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Today known as Burgundy Square, this building dates to 1926 and has had several names and uses.



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In the foreground is Venice Avenue, circa 1926, from about where Business 41 is today to Nassau Street (at right). Behind the Venice Avenue buildings is a green area that today houses such buildings as Comcast, Abbey's Restaurant, a city parking lot and the Pattison Building. Above that (to the south) is the beginning of what is today known as Burgundy Square.

Burgundy Square, a trip back in time

By **LARRY R. HUMES**
GUEST WRITER

Although its appearance and function during the past nine decades has gradually evolved, the cluster of buildings along Venice's Miami Avenue, known today as Burgundy Square, contributes to the ambiance of the city's unique heritage while continuing to serve the needs of its citizens.

"The stretch of Venice Avenue that extends through the city's historic business district is perhaps better known to our visitors, but the buildings comprising Burgundy Square have their own intimate charm," said Tommye Whittaker, a board member of Venice

Heritage Inc. "You can almost imagine what it must have been like to walk along the block when the city was first built."

Four Buildings

Four separate buildings were constructed on the block in 1926 as the City of Venice emerged. The buildings were originally named for the individuals responsible for their construction.

Thomas Green of St. Petersburg constructed the triangular-shaped building at the intersection of Miami and Ponce de Leon avenues at an original cost of \$85,000.

Designed by Harrison Gill, the first architect to locate in Venice, the

two-story building was modeled after the iconic "Flat Iron" building in New York City and was described to be of Spanish design due to its clay tile and stucco over-brick construction.

Green Building

The Green Building contained 10 apartments, five stores, four offices and an arcade-like automotive garage at the eastern end of the building. Before the building was even completed, retail space was leased to a hardware store and a sporting goods store. Tom Green's Electrical and Spray Paint shops were also located in this building.

The apartments located

on the second floor later became known as the Gonderman Apartments, Triangle Building, Hollywood Apartments, and, eventually, Burgundy Square.

The July 10, 1926, edition of This Week in Venice, stated that Mr. Green was "very pleased at the prospect of business in Venice. He has purchased a 5-acre farm, just outside the city limits, which he expects to live on and cultivate himself. This farm is the first of the Venice farms that have been sold."

The article went on to say that while Mr. Green was not giving up his business interests in St. Petersburg, he expected to devote most of his time to

his enterprises in Venice.

Wimmers Building

The second historic building to the west was the Wimmers Building, named for its first owner and tenant, H.N. "Bud" Wimmers, who originally served as paymaster for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) work crews that were building Venice.

Wimmers, considered to be one of the town's founding fathers, later served as a Venice city councilman. After the BLE pulled out of the project with the onset of the Great Depression, Wimmers was appointed receiver for the BLE Realty Corporation and closed the company's

local business affairs.

He later became a prominent real estate broker in Venice, while also serving as representative for the area's power, telephone, telegraph and water services. Wimmers also was instrumental in bringing the Kentucky Military Institute to Venice in 1931, as well as the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1960.

The Wimmers Building has changed owners numerous times and presently houses several retail businesses.

Located next to the Wimmers Building is the Teal Building, which was constructed by L.M. Teal

BURGUNDY

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in 1926. Its first tenants were the Teal Barber Shop and the Venice Billiard Hall. It was used as an elementary school in the 1930s and was occupied by the Stancil and Potts Garage in 1946.

The Teal Building was purchased by the Roberts-Shannon Funeral Home of Sarasota in 1950 and later

served as the site of the Rawles Funeral Home. It was remodeled for retail use in the late '80s and has been occupied by numerous businesses ever since.

The last building on the block constructed in 1926 was the Lawton Building, named for Mrs. Louis L. Lawton of St. Petersburg. This one-story retail building was designed by Harrison Gill and constructed at a cost of \$15,000 by Carey & Walter

Inc. of Plant City.

The building enjoys its original architectural style, with front doors set back from the storefront windows so that display areas appear as bay windows. The covered doorways also protected shoppers from the elements. Seven shops occupied the 100-foot-long building.

Although constructed in 1926 as four separate buildings, they were cobbled together by previous

owners about a decade ago at a cost of slightly more than \$4 million. The space between the Teal and Lawton Buildings was converted into a covered breezeway that offers outdoor dining as well as access to other shops and parking along Ponce de Leon Avenue.

The Burgundy Square complex was purchased

in February 2015 by Harold Caballeros. Although proposed plans for renovating the property are not yet complete, Caballeros has indicated he would like to see the buildings restored to their original 1926 grandeur.

"We don't know exactly what we are going to build yet because there are permits we will

need to obtain and the economics of the marketplace that will drive our decisions," he said. "But we have a vision of what the façade will look like and that will be the Mediterranean Revival style. We are excited by the possibilities."

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY VENICE MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

Today known as Burgundy Square, the building also was known as the Hollywood Apartments. It dates to 1926.



The Wimmers Building was not always attached to its neighboring buildings on Miami Avenue. It was built as a real estate office for Bud Wimmers, who was president of the city's chamber of commerce for so long that he is credited with bringing both the KMI and The Greatest Show on Earth to Venice.