

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

HOTEL PONCE DE LEON

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: HOTEL PONCE DE LEON

Other Name/Site Number: Flagler College

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 74 King Street

Not for publication:

City/Town: St. Augustine

Vicinity:

State: Florida County: St. Johns Code: 109

Zip Code: 32084

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local:

Public-State:

Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District:

Site:

Structure:

Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2

2

2

2

8

Noncontributing

 buildings

 sites

5 structures

1 objects

6 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 8

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ____ Entered in the National Register
____ Determined eligible for the National Register
____ Determined not eligible for the National Register
____ Removed from the National Register
____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Hotel

Current: Education

Sub: College

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Late Victorian Renaissance

Materials:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: concrete

Roof: clay tile

Other: brick, wood, terra cotta

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**INTRODUCTION**

The Hotel Ponce de Leon, a Gilded Age resort hotel, was constructed in 1885-1887 just west of the Plaza de la Constitution, the heart of Spanish colonial St. Augustine. The large hotel complex and its grounds occupy an entire city block (7.5 acres) on the north side of King Street, approximately a half mile west of the Matanzas River and Anastasia Island. The Atlantic Ocean lies east of Anastasia Island. The block is bounded by King Street on the south (main entrance), Valencia (north), Cordova (east), and Sevilla (west) Streets. King Street has been a primary east-west route in St. Augustine since colonial times, and the historic hotel site is a central location in the modern city. In 1967, the Hotel Ponce de Leon closed its doors, reopening in 1968 as Flagler College, a small, private liberal arts institution.

When construction of the hotel began in 1885, St. Augustine was still an isolated town with sand and shell-covered roads. Hotel builder and Florida east coast developer Henry M. Flagler and his architects, Carrère and Hastings, carefully considered the architectural style of their new hotel in the “ancient city.” During a 1909 interview with a newspaper reporter, Flagler was asked what he considered to be the hardest thing he had done in Florida. He replied: “Building the Ponce de Leon. Here was St. Augustine, the oldest city in the United States. How to build a hotel to meet the requirements of nineteenth century America and have it in keeping with the character of the place — that was my hardest problem.”¹

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Henry M. Flagler was the predominant influence in St. Augustine, as well as Florida’s entire east coast. In addition to the Hotel Ponce de Leon, in this vicinity Flagler built the Hotel Alcazar, the Alameda (gardens in front of the Alcazar), Memorial Presbyterian Church, Grace Methodist Church, a winter “cottage” residence, Kirkside (demolished 1950), and a railroad station, “transforming St. Augustine from a seedy southern Saratoga into a glamorous winter Newport.”² “At a time when most American hotels displayed predictably rectangular ground plans and Stick or Queen Anne detailing, [Flagler’s] resort hotels boldly and evocatively referenced Florida’s Mediterranean-like setting and St. Augustine’s Spanish colonial past.”³

¹David Leon Chandler, *Henry Flagler - The Astonishing Life and Times of the Visionary Robber Baron Who Founded Florida* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 250.

²Susan R. Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure: The Florida Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 142.

³*Ibid.*, 139.

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The Hotel Ponce de Leon and its grounds have a high degree of integrity. Its 8 contributing resources include 2 buildings, 2 sites, 2 structures, and 2 objects. There are 6 noncontributing resources, but they do not detract from the historic character of the property.

DESCRIPTION

The Hotel Ponce de Leon was designed by architects John Mervyn Carrère and Thomas Hastings and shows their commitment to the planning and design principles they learned at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The hotel exhibits a carefully thought-out pattern of circulation, with each major functional component reflected in the exterior massing. Its architectural style also received special attention. "The splendidly complex exterior of the Ponce de Leon reflected the influence of Spanish as well as Italian Renaissance and vernacular architecture . . . Flagler and Hastings credited the Spanish Renaissance appearance of the hotel's exterior to their admiration for the local Spanish colonial architecture, but the hotel's style owed much more to Hastings' Beaux-Arts interests and to his attraction to the architecture of the Renaissance."⁴

The historic hotel is harmonious in its proportions and symmetrical in design, with a central axis from south to north that links the various components in the hotel complex, one behind the other. They include: a semicircular entrance plaza at the front gate adjacent to King Street; a large courtyard just inside the entrance gate; the main hotel building, U-shaped in plan with a five-story central block, four-story wings that enclose the sides of the courtyard, and a one-story raised loggia with central entrance pavilion that parallels King Street and links the wings; an oval-shaped Dining Room, three-and-a-half stories, immediately behind the main hotel with two-and-a-half story connector bridges on the north and south facades; a four-and-a-half story rectangular service building behind the Dining Room; and an adjacent service yard with boiler room and 125-foot brick chimney. A long, narrow, two-story building (the Artists' Studios) facing Valencia Street encloses the rear (north side) of the complex.

Carrère and Hastings sited the hotel complex on the eastern side of its block to provide a "pleasuring ground" for hotel guests on the western side, which includes a palm garden in the southwest corner. A low, concrete wall surrounds most of the block, which is bisected by an east-west carriage drive (from Cordova Street to Sevilla Street) to the porte cochere at the rear of the main hotel building. The drive runs under the porte cochere formed by the bridge between the main hotel building and the Dining Room. On the east side of the block, a large fountain with circular pool at the intersection of the driveway and Cordova Street greeted guests arriving by carriage.

⁴Ibid., 161.

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The Hotel Ponce de Leon was the first large multistory building constructed of concrete in the United States.⁵ The concrete used in the building was a mixture of Portland cement, sand, and coquina (a limestone composed of broken shells, corals, and other organic debris). Blocks of coquina limestone were a traditional building material in St. Augustine. The Spanish built houses using a type of concrete know as *tapia* (which the English called *tabby*), and built the Castillo San Marcos of coquina blocks. The coquina for the Ponce de Leon came from quarries on Anastasia Island. It was crushed to use as the aggregate in the concrete mix, and the shell stone is plainly visible in the hotel walls. The Portland cement came from Baetjer and Meyerstein, a New York City company that imported it from Germany.⁶

An 1887 brochure by Carrère and Hastings promoting the new “American Riviera” includes a description of their hotel’s innovative construction:

Before entering the court we must notice that the building is a monolith. A mile away, on Anastasia Island, there are quantities of tiny broken shells that you can run like sand through your fingers. Thousands of carloads of this shell deposit or coquina were brought over and then mixed with cement, six parts of shell to one of cement, the whole forming an indestructible composite. It is not exact to say that the hotel was *built*; it was *cast*. For there is not a joint in the building; the material was made on the spot, poured in [wooden forms] while still soft and rammed down three inches at a time. Thus the great building conforms in its very material to the natural conditions of the place. The coquina, found almost on the spot, was a suggestion of nature not to be overlooked, and the hotel seems far more at home than it would were it built of brown stone from Ohio.⁷

Flagler hired James A. McGuire and Joseph A. McDonald to build the Hotel Ponce de Leon. They also built St. Augustine’s Hotel San Marco, which opened in 1884 and

⁵Carl W. Condit, *American Building - Materials and Techniques from the First Colonial Settlements to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), Plate 57, 291.

⁶Rafael Agapito Crespo, “Florida’s First Spanish Renaissance Revival” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1987) 161.

⁷John M. Carrere and Thomas Hastings, *Florida The American Riviera, St. Augustine The Winter Newport: The Ponce de Leon, The Alcazar, The Casa Monica* (New York: The Art Age Press, 1887), 24.

