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Front cover: David Paul Davis is shown third from left in this 1904 photograph taken at the entrance to Tampa’s Knight & Wall hardware company. This is the earliest known photograph of Davis and captures him in suit and cocked hat as a young, 19 year-old hardware salesman. (Courtesy of the Tampa Bay History Center.) Back cover: Guests of the Tampa Bay Hotel are shown in this stereoscopic photograph enjoying a game of tennis in the shadows of the hotel’s distinctive minarets, ca. 1890s. (Courtesy of the Henry B. Plant Museum.)
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

From a philosophical standpoint, the Tampa Historical Society's mission is to bring together those people interested in history, especially in the history of Tampa and Florida. Understanding the history of our community is basic to our democratic way of life, and gives us a better appreciation of our American heritage.

But I cannot help but fear that our heritage to be passed on is rapidly changing locally and nationally. Preservation and appreciation of historical places, people and things are locked in a seeming struggle against expansion and growth which would do away with the "old" and establish the "new." Look around our community. Small businesses are being replaced both locally and nationwide by officers of major national businesses. Small "Mom and Pop" restaurants close because they cannot compete with nationwide restaurant chains. Local businesses that have existed for decades are bought, closed, and bulldozed in order to be replaced with yet another nationwide chain location for either overpriced coffee, faceless and impersonal banking, apartment housing, or parking. What does this have to do with Tampa's history? Arguably, everything.

Preserving local history starts with organizations like ours raising public consciousness of historical buildings, people, locations, and events which are more than just Tampa’s history—they make up our cultural fiber and legacy.

It is our duty to help preserve and pass on this legacy of Tampa’s past while also safeguarding against expansion which would, unintentionally or otherwise, turn all towns and cities in America into a uniform landscape lacking the unique characteristics that are passed on through the preservation of local history. Let us hope that all of us who care about Tampa’s history will continue to support the Tampa Historical Society and all other local organizations dedicated to preserving the individuality and history of Tampa. Tampa has such a unique and rich history of different cultures melding into a vibrant city with a remarkable past and future. Your continued support will ensure that Tampa’s history will not go unpreserved or unappreciated in this struggle against factors which would have it erased, rewritten or forgotten.

Our schedule for the upcoming year calls for more events than ever for the Tampa Historical Society. Renew your support for Tampa’s history by joining us at these events. As always, we will host the annual Oaklawn Ramble and plan other fun and informative events of interest to our membership and the entire community. The first event of the year will be a social to be held at the Society’s headquarters, the Knight House, in January. I look forward to seeing you there.

Thank you,

William A. Knight
Tampa Historical Society

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"A Damnable Outrage": 1
The Sale Of The Tampa Bay Hotel

Josephine S. King

Women were hysterical, and children were crying for milk,” reported hotel guest, M. Berri­man, as Tampa’s Mayor Frederick A. Salomonson, accompanied by two sets of lawyers and four deputies, shut down the Tampa Bay Hotel.2 On the evening of November 22, 1904, several hundred guests looked forward to dinner after a day spent at the South Florida Fair. Instead, confused, tired and hungry, they crowded into the lobby to hear a writ of replevín evicting them, luggage and all, effective immediately; panic and anger ensued. Only the bar room was kept open, “… because the Mayor himself wanted to go down and get a drink occasionally,” commented City Councilman J.P. Hardee.3

Although distressing, this closing was but the latest in a succession of “body blows” that Henry Bradley Plant’s “Palace” had suffered since his death in 1899. Opened in 1891, the 511-room Tampa Bay Hotel was considered state of the art with its luxurious decor and limitless creature comforts including an elevator, electricity, hot and cold water, telephones, and heat for cool winter evenings. Plant had expended large sums for upkeep of both buildings and grounds without concerning himself about profitable returns. After his death, Plant’s heirs, unwilling to continue this support, realized the property was deteriorating and turned their “problem” over to a syndicate, Ocean and Gulf Realty of New York City. In 1902, another New York firm, Thomas J. Scott and Sons, obtained an option on the property; their agents traveled to Tampa to oversee Messrs. Proskey and Chase, who were leasing the hotel.4 What Thomas Scott and Thomas J. Laud Brown found was chaos: the grounds neglected, employees suing for back wages, liquor disappearing, numerous free meals and rooms given to young women, outstanding bills unpaid, and money missing, among numerous discrepancies. On March 4, 1904, Brown reported to the home office, “[Proskey and Chase] spend the major portion of their days and until early hours of the next morning in the bar room.”5

But the best was yet to come, as Brown wrote, “Tuesday evening in the dining room Mr. Proskey made an attempt to hit the cashier with a water bottle, this caused, as you may imagine, quite some excitement. About half an hour after that they met in the rotunda, and before all the guests had a tongue lashing, and had it not been for intervention, would have had a hand to hand fight.”6

Mr. Proskey and the cashier were not the only ones to get a “piece of the action,” as Brown continued, “… this was followed shortly afterward by a regular stand up fight between two of the bell boys.”7 One hopes that they did not tear their clothing, because, perhaps in anticipation of this behavior, management had made the following decision, which was included in an earlier report from Brown, “The bell boys’ uniforms are to be taken out of their wages when they are paid.”8 Staying at the Tampa Bay Hotel must have been quite an adventure and not for the faint of heart.

Hotel property was in disrepair; Brown estimated that it would take several hundred dollars to restore just the grounds that had been badly neglected. Finally, on April 4, 1904, Brown wrote, “I took charge of the hotel on Tuesday morning last after breakfast and have about got matters straightened out … I am making strenuous efforts to get the best people of Tampa to make this their headquarters throughout the dull and
monotonous Summer months.9 Thomas J. Laud Brown was a man with a plan, even going to the extent of organizing a Tampa Bay Rod and Gun Club with headquarters at the hotel.

One guest at this time was none other than Margaret Plant, widow of Henry B. Plant, who had moved to New York after her husband's death. An undated letter from Mrs. Gaston Scott to the Henry B. Plant Museum explained, "Mr. Taylor Scott managed the interests of the Scott family - and gave Mrs. Plant the privilege of selecting pieces that she wanted - she returned to Tampa and took two solid cars of items back with her, estimated value would be $175,000."10 Within months of her visit, Ocean and Gulf Realty put the property on the market to be sold quickly at a sacrifice price.

Many real estate firms, syndicates and others tried to make deals as soon as the intentions of the Plant heirs became known. Among those interested parties was the Presbyterian Church of Tampa, that wanted to use the hotel for a Presbyterian University. But one had to be fleet of foot to outflank Tampa's mayor. Frederick A. Salomonson, a local realtor who had emigrated from Holland in 1884, was serving his third term as mayor.11 Salomonson had made several trips to New York before the Tampa Morning Tribune of November 14, 1904, broke the news: "Mayor F.A. Salomonson Purchased the Magnificent Property Yesterday."12 What a tempting morsel it must have been: sixty-one acres, the hotel with its furnishings, botanical gardens, Casino, Bachelor's Quarters, Servants' building, Exposition Building, race track, park boats, boathouses, piers, power plant, laundry and an additional 22 acres outside the city limits! Sale prices were not publicized, but estimates varied from $3,000,000 to $5,000,000. According to the Tampa Morning Tribune, "Such a colossal bargain was never before known in real estate circles in the South, and a man who was speaking of the ... property last night said that the mere material in the hotel building was worth much more than the price at which it was held for sale."13

Speculation about the deal ran rampant in Tampa. How much had the mayor paid? Was he acting for himself or for a syndicate? What were the intentions of the purchaser? What would be done with the hotel...
A veranda view of the Tampa Bay Hotel. This side faces east and fronts Henry B. Plant's original "botanical gardens," now known as Plant Park, and the Hillsborough River. The photograph below shows the Tampa Bay Hotel Bar Room, where it was reported in a letter of March 4, 1904, from Thomas J. Laud Brown to his New York office, that the two men leasing the hotel, Proskey and Chase, spent a "major portion of their days and until early hours of the next morning." The bar remained open after the closing of the hotel on November 22, 1904, because Tampa's mayor, Frederick Salomonson, "wanted to go down and get a drink occasionally." (Courtesy of the Henry B. Plant Museum Archives.)
Letter received by Capt. Charles H. Scott from Thomas J. Laud Brown on February 29, 1904.

Scott's company, Thomas J. Scott and Sons of New York City, obtained an option on the hotel property in 1902, and sent Brown to Tampa to examine it and report his findings (Courtesy of the Henry B. Plant Museum Archives.)

building itself? And more ominously, “Just what effect [will] the sale have upon the present regime [T.J. Scott and Sons] in charge of the property?”14 The answer to the last question came on the fateful November 22nd when Mayor Salomonson appeared at the Tampa Bay Hotel with two pairs of lawyers (Macfarlane and Glen and Sparkman and Carter) and four “deputies” in tow.

Not to be outdone by a small-town mayor, New Yorkers Scott and Brown summoned their own “legal eagles” (M.B. Macfarlane and John B. Wall), posted a $50,000 bond and reopened the hotel.15 Tom Scott made his own report of the event to New York, “This paper [writ of replevin] was served just as the guests were getting to go to dinner, stopped all the cooking and spoiled our dinner entirely...They took this mean advantage to make us give up possession...They scored Salomonson good last night in the Council as you will see by the clipping from the paper which I will enclose.”16 Score him they did because for good or ill, Tampa had a city council as feisty as the mayor, and it wasted no time condemning Salomonson for impressing into service Tampa police officers as “deputies” to further his own private interests in the Tampa Bay Hotel.

Heated discussion ensued at the City Council meeting that night when J.P. Hardee, leading the attack, excitedly declared that it was their duty to demand the mayor’s resignation, and if he refused, to impeach him. Councilman E.W. Monrose employed more colorful language, denouncing the closing as a damnable outrage and cursing Salomonson, “for everything from an ass to a ______, the last epithet being one that would not look well in print.”17 Businessmen all, predictably they were incensed because the mayor’s actions had inconvenienced South Florida Fair-goers who had brought dollars to Tampa.

Located on the grounds of the Tampa Bay Hotel, the South Florida Fair, in progress from November 15 through November 28, was exceeding all expectations and breaking attendance records daily. While crowds flocked to enjoy carnival rides, food, horse racing and the many exhibits, judges labored tirelessly to select winning entries from every category including even “Best jackass, any age. First Prize, $5 – J.M. Branch, Branchton.”18

In light of this success, is it any wonder that city councilmen were furious? “I thought when Mayor Salomonson promised to do ‘all in his power for the success of the Fair,’ said Mr. Hardee in closing, ‘that perhaps for once he was going to keep his word, but now I do not believe that he will even do what he says.’ He wound up with a complimentary comparison of this Chief Executive to a donkey.”19 After considerably more invective, a committee was appointed to prefer formal charges against Mayor Salomonson for his unauthorized and illegal use of Tampa police. Insight into the municipal power struggle was evident in J.C. Hardee’s warning that, “...the city of Tampa had grown too large to be run by one man.”20

Meanwhile, both Mayor Salomonson and Scott & Sons had decided to seek justice in the courts, and the Tampa Tribune reported, “The suit now hinges upon the writ of
The main lobby of the Tampa Bay Hotel is shown in the photograph above. The large, framed oil painting, which is shown hanging on the far wall to the left, was one of two excluded in an option to purchase the property obtained by the Ocean and Gulf Realty Company in 1904. The language in the option listed the various buildings and property and closed by stating “...—in fact everything appertaining to the hotel property except two oil paintings, one of Henry B. Plant and one entitled ‘After the Ball’ which hangs in the lobby of the hotel, for the sum of $125,000.” The painting is shown below. (Courtesy of the Henry B. Plant Museum Archives.)

replevin secured by Mayor Salomonson, the service of which upon the hotel property created such a hubbub at the hotel last week...will be tried by Judge Robles—or by a jury in his court, in case either side should so elect...” So Tampa found itself embroiled on two fronts: impeachment and litigation, which gave citizens plenty of fodder for speculation.

Undoubtedly, fortune was smiling upon Frederick Salomonson because the committee that had been appointed to prefer charges for impeachment returned, instead, a resolution for censure of the mayor. However, before hearing the committee report, the City Council had received a letter from Salomonson, himself, “Couched in brief and Courteous terms” that had not only defended his actions, but actually chastised the Council stating that, “...if the honorable body had seen fit to investigate the facts before arriving at a conclusion, they would have been spared the necessity of passing such a resolution, and he would have been spared the necessity of replying to it.” Score one for the City Council and one for the mayor: a classic Mexican standoff.

Seemingly at the eleventh hour, Salomonson and Scott & Sons settled their dispute out of court, helped along by Frank Q. Brown representing the Ocean and Gulf Realty Company that had control of the remaining Plant assets. Ocean and Gulf Realty not only reimbursed Scott & Sons the unconfirmed amount of $25,000 to
relinquish their claims, but promised to close the Tampa Bay Hotel, all its buildings and its grounds immediately and never to operate it as a hotel again. Although the Tribune reported a renewed movement by the Presbyterian Church to obtain the property, “…the sale to the city seems to be the most likely event.”

True to prediction, only one day later Mayor Salomonson relinquished his claims to the Tampa Bay Hotel for the reported sum of $110,000 in cash from the Ocean and Gulf Realty Company. However, that was not the end of the matter as the Tampa Morning Tribune revealed in the next installment of this saga that Frank Q. Brown had given to a special committee appointed by the City Council “…an option on the property, including the hotel proper with all its furnishings, the Casino, the power plant, all buildings and their contents, the park the Fair grounds and 22 acres of land outside the city limits, the laundry – in fact everything appertaining to the hotel property except two oil paintings, one of Henry B. Plant and one entitled ‘After the Ball’ which hangs in the lobby of the hotel, for the sum of $125,000.” One can imagine the collective sigh of relief from all of Tampa at this news.

