice seduced a guest to overestimate his luck in a grand way, he could consider stopping by the flower shop on his way to explain the ill-fate to his wife; and if she was beguiled, perhaps parting with some of her less-treasured jewels would make amends quietly.

After the exhilarations of the day, hotel guests could go on to freshen up their glowing faces at the beauty shop, trim their beards at the barbershop, or polish their shoes at a shoe shine station, before dressing for supper. That is just what Edmund and the Vanderlynes set out to do, after drifting lazily down the river till dusk was began setting in. They meant to return sooner, but the sun beaming off of the little waves, and the lulling sway
of their boat had transfixed them and carried them out of time's familiar rhythm. But when they noticed that the sun grew red and heavy, they changed their course and sailed back to the dock. At the commencement of their leisurely escapade, the circle broke up with a promise to reunite in the dining hall at supper.

The Grand Banqueting Hall

A string of exquisite courses drew each evening to a glorious end. They were to be found elegantly served in the grand dining hall, reached from the main building by walking through an airy, pleasantly adorned, semi-circular corridor. The grand banqueting hall was an immense building with high, circular walls and a domed hollow ceiling; however, the glint of this room was not to be found in its sweeping walls and cornicing, but in the plates that soon appeared in front of the seated guests. In this room, the food was the main attraction and it was good enough to assuage hypochondriacs and revive northern invalids. The 1897 edition of the *New York Medical Journal* gave Plant's dining room a raving stamp of approval: “The food is of the best quality, the meat coming from Chicago and the West, and it is digestible and nutritious; while fresh vegetables and fruits can be had almost every day in the year” (McGilltcuddy 75).
White damask smoothly draped the square tables, neatly aligned on either side of the hall’s long center aisle. Around six o’clock in the evening, the polished mahogany chairs began to fill with lodgers and locals in comfortable parties of up to four persons per table.

![Menu dated January 16, 1901](Figure 27: Menu dated January 16, 1901)
The menus were presented as guests neatly laid their linen napkins across their knees and mused over their budding appetites. On the wintery evening of January 16, 1901, hors d’oeuvres drew near tables, resonating with a light sea-breeze. The breeze originated from the Chilled Blue Point Oysters being brought on a bed of shaved ice, in their half-shells encircling a dish of peppery Mignonette Sauce, ready to stimulate appetites before the first course.

A dish of rich, Madeira-colored Potage a la Windsor came next, topped with three elaborate French crawfish quenelles. It is expected that the meal was served a la russe, so that once the soup bowls emptied, the second course appeared.

Broiled Bluefish a la Laguipierre is a full-flavored game fish prepared in the style of Laguipierre, the chef admired for his piquant sauces and remembered for his role as an early mentor to Napoleon’s chef, Marie-Antoine Carême. Fresh-sliced tomatoes garnished the fish, and pairing of Potatoes Mitrailleuse – the French for “Potatoes Machine Gun.” The revolutionary potatoes were scooped with a round garnishing spoon to create cherry-size balls to be stewed in butter, lightly baked and sprinkled with parsley to resemble a pile of bullet casts.

A goblet of invigorating Cardinal Punch was sipped before indulging in main entrée of choice. The punch consisted of whiskey, lime juice, raspberry syrup and sugar dissolved in carbonated water, topped with cracked ice and splashed with a touch of claret. The entrées varied in front of each dining guest, though none of them would have been disappointed with the Ribs of Prime Beef au Jus, accompanied by the Stuffed Tomato a la Creole and a few golden Corn Fritters.
The salad came after a substantial portion of the beef had been taken in, a popular option was the *Macedoine Salad* of diced cooked carrots, white turnips, green peas, cauliflower, artichoke, asparagus tips and French beans, enveloped in a large leaf of lettuce.

Amid the dessert selections was an exotic sounding Spanish Pudding covered in deep red, Port Wine Sauce whose custardy sweetness enhanced the leisurely progression of the meal.

The cheese tray followed dessert, offering the three superb cheeses presented at lunch along with a variety of fruit and nuts for pairing. After a few Black Monukka grapes with a slice of Edam, and a Worcester blue cup of dark roasted coffee marked the closure of this evening’s meal.

In the evening, rickshaws whizzed the weary guests straight to their eider-laden beds. However, those who did not trust themselves to human-powered transport had a more technologically advanced option: the elevator.

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By now the moon mounted high. It slowly clambered out of window view unnoticed by the small clustered sets engaged in conversation, but one by one they began to dismantle. The Vanderlynes bid the rest of their party goodnight, but as Edmund’s quarters were on the same floor – they found themselves walking together down the circular corridor. Edmund assumed that they would ascend to their rooms by way of the nearest staircase, but Charles and his wife were accustomed to the speedier form of ascension.

“You have used this elevator— haven’t you, Edmund?”
“I have not yet been tempted. Besides preferring the walk upstairs, I’m not sure that I trust this particular innovation, after all—it is Tampa’s first,” he laughed, unconvinced of his own distrust of an elevator.

“It’s quite remarkable actually; you should venture out with us just this once. If you are to trust any elevator, I daresay, this should be the one. It was installed by the same company that provided the north and south elevators in the Eiffel Tower several years ago and I’ve not heard of tragedies in that quarter.”

“Ah—what company was that?”

“The Otis Elevator Company of New York, they are highly esteemed in the vertical transport business. To install this one, they had to install a pipe that runs four stories deep into the ground… it is the thing that operates the hydraulic lift and moves this little cabin,” he said motioning to the elevator door.

“I suppose I’ll give it a try. At least I’ll be in good company if anything should happen,” he gave in and followed them into the cabin.
During the hotel’s prime years, room and board, for one of the five hundred-eleven rooms could be secured at four dollars (and higher with additional stipulations and conveniences) for a basic guest room and breakfast, lunch and dinner under the American
Plan. The rooms were comfortable. Everything was considered and such considerations were necessary given the guest list which habitually included the names of well traveled individuals, socialites, celebrities, politicians and other affluent personas. Every general accommodation went without saying, plus a little something to give the room a bit of an edge.

Each room was beautifully furnished with a luxurious bed decked in crisp linen, spacious commodes to organize the numerous changes of clothing, and writing desks equipped with ink and paper. The rooms were lit in the most up-to-date fashion, with the glowing filament of the new, incandescent bulb; the bulbs were left open and mounted to mirrored plates for better light refraction.

Most rooms included a private bath fully equipped with all the modern commodities such as hot and cold running water. Call bells were installed in the rooms to allow guests to summon service at any hour. The combination of grand excess and little delicacies left the visitors satisfied and they went on to convey the pleasantness of their Tampa experience throughout the world. One traveler coaxed a friend in his letter, “It is impossible to give a perfect pen picture of the building and its surroundings; it must be seen and closely studied to be fully appreciated. I have seen most of the world’s great hotels, but have seen few that surpass the Tampa Bay” (Clayton 342). Curiosity enticed some of the wealthiest and most fashionable men and women to come see how the recently unheard of, subtropical swamp had risen to such esteem.

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Edmund’s stay in Tampa was not extensive. At the close of the week his luggage had been packed and he was being escorted through the keyhole of the east porch by his friends.
The Vanderlynes tried to persuade him to spend at least a month in Florida on account of the dangers he would face upon returning to New York in the winter.

“Really Edmund, you must give thought to your health. There is no reason to torture yourself with the cold when you can just avoid it. Simply— by staying here,” added Mrs. Vanderlyne to her husband’s previous inducements, though they both well knew that Edmund had business to attend to.