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helped inspire Flagler to build a luxury hotel in the “ancient city.” The site Flagler selected for his new hotel included a salt marsh with a creek running through it. Workers filled the creek and surrounding land with sand to prepare the site for construction. During the summer of 1885, McGuire and McDonald experimented with bricks of concrete to determine their tensile strength and ability to withstand crushing under pressure.⁸ Flagler hired a local civil engineer, Frederick W. Bruce, to survey the hotel site. In his June 1885 report, Bruce recommended a “floating foundation” rather than pilings due to the depth of the sand on the site.⁹ Bruce was also in charge of planning and supervising the backfilling of the marshlands.¹⁰

⁸James A. McGuire to Carrere and Hastings, June 25, 1910, 1910 McGuire Letterbook, Flagler College Archives (now lost); Flagler to J.A. McGuire, February 6, 1905, Box 40, Henry Morrison Flagler Museum.

⁹Frederick W. Bruce to Henry M. Flagler, June 12, 1885, Bruce Letterbook, transcript, St. Augustine Historical Society.

¹⁰Thomas Graham, *Flagler's St. Augustine's Hotels* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 2004), 21.

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McGuire and McDonald refer to the base of the hotel walls as the “foundation,” poured with an especially strong mix of concrete to a width of four feet. The formula used in the foundation was one part cement to two parts coquina and one part sand. In a January, 1886 letter to Franklin Smith, Flagler wrote: “I think it more likely I am spending an unnecessary amount of money in the foundation walls, but I comfort myself with the reflection that a hundred years hence it will be all the same to me, and the building better, because of my extravagance.”¹¹ The walls above used a weaker formula of one part cement to five parts coquina and two parts sand.¹² The exterior walls taper to a width of two feet in the upper stories, and interior walls are 16 to 20 inches thick.¹³ The concrete was mixed on site in two large steam-powered mixers. They could hold seven barrels of concrete, which were poured into wheelbarrows and lifted up to the walls by a construction elevator erected in the center of the building.¹⁴ “The architects of the building, Carrère and Hastings, chose poured concrete as the material most likely to withstand hurricane winds. The footings, foundations, main exterior walls, and some interior partitions are monolithic concrete with a shell aggregate. The hotel has been able to resist enormous wind loads partly through sheer mass of material and partly because the monolithic walls form a rigid box.”¹⁵

The Hotel also utilized reinforced concrete in a limited way because concrete without metal reinforcement is not strong under tension. Iron beams were used to span some spaces with long widths, including the Grand Parlor. Iron also supports the Mezzanine floor and dome over the Rotunda, where it is hidden inside the carved wooden caryatids and columns.

The hotel was wired for electricity from the beginning as its primary lighting source (with gas lamps as a backup). The system was designed by Thomas Edison (a part-time resident of Fort Myers, Florida, as of 1886), and included four Edison direct-current dynamos. A key Edison employee, William Hammer, ran the hotel plant for the first year after the hotel opened.¹⁶ An 1888 brochure for the Edison United Manufacturing Company lists the Ponce de Leon with 4,100 lights.¹⁷ The hotel's two hydraulic-powered elevators (for passengers and luggage) were converted to electric power in the early 20th century.

ENTRANCE PLAZA

¹¹Flagler to Franklin Smith, January 18, 1886, quoted in Edward N. Akin, *Flagler: Rockefeller Partner and Florida Baron* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988. Reprint: Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 121.

¹²McGuire and McDonald to Carrere and Hastings, July 15, 1910, 1910 McGuire Letterbook, Flagler College Archives (now lost).

¹³Crespo, “Florida's First . . . Revival,” 162.

¹⁴*St. Augustine Evening News*, March 22, 1886, clipping in Bevan Scrapbook, St. Augustine Historical Society.

¹⁵Condit, *American Building*, 159.

¹⁶www.bronsontours.com, page 4.

¹⁷www.edison.rutgers.

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At the hotel's front entrance on King Street, there is a semicircular paved plaza adjacent to the arcaded loggia at the southern end of the hotel's courtyard. The pyramidal-roof entry pavilion at the center of the loggia features an elaborate entablature with a terra cotta architrave, a frieze with putti, peacocks, and seahorses, and a scalloped cornice. The iron and wood portcullis in the tall round arch was raised historically during the hotel season (the winter months). Tall, square, burnt orange brick columns with terra-cotta lions' heads facing out to the street flank the gated entrance. A bronze, life-size statue of Henry Flagler stands at the center of the plaza. It was dedicated on January 2, 1916, Flagler's birthday, at its original location, the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway station built by Flagler just west of the hotel site. The FEC gave the land and statue to the City of St. Augustine, which gave the statue to the college in 1971 (plaza - one contributing site; statue - one non-contributing object.)

COURTYARD

A concrete walkway from the entry plaza through the center pavilion leads directly into a large courtyard, 150 feet square. A circular fountain ringed by a circular walkway at the center of the courtyard has water-spouting terra-cotta frogs around the edge of the pool, and turtles in the pool at the base of a tall, mosaic column at its center, on axis with the entry pavilion to the south and the main hotel entrance to the north. Concrete walkways from this focal point lead up steps to the hotel's main entrance, and to side entrances in the east and west wings enclosing the sides of the courtyard. All entrances to the hotel from the courtyard are through tall round arches surrounded by a variety of decorative features, e.g., niches with fountains, shields, shells, and carved figures. The two side entrances, Ladies' Entrances in the hotel's early years, feature highly decorated two-story terra-cotta grilles. A circular walkway around the perimeter of the courtyard also links the entrances to the hotel. Planting beds between the central fountain and the perimeter walkway were heavily planted historically with flowers, tropical shrubs, and palm trees (courtyard - one contributing site, fountain - one contributing object).

MAIN BUILDING

The main hotel building, originally designed with 450 guest rooms, is the primary and largest component of the Hotel Ponce de Leon complex. Its front-facing U-shaped plan includes a five-story center block with a southern exposure flanked by four-story east and west wings. The center block has several prominent features that reflect its Renaissance and Spanish-influenced architectural style: a prominent arched entrance with dramatically carved doors; a center dome surmounted by a bronze lantern; and square towers, 165 feet tall, that flank the central block adjacent to the side wings. The picturesque towers, with their arched and arcaded terra-cotta balconies and red-tiled conical roofs, are landmarks on the St. Augustine horizon.

The hotel's bold, monolithic walls of poured concrete speckled with coquina provide a sharp contrast to the lively, elaborate, and colorful construction materials and decorative features: first-floor arcaded loggias overlooking the courtyard; balconies with wooden ocher-painted posts at the third floor; wide eaves with heavy brackets; and red-tiled hipped roofs with a number of tall chimneys with decorated caps. The front corners of the hotel overlooking King Street have overhanging, wooden balconies at the third floor, and low towers with low-pitched hipped roofs. Window articulation varies by floor and by elevation, a wide assortment of windows that includes single round arches, round-headed pairs, flat heads with terra cotta pediments, casements with transoms, portals,

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and shed-roofed dormers. Red brick string courses and rusticated quoins add colorful horizontal and vertical elements.

Heavy paired oak doors open to the entrance vestibule with panels of pink marble. It leads immediately to the Rotunda, an extraordinary primary space that rises three-and-a-half stories to a heavily ornamented dome, painted and gilded. The Rotunda is the pivotal point in the hotel's floor plan, the crossing point of the primary north/south axis and the east/west cross axis, which also links the guest-room wings to the central block. This central location was the place where hotel guests arrived, departed, congregated, or circulated to other parts of the complex.

On the Rotunda's north side, stairs descend to the ground floor rear entrance with porte cochere, where guests arrived via carriage from the train station or exited for a stroll in the adjacent "pleasuring grounds" and gardens alongside the hotel. Stairs on the north side also rise to a landing in front of the Dining Room, a second major public space, and continue up to the Mezzanine's arcaded sitting area around the Rotunda. The Ponce de Leon's third major public space, the Grand Parlor, is at the end of the cross axis hall west of the Rotunda. Flanking the hall east of the Rotunda are rooms used as offices and recreation rooms in the hotel's early years. The cross halls also linked the guest room wings with the central block. According to Thomas Hastings himself, the floor plan took most of the time (75 percent) required to plan the Hotel Ponce de Leon.¹⁸

At the Rotunda's first floor, eight caryatids of carved oak define the octagonal plan. Additional features that contribute to the exotic atmosphere and character of this dimly-lit, elegant space include mosaic tile floors, marble and dark oak baseboards, wainscoting, fireplaces, and cased openings with paneled reveals, and a variety of gilded ornamentation on the walls. Electric lights with lions' heads were added at the mezzanine level of the Rotunda in 1893. On the dome's eight pendentives at the second-floor level, noted muralist George W. Maynard painted female figures that represent the four elements (fire, earth, air, and water), and the four stages of Spanish "exploration" (Adventure, Discovery, Conquest, Civilization). The highly-decorated plaster dome immediately above the Rotunda's third floor is a decorative, not structural, feature. The true dome on the hotel rooftop caps a large solarium that provided access to tropical rooftop gardens overlooking St. Augustine in the hotel's early days. Notable features in the solarium include an astrological chart with zodiac signs painted on the floor and the dome with exposed rafters. No rehabilitation work has occurred in this area, which is currently used for storage.

Back down on the first floor, a secondary staircase and adjacent elevator to the upper floors adjoin the Rotunda on its west side, north of the hall to the Grand Parlor, but the Grand Parlor occupies most of this western portion of the central block. Its formal, high style French (Louis XIV) decoration with its emphasis on white and gold, make this primary public space a marked contrast to the rest of the historic hotel. The long, rectangular parlor, 53 feet by 104 feet, has columns and arched openings that compartmentalize the large space into three smaller sections. The center salon is the

¹⁸Braden, 153.

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most elaborate, with wood flooring, an oversized mantelpiece of carved onyx on the north wall, heavy moldings, and a variety of decorative plasterwork on the ceiling, including interwoven medallions in a range of sizes. Salons at both ends of the Grand Parlor exhibit marble mantels, fluted Corinthian columns, full, deep entablatures, and ceiling paintings by Virgilio Tojetti. Henry Flagler was a patron of the arts and purchased a number of paintings to decorate his grand hotel. Some of his acquisitions remain at the hotel/college and are exhibited in the Grand Parlor.

In the early years, the hall east of the Rotunda was the location of hotel offices and the telegraph office, as well as a smoking room, library, reading room, barber shop, and ladies' billiard room. Each room features wainscoting, a fireplace with decorative mantel, and plaster moldings. The barbershop displays the most elaborate decoration, with carved wood paneling, large mirrors, and a built-in cabinet with drawers for barbering equipment and supplies. The east hall now houses Flagler College administrative offices. This new use required construction of a wall to separate the offices from the Rotunda area and its many visitors. The new wall is in keeping with the character of the historic hotel.

Hotel guest rooms occupied most of the central block above the first floor, and all of the east and west wings alongside the courtyard. The wide, double-loaded corridors on these floors were functional and plain, in contrast to the more public areas of the hotel. The side (Ladies') entrances from the courtyard were the exception. They feature wainscoting, fish-scale shingles on the walls, and groin vaults where the side entrance halls cross the main corridor. The guest rooms also received minimal decoration. Fireplaces in each room have wooden mantels with winged cherub faces and inlaid tile surrounds. The original hotel plan provided communal bathrooms, but after the hotel's first season Flagler ordered remodeling work for semi-private bathrooms between pairs of adjoining guest rooms. The former hotel rooms serve as dormitory rooms for Flagler College, a compatible adaptive use that required minimal alterations. The old guest rooms were renovated floor by floor between 1975 and 1985. The fireplaces and much of the wood trim were retained, and new plumbing, electrical, heating ducts, and carpeting were installed. Dormitory rooms were air conditioned in 2001.

DINING ROOM

The Dining Room, three-and-a-half stories and oval-shaped, is located just behind (north) of the main hotel building. From the north side of the Rotunda, a grand marble stair rises to a wide landing at the second floor level. Tall arched openings with large panels of Tiffany glass overlook the sides of the landing, and two large paintings hang above the landing, "The Landing of Columbus" and "The Introduction of Christianity to the Huns by Charlemagne." On the landing's north side, a wide hall to the Dining Room also serves as a bridge that connects the main hotel block and the Dining Room. In addition, this hall/bridge provides a porte cochere at the ground-level driveway below for guests arriving via carriage, and a vestibule for the magnificent Dining Room at the end of the hall through the carved arched entrance of pink marble.

The Dining Room is the largest of the Hotel Ponce de Leon's public rooms and generally considered the most notable. Its exceptional design, with lofty proportions, elegant and charming decorations, and beautiful, cheerful lighting, brought worldwide

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admiration.¹⁹ The two-story main hall, 90-feet square, receives natural light from Tiffany stained glass clerestory windows along the side walls of the 48-foot barrel-vaulted ceiling. Both end walls of the hall have monumental arched surrounds of carved oak and mahogany that encompass massive entrance doors and semicircular balconies with heavily carved niches that served as galleries for musicians. Along the sides of the main hall, paired and fluted Corinthian columns demark the cross axis. Its semicircular, one-story sections, the East and West Venido Rooms, are ringed with alcoves with triple sets of large double-hung windows that overlook the tropical grounds and fill these spaces with natural light.

Painter and muralist George W. Maynard was also responsible for the Dining Room's whimsical and delightful decorations, including

colorful ornaments, inscriptions, crests, and allegorical figures painted on the ceiling. Against a backdrop of vividly hued Renaissance-inspired classical decoration, Maynard depicted more of his full-length female figures. His winged women, accompanied by mermaids and rainbow-dappled dolphins, floated gracefully over a decorative array of trompe l'oeil pedestals and urns. Amidst the sea of lyrically decorative figures, there appeared the more formal Spanish crests and coats of arms for Spanish cities and provinces. The ceiling featured pithily worded proverbs incorporated into the decorative scheme and easily visible to diners. Not all the proverbs exhibited refined taste. For example, diners were treated to witticisms such as "the ass that brays the most eats least." . . .

¹⁹Braden, 173.

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In addition to ceiling paintings, the dining room contained friezes of grape-toting putti and two large murals on the north and south walls that featured ships similar to the ones that carried Ponce de Leon, the French Huguenots, and Sir Francis Drake to the New World.²⁰

According to an 1893 fire insurance map, ground floor rooms below the Dining Room included the following: a gymnasium, children's playroom, bar, officers' hall, and workshop. The former gymnasium space, adjacent to the carriage driveway and porte cochere, has a large semicircular stained glass window.

