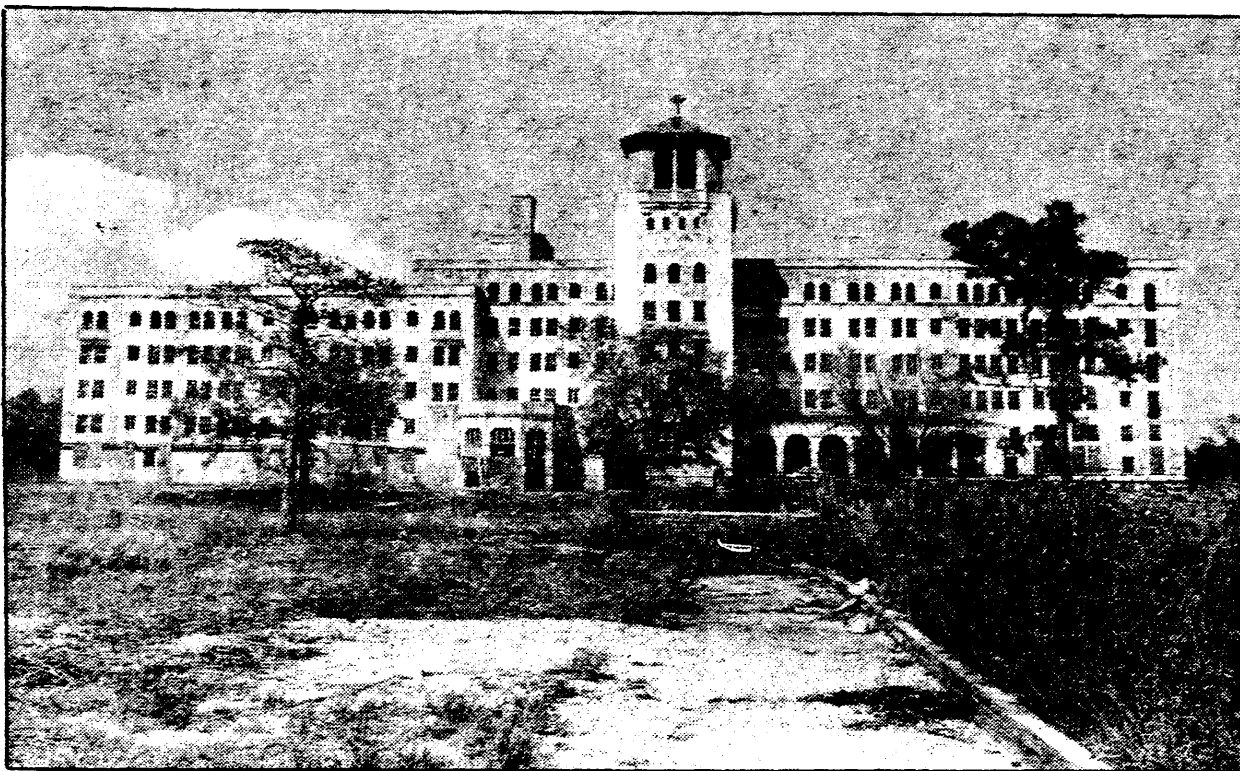


GULF COAST



Weeds run rampant where financiers once played, but 'pink place' still evokes memories.

PHOTO BY HELEN SMITH

Glorious past is only occupant of old hotel on Miss. Gulf Coast

By HELEN SMITH
Contributing writer

PASS CHRISTIAN, Miss. — As you cross the bridge over the Bay of St. Louis, the building on the north shore is a haunting presence, a fading monument to a Roaring '20s dream that died when the stock market crashed in 1929.

For many Mississippi Gulf Coast residents and New Orleans visitors, it came to be known simply as the "pink place," because of its color, or the "Oblate fathers," because of its last official residents.

The old Pine Hills hotel has a past as colorful as its exterior. Its first visitors were wealthy vacationers. Its most recent visitors have been the curious, and the vandals who delight in breaking what windows might still be intact and in defacing what is left of its beauty. In between, it was a temporary home for Roman Catholic seminarians and World War II soldiers.

Now it lies vacant. Washed away are the sand beaches, gone are the chandeliers. It stands today a ghostly reminder of things past, basking in the breeze of the bay, next to a Du Pont chemical and pigment plant in Delisle, one mile from interstate 10, on Mississippi 43.

The hotel was built by a group of New Orleans and Chicago businessmen for their wealthy friends. Rumor has it that mobster Al Capone also had an interest in it. The original drawings of the art deco-mission-style hotel, built by New Orleansian Moise Goldstein in 1926, are in the Southeastern Architectural Archives at Tulane's Howard Tilton Memorial Library.

It was one of the first of several hotels built along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in



the late '20s as part of the "Gold Coast." The Edgewater Gulf and Biloxi hotels were also built during that time.