Only one piece of business remained; the City Council reviewed and accepted a formal proposition to buy the Tampa Bay Hotel property by issuing bonds in the amount of $140,000. Included in the proposal was a suggestion that the hotel and the casino as well as the laundry could be leased, thereby providing Tampa with a source of revenue. Also proposed was that, “The annex to the Hotel, known as the Bachelors Quarters and Exposition building, could, at very little expense be made one building for the purpose of a hospital, which would give this city a hospital second to none in the South. The Bachelors Quarters we find being already equipped to such an extent that it alone could be used for a hospital without any alteration.”

In addition, Frank Q. Brown made one more stipulation, besides reserving the two oil paintings which were not to be included in the sale, and this concerned the “Transportation” fountain commissioned by Margaret Plant to honor her husband after his death. Terms of the proposal stated, “It being understood...that the little
This map was produced in 1996 for a brochure, PLANT PARK: STROLLING IN A PERFECT PARADISE, A Self Guided Tour of the Garden & Grounds of THE TAMPA BAY HOTEL. The map provides a site plan of the hotel and grounds which were present in 1891, and exist today, as well as the location of several outbuildings which were on the property at the time of its sale in 1904.
(Courtesy of the Henry B. Plant Museum.)

monument in front of the Hotel can remain where it is as long as the city owns the property. Should the city sell the property at any time, Mr. Brown reserves the right to remove this little monument.”

As the Tampa Tribune stated in 1904, “If there is anything in Tampa that has come near monopolizing the City Council lately, it is the Tampa Bay Hotel. It has appeared in every guise and shape, and like the ghost in Shakespeare, would not down.” In 2003, citizens of Tampa may only hope that as Shakespeare’s indestructible ghost, the Tampa Bay Hotel’s history from construction to resurrection by the City of Tampa will never be forgotten.
An article headlined "COUNCIL CONDEMNED MAYOR FOR ACTION IN TAMPA BAY MATTER," from the Tampa Morning Tribune of November 23, 1904, reported the Tampa City Council took action in "RESOLUTIONS PASSED CONDEMNING HIS [Mayor Frederick Salomonson's] PROCEDURE AND HIS USING OF POLICE DEPARTMENT FOR HIS PRIVATE INTERESTS - SEVERE CRITICISMS WERE MADE." Note the articles reporting that lightning struck the Fair Grounds and the Tampa Harness and Wagon Company exhibited. (Courtesy of the Henry B. Plant Museum Archives.)

ENDNOTES

Josephine S. King is a 1988 graduate of the Master of Arts Program in History at the University of South Florida. She is a volunteer in the Archives and Library of the Henry B. Plant Museum, Tampa, Florida.

2. "To Impeach the Mayor," Tampa Morning Tribune, November 24, 1904.
4. "Information-Tampa Bay Hotel," undated letter received by the Henry B. Plant Museum from Mrs. Gaston Scott, Henry B. Plant Museum Archives.
10. Letter received from Mrs. Gaston Scott, undated.
11. ... Frederick Salomonson, an immigrant from Holland who had entered the real estate business in Tampa after arriving in 1884, served as mayor for two one-year terms and for a two-year term from 1904 to 1906." Robert Kerstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001), 29.
13. Tampa Morning Tribune, November 14, 1904.
14. Tampa Morning Tribune, November 14, 1904.
16. Letter received by T.J. Scott & Sons from Tom Scott, November 2, 1904. Henry B. Plant Museum Archives.
20. "To Impeach the Mayor," Tampa Morning Tribune, November 24, 1904.
22. "Mayor Censured; No Impeachment," Tampa Morning Tribune, November 30, 1904.
27. Tampa Morning Tribune, December 14, 1904.
Michael Reneer and Dr. James M. Denham

"Letter From Okeechobee" 1880s Editorial Of Gabriel Cunning To Bartow Informant and Tampa Sunland Tribune

I think justice demands that Okeechobee should be heard," wrote Gabriel Cunning on June 30, 1881. So began Cunning's brief but interesting career as correspondent to the Bartow Informant and Tampa Sunland Tribune. Gabriel Cunning's given name is unknown; his home and real identity is likewise unknowable. And yet, letters from a man calling himself Gabriel Cunning and claiming a home in "Okeechobee County" appeared in the Bartow Informant from June to December 1881. Cunning also penned three missives to the Tampa Sunland Tribune in 1878 and 1881. His humorous and informative letters reprinted here shed light on the social, economic, and political times of the lower Florida frontier in the 1880s.

The first issue of the Bartow Informant appeared only two weeks before the first installment from Gabriel Cunning. The proprietor of this new journalistic enterprise was D.W.D. Boully, who emigrated to Bartow after a failed attempt in the newspaper business in Blountsville, Alabama. It was common practice for small-town nineteenth century newspapers such as Boully's Informant to make use of guest "informants" or "correspondents" to provide readers with information on places and events from nearby locales. Such articles spurred community interest and were eagerly sought after by the general reading public. In addition to Cunning's "Letter from Okeechobee" column, Boully's paper included letters and articles from Manatee County, Charlotte Harbor, Hernando County, Ft. Meade, and Tampa. While some of Boully's informants wrote irregularly, Gabriel Cunning's "Letter from Okeechobee" became a mainstay in the first six months of the paper's existence.

As the county seat of Polk County, Florida, Bartow offered many prospects to Boully and other migrants seeking a new start in the post Civil War era. In 1880, Polk's population stood at slightly more than 3,100 inhabitants. Even so, this total was poised to advance rapidly. At the time Cunning addressed readers of the Bartow Informant, cattle and subsistence farming was the chief economic pursuit of pioneers in the Lower Peninsula. Indeed, the cattle industry was the true key to riches for the pioneers of South Florida. Before the Civil War, the cattle trade with Cuba was substantial, but after the war it brought considerable wealth to the region. At the end of the Civil War, the focus of trade shifted from supplying Confederate and Union forces to supplying Cuba. In the decade after the war, pioneers shipped almost 200,000 head of cattle from Florida to Cuba. In 1878, for example, the Tampa Sunland Tribune reported that cattlemen shipped 8,012 head of cattle worth $112,168.00 from the Tampa Bay ports of Tampa and Manatee. While cattle shipments from Tampa Bay were substantial during these years, it is unlikely that they ever equaled the numbers shipped from Punta Rassa, in Charlotte Harbor, Florida's oldest shipping point. In 1879, F.A. Hendry, of Fort Myers, estimated that in the five previous years an average of 10,000 head of cattle, at a price of $14 per head, were shipped each year from Punta Rassa.

Citrus and vegetable growing also attracted migrants. Nearly every edition of news-
papers published in Tampa, Orlando, Bartow and other South Florida towns contained articles for perspective migrants extolling the various advantages of certain crops and the availability of land. By way of example, on September 4, 1879, the Tampa Sunland Tribune, in an article titled “Culture and Shipment of Vegetables,” lauded the ease and profitability with which garden peas, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, and squash could be grown in South Florida.

But if Cunning and his neighbors in the southern peninsula were to truly prosper, they needed communication and transportation links to the isolated region. They yearned for iron rails to reach their isolated communities. Cunning’s dispatches speak to these aspirations. In 1867, telegraph messages could be received at Punta Rassa and, in 1884, the first trains chugged into Tampa. By that time thousands of migrants were heading to the region to invest in citrus groves. Phosphate strikes in the late 1880s attracted hundreds of others. Cunning also writes of Hamilton Disston’s purchase of four million acres of land from the state of Florida for $.25 per acre. Disston’s dream was to use the latest technology to drain the overflowed lands. Through this scheme thousands of acres of land could be sold at cheap prices to migrants who could grow citrus and a multitude of other tropical crops. Cunning speaks to this scheme plus speculates on the nefarious political machinations that made it possible.

In 1880, only three counties and only a few settlements graced the southern part of the peninsula south of Polk County: Manatee (pop. 3,500), Dade (pop. 257) and Monroe County (pop. 11,800). Miami (which would become the region’s only real city) contained just a few dozen people in 1880. Because the vast majority of Monroe County’s population resided in the island village of Key West, no more than 5,000 souls would have lived in the southern peninsula south of Bartow. This total included approximately 200 Seminoles living in five villages. Only a few cattle trails and primitive roads, cut primarily by the army’s corps of engineers during the Seminole Wars, linked distant frontier outposts such as Pine Level (Manatee County Seat), the village of Manatee (now Bradenton), Fort Green, Fort Ogden, Fort Myers, and Fort Bassinger, on the west bank of the Kississimee River. Below Fort Bassinger, and located near the western shore of Lake Okeechobee, was the village that grew around abandoned Fort Center. It is likely that Cunning addressed his readers from one of these two settlements. Just to the south of these two settlements lay the Caloosahatchee River. South Florida’s earliest settlers speculated on the feasibility of connecting the river to the lake, but by 1879, these high hopes were about to be realized. In the spring of that year, a Tampa newspaper reported that J.L. Meigs, a U.S. Surveyor, had arrived in Fort Myers “on his way to the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee to give the river a thorough survey, and to make a report upon the feasibility, of opening the Okeechobee into the river.” F.A. Hendry of Fort Myers, and a number of his associates, were conducting an independent survey of their own.

While this trackless region was home to the Seminole, cattlemen, panthers, and only a few hardy homesteaders, local citizens were optimistic about the fertility of the soil and the desirability and prospects of outside immigration. One newcomer boasted that “Okeechobee is one of the finest lakes in Florida with only 2 islands in it with fine hammock and prairie land nearly all around it suitable for cane, corn, rice or vegetables also for fruits, oranges, guavas, bananas, pine apples &c. The Indians have fields and raise fine corn, potatoes, pumpkins, and bananas, which all grow finely and with little cultivation. Lovers of picturesque scenery should made a trip through, when the canal is completed, plenty of game of nearly all kinds, and fish in abundance.”

Cunning addressed readers of the Informant and the Sunland Tribune at the time when White Conservatives had retook control of state government. Florida had overthrown Radical Republican rule four years earlier. Florida’s Bourbon governors, George Drew and William D. Bloxham, brought their economic policies to a public eager for better times. It was a policy of low taxes, slashed state expenditures, and land giveaway schemes calculated to lure Northern investment capital to the state to develop the state’s resources and lure migrants to Florida’s open spaces. By 1880, in Florida, as in the rest of the South, the Republican Party (now discredited among white Southerners as the party of Carpetbaggers, Scalawags, and African-Americans),
became a marginalized victim of the solid Democratic South. Cunning’s letters are reflective of white conservative public opinion of the time. Readers of the Informant and Sunland Tribune would have reveled in his stories. Both were Conservative Democratic papers in a state increasingly taken over by Bourbonism.13

Cunning addressed the readers of the Informant and the Sunland Tribune in the manner and style of the southern humorists of the ante- and post-bellum periods. Such writers as Mark Twain and Joel Chandler Harris no doubt served as a model for Cunning and other writers of the time.14 Cunning’s purpose was to make his readers laugh, but also to have them absorb the hidden meaning of his stories. Because he shared the social and cultural attitudes that were typical of rural southern whites, Cunning used words and phrases (including racial and ethnic epithets) that may offend some readers, which the editors deeply regret. Still, these statements and references accurately convey racial attitudes and assumptions of the author’s time and place.

On June 30, 1881, D.W.D. Boully proudly proclaimed to readers of the Bartow Informant that he was introducing “Gabriel Cunning,” who furnished a series of articles to the Tampa Tribune, a year or two ago,15 and who made some reputation as a writer, has agreed to write regularly for the Informant, and his first article appears this week.”

“Letter from Okeechobee”
Bartow Informant, June 30, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

As all the counties of Florida are being ground through the press and tossed before the public in the newspapers of the day, I think justice demands that Okeechobee should be heard from in the great immigration furor.

For health Okeechobee stands superb – she has no graveyard in her territory. This fact alone should be enough; but we are happy to add, that in all the mounds and remains of the mound builders here, not a human skeleton appears – proving that race of people, who seemed to be “heavy on the die,” from the way they piled their bones over the continent, were never able to die at Okeechobee.

Gabriel Cunning

Okeechobee county presents inducements to emigration far superior to any county in Florida, or to any other state or territory on the continent. One of its great advantages is, that it has room enough for all who may come, possessing all that vast expanse of country extending from the Atlantic ocean on the east, to the empire of Manatee on the west; bounded by the sand mountains, or backbone of Florida, on the north, and running south to infinity; including the great lake which bears its name, with the Everglades and Big Cypress – presenting to the bustling world a county in which the tide of immigration will have room to spread out and develop, and not be always driving the inhabitants to Polk and Manatee, to make room for others, as is the case with many counties now. For health Okeechobee stands superb – she has not a graveyard in her territory. This fact alone should be enough; but we are happy to add, that in all the mounds and remains of the mound builders here, not a human skeleton appears – proving that race of people, who seemed to be “heavy on the die,” from the way they piled their bones over the continent, were never able to die at Okeechobee. And of late a great number of Northern invalids, in the last stage of life, with a morbid love of distinction, have come to Okeechobee in order to immortalize themselves by pioneering a graveyard, but soon after their project invariably “busted” by their regaining their health, and having to go to work, or leave the county to evade the vagrant laws.

But another item which gives us the ascendancy is this. While each of the other counties boasts of being “home of the orange,” Okeechobee is the home of the alligator. On him we look as the hope of the country. His utility in the wealth and commerce in our country is asset in its infancy. His future, however, is full of promise.
he smells of money. Already his very teeth are taking the place of diamonds and precious metals in the jewelry of the landholders of America and the nobility of Europe. J[ay] Gould wears them for shirt studs, and while in Florida loads his pants' pockets full to present to [Pres. U.S.] Grant and [Pres. James A.] Garfield. Also I am told that [Otto von] Bismarck never issues a diplomatic order unless bedecked in alligator jewelry. And it is reported down in the everglades that the bankers of Wall street are hoarding this precious ivory, fearing that the greenbackers will bring gold and silver into dispute, and 'gators' teeth become the currency of the country. Aside from the value of the teeth, the skins of the 'gators are becoming the desire of the old world. The gentry of France, and lords and commons of England, never trust themselves now-a-days to public gaze without standing knee deep in alligator boots; and I am credibly informed that several prime ministers of foreign powers are now corresponding with Philip Dzialynski,18 of Fort Meade, and certain parties at Orlando trying to engage alligator skins to carpet the royal palaces of their respective kingdoms and bottom the chairs of their parliament chambers. But it is for the enterprising citizens of Okeechobee to discover the practical utility of the 'gator. Dr. Pluck our most worthy county judge and hotel-keeper, has for a long time been regaling his New England visitors with codfish balls made from dried alligator; and his wife Mrs. Annalizer Pluck, has succeeded in making the best Bologna sausage from the same article, which many of the surveyors and explorers pronounced excellent; being free from the canine and feline odor so common to those in city markets. Also Capt. Purdy, our leading merchant has applied for a patent for making canned salmon out of alligator tails; and Rev. Napoleon B. Young, our minister (son of the late Brigham Young) has canned up quite a cargo of silver sides in alligator oil and expects to sell them in the North for French sardines. May success crown his effort.