A four-and-a-half story rectangular service building, nine bays by three, sits on axis immediately behind the oval-shaped Dining Room. Its low-pitched hipped roof has red clay tiles, shed-roofed dormers, tall, slender chimneys at the corners, and wide bracketed eaves. In contrast to the main hotel block and the Dining Room, this component served a more utilitarian use historically, and its decorative elements are limited to terra cotta grilles at the second and third floors windows, and burnt orange brick window surrounds, string courses and quoins. A bridge over a driveway on the north side of the Dining Room connects the service building to components towards the front of the hotel complex. In the hotel's early years, the first floor of the service building was a wash room. A huge kitchen occupied the second floor, along with separate rooms for baking, pastry, meats, and freezing. There was also a large pantry, a dish pantry, a store room, "helps" dining room, and waiters dressing room. Upper floors provided dormitory style quarters for hotel employees. After the Hotel Ponce de Leon's adaptive use as a college, this building became the main classroom building and faculty offices. In 1981-1982, it was largely gutted to provide more modern instructional facilities, and renamed Kenan Hall. A new "front" entrance on the side (west) facade has a one-story hipped roof porch. Two original windows in the center bays were enlarged to provide entrance doors (main hotel, Dining Room, Kenan Hall - one interconnected contributing building).

The service yard behind Kenan Hall includes a brick boiler room with a 125-foot brick chimney on its west side. A tall wall with a wide opening for vehicular traffic encloses the east side. At the far end of the original hotel complex designed by Carrère and Hastings is the Ponce de Leon Studios, more commonly known as the Artists' Studios. This long, narrow two-story building with a low-pitched, tiled hipped roof served two purposes historically. Its south facade, adjacent to the boiler room and service area, had arched openings on the ground floor for coal and wood storage. The north facade facing Valencia Street has a double veranda, presenting a residential appearance to the neighborhood beyond. Stairs on both east and west end walls provided access to seven artists' studios with doors on to the second floor gallery, carried on palm tree trunk posts. Each studio exhibits low wainscoting, a corner fireplace, canvas-covered walls, exposed rafters, and a skylight on the roof's north slope. This building currently houses the College's maintenance department on the ground floor. Art classes are held in the second floor studios. Plans are underway to restore Studio 7, occupied by Martin

²⁰Braden, 171-172.

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Johnson Heade, leader of St. Augustine's 19th century art colony (boiler building, chimney, studio - one contributing building).

Grounds

A low concrete wall with alcoves at regular intervals surrounds the grounds on the south, east, and portions of the north and west sides. Tall concrete bollards topped with concrete ball finials are linked by draped iron chains with spike-studded spheres. The wall was restored in 2001 (one contributing structure). On the hotel's east side, there is a large circular fountain with circular pool adjacent to the driveway that leads to the porte cochere (fountain - one contributing object, driveway - one contributing structure). The original driveway from Valencia Street at the rear of the property was extended to provide parking for cars circa 1930. The parking area was expanded in the 1980s, but the row of sable palms from the hotel's early years remains (one noncontributing structure)

On the west side of the hotel complex, the "pleasuring ground" occupied approximately one-third of the block. When the hotel first opened, there was an orange grove at the northwest corner, and shell-covered paths crossed the grounds, but apparently there were no formal landscaping features. There is a palm garden at the southwest corner (King Street and Sevilla Street), and the area also has a number of large, tropical plants. Several noncontributing resources have been constructed in this area since its adaptive use as a college: a swimming pool (1953 - one noncontributing structure), an octagonal brick pavilion (one noncontributing structure) in memory of Lawrence Lewis, Jr., founder of Flagler College; and a large Flagler College sign of brick and concrete at the northwest corner, 20 feet long by six feet tall. (There is a similar sign at the southeast corner - two noncontributing structures). These resources must be categorized as noncontributing because they were constructed after the period of significance for this property, but the grounds still retain their natural, tropical quality. The new additions do not really detract from the historic character of the grounds, which maintain a high degree of integrity.

Integrity, Restoration, and Rehabilitation

The Hotel Ponce de Leon has a high degree of integrity, which is especially remarkable in light of its age, historic function, and semi-tropical location. Continuity of ownership and operation are significant factors in its preservation. Flagler interests continued the hotel operation for 79 years, and specifically chose an adaptive use that would preserve the historic hotel and its grounds, Henry M. Flagler's first extraordinary legacy in the state of Florida. Lawrence Lewis, Jr., Flagler's grandnephew and founder of Flagler College, envisioned the school as a memorial to Flagler.

Flagler College opened in the former Hotel Ponce de Leon in 1968 without significant alterations to the building, launching an ambitious, long-term rehabilitation and restoration program in 1975. Rehabilitation work began with the dormitory rooms (the original guest rooms), followed by restoration of the towers (1978-1979), the Grand Parlor (1982-1987), the Dining Room (1986-1992, by Biltmore Campbell Smith of Asheville, North Carolina), and the Rotunda (1991-1995). In 1981-1982, major rehabilitation of the former service building, now known as Kenan Hall, provided the

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college with modern classrooms and office space for faculty members. Handicapped accessibility and fire safety modifications, including fire escapes at the southeast and southwest corners of the main hotel building and a handicapped ramp along the west wall of the courtyard, were in keeping with the building's historic character and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Balconies, roofs, the lantern on the dome, windows, and floors have also been stabilized, rehabilitated, or restored. The perimeter wall was restored in 2001. More than \$25 million has been spent to date, and a number of projects are currently in the planning stage.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A B C X D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban DesignVI. Expanding Science and Technology
2. Technological ApplicationsAreas of Significance: Architecture
Engineering

Period(s) of Significance: 1885-1888 (construction and hotel opening)

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: John M Carrère and Thomas Hastings, Architects
George W. Maynard, Frescoes and Mural Decorations
Virgilio Tojetti, Ceiling Paintings
Louis Comfort Tiffany, Stained Glass
Auguste Pottier and William P. Stymus, Interior DesignHistoric Contexts: XVI. Architecture
M. Period Revivals
7. Renaissance

XVIII. Technology (Engineering and Invention)
H. Construction

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**INTRODUCTION**

The Hotel Ponce de Leon in St. Augustine, Florida, a grand hotel of the Gilded Age constructed 1885-1887, has exceptional significance in American architecture and engineering. The original hotel building complex (with approximately a six-acre footprint) and its grounds (approximately one-and-a-half acres) occupy an entire city block in downtown St. Augustine. This exceptionally important work of design and construction retains a high degree of integrity and clearly meets National Historic Landmark Criterion 4.

