

The Robles Family During The Civil War in Tampa

by

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To Dr. David Carr who started me on the journey and  
to Dr. Gary R. Mormino who brought me home

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## Abstract

Joseph Paul Robles emigrated to America from Spain in the 1830s, married and settled in Hernando County in Florida in the 1840s. The growing city of Tampa drew the young Robles family away from the primitive settlement at Bentenville. When the Civil War broke out, the father and three eldest sons entered into the service for the Confederacy. The oldest son served in the Army of Tennessee, the next two eldest joined the Cow Cavalry to protect the local beef needed to feed the Confederate army. Joseph Paul due to his age volunteered for the local home guard for the city of Tampa. This paper places these contributions of this Spanish immigrant family into the context of Florida and local Tampa area history before, during and after the Civil War. Information concerning The Robles family history was found in Tampa newspaper interviews of Joseph Paul Jr. at the celebrations of various milestone birthdays during his 104 year life. Other information about the family came from public records, pensions and oral history given by Robles' descendants.

## Chapter One

### The Robles Family Settles in Bentonville

The Robles story in the Tampa area begins like so many immigrant stories do with Joseph Paul Robles' arrival in America. In 1832, at the age of fifteen, Robles left Malaga, Spain, with his brother-in-law who was the master of a vessel that traded between Havana and Nova Scotia. A family legend claimed that he left Spain rather than be forced into the priesthood. He jumped ship at St. Mary's Island Florida and hid in a well until the ship left, according to another family tradition. He traveled north to Georgia, where he was taken in by the Garrison family and worked on their farm in exchange for food and shelter. He also learned to speak English at this time. He met and later married Mary Ann Garrison, daughter of Michael Garrison and Mary Zetour, members of the old Swiss-German families of Effingham. In about 1841, the couple moved to Benton, Florida (now in Hernando County). In all probability the couple were squatters until they took advantage of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842.<sup>1</sup>

The Territory of Florida needed to stimulate immigration since the population of Florida in 1830 was 34,730 and had only grown to 54,477 by 1840, according to the

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.tampapix.com/robles.htm>

census records.<sup>2</sup> Florida had less fertile land than other territories so incentives were needed to encourage settlement. The long, costly and frightening Second Seminole War (1835-1842) had just ended. U.S. Senator Thomas Benton, in announcing his bill claimed, " Florida is now prepared for this armed settlement, the enemy has been driven off the field. He lurks an unseen foe in the swamps and hammocks... We want people to take possession and to keep possession; and the armed cultivator is the man for that."<sup>3</sup>

In 1840 the Missouri Senator introduced his Armed Occupation Bill that already had the approval of President William Tyler. Benton while addressing the Senate accused the large slave holders and speculators of wanting all the land for themselves and preferring soldiers to settlers. "This is an additional reason for me to place meritorious cultivators upon the soil to defend it both from Indians and speculators."<sup>4</sup> Despite the opposition of formidable Daniel Webster, the bill passed in the Senate by a 24 to 16 vote. In the House John Quincy Adams succeeded in eliminating the provisions for free food, seed and weapons, after which the bill passed 82 to 50 and was signed into law on August 4, 1842. According to the law 200,000 acres of land south of Gainesville were made available in quarter section

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<sup>2</sup>James Covington, "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," Florida Historical Quarterly 40:1 (Jul., 1961):41.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 43.

blocks of 160 acres to any veteran who would agree to clear five acres, build a home on it and defend it against Indians, and serve in volunteer companies when and if it became necessary for the common safety. The land would be given to any head of family or single man over the age of eighteen who was able to bear arms. He was required to live on the land in a house suitable for habitation for at least five consecutive years. The only conditions limiting his selection was that he could not claim a site on the coastal islands or settle on a private claim previously established or claim land within two miles of a fort. Indian reservation land was also excluded. The applicant was allowed to cut and use any timber on his land but not allowed to sell it. In Florida this grant was also a means of paying the men who had volunteered for service during the Second Seminole War. Robles had volunteered for service in the army in Trader Hill, Georgia in 1835.<sup>5</sup> He served in the Second Seminole War and was wounded in the arm and forced out of further service.<sup>6</sup>

Two new land offices were opened, one in St. Augustine and one in Newnansville, a now extinct town, which then consisted of about one thousand persons situated ten miles north west of Gainesville. Because of the arduous journey, a new settler did not have to appear in person to secure title to his lands. A volunteer agent could carry the application for a friend Isaac Garrison from the Bradenton area carried approximately one hundred permits to the Land Office for

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<sup>5</sup>Tamps Morning Tribune, 15 February 1907.

<sup>6</sup>David W. Haretman, Biographical Rosters of Florida's Confederate and Union Soldiers, 1861-1865 (Washington D.C.: Broadstreet Publishing Co., 1995), 1981.



his friends including the Atzeroths of Manatee. Some settlers immediately recorded their selected lands before the land was even surveyed because they were already squatters on it. Others moved frequently in order to try out several locations.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Robles may well have been one of these latter settlers who filed his claim in April 1850.<sup>8</sup> Some biographies say that he lived in Benton County about this time because in March of 1844 Hernando County was renamed to honor Senator Benton. It was renamed back to Hernando in 1850 when Benton fell out of favor over the slavery issue. Robles' 160 acres lay approximately one mile southwest of present day Spring Lake near Neff Lake and about one hundred and fifty yards off an Indian trail leading from Toachatka settlement to Henry Harn and on the east end of Harn Prairie. Nearby Spring Lake is just south east of present Brooksville which at that time was called Pierceville and consisted of a courthouse and only the beginnings of a center for the Hernando County government. James Covington in his Story of Southwestern Florida, claims that the Robles family lived in Columbia County until 1845 but the birthplace of their first three children, Michael F. (1842), John Godeff (1844) and Joseph Paul (1847) is indicated as being in Hernando County.<sup>9</sup> The next son Seaborn L. was born in Tampa in 1851 and demonstrates the probable move

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<sup>7</sup>Rosemary Trottman, *The History of Zephyrhills* ( New York: Vantage Press, 1978), 37.

<sup>8</sup>Armed Occupation Act, Register and Receivers Certificate Nos 339.

<sup>9</sup>James Covington, *The Story of Southwest Florida, Family and Personal History. Volume 2* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1957). 314.

of the Robles' family to Hillsborough County at that time.

The reason for this quick move just after the acquisition of title to his 160 acres may have something to do with the primitive conditions that existed for the first settlers in isolated areas. One such family was the Atzeroths, the first white settlers of Terra Ceia Island in Manatee County and whose story is known in more detail than the Robles'. Joseph, his wife Julia and three-year-old daughter, Eliza, came to Florida from Bavaria, Germany, in 1843. They set out from Fort Brooke on a scouting trip for a home site in northern Manatee County. They, too, wished to avail themselves of the Armed Occupation Act.

Terra Ceia was unsettled and remote from civilization. The nearest neighbors were the Josiah Gates family who had settled on the Manatee River in 1842. The Atzeroths found a thick hammock growth covering the island. The family planned to live on the boat that brought them to the island until a place could be cleared. Impatient to settle in, Julia, along with her husband wielded an ax in order to clear the thick underbrush and vines. Finally they cleared enough space for a tent. "The grubbing hoe and elbow grease" were to come in handy the rest of her life.<sup>10</sup> She learned quickly to chop wood, load and shoot a shotgun and raffle, thatch a roof, hoe and tend a garden, raise chickens and be prepared to defend her home in periods of war or emergency or in the absence of her husband.

The Atzeroths planned a more permanent home on the bank of the bay.

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<sup>10</sup>Cathy Bayless Slusser, "The Joseph Atzeroth Family: Manatee County Pioneers," Tampa Bay History 4:2 (Fall-Winter 1982): 23.

Stakes from local trees were driven for the frame, palmetto branches were gathered and Julia herself climbed the roof to thatch it. Having no skill or experience at this, the roof leaked during rain storms obliging the family to take cover under a table . The roof was rethatched and three corners of the hut were lashed to trees to withstand hurricane winds. This temporary residence was replaced by a typical log cabin. Because they had no access to a saw mill to cut boards, the trees they cut down were used as they were and the spaces between the logs were filled with moss and clay. The roof of their two- room house was covered with split cedar shingles and the chimney was improvised of sticks plastered with mud. Later, door, flooring and windows were imported from New Orleans. The area around the house was cleared and a large vegetable garden was planted, which thrived in the rich soil and mild Terra Ceia climate so much so that the Atzeroths were able to sell their excess crops to Fort Brooke, thirty miles away.

Just as the Atzeroths had complied with the requirements of the Armed Occupation Act, so did another Tampa Bay resident, Philippe Odet. A Frenchman of dubious beginnings, Odet ,with roots in Charleston and Key West, came to the area in the late 1830's. He established his homestead called St. Helena in what is now Philippe Park in Safety Harbor, Florida. Philippe cultivated citrus and is generally credited with having planted the first commercial orange grove in the Tampa Bay area. The site at the time was unsettled and was the previous location of an Indian village . An Indian mound over forty feet high marks the site. During the hurricane

of 1848, one of the most devastating to hit Florida, Philippe allegedly observed a tidal wave of water coming up Tampa Bay toward his house and saved all his family and slaves by taking refuge on top of the mound.<sup>11</sup> However, his home and groves did not survive the flood. After the flood Philippe replanted his groves and reestablished his home at St. Helena.

Another of the 1312 permits issued was to Maximo Hernández who was living in the Tampa Bay area and had operated a fishing camp at the tip of the Pinellas Peninsula. He secured legal title for his operations by application under the act.<sup>12</sup>

In trying to understand the Robles' move from their pioneer land site in Hernando to Tampa, one aspect needs to be considered. From the Robles family history we hear that Joseph Paul married Mary Ann Garrison on December 12, 1840.<sup>13</sup> The ceremony was held at Fort Fanning, a Second Seminole Indian War log fort on the Suwannee River between Dixie and Levy counties in present-day Fanning Springs, Florida. She was born on February 15, 1827 and was a little over fourteen years of age when she married. She began the pioneer life probably with even less money than Julia Atzeroth. Julia had at least funds for the voyage from Europe and her glazed windows from New Orleans. Possibly her parents gave the couple money when they left Georgia but that would likely been used up for the

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<sup>11</sup>Allison DeFoor II, "Odet Philippe in South Florida," Tampa Bay History 8:1 (Spring- Summer 1986): 29.

<sup>12</sup>Covington, " Army Occupation Act", 45

<sup>13</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 13 February 1907.

journey south and at the arrival of their first three children in 1842, 1844 and 1847. Perhaps there was no helping hand from her parents since her wedding took place in Florida and not at their home. Her leaving home and early marriage could have been encouraged for practical reasons. New babies came every two years in many households so adolescence among the older children especially daughters, was cut short at twelve to fifteen years. A poor family could not afford to fill extra mouths and even education was a luxury.<sup>14</sup>

A description of the poverty and hardship on frontier Hernando was provided by a traveler, Mrs. Catherine Hart, the wife of the future governor, Ossian B. Hart. Of her stopover at the cabin of a family on her way from Tampa to Levy County (named after the railroad builder and future U. S. Senator David Levy) on the Gulf coast in 1852, she describes, "We found them very poor people." "A man and his wife and five children...their residence consisted of a log house all in one room with a fireplace and three beds in it." She added, "When I laid down in it (a bed) ...the fleas were so thick we could not rest a minute...We did not get any sleep that night."<sup>15</sup> Most of the settlers who took advantage of the Army Occupation Act were probably in similar circumstances.

