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## PLANT'S LIEUTENANTS

by DUDLEY S. JOHNSON\*

**H**ENRY BRADLEY PLANT, native of Connecticut and owner of the Southern Express Company, successfully developed a rail network from the Georgia line to Charlotte Harbor. One of his lines was the first to reach the small, backwater village of Tampa where he built the lavish Tampa Bay Hotel in 1891. He also bought or constructed hotels in Port Tampa, Belear, Punta Gorda, Ocala, Kissimmee, and Winter Park. He established a steamship line to Havana, Cuba, with stops at various ports along the West coast of Florida and at Key West, and his riverboats operated on the St. Johns, the Apalachicola, and the Chattahoochee. Plant did all this between 1879 when he purchased his first railroad and 1899 when he died. In addition, his companies owned large tracts of land received from the state, and his express company shipped Florida products to northern markets. Few men have been more intimately connected with the economic development of Florida, and none was more important to the area west of the St. Johns River and south to Punta Gorda on the lower Gulf coast during the latter part of the nineteenth century than Henry Plant.<sup>1</sup>

Plant did not perform this work alone. He had a number of associates, wealthy men, who were willing to invest in his enterprises because of the expected profitable returns. As directors of the companies, they made policy, but that policy was actually put into operation by a faction that can be identified as "Plant's lieutenants." These men were tough, knowledgeable, experienced, and totally dedicated to Plant. Some were trained in the law, others in finance, and one began his career as an

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1. Plant's achievements are related in G. Hutchinson Smyth's laudatory *The Life of Henry Bradley Plant* (New York, 1898). Shorter accounts can be found in Sidney Walter Martin, "Henry Bradley Plant," *Georgians In Profile*, edited by Horace Montgomery (Athens, 1959), 261-76, and Dudley S. Johnson, "Henry Bradley Plant and Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLV (October 1966), 118-31.

apprentice in the railroad machine shops prior to the Civil War. Among those closest to Plant were Michael J. O'Brien, superintendent and vice-president of the Southern Express Company; Robert G. Erwin, general counsel and vice-president of the Plant System of railroads; Henry S. Haines, general manager and vice-president of the railroads; and Franklin Quentin Brown, vice-president in charge of the Plant hotels.

O'Brien was the oldest of the group and he was associated with Plant for the longest period of time. Born in Baltimore in 1838, he worked first in a printing house and then as a clerk in a drug store. He began working for the Adams Express Company in Memphis in 1859 as a messenger and waybill clerk. He was promoted to cashier and was transferred to the New Orleans office in 1860, but he left the following year to join the Confederate navy. O'Brien served in Captain Carter B. Poin-dexter's squadron on Lake Ponchartrain until the fighting unit was destroyed in 1862.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, Plant had formed the Southern Express Company from all the assets of the Adams Express that were located south of the Potomac River. The new company performed many services for the Confederate government, and all employees who were certified indispensable by the company's president were exempt from military duty.<sup>3</sup> However, the Southern Express could not find enough experienced men, and at the request of Confederate Secretary of Treasury Christopher G. Memminger, Michael O'Brien was detached from the navy and assigned to the express office in Atlanta. He was there when General Sherman captured the city, and he was instrumental in reestablishing the express lines behind the Union forces.<sup>4</sup>

Plant went to Europe in 1863, giving health as his reason for leaving the South. Some thought that he was on a diplomatic mission and others believed that he had made his fortune and

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2. *Express Gazette*, Vol. 24 (1899), 237, 239, 243; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. 18 (Washington, 1904), 256-57.
  3. *War of the Rebellion; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, Vol. 1 (Washington, 1900), 1174.
  4. *Express Gazette*, Vol. 24 (1899), 237, 239, 243. Memminger was interested in the welfare of the Southern Express Company because it was one of the very few means available to the government to transfer Confederate funds.

was leaving because he knew the South could not win.<sup>5</sup> In Plant's absence, James Shuter, general superintendent of the Southern Express, was named acting president, and in 1864 he appointed O'Brien as his secretary. Four years later, O'Brien became general superintendent. During the next twenty years he helped Plant, who had returned to America in 1865, extend the lines of the express company throughout the South. His work was so effective that he was made vice-president of the company in 1888.<sup>6</sup>