"Letter from Okeechobee – No. 2"
Bartow Informant, July 7, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

Since writing my last, the highest excitement has prevailed. Having been informed that the governor [William D. Bloxham]19 had sold Okeechobee County to a German and French company, and not liking the idea of coming under the rule of a foreign power, and losing our offices, we repudiated it by holding an indignation meeting. But after learning that the sale was made to a Mr. Disston,20 of Philadelphia, public feeling became more composed, and since telegraphing to the governor, and being informed by him that he would still control the offices and that there would be no changes made, public confidence has been completely restored. However, we learn that Mr. Disston still designs to settle German and French colonists in our county. This is a lucky hit on his part, and will greatly develop our resources; for we have frogs enough in the everglades to feed the French republic for the next century, and palmetto cabbage sufficient to fatten a million of Dutch. Then everglade frogs, both pickled and canned, will command the highest price in the markets of France, while palmetto cabbage chopped into sour kraut will be sold in the Berlin markets under the name and style of Okeechobee salad. Truly our resources are as innumerable as they are inexhaustible.21

But the great and paramount inducement Okeechobee offers to the emigrating world is the grand fact that every man here holds an office. Our white population being small and our territory large, we have so arranged our offices and districted our territory that every voter can hold an office. How much better this is than in Brevard county, where they have only half enough offices for the people, and that puts half the inhabitance out of office half the time. In Polk and Manatee it is still worse. There, I am told two thirds of the people are out of office two thirds of their time. How their families must suffer. What is freedom without office? What is an orange grove, a free store front, a coach-and-four, bank stock, governments bonds and such like without office? What is a republic without offices enough to supply each of its constituents? That is the reason, doubtless, why all former republics have failed, and the founders of our government made the same mistake by not providing each subject with an office. Who wants to spend a useful life moping up and down the thoroughfares of the world mixing with the commonality without as much as a title to his position, or a handle to his name?
Therefore we say to all, both far and near, both rich and poor, come one, come all, who have any disposition to serve their country, to be virtuous and be happy, to aspire and be honorable, here you can satiate your patriotic motives by holding office the balance of your day.

This inducement has proved a happy life. Most of the members of the last legislature, despairing of reelection, on account of the squatter tax law,\textsuperscript{22} are preparing to come to Okeechobee. And we are in constant receipt of letters from Polk, Manatee, and Orange counties, as well as from Tampa, Gainesville, Tallahassee, and Washington, from disappointed patriots, who are still determined to serve their country or "bust," and are rushing to Okeechobee to retrieve lost fame.

\textit{“Letter from Okeechobee”}  
Bartow Informant,  
July 14, 1881  
Gabriel Cunning  
Ed. Informant

Since I have commenced writing for your paper, I am in constant receipt of letters from abroad, making various enquiries, which, by your permission, I shall answer through your columns.

Absalom Jones, of Utah territory, wishes to come to Okeechobee for his health, and bring his family; but being a Mormon, and having three wives, he desires to know if the laws of Florida are lenient on polygamy, and if not, which wife had he better bring - the first, the last, or the middle one.

Absalom, the question has puzzled me much, having no law at Okeechobee but about half of Bush’s Digest\textsuperscript{23} and Andrew Johnson’s impeachment. I could find nothing in them satisfactory. I then inquired of all the prominent lawyers in the circuit, and wrote to the governor and attorney general of the state [George P. Raney];\textsuperscript{24} but they seemed reticent, and did not like to commit themselves upon so grave a question. Determined to have the subject sifted, I addressed a letter to attorney general Dovens [Charles Devens],\textsuperscript{25} at Washington, and he, after consulting with various members of the cabinet, wrote me a very unsatisfactory answer, declining to make any decision officially, but gave his private opinion that the middle wife was your best holt.

But since our legislature has passed a law to tax United States property, we have concluded Okeechobee county court has an equal right to make a law in favor of polygamy, which law will be entered on record at the next meeting of the court for the benefit of Mormon visitors. So now bring your entire family.

Solomon Jackson, Lake City, Fla, writes to know what would be the chance to start a school at Okeechobee. If it is a nigger school you want, there is no show; and if it is a white school, the prospects are not flattering. Dr. Pluck’s wife, Mrs. Annalizer Pluck, taught our first school under a wild grape arbor on the lake shore, but a sudden rise of the lake bursted her school. Since that we had a school taught by a minister in good standing, but he became so indolent and inattentive as to let the alligators catch most of the small children, which so depleted the number of scholar age in the place, that I doubt whether a man teacher could get a paying school. But I believe a woman teacher might get a school - our people are favorable to women teachers. In most instances, they teach as well, and sometimes better, then a man, and being "nothing but woman," you know, we get them for half price.

\textit{“Letter from Okeechobee”}  
Bartow Informant, July 21, 1881  
& Tampa Sunland Tribune,  
August 6, 1881.  
Gabriel Cunning  
Ed. Informant

I am in receipt of a letter containing an important question on a grave subject. I give the letter in full:

\textbf{However, we learn that Mr. Disston still designs to settle German and French colonists in our county. This is a lucky hit on his part, and will greatly develop our resources, for we have frogs enough in the everglades to feed the French republic for the next century, and palmetto cabbage sufficient to fatten a million Dutch.}  
Gabriel Cunning
Skye High P.O., Hillsboro Co., Fla
Gabriel Cunning

Had the last legislature the constitutional right to tax improvements on government land? If you claim they had, arise and explain.
Your's respectfully
Ichabod Ticklely.

In reply to your question, Ichabod, you are aware that your name has had a long reputation for being written on the wrong side. But to business, I shall answer you at arm's length.

The legislature most emphatically had the right to pass the squatter tax law. You are a pretty advocate of state rights, and doubt so plain a proposition. I can prove the legislature's right by seven inexorable and unanswerable arguments:

1. The constitution of the United States clearly defines what a state cannot do, but in no instance says it shall not tax the general government; and the Scripture says, “Where there is no law there is no transgression.”

2. The general government is a sovereign power, and the state of Florida is a sovereign power. Now, has not the general government the right to tax Florida? Certainly it has. Then, reversing the rule, that works both ways; Florida has the right to tax the general government.

3. Florida is a sovereign state, and if it has not the right to tax anything it pleases, it is not sovereign in its prerogatives.

4. The general government is a foreign corporation, doing business in the state of Florida, and has not the state the right to tax foreign corporations?

5. The general government being created by states, and not states by the government; makes the states supreme.

6. The land of the government was virtually given away to the people under the homestead act, and every settler has a defeasible ownership in the land he occupies; therefore what ownership he has should be taxed.

7. Florida is soon to be cut loose from the continent by a ship canal, and assume its position as a foreign power, and all we can get out of Uncle Sam, the better, before we are cut loose.

I could give a thousand more good reasons, but seven are enough. Not that I wish to cast reflections on the legislature by any analogy of the number to the seven sleepers, the seven plagues, or seven devils, No, not all. Those great men only took an advanced step in state rights, and as soon as the people can get the scales knocked from their eyes, they will rally and sustain these noble men in that noble act.

All we need is a little more light, and we will pass laws to tax all the lands, forts, arsenals, armories, hospitals, post-offices, land offices, custom-houses and ports of entry belonging to the general government within the limits of our state, and also compel all postmasters, custom-house officers, land officers, general surveyors, civil engineers, military and naval officers, to take out occupation license, and impose a heavy poll tax on all soldiers, sailors and marines stationed in the state.

The fact is, we must tax. I repeat it, we must tax. Our agricultural college must be guarded, or the lizards would devour it; our state officers must be supported at high salaries, in order to ensure first class talent (the kind we have had for the last fifteen years); our canal system must go on; our railroads must be built; we must perpetuate our bureau of emigration. Therefore we must tax!

Gabriel Cunning

“Letter from Okeechobee”
Bartow Informant, July 28, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

Our county court met on last Saturday, pursuant to adjournment. Judge Pluck,
the worthy chairman, introduced the object of the meeting by a short speech, as follows:

"Worthy Citizens and Faithful Servants of the Public Good

"Again have we met to deliberate on the interests of our country, and, if possible, devise some means to get Okeechobee out of debt. That has been our end and aim – the burden of our energies and effort from the date of our commissions until now. Every exigency, every emergency, every economy that we could devise has been brought to bear, and all up to date has proved a failing.

"First we knocked off our mileage, and it did no good; then we relinquished our fees, and that failed. We then sold our store clothes and patched up our old duds, but still the county remained in debt. As a last resort we entered an order on the minutes that we would do without our dinners, go to bed supperless, chew long green tobacco, eat our hominy without gravy, our clabber without syrup, drink watered whisky, and make our wives and children go barefooted.

"For months have we lived up to this rigid experiment, only to meet this morning to record in failure. Okeechobee is still in debt. Here we are, met together this morning, dry and hungry, ragged, discouraged, depressed in spirits and have lost so much flesh – at least forty per cent. Avoirdupois weight – that we look like a committee of skeletons, that had come up from the graveyard to light our pipes and go back again.

"The Scriptures say 'wise men will change, but fools never change.' Now worthy members, I, for one, am on the change. Fasting and prayer may cast out devils, but fasting will never get a county out of debt. And I tell you, in words with the bark on, that this day I am going to eat three hearty meals, drink some pure whisky, buy me a suit of store clothes, and some shoes and socks for my wife and children, or I will resign before the sun goes down. I tell you, we have got to the end of the track, and must reverse the engine. We must change our tactics. I can stand it no longer. Who is going to thank us for all this privation, suffering, sacrifice and starvation? And when we are dead, and buried up yonder in that scrub, who is going to point to our cypress headboard and say, 'There, lie the five illustrious martyrs, that starved Okeechobee county out of debt.'

"Now, gentlemen, business is business, and it takes poison to kill poison, and the hair of the dog is good for the bite; and I propose we try going in debt to get out of debt. It is the last resort; the only remedy. I propose this, that we issue new scrip, and take up our old scrip; then issue scrip to pay off all outstanding claims, then issue $10,000 in small bills, from 5c to $5, and make it a legal tender by order of court. Soon it will become a circulating medium and we can loan out the $10,000, and in two years the interest on the same will pay our county debt. Then call in the $10,000 in scrip; and won't we be out of debt? Most assuredly we will. Don't you see the point gentlemen?"

At this the speaker was interrupted by all the board clapping their hands and exclaiming: "We see it! we see it!"

"Judge Pluck desired to go on the hungry board, but it would not suffer him. His measure was then put to vote, and passed without dissent or debate.

The clerk, Maj. Plute, was ordered to provide a quire of paper, and proceed to issue. Soon each member had his hands full of small scrips, paying themselves back dues. Sheriff McKillop was dispatched up to Cap. Purdy's store with some scrip to lay in refreshments, but soon returned with the sad news that the Captain refused to take the scrip. This was a slam to our hopes, but Judge Pluck was equal to the emergency. He had an order entered of record, making it contempt of court to refuse our scrip.

The sheriff returned with a copy of the order, and was told to bring the supplies, or bring the Captain. The supplies came; and soon the board was feasting on the emoluments of office.

After they had finished their repast, they adjourned till after dinner, in order to lay in store clothes and shoes and socks for their families.

"P.S. — Our people are well pleased with the Disston land sale, since they have learned it only includes the stumps that [Gov. George F.] Drew sold the timber from. A million dollars for stumps is bully!

"Letter from Okeechobee"
Bartow Informant, August 4, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

Last week I left our county court adjourned, on the hunt for store clothes.
But during their adjournment they indulged in some pure whisky, which being a little too good, they didn't assemble till next morning, when they put on an early appearance, uniformed in black calico suits, creaking brogans, standing collars, and "shoo-flies"—the most dignified-looking body of men I ever beheld, except the last general assembly.

The former minutes being read and adopted, the chairman announced the board ready for business.

Sheriff McKillop presented a claim for guarding a prisoner three months, during the last rainy season, while the jail was overflowed.

One member objected to the claim on the ground that said prisoner was his own son, and, to his own personal knowledge, the said prisoner chopped five acres of hammock and furnished all the palmetto cabbage and catfish the sheriff's family lived on during said imprisonment.

This was leading to a warm discussion, when the sheriff very wisely withdrew his claim for the present, but that day took the dissenting member home with him to dinner.

After dinner he again presented his claim, somewhat amended and considerably enlarged, and it passed without a dissenting voice.

Rev. Napoleon B. Young, our county superintendent, then presented an old account for taking the enumeration of the school children of the county last year. But a Hard-shell member of the board said he would oppose it on the ground that the reverend gentleman preached all the time he was engaged in said service, and it would look too much like making the county pay for preaching, to allow the claim—not that he cared for the scrip, but the principle was his point.

But Judge Pluck—who is well versed in state matters; having been engaged in a keno bank in Tallahassee, for a number of years; which business made him quite intimate with the state officers and members of the legislature—decided in favor of the claim, because many of the state officers traveled ostensibly on official business, when their real point was to make stump speeches and pack conventions to secure the next governorship. Yet they always received pay, therefore the claim should be allowed.

Judge Pluck then presented a pauper medical bill for doctoring a sick Seminole.

One impertinent member asked the clerk if the doctor had his diploma on file as the law requires.

Judge Pluck soon silenced his chops by a fine for contempt of court.

Another member declared the Seminoles were not citizens, and therefore not entitled to pauper rights.

Judge Pluck said he knew a prominent Radical to be admitted to the general assembly on the Seminole vote.

Another member said, as long as the Seminoles rejected Christianity and accused white men of stealing hogs, he should oppose them to the hilt.

The last member asked the Judge if he cured the Indian. The Judge said he did. "Well," said the member, "I shall not allow it neither. If you had killed him, I should have favored your claim."

The Judge became vexed and vicious, and swore he would enlarge it fourfold, and have the legislature to pass it as a relief bill, as many bills of less merit had passed that body.

Capt. Purdy then presented his account for acting as registering officer at last election.

Judge Pluck, still mad over his own claim, declared there was no law in Bush's digest for paying registering officers. The entire board agreed with him.

The Captain became enraged, but was firm; and, looking the board square in the face, he declared he would go to jail and lie there till the ants carried him out through the grates, before he would ever take another dollar of Okeechobee scrip for any purpose; and stamping the muck off his brogans, he left the room.

The board turned pale and caved in. The public credit was at stake. They allowed his claim in an instant.

Squire McClintock presented a bill for acting as coroner in holding an inquest. But the Squire's divorced wife was at that time cooking at Judge Pluck's hotel, and had put him on the alert. The Judge swore the Squire to answer questions. The first question propounded was:

"Where did you get that coat, hat, breeches, boots, and hickory shirt you have on?"

The Squire turned deadly pale, began to stammer and evade, when the Judge, becoming excited, said:

"You dirty, thieving scoundrel! You stripped them off the dead man—that's how you got em!"

And he immediately ordered sheriff
McKillop to take him out in the scrub, strip the stolen duds off, and send him home ten miles, stark naked, through the saw-grass, with orders for him and his hog thieving jury to bring up the pocket-knife, brass watch and $10 in change they stole at the inquest, under penalty of being put where the dogs won't bite 'em."

I understand the Squire has sold out and got a position in the United States secret service.

The clerk, Maj. Plute, now reported all the paper used up, and all the fly-leaves of the digest absorbed in writing warrants; whereupon the court ordered the sheriff to dispatch a nigger to Orlando with a pair of saddlebags full of alligator's teeth, and a pillow-slip full of bird plumes, and lay in stationery enough to bring Okeechobee out of debt.

They then adjourned.

Bartow Informant, August 11, 1881
D.W.D. Bouly

We have on file for next week's issue a long and laughable communication from "Gabriel Cunning." These articles alone are worth the subscription price of the Informant.

"Letter from Okeechobee"
Bartow Informant, August 11, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

I write under excitement, and of course shall not be very concise.

The real estate boom has played the wild with Okeechobee.

Last week the celebrated Irish soap receipt man put in an appearance, looking out a location. Property prices soon became shaky, and gradually commenced rising.

Dr. Pluck, who had offered his hotel a few days before for $200, payable in gator skins, was now offered $500 by the soap man, and refused to sell.

Capt. Purdy had two corner lots bargained to sheriff McKillop for $100 in Okeechobee scrip on credit, but now became frightened, and refused $600, and is still raising.

But in a few days the boom would have gradually went down, and public confidence been restored, had it not been that just as things were beginning to calm down the "Lone Pilgrim," who sells a patent medicine by that name, put in his appearance also. Then everything was confusion and alarm. Corner lots went up kiting. Judge Pluck was offered $15,000 for his sanitarium and shook his head. Capt. Purdy would not take $10,000 for his lots, and refused to sell at any price. Sheriff McKillop, who had repeatedly offered his saw palmetto residence on the edge of the lake near the boulevards, for two cows and calves, now rose $500 every day, till this morning he was offered $5,000, and refused to sell at any price.

Rev. Napoleon B. Young, who had given a mortgage on Bird-roost island to secure the payment of a board bill to Maj. Plute, borrowed scrip and redeemed the same, and was yesterday offered $20,000, and asks $50,000.

Just as real estate was toppling at its highest notches, we received two valuable additions to our place in the persons of Prof. De Lacey and wife. Although the Professor has considerable capital, yet he refuses to buy property at present prices; but wishing to establish a permanent theatre, he leased forty acres on the corner of the square from Judge Pluck, and at present is boarding at Judge Pluck's hotel, and mowing saw-grass to cover his opera house, where, about the 1st of October, he will open up with a small galaxy of stage stars for the ensuing winter. He expects to add great variety to his theatre by the addition of some Seminole stars that he has commenced training.

Such have been the sudden changes in Okeechobee in the last fortnight. All is speculation, hurry, bustle and excitement. There is not a saw-grass or muck pond for forty acres, in five miles of town, to be obtained for love or money. The people are
alarmed, affrighted and uneasy! Judge Pluck says that if personal property should take a sudden raise, the county court would have to issue some more scrip in order to keep the circulation medium equivalent to the wealth of the country.

_P.S._—Judge Pluck, who is a faith doctor, claims the honor of curing [Pres. James] Garfield.29 No sooner than he heard the sad news, he hasted to bury a black cat under his door step, nailed a horse shoe to the head of his bed, killed a garter-snake with a broom handle stretched its head out toward the North Star, and said if the tail wiggled at sundown Garfield would recover. The tail wiggled.

“Letter from Okeechobee”
Bartow _Informant_, August 18, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. _Informant_

having occasion lately to travel from Jacksonville to Okeechobee, I feigned myself a late arrival, seeking a home in Florida, just to determine if those north and middle Florida fellows did tell as many lies and villainous slanders about south Florida as the emigrants who run the gauntlet and get through say they do.

I first took passage on a boat up the St. John’s River. The passengers were from every part of north and middle Florida. I found they were all land agents. Each one gave me his card. In fact, in those upper counties a man is not entitled to vote, hold office, preach or get married unless he is a licensed land agent. Of course I was beset by them from all sides.

An old, weather beaten disciple, whom they called “deacon” and who was distributing tracts, told me his experience in oranges. He said he came to Florida six years ago, planted a quart of orange seed, and in six months they were ten feet high. He transplanted a grove of a thousand trees, and the next year they produced 1,000 oranges to the tree, which he sold at 5c, a piece. The same year in the same grove he raised 2,000 crates of tomatoes, which he sold at $13 per crate and 1,100 crates of cucumbers, which realized him $9 per crate. That he had since that time planted out 31,000 orange trees with similar success; that his groves increased in bearing fourfold every year.

I had just commenced figuring, when the dinner bell rang. After dinner he had to leave, but before starting asked me to contribute to the tract society. I gave him a dollar, which he paid on his passage, and being acquainted with the captain, begged time on the balance.

I suggested that I thought pine-apples the most profitable. At this a large, sturdy, well dressed fellow, who had a large gold-stenciled land-agency card in his hat band, said I was right, in that he had 40,000 acres of pine-apple land to sell around Orange lake— took his start on pine-apples three years ago. He planted 120 acres in pine-apples. In three months he shipped from there 1,200,000 pine-apples, which realized him a profit of $5 on each. Since that time he had planted out 500 acres of pine-apples, and the business was still successful.

Perceiving that I was getting interested, he asked me up to the bar to “smile.” We “smiled.” He wistfully fingered his jacket pockets, looked at the barkeeper, and the barkeeper at him, and at last with a smiling not said, “Remember that, if you please.”

“To thin,” was the gruff response. “You promised to pay old scores this trip,” said the barkeeper.

He struck out to borrow money from a friend.

I was next attacked by a tall, jewelry-bedecked gentleman, with a stove-pipe hat, whom I mistook for a member of the legislature. He desired to sell me 10,000 acres of hammock land in north Florida. He advised me to go into the vegetable business—said he followed it with success; that last winter and spring he planted 900 acres in early vegetables, that his shipments footed up 1,000,000 crates of tomatoes at $11 a crate; 1,800 crates of cucumbers at $9 a crate; 1,200 crates of cabbage at $8 a crate; 500,000 crates of beans at $5 a crate; 1,500 barrels of mutton corn at $16 a barrel; 9,000 bushels of Irish potatoes at $3 a bushel; that he had made arrangements with Mr. Disston for 500 Bohemian gardeners, and would then go into business right. Here he flew off and left me abruptly. A villainous constable had come aboard and levied on his trunk for an unpaid board bill, and he had to go ashore.

I now became interested with an elderly, intelligent, seedy looking Northerner. He presented me a list of his lands for sale; said he had spent a great many years in congress
from different states, and been governor of
divers territories out west; had been minis-
ter to the Fiji islands, and consul to most
of our important ports; that he was residing
in Florida, looking to the interest of a vast
running of northern capitalists that he was
representing some $20,000,000 in Florida;
that he had bought a number of bearing
groves for special care and amusement; that
Mrs. Garfield, his niece, was coming down to
spend the winter with him; that his mother
was an aunt to Jefferson Davis, he himself a
cousin to Robert E. Lee, his brother married
a sister to Grant, and another brother mar-
rried a sister to Jay Gould; that his mother
was a second cousin to [Daniel] Webster,
and his father distantly related to [Pres.
George] Washington. He himself graduated
in the same class at West Point with Alex H.
Stephens, after which he studied law with
Com.[Commodore] Vanderbilt. That he
went on a whaling expedition once with Dr.
Tahnage. He was Abe Lincoln's right-hand
man during the war, and closed Horace
Greeley's eyes in death. However, he voted
for [Winfield Scott] Hancock,30 as Hancock
was a brother-in-law to his oldest son.

“And is that all?” I exclaimed, “Why, I
made sure you were going to round up by
making yourself father-in-law to Sitting Bull
and grandfather to [Charles] Guiteau. What
do you mean by leaving them out?”

The old fellow said I was poking fun at
him, passionately turned on his heel, and
commenced selling soap receipts and prize
packages — going to the bar between sales.

Feeling that I had interviewed the “up-
er crust,” I thought I would now strike out
among the common people and see what
they had to say.

On leaving the boat I found the land
agency boom still at top mast. The fences
were all stenciled with “Land Agency,” and
shingles nailed thickly to the pine trees in
front as high as a man could reach with a
hammer.

The first place I passed, the man was not
at home. His wife wished he was. She said
he was a land agent, and could fit me up,
she knew. Said he was out shooting bats and
buzzards to fertilize his orange grove; that
most of the people in that locality set hens
at the roots of their trees, but they, not be-
ing able to buy bone-dust, used bats, buzz-
dards, rabbits and gopher-shells, which she
deemed preferable. I asked if she knew any-
thing about Polk, Hernando, Hillsboro or
Manatee counties, “Oh! dear,” said she.
“Don’t go there; it’s awful! If you cross the
Withlacoocie or the sand hills, you are a
goner. Why, there’s nothing but wild people
down there! There’s no churches, no
schools, no law, no order, they raise nothing
to eat, live on wild fruit and game, kill their
deer and eat them with the hair on, never
pick their chickens or scale their fish, and
but few places where Sunday ever comes,
and there they catch their children with
dogs to put clean clothes on them.”

“Soil’s rich and country good, I pre-
sume,” I said.

“Oh! me, but you are out of it again,” said
she, “It’s all under water nine tenths of the
year, and when the water sinks away, it
leaves it a commingled mass of saw-grass,
sand hills, mud lakes, barren scrubs, bay-
heads, muck-ponds, sand-soaks, buttonwood
thickets and gopher holes. If all the soil in
the whole country was condensed, it would-
’n’t raise your hat-crown full of pirdars.”

“Just so it is healthy. I shall be content,”
said I.

“The Lord be with me, stranger!” she
exclaimed. “Why they die there like rotten
sheep. You are never out of sight of a grave­yard. The women are all widows, the men are all widowers, and the children all orphans, and oh my, just such a sickly, sunburnt, pale-faced set of squalid wretches you never saw! And here she burst into tears and I left. She was a woman and what she said went by default.

But the next customer was a “foeman worthy of my steel” – an old, weather-beaten, rough-boned, lantern-jawed, cross-eyed, seedy soul, mounted on an ancient bobtail horse that looked just like his master. He seemed quite loquacious – told me he had been down ten miles to a lake, gigging gars to fertilize a greens patch, not being able to buy bone dust. I told him I was bound for south Florida – either Polk, Hernando, Hillsboro, or Manatee – not sure which.

“Oh,” said he, “don’t go to Hernando. Why, the niggers killed all the white inhabitants there three years ago. No white man dare to live there. It’s bad as St. [Santo] Domingo, and Polk is still worse, being inhabited by a set of barbarous outlaws, who kill a man for breakfast every morning. Hillsboro and Manatee are equally objectionable from the fact the yellow fever depopulates them every two years, being on the coast.

“Well, but I am an invalid,” said I, “seeking health.”

“Health indeed,” said he. “Keep out of south Florida. Why, I have seen the malaria so befog the air that the birds couldn’t fly, and the flies, gnats and mosquitoes; not being able to fly, would lie ankle-deep along the roads. I tell you, stranger, there’s insects down there and lots of them, too. I have actually seen the sun on a clear day so beclouded with horseflies, sand-flies, gad-flies, house-flies, and all other kinds of flies, that a man couldn’t see his shadow to save his life; and in all those counties the mosquitoes are so bad that they can’t kindle a fire or light a lamp from the first of May to the last of August.

Said I: “How do they cool their victuals during that time?”

He replied: “oh, they just live on milk and huckleberries.”

“Great place for orange groves,” I remarked.

“Never saw but one bearing grove down there;” he replied, “and it was in an Indian mound, and had been fertilized with rattlesnakes.”

“Oh, gracious!” I exclaimed. “Is it snakey down there?”

“Snakes take care,” he exultingly shouted.

“Why, I’ve seen rattle snakes, black snakes, garter snakes, moccasins, cotton-mouths, vipers and every other kind of snake thick enough on the land to fence it, and each one from the size of a fence rail to a pine sapling! And that’s not half; but a man dare not trust himself on foot there, for the alligators are large enough to swallow a half grown cow, and so vicious that they will chase a man on horse back. Now, these things I know. Being a minister, I spent many months in these counties distributing Bibles and tracts, some years ago, and speak from actual observation.

“Well, sir,” said I, “it sounds like gassing to me.”