The Hotel was designed by Carrère and Hastings, a leading American architectural firm. In their first major commission, Carrère and Hastings proved themselves to be masters of the plan, a key Beaux-Arts design principle. They were also pioneers in the use of construction materials, building the Hotel Ponce de Leon of poured concrete using coquina, a kind of limestone, as the aggregate. In combination with their thoughtful consideration of St. Augustine's unique environment and local building traditions, Carrère and Hastings produced a Spanish Renaissance Revival luxury hotel of world renown that established the firm's reputation at the beginning of its long career.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Hotel Ponce de Leon (Flagler College since 1968), was the first of Florida's great winter luxury hotels and the flagship of Henry M. Flagler's railroad-hotel-land development empire in Florida. Henry Flagler made his fortune during the period immediately following the Civil War. He was one of John D. Rockefeller's two original partners and a founder of the Standard Oil Company in 1870. Standard Oil became the world's first and greatest oil monopoly. By the early 1880s, Flagler's interest in Standard Oil waned as the daily business became more routine, although he remained a vice-president until 1908 and a member of the Board of Directors until 1911. Flagler found a new challenge that became his second remarkable career, the development of the State of Florida. It was the last American frontier east of the mighty Mississippi.

Flagler built a railroad, the Florida East Coast Railway, that ultimately extended all the way down the Atlantic coast of Florida. It ran 522 miles from Jacksonville (just south of the Georgia state line) to Key West, the southernmost city in the United States, and took 27 years to complete the entire system. Along the way, Flagler established new towns, improved existing ones, built hotels, resorts, depots, schools, and churches, and established utility companies, newspapers, steamship lines, land development companies, and experimental farms. Flagler and his railroad linked vacationers to resorts, settlers to homesteads and new farm lands, and produce to market, and they were catalysts in the creation of modern Florida and its main industries, tourism and agriculture. Flagler "financed this venture out of his own wealth, an act unprecedented in the annals of American history."²¹

²¹Chandler, book jacket.

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Flagler first visited Florida in the winter of 1877 with his ailing first wife, Mary. At the time, St. Augustine had a reputation as a warm winter seaside location for invalids. After Mary's death, Flagler visited St. Augustine again in the winters of 1882-1883 and 1883-1884. He noted "a wonderful change" in the accommodations and in the visitors, no longer predominantly invalids. Many years later he remembered: "But I liked the place and the climate, and it occurred to me very strongly that someone with sufficient means ought to provide accommodation for the class of people who are not sick, but who come here to enjoy the climate, have plenty of money, but could find no satisfactory way of spending it."²²

Florida had a population of just 140,000 on the eve of the Civil War, and was the last frontier east of the Mississippi when Flagler first arrived. The land belonged to Spain until 1821 and did not become a state until 1845. Florida's few towns included the ports of Pensacola, Tampa, Jacksonville, and Key West, the state's largest city. St. Augustine was established by the Spanish in 1565 and is the oldest permanent settlement in the United States.

Resort hotels in scenic, exotic locales provided Gilded Age Americans the opportunity to escape their urban environments. In the late 19th century, Florida was considered to be one of the most exotic regions of the United States, a forbidding land of swamps, mosquitoes, and alligators. Sportsmen, health seekers, and vacationers had just begun to visit a few areas of northeast Florida that could be reached by steamboat. Flagler, however, believed that Florida could become an American Riviera. With the addition of modern conveniences, the forbidding could be tamed into the picturesque. Moreover, the old Spanish city of St. Augustine's European ambiance could be enhanced and promoted as an Iberian-Moorish escape from urban-industrial American cities. A luxury hotel in Florida could be an ideal location for conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption.

In the winter and spring of 1885, Flagler began to develop plans for a winter resort hotel in St. Augustine that would transform the old city into the "Winter Newport." With the assistance of Dr. Andrew Anderson, a prominent local resident, and Franklin W. Smith, a winter resident from Boston, he gradually assembled a site that included marshlands west of the town's central plaza. Flagler hired Frederick W. Bruce, a local engineer, to survey the site and prepare the low-lying land for construction, and James A. McGuire and Joseph A. McDonald to build the new hotel. In 1884, McGuire and McDonald had built the Hotel San Marco, St. Augustine's new leading hotel that helped inspire Flagler to build a luxury hotel.²³

²²Jacksonville *News-Herald*, June 20, 1887, quoted in Chandler, 94.

²³Susan L. Clark, "Franklin W. Smith: St. Augustine's Concrete Pioneer," Master's Thesis, Cooperstown Graduate Program, 1990, 42. Franklin W. Smith also supervised the initial concrete construction process for the Hotel Ponce de Leon, although he and Flagler parted ways early in 1886.

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Transportation for Flagler's northern hotel guests was crucial to the success of his resort hotel. At that time, there were only a few short railroads in northern Florida and their tracks had different gauges that could not be interconnected. This was an inconvenience to travelers because it required them to change trains. Steamboats brought some tourists to Florida, but they were less reliable than railroads and reached only the coastal cities and the lower reaches of the St. John's River. In December 1885, Flagler bought an interest in the Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Halifax River Railway, and subsequently was elected president of its board of directors. In 1888 he built a depot a short distance west of the Hotel Ponce de Leon when the railroad tracks were extended across the river to St. Augustine. Flagler bought several more existing railways in the area, and by the spring of 1889, his railroads provided service from Jacksonville to Daytona (90 miles). The improved transportation increased tourism dramatically, and the system was renamed the Florida East Coast Railway in 1889.²⁴

Henry Flagler selected two architects in their twenties, John Mervin Carrère (1858-1911) and Thomas Hastings (1860-1929), to design the Hotel Ponce de Leon. The two young architects had met in Paris as students at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, the period's most prestigious school of architecture. In 1883, both found work as draftsmen in the office of McKim, Mead and White in New York City. They formed their own firm in early 1885, at first leasing office space from McKim, Mead and White. Carrère had been born in Rio de Janeiro of American parents and was educated in Europe. Hastings was from a well-to-do New York family, and his father, the Reverend Thomas S. Hastings, was pastor of the city's West Presbyterian Church. Henry Flagler was a member of the church and a close friend of Reverend Hastings.²⁵ It is highly unlikely that such a large commission would have gone to a brand-new architectural firm absent the family connection between Flagler and Hastings. Thomas Hastings later explained that Flagler at first considered hiring the new firm only to prepare a general design of the building, but eventually decided to place them in full charge of the design and construction of the hotel complex.²⁶

Carrère and Hastings prepared carefully for this large project at the beginning of their careers. They conducted extensive interviews with hotel operators and others to educate themselves on the functional requirements of hotels. Additionally, they studied the climate and local building traditions of St. Augustine. Carrère and Hastings were determined to move away from the American tradition of constructing inexpensive, fire-prone hotels of wood and eager to apply the principles they had thoroughly absorbed at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.²⁷

The design principles of the Ecole had a profound influence on the major works of

²⁴In the early 20th century, Louis Hill's Glacier Park hotel chain along the route of the Great Northern Railway would follow the Flagler model for a symbiotic relationship between railways and resort hotels in remote, picturesque places.

²⁵Curtis Channing Blake, "The Architecture of Carrere and Hastings," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1976, 1-2, 10-11, 99-102; Braden, 148-49.

²⁶Thomas Hastings, "A Letter from Thomas Hastings," *American Architect*, July 7, 1909, 3-4.

²⁷Braden, 150-52.

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American architects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notably on the leading firms of McKim, Mead and White and Carrère and Hastings. Education at the Ecole had three components: lectures, work in the *atelier* (studio) of a practicing architect, and a program of design competitions. In the late 1800s, the Ecole emphasized the following principles of design and composition:

- Clear and logical solutions to architectural problems.
- The need to focus on the most important aspects of the problem first, with details worked out later.
- The idea that the building floor plan was key to the overall architectural conception; all other aspects of a design should be derived from an appropriate placement of rooms and free-flowing circulation among them.
- Placing different building functions in clearly defined, separate spaces.
- Biaxial symmetry.

