

W.B. Herring and the Central Pharmacy



White's Central Pharmacy, Collins Street at Reynolds Street. Circa 1936

The Camellia Rose Tea Room and Gift Shop is the latest occupant in the storefront located at the historically popular southeast corner of Reynolds and Collins Streets. That site is best known and remembered as White's Central Pharmacy.

Paul Gary White (1887 – 1950) came to Plant City in 1902, at the age of fifteen. After graduating from Plant City High School, he attended the Max Morrison School of Pharmacy in Macon, Georgia, completing his degree in 1908, and returned to Plant City to work with his brother-in-law, Wesley Benjamin ("W.B.") Herring. Paul White became owner/proprietor of the Central Pharmacy in 1912 and operated the drug store until his death in 1950; Paul's wife, Bertha Hull White (1889 – 1964), then managed the drug store until her death in 1964. Paul and Bertha Hull White's sons, Jack Hull White and James Richard "Dick" White, both graduates of the University of Florida School of Pharmacy, purchased the Central Pharmacy from the estate in 1964; they expanded the business in 1971, adding "The Other Brother Card and Gift Shop."

Paul White was creative and personable. He spent many hours at the store, which became known as the

place "Where Paul White Stays." The store opened at 7 a.m. and closed at 11 p.m. He made his own ice-cream for the busy soda fountain, made his own "simple syrup" and added the flavors. The Central Pharmacy was known for the small pretzel hung on the straw in glasses of Coca-Cola, or, the favorite – Cherry Smash! A popular spot after school, cars parked on both Collins Street and Reynolds Street for "curb service."

Wesley Benjamin, "W.B.", Herring, (1871 – 1926), began his career as a teenager, working for C.S. Lowry, who ran a drug store, (Lowry's Drug Store), at the southeast corner of Collins and South Drane Streets. In 1891, W.B. was admitted to the School of Pharmacy at Northwestern University in Illinois, attending night classes and working during the day to pay expenses, and graduated and obtained his license in 1893. Following this, he operated a drug store in Wildwood, Florida, and one in Plant City.

W.B. Herring married Lelia Stewart White in 1896, shortly after purchasing the drug store from Lowry, who returned to medical school to become a doctor. Herring became one of the leading druggists and a leading citizen until illness curtailed

his activities shortly before his death in 1926.

In 1904, W.B. recruited John Walter Alsobrook, a recent graduate of Vanderbilt University's School of Medicine, and set up Dr. Alsobrook's practice in a lean-to building added to the current drug store. Herring's Drug Store was destroyed by the raging fire of October 1907, taking with it the Plant City Opera House that had been housed on Herring's second floor. Herring rebuilt on the site, constructing a two-story brick building. A fire in 1910 destroyed part of the building, including the second floor which housed The Courier and the newspaper lost most of its files and equipment. Herring rebuilt again, and the second floor became the office and private hospital for Dr. T.C. Maguire, (1881 – 1954), who arrived in Plant City about 1908 and practiced until about 1950.

In 1908, W.B. purchased a second drug store from S.C. Wells, located in the three-story Wells Building on Collins Street. He renamed it Central Pharmacy and moved it to a building he constructed for it at the southeast corner of Collins Street and Reynolds Street. Dr. Alsobrook moved into the quarters on the second floor, set up his office and "hospital", and practiced here for nearly forty years. Herring also helped organize the Bank of Plant City in 1908, and was involved in the construction of the two-story brick building adjacent and to the south of the Wells Building. This was the first home of the Bank of Plant City.

W.B. was also involved in real estate; he grew and marketed cotton, and later established the W.B. Herring subdivision on North Wheeler Street. The city later purchased Courier

Field from the Herring estate. He also served Plant City's council and was mayor 1912-1913. In 1912 he organized the First National Bank of Plant City and located it in a building he constructed at the northeast corner of Collins and Haines Streets. Having many interests and investments, W.B. sold an interest in Herring's Drug Store to one of his druggists, Will Griffin, and Dr. T.C. Maguire. He also sold the Central Pharmacy to his brother-in-law, Paul G. White.

About 1919 he folded the First National Bank into the Bank of Plant City and moved the Bank of Plant City to the site of the Central Pharmacy, relocating the drug store one door to the south. Then, in 1920 he helped organize Farmers and Merchants Bank and located it in a new brick building constructed on the northeast corner of North Drane and Collins Streets, later the site of Hooker's Department Store.

When W.B. died in 1926, he was operating the Herring Finance Company and owned a number of commercial buildings along Collins Street and throughout the downtown area. After the Bank of Plant City closed, about 1929, the Central Pharmacy moved back to its corner location at Collins and Reynolds and remained there until it closed in 1991.

Sources: Plant City Photo Archives, Inc., Plant City Photo Archives' Oral History Project 2007, Quintilla Geer Bruton and David E. Bailey, Jr., Plant City; Its Origin and History. 1984, and Mr. Louis McGrath.