

ARTI FACT

SEASIDE OPULENCE

IN THE NATION'S OLDEST CITY—St. Augustine, Florida—there are a lot of historic structures, but perhaps none characterizes the place more than the former Hotel Ponce de Leon, a newly minted national historic landmark.

OPENED IN 1888, the five-story hotel was a latecomer to America's first continuously occupied European settlement, but it transformed the city's image from a sleepy seaside village into an opulent vacation resort.

Henry Flagler, who with John D. Rockefeller co-founded Standard Oil, dreamt it up to anchor a winter playground for wealthy northerners. **THE**

PONCE WAS THE ESSENCE of luxury. There were electric lights, steam heat—even private bathrooms—plus stained glass windows and mosaics by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Two architects from the prominent firm McKim, Mead and White—John Carrere and Thomas Hastings—designed the Ponce to honor the city's Spanish past. The opening announcement for the hotel and Flagler's other resort, the Alcazar across the street, said "it would take volumes to describe the architectural beauties of these Spanish-Moresque palaces, set amidst the luxuriance of the orange, the palm and the olive." News of the opulence spread, and with New York City only 36 hours away by train, the place was soon booming. **BY THE 1960S,**

HOWEVER, people were vacationing in the summer, by car. The hotel was a relic of bygone days. Flagler College purchased the property in 1968, a year after it closed. "It's remarkably unchanged," says Thomas Graham, a Flagler history professor who prepared the NHL nomination for the Ponce, now a dorm and office building for the school, which has invested over \$23 million in restoration. The photograph shown here, taken by the Historic American Buildings Survey, captures the jewel and its sparkle.

