



## The Kenilworth Lodge

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[Coverage of event by The News-Sun](#)

### Heartland Pride

Highlands Today, January 21, 2001

Photos by: Norm Cukras/for Highlands Today



Friday the Kenilworth Lodge dedicated the plaque honoring the hotel's inclusion on the **National Registry of Historic Places**.

Sebring Mayor George Hensley gave opening remarks before turning the podium over to "George Sebring." His Honor commented on Sebring's vision in building the grand hotel remarking that it was the founder's belief, "If you build it, they will come."

Mark & Madge Stewart, Kenilworth Lodge owners, admired the plaque honoring their hotel's inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Places. At the unveiling Friday Madge Stewart told the group of



nearly 200 well wishers, "Thank you for sharing this occasion with us. It's a milestone that took us four years to obtain."

George Sebring, aka local resident Bill Farmer, unveils the historic place designation plaque. Prior to removing the protective cloth, "Sebring" gave the guests a brief history of the Kenilworth, beginning with its construction in 1916.

### Kenilworth Lodge Unveiling Ceremony, January 19, 2001

The unveiling ceremony was held on the front verandah of the Kenilworth Lodge at 5:p.m. on Friday, January 19, 2001.

The ceremony started with Madge Stewart, co-owner with her husband Mark, welcoming the crowd of just over 200 attendees. Stewart said that it had "taken four years of research and application" to receive the designation to the National Register of Historic Places. A property must be at least fifty years old to qualify, but must also have some significance in one of three categories, architecture, commerce or history. The Kenilworth Lodge qualified in two categories, architecture and commerce. The lodge architecture is Mediterranean Revival, very modern at the time. In the category of commerce it was noted that the Kenilworth has been a resort property for over three quarters of a century, much as George Sebring envisioned it. Stewart mentioned some of the various features of the lodge, including the fact that the Plantation Room, site of the reception to follow, had the original wooden floors that many famous guests had danced upon in years past. Mrs. Stewart then introduced Sebring's Mayor George Hensley.

Mayor Hensley mentioned that he too had danced in the Plantation Room at events held in the past. Hensley also spoke of the significance that the Kenilworth Lodge had played in local community events over the years. He then introduced "George Sebring."

George Sebring noted that at 121 years of age (born in 1859) his memory started to fade and after adding to that an additional 20 more years, he would use notes.

#### Transcript of "George Sebring's" Speech at Kenilworth Lodge Unveiling Ceremony

George Sebring was portrayed by Sebring resident Bill Farmer

I am so pleased to be here at the Kenilworth Lodge on such an historic occasion as this. That I could be here at all was heretofore a matter of mere fanciful speculation. But that matter is something I will simply leave to your own disposition. I am here and I will enjoy every moment of it.

As I stand here, looking out toward the beautiful Lake Jackson, I am taken back to my first visit to this lovely site with Mr. Earl Haskins, a Winter Haven realtor, some ninety years ago. Chauffeured to this site by Mr. Edward Nilson in his chain driven Buick over sand trails, I immediately fell in love with the area. Although through our conversation along the way I realized he was demonstrating his Buick as much as showing me the acreage.

That notwithstanding, the two gentlemen proceeded to show me the most unbelievably picturesque setting I could have imagined. Looking back I don't think I reserved a moment of thought for consideration of another place to begin Sebring, Florida.

Although it has long since been but a memory, I still see the A.G. Smith shack standing straight ahead on the lakeshore. There was no more than an unaccommodating sandy trail winding past, allowing hunters, fishermen, and the occasional cowboy shelter for the time they'd spend here.

But I could see more here. A view such as this lake offered deserved accommodations from which to enjoy its splendor. And the vision of this magnificent grand hotel took hold of my imagination and preoccupied my thoughts through its completion.

When my family founded the enterprising city of Sebring, Ohio, we intended for it to become a great center for manufacturing in the midwest. But my intentions for the Florida version of Sebring were to offer citizens a perfect opposite to the bustle of industrial endeavors. Only quiet, calm, and tranquil pursuits would occupy the residents of this lakeside retreat. The noiseless commerce of growing oranges would be the only manufacturing found here. Nothing was to disturb the health and happiness of the contented citizens of Sebring, Florida. Especially not the mischievous liquid of spiritous drink. And in keeping with my wishes, Mrs. Stewart is serving nothing but non-alcoholic champagne in the grand ballroom today.

This historic occasion comes almost 85 years after the completion of the Kenilworth Lodge. Contractor B.A. Cope and I planned the most modern facility available at the time, with every comfort of the guest in mind. We knew we had to build a facility of maximum size in order to hold the many people who would be attracted to the sunny climate and healthy environment of Sebring. The hotel was constructed with pre-hung doors, electricity throughout, and modern fixtures. Each room was designed with a private bath for the convenience and modesty of our visitors. And the verandah was situated to provide a spectacular view of the sunset over Lake Jackson in the evening.

During the early years, lovely formal gardens supplied the guests and dining room with fresh-cut roses. And the Kenilworth Golf Club offered exercise for the sports minded just out the back door. Ladies groups met here often for bridge parties and luncheons. Newly organized churches met here while building their own facilities on land which I modestly admit to donating in the hopes of perpetuating the contentment and virtue of the populace.

In 1931, one of the best known radio preachers of his day, Rev. Dr. Harry Fosdick, attracted so many people to a service here that those in attendance had to stand outside the open windows of the lobby to hear the message. Newspapers report that 2,000 people crowded the Kenilworth to receive the sermon and get a glimpse of the clerical celebrity.

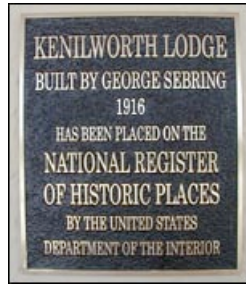
Through the years, many famous and influential people found rest and rejuvenation at the Kenilworth. C.W. Nash, of the Nash automobile manufacturing company, Adolph Ochs, owner and publisher of the New York Times, and Samuel Undermeyer, the most prominent lawyer in New York were guests in 1925. Colonel Lewis, inventor of the Lewis machine gun, and H.G. Hawk, the retired inventor of that healthful staple, Post Toasties, both spent the winter here in 1928. And I'm told many popular movie stars and musicians have availed themselves of the Kenilworth's hospitality, albeit incognito.

But no gathering of notable citizens was as impressive as the 1924 National Governor's Convention. All 42 governors and their entourage dined and slept with the genial walls of this establishment as part of a state-wide tour of Florida.

Now, I've been invited here today to reveal to you a marker the significance of which you may or may not be aware. Hours and hours of research by the esteemed historian Dr. William Adams contributed to this occasion. Mr. Mark Stewart, and his wife Mrs. Madge Stewart, herself a student of history, pressed forward with the project to recognize the significance of this building. The Highlands County Commissioners issued their support through an official proclamation, and members of the Sebring Historical Society offered their services to complement the effort.

The result is that the United States Department of the Interior has named - and worthily so - the Kenilworth Lodge to its prestigious National Register of Historic Places. The committee which makes the designation recognized the Lodge for its superb example of the Mediterranean Revival style, so popular and modern at the time of its construction, and for the historic meeting of the United States governors which took place just beyond these very doors.

It is with great pleasure that I now reveal to you the stately bronze plaque denoting this great honor.



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