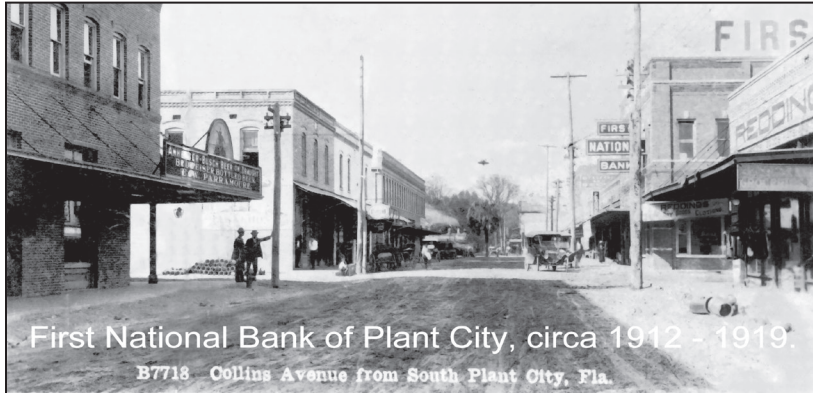


W.B. Herring and Banking in Plant City



About 1890, Wesley Benjamin, “W.B.”, Herring, (1871–1926), began his career working for C.S. Lowry, who ran a drug store, (Lowry’s Drug Store), at the southeast corner of Collins and South Drane Street. 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, bankers, and businessmen, and a leading citizen of Plant City until illness curtailed his activities shortly before his death in 1926. Herring had been elected to the City Council, elected Mayor several times, and served as the President of the Board of Trade shortly after its inception.

The Plant City Courier eulogized him with an editorial. Part of it read this way: “In the death of W.B. Herring Plant City has lost one of her greatest and finest citizens. She has lost a builder. For something like thirty years the best energies and thought of this man, now gone, went into developing and furthering the destinies of our town.”

A 1900 Tampa Tribune article on Plant City referred to two successful druggists in town – Dr. Olin Wright, who owned the Magnolia Pharmacy, and W.B. Herring. A successful businessman, Herring joined a few friends and together organized the Bank of Plant City, which was chartered in 1906 and opened in the early part of 1907. Albert Schneider became president, and W.B. Herring, vice-president. Others included C.A. Root, S.E. Mays, William Schneider, (William and Albert were brothers), Henry B. Wordehoff, W.A. Clark, T.M. Strickland, and John Trice. They located the bank in a brick building erected next to the south side of the three-story Wells Building on North Collins Street.

Herring’s Drug Store was destroyed by the raging fire of October 1907, taking with it the Plant City Opera House, a second story 250-seat auditorium that had been the site for graduation exercises and many of the important civic functions of that time. Herring rebuilt on the site, constructing a two-story brick building.

In 1908, W.B. Herring purchased a drug store from S.C. Wells located in the three-story Wells Building. He renamed it Central Pharmacy and moved it to a building he constructed for it (1908-09) at the southeast corner of Collins Street and Reynolds Street.

A fire in 1910 destroyed part of the Herring’s Drug Store building, including the second floor, which at that time housed The Courier, and the newspaper lost most of its files and equipment. Herring rebuilt again.

In 1912 W.B. 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, and he served as president. Vivian B. Collins, step-son of Dr. Olin Wright, was the cashier, a position reflecting general management responsibilities. This building lasted until it was torn down about 1970.

(Insert here a note about Vivian Collins. He was the son of Palastine Hamilton Collins Wright and Perry Collins, her second husband. [She had previously been married to Thomas Calmes, with whom she had one son, Thomas Calmes, and she married Wright about 1888.] Vivian Collins became Adjutant General of Florida, and served in WWI as a two-star general – General Vivian Collins, 31st Infantry Division, under whose command a number of Plant City enlistees, including Mike Sansone, served. During WWII, Collins served at Camp Blanding as a three-star general.)

About 1919, Herring 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 Street, later the site of Hooker’s

Department Store. Businessman W.A. Haymond was president. Other organizers of the bank included George Wilder and W.B. Herring. The cashier was V.B. Collins.

About this time, W.B. opened and operated the Herring Finance Company, which he managed until his death in 1926. The Farmers and Merchants Bank closed about 1927. Some of its remaining organizers gave it one more try, organizing the Citizens Bank in the same location about 1930, but it lasted only a short time – the Great Depression years were not easy on the banking industry.

In addition to his subdivision on North Wheeler Street, the W.B. Herring Subdivision, Herring constructed many buildings in downtown Plant City, including a number of them along South Collins from South Drane Street, (J. Arden Mays Boulevard today), to Haines Street, (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard today). Although his drug stores continued for some time, the only bank to survive the Depression years was the Hillsboro State Bank, today known as SunTrust Bank.

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



Farmers And Merchants Bank