One of the worst jobs a new settler undertook was clearing his land. Trees had to be cut down, tangled underbrush cleared and the roots removed. It could take

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<sup>14</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., *Women on the Tampa Bay Frontier* (Tampa: The Tampa Bay History Center, 1997), 20.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

more than a month to clear one acre. After the garden was planted, the tender new growth had to be protected against deer, rabbits and turkeys who would devour crops. These predators of the garden, however, offered the pioneer an ample and nearby food supply for his family.

Daily life for a young frontier wife and mother consisted of constant work. Chores consisted of supplying the family all the items which would normally have come from a store . This would included carding, spinning and weaving, knitting and crocheting cotton for cloth, making thread, clothing, blankets and rugs. She worked leather into usable products, shoes, belts and jackets. Other tasks included grinding corn by hand, cleaning the house and washing clothes in a nearby creek and bringing water back for household use and cooking. An onerous task was making soap for cleaning. Grease was obtained from wild razorback hogs. Lye was produced by the time consuming process of leaching the ashes of burned hickory logs. The soap which resulted was not sweet-smelling, but would do the job.<sup>16</sup> Outside she gathered honey and started a vegetable garden which was part of the Armed Occupation Act requirement.

Cooking posed enormous challenges. For early settlers the first fireplace cooking stoves were similar to Julia Atzeroth's. Other pioneer cooks worked over a scaffold stove constructed of pine logs, formed into a frame about three-feet high and four-

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<sup>16</sup>Karl H. Grismer. A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida, (St. Petersburg, Florida: The St. Petersburg Printing Company, Inc., 1950), 102.

feet square. Sand was poured on the top and inside of the frame and marl or clay covered the outside to prevent the logs from burning, Pine lightwood splinters rich in turpentine were used to start the fire. The fire was fed with hard wood, which produced intense heat for long periods of time. These stoves were often located in detached kitchens at the rear of the home. Sometimes they were covered with a wooden roof high enough so as not to catch fire. Some pioneers boasted of iron grills for their scaffolds where meat could be broiled or skillets used. Most women placed Dutch ovens with iron legs directly in the hot ashes.<sup>17</sup> They learned to stoke the fire and shovel coals in such a way so as to simmer, boil, fry, quick bake and roast using only one tool, a fire shovel.

Frontier wives were often left alone by their husbands. The simplest hunting trip, visit to "civilization", the nearest grist mill, or if no obliging friend was available, the trek to Newnansville to file the land claim could take many days. Robles, according to the records received his own deed and so must have made the trip to Newnansville.<sup>18</sup>

Childbirth was another frightening and lonely time for pioneer women. Large-sized families were common. It was not unusual to read obituaries such as Ardelia Lanier Hendry's: "She was the mother of 11 children five of whom are dead."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>18</sup>Covington, Volume 2, Appendix.

<sup>19</sup>Brown, Women, 11.

Women had little accurate knowledge of their own bodies so methods to prevent pregnancy and practice healthy prenatal care were minimal. The best most women could hope for was an experienced midwife or even a neighbor at the delivery. Children were often born sickly which further accentuated the dependence of frontier women on one another. Death of mother and baby during or just after childbirth was all too regular. Often weakened mothers or their children died shortly after the birth of measles, plagues of yellow fever or pneumonia.

Mary Ann Robles and her three young children would have certainly looked forward to a move from these primitive conditions to the attractions of the growing town of Tampa in 1851.



## Chapter Two

### The Attractions of Tampa

The region's few towns provided better living conditions than the frontier. Before the Civil War the only town of substance in the Tampa Bay area was Tampa itself.

Villages such as Manatee, Fort Meade, Fort Dade and Brooksville were only beginning to emerge. An army officer, George W. Hazzard, in 1856 wrote that the village of Tampa adjoins Fort Brooke, has about eight hundred people and contains a court house, a ten pin alley, two churches, two hotels and any quantity of oyster houses and groceries. He went on to say that there is neither agriculture or manufacturing to support the place and all the inhabitants derive their living either directly or indirectly from the government appropriations.<sup>20</sup>

The probable date of the Robles' family move to Hillsborough was 1851. At the time Tampa was still recovering from hurricanes, one in 1846 and the terrible storm of 1848. Juliet Axtell described the September 25<sup>th</sup> hurricane in a letter to Mrs. P. I. Tracy on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, which "laid our beautiful Tampa in ruins." She continued, "There are not more than four or five buildings left- our house was blown down in part and the waters from the bay swept around it with fearful violence." "We escaped from it in the midst of the fearful tempests, the roofs of buildings flying around us

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<sup>20</sup>Brown, Women, 9.

and the tempest raging at such a rate that we were unable to keep our feet or wear any extra clothing such as (a) shawl to protect us from the piercing rain."<sup>21</sup> In a letter to her sister Harietta on October 24<sup>th</sup> she described how the water rose twelve feet higher than it ever had been known to rise before, five feet in fifteen minutes. Piles of rubbish extended two or three miles up the river. The sutler's store, chapel, the commissary building of Fort Brooke, the whole row of structures where she lived were "all gone."<sup>22</sup> Great waves blown by southwest winds swept the waters of the Gulf into the bay and crashed against the Garrison section up to Whiting Street. The Interbay Peninsula and Hooker's Point were partially flooded.

Out of this destruction Anthony P. Pizzo author of *Tampa Town* argued, "emerged hope and prosperity and the first real beginning of growth for Tampa."<sup>23</sup> The village began to boom with activity. The fort was rebuilt along with new warehouses, barracks, officers quarters and horse sheds. The hospital, wharf and blacksmith shop were replaced. The buildings of the some one hundred inhabitants had to be repaired. Soon Tampa was brimming with carpenters, painters, brick masons and laborers many of whom stayed after the rebuilding to bring the population up to 185. Joseph Robles may have been drawn to this activity. He was

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>22</sup>Anthony Pizzo, *Tampa Town, 1824-1886, The Cracker Village with Latin Accent*, (Miami: Hurricane Hours Publishers, Inc., 1968), 10.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 20.

reputed to have carpentry skills and had made cedar canoes which the government used for troop transportation during the Seminole War.<sup>24</sup> Mary must have agreed to the move since her fourth child, Seaborn L. was born in Hillsborough County in 1851. There is no record of the Robles family in the 1850 Census for Hillsborough County so the move must have been made after that time.<sup>25</sup>

Land around Tampa was being sold to planters who grew corn, cotton, tobacco and sugar cane. Other perspective farmers came to raise cattle. When these landowners brought their products to market they would stop in Tampa's thriving business district which grew up after the hurricane. It consisted of nine general stores, as well as the Florida Bakery owned by John Fletcher, Richard L. Hick's barber shop, four blacksmiths shops, three butcher shops. A stationary store was operated by Dr. S B Todd, a cobbler shop by John Crosson. A printing shop, silver smith and a gunsmith's establishment were also opened.<sup>26</sup> One of the new general stores on Washington and Tampa Streets was erected by John Jackson. A three-story high wood frame building at the corner of Franklin and Whiting Streets, considered a dangerously high structure for Tampa at the time became the meeting place for the Hillsborough Masonic Lodge No. 25, F&AM, and its twelve original members. C.L.

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<sup>24</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 13 February 1907.

<sup>25</sup>James Covington, *The Story of Southwestern Florida, Family and Personal History*, Volume 1. Appendix. Census Records for Hillsborough county, 1850.

<sup>26</sup>Pizzo, 21.

Friebele opened a general store on the northwest corner of Washington and Franklin, while Antonio Castillo ran his oyster house nearby. José Virgil introduced candy making to Tampans. By the mid 1850's Tampa had two churches, one Methodist and the other Baptist. The Presbyterians were just organizing a congregation. The Methodists built a frame church on the northeast corner of Lafayette and Morgan Streets and the Baptists erected theirs on the southeast corner of Twiggs and Tampa. A Catholic church and the new parish of St. Louis was begun in 1859 at Twiggs and Florida Avenue. Father C. S. Mailley became the first resident priest.

The business district of Tampa became a drawing point for back country settlers. Their ox and mule teams hauled wagons into town and chewed up the dirt streets especially in the dry season. They drifted in and out all through the week but on Saturdays the town became crowded. "Going to town" was a big occasion and whole families came, mothers to shop and gossip, fathers to have a drink or two and children to see the sights, eat candy and play.<sup>27</sup> Descendants of Joseph Robles say that the area now known as Robles Park was the 1858 family homestead site consisting of 160 acres which Joseph Robles most likely bought at \$1.25 an acre in 1878.<sup>28</sup> He and the family could easily have made the trip to Tampa and back in one day. He is remembered by his son riding an old piebald horse to Masonic

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<sup>27</sup>Grismer, 118.

<sup>28</sup>Tampapix,1.Program USF Florida Center for Community Design and Research.

meetings that he had been initiated into by the Kendricks.<sup>29</sup> At his death in 1907 he was the oldest living Mason in Florida and so must have made many visits to the Lodge in Tampa.

The county government played its role in the development of Tampa by ordering courthouse repairs, the erection of a jail nearby and the planting of trees around the new county and municipal buildings. A public cemetery, now called Oakland, was opened and Benjamin Hagler was given permission to conduct a ferry service across the Hillsborough River. W. P. Wilson was allowed to reopen the courthouse school. The municipal government began a market at Lafayette Street near the river. John Jackson completed a new survey of the Town of Tampa, which encouraged land sales since clearer property lines could be established. John Darling expressed the feelings of the community to Thomas Brown on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1851, "Still business steadily increases showing healthy progress of the country and although we have no money now, we live on hope and look for better times ahead."<sup>30</sup>

One of the new Tampan entrepreneurs who quickly came to the fore was a Scottish mariner, James McKay. He had come to Tampa with money and bought up entire blocks of the city, as well as land east of Fort Brooke and at Ballast Point. He built a general store on the busy corner of Washington and Franklin Streets across

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<sup>29</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 11 July 1954.

<sup>30</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., *Tampa Before the Civil War* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1999) 115.

from his home. At the request of the county commission he was contracted to build a courthouse at Franklin and Madison but President Polk neglected to approve the reduction of the size of the Fort Brooke reservation and the county lost its seat land.<sup>31</sup> But McKay's crew went ahead and Congress passed the act granting 160 acres to the county on March 21, 1848. Flushed with success, McKay placed ads in the Mobile papers that a number of lots in and around Tampa had been sold and would be speedily improved. The Jacksonville News reported that coeducational classes of fourteen boys and girls were being conducted as an experiment at the new courthouse school.<sup>32</sup>

In 1850 McKay purchased a schooner which he named the Sarah Matilda for his wife and began a shipping business between Tampa, Mobile and New Orleans. His son recalled that was the only vessel being used commercially in the port. In 1850 he bought another ship, the Emma, to link Tampa with Fort Myers. He built a wharf at the foot of Washington Street to moor his small fleet and a pen to hold the cattle destined for shipment to Key West. During the 1850's he added to his fleet, buying the 125-ton steamer Venice, a smaller steamer, the Woodduck and the brigantine Huntress, purchased at a federal auction in Key West. In 1859 he chartered the steamer Magnolia and entered the cattle business buying herds from central Florida

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>32</sup>Jacksonville News, 15 April 1848.

and selling them in Cuba.<sup>33</sup> As the Seminole Indians withdrew south, the new settlers and herders in the interior of the state absorbed the goods brought into port by Captain McKay.

McKay further expanded his enterprise in 1851 when he began a cooperative endeavor with the New York firm of Blanchard and Fitch to revive the lumber business of earlier days. The company cut cedar logs from public land on the upper Hillsborough River and cut them into logs which McKay transported in his ships. The firm also milled them into pencils. In June McKay erected a large steam saw mill on the Hillsborough River north of town later called Waterworks Park. He realized that a prospective new clientele of homesteaders might no longer want simple log cabins or to import plank-boards all the way from Mobile.

The ever-enterprising McKay also took advantage of the warm climate of Tampa, which was beginning to attract winter visitors with health problems, especially those with throat and lung conditions. He began building Florida House, which Reason and Jane Duke operated for him. The hotel consisted of eighteen rooms and had all the modern improvements including a well with excellent water.<sup>34</sup>

The presence of Fort Brooke had to this point been vital to any community rising up around it. The damage to the fort from the hurricane prompted the army to consider relocating the post. In October the secretary of war began considering

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<sup>33</sup>Grismer, 110.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, Tampa before the Civil War, 125.

Charlotte Harbor or in January 1849 Useppa Island. General George Brooke, commander of the southern department, protected his namesake, lest the army listen to the rural settlers east of Tampa who wanted a garrison between themselves and the Indians to the south. Fourteen Tampans met on January 18 1849 to incorporate the "Village of Tampa", a community of 185 individuals. A board of trustees was elected who saw that Tampa could become a business center to provide for the needs of the steadily increasing population of immigrants to the east of the city. When a small band of Indians attacked, burned and killed two men at the Kennedy and Darling store on the Peace River, the incident offered the possibility of a war which would enhance army presence and thus civilian jobs and might also lead to the final removal of the remaining Indians to the West. New cattle ranges would open up along the Peace and Kissimmee Rivers drawing a larger population and lucrative trade. General David F. Twiggs declared, "It is astonishing to find how many persons , in and out of Florida, are whetting their appetites, expecting to share in the plunder of another Florida affair... I will make every effort to disappoint them." With the help of Indian agent John C. Casey and Seminole chief Billy Bowlegs, the general averted hostilities when Bowlegs agreed to withdraw from the upper Peace River and move south to Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. Twiggs established Fort Meade and opened a road from Fort Brooke to Fort Meade and Fort Pierce on the Atlantic Ocean, giving Tampans access to interior markets and settlers which the Tampa merchants wanted. Fort Brooke's future was still in question, which meant



financial doldrums for Tampa's growing business community.

Things were made worse when a government steamer from New Orleans landed in September 1853 carrying yellow fever. The death toll ran high, of the fifty persons who caught the fever twenty-three soldiers and civilians succumbed. Before he passed away from the fever, General Thomas Childs reported that nearly all those who died were comparative strangers. People felt that those "acclimated" were less likely to be affected.<sup>35</sup>

Tampa recovered however. Not only did McKay complete his hotel but in February 1855 Eden Brown opened his "tin-ware manufactory,"<sup>36</sup> And Edward Clarke established his famous "Blue Store" where almost anything could be bought from candy to plows "for cash or country produce only as credit is dead and bad debts killed him." The Masonic Lodge Hall on Whiting was now also used by the Odd Fellows and as a place for political rallies and social occasions. In March, Collector of the Port , James T. Magbee secured federal assistance in marking the Tampa Bay channel to improve shipping.

A big step in Tampa's governmental growth was taken on September 17, 1855, when the citizens overwhelmingly voted to adopt a city charter, elect a mayor and council and have the corporation validated by the state legislature. This was done on December 15 and the first election under the city charter was held on February 16,

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<sup>35</sup>Brown, *Tampa before the Civil War*, 121.

<sup>36</sup>Tampa Herald, 17 February 1855.

1856. Judge Joseph B. Lancaster was chosen mayor. Unfortunately he died in less than a year and was replaced by Alfonso DeLaunay. "The child of Fort Brooke and once embryo village on the Hillsborough River had become a full fledged incorporated city."<sup>37</sup> Hillsborough County was struck a blow when the owners of the large plantations along the Manatee River, the struggling Robert Gambling, Dr. Joseph A. Branden and the Craigs began a drive to form a new county separate from Hillsborough. The formation of Manatee County was made legal in October 1856. It took the lands now including Hardee, Sarasota, DeSoto, Charlotte and present day Manatee counties. This removed vast and rich taxable lands from Hillsborough County and increasing the tax burden on the remaining areas.<sup>38</sup>

As Canter Brown describes it, " a second fever struck Tampa, the railroad fever."<sup>39</sup> All the leading citizens of Tampa "a pressured U. S. Senator David Levy Yulee the state's main railroad advocate and the state legislature to direct a railroad toward Tampa. The state legislature dictated that the proposed railroad should run from Fernandina on the Atlantic to "some point, bay arm or tributary of the Gulf of Mexico in south Florida."<sup>40</sup> It seemed like Tampa stood a good chance. Its prospects drew people such that by 1855 the population on Hillsborough County was 3,014 and the

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<sup>37</sup>Grismer, 118.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 127

<sup>39</sup>Brown, Tampa before the Civil War, 123.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.,124.

estimated number of people in Tampa was 800.<sup>41</sup> A new newspaper was founded to publicize Tampa and “to advocate the claims of our Bay as the proper point for the terminus of the Peninsular Railroad.”<sup>42</sup> The first issue of the Tampa Herald hit the streets in January 1854.<sup>43</sup>

Political differences soon erupted between the paper and the state legislator, Democrat Jesse Carter who was a friend and supporter of the Florida Rail Road and David Levy Yulee of Cedar Keys. M. Whit Smith and the Herald editor, Henry A. Crane questioned the promises of the Florida Railroad Company and its friends. “The Herald warned us...their real intention was to construct the road to Cedar Keys and not to Tampa.” a local man said.<sup>44</sup> The paper’s owner, M. Whit Smith later sold the Herald to Dr. James S. Jones who changed the paper’s name on March 3, 1855 to the Florida Peninsular.

Tampans were further encouraged when the state passed the Internal Improvement Act in January 1855. The statute organized a system of public subsidies for railroad construction, including the Florida Rail Road. To then Senator Yulee’s dismay the law restricted his line to a route from Amelia Island on the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>42</sup>Florida Peninsular, 8 January 1859,

<sup>43</sup>Anthony Pizzo. Tampa Town, 1824-1886 (Miami, Florida: Hurricane Hours Publishers, Inc.1968) 21.

<sup>44</sup>Florida Peninsular, 8 January 1859.

Atlantic to Tampa Bay in South Florida, with an extension to Cedar Keys. Local Tampa leaders demanded that the railroad "undertake to construct the road upon the whole route according to the intent and meaning(of the law)."<sup>45</sup> The Billy Bowlegs War which erupted suddenly in late 1855 put off the question of the route, but Yulee used the interim to foster his own interests. After the war, Governor Madison Starke Perry of Alachua County joined with the Tampans to fight Yulee's Cedar Keys terminus plan. James McKay and others even tried to charter their own line but the gambit failed. Yulee was burned in effigy on the courthouse grounds. The fight wound its way through the court system and persisted into 1860. The construction of the railroad had begun in the summer of 1855 at Fernandia and in three years had reached Gainesville. Everyone still expected the road to turn south to Tampa. In June 1860, to the city of Tampa's dismay and disappointment, the Florida Rail Road rolled into Cedar Keys where Yulee had his vast real estate holdings.

The war that caused the interruption in the railroad question was brought about by a band of army surveyors, under Lieut. George L. Hartsuff, who left Fort Myers on December 7, 1855 and came across the home of Seminole chief, Billy Bowlegs in Big Cypress. They began trampling his banana grove, smashing his pumpkins and uprooting the potatoes. When Bowlegs returned he angrily demanded compensation. Instead they insulted him by laughing at him so that he was forced to leave. He

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<sup>45</sup>Florida Republic, (Jacksonville), 19 April 1855.

returned on the 20<sup>th</sup> with a band of Indians and attacked Hartsuff's camp, killing two and wounding four. The army was now provided with an excuse for waging war against the Indians. Since the line of frontier settlements had pressed east into the upper Peace River( now Polk and Hardee Counties), Tampans felt they had a buffer from direct attack even if Fort Brooke manned only a small garrison. Tampa felt that Colonel M. Whit Smith, and his band of volunteers could handle the job. But Hamlin V. Snell's Sarasota Bay home was attacked and John Carney, a ferry operator on the Alafia River, was shot near today's Bloomingdale and Robert Browning's children were killed near Darby in now Pasco County. After Levi Sterling and his wagon party were killed twelve miles east of Tampa, pioneer settlers in outlying areas, especially those near the Peace River, began to feel that Tampa was unwilling to help them. Tampa, they felt, was more interested in protecting its own property. A Manatee justice of the peace, James D. Green stated the case, "The people have asked, begged, demanded ...to get protection for their women and children...and all to no effect."<sup>46</sup>

To make matters worse, an epidemic of measles broke out among the volunteers in March 1857. The conflict that followed consisted of a few minor engagements and became mainly one of pursuit of the Seminole Indians into the swamps and marshes deep in the Everglades and Big Cypress. The army at Fort Brooke moved to Fort Myers leaving the fort to local volunteers who were to be paid \$500 for each

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<sup>46</sup>Florida Peninsular, 25 January 1856.

warrior captured and \$200 for each squaw or boy brought in. Newly elected President James Buchanan decided to try more peaceful efforts to settle the Indian situation. The Seminoles were promised transport to an Arkansas reservation and care for life. By May 1, 1858, a total of 124 Indians were assembled at Fort Myers and placed on the steamer Grey Cloud which made a stop at Egmont Key, where forty-one more Indians who had been captured by the Tampan volunteers were placed aboard.<sup>47</sup>

With the excitement of the conflict ended, the volunteers at Fort Brooke became restless. The unpaid and idle men turned to drinking and general misbehavior. A vigilante committee was formed to control the men and the lewd women who were beginning to frequent the fort. Five persons were hung by the Regulators, the former Know-Nothings, who policed Tampa's municipal affairs. Politically the Regulators opposed the Democrats who controlled the county government. The infighting going on at this time between these groups was interrupted by another attack of yellow fever in the Fall of 1858 which lingered through the Spring of 1859. Now Tampa had nearly one thousand inhabitants who lived in closer proximity than in earlier days. The disease attacked mostly the children. Two hundred and seventy five cases of fever were reported and thirty deaths. Every one who could left Tampa. The Peninsula described it in October, "Our city is almost depopulated, and presents more the appearance of a church yard

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<sup>47</sup>Grismer, 126.

than a thriving business place."<sup>48</sup>

Another tragedy struck the town in July 1860 when McKay and cattleman Jacob Summerlin, called "Uncle Jake", decided to ship cattle from Ballast Point to Havana, Cuba. They bought Captain L. G. Lesley's entire stock, as well as, 2000 head from other nearby ranchers. The newly purchased steamer, *Salvor*, arrived a month and a half late from Chicago. The cattle pen went dry in the summer heat for lack of rain and hundreds of cattle died. Operations had to be shifted to Charlotte Harbor depriving Tampa of a promising business opportunity. Summerlin and McKay erected an eight hundred foot wharf in Charlotte Harbor which reached the deep water channel. They began shipping out cattle in November. McKay not only traded with Cuba but also with the Union troops garrisoned in Key West and the Dry Tortugas which later landed him into trouble.<sup>49</sup> This difficulty was preceded by the March 2<sup>nd</sup> fire at McKay's sawmill. The mill was completely destroyed and timber worth about \$5,000 was burned. The only happy diversions that year for Tampans were provided by Englishman James Butterfield who formed a glee club and cornet band and by W.G. Ferris and O.B. Hart who opened an icehouse in April with the precious cargo brought in from Boston.

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<sup>48</sup>Brown, *Tampa before the Civil War*, 149.

<sup>49</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida's Peace River Frontier* (Orlando: University of Florida Press, 1991) 147.

## Chapter Three

### The Civil War Comes to Tampa

News of the Republican victory in Washington overshadowed local Tampa politics. A meeting called to discuss secession was held on November 26<sup>th</sup>. It was attended by a crowd of four hundred Tampons. Those for secession included the owners of the local newspapers, the county's slave owners, and Tampa's merchants. Judge, O. B. Hart and James McKay were the notable exceptions. Hart "remained firm in his attachment to the Union believing that to be worth more than slavery or party, and proclaimed ... his devotion to the Union and his opposition to all its enemies, in defiance to the secessionists around him."<sup>50</sup> McKay explained his position, "The people from whom I was obtaining cattle, numbering about 150 persons, or families, never could see any benefit they could derive by breaking up the Government, but to the contrary."<sup>51</sup>

When the word came to Tampa on Sunday, January 13, 1861, courtesy of the stage coach driver from Gainesville that Florida had separated from the Union, the

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<sup>50</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., *Tampa, In Civil War and Reconstruction* (Tampa , Florida: University of Tampa Press, 2000), 22.

<sup>51</sup>Tallahassee Sentinel, 24 August 1872



news set off celebrations. The guns from Fort Brooke unoccupied since the end of the Third Seminole War were fired off, speeches were made and the ministers from the three local churches offered prayers. Fireworks were set off as militia Colonel William I. Turner reopened the fort with the "ardent Secessionists armed with the weapons used to fight Billy Bowleg's warriors."<sup>52</sup>

Joseph Robles described his own feelings at the declaration of war after the surrender of Fort Sumter. He did not agree with fighting against the country he had pledged to support when he became a citizen. Later he decided that he had to follow the same course his state had taken.<sup>53</sup> He was not alone in this thinking. When Catherine Hart of Tampa wrote to her sister in Newark she described the spirited meetings in the city to discuss secession to which ladies had been invited. Her husband Ossian, the judge, was also not in favor of leaving the Union but she believed that he would follow his state whatever its course.<sup>54</sup> +Other Tampans may have felt like Dr. Robert Jackson and his wife Nancy who were survivors of the Seminole Wars and had no sympathy with secessionists. They had seen enough of war and viewed their son's eagerness to enlist in the army as the worst trial of their

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<sup>52</sup>Florida Peninsular, 19 January 1861.

<sup>53</sup>Tampapix,1.

<sup>54</sup>Tracy Revels, Grandeur for Her Daughters, Florida's Women During the Civil War (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 10.

lives.<sup>55</sup>

From Florida's 1860 population of 140,424 whites and approximately 61,000 slaves Florida furnished about fifteen thousand to sixteen thousand troops to the Confederate cause.<sup>56</sup> Florida also contributed 1290 white troops to the Union cause and 1,044 to the United States Colored Troops.<sup>57</sup> Most Confederate troops were trained and sent to Virginia or Tennessee: others stayed in Florida to defend the state, to protect the cattle, salt and food supplies needed to feed the Southern army or to defend against the Union blockade. The Robles family, father and three oldest sons, were involved in each of these aspects.

Michael F. Robles Serves in Tennessee

The eldest Robles son, Michael F., born in 1842, enlisted in Tampa on June 6, 1861, as one of the first of the nearly 5,000 enthusiastic Florida enlistees at the start of the war. He joined Captain John T. Leslie's Sunny South Guards in the Tampa Bay

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>56</sup>Thomas Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-65* (Boston: Mifflin and Company, 1901), 25.

<sup>57</sup>Jonh H. Eicher and David J. Eicher, *Florida in the Civil War* ( California:Stanford University Press, 2001), 5.

area who in September were mustered into Confederate service and became Company K, 4<sup>th</sup> Florida Infantry.<sup>58</sup> Leslie was a prominent cattleman and like many prominent men in Southern communities formed a military company at his own expense. Leslie's Tampa troops who were later described as coming from "the best families of the town and vicinity," trained and paraded through Tampa streets while waiting two months to be sworn in.<sup>59</sup> Even the older secessionists formed a volunteer company called, "The Silver Grey" under the leadership of Captain William Cooley.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, some of the Leslie's youngsters were more used to parties than digging the earth works ordered by Col. William I. Turner, commander of Fort Brooke and a veteran of the Second Seminole War. This lack of discipline led to problems. In one instance Leslie and his men refused to obey the direct orders of Turner, a colonel in the state militia.<sup>61</sup> They had seized and refused to return a fishing smack belonging to the controversial James McKay whose business dealings, including selling Florida beef and supplies to Unionists in Key West, placed his loyalty to the Confederacy in question. The high jinks by Leslie's men angered fellow merchant,

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<sup>58</sup>[www.tampabayhistorycenter.org/civwar.htm](http://www.tampabayhistorycenter.org/civwar.htm), 1. Leslie is sometimes spelled "Lesley".

<sup>59</sup>Grismer, 139.

<sup>60</sup> Brown , Tampa In Civil War, 28.

<sup>61</sup>Zack Waters, "Tampa's Forgotten Defenders: The Confederate Defenders of Fort Brooke," Sunland Tribune 17:1 (November 1991): 169.

John Darling and others who wanted the men placed under Turner's authority. McKay wrote to the governor, Madison Starke Perry, and asked him to clarify for Leslie and his men that they were subject to his friend, Turner's authority.<sup>62</sup> Perry agreed but the unit was mustered out before McKay's boat was returned.

These were not the only sort of problems at the first mustering of Confederate troops in Florida. Historian John E. Johns calls this period a "deranged state of affairs" where delays and mix-ups also occurred because most arms, ammunition, tents and even clothing had to be purchased from outside Florida, a problem which persisted throughout the war.<sup>63</sup> In Tampa, Leslie was supposed to be refunded the cost of his unit's clothing and equipment when it was called into actual service. According to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of Rebellion, such reimbursements were not always paid or paid promptly.<sup>64</sup> Leslie's refusal to obey Turner's orders could be the result of, among other things, his frustration over this lack of payment. The two-month holdup before getting into the regular army also meant loss of time toward service for his men and the better

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<sup>62</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., "Tampa's James McKay and the Frustration of Confederate Cattle- supply Operations in South Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70:4 (April 1992): 418.

<sup>63</sup>John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, Florida; University of Florida Press, 1963), 77.

<sup>64</sup>Official Records of Union and Confederate Navies, 1 Series IV 117-19 126.

chances of regular payment to be had in the army.<sup>65</sup>

Tampa's citizens informed Governor Madison Starke Perry in a letter dated June 27, 1861, of the conflict at Fort Brooke and Turner's strict conformity to orders. Col. Turner was replaced in late July by Florida Militia General, Joseph M. Taylor. When McKay headed to Tallahassee to speak to the governor in person, James T. Magbee began a campaign in the Peninsular to have McKay arrested for petty treason. At the August trial McKay's like-minded friends, attorney O. B. Hart, James Gettis, the new Fort Brooke General Joseph M. Taylor and a number of cattlemen pressed the justices to set McKay free on \$10,000 bail. Taylor also arranged for him to pass the new Union blockade and head for Key West.<sup>66</sup> In mid- August Taylor left and Leslie began his short stint as commander of Fort Brooke. In less than two weeks he and his men were transferred to Shaw Point on the south side of the Manatee River. His unit came under the new commander of Fort Brooke, Major Wylde Bowen from Lake City who brought his two companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Florida Infantry formerly of Cedar Keys.

In September Union Major William H. French ordered all families in Key West whose men had joined the Confederacy to leave. The nearest rebel port was Tampa which was already stressed by earlier refugees from Key West. Bowen put the newcomers to work building an artillery battery on an island, three quarter of a mile

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<sup>65</sup>Johns, 37.

<sup>66</sup>Brown, Tampa, In Civil War and Reconstruction, 32

out in Hillsborough Bay. Newly elected Governor John Milton regularized this effort by implementing the Florida Volunteer Coast Guard. The refugees called themselves "The Key West Avengers."<sup>67</sup>

In mid-December Bowen and the Sunny South Guards were ordered to Fernandina to help Gov. Milton meet the request for Confederate troops. The Florida 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment had been formed from the planter elites of northern Florida counties under the command of James P. Anderson and sent to Pensacola under General Braxton Bragg. In the spring of 1862 it was sent to serve under Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles and dispatched to Corinth, Mississippi, to commence an attack on the Federal Army of the Tennessee. The attempt by southern general Albert S. Johnston to attack Grant near Corinth resulted in the order by General P. T. Beauregard to withdraw to Tupelo due to the arrival of General Buell with reinforcements. The Southerners lost some 10,500 soldiers. The Florida 1<sup>st</sup>, along with other southern units suffered horrific casualties at its first major battle. Commander Anderson noted in his battle report that the unit had fought bravely, and despite severe casualties, had brought "new luster to the arms of the State they represented...."<sup>68</sup>

Colonel William Dilworth organized the Florida 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry on July 25, 1861

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>68</sup>Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor, Florida in the Civil War (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 63.

which served in Florida at the Battle of Smyrna. In the summer of 1862, it was ultimately sent to Chattanooga where it joined with the 1<sup>st</sup> and participated in Bragg's invasion of Kentucky. In October, at Perryville, both regiments were decimated, after which they existed in name only.<sup>69</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Florida Regiment under Colonel Bowen, was reorganized after the year of duty in Florida and in May 1862 and was ordered to Corinth, Mississippi, and later reassigned to Mobile. On December 28, the 4<sup>th</sup> along with the Florida 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> were brigaded to General William Preston in General John C. Breckinridge's command and saw heavy action in a skirmish at Lebanon Pike. From December 31 until January 3, 1863, the 4<sup>th</sup> participated in the major battle at Murfreesboro. Although the combined Florida units behaved well in this decisive battle, they suffered horrific casualties.<sup>70</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> entered the battle with 458 soldiers and lost 194 or forty-two percent of its force. After the battle the officers and men were exhausted from the fight but especially from exposure to the heavy winter rains and sleet. The wounded who could walk trailed behind the baggage and ordinance trains as they retreated down the roads toward Shelbyville and Manchester and ultimately Chattanooga. Bragg and his council of generals met to decide whether to abandon Murfreesboro which meant the surrender of seventeen hundred men, the sick and

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>70</sup>Thomas Lawrence Connelly, *Autumn of Glory, The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 61.

wounded and their attending medical officers. If they stayed another twenty-four hours more of the wounded might be evacuated. The generals voted to evacuate immediately. Since continual reports were coming in on January 4<sup>th</sup> that General Rosecrans and the Union army were advancing, Bragg and his staff decided to move south to Shelbyville on the north bank of the Duck River and then on to the Elk River Valley.<sup>71</sup>

It is unfortunate we do not know more of the movements of Michael Robles after the fighting near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where he was reported wounded and a year later in 1864 listed as captured and sent to Camp Chase in the beginning of 1865. No record documents his release and so it was presumed that he died in prison.<sup>72</sup> Following the engagement at Murfreesboro, the Confederates went into winter camp to recuperate and reorganize.<sup>73</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> went on to fight at the battles of Jackson, Tullahoma, and at the Battle of Chattanooga where Florida's 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments joined the Army of Tennessee. The Florida 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment and the Florida Marion Artillery joined in also. Colonel Bowen who had remained with the 4<sup>th</sup> reported 87 men killed at

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>72</sup>David W. Hartman, *Biographical Rosters of Florida's Confederate and Union Soldiers, 1861-1865* (Washington D.C.: Broadfoot Publishing Co. , 1995), 2038.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor, *Florida in the Civil War* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing Co., 2001 ) , 65-68.