“Gassing indeed!” said he. “If you doubt my being a preacher, I’ll show you my credentials.”

Ramming his hand into his pantaloons, he pulled out a roll of papers. I took them and began to read, it proved to be a list of lands he had to sell. I threw it back to him, remarking:

“No more evidences of your piety, if you please. But a few words to you, with the bark
on, and we dissolve. Now, old hoss, these are just the kind of tales you and these up-country folks have been preaching to immigrants about south Florida for years, but this time you waked up the wrong passenger. At present, I own a large alligator peat grove on lake Okeechobee, in sight of the ship canal, but I was principally born and raised all over these counties you speak of; and with due difference to your high calling and mission work, I am prepared to say that everything you have muttered is a viperous slander. The yellow fever never touched south Florida out of sight of tide water, and Hernando county can boast of a numerous, high-toned, intelligent, enterprising white population, and rich hammock soil – rich enough to supply all your up-country with better and cheaper fertilizers than all your bone dust, ash element, bats, buzzards, skinned rabbits, hogs’ hair, chicken feathers, fish scales, Brandreth’s pills and various other things you use now; and as for your snake yarns, I know that burning the woods every year has as completely liberated south Florida of snakes and living venom as St. Patrick’s famous sermon did old Ireland, and I am willing to give you a quarter section of first-class saw-grass land on the public square at Okeechobee, if you can show two dozen mosquito bars in south Florida. And as for health, I can say we have but few graveyards, and they are principally filled with doctors and lawyers, who have starved to death for want of business. Besides, there are but few men in that region but what will go ten miles to find a live alligator. They are becoming valuable and scarce. Talk of Polk county having a barbarous people, indeed! Why, sir, there are not to be found on the continent a more orderly, quiet, peaceable, pious, intelligent, enterprising people than live there. Polk county, I’ll venture, today has more church-houses and fewer dancing-halls; more first-class schools and fewer dram-shops; more preachers and fewer roughs; buys more books and carries fewer revolvers; plants more orange trees and steals a less number of hogs than any county of the same population in the south. And two better counties of land never faced yonder sun than Hillsboro and Manatee. Hillsboro county to day has cattle and mercantile capital enough to buy all the steam-boats on St. Johns river, and all the orange groves in 20 miles of Orange lake. More then half the population of that county are graduates from college, and have professional diplomas. And in Manatee I can safely say it has some localities settled up with as intelligent men, refined women and pretty children as you ever met with: and in proportion to its population, it takes more newspapers, reads more magazine literature, cultivates a greater variety of tropical fruits, writes more for editors; discusses more scientific questions, talks more politics, makes more speeches, holds more picnics, and bakes bigger pound cakes than any place in Christendom. And now, old fellow, I would advise you and all such up-country croakers to come down to south Florida to eat some of our grass-fattened beef, some of our corn-fed pork, stuff well on our cassava pudding and guava pies, attend our camp-meetings; reform your way, and pretty soon the scurf will slip; and in less than a fortnight you will shed more total and hereditary depravity than Adam carried out of the garden of Eden."

"But mind, I tell you, and don’t you forget it, if ever you come on another mission tour through south Florida, if you don’t wear different spectacles; you had better steer clear of Okeechobee, unless you have suicide on the brain, and then we won’t honor you by pioneering a graveyard with you. No, sir; we will utilize you on an alligator hook."

Just then his horse frame began to squeak and his cart wheels were calling for more soap as he lumbered out of sight.

Bartow Informant, August 25, 1881
D.W.D. Boully

"Gabe" does not appear in the Informant this week, as they have organized an immigration society in Okeechobee county, and he has been employed to get up facts for the immigration circular to be issued.

"Letter from Okeechobee"
Bartow Informant, September 1, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

In accordance with the request of the state board of immigration, we folks of Okeechobee county, have responded by organizing our county immigration society,
consisting of Judge Pluck as president, and
Maj. Plute as corresponding secretary.
Then we appointed the following
committee on facts and data. Assigning to
each one his respective part:
NAPOLeON B. YOUNG on longitude.
CAPT. PURDY on attitude.
SHERIFF MCKILLOP on townships.
SQUIRE MCCLINTOCK on ranges.
MRS. ANNALIZER PLUCK on climate.
MRS. CAPT. PURDY on temperature.
COL. METNUSELALI JONES on wages
and prices.
GABRIEL CUNNING on ways and
means of living.
After a few hours preparation the following
circular was read and adopted and a copy
forwarded to the state
board for insertion in the pending column, “Florida
As It Is.”

P.S. - hope the reader will
excuse the monotonous
repetition of South Florida to
the different routes; but the
legislature, by a late act,
declare that all roads must be
the South Florida something.

Gabriel Cunning

CIRCULAR.

The latitude and
longitude of Okeechobee county is
superb. It can not only
boast of a greater quanti-
ty than any other county
on the continent, but a
superior quality, the longitude being longer
and the latitude wider than any county in
the state.

In regards to township, they are of
rather inferior quality, being made rather
small, in order to supply the inhabitance
with plenty of offices; but what they lack in
size they make up in number. Our county
court is constantly organizing new ones for
the benefit of immigration.

In regards to ranges, we have the great-
est variety and most extensive ranges of any
country in the known world. For instance,
the cattle range; which on account of its su-
periority now grazes the half million cattle
which annually flood south Florida with
Spanish gold. Then the hog ranges, out of
which a thousand, fat hogs are stolen and
salted down every winter. In addition to
these, we have the bear range, the deer
range, the alligator range and sometimes
when a strange sheriff puts in an appear-
ance, the people range extensively.

In regards to temperature, our climate is
the same with winter and summer – never
so cold but what young alligators can be
hatched in the sun, and never hot enough
to scald the scales of the moccasins. But if
it is the temperature of the people that is
required; it is quite variegated. Sometimes
our temperature is low; given to cold
shanties, cold shoulders and freeze-outs –
especially towards strangers without mon-
ey. But to rich Northerners we are warm-
hearted, and highly given to hot-house hos-
pitalties.

Wages in laborers here are good, being
from $3 to $5 a day, payable in Okeechobee
scrip. Before the adoption of our county
currency, a good hand could be hired for a
month for two wolf scalps, or a pound of
gator teeth, which was our only circulating
medium at that time.
The only safe criterion by which we can
determine the prices is
to give the hammer
rates at a recent con-
stable’s sale. Two cows
brought $10; a sow and
a pig, $11; a patch of
“stand-overs”, $7; a
large mule, $15; three
pecks of corn, received
from time to time from
the patent office, went
off at the rate of $2 a
bushel; and from the
number of advertisements on the court-
house door signed by the constable, we
think our stock exchange is beginning to
revive.
The transportation here is abundant.
Capt. McQuaig ran a successful line of
transportation on the waters of Okeechobee
for several months. He found a mixture of
lard and water combined to facilitate his
progress wonderfully. When the water is
above a foot deep in the sawgrass, the crew
can wade and shove the boats ... at a rapid
rate. In this way the captain made regular
trips... summer from Lake Tohopekaliga to
the head waters of the Caloosahatchee.

In regards to the various occupations of
our people and means of living, they are too
numerous to mention our most reliable
means of support, however, is wild or un-
marked hogs, in which our country
abounds. Our next best source of wealth is
“hair-dicks,” of which we brand a great
many every year. Also at certain seasons of
the year, a great many wolf scalps are taken
- sufficient to pay off our state and county
taxes. Of late the alligator trade has sprung
up afresh, and bids fair to enrich our people
at no distant day. As soon as the ship canal is completed, and the Frost-line railroad in operation, we expect to ship dried muck and pulverized soil to the northern parts of our state for fertilizing purposes. But our most visible means of support is holding offices and as the organization of the county is such that each voter is entitled to an office, this alone ensures each family a bountiful support regardless of any other resources.

Having strictly complied with the requirements of the state board, we must respectfully, submit the foregoing.

Zebedee Pluck, Pres
Mag. Sitting B. Plute, Sec.

I think when the foregoing circular speaks to the migrating millions seeking homes up and down the highways of the great world, it will hurl a tidal wave of immigration into the everglades of Florida that will astonish the natives.

"Letter from Okeechobee"
Bartow Informant,
September 29, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

I am in constant receipt of letters making inquiry in regard to the railroad prospects of Okeechobee county. For the benefit of all concerned I would state that our prospects are decidedly flattering. We expect to be the grand terminus of all the principal railroads of the state, as well as of the entire continent. To describe them all would require too much time for my pen, and too much space for you columns. I will begin with the South Florida Tropical; which bids fair to be the first road completed. It is more generally known as the Adamsville, Tucker town, Gapway and Camp Ground route. Then comes the South Florida Frost Line, which is locally known as the Sand Hill, Fort Cummings, Chipoco's Camp, and Kissimmee Island line. Also the South Florida Peninsular, which is destined to cross at Lanier's bridge and Flat Ford, then by way of Sherhouse's mill, Nigger Ridge, Hooker prairie, Fort Green and Popash, to Okeechobee. Next in order comes the South Florida Central, or "steer trail" line, which, passing through Okahumpke, steers directly south by way of Fox town, the tanyard, and Joe Guy's cattle pens on Fish Eating Creek.

Then we will, in addition to the above, have the South Florida Freshwater Line, the South Florida Seaboard Line, the South Florida Tidewater terminus, the South Florida Express Line, and the South Florida — I don't know what all. But the main line, upon which we mostly rely in the future, will commence at the ship canal landing on Okeechobee, and running due north towards Streely lake, Squire Boney's and Welch's mill, then on an air line by way of Cincinnati, Chicago, Duluth, and on through the British dominions to Hudson's bay. The name of this route will be the Grand South Florida Polar Star International Continental Esquirmaux and Seminole triple zone line. It will be a grand trunk, triple track, and being the main road of the western hemisphere, will, without doubt, make Okeechobee the principal jumping-off place of the continent.

The county court expects to take steps to bring this line into notice. Judge Pluck and Prof. DeLacy will start in a few days to lay the project before Wall street.

We would have no trouble in obtaining the charter and receiving heavy donations from the state, was it not for a little mishap of our legislature. They, by an unfortunate oversight, gave to the different railroads eight million acres more land than the state owned; and the general government having but little more land in Florida, I fear that some of the roads will have to await the draining of the everglades, or the annexation of Cuba, to get there prorata.

P.S. — hope the reader will excuse the monotonous repetition of South Florida to the different routes; but the legislature, by a late act, declare that all roads must be the South Florida something.

"Letter from Okeechobee"
Bartow Informant, October 6, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

Amidst the clash and dash of ship canals, Disston lands, immigration, railroads, everglade drainage, Kissimmee navigation, county courts, hotels, boarding houses, and invalid sanitariums, all of which are on the boom at Okeechobee, I am at a loss to know
what to write about.

Our great railroad project, to wit: The South Florida, Polar Star, International, Continental, Esquimaux and Seminole triple zone line – the initials of the road, if the sides of a car will hold them, will be the S. F., P. S., I., C., E., and T. Z. L. As I was going to say, this great project is looming up into notice. It meets the approbation of Europe. England has already betrayed her willingness to grant the right of way, and as soon as we get the charter we wish to present the Queen with a thousand-mile ticket. But we are no little surprised to find the grand scheme meeting with opposition at home. That old king of monopolies, Jay Gould, has taken a stand against us. He is aroused, and all Wall Street is in a buzz. He is beginning to sell. At last accounts he had purchased seventy-seven congressmen. Being third-rate fellows, however, he got them at low figures, averaging about $95 a head. He has also purchased a number of medium-priced editors, and advertised $2,000 to any and all engineers who will report our route impracticable.

But one thing is in our favor. The long expected demise of the president has led the leading editors to sharpen their quills and strike for higher wages. The cabinet officers have risen a hundred per cent in the last month, and a strike in the senate is daily expected.

But the most daring effort on the part of Jay Gould was to corrupt our own people, by sending a worsted dress pattern to each of our county commissioners, and a ready made suit of black alpaca to Judge Pluck. He got the wrong sow by the ear that time – you bet he did. Judge Pluck is rightly named: he is not made of bending metal: he don’t sell. But he bundled J.G.'s old duds, and returned them with a letter couched in words with the bark on.

It is a long road that has no end, and Jay Gould may be nearer the jumping-off place in his career than he supposes. England is going to favor our line. English capitalists will take hold of it. And when it come to baying men, he will find that the bank of England, backed up by our Okeechobee scrip, will play the winning hand. Let Jay Gould make a few passes at Judge Pluck and our county court, and he will get it done for him. He had better take out a policy in his moccasins.

P.S. – Guiteau will necessarily be hung at no distant day. Our county court has memorialized congress, through our senators, to have the execution come off at Okeechobee. It will give South Florida notoriety, bring oceans of money into the country, and wonderfully enhance immigration. It will also bring the efficiency of our Okeechobee jute hemp before the commercial world.

"Letter from Okeechobee"
Bartow Informant, October 20, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

It has been determined upon the part of the people of Okeechobee to keep clear of lawyers, believing them to be detrimental to the good of society; and the present conditions of our county; such that litigation would work a great hardship to many of our people. For instance, many of our county officers have, through ignorance of law, charged higher fees than the law strictly allows; and some of them, through actual necessity, have been compelled to use public money, which they honestly design to
refund so soon as the railroad comes, and they can dispose of their real estate. There are also a great many of our guardians and administrators that are, from the same cause, behind on settlement, and they and their bondmen would be ruined, was it not for the clemency of Judge Pluck – he having much of their money borrowed, which they loan him at low per cent., kindly allowing him to charge liberal costs, and paying him a little besides, he in a most noble and generous manner refrains from oppressive measures.

This being the condition of things, we well knew that the advent of a little, sniveling, strap toad lawyer in our midst would soon set Okeechobee in a buzz – would soon have all our official bondmen seated into a gin-shop, and all the old widows and orphans clapper clawing at the heels of Judge Pluck for the benefit of said lawyer collecting their estate on the halves. Such a state of affairs would ruin our prosperity, unless we burnt our courthouse; and that we hate to do. Therefore we set our faces like flint against the location of a lawyer in our midst, and were quite fortunate in cold-shouldering every one who put in his appearance, till he disappeared in the saw-grass.