O'Brien visited Florida many times on business and as a tourist. He and another express official sailed from Port Tampa to Havana, Cuba, just before the Spanish-American War, to promote express and steamship trade with the island. After the war, he and Plant and other officers again visited Cuba on an inspection tour. The Plant Steamship Company had five vessels sailing regularly between Port Tampa and Havana by the time of the latter visit.<sup>7</sup> When Plant died in 1899, O'Brien was chosen by the directors to be president of the Southern Express Company, a position he held until his own death in 1909.<sup>8</sup> O'Brien's role in Plant's Florida developments is not altogether clear. He served as a member of boards of directors of some of the smaller railroads and therefore he helped to make policy decisions in the Plant organization. Perhaps his greatest contribution was in relieving Plant of some of the responsibility of directing the express company. O'Brien knew the express business and the southern territory so thoroughly that Plant could safely leave the management of the company to him.

Robert Gaullaudet Erwin became associated with Plant through the legal profession. He was born in Savannah, Georgia, on May 6, 1854. He entered Trinity College at Hartford, Connecticut, in 1871, and was graduated three years later.

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5. Francis B. C. Bradlee, *Blockade Running During the Civil War; And the Effect of Land and Water Transportation on the Confederacy* (Salem, Mass., 1925), 312-13; J. B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, edited by Howard Swiggett, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), II, 4.
  6. *Express Gazette*, Vol. 24 (1899), 237, 239, 243; Smyth, *Life of Henry Bradley Plant*, 61.
  7. *Tampa Journal*, February 12, 1891; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 18, 1898, January 31, February 3, 1899.
  8. *Express Gazette*, Vol. 24 (1899), 237, 239, 243; Vol. 34 (1909), 261-62. He was buried in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Henry M. Flagler, builder of the Florida East Coast Railroad and Plant's chief rival in Florida, was listed in the obituary notice as an honorary pallbearer.

Studying law in the offices of Hartridge and Chisholm in Savannah, he was admitted to the bar in 1875. Four years later, Erwin entered into a partnership with Judge Walter Scott Chisholm under the firm name of Chisholm and Erwin, and they became the attorneys for the Southern Express Company. Plant secured his first railroad, the Albany and Gulf extending from Savannah to Bainbridge, Georgia, in 1879, and Chisholm and Erwin were instrumental in reorganizing the company into the Savannah, Florida and Western Railway. As Plant added new companies, this legal firm continued the association, with one or the other always represented on the boards of directors. Chisholm also served as vice-president of many of Plant's companies.<sup>9</sup>

Chisholm died in 1892, and Erwin succeeded to his position as vice-president of the Savannah, Florida and Western Railway and of several of the smaller Plant operations. His duties and his position as general counsel gave him a thorough knowledge of the Plant System. He traveled over the lines of the system many times and was often in Florida. Although there is no evidence that he was particularly interested in the development of the state, he was the chief legal officer of the Plant System and his advice was often sought. Erwin was seldom interviewed by the newspapers, but his name was usually listed among the members of the Plant party on inspection tours and at the seasonal openings of the Tampa Bay Hotel after 1891.<sup>10</sup>

In 1899 Robert Erwin was selected to succeed Plant as president of the Plant Investment Company, the Savannah, Florida and Western Railway, and some of the smaller companies.<sup>11</sup> In addition, he was appointed one of the executors of Plant's estate.<sup>12</sup> After long legal proceedings involving Plant's will, Erwin negotiated the sale of the Plant railroads to the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad in 1902, and he became president of the latter company. He retired from this position on November 21,

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9. *Twenty-third Report of the Georgia Bar Association* (1906), 344-45; *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1906. For a sketch of Chisholm's career see "Walter Scott Chisholm," *Memoirs of Georgia*, 2 vols. (Atlanta, 1895), II, 381-82.

10. "Walter Scott Chisholm," *Memoirs of Georgia*, II, 381-82; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 18, 22, 1895; December 1, 9, 1897; March 18, 1898.

11. The Plant Investment Company was a holding company organized by Plant to manage his real estate and railroad properties.

12. *New York Times*, July 10, 1902.

1905, but retained his position as a director of various other railroad and steamship companies.<sup>13</sup> Erwin died at the relatively early age of fifty-two on January 13, 1906, while inspecting a game preserve which he owned in Connecticut. The New York newspapers carried the obituary on an inside page, but the Jacksonville and Tampa papers, realizing the importance of the rail system to Florida's growth and economy, carried it as a front page story. The Tampa press pointed to the fact that Erwin had been a frequent visitor to the area and the paper referred to him as a friend.<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to evaluate fully Erwin's contributions to Florida and to the Tampa Bay area since he was so overshadowed by Plant and the other associates.

Franklin Q. Brown was only eight years younger than Robert Erwin, but he outlived the older man by almost fifty years. Brown, the descendent of New Englanders, was born in Chicago in 1862, but he attended high school in Melrose, Massachusetts. He began his business career with Chandler and Company of Boston, a company interested in the East India trade and in Florida railroads. He came to Florida in 1886 at the age of twenty-four, and two years later he was elected a director and secretary-treasurer of the Florida Southern Railway Company. At that time he listed his residence as Boston, perhaps because the home office of the company was located there. He became president of the company at the age of twenty-nine, a rare distinction for one so young. When the Florida Southern was absorbed by the Plant System, Brown became third vice-president of that company.<sup>15</sup> He was in charge of the hotels of the Plant Investment Company and spent a great deal of his time in Florida; he was usually present at the opening of the tourist season. At one time he purchased land on Captiva Island near Fort Myers, planning to build a smaller version of the Tampa Bay Hotel, but this project never materialized.<sup>16</sup>

Young and energetic, Brown was entrusted with many con-

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13. *Twenty-third Report of the Georgia Bar Association* (1906), 344-45; *New York Times*, May 14, 1902; *Jacksonville Florida Times Union*, January 14, 1906; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 14, 1906.
  14. *New York Times*, January 14, 1906; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 14, 1906; *Jacksonville Florida Times Union*, January 14, 1906.
  15. *New York Times*, November 8, 1955; Franklin Q. Brown, Jr., to Dudley S. Johnson, December 4, 1969; *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1962), XLIV, 518.
  16. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 28, 1897, October 8, 1898.

fidential missions for the government. He went to Cuba just prior to the Spanish-American War to survey business opportunities there and to ascertain as best he could the threat of war. Upon his return to the United States he visited President McKinley in Washington, and apprised him of conditions on the island. Believing that armed conflict was an immediate threat, Brown described the advantages of the Tampa Bay area and particularly Port Tampa as a sea port that might be utilized by the military. It is believed that his enthusiasm aided the President in selecting Port Tampa as the port of embarkation when the war began.<sup>17</sup> Brown was on hand to greet the first army commander to arrive in Tampa in 1898, and to help him settle into the Tampa Bay Hotel, which became army headquarters. As was its custom, the hotel had closed at the end of the tourist season, but Brown reopened it, first for the military and later for visitors and officers' wives and families. Brown was appointed to the staff of Florida Governor William D. Bloxham in 1898 with the rank of colonel, but this was a completely honorary position.<sup>18</sup>

Florida newspapers realized that Brown was one of Plant's most important lieutenants, and they often carried news stories about him. After he had added the Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad to the Plant holdings in Florida, the Tampa paper stated: "Brown is recognized as the executive head of the Plant System and is always brought to the front when any important deals are being negotiated, either with any of the immense hotels that are owned and controlled by the Plant Investment Company or with any division of the railroad system. . . . No man connected with the Plant System is held in higher regards than Mr. Brown either by the officials of the company or by outside parties with whom he has business transactions. In all his dealings he is gentlemanly, courteous and honor-

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17. Frank Q. Brown to A. J. Hanna, January 24, 1938, Mss. Collection, box 6, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

18. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 22, May 19, 1898; W. D. Bloxham to Ziba King, May 2, 1898, Governor Bloxham's letterbooks, April 28, 1898, to August 4, 1900, p. 22, Florida State Library, Tallahassee. King had written to the governor requesting a commission for Brown whom he called Frank Hugh Brown. The governor refused the request at that time because there were no vacancies on his staff, but later Brown received the appointment.

able. He is shrewd and well informed, but never resorts to trickery as a means of getting the best of his competitor. He is one of the youngest railroad promoters in the country, is full of ambition and will yet stand in the front rank of American railroad magnates." <sup>19</sup>

Brown became the president of the Plant Investment Company after Robert Erwin's death in 1905. However, by that time that company's holdings were limited to hotels and real estate. He had already negotiated the sale of the Tampa Bay Hotel to the city of Tampa, and he was now liquidating other properties belonging to the Plant Investment Company. <sup>20</sup> Brown was interested in many business ventures outside Florida and was associated with over thirty companies during his lifetime. At one time he had an interest in the *Tampa Tribune*, the *Florida Times-Union* of Jacksonville, the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the American Beet Sugar Company, and various railroad and trust companies. His most enduring business ventures were with the New York City banking firm of Redmond and Company from which he retired in 1937, and the Dobbs Ferry (New York) Bank. He was president of the bank for fifty years, he served as mayor of Dobbs Ferry, and headed the Dobbs Ferry Free Library and Dobbs Ferry Hospital. <sup>21</sup> Brown's public services were many and varied. Although he was a man in his middle fifties, he volunteered during World War I. He was sent to Washington as chairman of the Finance Advisory Committee of the United States Railroad Administration. In addition, he headed the Liberty Loan drive in his district of New York and Connecticut. Later he was trustee and treasurer of the Raymond Anteiq Fund that was awarded to Charles A. Lindbergh for his 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic, and he served as a director of numerous relief and charitable organizations. <sup>22</sup> He died in 1955 at the age of ninety-three. <sup>23</sup>

Henry Stephen Haines' parents lived in North Carolina, but he was born in Nantucket, Rhode Island, in 1836, while his

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19. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 9, 1899.

20. *Ibid.*, November 10, 1955; Brown to Hanna, January 24, 1938, Mss. Collection, box 6, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History; James W. Covington, "The Tampa Bay Hotel," *Tequesta*, XXVI (1966), 18.

21. *New York Times*, November 8, 1955.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 10, 1955.



mother was visiting her family home. He was educated in North Carolina and Massachusetts schools but did not attend college. While very young, Haines secured a job as an apprentice in the railroad shops of the Manchester Railroad Company in North Carolina.<sup>24</sup> By the age of twenty he was employed as an engineer on a railroad operating in North and South Carolina. For part of that year he kept a diary and in it he described the problems caused by the poor equipment used on southern railroads of that day.<sup>25</sup> One source states that Haines and his brothers enlisted in the Confederate army, but that he returned to railroad construction and that he was in charge of Confederate transportation in South Carolina when Charleston fell to the Federal forces.<sup>26</sup>

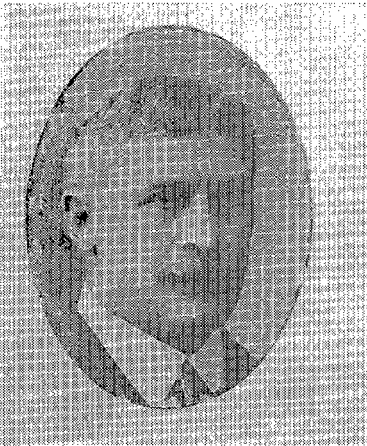
Haines became general superintendent of the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad Company after the Civil War. This railroad operated a line from Savannah through south Georgia to Bainbridge. On April 4, 1871, Haines optimistically predicted to the president of the company that gross revenue for the line in that year should be \$1,300,000. His comparison of the company with other Georgia railroads seemed to prove that the Atlantic and Gulf was the most profitable.<sup>27</sup> However, the figures were misleading and the company became heavily mired in debt. Plant, partly on the recommendation of Haines, purchased the Albany and Gulf in 1879, and soon thereafter changed the name of the line to the Savannah, Florida and Western.<sup>28</sup> Haines retained his position under the new management, and his duties were extended to the other railroads that Plant purchased and con-

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24. Charles O. Haines, "Memoir of Henry Stephen Haines," *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, Vol. 98 (1928), 1695-97. Haines was probably a brother of Henry Haines. A Charles O. Haines was employed by the Plant System when Henry Haines was general manager.
  25. Henry S. Haines Dairy, Vol. I, March 10-September 26, 1856, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
  26. Haines, *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, 1695. Neither the U. S. War Department Collection of Confederate Records in the National Archives nor the Georgia Department of Archives and History have any record of Haines' military service, but Confederate transportation records are sparse and that may account for the lack of documentation.
  27. Haines, *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, 1695; Haines to John Screven, April 4, 1871, in Haines Dairy, Vol. II.
  28. *Poor's Manual of the Railroads of the United States* (1880), 531-32; *Expressman's Monthly*, Vol. IV (1879), 302-03. This journal became *The Express Gazette* in 1882. See also *Jacksonville Florida Times Union*, January 11, 1884.

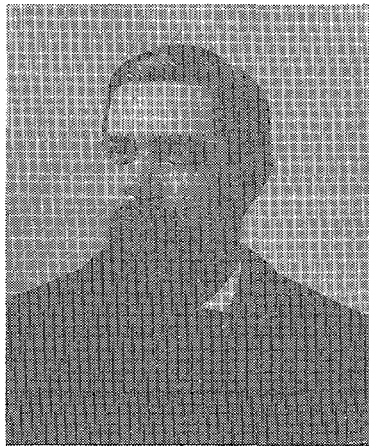
## Johnson: Plant's Lieutenants



Henry Bradley Plant, reproduced from *The Life of Henry Bradley Plant* by G. Hutchinson Smyth.



Franklin Q. Brown. He was forty-eight at the time of this photograph.



Henry Stephens Haines from an original in the office of the Chamber of Commerce, Haines City, Florida.

structed. He supervised the building of the East Florida Railway from Waycross, Georgia, to Jacksonville. This company had secured the lease for the state's convicts for a period of two years, paying Florida fifteen dollars a year for each prisoner. Planning to utilize this cheap labor supply before the contract ran out, Haines also wanted to construct the Live Oak and Rowlands Bluff Railroad.<sup>29</sup> He also supervised the building of the South Florida Railroad from Sanford to Tampa. Haines City, located on the route of the South Florida, was named for him.

Haines instituted a thorough annual inspection of all railroads under his jurisdiction. Rules for inspectors conducting annual and intermediate inspections were printed in a pamphlet which was made available to all personnel. A premium of \$100 was awarded to the supervisor of the best division, while the next two supervisors received fifty dollar awards. The foreman of the best section in each division received forty dollars and the second best received twenty dollars; ten dollars were awarded to the wife of the foreman who maintained the neatest section house and grounds. Other awards were given to the foreman showing the greatest improvement, to the one having the least expense without sacrificing efficiency, and to the one with the least expense for tools per man.<sup>30</sup> These awards were aimed at increasing the morale of the supervisory personnel and adding to the efficiency of these Florida and southern rail lines.

In 1892 Haines was promoted to vice-president of the Savannah, Florida and Western while continuing to serve as general manager of the entire system. Two years later he severed all connection with the Plant System. It was thought that he made the decision because he believed that another official was trying to assume his duties.<sup>31</sup> What the truth was of this is not known. Haines went to Europe with the intention of organizing an investment company there to trade in American railroad securities. Late in 1895, a rumor circulated that Plant would retire

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29. N. Gordon Carper, "The Convict-Lease System in Florida, 1866-1923" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1964), 70-71; Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, January 11, 1884; *Florida House Journal*, 1881, 41.

30. *Railroad Gazette*, August 20, 1886, 571; December 17, 1886, 675.