Chattanooga.<sup>74</sup> Due to the heavy losses, all the Florida regiments were consolidated under the command of newly appointed general Jesse J. Finley. Later the 4<sup>th</sup> participated in the Battle of Missionary Ridge where 154 of 172 men were killed or wounded.<sup>75</sup> The final battle for Florida troops in Tennessee took place at Nashville in 1864, where although Union casualties were greater, Confederate General John Bell Hood was obliged to retreat into Mississippi knowing the South's death-knell had sounded.<sup>76</sup> It had become a war of attrition for the 4<sup>th</sup>. It had 926 enlisted men and 47 officers when it was organized in June 1862. At the surrender in 1865 only 23 were left.<sup>77</sup>

Company K of the 4<sup>th</sup> Florida Regiment retained Leslie as its captain during the early battles of the Army of Tennessee. He resigned with the rank of Major on March 1, 1863, stating "...I have a large stock of cattle roaming at large, which will necessarily go to destruction unless some attention is given to them." He told his superiors that, "...My private affairs have been neglected and are fast going to ruin."<sup>78</sup> He returned to Tampa to lead a company of Major Charles J. Munnerlyn's

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<sup>74</sup>Wynne, 67.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 74

<sup>78</sup>Brown, Tampa Civil War, 58.

"Cattle Guard Battalion."<sup>79</sup>

While the Robles family in Tampa may or may not have known whether Michael had been wounded or the circumstances of his capture at Murfreesboro, they were certainly aware of the food shortages which the Confederate troops in Tennessee and Virginia were experiencing. As early as 1862 General Braxton Bragg was making forays into Kentucky to feed the Southern army in Tennessee.<sup>80</sup> In April 1863 some three thousand head of Florida cattle were destined for the Army of Tennessee, which improved their situation momentarily.<sup>81</sup> By October officer, Henry Guerin recorded that "starvation stares us in the face, the handwriting is on the wall."<sup>82</sup> Historian Robert A. Taylor wonders, very much like the Robles family back in Tampa might have done, whether the "seeds of defeat were in the lack of beef in Confederate mess tins."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Paul Taylor, *Discovering the Civil War in Florida, A Reader and Guide* (Sarasota, Florida: Pineapple Press, Inc., 2001), 173. See also Waters

<sup>80</sup>Robert A. Taylor, *Rebel Beef*, 15.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

## Joseph Paul Robles Jr. and John G. Join the Cow Cavalry

Joseph Paul Robles, Jr. and his brother John G. joined Colonel Munnerlyn's Battalion in October 1864 and were transferred to Captain W. W. Wall's Company in December. In February of the following year they went to Captain John Parson's troop until the war's end in May. Their late entry into the regular army was probably due to their ages. Joseph Jr. was born on February 14, 1847 and so did not meet the minimum age requirement of eighteen until nearly the end of the war. At sixteen he joined the Florida militia that was less strict about age requirements. His brother, John Godeff, was older, born on December 18, 1844, and according to pension records enlisted at Tampa in November 1862 and joined Company C of the 9<sup>th</sup> Florida Battalion CSA. He stated that he was later detailed to "hunt Beef Cattle in Captain James McKay's Company until the South's surrender."<sup>84</sup>

During the summer and fall of 1861, the Confederate Commissary Department had little difficulty providing rations for the South's expanding military forces. The troops in Virginia and Tennessee consumed the beef obtained from local sources. Supplies were plentiful and most people believed that there were ample means to meet the need of the army and civilians. Texas exported considerable numbers of

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<sup>84</sup>State of Florida Comptroller's Office Letter to Mrs. McCottery regarding the pensions of John G. Robles and Joseph P. Robles, dated June 15, 1953.

beef cattle into the eastern part of the Confederacy. Thirty thousand head reached New Orleans between April and December 1861. Another fifteen thousand were delivered before the city fell to the Union forces in April 1862. Commissary officials claimed to have placed orders for an additional two hundred thousand head, but the delivery was held up because the Confederacy lacked the funds for advanced payment. The beef herds in the lower South partially made up for this dilemma. Florida's beef were not yet needed.<sup>85</sup>

In 1862, however, Confederate reverses on the battlefield placed a strain on the army's ration system. As General Braxton Bragg lost territory in Tennessee so too did he lose easy access to beef which required little or no transportation. Two-thirds of his supply of beef was cut off and his abortive invasion into Kentucky was an attempt to supply his troops with meat. Local army commissaries competing with those contracted by the Bureau in Richmond produced difficulties supplying the army in central Tennessee with food during the winter of 1862-63. After the Battle of Murfreesboro, as we have seen, the Army of Tennessee began a retreat toward Chattanooga. The soldiers nearly starved along the 200 mile march. The commissary had already purchased all the beef along the route and the beef in Atlanta had been shipped to Lee's army in Virginia and new incoming provisions were also earmarked for the Army of Northern Virginia. In March, Commissary Major John

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<sup>85</sup>Robert A. Taylor, *Rebel Storehouse, Florida's Contribution to the Confederacy* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 91.

F. Cummings, one of the best in the Bureau, could only supply about half of the 400,000 pounds of meat Bragg needed. Now it became evident that Florida beef was necessary to feed the Army of Tennessee.<sup>86</sup>

At the beginning of the war Florida beef went to feed the state's troops within Florida's borders. It was purchased and sent to places like the railroad terminus at Cedar Keys, for shipment to all ports in the Confederacy. Price inflation quickly crept in. Beef that sold for six cents a pound in May 1861 cost eight cents by September and remained at that price into 1862.

Florida became the primary source of beef for the Confederate troops east of the Mississippi after the battle of Vicksburg cut off supplies from the Mississippi River and Texas. To facilitate this, Florida was divided into five commissary districts under Major Pleasant W. White. His job of procuring foodstuffs, especially cattle, was exacerbated by the increasing presence of Union troops, pro-Union Floridians, Confederate deserters and draft evaders who attempted to interrupt the transport of cattle herds from central and southern Florida. By 1864, it was clear that troops were needed to protect isolated areas and defend against the Union army which now occupied Key West, Charlotte Harbor's Useppa Island, Cedar Keys, and Fort Myers.<sup>87</sup> These Florida troops needed to be able to live off the land and be familiar with the

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<sup>86</sup>Robert A. Taylor, "Rebel Beef: Florida Cattle and the Confederate Army, 1862-1864," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67:1 (July 1988): 17.

<sup>87</sup>Brown, *Tampa's James McKay*, 427.

territory they were patrolling.

The controversial Captain James McKay, a Tampa resident and self-serving blockade runner, had been appointed commander of the South Florida Fifth Commissary District . He wrote to Major White on March 25 that "the government is certainly very blinded to their interests in leaving this county as they do."<sup>88</sup> McKay hired additional men to protect herding parties and to do picket duty. He sent another letter through Major White to the Secretary of War, James A. Seddon, proposing the formation of a special unit that would gather and protect the herds of cattle destined to feed Confederate troops.<sup>89</sup>

The proposed and so-named Cow Cavalry was not a totally new concept in Florida. During the Second Seminole War, a body known as the "Cracker Cavalry" was formed. These recruits were locals from eastern and southern Florida and good horsemen, as well as good shots. McKay had these men in mind when he made his suggestion.<sup>90</sup> Major White submitted the request to Richmond and it was approved by the War Department. Charles Munnerlyn was Jefferson Davis' choice for command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Florida Special Cavalry. Munnerlyn, with second in command Captain William Footman, set about finding suitable enlisted men for

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<sup>88</sup>James McKay to W. White, March 25, 1864, White Papers Collection of the Florida Historical Society at the University of South Florida.

<sup>89</sup>Robert A. Taylor, "Cow Cavalry: Munnerlyn's Battalion in Florida, 1864-1865," Florida Historical Quarterly 65:2 (1986): 197.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 198.

their new unit. Some came from General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee. Sixty men came south under Lieutenant Spenser and reported in at Live Oak. Other volunteers came from the various Commissary Bureaus at Tampa and Quincy and finally from all over the state. Nine companies were formed with local men serving as officers. A number of veterans from units like J. J. Dickinson's cavalry added skill and experience to the battalion.

By April, the Cow Cavalry took to the field, including John G. Robles who had enlisted in 1862 in Company "C" of the 9<sup>th</sup> Florida Battalion of the regular Confederate army but joined Captain James McKay's company "to hunt Beef Cattle until the surrender."<sup>91</sup> His younger brother Joseph, not yet eighteen, enlisted in October 1864 in Captain L. G. Leslie's (John T.'s father) company. He had been serving in Brooksville in the state militia since his sixteenth birthday.<sup>92</sup> Mostly he was performing guard duty on cotton supplies at Bayport. He said he was never under fire except for the occasional shelling by Yankee blockade ships who wanted to remind the citizens of Tampa that they were around.<sup>93</sup>

Captain McKay, John Robles' company commander, continued to believe that an army was needed to protect the cattle ranges of south Florida from the large numbers of Confederate deserters and Florida Unionists who congregated around the

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<sup>91</sup>Pension Letter

<sup>92</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 1 March 1951.

<sup>93</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 15 February 1940.

Union held base at Fort Myers. Something had to be done and soon to reduce the influence of the fort's forces which was harassing the cattle supply from southern Florida. McKay thought that Munnerlyn's force should be further strengthened against the possible threat that the Indians of south Florida might join the Unionists at the fort. The Seminoles, however, proved to be completely pacified by Confederate gifts of woolen cloth and two dozen muskets.

More and more south Florida ranchers refused to sell their cattle to the Confederacy, either because they were saving them as a future investment, did not want to risk driving them to distant markets, or were reluctant to accept Confederate currency. They began to use the upper sections of the Myakka and Kissimmee Rivers as hiding places for their stock. Rustlers and renegades also began operating in these areas. Patrols by the Cow Cavalry had to become more aggressive to prevent this loss of cattle for the Confederate cause.

McKay's arguments to strengthen the Cow Cavalry Battalion were proved valid when Union forces landed a force of four hundred regulars, a group of ex-deserters and a contingent of black troops on the coast of Hernando County in July 1864. They proceeded inland towards Brooksville after brushing aside a Cow Cavalry picket force and taking eleven prisoners. The diary of Sergeant Thomas B. Ellis relates how he dashed off to warn Leslie's company of the attack. A fight broke out and the Cow Cavalry got the worst of it and was forced to retreat. After the skirmish the Federals retraced their steps back to the coast and re-embarked on their waiting



vessels.<sup>94</sup> Prominent families in the area besides McKay formed or re-strengthened armed companies to step up the policing of the cattle ranges. These included the Hendrys, Bounts, and Summerlins who added men to the unit formed by Leroy G. Leslie.<sup>95</sup> His company consisted of one hundred twelve members whose base camp was at Brooksville and four picket posts who were supposed to be added security for Hernando County. The unit including the not quite eighteen-year-old Joseph Robles, whose duty was as he described it, "guarding cotton shipped down the Weekiwachee River to Bayport where it was loaded on a vessel that ran the Yankee blockade."<sup>96</sup> A veteran who fought with the Cow Cavalry E. G. Wilder of Socrum, Florida, described in 1911 how the Union forces in Fort Myers were a "great annoyance to our citizens north of the fort. Their ravages on one occasion reached as far north as Bayport, where Capt. John Lesley was wounded, and is carrying a crooked arm today."<sup>97</sup>

The Cow Cavalry continued to patrol the trails through the fall and winter of 1864 and began to establish their authority in the Peace River valley and on the cattle ranges stretching from the Kissimmee to the Caloosahatchee River. By early August,

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<sup>94</sup>Robert a. Taylor, *Cow Cavalry*, 205.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>96</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 15 February 1940.

<sup>97</sup>Paul Taylor, 195. "Escapade in Souther Florida" was originally published in *Confederate Veteran*, Vol.19, 1911.

fears of Unionist attack had diminished so much that William J. Watkins at Bartow could swear that his family was "as safe as any where in the Confederacy." Two months later the commissary general reported that the Cow Cavalry "has checked desertions and restored the confidence of the people." The same month Captain Childs at Fort Myers acknowledged that the Confederates were actually engaged in driving cattle and noted that they have "established small picket guards from Peace Creek through Fort Thompson."<sup>98</sup> As the Cow Cavalry force strengthened, more thought was given to a direct attack on Fort Myers.<sup>99</sup> Exactly where John Robles patrolled as a member of McKay's company is not recorded but a Union scouting report dated December 9th placed Captain McKay with a force of Confederate drivers below the Withlacoochee River. John Robles may have been in this group.

In preparation for the attack on Fort Myers around the second week of February 1865, Major William Footman led a force out of Tampa and assembled between 150 and 275 Confederate troops near Jacob Summerlin's house at Fort Meade. They consisted of the companies of F. A. Hendry, John T. Lesley, Leroy G. Lesley and others. On February 19, Footman stopped his column near the Caloosahatchee River. After an inspirational talk from Footman, the troops launched a skiff which capsized, ruining most of their artillery ammunition. Eight hours later they finally got

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<sup>98</sup>War of Rebellion : A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 4, Vol.4, 730. Childs to Bowers, October 24, 1864, Dept and District of Key West, 1861-68 Record Group 393

<sup>99</sup>Brown, Peace River Frontier, 172

everything across the rain- swollen river. The planned night attack was canceled when, as a veteran described it, "The (rain) water rose up about a foot deep all over the face of the earth. We could not tell where the road was, much less travel."<sup>100</sup> The troops left a supply train at Fort Thompson, a deserted Seminole War post on the Caloosahatchee River near present-day LaBelle.

The next morning, Lieutenant William M. Hendry, with Frank Saxon, Gideon Zipprer, Benjamin F. Blount and others attacked and overpowered a Union picket post at Billy's Branch, one mile east of the fort. They captured Edward Ashley, James F. Barnes, Charles C. Whidden and William Bush. A short while later Francis M. Williams and John Williams were seized doing laundry detail at a nearby pond. William McClenithan Jr. and James Whidden were chased down while tending cattle. Black Sargent Henry Sanders refused to surrender and was shot and killed near the washing pond.<sup>101</sup> The element of surprise being lost by the sound of the gunfire, Footman demanded the surrender of the fort. Captain John F. Bartholf refused on behalf of Captain James Doyle, the fort's commander. At 1:10 in the afternoon Footman opened fire. A Union skirmish line composed of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Florida Cavalry under the command of Lieutenant William McCullough returned fire. When nothing was accomplished the Confederates withdrew to a nearby cow pen where they killed

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<sup>100</sup>Fort Meade Reader, 24 February 1916.

<sup>101</sup>Brown, Florida's Peace River Frontier, 173.

some of the animals for their supper.<sup>102</sup> It was estimated that the Confederates suffered forty casualties compared to only four Union losses among the black troops. A veteran of the campaign, E. G. Wilder, described the ignominious return trip to Tampa, with "scant supply of horse feed or rations. Some of our boys ate palmetto buds... We killed some beef, broiled and burned it to a crisp and ate it without salt."<sup>103</sup>

Fort Myers had been occupied by Union forces since January 1864. Fort commander Henry Crane had requested men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> U. S. Colored Troops from their station at Key West. He requested these disciplined soldiers to support the fort's defenses. James Doyle, Union Commander during the attack, later praised the actions of black Captains Childs and Bartholf in the encounter.<sup>104</sup> Crane also wished to curry favor with General Woodbury who wanted more black troops in south Florida. The visibility of black faces in Florida was as he put it to place "prickly pear cactus under the Confederate saddle." He also succeeded in bridling Confederate slave holders who feared that their slaves would run away to join the Union forces.<sup>105</sup> McKay had used these same fears to stir up what was probably the ill-advised attack

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>103</sup>Paul Taylor, 195, 196 The article by E. G. Wilder was originally published in Confederate Veteran Magazine , Vol.19, 1911.

<sup>104</sup>Paul Taylor, 198, 199. Official Report Series 1 vol. 49/1 February 20, 1865. ( Report of Captain James Doyle, 110<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry).

<sup>105</sup>Irvin Solomon, "Southern Extremities: The Significance of Fort Myers in the Civil War," Florida Historical Quarterly 72: 2(1993): 144.

on the well-defended fort and to enhance his own ability to collect cattle from south Florida ranchers. His motives were always in question since it was never certain whom he was going to sell the cattle to: the Union, the Confederacy or Cuba.

Historian Irvin D. Solomom points out that the Cow Cavalry formed the nucleus of the local militia in southern Florida and through a "quasi-guerrilla and vigilante" campaign remained the primary threat to both Union forces and Confederate turncoats. After the Battle of Fort Myers, however, Solomon believes that the Cow Cavalry "dissolved into a band of disparate, independent-minded units of local rather than regional orientation."<sup>106</sup> Another assessment of the Battle of Fort Myers views the Cow Cavalry as effective in protecting livestock and opposing small-scale Federal and deserter expeditions, but lacking the power to dislodge the Union forces from south Florida.<sup>107</sup>

Joseph Robles, Jr. remarked that while he was in Fort Myers, he predicted the end of the war, "The war'll be over in ten days, I told them, and they thought I was crazy. And when I got back to Brooksville it was over."<sup>108</sup> It is strange that he should have been at the fort at this time because the Federals evacuated the fort before the end of the war probably in mid-March. He may have wanted to revisit the remains

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>107</sup>Rodney E. Dillon, Jr., "The Battle of Fort Myers," Tampa Bay History 5:2 ( Fall/Winter 1983): 33.

<sup>108</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 2 January 1949.

of the 1858 fort which boasted fifty-seven structures including a breast works, block houses, three major field pieces, officer quarters, an administration building, a three story hospital, a blacksmith shop, two stores, stockade and a thousand foot-long wharf.<sup>109</sup>

#### Joseph Paul Robles, Sr. Goes on Patrol

The boy's father, Joseph Paul Robles, born on September 15, 1817, fought in the Seminole Indian Wars and received wounds which forced him out of the service. He was too old for the Confederate army when the war began. The Confederate Conscription Act passed on April 16, 1862, subjected all white males aged 18 to 35 to the military draft. Only five months later, however, the upper age limit became 45. Gov. Milton became concerned that many Florida conscripts would be sent out of the state leaving Florida unprotected and proposed an amendment to say that persons over 35 should be kept in the state for local defense.<sup>110</sup>

An example of these early volunteers for local protection is the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment Florida Volunteers who were stationed at Cedar Keys to protect the wharf and

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<sup>109</sup>Solomon, 131.

<sup>110</sup>Johns, 116.

terminus of the Florida Railroad, several small vessels for blockade running and the citizens of Cedar Keys, some 80 to 100 people. The small force consisted of a lieutenant and twenty-two men whom Union Brigadier-General J. H. Trapier described as "a sort of police force."<sup>111</sup> The small Confederate garrison was caught by surprise.<sup>112</sup> The better part of the force had been sent to protect the Atlantic terminus of the Florida Railroad. The Union steamer Hatteras entered Cedar Keys and destroyed the railroad depot, railroad wharf, seven freight cars, telegraph office a turpentine warehouse, four schooners, three sloops, a ferry barge and abandoned Confederate defenses. In his report to Flag officer W.W. McKean, commander of the Union's Gulf Blockading Squadron, commander George Emmons said no resistance was offered by a small Confederate garrison.<sup>113</sup> Cedar Keys became a Union port and the citizens of the Keys were required to take an oath not to take up arms against the Union. This bombardment was part of the beginning of the Union naval blockade of Florida's west coast. Cedar Keys represented a strategic port, as did Apalachicola which was one of Florida's busiest cotton exporting areas. The USS Montgomery closed this port in June 1861. Governor Milton realized that he did not have adequately trained troops to defend Florida's long coastline. Volunteers when

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<sup>111</sup>OfficialRecords of theUnion and Cconfederate Navies, Series I, Vol.17, January 16, 1862, (Naval Bombardment of Cedar Key).

<sup>112</sup>Charles Fishburne, *The Cedar Keys in the Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861-1876* (Cedar Key, Florida: Sea Hawk Publications, 1982), 4.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

properly trained were being sent out of state to more vital areas of the Confederacy.<sup>114</sup>

Since the number of volunteers for early service was high and meat supplies became a priority in Florida, the Confederate Congress passed an amendment in October 1862 to exempt one man from the draft for every 500 herd of cattle. McKay and Summerlin received authority to decide upon the exemptions for south Florida.<sup>115</sup> On May 1, 1863, the Confederate Congress was further obliged to make more exceptions to keep food production up. One white male , overseer or owner, must reside on a plantation where slaves worked. The Florida General Assembly that met in the fall of 1862 realized that the state militia was spread so thin that it could not defend saltworks. Their defense was left to the salt industry itself. All salt workers were organized into military companies enrolled and commanded by first lieutenants appointed by the governor and furnished with guns and ammunition by the state and became subject to the articles of war.<sup>116</sup>

Joseph Paul Robles, Sr., the feisty one hundred thirty-five pound, nearly 45 year old Spaniard, took advantage of the practice of letting boys of fourteen and men past 45 be volunteers in army service.<sup>117</sup> He became superintendent of the vital salt

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<sup>114</sup>Wynne and Taylor, 28.

<sup>115</sup>Brown, Tampa, In the civil War and Reconstruction, 59

<sup>116</sup>Florida Acts (1862), Resolution Number 30, 77.

<sup>117</sup>Covington, vol.1, 143.



works near Tampa Bay and did voluntary service for the local Home Guard.<sup>118</sup> Covington describes Charles J. Munnerlin's Cow Cavalry as sort of a "home guard unit" because they slept "in their beds at home."<sup>119</sup> This appears to describe the situation for local volunteer groups. His obituary of February 13, 1907, in the Morning Tribune noted that Robles also served as a volunteer on a blockade runner where, " He was captured while aboard this craft, and spent a time in a Northern prison. Upon being released he returned to this county and began his long residence on North Central Avenue."<sup>120</sup> Since records of volunteer groups and blockade runners are not always available, there is no written verification of these stories.

There is no doubt, however, that in the winter of 1863 Joseph Paul Robles Sr. exhibited his own brand of courage and patriotism. He was on guard duty at the salt works owned by Captain James McKay at Frazier's Beach at the head of Old Tampa Bay. The works had been attacked a few months before in mid October when Commander A. A. Semmes sent eighty-five Union troops from the S.S. Adela and the U.S.S. gunboat Tahoma to land on Gadsden Point and move six miles up the Hillsborough River to destroy McKay's blockade runners, the Scottish Chief and the Kate Dale. The landing party removed one hundred and fifty-six bales of cotton from the Scottish Chief and eleven bales from the Kate Dale before they set them

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<sup>118</sup>Hartman, 1981.

<sup>119</sup>James Covington, *The Story of Southwestern Florida*, Vol. 1, 146.

<sup>120</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 13 February 1907.

aflame.<sup>121</sup> Before Semmes' crewmen left they destroyed the salt plant as well.<sup>122</sup>

When Robles saw a Union gunboat anchor at approximately where the Gandy Bridge is now, he must have known that the crew of eighteen to twenty men entering the launch were coming to check whether the works had been rebuilt. Ten or twelve of them came ashore to do another wrecking job. Robles concealed himself in one of the old abandoned steam boilers used to evaporate the salt water which had been destroyed on the previous raid. When the landing party started up the beach he "cut loose with his heavy caliber double-barreled rifle and brought down two and wounded several others with the first discharge."<sup>123</sup> The men in the boat backed off the beach stranding the shore party. Robles told the eight survivors to drop their weapons and lined them up for the march back to the commander of the Home Guards stationed in the Orange Grove Hotel in Tampa.<sup>124</sup> All the while during the march his muzzle-loading rifle was empty, but his captives didn't know that and went along passively. In his "Pioneer Family" column, D. B. McKay recalled seeing that old boiler out on the beach when he was a young man on hunting and fishing expeditions in the area.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>New York Herald, 9 November 1863.

<sup>122</sup>Grismer, 146.

<sup>123</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 10 January 1954.

<sup>124</sup>Hartman, 1981.

<sup>125</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 25 August 1946.

Union Rear Admiral Cornelius K. Stribling issued a warning to his captains about being reckless in attempting to damage enemy salt works and suggested caution in the future. He must have had an event like Robles' in mind when he said that such raids "are too frequently... undertaken without due caution and without regard to consequences in the hope of doing something to get... prominently into notice."<sup>126</sup> Not only were these raids for propaganda purposes but also to occupy boat crews during the long periods of inactivity on blockade duty. As Joseph Robles Jr. noted the Union wanted to establish its presence in Tampa Bay, "That they were around."<sup>127</sup>

Salt was vital to the Confederacy, to make food palatable and for preserving beef, pork, fish and butter and for pickling. Cattle, horses and mules needed it in their diets and tanners needed it to cure hides for leather. The Confederate coasts of Florida became dotted with salt works as the Union blockade cut off salt supplies from West Virginia and the 3.3 million bushels per year that Floridians imported from New Orleans.<sup>128</sup> Salt works were frequently established at the head of small islets or bays, from one to five miles inland from the open Gulf or the deep water of a large bay so that they would escape detection by blockading vessels and deep

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<sup>126</sup>Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of Rebellion, (Washington DC :Government Printing Office ,1901 ), Series1 17:775-76 780.

<sup>127</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 14 February 1940.

<sup>128</sup>George E. Buker, Blockades, Refugees and Contrabands, Civil War on Florida's Gulf Coast, 1861-1865 (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 46.

drought gunboats which could not penetrate the upper islets. The Tahoma had already attacked salt works at Lake Ocala, St. Andrews Bay, St. Marks, and Goose Creek.<sup>129</sup> These were the largest works of the eastern Gulf, producing 130 bushels of salt a day.<sup>130</sup>

On October 4, 1862, Lieutenant Earl English, commander of the gunboat Somerset, raided some salt works near Cedar Keys on the mainland of Suwannee Bay near Station Number Four of the Florida Railroad. The commander ran his vessel as close in as the shallow water would allow and fired shells at the salt works until a white flag was raised. The small boat under the command of Acting Master Dennison was launched to investigate. It received fire from several dozen men behind a building flying the white flag. The Union crew returned fire but were soon recalled by Commander English as the tide was ebbing. When J. C. Howell arrived in the Tahoma a joint assault was planned for October 6<sup>th</sup>. At that time 111 men set out in eight small boats under the command of Lieut. Commander Crosman of the Tahoma. The working party succeeded in destroying several barrels of salt and some boats as well as capturing a launch and a large flatboat. The houses and other buildings were set afire and howitzer shells were put through two very thick cast iron kettles and two wrought iron boilers destroying an estimated salt making capacity of

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<sup>129</sup>Johns, 132.

<sup>130</sup>Ella Lonn, "The Extent and Importance of Federal Naval Raids on Salt-Making in Florida." Florida Historical Society Quarterly 10:4 (Apr., 1932): 174.

150 bushels a day.<sup>131</sup>

These raids, at the time, were considered by the Union's East Gulf Blockading Squadron to be harassing actions, raids of opportunity, not planned attacks. The commander of the Somerset assessed them as, "The rebels here needed a lesson and they have had it."<sup>132</sup>

What began to make the East Gulf Blockade Squadron realize how important salt was to the Confederacy was the inventories of cargoes from captured blockade runners. Throughout 1863 these cargoes revealed the critical products needed by the South. The Ann captured off Indian River, carried coffee, matches, small items and seventy-six bags of salt. The Anna, taken off Cedar Keys, carried a cargo of coffee, soap and seventy-five bags of salt. The schooner, Mattie, seized at sea held coffee, dry goods and ten bags of salt. In October, the British schooner, Director, caught running into Charlotte Harbor yielded twenty small bags of salt and a barrel of rum. The sloop Hancock' captured off Tampa Bay, was running rum, borax and twenty sacks of salt.<sup>133</sup>

In early December 1863 the East Gulf Blockading Squadron began organized attacks on saltworks from St. Andrew Bay area southward. By the end of 1863, the works destroyed both by the Union and by the Confederacy who did not want them

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<sup>131</sup>Fishburne 13, Lonn, 169.

<sup>132</sup>Official Records of Union and Confederate Navies, Series I, Vol.17, 318.

<sup>133</sup>Buker, Blockades, 53.

falling into enemy hands amounted to a potential loss of 15,595 bushels of salt per day valued at six million dollars.<sup>134</sup> Because of their value and the intrinsic need for salt, the Confederate government was willing to rebuild most of the works especially those at St. Andrews Bay. The Squadron was then obliged to destroy salt works repeatedly and to return again and again to see if they were being rebuilt.

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<sup>134</sup>Johns, 133.

## Chapter Four

### Conditions in Tampa during the Civil War

The Robles household must have been disappointed to see some of Tampa's leading citizens leaving the city at the beginning of the war. Leroy G. Lesley was selling his businesses and moving to Hernando County, as was William B. Hooker and Christopher L. Friebele who closed their Tampa stores and reopened in Brooksville. John Jackson moved his family some ten or fifteen miles out of town where food could be grown. Others moved in with relatives who lived in remote areas where game was plentiful. Unionists left seeking U.S. military protection. After Egmont Key was taken over by Union troops in the summer of 1861, it became a refugee camp for families who did not wish to remain in Tampa and support the Confederate cause. They remained there until ships were available to take them to Key West or the North. As many as 200 escaped slaves fled to the key at one time in 1863.<sup>135</sup> Many young men, like James McKay, Jr. and Peninsular publisher William J. Spencer and editor Simon Turman, were eager to serve the Confederacy even before the conscription act. They left Tampa early to find a unit in which to enlist. After the conscription act was passed, dozens of eligible men left Tampa to sign up with what was to become Company B, 7<sup>th</sup> Florida Infantry.

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<sup>135</sup>Grismer, 140.

All these departures left Tampa populated mostly by white women, children and older men and a ever declining number of slaves. Slaves moved away with their masters or fled to Egmont Key. The only men of fighting age were those garrisoned at Fort Brooke. Conditions for the remaining citizens deteriorated with the collapse of the local economy and the further pressure on local food and supplies caused by the influx of refugees from Key West and the effectiveness of Federal blockade imposed on the port of Tampa . In March 1862 the New York Herald reported Tampa's plight, "The state of things...is fearful...They are literally starving."<sup>136</sup>

President Lincoln issued the naval blockade of the rebellious Southern states on April 19, 1861. At that time the US Navy had four ships to blockade 3500 miles of coastline from Alexandria to the Rio Grande. During the first year of the war, 52 ships were built and 136 purchased. The blockade fleet utilized everything from ferries to fishing boats. Volunteers from civilian marine occupations were commissioned to work along with regular naval officers. The southern coastline was divided into squadrons. From Key West to just east of Pensacola became the East Gulf Squadron.<sup>137</sup> The first Tampan captured running the Union blockade was Captain James McKay who was on a return trip from Key West where he had gone after his Tampa trial for treason. His steamer, the *Salvor*, on its return from Havana for repairs was stopped on October 14, 1861 by the USS *Keystone State* and brought

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<sup>136</sup>New York Herald, 24 March 1862.

<sup>137</sup>Buker, Blockade, 1,2.



into Key West. It was discovered that his ship contained 600 pistols and 500,000 percussion caps. McKay became a prisoner of war, his steamer confiscated and his slaves freed. He was sent to Washington D. C. and through the personal intervention of President Lincoln he was allowed to take an oath of allegiance and was paroled. On April 21, 1862, he was back in Key West and allowed to return to Tampa. He obtained a new side-wheel steamer, the Scottish Chief, and from that summer until October 1863 made six runs through the blockade. At first he carried beef to Havana but as beef became more vital to the Confederacy and the Florida legislature outlawed the export of cattle, he shifted to cotton.<sup>138</sup> For the relief of the remaining Tampans he also brought in medicines, rum, foodstuffs and other supplies. The relief offered to Tampa by McKay and the other local blockade runners so rankled Union blockaders that on several occasions Union ships entered Tampa Bay to reek mischief and remind Tampa citizens that they were being blockaded. On April 14, 1862, Lieutenant William B. Eaton who had begun the blockade, preceded up the harbor in the USS schooner Beuregard and anchored off Big Grassy Island just one and a half miles from Fort Brooke and out of range of her guns. He demanded the unconditional surrender of the fort or he would bombard the town after twenty-four hours during which time non-combatants would be permitted to leave. Major Robert Brenham Thomas who commanded Company F, 4<sup>th</sup> Florida Infantry ("Lafayette Rangers") and the Key West Avengers (who became

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<sup>138</sup>Buker, Blockade, 37.

Company K, 7<sup>th</sup> Florida Infantry) at Fort Brooke refused to surrender but removed the women and children to safety. There is some question whether Eaton bombarded the town as he had threatened.<sup>139</sup> Some say the damage was slight and he later wrote a letter of apology.<sup>140</sup>

Major John W. Pearson who had raised his own company of volunteers, the Oklawaha Rangers, replaced Thomas at Fort Brooke just in time to face the not unexpected arrival of Union warships into Hillsborough Bay. On June 30 the ironclad gunboats, U.S.S. Sagamore and the Ethan Allen under the command of Lieutenant Bigelow, came to anchor broadside to the fort and opened her ports. She sent a launch bearing twenty-one men bearing a flag of truce. Pearson took a boat and sixteen men and met the Federal forces on the bay and rejected the demand for unconditional surrender, saying he did not "understand the meaning of the word surrender."<sup>141</sup> The Union officers after allowing time for the civilians to evacuate the town began the shelling of Tampa at 6:00 p.m. and continued it for one hour. They continued the attack next morning for two hours with an 11 inch gun and rifles, inflicted no significant damage and then suddenly just sailed away.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Brown, Tampa, In Civil War. 40.

<sup>140</sup>Grismer, 141, 142.

<sup>141</sup>Zack Waters, "Florida's Confederate Guerrillas: John W. Pearson and the Oklawaha Rangers, Florida Historical Quarterly 70:2 (October 1991):140.

<sup>142</sup>Waters in Paul Taylor, 177., Brown, Tampa, 52.

Angered by the June 30<sup>th</sup> attack and the ramming of a blockade runner in Tampa Bay by two Federal gunboats Pearson got his revenge on March 27, 1863. When the Federal gunboat Pursuit appeared in the harbor, Pearson dispatched some of his men to Gadsden Point disguised in dresses and in blackface to lure the sailors ashore. The Union sailors took the bait and when were in range Pearson's men emerged from the woods and opened fire, wounding four sailors and incensing the Unionists. They again bombarded the town, but as before little damage was done.<sup>143</sup>

On Christmas Eve 1863 Tampans were given another reminder of the Union's presence and a warning not to interfere with the Union forces around Fort Myers. The U.S.S. warship Tahoma anchored off Fort Brooke and fired off one shell just before midnight. The next morning after fine-tuning its trajectory it bombarded the fort and the town at two hour intervals.

