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Hampton Dunn
HOTEL of 1890's NOW HOUSES ANTIQUES

By HAMPTON DUNN

HERNANDO --- A half block off U.S. 41 in this lakeside community north of Inverness is an interesting old house that now serves as an antique shop. But it was originally built during the phosphate boom and provided hotel accommodations.

The two-story frame structure was built by James Ernest Westbrook as a homestead and hotel, in 1891. Among its features was an upstairs ballroom, space now filled with artifacts of yesteryear. The Westbrooks had six children, all born in this house.

In the early years there wasn't much activity around Hernando, but in 1900 the phosphate discovery set off a boom, and the first railroad was built. The Westbrooks soon sold the property to the Wilkerson family and they moved to Texas. The new owners continued to run a boarding house and hotel, and then in 1906 the Westbrooks returned to town and bought back their old place. They resumed operation of the hotel and this continued until Westbrook's death in 1920.

Other owners came along, including a Mr. Hooper who rented rooms and established a well-known dining room. People came from miles around to enjoy the delicious meals, especially Sunday dinners.

Finally, Harold Fowler purchased the home place, closed the hotel and used it as a dwelling. It is now owned by Mrs. Evelyn Ferguson, formerly of St. Petersburg, and is used as a museum and antique shop.

Some of the information for this sketch was furnished to researcher, Mrs. H. W. Roland, of Dunnellon by Mrs. Josie Westbrook Newton, daughter of the original owner who was born in the house in 1897, and lived there until the Westbrooks sold the building in 1920.

The landmark is usually referred to as "the old house," as good identity as there is.