31. *Poor's Manual of the Railroads of the United States* (1892), 574; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 8, 1895, quoting the Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*. Details of this episode were never clearly explained and only rumors were reported in the Florida press.

shortly and that Haines would replace him as head of the Plant operations. According to this story, Haines had received a concrete offer via a telegram which he first refused and later accepted.<sup>32</sup> However, if such an offer was made and accepted the transaction was never consummated for Plant did not retire until death in 1899 forced him to do so. Haines was a pall bearer at Plant's funeral, so evidently the two men remained friends even though their business association had ended nearly a decade earlier.<sup>33</sup>

Haines did not establish the European investment company, although it was reported that he had adequate financial support. He served as commissioner of the Southern States Freight Association, and for a short time he was vice-president of the Atlantic and Danville Railroad Company, a corporation largely owned by Englishmen.<sup>34</sup> Although he was not a university graduate Haines was an intellectual man with marked literary inclinations. His diary, dated May 26, 1865, includes two pages of notes from a review published in *The Edinburgh Review* of two of Alexander Bain's books, *The Senses and the Intellect* and *The Emotions and the Will*, numerous notes on the *Course of History of Modern Philosophy* by Victor Cousin, although these notes appear to be in a different handwriting.<sup>35</sup> Haines published a total of six volumes on freight rates and railroad management. The first effort was a pamphlet of twenty-three pages long which appeared in 1879 (?) under the title *The Railroad and the State: The Regulation of Railroad Tariff by Law*. He collected his speeches and published them in 1897 in a book entitled *American Railway Management*. Haines delivered twelve lectures at the Boston University School of Law in April and May 1905, which were published as *Restrictive Railway Legislation*. Two years later he presented another series of lectures at the same institution and again they were published. The title was *Railway Corporations as Public Servants. Problems in Railway Regulations* appeared in 1911, and *Efficient Railway Operations* in 1919. These volumes were used as standard texts and were translated

32. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 8, 1895, quoting the *Jacksonville Florida Times Union*.

33. *New York Times*, June 27, 1899.

34. *Railroad Gazette*, December 2, 1898, 866; Haines, *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, 1696.

35. Haines Diary, Vol. I, May 26, 1865.

into many languages, including Japanese.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Haines' reputation in the field of engineering was international. He was consulted by the French government on the problem of increasing the water supply for Paris, and by the British on the best method of changing the railroad gauge in India. He served as president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, as a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and was one of the founders of the American Railway Guild.<sup>37</sup> Haines died in Lenox, Massachusetts, on November 3, 1923, at the age of eighty-six.<sup>38</sup>

There were many other individuals who worked for Henry Plant, although none rose so high in the organization as did O'Brien, Erwin, Brown, and Haines. Plant seems to have inspired a loyalty which kept men in his organization year after year. Perhaps it was because individuals who began as employees could, after years of service, rise to the top level of management as did these four. It is impossible to determine the full impact that Plant's associates had upon the economic development of Florida. Neither is it possible to say which one was closest to Plant nor who influenced him the most in making his decisions. In point of time O'Brien worked for and with Plant the longest, and he remained a close personal friend. Haines directed the operation of the railroads with dispatch and efficiency and apparently he also maintained a lifelong friendship with Plant, although he was the only one to leave the Plant System. Erwin and Brown rendered valuable service to the organization, but it is difficult to determine where their authority and ideas ended and those of Plant began. However, it was these men, Plant's lieutenants, who performed the detailed supervisory work necessary to carry out the plans formulated by Plant and his wealthy associates. It is very probable that Plant would not have succeeded in creating so great a business empire in Florida without the aid of his lieutenants—Michael O'Brien, Robert Erwin, Franklin Brown, and Henry Haines.

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36. *Library of Congress Catalogue of Printed Cards*, Vol. 62, 388; *New York Times*, November 4, 1923; *Macon (Georgia) Telegraph*, November 4, 1923.

37. *New York Times*, November 4, 1923; *Macon Telegraph*, November 4, 1923.

38. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 4, 1923. Funeral services were held in Lenox, but the body was taken to Savannah for burial.