

EL MODELO BUILDING  
501-513 West Bay Street  
Jacksonville  
Duval  
Florida

HABS No. FL-345

HABS  
FLA,  
16-JACK,  
8-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C.

HABS  
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16-JACK,  
8-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

EL MODELO BUILDING

HABS No. FL 345

Location: 501-513 West Bay Street, Jacksonville, Duval County, Florida.  
USGS Jacksonville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.436100.3355060

Present Owner: Raymond N. Norton, et al, (Stanley Harris and G. B. and Raymond H. Norton).

Present Occupant: Fox Jewelry and Loan, and Phoenix Surplus Store (upper two stories vacant).

Present Use: Commercial.

Significance: One of the oldest of the few commercial buildings in Jacksonville to survive the May 3, 1901 fire downtown. The structure housed one of the City's most important industries in the nineteenth century, the El Modelo Cigar Factory, and was visited by the Cuban patriot Jose Marti.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The building was probably erected between 1887 and 1889, the El Modelo factory having moved from 6-14 West Bay to 501-513 West Bay by 1889, and the building becoming known as the El Modelo Block in 1889, according to City Directories.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building lies on the parcel described and recorded as Block 97, lot 3 of Hart's Map of La Villa, in the Hart's Jacksonville and LaVilla plat book in the office of The Title and Trust Company of Florida, 2-0 East Forsyth Street, Jacksonville, as follows:

1884 Warrantly Deed for \$6,000, March 8, 1884, recorded February 27, 1884, in Archibald Book H-116; passed from

Abigail Barrs, widow and Carrington C., Amander W. and Henriette M. his wife and John M. and wife Annie G., Joseph C. and Burton K. Barrs.

to

Lydia W. Foster

1887 Warranty Deed, March 14, 1887, recorded October 27, 1893, in  
liber 88 folio 54; passed from

Lydia W. Foster and husband George R.

to

Charles R. Bisbee

1887 Warranty Deed, March 14, 1887, recorded October 27, 1893, to  
liber 88 folio 57; passed from

Charles R. Bisbee

to

George R. Foster

1911 Warranty Deed, October 23, 1911, recorded October 25, 1911, to  
liber 85, folio 13; passed from

Annie Hamilton Foster

to

George R. Foster, Jr., et al

1935 Warranty Deed for one-third interest, November 25, 1925,  
recorded December 2, 1925 in liber 319 to folio 104; passed from

George R. Foster and wife

to

Independent F.G.S. Realty Co.

1925 Warranty Deed for two-thirds interest, November 23, 1925,  
recorded December 2, 1925 in liber 319 folio 104; passed from

Lydia Barrs Browder

to

Independent Realty Co.

1931 Sale of Independent F.G.S. Realty Co.'s holdings, Block 97, lot 3, according to Hart's map of the City of Jacksonville and Vicinity by Special Master (foreclosure of mortgage) for \$100,000, recorded in Chancery Book 101-12, LP 14-348;

to

George R. Foster, Lydia B. Browder, and Helen T. Foster

1934 Quit Claim Deed, August 7, 1934, recorded October 13, 1935, in liber 700 folio 13; from

Metta L. Foster, wife of George R.

to

Lydia B. Browder

to

Foster Property Co.

1940 Warranty Deed for four-fifths interest, August 28, 1940, recorded June 26, 1945, in liber 1098 folio 428; passed from

Foster Property, Co.

to

Lydia Barrs Browder

1962 Warranty Deed for one-fifth interest, May 26, 1962, recorded June 1, 1962, in liber 1588 folio 289; passed from

Arthur Foster

to

Lydia Barrs Browder

1962 Warranty Deed for one-fifth interest, May 26, 1961, recorded June 1, 1962, in liber 1588 folio 289; passed from

Arthur Foster

to

Lydia Barrs Browder

1971      Executor's Deed, July 2, 1971, recorded July 2, 1971, in liber  
          3237 folio 1154; passed from

John B. Browder, executor for Lydia Barrs Browder, deceased

to

Hamilton Properties

1972      Quit Clain Deed, December 8, 1972, recorded December 8, 1972, in  
          liber 3436 folio 492; from

Hamilton Properties

to

S. Harris and E. H. and G. B. Norton

4.      Additions and alterations: A major renovation was made for the  
          Fox Jewelry Company, located in 501-503 West Bay by Charles A.  
          Sutton, Civil Engineer, of Jacksonville, beginning on July 24,  
          1955. This included bricking up four windows and two doors on  
          the rear elevation and a door on the Clay Street (east)  
          elevation, cutting two archways into the interior wall  
          partitioning the two stores, applying asphalt tile to the  
          floors, adding a mezzanine, adding a plate glass display window  
          in the Clay Street elevation, erecting a display counter, and  
          creating new display windows on the front elevation for both  
          stores, with plate glass windows, and rusticated red brick below  
          them (work permits).

