

**The Mari-Jean Hotel
2349 Central Avenue
HPC #00-02, Designated July 2001**



The 1926 Mari-Jean Hotel building is significant for its association with the development of the tourism industry in St. Petersburg during the 1920s. Built during the city's golden era of hotels, the hotel with its fifty-six rooms and baths reflects the changing character of the city's lodging industry from small boarding homes such as those built in the 1910s to the larger sized hotels built during the Florida Land Boom Era. Unlike the larger hotels built in the 1920s, the Mari-Jean would be operated by its owners for over thirty-four years until 1970. In addition, throughout its duration as a hotel the Mari-Jean operated seasonally, closing its doors after tourists left with the onset of the summer heat. Furthermore, the lodging was extended stay, meaning guests would stay the duration of the tourist season at the hotel without moving.

The Mari-Jean is also significant for its association with the development of Mediterranean Revival in St. Petersburg and Florida during the 1920s. The style flourished as Florida's communities imaginatively promoted themselves as fantasy lands, but also with a view to creating "antiquity" in hopes of competing with the ambience and elegance of European travel destinations. Noteworthy features of the Mari-Jean Hotel include red tile roofs, Mission parapets, spiral-fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals, and a decorative entry. In particular, the hotel's entry tower with its decorative features, pyramidal tile roof and cartouche is a well-executed treatment that connects the building back with the Italian antecedents of the style. The Mission-style relief panel on the tower, a stylistic theme reflected also on the southeastern entry, is an imaginative design harkening to both the eclectic nature of Mediterranean Revival architecture generally, as well as the style of significant buildings which existed in St. Petersburg during the period such as La Plaza Theater, the Florida Theater, and the old St. Petersburg Yacht Club.

The Mari-Jean was built in 1926 by George F. Young, who was born in Philadelphia on April 14, 1880. He moved to Tampa in 1913 forming a partnership with an English landscape engineer who later returned to Britain after the outbreak of the First World War. Young continued in city planning and development design, and some of his work includes properties in Oldsmar, the Sunset Park in Tampa and McClellan Park in Sarasota. He moved to St. Petersburg in 1917 where one of his first projects was to plan Lakewood Estates on the shores of Lake Maggiore for Charles Hall. In 1919, he was hired by A.B. Archibald, the pioneer beach developer, to lay out Sunshine Beach on Treasure Island. During the Florida Boom, Young's work spread rapidly and he had offices in eight Florida cities. While in the early part of the boom Young had a separate office, after the bust he would reside at the Mari-Jean along with his wife Margaret until he sold the building in 1934. Young and his wife moved to Sunshine Beach where he served as its mayor for fourteen years, until he died in 1955 in Rome while touring the Holy Lands.

Young sold the hotel to Elijah B. Howarth, a 48-year old former politician from Michigan who was retiring to Florida. Howarth would spend the remaining thirty years of his life as owner-proprietor of the hotel. He and his wife Laura would reside in Young's old office at 2335 Central Avenue for the duration of their lives. Born in Michigan in circa 1886, Howarth was a graduate of Ohio Northern College and the Detroit College of Law. Living in Royal Oak for much of his northern life Howarth served as a senator and representative in the Michigan legislature as well as the state's assistant attorney general. After moving, Howarth would become president of the Town Hall Committee of the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce.