

**The Princess Martha (Mason) Hotel
401 First Avenue North
HPC #95-03 - Designated October 1995**



Constructed in 1924, the Princess Martha Hotel was one of ten major hotels built that added approximately 2,000 hotel rooms to the area during the Florida Boom Era to accommodate the growing number of tourists coming to the St. Petersburg area. These hotels included the Vinoy Park, Soreno, Jungle Country Club, Dennis, Pheil, Suwanee, and the Pennsylvania. In fact, much of the City's economy during this time period depended on the tourist industry. The Princess Martha is also significant for its Neoclassical Revival architecture.

The Princess Martha Hotel was the first hotel in St. Petersburg to be financed by the sale of public stock. In 1923, Franklin Mason purchased the future hotel site and created the Mason Hotel Corporation which was comprised of fourteen partners, all local citizens. Included in the partnership were prominent community leaders Herman Dann and James Bussey. Stock sale raised \$1,500,000 which was spent entirely on the construction and furnishing of the hotel. Franklin Mason came to St. Petersburg in 1919 from New York City where he had been a building contractor for twenty years. Mason was also the contractor for the Dennis Hotel. He remained involved in real estate speculations in St. Petersburg until his bankruptcy in 1926 as a result of the collapse of the Florida Land Boom.

Frank Jonsberg, from the Boston firm of James H. Ritchie and Associates, AIA, was the supervising architect on the project. Although he retired to St. Petersburg in 1918, Jonsberg was a partner with the firm, having joined it when it was founded in 1909. Mason asked Jonsberg to take on the project when the first architect hired was fired. The Boston office of the firm did the design work, including the interior decoration, and produced the finished plans and specifications. Mr Jonsberg was also involved in the design of the St. Petersburg Woman's Club and the Dennis Hotel, both locally designated landmarks.