Grand Hotels: Orlando's Landmarks (1880's - 1980's), Exhibit Brochure

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Bibliography

The following resources may be useful for those who wish to read more about the history of lodging and hospitality in Central Florida:


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* You should see the hotel being built here (all wood of course) with about 3 or 4 hundred rooms in it, all for the northerns who want to come and winter in and they say that every room is engaged already and this is at present a most out of the way place with just two stores and a station (train). *

—Excerpt from a letter, Helen F. Warner to her mother, dated August 14, 1885, Winter Park, Florida (Central Florida Memory Project)
Orlando in the 1880’s was a raw town with lots of dirt streets. Emerging as Florida’s largest inland city once the railroads provided access, the town rapidly attracted visitors who came for business and for pleasure—all in need of lodging.

For the next 100 years—these grand hotels, with their guest rooms, swimming pools, restaurants, barbershops & pharmacies, spaces for conventions and wedding receptions, provided services and great gathering places for Orlando’s residents and visitors alike.

The few left standing are no longer used as hotels. Fortunately, the Angebilt— Orlando’s first skyscraper when it was built in 1923 by Murray S. King, Florida’s first registered architect—a downtown focus for decades, a spot where glove-clad ladies lunched and couples glided to big band tunes—still stands, restored as home to an engineering company.

The Orange Court Motor Lodge, one of Orlando’s most luxurious hotels, housed the cream of Orlando’s society and even boasted the area’s first indoor swimming pool—it was demolished in 1990.

These artifacts—a key ring, a deck of cards, a coffee pot, a small pharmacy box, or a hotel room door sign listing the rules of the hotel—are, in many cases, all which remain to tell the story of some of the grandest hotels in the history of Orlando hospitality.

Featured Hotels
Angebilt Hotel: 1923-1980’s
Cherry Plaza Hotel: 1950’s-1960’s
Contemporary Hotel: 1971–Present
Empire Hotel: 1913-1960’s
Fort Gatlin Hotel: 1926-1964
Harley Hotel: 1963-2000
Hotel Lucerne: 1907-1966
Lamar Hotel: 1924-1997
Orange Court Motor Lodge: 1928-88
St. Charles Hotel: 1908-1929
San Juan Hotel: 1885-1980
Seminole Hotel: 1902-1970
Tremont Hotel: 1875-1956
Wyoming/Darrow Hotel: 1900-1950’s

With the exception of Disney’s Contemporary Resort, few of these landmarks remain intact today. The San Juan—one of the state’s largest and most elegant hotels when it opened in the 1880s—after being destroyed by fire in 1979, eventually met the fate of the wrecking ball.

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