“Ah, but I’ve soaked up enough sun to carry me through what’s left of winter,” he replied warmly upon seeing that the train was boarding its final passengers. They exchanged their final farewells and he dashed off to take his seat. The train honked, roared, whistled and Edmund was gone.
1899. The sun was gleaming through a large open window, in front of which a circular, rosewood breakfast table was set for the morning meal. The sunrays shooting through the window, cast an inviting shimmer over the silverware and porcelain. Edmund was now at home in his New York apartment casually perusing a copy of the *The New York Times* in his usual manner, in between sips of steaming caravan tea. His eyes scrolled the headlines mechanically, but came to a sudden halt at the sudden recognition of a familiar name. He felt a pain as he read the headline over and over, nearly a dozen times, before he could fully comprehend its meaning: “HENRY B. PLANT DEAD.”

After reading the article carefully a chill of regret arrested his senses. He laid the paper on the side of the table and recollected all that he learned of Henry during his repeated winter retreats in Tampa. He balanced what he already knew with the biographical sketch found in the day’s news and leaned back into his chair with a sigh, reflecting on the sort of man death had snatched with its unyielding grasp.

*Auld Lang Syne*

A grand suite on the first floor was always on reserve for Henry Plant. He was known to occupy it during his occasional visits in between similar stops at his other hotels. The Tampa Bay Hotel was indeed the cream of the lot, but it was by no means the only lodging house installed along his long rail line. He made sure to place hotels at various strategic stopping points along his railway system. This resulted in The Ocala House in Ocala, The Seminole in Winter Park, Hotel Kissimmee in Kissimmee, The Hotel Punta Gorda in Ponta Gorda, The Fort Myers Hotel in Fort Myers, The Inn at Port Tampa, and his son’s project The Belleview Biltmore in Belleair (Braden 37).
Henry made many contributions to Florida, but he never made it his home – in fact, he barely made a home anywhere. The closest thing to a stable dwelling was inside his private rail-car, “No. 100.” New York – Boston – Florida, “No. 100” would show up unexpectedly at various points along his rail system; any news or embarrassments in any section would take “No. 100” there directly, claimed The New York Times article that Edmund had just laid aside (“Henry B. Plant Dead”). However, like any self-respecting gentleman, he did have a permanent address on solid ground. It is of little consequence that he was rarely to be found at home, his homes could always be in his hometown of Branford, Connecticut and at 580 Fifth Avenue, New York City (which later became the famed address of The World Diamond Tower).

Plant exuded an air of reserve that commanded respect from those less acquainted with him, while among his friends he was known for his charming simplicity, fairness of mind, kindness of heart, and most of all— a restless spirit that thrived on adventure. He retained his vigor and energy to advanced years, till the age of eighty when he shocked everyone with his sudden death on June 23, 1899 at 2:45 in the afternoon (“Henry B. Plant”).

Edmund later heard that Tampa mourned his death grievously, “The hotel was hung with black to mark Mr. Plant’s death, the lengths of cloth flapping in the breeze like crows; indeed the whole town seemed veiled” (Chidgey 300). During the succeeding weeks his name appeared in the papers frequently and Edmund made a point of following the stories closely with an interest in the sort of settlement that would put the vigorous inheritance battle to an end.
Henry Plant left behind an enormous fortune that amounted to more than $20,000,000, and although he tied it to an impeccably crafted will, the fortune was still bitterly fought for making many headlines in newspapers, and a case in the Supreme Court (“Compromise Reached”).

Mrs. Plant was said to have been “completely prostrate” from the shock caused by her husband’s death, but in due course the wailing widow regained her posture, secretly married the prosperous steamship man, Robert Graves, and received a handsome third of her late husband’s residuary estate. The remaining two-thirds went to Plant’s only son, Morton Freeman Plant. The arrangement that was agreed upon at the close of the law suit was congenial to the heirs, but entirely disregarded Mr. Plant’s original wish. He wanted to keep his estate intact by skipping the immediate generation and passing it undivided to his grandson Henry Bradley Plant Junior, who was just an infant at the time.

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What a pity his final wishes were disregarded, thought Edmund gravely as he sank into his belladonna hued, leather armchair. He sat still a moment, locked into motionlessness under the sway of a pensive spell, “dead as he is, I sure hope the two will find a way to make amends with their benefactor,” he muttered to himself, at last breaking the spell with his sudden movement.