The next bombardment came that Fall during the invasion by Commander Semmes. The shelling from the eleveninch Dahlgren gun (two hundred pounder) on the Tahoma and the two twenty pound Parrot guns, one twelve pound and four twenty-four pound smooth bores on the Adela was intense. A shell was said to have blown the dinner off the table of a Miss Crane.<sup>144</sup> The bombardment lasted all day

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<sup>143</sup>Zack Waters, " Florida's Confederate Guerrillas," 141.

<sup>144</sup>Julian Yonge, " The Federal Raid on Tampa Bay, October, 1863," Florida Historical Quarterly 4 (January 1926): 135-7.

and later it was found that one hundred twenty-six shells had been fired at Fort Brooke. A later short bombardment of two hours took place by the Tahoma on December 24, 1863.

In another show of force in early May 1864, Federal forces actually took control of Tampa for two days. The town seemed empty to them because all the men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were away fighting.<sup>145</sup> The blasé attitude towards the bombardments adopted by Robles and the citizens of Tampa was noted by a New York Herald reported: "Some of the rebels would dodge behind the trees when the shells were fired and after they had exploded would come out again evidently much pleased with the fireworks."<sup>146</sup> Despite their brave fronts, Tampa's wives, mothers, sisters and sweethearts not only faced the loss of their beloved men from war and disease in far off places, they faced deprivation at home. Women's lives in Tampa were greatly affected by the widespread shortages brought about by the blockade. Luxuries and often the basic necessities of life were curtailed. Candles were used sparingly because of the shortage of tallow. Clothing became scarce. New dresses were unavailable due to the cost of cotton. Some women made-do with hats made from palmetto fronds. Shoes sold at fantastic prices if they could be found at all.

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<sup>145</sup>After November 1862 the upper age limit for enlistment in the Confederate army was raised from thirty-five to forty-five.

<sup>146</sup>Waters in Paul Taylor, 177 ff.

Due to the blockade food items like mustard, black pepper, tea, coffee, rum, imported fruits, and white sugar disappeared from tables. Rice, molasses and bread baked with baking soda were no longer available. In the Tampa Bay area and elsewhere in Florida, substitutes could be found for familiar products. In north Florida "Cream Nectar" was made of cotton seeds soaked for twelve to twenty four hours and dried. The beans were ground in a coffee mill and prepared like coffee. If one-third real coffee and hot milk were used, the brew," cannot be told from real java," an article in the Florida Sentinel of April 22,1862 told readers. <sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>Johns, 176.

## Chapter Five

### The Robles Family and Tampa after the Civil War

The war's end came suddenly to Brooksville. "There was a stir that day," Robles was quoted as saying in a Tampa Morning Tribune article which announced, "Tampa Confederate Veteran, Joseph P. Robles, Dies at 104." "People were running up and down the streets with dismay and disbelief on their faces. After entering town, I asked someone, 'What's the matter?' The answer was, 'We've stopped fighting.' Next day we were discharged and we scattered for home."<sup>148</sup>

Mayor and newspaper publisher, D. B. McKay remembered how Robles planted the first avocados and pears, as well as, chestnuts and other fruits on his Tampa homestead on the site of the present Robles Park.<sup>149</sup> Many of his exotic ornamental trees can still be seen in the park.<sup>150</sup> He was also a good mechanic and built his own wagons and carts and most of his farm implements, including a cane-grinding machine. He used hickory logs for cylinders and cut cogs that meshed perfectly. The

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<sup>148</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 1 March 1951.

<sup>149</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 10 January 1954.

<sup>150</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 3 August 1951.

grinder performed successfully for years.<sup>151</sup> He was best remembered by his son for his five-foot tall muscular frame and the way he rode his old piebald mare to Masonic Lodge meetings. As he rode he would whistle or sang a tune, usually a hymn but occasionally a Confederate war song which could be heard half a mile before he came into sight.<sup>152</sup> When Robles died on February 12, 1907, at age ninety, his obituary described how he had lived for forty years near his orange groves that stood beside the large pond which was later named for him.<sup>153</sup> An elementary school near the lake was also named for him according to his great grand-daughter Mary Louise Smith.<sup>154</sup> He was buried with full Masonic honors with Senator J. E. Crane officiating. Honorary pall bearers included Captain J. T. Leslie and Captain James McKay, the men he and his sons had served with.

Among his many children, five of whom were boys was the Cow Cavalry son also named Joseph Paul, but called "Uncle Dick," born in Benton County on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1847. After the war "Uncle Dick" lived on his father's property in Hernando County and later moved back to Tampa.<sup>155</sup> He married Martha Boyett on

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<sup>151</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 9 June 1946.

<sup>152</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 11 July 1954..

<sup>153</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 13 February 1907.

<sup>154</sup>Personal History, Florida Center for Community Design, Mary Louise Smith.

<sup>155</sup><http://www.pascocemeteries.org/biojoseph.html>

February 5, 1870.<sup>156</sup> He became the proud father of twelve children, fifty-six grand children, fifty-three great-grandchildren or thereabouts. He was not quite sure of the number.<sup>157</sup> As he got on in years and was interviewed by the press he boasted that he had never left the state and demonstrated his pride in the 160 acres of land Joseph Robles staked out was several miles north of town, at Route #8, Box 911 in Tampa .<sup>158</sup>

“Tampa was just a cross-roads” then he told a reporter for the Tampa Daily Tribune in an interview on his 101<sup>st</sup> birthday.<sup>159</sup> “See these old cedar trees, I planted them when I decided to make my home here.” Later he recalled that he had sold some of the land off but had given most of it to his children.<sup>160</sup> He further described his tract as “a happy land- after the hostile Indians were subdued and some of them (were) shipped to reservations in the West.” “Game and fish were plentiful and any man who was willing to could raise all the food his family and his stock and poultry needed on a few acres.”<sup>161</sup> “We always had plenty of hogs and cattle and game and good garden and field victuals.” He reminisced during an interview on his ninety-third

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 1 March 1951.

<sup>158</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., Tampa, Before the Civil War (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1999), 100.

<sup>159</sup>Tampa Daily Tribune, 14 February 1948.

<sup>160</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 9 June 1946.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid.



birthday.<sup>162</sup> He talked about the deer, turkey and other game that used to roam about his house.<sup>163</sup> One of the things he prized, he said on his 102nd birthday was the testimonial certificate given to him on his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday by county officials and other old Tampa friends. It occupied a prominent place in his small house along with a picture of his parents and a family bible.<sup>164</sup>

He was the last Confederate veteran from Tampa when he died at age 104 in 1951. He was among the last twenty Confederate veterans to still be living and among the last thirty-eight Civil War veterans.<sup>165</sup> The last Confederate veteran of Florida, William A. (Uncle Bill) Lundy died at age 109 on September 1, 1957 in Crestview.<sup>166</sup>

During Reconstruction the Robles family was occasionally in the news. "Uncle Dick's" brother, John G. was elected marshal in June 1866 to get "tough" with Negroes who caused trouble and were caught stealing, and he did. After the trouble abated taxes were levied to pay the marshal a salary.<sup>167</sup> In 1873 he was elected marshal again. In the 1870s Tampa was steadily losing population but was

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<sup>162</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 15 February 1940.

<sup>163</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 2 January 1949.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Pasco cemeteries

<sup>166</sup>Tampa Morning Tribune, 3 September 1957.

<sup>167</sup> Grismer, 154.

expanding in size. This anomaly was due to the influx of northerners with money enough to buy plots of land near town to plant small orange groves. Many locations north of town needed new streets opened but neither the town nor the county had the money for road construction and so their demands went ignored. Joseph Robles got Florida and Nebraska Avenues extended about a mile north of the city limit to meet his property at what is now Columbus Drive. Capt. John Robles provided teams of oxen and log carts to assist the twenty-six volunteers led by Sheriff D. Isaac Craft who completed the job in one day on June 18, 1876.<sup>168</sup> In the 1870's the Robles family owned a timber mill on the eastern bank of the Hillsborough River near present-day Kennedy Boulevard.<sup>169</sup> From 1872 to 1875 John was also buying up more property along the river front as recorded in the Deed Record Book.<sup>170</sup>

Today in the city of Tampa there are literally hundreds of descendants of the Spanish immigrant Joseph Paul Robles who came to the greater Hillsborough area in the 1840's. The family has contributed, as all immigrant families do, to the growth, development and history of their new country. Robles built a homestead, fought the Indians, raised his children and fought for the Confederacy. After the Civil War, he returned to his Tampa homestead and his orange groves. His children

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 162, 166.

<sup>169</sup>Canter Brown, Jr., *Tampa In Civil War Reconstruction* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2000), 127.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 176.

in their turn, opened businesses and pursued careers that gave new life and prosperity to the Tampa community.

There are few tangible reminders today of what happened in Tampa during the Civil War. The Department of the Interior's Civil War Sites Advisory Commission describes that the old battlefield site of Fort Brooke "has suffered the greatest degree of modern intrusion."<sup>171</sup> The present Tampa Convention Center sits atop its site.

In the 1970's Jim Grey pulled a rusty iron davit from the river muck at Lowry Park. It once held one of the Scottish Chief's landing boats. The twenty foot, several hundred pound davit was put on display at the Hillsborough County Veterans Memorial Park to commemorate the Battle of Ballast Point.<sup>172</sup> Wood from the sunken Kate Dale was examined in May 2008 but there are no plans to raise the ship due to its poor condition.

Many Civil War events in the area are kept alive by re-enactors. The Battle of Ballast Point near Gandy and Bayshore Boulevards is recreated in the Tampa Bypass Canal by the USS Fort Henry Navy and Marine Corps Re-enactment Association as reported in the Tampa Tribune of October 5, 2006 entitled, "Rebels Best Yankees

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<sup>171</sup>United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Update to The Civil War Sites ( Washington, DC, March 2011), 6.

<sup>172</sup>Tampa Tribune, 23 September 2006.

Again in Battle of Ballast Point."<sup>173</sup> The Brooksville Raid is re-enacted at the Sand Hill Boy Scout Reservation and has become the second largest such event in the state. The six hundred participants nearly double the actual number involved in the original action in July 1864.<sup>174</sup>

Like many Confederate symbols, one memorial has become controversial. The Plant City United Daughters of the Confederacy and the descendants of the Cow Cavalry of eastern Hillsborough County hoped to raise a statue in memory of their Confederate forbears. The bronze memorial sculpted by Mike Bethune depicts a soldier with a rifle standing in front of a horse and a calf. The one hundred and forty names of Captain John T. Leslie's Company including Joseph and John Robles and a younger brother are etched into the granite base.<sup>175</sup> When the tarp was removed at the unveiling ceremonies at old Plant High School the lone black member of the city commission said she "ha(d) reservations." Mary Yvette Thomas Mathis objected to a Confederate soldier, not just a cowboy, being put on city property. "I just don't feel good about it," she said.<sup>176</sup>

On November 24, 1948 reporter Jim Powell of the Tampa Sunday Tribune wrote an article, "Tampa Confederate Vet, Nearing 100, Takes Life Easily." In it Joseph

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<sup>173</sup>Tampa Tribune, 27 September 2006.

<sup>174</sup>St. Petersburg Times, 4 October 1992.

<sup>175</sup>Tampa Tribune, 8 February 2003.

<sup>176</sup>St. Petersburg Times, 18 November 2007.

Robles summed up some of his feelings "War is a bad thing, Sherman was right when he said ' war is hell. ' There has always been war. It will always be. There'll never, in my opinion, be peace as long as there's a man living." About himself he reflected, "My life hasn't been perfect, as no man's has, but I don't figure I will leave the world any worse than I found it."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>Tampa Sunday Tribune, 24 November 1948.

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