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FERNANDINA HOTEL RICH IN HISTORY

By HAMPTON DUNN

FERNANDINA BEACH --- Old Keystone Hotel here was built as a community project. A group of citizens decided about 1910 that the town, which was then just Fernandina, before its incorporation with Fernandina Beach, needed a good facility so they formed a stock company to finance its construction.

Thus came into being the Keystone, which in its heyday was a handsome building, an elaborate structure of terra-cotta hollow tile with a stuccoed exterior. The three-story hostelry was erected at Eighth Street and Atlantic Avenue, across the street from historic St. Mary's Church.

All those joining in the original company did not come through and the burden of actually building the Keystone fell to John Mann, a contractor. An eventual owner was one of the founders, L. G. Mirth, with E. W. Bailey as his partner.

Fernandina was an active place at the time and the glittering new hotel was the social center for a long while. Special events here attracted the area's top socialites, decked out in white tie and tails. The restaurant was outstanding and served luscious food for the banquets.

The Keystone likewise was headquarters for visiting businessmen, salesmen and "drummers." The hotel lacked features that are usually demanded by guests in later days. There was only one room with a private bath. The other guests shared adjoining baths.

At one time, the hotel was headquarters for the Minnesota Twins and Washington Senators baseball farm clubs.