



## If These Walls Could Talk

In a city that's constantly evolving, one Atlanta landmark has stood the test of time.

| By Lisa Horten |

It's played host to the premiere gala for *Gone with the Wind*, housed rock legends like Fleetwood Mac and Bruce Springsteen and earned a well-deserved spot on the National Register of Historic Places. An atypical property with a storied history, the Georgian Terrace Hotel is celebrating its centennial anniversary this year in a city where longevity is a prized rarity.

The Georgian Terrace first opened its doors on October 2, 1911, at the corner of Peachtree Street and Ponce de Leon Avenue—the site of former Mayor Livingston Mims' residence. The 10-story, pale yellow brick building was designed by New York architect William L. Stoddart in the French Renaissance style, and was soon dubbed Atlanta's "Paris Hotel."

The property quickly gained a reputation for its sophisticated design, and was soon hosting the likes of presidents Calvin Coolidge and Warren G. Harding, as well as Charles Lindbergh and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The 1929 opening of the Fox Theatre elevated the hotel to a new level of relevance, as it was the esteemed Metropolitan Opera's performance venue. During performances, a red carpet was rolled across Peachtree Street so that the cast could cross the street to the Georgian Terrace.

Opera star Enrico Caruso, a frequent hotel guest, became known for sketching caricatures of his friends on the property's expansive terrace, and wrote a letter praising his experience there, noting the Terrace's "good treatment, excellent food and having everything that could be desired."



Top left: The Georgian Terrace Hotel in

In fall of 1935, Harold Latham of Macmillan Publishers booked a stay at the Georgian Terrace for a business trip to Atlanta. His goal was to scout new manuscripts, and the night before he returned to New York, Latham had a meeting with a young author—Margaret Mitchell. In the lobby of the Georgian Terrace, Mitchell presented the editor with a draft of a work-in-progress about a torrid love affair set in Civil War-era Atlanta. The manuscript was so thick, Latham had to purchase a new suitcase just to transport it back to New York. Six months later, *Gone with the Wind* debuted to rave reviews, and on December 15, 1939, the Georgian Terrace's ballroom was the site of the gala following the film's premiere. The star-studded guest list included Clark Gable, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh—needless to say, the Georgian Terrace was the place to be.

Joseph Gatins, whose great-grandfather was one of the original owners of the hotel, recently

Above: The Georgian Terrace Hotel as



Clockwise from left: One of the hotel's three ballrooms; a rooftop swimming pool and sundeck boast 360-degree views of the Atlanta



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documented his family’s history in a memoir, *We Were Dancing on a Volcano*. “One of my earliest memories was when I was 2 or 3 years old,” Gatins says. “I would ride my trike around the lobby of the hotel, and I remember how tall it seemed to me. If you looked outside, everyone seemed so small.”

In 1961, the Gatins family relinquished ownership of the hotel to Dr. Irving Goldstein and Dr. Marvin Goldstein, who reportedly bought it for \$250,000.

While the '70s saw a decline in the aging property, Alex Cooley, the “unofficial mayor of Atlanta music,” infused the former Grand Ballroom with rock and roll with the introduction of his Electric Ballroom. Between 1974 and 1978, the era’s most iconic figures in rock performed at the Georgian Terrace—from KISS to Billy Joel to The Ramones. On one particularly memorable evening, Cooley recalls Bruce Springsteen requesting that the cash registers be shut down because they were making

too much noise during his performance. “That’s the only time I ever did that,” he says.

Cooley would later become instrumental in saving both the Georgian Terrace and Fox Theatre from demolition in the struggling early 1980s, when the aging hotel shut its doors for the first time in 70 years. Preservationists successfully halted plans for demolition, and in 1986, the Georgian Terrace was added to the National Register of Historical Places.

In a city that’s never lacking for new places to see and things to do, the Georgian Terrace Hotel has stood the test of time. After several evolutions, the property is still standing tall above Peachtree Street, thanks in part to an \$11 million renovation that included the addition of the exquisite Livingston Restaurant and Bar in May 2009. While half of the stories that unfolded within the walls of the Georgian Terrace have most likely remained untold, perhaps the intrigue is part of the appeal. ■