But recently we got hold of rather a tough customer, who did not seem to see a point, or take a hint. Said customer was a little, box-toad, dwarf of a fellow, with right pants, swallow-tailed coat, standing collar, and a zinc trunk, full of leather-back books. He seemed determined to stay; and, despite the frown, sneers, insinuations, reproaches, rebuffs, insults, slights, reflections, cold shoulders, and such like, he persisted in remaining. Judge Pluck tried to bluff him by demanding a month’s board in advance, supposing he couldn’t chink; but he chinked.

Fearing he might create disturbance in our county matters, we took the precaution to hide all our court and county records in a hallow cypress. We thought this ought to check mate him, but it failed. He still stayed and nosed around, till at last he got up a little lawsuit, and filed the papers before Judge Pluck. The Judge holds court in the cypress park on the edge of the lake, at the junction of Guiteau Street and ship canal.

The case coming on, Judge Pluck took his seat upon a cypress stump cushioned with a hog-skin, while the jury occupied two stout cabbage palmettos logs prepared for the purpose. The testimony being heard, our little upstart walked around behind a cabbage stump, on top of which he had an armful of his leather-back books stacked. He began his speech, and soon convinced the bystanders that he was an unsophisticated idiot, by using all kinds of Seminole words, which he had picked up from the squaws during his short stay among us – such terms as “res geste,” *lis pendens,* *sine qua non,* *ad infinitum,* and other Seminole gibberish, which no Indian himself, could have understood. He then opened his books and began reading and oh! forever! such sights and immensities as that poor fellow did read! He beat Bill Arp’s lawyer – no touch! He read from [William] Blackstone on immigration, [Joseph Kinnicutt] Angell on limitation, [James] Kent on meditation, [Theophilus] Parsons on concentration, [Joel Prentiss] Bishop on recreation – and for my life I can’t tell how many actions he did read about. But all that had any point was a story written by a fellow named Baiment on broken buggies and borrowed horses.

As he finished reading, a nigger and half-breed on the jury got to quarreling in Indian. Sheriff McKillop was lying on the pine straw sound asleep. Judge Pluck was leisurely lighting his cob pipe at the mosquito fire, paying no attention whatever to the disturbance – it being no unusual occurrence in his court. But the little Pickwickety lawyer, wishing to say something to look smart, remarked, that as the sheriff was asleep, he would recommend that the court appoint an *elisor* to keep order – pronouncing the word *elisor* in old style. Judge Pluck dropped his pipe, and, clenching his fists, made for the speaker, exclaiming, “You scoundrel! You villain, dog and thief! You dare insult me by asking that my wife be appointed sheriff of my own court? I’ll show you, sir, that Annalizer Pluck, if she was a Minorcan when I married her, is not the wife of a county judge and mistress of a hotel and act to be scandalized by a scabbed nosed salamander like you!”

The thunder-struck attorney, who had been falling back in good order as the judge advanced, felt suddenly relieved by sheriff McKillop springing between them, and seizing the Judge in his arms, slowly hustled him back to his cypress stump. The sheriff insisted that the Judge hold his boots and
calm down, so that the lawyer could apologize or explain.

The Judge at last cooled, and the little fellow explained — you bet he explained — and to our surprise, the took up one of the leather-backed books and read, sure enough, that in case of the absence of a sheriff, the judge could appoint an officer in his place, called an elisor. This was a new point in Okeechobee, and slightly reflected on the ignorance of the court. The Judge felt chawed. He apologized at arm's length, and in furtherance of justice ordered Major Plute, the clerk, to enter up a fine of $10 against himself, Zebi-dee Pluck, for contempt of court, payable in Okeechobee scrip.

The little spindle-shanked pettifogger, elated at his triumph, pitched in with his soft-soap apologies, saying he had no design whatever of reflecting on the court; that he hardly knew the Judge was a married man, much less that his wife's name was Annalizer; that so far from intending an insult, he was rather playing the part of an amicus curia.

"An amicus what?" said Judge Pluck, slowly rising up.

"An amicus curia," said the speaker hastily. "That means a friend of the court."

"Ah shucks!" said the Judge, settling back on the stump. "I thought you were calling me a half breed."

The little swallow-tail now began to realize that he was in the wrong pew, but was determined to finish his speech at the risk of blood and bullets. He went on with his argument, and presently remarked that the case in point came within the rule of cayeat emptor.42

"No it don't," said the Judge firing up. "I am judge of this court, and your case comes within my rule, sir. Don't doubt by authority again, if you don't want to get saddled with a fine for contempt."

The little box-toe had to explain again, and then he began closing but before he got to the amen, he suggested that he had abridged his arguments and made his speeches rather multum in parum.43

The Judge looked fierce again, when sheriff McKillop interrupted the speaker by telling him that the Judge's knowledge of Indians was very shaky and he had better not use any more Seminole terms. The little fellow closed in a hurry, and the judge and jury retired in the saw-grass, where the judge instructed the jury that the law and testimony were clearly in favor of the lawyer's client, but never to let that scoundrel gain a case in their midst, or he would ruin the country; therefore to find the verdict against him, and he would leave; and after the lawyer vamoosed, then he would discover an error in his own judgment, grant a new trial, and the next verdict could be according to law and evidence.

This scheme showed great legal ability upon the part of Judge Pluck, and was a wise ruling, to be sure, but proved wholly superfluous, for before the verdict was brought in, the little shinkumbracket had gobbled traps, and was hitching his broken-horned ox between the unpeeled shafts of his rickety cart, and soon the plug-hat, box-toed, scissor-tailed-coat, zinc-trunk and leather-backed books disappeared in the saw-grass, on the route for new scenes and new adventures. And we hope and trust that he is the last of the Mohicans, in a legal line, that will ever try his fortunes at Okeechobee.

Sheriff McKillop rendered himself very
unpopular, by interfering in behalf of the little vagabond. The whole community was anxious to see Judge Pluck maul him.

There was an impudent clock-peddler in town, the other day, who had the brass to remark that lawyers were a public benefit, that in every county where they had a good bar of lawyers, the county was out of debt, and where there were few or no lawyers, the scrip was low and depreciated, and the county in debt to its eyebrows, and cited several counties in point.

You bet we made him take out state and county license quick, then charge him double fare for what time he had stayed; bought none of his clocks, but advised him, for safety of his merchandise, to locomote to new quarters. He locomoted.

“Letter from Okeechobee”
Bartow Informant,
December 10, 1881
Gabriel Cunning
Ed. Informant

O
ur town has recently underwent another serious disaster. The circumstances are as follows:

About a week ago a tall, raw-boned tramp, with tattered raiment, rundown stove, and seedy stove-pipe hat, put in his appearance at the upper end of town, with an old pocket compass, a dirty haversack slung to his side, a hatchet handle sticking through the corner, with a bundle of stakes under one arm. Every hundred yards he would stop and drive a stake, then step off another hundred yards and drive another stake. In this way he continued on down Main Street to the landing, where he waded in to his arm-pits, drove a long stake, and then sighted through his compass for a long time in a curious direction across the lake.

This rather novel spectacle excited great curiosity among our people who were soon crowding around the mysterious stranger, and asking him all manner of questions in regard to this objective point, to all of which he gave the most evasive answers. But after coming to shore and figuring in this blank book for a time, he surveyed the crowd around him, and settling his eye on Rev. Napoleon B. Young, who happened to have on his broadcloth coat, he winked him out of the crowd, and told him his business was a profound secret he would not have [David Levy] Yulee44 and Disston find it out for the world; but desired that a few of the most trusty citizens meet him in a private room at the hotel, where he would entrust them with the objective point. Then receiving direction to Judge Pluck’s sanitarium, he made his way there in wet boots and breeches.

Soon, Judge Pluck, Rev. Napoleon B. Young, Sheriff McKillop, Squire McClintock, Capt. Purdy and Major Plute were all snugly ensconced in the presence of the mysterious stranger, with closed doors. He introduced himself to their confidence as Prof. De La Gong, a step-son of Gen. [Winfield Scott] Hancock; that a heavy engineer corps was then engaged in surveying the great Chimborazo, Continental, Peninsular, Frost-line, South American railway; that it was the greatest project of the age; that Vanderbilt and [John Jacob] Astor had taken it in hand to corner Jay Gould and Grant in their Mexican project, by binding the two hemispheres in one grand chain of transportation; that the plan was a triple track railway from New York to Cape Sable, the southern point of the United States, there to connect with a heavy line of steamers, that would connect at Panama with a grand central trunk line designed to pass down through central part of South America, terminating at Cape Horn; that Lake Okeechobee was to be the great inland harbor of the ship canal, therefore must be made the principal point in the Northern line. Then taking from his pocket a tattered map of Florida, he showed the established route heavily drawn with a pencil from where it crossed the northern boundary of the state to within about twenty miles of Okeechobee. That the corps, consisting of about 100 men, with all their teams, tents and equipage, were encamped there, resting, while Col. Vanderbilt, a nephew to the great millionaire, who was superintending the survey, had taken an eastern route to our town, on horseback, while he, the professor, being the chief surveyor, had taken his light pocket compass and come through on foot, in order to form a rough estimate of the nature and distance of the route; that he was sadly disappointed in not finding the Colonel there awaiting his arrival. It placed him in rather a state of destitution among strangers. Being a pioneer railroad man, he knew he would encounter scrubs, swamps and saw-grass, therefore he had worn the hardest old suit of clothes he could borrow in camp, which, by
a tight squeeze, had lasted him through. But, fortunately, he had undergone similar experiences before, having been frequently caught in scrapes of the kind when surveying the North Pacific, Texas Central, and various western routes. That he hoped, under the circumstances, they would favor him with the necessaries of life, and render him comfortable till the Colonel arrived, who had plenty of funds, and would lay in heavy supplies. And for the present, if it wouldn’t be intruding too much on their hospitality, he would like the favor of a suit of dry clothes, and in a smiling mood said, if it would be no offence to their temperance proclivities, he was in good condition to accept a glass of good whisky.

By this time our leading citizens in conclave were full and ready to explode with brilliant prospects. The future just loomed up with booms and bonanzas of wealth. Air castles of triple track railroads, ship canals, ship-crowed harbors, cities towering up around the lake, glittering spires above the saw-grass, dry docks, big steamers, millionaires, national banks, government bends, and such like, were lighting up their imaginations in bold reality. Each man felt himself a dormant partner of Vanderbilt and Astor. Judge Pluck rushed and brought out his old broadcloth suit, that had not been worn since he ran the faro bank in Tallahassee. Then he whispered to Major Plute to run home and bring up that "bled" shirt and gold-washed studs he wore when he went to the capital to get his appointment from Gov. Bloxham.

Before the Major arrived with the shirt and studs, Capt. Purdy, who had an eye to the Colonel's money put in an appearance with a box of collars, some underwear, and the best hat and pair of boots he had. And before the stranger could be redressed, sheriff McKillop, who runs a moral drug store, came dashing in with a pound of sugar, a quart of Cognac, and a handful of goblets.

The professor, by this time was dressed, except that the Judge's coat proved moth-eaten at the elbows. So Rev. Napoleon B. Young, who expected the job of guide to the corps through the everglades, kindly removed his fine broadcloth coat and contributed it to the outfit.

The professor being dressed dry on the outside, dampened his inside by putting himself on the outside of a heavy draught of Cognac. The leading citizens, feeling quite railroadish, heartily imbibed the remainder. By this time Mrs. Annalizer Pluck, who had eaves-dropped the entire deliberations, announced dinner for the stranger, who retired for refreshments, while the leading citizens held a hurried consultation how to shape their ends to get the biggest pile out of the railroad men. It was apparent that the entire corps would be down on us in a few days; that they would eat Judge Pluck's hotel to a famine the first meal, buy our Capt. Purdy's store instant and drink the moral drug store dry before going to bed; that Col. Vanderbilt had scads of money; that the hungry, ragged hands would not regard prices in the least. Therefore Capt. Purdy was to mark up his goods about 300 per cent above cost. Sheriff McKillop, by the aid of fish berries and tobacco juice, could dilute his alcohol some 500 per cent; Judge Pluck was to prepare to entertain as large a crowd as possible, and put his rate to $5 per day; Squire McClinton with the two half breeds was to scour the country and kill hogs with out regard to mark or brand, and prepare heavy supplies of meat; Maj. Plute, with a nigger to help, was to repair to Bird Roost Island and cut several boat loads of palmetto cabbage, and catch catfish and corral them in a lagoon. No sooner were the plan laid then each man went to work.

Prof. De La Gong spent the evening, and till late at night, drawing a plat of the lake and the route leading thereto, on goods box linings found at the store. He also drew a plat of the future town of Okeechobee, containing about five miles square of dense city, including parks, gardens, grounds, wharfs, forts and the like, but next morning said he must go back about a mile and run in again to straighten a slight crook in the line where he had lost his variation. This time he ran smack through Judge Pluck's hotel, Captain Purdy's establishment, and slightly tipped the corner of the moral drug store. He said it was very unfortunate for the citizens, for Col. Vanderbilt would order them pulled off the survey as soon as he arrived, provided he reported to him the true line.

Our leading citizens were at first greatly non-plused, but finally persuaded him with $40 down and their bills for $60 more, when the Colonel came, not to report the crook. He suggested that it would be best to buy what things he and the Colonel and his
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staff might want before the corps of roughs arrived. So Capt. Purdy put off on him a suit of clothes for himself, a suit for the Colonel, a large cheese, a case of oysters, a case of sardines, a box of crackers and various sundries. He also took five gallons of sheriff McKillop's Cognac brandy. By this time he became very anxious about the Colonel; what was detaining him was a mystery. That night he walked the streets till late looking for the Colonel. Next morning he called the leading citizens together to take steps to develop the Colonel. Accordingly he proposed that the leading citizens follow the survey up to camp. And if the Colonel had not returned to camp, for them to guide the corps down to town, while he would take Squire McClintock's shot-gun and his compass and go on the eastern route, and perhaps meet the Colonel, and bring him in. The leading citizens started, but before they had gone 10 miles they found the blazes growing dim and the stakes getting fewer in number. At last the survey ran into a swamp hammock, which they waded, and followed it into a deep morass, in which Judge Pluck, who was foremost, sank to his chin and had to be pulled out with long poles. After trying all evening to follow the survey they camped for the night, and next morning took a circuitous route and went to camp, the whereabouts of which had been located so they knew where it was. But oh! What was their chagrin and disappointment to find neither men, mules, tents, wagons, or even tracks of the same. The only thing to show any signs of identity was the word "sold" hacked with a hatchet on several of the large pines. They now smelt the rat. For the first time the leading citizens began to suspicion that Prof. De La Gong was a fraud. Hungry, wearied and hurriedly they retraced their steps to have an explanation of bait their alligator hooks with him that night. But they proved too late, for they had not been gone but a few hours before he returned in great excitement, stating that he he learned from an Indian that Col. Vanderbilt with part of his staff was down on the lake about six miles east sloshing about among the lagoons trying to find their way into town, accordingly he piled all his purchases into the best boat, and borrowing a blanket, overcoat and umbrella, set sail in search of the Colonel. And from that day to this, our enraged citizens have never heard hair nor hide of him, or his Colonel, or his corps. Such is Life.

But the loss of Purdy's goods, Judge Pluck's vest and breeches, Maj. Plutes "bled" shirt and "shootly," Rev. Napoleon B. Young's new coat, sheriff McKillop's Cognac, and the Squire's shot-gun, are nothing to compare to the loss in preparation. Squire McClintock has the woods stinking with piles of spoilt meat and no salt to save it; Sheriff McKillop diluted his alcohol till it soured and had to be thrown out; Judge Pluck had gilled his hiss, stables, sheds and back-lots with green moss bunks and hung the turkey oak grove before his door with cow-skin hammocks preparing to lodge the whole corps. His house stinks with sour victuals, and the old duds shed off by Prof. De La Gong have completely stocked his sanitarium with specimens of animated nature. Away with railroad men! Okeechobee is done with them. The next one who starts to tour our town had better write and leave his last words behind him, and say his prayers as he enters town, for this is doomed. Words are inadequate to express our rage and disappointment.

This zany story was the last surviving dispatch that Gabriel Cunning wrote to either the Bartow Informant or the Tampa Sunland Tribune. While Cunning's true identity will probably never be known, his humorous missives provide modern readers with some interesting insights into the mindset, time, and place of late nineteenth century South Florida.

ENDNOTES

James M. Denham is a professor of history at Florida Southern College, where he also directs the Center for Florida History. Before joining the FSC history faculty in 1991, Dr. Denham held teaching appointments at Florida State University, where he earned his Ph.D degree in 1988, Georgia Southern University, and Limestone College in Gaffney, South Carolina. His articles and reviews have appeared in many scholarly journals and newspapers. He is the author of "A Rogue's Paradise: Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida 1821-1861" (Tuscaloosa, 1997); "Cracker Times and Pioneer Lives: the Florida Reminiscences of George Gillette Keen and Sarah Pamela Williams" (Columbia, 2000), with Canter Brown, Jr.; and "Florida Sheriffs: A History, 1821-1945" (Tallahassee, 2001), with William W. Rogers. An award-winning author and public speaker, Denham was awarded the Florida Historical Society's Arthur W. Thompson Prize in 1992. In 1997, he was appointed a fellow to the Grady McWhiney Research Foundation, an organization committed to advancing the research...
of southern and military history. He has served fellowships at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the University of South Carolina, the University of Wisconsin, Harvard University, and the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle, NC. Denham lives in Lakeland.


3. These figures are based on the cattle prices at $14 per head. *Tampa Sunland Tribune*, November 16, 1878.


6. A good general overview of population and agricultural production of Hillsborough, Polk, and Manatee Counties can be found in “Florida As it is,” *Tampa Sunland Tribune*, January 15, 1881.


8. For a contemporary description of Manatee (both the village and the county) see *Tampa Sunland Tribune*, July 27, 1878. “The village, or settlement known as Manatee, is by no means closely built up as a regularly laid off town, but is divided off into lots containing from four to ten acres on which the owner resides and has the balance set out in an orange grove with other semi-tropical fruits interspersed. The houses are mostly of a plain cottage style, built of wood and ciled or plastered inside and painted; and embowered, as the majority are in umbrageous fruit trees, the effect is extremely pleasant and inviting.” The correspondent also noted that the village had five or six stores. Two or three steamers full of cattle are taken per week to the Havana market. Subsequent description in *Ibid.*, May 27, 1880. See also Janet Snyder Matthews, *Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay* (Tulsa: Caprine Press, 1983).

9. On December 13, 1879, Cuss Finger, a correspondent to the *Tampa Guardian*, reported that “Fort Ogden was improving. It had three stores and a drinking saloon. In the absence of a clerk there can be no license obtained to sell whiskey or get married, so we have for the time being to suspend both drinking and marrying.”


16. Cunning is no doubt referring to the southern tip of the “Florida Ridge,” which extends down to the bottom of present day Highlands County, at that time Manatee County. For an elevation map see Edward A. Fernald and Elisabeth D. Purdum, eds., *Atlas of Florida*, 57.

17. There were hundreds of Indian temple and ceremonial mounds, burial mounds, and habitation mounds scattered throughout Florida in the mid-nineteenth century. In Lake Okeechobee region, in the 1880’s, the mounds were untouched by tourism and for the most part humanity, standing as proud relics to the Indian nations that once lived in South Florida. See Jerry N. McDonald & Susan L. Woodward, *Indian Mounds Of The Atlantic Coast: A Guide To Sites From Maine To Florida* (Newark: The McDonald & Woodward Publishing Company, 1987), 41-45; Lawrence Will, *Cracker History Of Okeechobee: “Custard Apple, Moonshine, Gatorfish, and Moonshine”* (St. Petersburg: Great Outdoors, 1964), 18-19; Randolph Twidmer, *The Evolution of the Caloosa: A Nonagricultural Chiefdom on the Southwest Florida Coast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 6, 36-46, 86-94.

18. Philip Dzialynski was a Jewish businessman of Cunning’s time, and owned stores in Bartow, Orlando and Fort Meade. Dzialynski was also a real estate agent, citrus grove and hotel owner as well as serving on the Polk County board of county commissioners. See Canter Brown Jr., *In The Midst Of All That Makes Life Worth Living* (Fort Meade, Florida to 1940) (Tallahassee: Sentry Press, 2001), 122-124, 264; and Canter Brown Jr., *Florida’s Peace River Frontier* (Orlando: University of Central
19. William D. Bloxham (1835-1911) served as Governor of Florida from 1881-1885, and again from 1897-1901. One of his administration's first acts was to sell Hamilton Disston 4 million acres of land at $0.25 per acre. Bloxham was sworn in as governor only a few months before Cunning's first article appeared in the Informant. See Allen Morris and Joan Perry Morris, eds, *The Florida Handbook* (Tallahassee: The Peninsular Publishing Company, 1997), 321.


21. Common derogatory names for French people and German people were Frogs and Krauts in corresponding order.

22. Cunning is referring to an unpopular law passed by the Florida legislature, taxing improvements squatters made on state lands. The tax Cunning is referring to is discussed in *Tampa Sunland Tribune*, July 30, August 18, 1881.


25. Charles Devens was U.S. attorney general during the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes.


29. President James Garfield (1831-1881) was shot by Charles J. Guiteau on July 2, 1881, and died on September 19. The first local coverage of the shooting appeared in the *Tampa Sunland Tribune*, July 9, 1881.

30. Winfield Scott Hancock (1824-1866), a Democrat, lost to James Garfield in the presidential election of 1880.

31. Cunning is probably referring to the Three Mile Canal that connected the southwest corner of Lake Okeechobee with Lake Hiecchopee, close to the present day town of Moore Haven.

32. *Lis pendens* is Latin for "a pending lawsuit."

33. *Sine qua non* is Latin for "without which cause not."

34. *Ad infinitum* is Latin for "to infinite."

35. Charles Henry Smith (Bill Arp) (1826-1903), a prominent lawyer and politician, wrote many humorous letters published in the Rome, Georgia *Southern Confederacy*, similar to those of Gabriel Cunning, signed with the name Bill Arp. See L. Moody Simms, *ANB*, 20:150-151.


37. Joseph Kinnicutt Angell (1794-1857), a prominent legal writer, was the author of *Treaties On The Common Law In Relation To Watercourses* (1824) and *Right Of Property In Tidewater And In The Soil And Shores Thereof* (1826). See Mark Warren Bailey, *ANB*, 1:524-525.


39. Theophilus Parsons (1797-1882) was the editor of the *United State Literary Gazette*. He was also the author of *The Elements Of Mercantile Law* (1856); *Law Of Business For Business Men* (1857); and *The Law Of Contracts from 1853 to 1855*. See Francis Helsinki, *ANB*, 17:95-96.


41. An *elisor* is one of two persons appointed by a court to return a judgment or serve a writ when the sheriff and the coroners are disqualified.

42. *Cayeat emptor* is Latin for "let the buyer beware."

43. *Multum in parum* is Latin for "many in one."

"God Bless America, my home sweet home!"
The Tampa Theatre audience finishes singing with patriotic enthusiasm and applauds Lee Erwin, the Mighty Wurlitzer virtuoso who leads them in this nostalgic sing-a-long. Tonight is "An Evening of Silent Classics," and the elfish Erwin, who has played the Mighty Wurlitzer organ in more than 400 venues around the world, is providing the accompaniment for a screening of *The Great Train Robbery*, *Big Business*, *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and *Safety Last*. This cinematic journey into the past is part of the National Film Preservation Board and the Library of Congress' National Film Registry Tour at the Tampa Theatre.

When the applause dies, Tampa Theatre director John Bell steps up to the podium on the small stage and introduces David Francis, the Chief of Motion Picture Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division at the Library of Congress. "When we planned this tour," begins Francis after a polite round of applause, "this is the sort of place that we dreamed of – an original theater with an organ for our program of silent films. So, at last, our dream has been realized. The first items on the program are something special to Tampa, because they are actually films shot here in 1898, the time of the Spanish-American War. I think Tampa was chosen because of Henry Plant's railroad and his luxurious hotel – they made Tampa an ideal setting off point for the troops to leave for Cuba." For two minutes, the Technicolor audience silently watches yellow and brown shadows captured on nineteenth century film. Indistinct soldiers pick up blurry boxes of supplies and place them on a loading dock. When the soldiers disappear into bright light, we applaud respectfully. The next film, as brief as the first, offers century-old images of war preparation. Filmed from the window of a slow moving train, the panoramic footage shows groups of soldiers standing in front of railway cars. After a few minutes of silent attention, we applaud the brittle film and its enduring images of life in Tampa a century ago. These ghosts – the soldiers, the railroad, the Spanish American War, and the Edison Company that recorded it – give us a flavor, Francis tells us, of the early days of cinema and a portrait of a Tampa none of us have ever seen. The sepia image not only carries us into Tampa's past, but also shows us some of the forces that would forge the way for the Tampa Theatre to be built twenty eight years after Edison's films of the Spanish-American War. The framed apparitions evidence the success of Plant's railway, the notoriety the Spanish-American War brought to Tampa, and the visual impact of Edison's Vitagraph. Yet, the images are fleeting, bound in celluloid, and I want the camera to show us more.

Beyond what I can see in the frames are the industrial and urbanizing influences in Tampa that began developing in the 1880s, and culminated in the construction of the Tampa Theatre in 1926. Tampa's industrial development, the expansion of the railway and the introduction of the streetcar, the formation of Franklin Street as the center of commercial activity and circulation, and the city's boosterism of the 1920s were all
factors leading to Tampa's economic boom and the expansion of the city's middle class. These aspects of modern urban life, along with the growth and commercialization of film entertainment were critical factors in the eventual construction of the Tampa Theatre. In fact, the two went hand in hand in the creation of the theater as a place of public leisure, social interaction, class and status distinctions, cinematic experience, and a symbol of Tampa's rapid growth.

Much of the social residue created by mass entertainment, commercialization and urbanization settled in the space of Tampa's opulent picture palace on October 15, 1926, the theatre's opening night.

In this paper I explain the significant forces leading to Tampa's urbanization as refracted through the space of the Tampa Theatre. The construction of Henry Plant's South Florida Railroad, promotional activities of Tampa's Board of Trade's, Tampa's booster rhetoric, the development of Tampa's streetcar system, the commercial evolution of Franklin Street – the heart of Tampa's downtown – and the emergence of pre-cinema and cinema spectacles that helped to develop an urban mass audience are the critical urbanizing elements that converged and culminated in the social space of the Tampa Theatre. While the theatre claimed to be a palace of entertainment for the masses, its new patrons received lessons about public behavior and class distinctions. Although the instructions the patrons acquired helped them find their place within a spectator culture, the theatre itself was a realm of placelessness mirroring the transformative experiences its patrons were encountering in their growing city.

The Tampa Theatre has been a deeply symbolic space and a locus of cultural meaning in Tampa for the last 72 years. A gargoyle- and statue-stuffed castle of fancy, “the most beautiful theatre in the south” has also been called the “crown jewel” of the city. The picture palace – the economic, cultural and architectural apex of Tampa's urban development during the twenties – reigned as the queen of the city until the early sixties. Then, the very forces that first publicly elevated the theatre – transportation development, increased mobility, and economic expansionled to an increasingly suburbanized Tampa, which ultimately undermined her power, and left her alone in a nearly empty downtown. Integration helped to displace the theatre's status even more. Tampa's black citizens, who had never been welcomed in the theatre, finally began regularly frequenting the theatre in 1968. The theatre's white middle class patrons fled to drive-ins and other theatres closer to their new suburban homes. Yet, the impact of the Tampa Theatre on the city was not forgotten, and in 1976 the city bought and restored the theatre in the hopes that its re-opening would encourage resurgence in commercial activity downtown.
For the last twenty-two years she has sat on her throne on Franklin Street ruling over many abandoned buildings and mostly uninhabited sidewalks and streets patiently waiting for her loyal subjects to return. Today, the picture palace does have a faithful following of patrons who enjoy the theatre's art films, revel in the historic ambience of the auditorium and savor one of the last remaining urban public spaces in a city afflicted with epidemic suburban sprawl. While Tampa's movie palace that dominated motion picture exhibition from the late 1910s through the advent of the stock market crash and the subsequent depression of the late 1920s. The highly profitable picture palaces provided the bulk of the movie industry's revenue. Far from white elephants, Douglas Gomery maintains that they were lucrative enterprises that were the most profitable enterprises in film industry. In 1926, for example, the year the Tampa Theatre opened

periphery continues to expand, the Tampa Theatre stands as a historical monument to a once thriving centralized city that only hopes to flourish again.

