

Dr. Olin Seymour Wright

AN EARLY PLANT CITY LEADER

A special edition of The Tampa Tribune in 1900 carried references to Plant City having “progressive people”, “good churches”, and an “excellent school system”. It was a recognized commercial center, the newspaper stated. There were also brief sketches of prominent men, one of whom was Dr. Olin Seymour Wright, the owner and proprietor of the Magnolia Pharmacy. He was described as one of the leading and most prominent men in the county, who had long ago attained the pinnacle of success in his profession. Wright, who had served as mayor from 1893 to 1896, and who was re-elected in 1899 for another three-year term, was given credit for the “flourishing condition of this thrifty little village”.

Dr. Wright was indeed a leader. He came to Plant City in 1887, in the midst of the great Yellow Fever Epidemic. He was one of the few doctors who had experience with the dreaded disease, having dealt with it in Jacksonville prior to moving to Plant City. He came to treat the sick and stayed afterward to involve himself in business, government, fraternal and religious activities, and continued to pursue his medical profession.

When elected mayor, Dr. Wright set about immediately to revise the town code, enact or re-enact ordinances, work on the new charter and the new municipal corporation, promote the bond issue, and the building of a new brick school house between Wheeler and Thomas Streets. Collins Street was completed to the southern town limits, which is known today as Alsobrook Street.

In 1894 the town was in good order, with experienced men at the helm – Dr. Wright continued as mayor and

Attorney Wells as clerk. The Courier observed that “the spirit of improvement is looming up on all sides” in Plant City, then less than a decade old.

Olin Seymour Wright was born in 1852 in Tioga County, Pennsylvania, near the New York state line. He attended school in Hornell, New York, and after graduating from the University of Michigan’s medical school, he started his practice in Hornell. He moved to Manatee County and then to Jacksonville, where he practiced medicine for a period. He set out for Plant City in 1887. In 1888 he married Palestine Hamilton Collins, daughter of Polk County pioneer George Hamilton, and with her two sons from previous marriages, they settled into a home on Evers Street, not far from the Masonic Lodge at Evers and Mahoney Street.

Palestine Hamilton (1858-1926) came from a prominent Polk County family and she married George Calmes in Polk County in 1879. They had one son, Thomas Calmes. Palestine later married Perry Collins, the oldest of the five children born to Enoch Collins and his second wife, Elizabeth Guthrie. Palestine and Perry Collins had one son, Vivian B. Collins, who was active in banking in Plant City, and in the United States Army, becoming Adjutant General of Florida. Olin Wright and Palestine Hamilton Wright had three children, Juno, Pallas Athene, and Victor Olin.

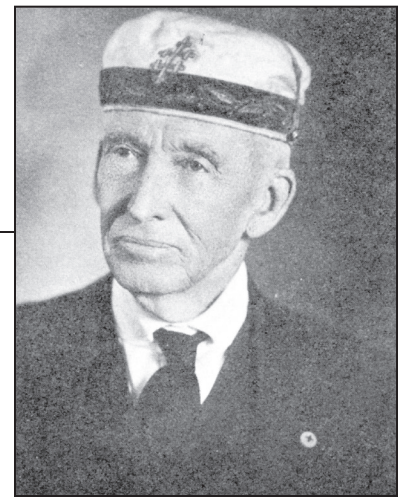
The Wrights were involved in many of the early civic activities. Dr. Wright was a musician and played and composed music for both the piano and the violin. She supported the arts and reportedly grew outstanding orchids, which she used to decorate the counter at the pharmacy. He was the first Plant City doctor affiliated

with the new Hillsborough County Medical Association, and he owned both the Magnolia Pharmacy and the White Brick Drug Store, possibly in the building that he owned at 111-113 South Collins Street, (originally built by H.B. Wordehoff in 1901). Olin Wright bought one of the first four automobiles delivered to Tampa, and he drove his Oldsmobile to the only filling station in town, in front of the Magnolia Pharmacy. He was a charter member of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, helping lead and finance the construction of the church in 1908.

Dr. Wright was a school trustee in Plant City and served on the Hillsborough County School Board. He promoted compulsory education, good roads, and economic development. The Wrights bought property in Manatee County, Pinellas County, and Hillsborough County. He was an organizer and director of the Hillsboro State Bank, and with his step-son, V.B. Collins and W.B. Herring, he was involved in the First National Bank of Plant City and the Bank of Plant City. He was also a principal in the Plant City Granite Brick Company in 1906, along with Col. James Lauren Young, who served as Vice President and General Manager. Most of the brick buildings erected in Plant City following the 1907 fire were built with bricks from this plant, as was the power house at the Coronet Phosphate facility. Ironically, the brick plant was destroyed by fire in 1911.

Dr. Wright and Palestine divorced and, at 68, he married Dorothy Athene Holloway in Lakeland in June 1921; their son, Olin Seymour Wright, Jr., was born July 25, 1922.

Dr. Wright was also very involved in the Masons. In 1899 he was appointed Deputy of the Supreme



Council of Florida. In 1915 he became the Sovereign Grand Inspector General of Florida. In 1921, Wright was installed into the office of Grand Herald, and in 1923 he was installed as the First Grand Equerry. When he died, December 17, 1923, he was given the highest services by the Grand Master, F. & A.M. of Florida. In his memory, in 1925, the Plant City Lodge No. 79 changed its name to Olin S. Wright Lodge No. 79.

Palestine owned several properties in and around Plant City. One of them was the block on North Collins where the circuses and various shows were held. The City officials tried to get her to refuse to rent to these types of shows, but she refused them. It was, after all, her property. Later they agreed to a deal and the land was purchased for the new high school building constructed in 1914. She also sold the land at the corner of Reynolds Street and Evers Street to Col. James Young, Dr. Calvin T. Young, and Moreau E. Moody, where they constructed the Young and Moody Building. Palestine died in 1926; the Wright Arcade Building was constructed in her honor.

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; Remembering Plant City; Tales from the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World, The History Press, 2007; Scottish Rite Freemasonry in Florida; Polk County Marriage Records; and Gladys Jeffcoat.