Edmund’s initial stay at the hotel was succeeded by several more winter retreats, but after the death of Henry Plant, he felt that it would no longer be the same. He could not pinpoint the reason exactly, but it somehow made him feel as if it would be bordering on betrayal to stay at Henry’s hotel when Henry was no more.
He reached toward a tall mahogany side table and tinkered with the metal clasp latching a wooden cigar box. Edmund was in New York now, but he never took a trip to Tampa without a slight detour to Ybor City, where he purchased an adequate supply of aromatic cedar boxes. Not only was he convinced that the Cuban cigars, with which they were stocked, the finest in the land, but their aroma always reminded him of his pleasant winters in Tampa, the fumes seemed to saturate the air with memories. Lighting a match, he wondered what would become of Henry Plant’s little palace as he relished his Cuban behind a pale cloud of smoke. His eyes followed the vanishing puffs of smoke till his mind drifted into a long reminiscence bringing back the memorable aspects of Plant’s hotel and its many pleasures.

**Fate’s Caprice**

![Figure 33: Henry Bradley Plant Memorial](image)
In 1905, Margret commissioned George Gray Barnard to construct a large fountain in front of the hotel’s main entrance in honor of her late husband. After the death of Henry Plant, the hotel kept its composure and continued hospitality for ten years under changing management. Although Plant’s heir Morton was known to be a rather successful businessman, his generation did not inherit an enthusiasm for gilded-style hotel life. Their appetites for luxury were better satisfied aboard their private yachts, so the hotel was sold—or merely discarded for a meager $125,000 with everything included. The City of Tampa made the purchase in 1905, buying the hotel with all its treasures and 150 acres of surrounding land.

The hotel continued to operate falteringingly under various leaseholders, but it was soon learned that it was not merely the pinnacles and minarets that had attracted the crowds, but the commanding charm of its host.

**Noteworthy Guests**

New York’s socialites flocked to the hotel, “Departures for the South are becoming every day more frequent,” claimed the *New York Times*, “Mr. and Mrs. Oakleigh Thorne. Charles H. Fairchild, and Mrs. Frederick Chase and Miss Chase are at the Tampa Bay Hotel” (“What is Doing”).
The swan herself once graced the luxurious hotel rooms. Anna Pavlova, the world renowned ballerina immortalized for her solo role in *The Dying Swan*, brought her ballet company to stay at the hotel during their performance.

Babe Ruth allegedly signed his first baseball contract in the hotel lobby as a prospective pitcher for the Red Sox and immortalized Plant Field on one April afternoon. In 1919 Babe Ruth is said to have “gripped the bat so far down the handle, his right pinky actually hung off the end, like a society matron sipping tea” (Brooks). His swing hurled “the longest ball…ever seen hit” measuring somewhere between 587 to 600 feet (Brooks). This of course resulted in national news, sports history, and an immovable plaque to commemorate “Babe Ruth’s Longest Homer.” He was a frequent guest during spring training and seemed to take pleasure in the accommodations provided though that was not the case for all of the visiting celebrities.

“The divine Sarah,” Sarah Bernhardt, found the hotel too drafty and disappeared into her private railroad for the night during her legendary farewell performance tour (Tour). Hollywood’s Gloria Swanson passed through the Moorish arches, and the brilliant Thomas Edison visited, probably curious to see how well his light bulbs were installed.

At the close of the season in 1898, Henry Plant opened the hotel’s hospitality to military forces and housed a great number of well-known war celebrities. Among them was the mother of the Red Cross, Clara Barton, and Stephen Crane, the author of “The Red Badge of Courage” who made use of his leisure moments during his stay to draft, “The Price of the Harness.”
“In the midst of the desolation is the hotel,” wrote Richard Harding Davis during his stay when doors reopened to aid Spanish-American War efforts (Mormino). Edward Marshall, James Creekman, John Fox Jr. and Frederick Palmer were some of the other celebrated war correspondents who gladly occupied various guestrooms during the war, while the grand suite was reserved for the head of the American expedition, General Nelson A. Miles. Overall, the hotel’s war contributions were admirable and gladly received, Richard Davis heard one cavalry officer reaffirm how conducive the place had been “Only God knows why Plant built a hotel here, but thank God he did” he muttered (Mormino).