B.      Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building

El Modelo Cigar Factory History: B.H. Gato and Jose Arti: According  
to Brown's Book of Jacksonville of 1895, "next to lumber, tobacco is  
the greatest industry in Jacksonville" (Brown, p. 102). The largest  
of the concerns was the El Modelo (Ibid). El Modelo was first  
managed and then owned by Gabriel Hildalgo Gato (1850-1898) a Cuban.  
A second factory owned by the company was situated on the northern  
limits of Springfield, and burned on April 2, 1899 (Godoy  
interview). The Bay Street plant employed 225 workers at salaries  
ranging from \$9 to \$36 per week in 1895 (Godoy interview).

Jose Marti, the Independence Patriot based in New York, made a speech  
at the Bay Street plant on December 23, 1893, on his fifth visit to  
Jacksonville to rally workers to support the Cuban Cause (Godoy  
interview).

Upon Gato's death in 1898, (the year following the murder of his daughter Maria Luisa by her nineteen year old jealous lover and the sensationl trial which acquitted him (Godoy and Davis, p. 203), the Bay Street factory was sold to Vicente Guerra for the El Esmera Cigar Company (Godoy). The Plaza Hotel located on the upper floors of the building continued in operation for several years afterward.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished:

Deeds: Office of the Title and Trust Co. of Florida, 200 East Forsyth Street, Jacksonville.

City Directories: Webb's Directories for Jacksonville, 1887-1889, are contained in the Floridian Collection of the Haydon Burns Public Library, Jacksonville.

Permits: Work, miscellaneous, and building permits for 501-513 West Bay Street, are located in the Division of Building and Zoning Inspection, seventh floor, City Hall, East Bay Street, Jacksonville.

Interviews: Gustavo J. Godoy, professor of Spanish and Researcher of Marti's involvement with the El Modelo plant, Jacksonville University, August 8, 1975; concerning the history of the El Modelo Building.

Miscellaneous: Information on the Plaza Hotel, which occupied the second floor of the building, is reputedly contained in the Dauntless Thesis at the University of Florida, Gainesville; it was not consulted for this report due to lack of time.

2. Secondary sources:

Brown, S. Paul, The Book of Jacksonville. Poughkeepsie, New York: A.V. Haight, 1895.

Davis, T. Frederick. History of Jacksonville, Florida, and Vicinity, 1513-1924. St. Augustine: The Florida Historical Society and The Record Company, 1925

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. One of the oldest of the few commercial buildings in Jacksonville to survive the 1901 fire, this structure which housed a cigar factory exhibits brick corbelling at the cornice, decorative iron corner entrance column, and pressed tin ceiling.

2. Description of fabric: Good, deteriorating.
3. Description of Exterior: Over-all dimensions: w 108'-4" x 75'-4". Rectangular, 5 bays (3 windows each) plus single bay. 2 stories.
4. Foundations: Concrete.
5. Wall construction, finish and color: Painted brick, pilastered corners.
6. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc: Corner stone front entrance with iron column supporting upper floor.
7. Chimneys: None.
8. Openings: Doorways and doors: Central entry to second floor. Other: Glass shop entries.
9. Windows and shutters: Connecting segmental arch headers with projecting upper course, double hung sash, lower level glass shop fronts.
10. Roof, shape, covering: Parapet, flat deck.
11. Cornice, eaves: Parapet, corbelled, dentils.
12. Floor plans: Lower floor shops, central entry to second level. Second level inaccessible (housed cigar factory).
13. Stairways: Central stair to upper floor.
14. Flooring: Asphalt tile in shop.
15. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls, covered with displays in shop. Ceiling, pressed tin with coffer mold and anthemion motif.
16. Doorways and doors: Shop front doors - added.
17. Special decorative features: None noted, except tin ceiling.
18. Notable hardware: None noted.
19. Mechanical equipment: None noted.

B. Site and surroundings:

General Setting: Deteriorated commercial area, mainly pawn shops, prefire commercial buildings. Adjacent to Adams Building. Corner of Bay and Clay. Oriented south, 190 degrees.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Florida Bicentennial Commission and the Jacksonville Historical and Cultural Conservation Commission, under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, at the HABS Field Office, Riverside, Jacksonville, Florida, by Susan Tate (University of Florida), architect; Carolyn Hamm (Cornell University), project historian; and student assistant architects Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Ruthie Wiley (Mississippi State University), and Robert Wiltse (Louisiana State University).

Prepared by: Carolyn Hamm  
Historian  
Historic American  
Buildings Survey  
August, 1975

ADDENDUM TO:  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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