Although the Ecole preferred the use of ornamental details taken from a previous period of architecture (classical, Renaissance, Gothic, etc.), this was not at the core of the Ecole's system. The Ecole also was open to the use of modern materials, such as iron, glass, and concrete.²⁸

The Ecole's design principles are clearly evident in the Hotel Ponce de Leon. The hotel has a very strongly organized, symmetrical plan, featuring a central axis running straight through the complex from south to north, with several cross axes. The major functional components—hotel, dining room, and service space—reveal themselves as separate spaces on the exterior and are connected by subsidiary spaces that serve as links. On the interior, the low-ceilinged connecting spaces open into the lofty spaces of the octagonal Rotunda and the barrel-vaulted Dining Room. The centerpiece of the design is the Rotunda, where the main axis leading back to the Dining Room is crossed by another axis, leading to additional important public spaces of the hotel. Throughout, the scheme of circulation is clear and logically determined. In their first major commission, Carrère and Hastings established their reputation as masters of the plan, a reputation that stayed with the firm through its life. By contrast, McKim, Mead and White tended to place more emphasis on the façade composition.²⁹

A story told by Hastings illustrates both the importance of the plan and the meticulous care that the firm took with this commission. When local builders McGuire and

²⁸John Philip Noffsinger, *The Influence of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts on the Architects of the United States* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955).

²⁹Braden, 158-61; Blake, 26-36.

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McDonald first laid out the outline of the building on the site, they found that the plans appeared to be askew. Carrère traveled to St. Augustine and discovered that the builders had started from one corner of the building plan and surveyed around each wall, accumulating errors in measurement all the way. Carrère started over, setting up his survey equipment in the center of the building and running lines out from that point to demonstrate that the plans were accurate. Hastings later wrote that it was this demonstration that convinced Flagler that the young architects needed to supervise every aspect of the hotel's construction.³⁰

³⁰Hastings, "A Letter."

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Carrère and Hastings consistently stated that the Hotel Ponce de Leon “is built in the style of the Spanish Renaissance, which was strongly influenced by the Moorish spirit.”³¹ Hastings was familiar with Spanish architecture from his travels in Spain, and the partners consulted photographs of Spanish buildings available in McKim, Mead and White’s extensive library. Architectural historian Richard Longstreth describes the hotel as “an especially brilliant synthesis of diverse sources,” and mentions elements drawn from “Italian Romanesque; Moorish; and Italian, Spanish, and even French Renaissance architecture.”³² Carrère and Hastings took pains to ensure that the hotel would not clash with the colonial Spanish buildings of St. Augustine. In addition to using crushed local coquina stone in the concrete aggregate, the architects borrowed the local tradition of projecting wooden balconies; the four “Mirador Rooms” at the corners of the building’s front seem to have been inspired by the four corner “lookout towers” of the nearby Spanish fort, the Castillo de San Marcos. Whatever the exact sources of decorative elements, the Hotel Ponce de Leon is considerably more exuberant than almost all of the firm’s later work, which drew largely from French architecture from the early Renaissance to the reign of Louis XVI.

Carrère and Hastings involved several artists in the decoration of the hotel and may have assigned some of the interior design to Bernard Maybeck, a young architect working for them. Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), who had been known primarily as a painter, received his first major commission in glass when he was tapped to design the hotel’s stained-glass windows. George Maynard (1843-1923), a well-known muralist who had worked with McKim, Mead and White and would later create murals for the Library of Congress, painted the dome of the Rotunda and portions of the Dining Room. An Italian-born artist, Virgilio Tojetti (1851-1901), painted canvases that were installed in the ceiling of the Grand Parlor. The noted New York furniture and design firm of Pottier & Styms supplied furniture for the hotel.³³

³¹Carrere and Hastings, *Florida The American Riviera, St. Augustine The Winter Newport: The Ponce de Leon, The Alcazar, The Casa Monica*, 22.

³²Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 31 (quotation), 37.

³³Braden, 166-72; “Louis Comfort Tiffany,” in *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. by Dumas Malone, vol. 18 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1945), 534-35; George Collins, www.askart.com (Accessed March 29, 2005).

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Bernard Maybeck (1862-1957), who would go on to a long and distinguished architectural career in the San Francisco area, worked for Carrère and Hastings from 1886 to 1888. Maybeck and Hastings had been in the same *atelier* during their Ecole years, that of Louis-Jules André, and had even briefly roomed together. A few architectural historians have suggested that Maybeck had a role in the overall design of the Hotel Ponce de Leon, but his contributions seem to have been confined to the interior. As Longstreth notes, Maybeck did not join the firm until 1886, and it is well established that the basic design for the hotel was completed in 1885, with foundation work beginning in December of that year.³⁴ Further, Carrère and Hastings would have wanted this, their first important commission, to be unmistakably their own work. Maybeck did supervise construction of the hotel.

³⁴Longstreth, 62-63, n. 40, 366; Chandler, 100, citing a 1912 Flagler speech. Braden states that by late summer 1885, Carrere and Hastings had prepared working drawings for the hotel (153). Carrere and Hastings' *Florida The American Riviera* notes that construction "commenced November 30, 1885."

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From 1885 to 1889, Carrère and Hastings spent almost all of their time working on the Hotel Ponce de Leon and Flagler's other St. Augustine projects. The firm designed the Alcazar Hotel (1886-1888), directly across the street from the Ponce de Leon, Grace Methodist Episcopal Church (1887), and Flagler Memorial Presbyterian Church (1889-1890). Flagler again called on the firm to design two of his houses, Kirkside (1893) in St. Augustine and Whitehall (1901) in Palm Beach.³⁵

The tremendous public and professional acclaim for the Hotel Ponce de Leon immediately established Carrère and Hastings as a leading architectural firm. Shortly after the hotel opened for the first time, this account in New York's "Evening Post" was typical praise: "But, after all, the greatest wonder of St. Augustine is the Hotel Ponce de Leon, recently finished; without doubt the finest piece of hotel architecture in this country—probably the finest in the world."³⁶ In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Carrère and Hastings and McKim, Mead, and White were the dominant U.S. architectural practices. From its founding through Hastings' death in 1929, the firm designed more than 600 buildings. Carrère and Hastings are best known today for their New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue between 40th and 42nd Streets; the firm won a competition to design the building in 1897. Construction began in 1902 and the library opened to the public on May 23, 1911. Other noteworthy commissions included the New (later Century) Theater in New York; the Standard Oil Building, New York; the House (now Cannon) Office Building in Washington, DC; the Senate (now Russell Senate) Office Building in Washington, DC; the approaches to the Manhattan Bridge, New York; 12 Carnegie libraries; and a company town for U.S. Steel in Duluth, Minnesota. The firm also designed dozens of residences for many of the period's corporate princes, including Harrimans, Fricks, Vanderbilts, and DuPonts. Both men were active in professional activities and associations. Carrère died in an automobile accident in 1911, while Hastings continued to receive acclaim and numerous professional awards. He was only the third American (after Richard Morris Hunt and Charles F. McKim) to receive the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, awarded in 1922.³⁷

With the Hotel Ponce de Leon, Carrère and Hastings not only produced an exceptional

³⁵Whitehall was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2000.

³⁶*The Evening Post*, January 17, 1888.

³⁷"Carrere and Hastings," in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architecture*, vol. I, Adolph K. Placzek, ed. (New York: Free Press, 1982), 387-88; see the building list in Blake, 378-418.

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work of architecture, they also reinvented the late 19th century concept of a hotel. “Using the Renaissance vocabulary, Carrère and Hastings retrieved, if only for a short time, the design of resort hotels from the hands of contractors and builders. Adding the 1891 Laurel-in-the Pines Hotel to their earlier successes, the firm lifted the building type out of wooden construction, epitomized by the clapboard Grand Hotel in Saratoga, New York and the shingle Hotel Thorndike at Jamestown, Rhode Island, and into the realm of serious aesthetic consideration. They proved that the results could be impressive, functional, and architecturally influential.”³⁸ In the years following its opening, the hotel became a prime winter destination for America’s elite. Novelist Henry James pronounced the Ponce de Leon “highly modern, a most cleverly-constructed and smoothly administered great caravansary.”³⁹

³⁸Blake, 100-01.

³⁹Braden, 178, quoting from James’s *The American Scene*, first published in 1907.

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In addition to his more well-known business accomplishments, Henry Flagler was also a patron of the arts. He hired a number of artists to decorate his first hotel and purchased paintings by noted artists for exhibit at the Hotel Ponce de Leon as well. There were also a number of artists in residence at the Hotel. The building at the north end of the hotel complex, the Ponce de Leon Studios (now called the Artists' Studios), was specifically constructed to support St. Augustine's local art colony. Martin Johnson Heade, the senior artist in residence at the Hotel, occupied Studio No. 7 for a number of years. Flagler met Heade in St. Augustine in 1883, a meeting that may be responsible in part for Flagler's construction of the studio building. "More like ateliers or small salons than artists' garrets, these artists' studios were an integral part of the cultural life of the Ponce de Leon and provided a center for the growing artistic community of St. Augustine."⁴⁰ A number of visiting artists used the studios in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Otto Henry Bacher, Charles Grafton Dana, F. Arthur Callender, George Seavey, Frank Shapleigh, Laura Woodward, and Marie a Becket.

Not surprisingly, the exotic and innovative Ponce de Leon, almost immediately upon its completion, also appeared on the lists of the world's "best" hotels In size and elegance, the Hotel Ponce de Leon surpassed all other hotels in Florida Fashionable and expensively plush furnishings by Pottier and Stymus embellished the parlors. Allegorical and decorative paintings by George Maynard and Virgilio Tojetti adorned the ceilings. Stained glass by Louis Comfort Tiffany and Company transformed the hotel's grand stairway into a shimmering stage of golden amber. The hotel's fine linens and signature chinaware came from Boston. Modern technology at the Ponce de Leon included an Otis elevator and electric lights.⁴¹

In December 1906, John Carrère spoke to the New York Architectural League on the subject of "Hotels." Carrère was introduced by Richard Howland Hunt, president of the League and a son of Richard Morris Hunt, who noted that Carrère and Hastings "were the first architects to open the eyes of the country in regard to hotels . . . and that [the Ponce de Leon] was the first hotel in this country to be erected from a definite art standpoint." In his remarks, Carrère observed that "When you decorate a hotel so artistically that you get a man to go there for something else, other than to eat or sleep, you have accomplished a great deal for art."⁴²

⁴⁰Sandra Barghini, *A Society of Painters: Flagler's St. Augustine Art Colony* (Palm Beach: Henry Morrison Flagler Museum, 1998), np.

⁴¹Braden, 157.

⁴²"How the Ponce Was Built," *St. Augustine Record*, December 20, 1906, quoting an address by Carrere to the New York Architectural League.

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The Hotel Ponce de Leon is also exceptionally important for its pioneering method of construction. It was the first large multistory building in the United States constructed of concrete,⁴³ a building material choice that has been characterized as “startlingly innovative.”⁴⁴ An additional innovation was the use of coquina, a native sandstone that was crushed to provide the aggregate for the concrete mixture.

In American Building - Materials and Techniques from the Beginning of the Colonial Settlements to the Present, Carl Condit discusses the early history of concrete:

Concrete is the oldest synthetic material used in the building process, and yet there was a period of about thirteen centuries when the knowledge of it was wholly lost in Europe. It was used by Mayan builders as early as the eleventh century, but this work had no influence on later building in the New World. Of the four primary materials in concrete, the sand and gravel (aggregate) are inert, and the cement and water are the active ingredients in the complex chemical reactions that transform the wet plastic into a rigid and durable substance. Cement is essentially quicklime (calcium oxide), which can be obtained most easily by burning finely broken limestone. This process, known as calcining, originated in remote antiquity, the earliest known lime-burning kilns dating from about 2450 B.C. Sometime in the late republican period [ending 27 B.C.], the Romans made two extremely important discoveries. They first found that ordinary cement will set under water if lime is previously mixed with a small quantity of a volcanic earth now called pozzolana, after the town of Pozzuoli, Italy. Somewhat later they discovered that if hydraulic lime, sand, and water are mixed with an aggregate of broken stones or bricks and allowed to set, the resulting product is a strong and durable stonelike substance that will harden in water as well as in air. The Roman builders gave the invention its first practical demonstration in the foundations of the Temple of Concord, completed at Rome in 121 B.C. During the imperial period [27 B.C. to 5th century A.D.] concrete was used for walls, domes, vaults, and breakwaters, and eventually for all structural elements except columns.

These valuable arts were lost in the Middle Ages. Hydraulic-lime mortar was rediscovered in the sixteenth century, when English builders began to import pozzolana and lime mixtures from Italy. But concrete in Roman form was not revived until the latter part of the eighteenth century, when England again led the way. Around the mid-century, George Sempile mixed hydraulic lime and gravel to make a primitive concrete for the foundations of the Essex Bridge over the River Liffey in Dublin. The famous British engineer John Smeaton used a similar concrete in 1760 for the cores of lock walls on the River Calder. Before concrete could be employed extensively, however, a method of providing a steady supply of reliable hydraulic cement had to be developed The decisive step for the building arts was not taken until 1824. In that year Joseph Aspdin of Leeds, England, obtained a patent for an artificial cement again prepared by calcining a mixture of chalk and clay, but he carried on the process at a temperature high enough to vitrify the mixture, which was then ground to a powder. He was thus able to produce a cement superior to and more reliable in quantity than [earlier products]. Aspdin called it Portland cement because of the similarity of its appearance to a limestone found in the region of Portland, England. It has retained the name to the present time and continues to be the prime cementing agent in modern structural concrete.⁴⁵

⁴³Condit, *American Building*, Plate 57, 159, 291.

⁴⁴Braden, 155.

⁴⁵Condit, *American Building*, 155-56.

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A New York canal engineer, Canvass White discovered a natural source of hydraulic cement near Sullivan, New York. He patented “water lime” in 1819 and used it in the concrete walls and aqueducts of the Erie Canal. In 1828, builders of the Delaware and Hudson Canal found a superior natural cement, Rosedale cement, which dominated the market for the next 40 years.⁴⁶

Condit goes on to note:

⁴⁶Condit, *American Building*, 156-57.

