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CORNERSTONE FOR THE TAMPA BAY HOTEL LAID 100 YEARS AGO – BUT WHERE IS IT?

By HAMPTON DUNN

History Mystery: What Happened To the Marker?

It’s time to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone for the fabulous Tampa Bay Hotel, but how can we?

It’s a matter of record that the cornerstone was placed amid much whoopla on July 26, 1888. Stories in contemporary newspapers made a big deal of the event. (See news story accompanying this article.)

I learned of the baffling mystery when preparing a story for my history series on WTVT-TV, Channel 13. Interviewing Dr. James W. Covington, professor of history at the University of Tampa, which now occupies the old hotel structure, in the "Reading and Writing Room" of the hotel, my ears perked up when Covington blurted out:

"We believe (the cornerstone was laid) roughly 100 years ago ... but we have some problems with that! .... Where is the cornerstone? We can’t find it. Dr. Delo (Dr. David M. Delo, president of the University of Tampa a number of years ago) offered a reward of $100 to anyone who could find it. Many of our students hunted for it ... and I tried just a little bit."

Dr. Covington, who came to the faculty of the University in 1951 and has since researched the history of Henry B. Plant, the builder, and of the structure itself, does have a theory about the missing cornerstone:

"You notice part of the hotel was built and then they tore it down. I think our architect didn’t like it, so it was torn down. Maybe that’s part of the problem."

A mystery in history was discovered when we newsmen and historians started looking for the stone. What we found was there is no stone and, as far as that goes, since the building is curved all over, there’s no corner either!
The historian reported: "Now the proof that there is a cornerstone ... the Mayor laid it ... the Masons always take part in something like that . . . and the newspaper noted that the cornerstone was laid ... sometime in July 1888."

In the book, Tampa: The Treasure City published by the Tampa Historical Society in 1983, co-authors Dr. Gary A. Mormino and Tony Pizzo, had this to say about the laying of the cornerstone:

"On July 26, 1888, the cornerstone for the Tampa Bay Hotel was laid. Mayor Herman Glogowski declared a holiday and hundreds of citizens celebrated the moment . . ."

Wonder if Dr. Delo’s $100 reward offer is still good?
THE PLUSH TAMPA BAY HOTEL 'PARLOR'
... Henry Plant Spared No Expense

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION