

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED **AUG 13 1980**  
DATE ENTERED **OCT 16 1980**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

El Modelo Block

AND/OR COMMON

Plaza Hotel

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

513 W. Bay Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Jacksonville

VICINITY OF

# 3

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Florida

12

Duval

031

**CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

**OWNERSHIP**

**STATUS**

**PRESENT USE**

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Norton, Raymond H.

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 23221

CITY, TOWN

Jacksonville

VICINITY OF

STATE

Florida

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Duval County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Jacksonville

STATE

Florida

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1975

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

CITY, TOWN

Washington DC

STATE

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The El Modelo building is a three-story, rectangular, brick, commercial style building. The building's appearance has changed little since its construction sometime between 1887-1889.

The ground floor of the south (Bay Street) facade has five bays. There is a plate glass display area for merchandise in each of the four western most bays. These areas flank entrance doors to each store. The southeastern corner bay also has a plate glass display area on its south facade, but the entrance is in the southeast corner. There is a fluted column at the corner. The entrance to the stairway to the second and third floors is between the second and third bays from the west side of the building.

The second and third stories also have five bays on the south facade and nine bays on the east. The south facade bays are formed by five groups of three closely-spaced windows. A large space separates each sequence of windows. In each of the upper stories, above the main entrance is a single window. The second floor windows have brick label hoods. This pattern is also present on the third floor windows, although each hood is connected to the adjacent hood with a brick string course.

The third floor windows rest on a brick belt course in both the east and south facades. The building has a parapet with a corbelled cornice. A metal fire-escape extends down the east facade of the building.

Very little is known about the original exterior appearance. However, except for the ground floor storefronts the building appears to be unaltered. The interior has been remodeled and altered extensively to adapt to its various functions through the years. Presently the building is vacant and much of the upper floor glass has been destroyed.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

+1888

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The El Modelo Block is significant as one of the oldest commercial structures in Jacksonville, Florida. The building also housed the El Modelo Cigar Manufacturing Company, one of the largest and most important establishments in Jacksonville and in Florida.

The three story brick commercial building was constructed between 1887 and 1889. It was first recorded in early records as "Foster's Block", taking this name from its owner and builder, George R. Foster.<sup>1</sup> At that time the building housed a drugstore and cabinet and upholstery shop.<sup>2</sup>

The El Modelo Cigar Manufacturing Company moved its factory to Foster's building in 1889. By this time the company had established itself worldwide, and had reputation for fine, hand-made cigars. The factory produced a variety of cigars, with such brand names as El Modelo, La Tropic, Hamlet, La Capitalo, El Deicite, and Florida Alligator.<sup>3</sup>

In 1895, there were fifteen established cigar factories in Jacksonville which produced more than 6,000,000 cigars annually.<sup>4</sup> The El Modelo Cigar Manufacturing Company was the largest of these factories. Under the general management, and later ownership, of Gabriel Hidalgo Gato,<sup>5</sup> the El Modelo company employed, in 1885, 225 men and had an annual pay roll of approximately \$147,000. Gato paid his workers from \$9.00 to \$35.00 per week.<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Gato died in 1898 and his heirs sold the company for more than \$42,000 to the El Esmero Cigar Manufacturing Company, owned by Vicente Guerra.<sup>7</sup>

The founder of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, José Martí, came to Jacksonville on December 23, 1893, and spoke at the El Modelo Company. At that time Jacksonville was considered one of the major centers of Cuban revolutionary activity in Florida.<sup>8</sup> Martí's visit to the El Modelo was one of eight trips he made to Jacksonville to stir up enthusiasm and raise money to support his endeavor to gain Cuban independence from Spain. Gato was the brother-in-law of José Alejandro Huau, who helped arrange Martí's visits to Jacksonville and was an agent of the Cuban Revolutionary Party organization and Cuban Political Club in Jacksonville.<sup>9</sup> Martí later wrote of his visit to the El Modelo factory, "... the Cubans from 'El Modelo', Gato's

(See Continuation Sheet)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

**UTM NOT VERIFIED  
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one.

QUADRANGLE NAME USGS Jacksonville, 1964

QUADRANGLE SCALE 7.5

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	7	4	3	6	1	0	0	3	3	5	5	0	6	0
ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

B 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

C 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

D 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

E 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

F 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

G 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

H 

ZONE	EASTING			NORTHING										

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lavilla Harts Map, Lot 3, Block 97.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Rolla L. Queen, Historic Sites Specialist

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Florida Division of Archives History and Records Management July 11, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

The Capitol

(904) 487-2333

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Tallahassee

Florida

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*[Signature]*  
DATE 9/5/80

TITLE

L. Ross Morrell, State Historic Preservation Officer

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*[Signature]*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 10/16/80

ATTEST: *[Signature]*  
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 10/16/80

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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Duval County Survey  
Florida Division of Archives History and Records Management  
1975

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cigar factory, rewarded with applause of an unaccustomed warmth, the delegate who spoke to them about those things that irritate selfish men but please generous souls."<sup>10</sup>

After the Gato Family sold the factory in 1898 the building continued in use as a smaller cigar factory and knitting mill with various stores located on the ground floor. On May 3, 1901, a major fire destroyed most of downtown Jacksonville. The El Modelo Block was one of the few commercial structures to survive. However, less than one month later, the building was damaged by another fire that consumed the knitting mill situated on the third floor and seriously damaged the Fernandez Cigar Factory located on the second floor.<sup>11</sup>

The building apparently suffered only interior damage from the fire. City directories show it soon functioning with several businesses which operated on the ground floors with hotel space on the upper floors. It functioned as a hotel from 1915-1965. Operating under a variety of names, such as the New York Hotel (1915-1921), the Hillsboro (1922-1925 and 1932-1935), and Hillsborough (1928), the Commercial Hotel (1926-1927) and Southern Hotel (1930-1932), it was predominantly known as the Plaza Hotel which was open from 1950-1965.<sup>12</sup> The upper floors were vacated after 1965, although the ground floor space is still used for businesses.

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<sup>1</sup>Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Jacksonville, Florida. May, 1887.  
p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup>Wanton S. Webb, ed., Webb's Historical, Industrial and Biographical Florida Part 1. (New York: W.S. Webb and Co., 1885), p. 142.

<sup>4</sup>S. Paul Brown, The Book of Jacksonville, A History. (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: A.V. Haight, Printer and Bookbinder, 1895), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup>Gabriel Hidalgo Gato was born in 1850 in the town of Bejucal, province of Havana, Cuba. He moved to Jacksonville, Florida in 1874 with his family and engaged in the cigar manufacturing business. He married Erigueta Huau, sister of Jose' Alejandro Huau in 1874. Gabriel Gato does not appear to be a part of the Gato family involved in cigar manufacturing in Key West, Florida and should not be confused as such with Eduardo Hidalgo Gato.

<sup>6</sup>Brown, p. 103.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Gustavo J. Godoy, Professor of Spanish, Jacksonville University by Carolyn J. Hamm, Historian, Historic American Buildings Survey, August 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Gustavo J. Godoy, "José Alejandro Huau: A Cuban Patriot in Jacksonville Politics." In Florida Historical Quarterly 54 (2) (October, 1975), p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 200-201.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> The Florida Times Union and Citizen (Jacksonville), June 17, 1901. p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> City Directories for the City of Jacksonville, Florida. 1915-1965.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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