

The Emerson Apartments
305 5th Street South
HPC #02-02, Designated August 2002



The ca. 1916 Emerson represents an important phase in the development of apartment buildings in St. Petersburg. Prior to 1920 most were converted homes. The Emerson, on the other hand, was a three-story building with each apartment accessed from the outside via stairways and landings. The building was also one of the first to use concrete block construction. The building derives its name from Emerson M. Wood who built the apartments circa 1916-1917 and would continue to own and operate the Emerson Apartments until 1924, when he sold the building to W. Clark. Wood then became Vice President of the Guarantee Title and Abstract Company in St. Petersburg. He died in 1930.

The Emerson represents an important phase in the development of apartment buildings in St. Petersburg and is the best of the few remaining examples in the city, most of which remain south of Central Avenue. Apartment houses in St. Petersburg prior to 1920 most often were converted homes and reflected the configuration and massing one would expect from single-family homes, including one or two stories in height and a single exterior entrance. The Emerson Apartments, on the other hand, was a three-story building with each apartment accessed from the outside via stairways and landings. This practice was less prevalent during the second land boom of the 1920s when apartment buildings were integrated into neighborhoods and had courtyards or interior hallways to accommodate circulation. The evolving building style depicted by the Emerson parallels the development of the lodging industry in St. Petersburg, which also was in its infancy when tourism first emerged in force in the early part of the 1910s.

In addition, the building represents a departure from typical Apartment House architecture. Instead of copying styles from "northern houses," it utilized a vernacular design adapted to St. Petersburg's mild but often warm and humid climate. Its rectangular plan allows for cross-ventilation and the full facade porches provide constant shade for each apartment.