Request for REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS for the Plantation House Hotel

Edgefield, South Carolina
The History
of the
Dixie Highway / Plantation House Hotel

The early 1890s found Edgefield as one of the most progressive towns in South Carolina. The public square was fresh and modern with new brick buildings that were constructed after the fires of 1881 and 1884. Business boomed in the town with merchants of all kinds selling their wares to eager shoppers. Sales-day, the first Monday of every month, found Edgefield particularly busy—crowded with horses and wagons filled with merchandise of every description. The crown jewel of the square was the courthouse that towered over the county seat as a stoic and dignified guardian.

Then, on January 22, 1892, another fire broke out in the village. This one burned the entire south side and half of the west side of the public square, sections of town that had not been destroyed in the previous fires.
The old Ryan Hotel, built in 1812, was completely gone. The only remainders of it were six scorched chimneys that loomed up out of the ashes and rubble. The Anderson House Hotel was also a victim of the flames. Work began immediately to scrape away the ruins and rebuild better, grander buildings.

However, Edgefield was left for a number of years without a hotel on the public square.

Almost thirty years later, a notice appeared in The Edgefield Advertiser dated 6 August 1919. It stated that the “books of subscription to the capital stock of the Dixie Highway Hotel Company, will be opened at the office of Sheppard Brothers, and at the office of the Clerk of Court at Edgefield, S. C., on Friday the 8th of August, 1919.” It was signed by J. C. Sheppard, Chairman of the Board of Corporators.
Then, on 27 August 1919, another article appeared in the paper concerning the Dixie Highway Hotel. It was titled “Hotel of Thirty Rooms” and appears below:

The directors of the Dixie Highway hotel held a meeting Saturday morning to confer with Mr. G. E. Lafaye, the architect, who came over from Columbia. Mr. Lafaye brought with him a sketch of a three-story building, with three store rooms and lobby on the first floor, which met with the approval of the members of the board. The lobby will be in the corner and the stores between the lobby and Stewart and Kernaghan’s store. Mr. Lafaye has roughly estimated that the building when completed will cost around $70,000. Several applications have already been made for the stores. Mr. Lafaye will draw plans and specifications and receive bids for the construction, which will require about three or four weeks.

On 1 October 1919, a brief notice was published in The Edgefield Advertiser that proudly stated that “the stockholders of the Dixie Highway Hotel have paid in 20% of the stock and a charter will be applied for in a short time. People are eager to see actual work begin. Edgefield’s need for a large, modern hotel grows greater with each passing day.”

This was followed by another short article (dated 15 October 1919), titled “Plans For Hotel Approved,” which revealed that “the architect submitted plans of the Dixie Highway Hotel to the directors at a meeting held Saturday and they were accepted after a few minor changes were made.
The architect was instructed to advertise for bids for the building of the hotel, all bids to be in the hands of the president of the hotel company, J. C. Sheppard, on or before November 10. It is probable that the contract will be let at that time.”

With great excitement and enthusiasm, The Edgefield Advertiser, on 15 December 1920, proclaimed the “Dixie Highway Hotel Open For Business.” The newspaper went on to state that:

Edgefield at last has a hotel that is the joy and pride of her community, and what is better still the hostelry has a manager, the one who will really make the hotel, who is second to none in the state. The Dixie Highway hotel was opened for business Sunday, an elaborate turkey dinner Sunday being the first meal served. A hungry throng gathered to express to Mr. and Mrs. Vause their interest and spirit of co-operation by registering for dinner and supper, 110 being served at dinner and about 40 for supper. Without a single exception everybody was delighted. The menu was elaborate and everything was beautifully served. It was also prepared and seasoned to the king’s taste. Notwithstanding the fact that Sunday was the opening day, with the serving force yet untrained, Mr. Vause handled the crowd splendidly. Everybody went away fully satisfied and with words of highest commendation of the new management. The Dixie Highway hotel is conceded by persons who know to be the most modern and best appointed hotel in the State outside of the cities and with his executive ability and past experience there is no doubt about Mr. Vause making a great success of the enterprise.

With great zeal and eagerness, organizations, businesses, and individuals flocked to the Dixie Highway Hotel to enjoy its amenities and support this new, grand, innovative structure in the Town of Edgefield.

The construction of the Dixie Highway Hotel was believed by many citizens to be a herald for a new, gilded age in Edgefield, converting it from a small, sleepy village into a larger, modern town. It was seen as a necessity to assist in the transformation of the town and was a source of pride and excitement, especially since it was built through the efforts and monies of the townspeople. It took almost thirty years for the vacant space to be filled that had been left by the Great Fire of 1892, but the Dixie Highway Hotel rose from the ashes like a phoenix and became a colossal landmark on the public square of the Town of Edgefield.

In 1921, management of the Dixie Highway Hotel changed hands. The Edgefield Advertiser reported on 12 October 1921 that “Mr. Foy A. Vause who has managed the Dixie Highway Hotel from the time it opened will
leave in a few days for Florida, where he and Mrs. Vause will probably make their home. Capt. and Mrs. L. Y. Moore will assume the management of the hotel, the change being made sometime this week.” Almost exactly a year later, management changed hands again at the hotel.

It is curious to note that just a week earlier, 27 September 1922, TheAdvertiser reported the shocking news that “more valuable real estate will be sold on the block at Edgefield next Monday than for a long time. Among the property sold will be the handsome new Dixie Highway Hotel on the corner. It will go to the highest bidder. Valuable farms will also be sold.” Then, on 4 October 1922, the newspaper gave an account of the land sales that had occurred on the previous Monday. It stated that “a larger number of tracts of land than usual were sold at public outcry Monday but on account of the ravages wrought by the boll weevil there was but little demand for farm lands... The Dixie Highway Hotel was bid in by the Farmers Bank which held the mortgage on this valuable piece of Edgefield property.”

The devastation caused by the boll weevil had caught up with the Dixie Highway Hotel. Mr. William A. Strom, a very prosperous farmer and the primary financier of the hotel, virtually went bankrupt due to the boll weevil destroying his cotton crops. The hotel suffered the consequences and was sold on the courthouse steps in January 1923.

The Farmers’ Bank purchased the property at this sale and the hotel continued in operation. In 1937, Senator J. Strom Thurmond bought the hotel and owned it for a decade.
In 1960, Mr. William Walton Mims acquired the building and owned it until his death in 2007. He renamed it the Plantation House and operated it as a veteran’s home during the 1960’s and 70’s.

The Dixie Highway Hotel stands today. Though the dining room that was filled with laughter and gaiety from lavish parties and other social gatherings is now silent and the rooms that were proudly touted to have hot and cold running water have long been vacant, the building still stands after ninety-six years as a testimonial to the willingness and perseverance of the townspeople of Edgefield. This spirit of hospitality is still alive and well in the Town of Edgefield and part of the Town’s revitalization is to breath new life into this structure, now under the new ownership of Preservation SC.

For more information, please contact:

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