Pine Hills was the ultimate in luxury on the Gulf Coast. The hotel was filled with \$200,000 worth of furnishings and the 180 rooms had Persian rugs and tiled baths. The hotel installed a stock ticker-tape machine to handle the stock transactions of its visitors.

The hotel boomed for a short time until the opening of U.S. 90 and its bridge nine miles south, which took the hotel off the new coast route. It could not weather the stock market crash and closed Oct. 29, 1929.

The hotel remained closed except for a brief stint in 1942 during World War II when it served as a troop training site. In

1953 it became a seminary for the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate. It was closed because it was too far from New Orleans and Mobile, where the seminarians had to attend college.

Du Pont bought the property in 1984 "from a developer who went under. We needed a buffer zone (for its original 2,300 acres), so we are not right next to our neighbors. At this point we do not have any plans to renovate it; it would be too expensive and it is too old," said Peter Morgenthaler, Du Pont's senior supervisor for safety, health and environment.

"We are going to make this 86-acre parcel a company recreation area with softball, archery and a running track. There are 600 people who work here and we want to make it an activity area for them," he said.

"We are trying to secure the area," Morgenthaler said. "We worry about the liability. We do not plan to renovate, we want to keep control of the land. We have started to fence the property."

The fence will keep out most of the people, Morgenthaler said. "But to the teen-agers it is a challenge to get in there. I do not want to see anyone hurt. The liability would be tremendous." Some people have been arrested inside the building.

The building has withstood everything nature threw its way. Hurricane Betsy hit in 1965 and Hurricane Camille's eye passed over the hotel in 1969. But Pine Hills still stands, despite the damage and the neglect.

And from a distance, the "pink place" still evokes memories of a time gone forever.

HOME TOURS

Plantation, walking tours set

Four walking tours and two plantation tours by chartered bus are scheduled April 5-8 as part of the 50th anniversary celebration by the New Orleans Spring Fiesta Association.

The charge for each walking tour is \$10 per person, while the cost of the plantation tours ranges from \$35 to \$37 per person. Tickets can be purchased at Spring Fiesta headquarters, 826 St. Ann St., or at Christ Church Cathedral, 2919 St. Charles Ave. They also can be bought from members at a table set up outside the Presbytere at 751 Chartres St.

All walking tours begin at 1 p.m. each day and end at about 4 p.m. Refreshments will be served at the last home visited on the tour.

Following is the schedule of tours:

► Saturday, April 5, at 9:30 a.m. — Plantations Along the Mississippi. A chartered air-conditioned bus will pick up all passengers at Spring Fiesta headquarters to visit plantations along the east bank of the river. The tour includes stops at Bocage, Houmas House and ends with hot lunch at L'Hermitage Plantation. The tour will last about six hours and the cost is \$35 per person.

► Saturday, April 5, 1 to 4 p.m. Tour of Vieux Carre Homes and Courtyards. The homes on tour include the home of U.S. Rep. Lindy Boggs, 623 Bourbon St.; the Spring Fiesta home, 826 St. Ann St.; the homes of Mrs. Mary Spencer Fortier, 835 Chartres St.; and Mrs. Paul McBerty, 831 St. Philip St. Refreshments will be served at Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, 616 St. Peter St.

► Sunday, April 6 at 9:30 a.m. — Bayou Country Tour Bus will leave fiesta headquarters for visits to Madewood, Oak Alley and Nottoway plantations with a hot lunch served at Nottoway. Tour cost is \$37 per person and the tour will last about 9 hours.

► Sunday, April 6, 1 to 4 p.m. Creole Homes and Courtyards. Homes on tour include Mrs. D.J. Blanda, 1015 Esplanade Ave.; Mr. and Mrs. John O. Humphreys, 905 Esplanade; Joseph Newell and Terence McGough, 933 Burgundy St., with refreshments at fiesta headquarters.

► Monday, April 7, 1 to 4 p.m. Homes in the Garden District. The homes of Mrs. A.C. Uddo, 2401 Prytania St.; Mr. and Mrs. John A. Mmahat, 1239 First St.; Dr. and Mrs. Alan Sheen, 1122 Jackson Ave.; and Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. deBoisblanc, 1322 Felicity St., ending with a tour and refreshments at the Terrell House, 1441 Magazine St.

► Tuesday, April 8, 1 to 4 p.m. Uptown Home Tour. Homes to be visited include those of Mr. and Mrs. James Viavant, 4941 St. Charles Ave.; Mr. and Mrs. James Pellerin, 6020 St. Charles Ave.; Dr. and Mrs. Richard Levine, 1640 Palmer Ave.; and Dr. and Mrs. Charles Lavis, 7 Rosa Park, ending with a tour and refreshments at the Elms House, 3029 St. Charles Ave.