



## **Gilded Age**

### Fact Sheet

**Flagler History** St. Augustine is rich in history, and in the late 1800s, “rich” was the operative word. This little town became the premier resort destination for the well-to-do – and it all began with an auspicious visit by Henry Morrison Flagler, John D. Rockefeller’s partner in founding Standard Oil.

In 1878 Henry Morrison Flagler first visited St. Augustine with his wife Mary, whose doctor had urged her to head south to recuperate from tuberculosis. Flagler believed St. Augustine was a refuge from the harsh northern climate but the hotels weren’t up to par. During another visit in 1885 with his second wife Ida Alice, he set in motion plans that would transform the small city into one of the country’s foremost resort destinations.

Considered the father of modern Florida, Flagler acquired a six-acre parcel of land just west of downtown and embarked on a vision to build what would soon become the Hotel Ponce de León. The opulent 450-room Spanish Renaissance Revival resort was the first of many landmarks that Flagler would develop in St. Augustine with the help of the greatest American architects, inventors and craftsmen of the time, including Thomas Edison and Louis Comfort Tiffany.

**Historic Sites** **Flagler College** has provided a rich liberal arts education to the community and nation for over 50 years. Its history, however, spans more than a century. Henry Flagler built the luxury Hotel Ponce de León in 1888, which now serves as a residence hall and centerpiece of the campus. The hotel was Flagler’s first in a series of luxury resorts along Florida’s east coast. The hotel was the first major poured-in-place concrete building in the United States and is a masterpiece of Spanish Renaissance architecture. Its grandeur launched the careers of famed architects, John Mervin Carrère and Thomas Hastings, and The Edison Electric Company powered the building with steam heat and 4,000 electric lights, making the hotel one of the nation’s first electrified buildings. Louis Comfort Tiffany designed the hotel’s interior, including remarkable stained glass and mosaics. Today, Flagler College is committed to preserving the opulent architecture that serves as a reminder of the economic and industrial growth of the Gilded Age.

**The Lightner Museum**, housed in a former Gilded Age resort hotel, is home to an extensive collection of Gilded Age artifacts, including fine and decorative art, Tiffany glass, musical instruments and rare oddities such as a mummy and a stuffed lion that once belonged to Sir Winston Churchill. In 1948, Otto Lightner founded the museum as the Lightner Museum of Hobbies, as its origins are attributed to the craze for collecting that swept America in the years surrounding the Great Depression. The museum occupies the former Hotel Alcazar, which Henry Flagler commissioned

architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings to construct in 1888. This architectural masterpiece, like the neighboring Hotel Ponce de León, housed some of America's wealthiest vacationers at the turn of the 20th century. The hotel contained the world's largest indoor swimming pool at the time, a grand ballroom, sulfur baths, a steam room, a massage parlor, a gymnasium, a bowling alley, archery ranges, tennis courts and a bicycle academy. Visitors to the museum can see what remains of the resort as well as galleries filled with an interesting collection of eclectic artworks that give visitors a glimpse of 19th and 20th-century daily life.

**Casa Monica Resort and Spa**, a member of Historic Hotels of America since 2001, is an opulent Gilded Age resort hotel constructed in 1888. In 1887, Henry Morrison Flagler sold the land to Bostonian amateur architect Franklin W. Smith, and on New Year's Day the next year, Smith opened the historic Casa Monica. Four months later, Flagler purchased the hotel from Smith and changed its name to Cordova. At first, the hotel flourished under Flagler's management. When the stock market fell, however, the hotel was forced to officially close in 1932. In February 1962, St. Johns County Commission purchased the Cordova to use it as a county courthouse. Then in the mid-1990s, Richard C. Kessler of the Kessler Enterprise, Inc. purchased the building with the intent to restore it to a luxurious hotel. Today, the hotel retains its historic grandeur with décor that includes Moorish columns and original art. It is the only former Gilded Age hotel that still serves as a hotel today and maintains its heritage with its decorative lobby, fountains, frescos and chandeliers all dating back to the turn of the 20th century. With 138 guest rooms and suites, three eating and drinking establishments, private dining, a wine room and event facilities, this hotel transports visitors to the heyday of the Gilded Age in America.

**Memorial Presbyterian Church** was built in 1889 by Henry Flagler as a memorial to his daughter, Jennie Louise Flagler Benedict, who passed away following childbirth that same year. Memorial Presbyterian was designed by architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings. Many of the exterior architectural details were created with gold and white terracotta. The copper dome was created in Italy, the floors are Italian marble, the pews are carved from mahogany and the baptismal font was carved from a single block of Siena marble. When Flagler died in 1913, he was interred in a marble mausoleum connected to the church alongside his daughter Jennie, his granddaughter and his first wife Mary Harkness Flagler.

**Grace United Methodist Church**, built by Henry Flagler, is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance. Designed by architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings, the building boasts a Spanish Renaissance Revival architectural style, complementing the structures built by Flagler in St. Augustine. Construction was completed in 1887, and the church held its first service on January 1, 1888. It was built of poured concrete, an underused building material and process at the time, and the sanctuary was adorned with Louis Comfort Tiffany-stained glass windows, resembling Ponce de León.

**Villa Zorayda Museum**, constructed in 1883 as the winter residence of Franklin Webster Smith, set the precedent for architectural styles in St. Augustine and represents the birth of the Moorish Spanish Revival style that is seen throughout the

city today. For 20 years, the building served as Smith's residence and was later transformed into the Zorayda Club, a restaurant and club where the most prominent guests enjoyed dining, dancing and socializing. After Smith died in 1911, the building and part of Smith's collection were sold to Abraham Mussallem, an immigrant from Lebanon, who was an authority on oriental rugs and Egyptian artifacts. In 1933 the Mussallem family decided to turn it into the Villa Zorayda Museum, which features the priceless antique collection of both Smith and Mussallem.

**Images** <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/ptrcW4hbpc>

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