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The great age of concrete began in 1871, when David O. Saylor patented an American equivalent of Portland cement and built a mill at Coplay, Pennsylvania, to manufacture the product. This marked the establishment of the artificial cement industry in the United States as well as the beginning of a scientific understanding of the physical properties and structural behavior of concrete . . . The success of Saylor's business was assured when James B. Eads specified his cement for the South Pass jetties at the mouth of the Mississippi River (1875-79) . . . a remarkable example of megalithic construction in which some of the blocks poured at the site weigh as much as 260 tons.⁴⁷

Prior to Eads' Mississippi River jetties, concrete houses were built by Obadiah Parker in New York City in 1835 (poured concrete), G.A. Ward on Staten Island in 1837 (concrete block), and Joseph Goodrich in Milton, Wisconsin (1844).⁴⁸ The New York and Erie's Starrucca Viaduct had the first concrete pier footings (1848), and an 1871 footbridge in Brooklyn's Prospect Park was the first concrete bridge.⁴⁹ Concrete structural elements were in wide use by 1880, and the first concrete dams followed later in the 1880s.

The structural system of St. Augustine's Hotel Ponce de Leon

represents an original conception with little precedent in the high design of the 19th Century: all footings, foundations, exterior walls, interior partitions, and rotunda piers—that is, all primary compression elements—are composed of a concrete derived from a material that had long been used by Spanish builders. The new variant was made from hydraulic cement, water, sand, and an aggregate of broken coquina stone. The last substance is a locally abundant but poorly consolidated limestone composed chiefly of unfossilized shells that is easily worked and hardens on prolonged exposure to the air.

The idea of using this novel material came directly from the native building tradition. In the 16th Century Castillo de San Marcos and in many of the colonial houses of St. Augustine, the Spanish used a primitive concrete originally known as *tapia* (English tabby) or *ripio*, and later as *piedra de ostion*. The common recipe involved oyster-shell lime, water, sand, and a shell aggregate instead of the usual gravel . . . In a region devoid of a local iron industry and of a building stone capable of withstanding high loads, *tapia* recommended itself as the only fireproof material with sufficient mass to resist hurricane pressures, but it suffered from two defects; namely, its internal weaknesses and the absence of the hydraulic property. The first was corrected by using coquina as an aggregate in the place of the brittle shells, and

⁴⁷Condit, *American Building*, 158.

⁴⁸Condit, *American Building*, 157. The Milton House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1998 for its national significance in the Underground Railroad and not for its construction method.

⁴⁹Condit, *American Building*, 158-59.

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the second by substituting a hydraulic cement for the oyster lime.⁵⁰

Carrère and Hastings' Beaux-Arts training made them partial to local materials and building traditions, but the pioneering formula with coquina and Portland (hydraulic) cement used to construct the Ponce de Leon was the innovation of Franklin W. Smith of Boston. Smith, a millionaire and an amateur architect, constructed his winter residence in St. Augustine of poured concrete with coquina and Portland cement in 1883. Henry Flagler was impressed by the Villa Zorayda (inspired by Spain's Alhambra), and discussed its construction and debated concrete formulas with Smith at length.

The initial concrete construction of the Ponce de Leon, which began November 30, 1885, was supervised by Smith until January 1886 when Flagler and Smith had a parting of the ways. Smith then built his own hotel with Spanish and Moorish features, the Casa Monica, across King Street from the Ponce de Leon. He used a modified concrete formula with much less coquina than the formula for the Ponce de Leon, resulting in a finer material with a smoother texture that made the walls more uniform in color. Both the Casa Monica and the Ponce de Leon opened in January 1888, but Flagler bought the Casa Monica from Smith at the end of its first season (April 1888). Flagler also commissioned Carrère and Hastings to build a less formal hotel with a large entertainment complex across King Street from the Ponce de Leon. The Hotel Alcazar, which included steam baths, gymnasium, casino, swimming pool, and ballroom, opened in December 1888.

⁵⁰Carl Condit, "The Pioneer Concrete buildings of St. Augustine," *Progressive Architecture*, September 1971, 128-29.

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In the late 1880s Henry Flagler owned three of the most extraordinary hotels in the world: the Ponce de Leon and the Alcazar, both designed by Carrère and Hastings; and the Hotel Cordova, originally called the Casa Monica by its owner-builder Franklin Smith, and renamed the Hotel Cordoba by Flagler . . . [These] hotels recalled historic coquina-based concrete building traditions in St. Augustine. In addition, they reflected the often flamboyant taste for historically stylish architecture so popular during the Gilded Age, and they revealed the aesthetic and technical potentials of modern concrete construction.⁵¹

The Hotel Ponce de Leon enjoyed its greatest artistic and financial success in its earliest years. The rich and powerful of the United States did patronize it, as Henry Flagler had hoped. Early guests included presidents Grover Cleveland, William McKinley (when he was governor of Ohio), Theodore Roosevelt, and Warren G. Harding who visited in 1921 and 1922. By the mid-1890s, however, Flagler's railroad and hotel development had pushed south where the weather was warmer, and Palm Beach soon became the real "Winter Newport."

During the Florida Land Boom of the 1920s, the Hotel Ponce de Leon enjoyed a few years of renewed prosperity, but the crash of the real estate bubble in 1926 signaled the end of an era for the Hotel Ponce de Leon. During the Great Depression it remained open, but only as a ghost of its former self. The Ponce's sister hotels, the Alcazar and Cordova, both closed and never reopened as hotels. During World War II, the Coast Guard took over the Ponce de Leon for use as a basic training camp. The hotel enjoyed a slight revival in the 1950s, but by then it had become an anachronism in Florida tourism. It closed in 1967 after the death of William R. Kenan, Jr., Flagler's brother-in-law and the last of the Flagler generation to pass away.

In 1968 the Hotel Ponce de Leon's main building reopened as the center of the new Flagler College campus. Students moved into former hotel guest rooms, and the artists' studios became classrooms. The college library was located first in the rooftop Solarium, and later in the Grand Parlor. At first very little was done to change the building because the fledgling college could not afford even modest renovations. In 1975, the college began to renovate the guest rooms—now dormitory rooms—one floor at a time over the summer breaks. The first major restoration project was the 1978 restoration of the roofs on the two towers, which had suffered from weather exposure. Renovation and restoration of the building accelerated after that. In 1988, the college celebrated the Hotel Ponce de Leon's 100th anniversary with festivities in the Grand Parlor and Dining Room, both recently restored to their former grandeur. Restoration projects are ongoing in the 21st century, with more than \$25 million spent to date. The Hotel Ponce de Leon's adaptive use as Flagler College is a remarkable success that preserves the building itself, the spirit of the original hotel, and the memory and legacy of Henry Morrison Flagler.

⁵¹Braden, 135, 139.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
☒ Previously Listed in the National Register.
☐ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
☒ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State Agency
☐ Federal Agency
☐ Local Government
☐ University
☐ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 7.5 acres

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
17 469601 3306949

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the Hotel Ponce de Leon (now Flagler College) is shown as the dashed line on the map entitled "Site Plan, Hotel Ponce de Leon, St. Augustine, Florida" and includes the block bounded on the south by King Street, on the west by Sevilla Street, on the north by Valencia Street, and on the east by Cordova Street.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes all of the parcel purchased in 1885 for construction of the Hotel Ponce de Leon and the resources that have historically been part of the Hotel Ponce de Leon which maintain integrity to the period of significance

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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY
September 1, 2005