

The Hotel Cordova
253 Second Avenue North
HPC #98-02 - Designated April 1998



The 1921 Hotel Cordova was constructed circa 1921 and represents the transition in the lodging industry from small scale, mainly frame boarding houses and hotels built before the World War I era to the large, to masonry hotels built in the boom years of 1921-26. Hotels built in St. Petersburg before 1920 were small, usually less than 50 rooms, and entirely financed by their owner-operators. The first hotels built after the war in St. Petersburg, the Alexander in 1919 and the Ponce de Leon, show a change to masonry construction and architectural sophistication, but remained small in size. This shift in hotel type was a reflection of the growing wealth of the American economy in this period and the increased popularity of Florida as a winter tourist destination. The hotel is also a fine example of Neoclassical Revival architecture.

The Cordova was built by Frederick Scott who named it after himself. Mr. Scott sold the hotel in 1924 to Robert Bartlett, who renamed it the Hotel Cordova. The City Directory indicates the hotel was sold to Mr. and Mrs. F.J. Rowe during the early 1930s. During the early 1920s there were several small hotels and apartment houses in this area, such as the Caulfield House (Shelton Suites) at 235 2nd Avenue North, the Allison (250 2nd Avenue North), the Carr (210 2nd Avenue North) and the Stanton Hotel & Apartments at the corner of Third Street and Second Avenue North.

The Hotel Cordova is a three-story Neoclassical Revival style building, a rare architectural design in St. Petersburg. Less than one percent of the buildings surveyed in the City in 1978 were Neoclassical style. This style, along with the more ornate Beaux-Arts architecture, were often used for public buildings at the beginning of the 20th century due to the bold, regimented image projected by their appearance. Neoclassical Revival was also a dominant style for domestic building types during the first half of the 20th century.

The Neoclassical style is based on the rebirth of past classical styles which originated in the Roman and Greek empires. The revival of interest in classical models originated with the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 held in Chicago. Buildings were becoming less ornamental during post-Victorian times and the Neoclassical Revival style relied more on bold mass than detailed ornamentation, which provided the simplicity desired without having the building appear "stripped down."

The Cordova's Neoclassical elements, combined with its small scale, make it unique in downtown St. Petersburg. The Hotel is rectangular in plan, constructed of masonry and clad with stucco scored to resemble stone. Scoring is a technique which was frequently used both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to give buildings the appearance of more expensive materials were utilized in their construction. The main facade of the Cordova features decorative columns supporting the open, arcaded entrance. The five keyed arches form the base of the decorative classical entablature.