Theodore Roosevelt, before he became the “Theodore Roosevelt,” camped with his Rough Riders about a mile north of the hotel during the “Splendid Little War” with Spain. “Our camp is on a great flat, sandy soil without a tree, though round about are pines and palmettos. It is very hot, indeed, but there are no mosquitoes…” he wrote in a letter to his children (Tour 10), but his prospects soon brightened. His wife came to Tampa and stayed at the hotel during her visit, this allowed Roosevelt to become a part-time guest where he could enjoy all the comforts amid plenty of trees.

After the death of Henry Plant, guests could not be long entertained without the constant attendance of a compelling host—efforts persisted, but the hotel was obliged to close its doors in 1932.

The University of Tampa

2011. One hundred and twenty years have passed since the grand opening of Tampa Bay Hotel, and yet it remains in its place even though many of its kindred have been demolished or left desolate after the demise of the hotel society era. The hotel certainly had
its trials, but desolation was far from its destiny. The building as well as the surrounding grounds continue to be very much alive. The Veranda is still wide and spacious, though the rocking chairs have grown scarce and the hotel orchestra no longer infiltrates the morning air with music. Other sounds have replaced those original melodies—the sound of chattering students rushing to their classrooms and the voices of professors ringing from the guest rooms.

In the fall of 1933, Hillsborough College got the deal of the century when the City of Tampa offered the hotel site on a one-dollar-a-year lease! From that day forward, the building took on a new guise as languid leisure was exchanged for strenuous study and the small community college grew into the University of Tampa.

As the pleasures of the Gilded Age yielded to the high pursuit of knowledge—the hotel’s guest rooms were transformed into classrooms and faculty offices. The dining hall once filled with bustling waiters and the tantalizing aroma of Planked Shad became equally filled with studious students and the aroma of old books. It served as the college library for a time until renovation efforts cleared out the books and made the hall available for weddings and other ceremonies.

The new student center took the place of the old casino (where hopefully old practices have ceased to resume). The speed of whizzing race cars and galloping horses toned down a notch as Plant Field was converted into an athletic field for students.

The north wing of the building was carefully preserved and many of the original relics, works of art and furnishings made their way into that part of the building and came to be recognized as the Tampa Municipal Museum in 1933.
Finally on January 3, 1966, the Tampa Bay Hotel lost the last remaining feature of its natural identity – its name. The building was officially renamed the Henry Bradley Plant Hall.

The museum followed to adopt the new name some years later, becoming the Henry B. Plant Museum in 1974. The museum stays active by offering fresh exhibits that pertain to the hotel directly, such as the *Henry Plant: King of Florida* exhibit, or to the time period in general showcasing Victorian Valentines and the like. It operates in conjunction with a little museum shop selling all things reminiscent of the Belle Epoch: Chinese porcelain, gilded-home ornamentation, and all varieties of hotel memorabilia, such as the handcrafted minaret pin in sterling or gold. The preservation efforts have been truly commendable in the north wing, especially in rooms like the ebony Reading Room, which looks as if it had been frozen in its heyday and put on display for moderners to gaze at. The Grand Hall, the Garden Room, a guest room and bath, The Parlor Suite can be veered round in and the artifacts can be surveyed. It is only hoped that the preserved treasures will retain their intrigue and lure visitors for many years to come.

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The university halls were still after the afternoon rush, one straggling student sauntered down the corridor towards the wide staircase he habitually took. He was already late to class so hurrying at this point seemed useless. Five minutes… fifteen minutes… late will be late he reasoned with himself as his pace continued to slacken until it dwindled into a leisurely stroll. He floated on at that pace, going further and further down the circular
hallway till a luminous dreamy feeling came over him and he begin to notice things that he was entirely unaware of before.

He has been enrolled at The University of Tampa for nearly a year and summer break was just around the corner. The morning was spent in the most splendid dullness, a rolling secession of homework assignments and preparation for upcoming exams—all that studying cast a strange stupor over him, which is why he lost track of time and was now running late.

He looked at the long, curved walls and for the first time noticed that they were neatly lined with large, slightly protruding picture frames. He has walked down the same hall hundreds of times that year, but he could not remember seeing those framed images before. He stepped up to one of the pictures, it was a black and white photograph taken of the same hallway decades ago—he glanced forward and back at the hushed, bare corridor and compared the views. The original artwork no longer adorned the walls, the furnishings and rows of verdant potted plants ceased to decorate the deserted hallway, still its antiquity intrigued him. He continued along languidly glancing at the pictures in passing. He walked
on and on, suddenly realizing that he had long passed the staircase he meant to take. He veered round, but stopped himself in mid turn. A narrow door, much smaller than the rest, caught his eye and something about it enticed him. He surveyed and approached it, noting the photograph that hung at its side. It was a black and white image of the veranda from the hotel’s glory days. A few guests comfortably occupied some of the rocking chairs frivolously scattered along the porch, all sorts of verdant palms and things sprouted cheerfully in the lawn behind them and they seemed to be having a genuinely pleasant time. I would skip class for that, he thought with a sigh as his gaze reverted back to the unusual door.

I wonder… No! he interrupted some silly thought creeping out of his imagination. He walked up to the door and grasped the handle. He turned it— it turned. He pulled it—it opened, he peered in— it was dark and the musky smell reminded him of an antique shop that he had once stepped into. It was a small room or rather a large closet or a storage area, or something he thought, stepping inside while consciously leaving the door open as it was the only source of light. The light was faint, but sufficed, and he set forth to look around when all of a sudden a series of quick steps and a couple of voices emerged in the hall— trespassing into an old closet could hardly be a serious crime, but the voices startled him and before he knew what he was doing he had already sprung back and shut the door. Darkness now veiled his eyes and the smell of old wood strengthened under his nose. He made a few cautious steps blindly and stumbled over something nearly tumbling to the ground. He straightened himself and kneeled to search for the thing, it was fairly small and he was sure he kicked it somewhere over there. As he patted around in the dark, he began hoping that it was some
long lost treasure of antiquity, but more than that he hoped that he did not crush the darn thing. Finally he felt something under his searching hands,

“Here you are. That’s it,” but it didn’t feel like much of a treasure— he tried to make it out with his hands— it just felt like… like a book, merely a book, he did not really expect a treasure, but his heart still sank a little when he discovered that it was just a hard, cloth-covered book. He picked it up and sat down in its place straining his eyes to make something out, but try as he might his eyes would not produce a single glint of light, the utter blackness prevailed and he gave up.

He was about to rise to his feet when a new thought blazed through him and sent his hand racing into his jean pocket from which he pulled a dingy, plastic lighter. Somebody forgot it on his table earlier that week and after tinkering with it just this morning, he just pocketed it for no particular reason.

“Aren’t I lucky,” he mumbled to himself as he rolled the little, jagged metal wheel with his thumb igniting the plastic match. It sparked and the blackness was immediately chased away, giving him just enough light to make out what he so eagerly wanted to see. It was indeed a book, the blue vintage cover was lightly faded, but it was otherwise in pristine condition. The title was marked with gold lettering.

“Cosmopolis” he read, as he turned the book and studied the spine, “by Paul Bourget, hmm, sounds French,” he mumbled to himself again while flipping the front cover. On the first he noticed a few lines neatly scratched with the effect of being written with a quill, he brought the flickering light closer and read:
Edmund—

Here’s the Bourget book you so coveted.

We’re in Florida and you absolutely must join us at
the Tampa Bay Hotel the very first minute you can.

Yours,

Charles and Corneilia Vanderlyne — 1893

The End
Works Cited


Illustrations

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