The Picture Palace Phenomenon

It is doubtful that there will ever be anything as remarkable or fantastic in movie theater architecture as the urban

for business, an average of 50 percent of America's film audiences attended the 2,000 picture palaces in 79 cities.¹

The fantasies that the films promised to spectators paled in comparison to the surroundings that the patrons found themselves in once they bought their tickets. Located in prime downtown locations, the showplaces for the city were never hard to find. Like the Tampa Theatre, picture
palaces were usually near a trolley or streetcar stop. Ornate box offices surrounded by a sea of terrazzo jutted out onto the sidewalk, and bas-relief and stone figures marked the period-revival exteriors. Often the picture palaces were named after the cities of their locations. Huge signs with neon letters illuminated "The Chicago," "The Los Angeles," and "The Tampa" as if they were the city's flagship theater. The extravagantly decorated and highly eclectic historic modes of the exteriors distinguished the theaters from the buildings around them, explains Charlotte Herzog, while also giving them a stamp of legitimacy.

The Branch Opera House on Franklin Street photographed by James C. Field in 1870. (Courtesy of the Florida State Archives Collection.)

While the picture palaces' exteriors were appealing, the interiors were designed to dazzle. The theaters, rather than the films shown there, were generally the main attraction. As the renowned picture palace owner Marcus Loew explained, "We sell tickets to theaters, not movies." Palaces were so ostentatious that people paid for tickets just to see inside of them. Roxy Rathefel, the well-known manager of several New York picture palaces, understood the underlying requisite for success - the attraction of large crowds. He believed that people were searching for the exotic, and he played on their curiosity. Rathefel's theaters' interiors, like the Tampa Theatre and other picture palaces around the country, intentionally dramatized opulence.

Red velvet curtains, balconies, mezzanines, chandeliers, classical statues and fountains, orchestras and organs signaled to the palaces' new patrons that they had entered a refined space that required them to behave appropriately. Picture palace owners, Gomery contends, were able to fashion patrons of their choice rather than the other way around, helping to reposition the consumer culture in the United States. Patrons managed their own behavior because of the dignified settings that were similar in ambience to the grand stage theaters. Picture palace patrons copied the codes of behavior established in stage theaters in the middle of the nineteenth century. Palace owners such as Balaban and Katz proclaimed their palaces were built "for all of the people all of the time," rather than
the few who wanted to appear more aristocratic than the rest. Yet their theatres
did cater to the rising aspirations of customers drawn from better neighborhoods.6
John Eberson, the movie palace architect who designed the Tampa Theatre, expressed a similar sentiment as Balaban and Katz. “Here we find ourselves today creating
and building super-cinemas of enormous capacities,” boasted Eberson, “excelling in splendor, in luxury and in furnishings the most palatial homes of princes and crowned kings for and on behalf of His Excellency – the American Citizen.”7

Eberson’s royal citizens were treated to a multitude of architectural and design delicacies when they walked through the doors of the Tampa Theatre for the first time in the middle of October 1926. Upon entering the cool, dim and curiously hushed theatre, they left behind the yellow glare of Franklin street’s neon signs, the din of automobile horns and clanging streetcars and other familiar reverberations of life in the sweltering, humid city. Once their pupils adjusted to the dusky light, they beheld dozens of menacing gargoyles jutting from the sides of the two-story lobby, Spanish and Italian pottery, gilded mirrors, stuffed parrots and medieval tapestries. Spanish tile roofing and jewel colored, intricately tiled floors accentuated the twin marble staircases. Embellished with wrought iron balustrades and carved oak banisters, the palatial stairs led to the similarly adorned mezzanine.

As the theatre’s astonished patrons made their way inside the auditorium, they confronted a Mediterranean temple of the past. Mellifluous lights, some on towering wrought-iron stands and others suspended from small balconies and alcoves faintly illuminated the flamboyant proscenium arch above the stage. Surrounding the arch, reproductions of Grecian and Roman antiquated statues peered gracefully down upon the auditorium’s fifteen hundred red velvet seats. Whimsical Venetian facades, French colonnades, and quixotic Persian balconies helped to create an illusion of an outdoor courtyard that might have bordered the ancient Mediterranean Sea. A regal peacock perched outside a renais-
sance window, earth colored roof tiles embellished with white flowers and trailing vines, orange trees, and white doves seeming to soar through the shadowy air created the ambience of a make-believe Moorish

alfresco. When the flabbergasted ticket buyers looked above the rooftops of the ex-
cessive and sensual garden, the mystery of the auditorium intensified, for overhead
was an expansive, simulated twilight sky brimming with twinkling stars and billow-
ing cumulus clouds.

While Tampa Theatre patrons were entering a modern and technologically advanced movie theatre located on Tampa’s busiest and most fashionable street, they also were discerning an aura of some forgotten and then rediscovered ruin near the Mediterranean shore. The juxtaposition and contradictions of its modern technology, ancient atmosphere, and montage of eclectic and exotic architectural styles astonished the picture palace’s new patrons – many of whom had never seen a theatre with a balcony. Why and how did such an urban alcazar appear on Franklin Street in Tampa, Florida in 1926? To begin to answer that question it is necessary to understand how the town of Tampa grew into a city.

The Railroad’s Urbanizing Influence

The moderate growth trend Tampa experienced in the last decade of the nineteenth century escalated dramatically in 1898 with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. The War Department had not intended to use Tampa’s railway and port facilities, but Henry Plant, a railroad developer, wrote a letter to the secretary of war praising Tampa’s railroad lines and expressing his concern that the railway lines were vulnerable to attack. In response to Plant’s letter, Secretary Alger integrated Tampa into his plan of defense, and the city of Tampa began its preparation to play a part in the Spanish-American War.8

Like the twentieth century’s two world wars, the Spanish-American War more than doubled Tampa’s population and economy. Tampa became the major port of embarkation for men and supplies. 30,000 soldiers came to Tampa within a two-month period in 1898. Tampa’s retail and entertainment establishments reaped great profits when soldier’s paychecks began circulating, and millions of dollars spread through the city’s economy. Besides the dramatic increase in revenue, the nation’s attention turned to Tampa. “The city,” writes Durwood Long, “enjoyed the limelight of free advertising of inestimable value.”9 The publicity of the
Spanish-American War, insists Gene Burnett, would actually triple Tampa’s population in the decade following the war.\textsuperscript{10}

While Plant’s plea to the secretary of war boosted the city’s economy and made “Tampa” a familiar place around the country, Plant had been laying the tracks for Tampa’s economic expansion and urbanization for nearly a decade before the Spanish-American War. Some historians suggest that road began construction in 1883 on a railway connection from Tampa to the eastern seaboard, Tampa was well on its way to becoming a modern city.\textsuperscript{12} Three years later, Plant had completed his plan for Tampa as a major railroad and port center. Tampa was linked by rail with cities as far away as Jacksonville and a 200-foot steamer connected Tampa with Key West and Havana.\textsuperscript{13} Plant finished construction of

![Nighttime view of Franklin Street at Harrison Street taken by W. A. Fishbaugh in 1916. The photograph captures Tampa’s first “Great White Way” lighting, the bright illumination of the downtown business district made possible by the installation of electric lights on ornamental iron posts along Franklin Street. (Courtesy of the Florida State Archives Collection.)](image)

when Plant chose Tampa for port development and for a railroad terminus in the early 1880s, he secured Tampa’s economic future. Rail transportation in the last decades of the nineteenth century was one of the most important factors in the formation of high concentrations of southern populations. “By 1900,” notes T. Lynn Smith, “important towns were aligned along the principal railways like beads on a string.”\textsuperscript{11} When Plant’s South Florida Rail-

his extravagant Tampa Bay Hotel (now a part of the University of Tampa) in 1891. The hotel rivaled Henry Flagler’s Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida in opulence and the amount of national attention it received. Plant’s railroad and port construction urbanized Tampa, dramatically increasing its economic production, accessibility to other regions, and inevitably, its population. While in 1880, Tampa’s census recorded a meager 722 citizens, five years
later there were 2,739 people; by 1890, Tampa's population reached nearly 16,000.

Promoting Paradise

While Plant’s railroad is a predominant reason for Tampa’s urban and economic growth, Long contends that the promotional activities of the Board of Trade also were instrumental in turning the village of Tampa into a city. In 1885, Tampa’s Board of Trade, the town’s first civic/financial organization, held meetings in Tampa’s first cultural institution, the Branch Opera House. Within one year, the Board of Trade laid the groundwork for much of the economic prosperity Tampa would experience in the first decades of the twentieth century. The board led a movement in support of a city water works; it attracted ice factories necessary for the fish industry and pushed the local government to erect a bridge across the Hillsborough River, so Plant could build the Tampa Bay Hotel in Hyde Park.

The board is most acclaimed for underwriting the loan needed to bring cigar magnate Vicente Martinez Ybor to establish Tampa’s first major industry. Persuaded by his friends, who had praised the qualities of Tampa, Ybor came to Tampa in September of 1885, to locate and purchase property for his cigar factories. The board offered to pay nearly half of the bill for the tract of land that Ybor desired. By October of 1885, Ybor City was plotted and construction on streets and homes began. Within a year and a half, four cigar factories were in operation and 1,300 people migrated to the area to work in Ybor’s flourishing cigar industry.

One of the most important characteristics of southern civic and financial leaders during the south’s urban development, argues Blaine Brownwell and David Goldfield, was their participation in the development of an urban consciousness. The associational activity of the civic booster helped to construct an urban awareness that “illuminated the possibilities of the southern city as a cultural center, a repository of capital and expertise, and ultimately of ‘civilization’.” While Tampa’s Board of Trade was initially comprised of store owners, lawyers and other professionals mirroring Tampa’s early mercantile sensibilities, by 1892, real estate dealers and builders outnumbered retailers and lawyers. This shift both reflected and shaped the contours of Tampa’s urbanism for two decades. By 1911, manufacturers and managers exerted the greatest influence on board decisions helping to form the entrepreneurial sensibilities of the early city.

A Tampa Board of Trade brochure, at the turn of the twentieth century, gloated that “between 1890 and 1910, Tampa’s growth was the greatest of any city of its class in the United States. Since being a city the growth has been nothing short of marvelous.” The Board of Trade was not the only organization impressed with Tampa’s staggering 596 percent increase in population between the years 1890 and 1910; newspapers noting the dramatic population increase renamed Tampa the “Queen City of the Gulf.”

Besides Plant, Ybor, and the Tampa Board of Trade, others consciously developed Tampa into a city with commercial assets affecting the city’s growth and attracting tourists. For instance, George S. Gandy enhanced Tampa’s reputation as southwest Florida’s playground when the bridge he built opened in 1924, connecting Tampa with Pinellas County and the Gulf beaches. But no one epitomized the dizzying Florida real estate boom of the 1920s like land developer D.P. Davis. A mile from Tampa’s flourishing downtown, Davis created Davis Islands by dredging up the bay and expanding some mud flat islands. Before the dredging was completed, Davis sold 18 million dollars worth of lots, creating Tampa’s most prestigious residential and resort community. Booster brochures and booklets about the Islands development and Tampa and advertisements placed in newspapers and magazines helped to lure thousands of people to buy a lot on Davis Islands, move to Tampa, or at least travel there for a vacation. Davis’ 1925 promotional booklet depicted attractive scenes of middle class leisure with people playing tennis, boating, sunbathing and golfing. Its rhetorical effort became a hallmark of promotional publications. “As the brochure ticked the highlights of the development,” explains James Ricci, “the language reinforced the image while calling to mind the ingredients and virtues Americans typically seek for their home or vacation.” Booster literature helped to create in Northern minds a compelling image of a middle class Tampa, attracting them and their dollars to
the city. Vacationers nicknamed “tin can tourists” drove to Tampa from northern states, contributing to the 100,000 people per year who visited the city during the boom years of the 1920s. Pitching tents and eating from tin cans, they experienced Tampa less extravagantly than those who vacationed on Davis Islands; however, during their visits they managed to pump millions of dollars into the local economy.

Popular magazines such as *Saturday Evening Post* and *Harper’s Monthly* further enhanced the economy and Tampa’s boom. Construction of Gandy Bridge escalated land prices from 50 dollars to, in some cases, 10,000 dollars an acre. In 1920, a parcel at the intersection of Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Boulevard) and Florida Avenue sold for 20,000 dollars. Three years later the same property sold for 150,000 dollars. In 1923, investors put nearly two million dollars into Tampa’s building construction. One year later that amount doubled in the city, and by 1925, – at the peak of the boom – 23 million dollars had been spent on development.

In part, Tampa’s urban and economic growth during the twenties depended on mediated images of a blissful resort. Portraits of leisure in paradise helped to define the reputation of Tampa. Booster rhetoric that put Tampa “on the map” called forth images of paradise, gold mines and Eden, creating a mosaic that always referenced some place other than the city itself. For
example, Tampa Theatre's architect, John Eberson, who spent several winters in Florida before he was hired to design the Tampa Theatre, contributed to the utopian rhetoric. He attributed his inspiration for the atmospheric design of his picture palaces to the vibrant panoramas he saw while vacationing. "I was impressed with the colorful scenes which greeted me at Miami, Palm Beach and Tampa," Eberson remembered. Visions of Italian gardens, Spanish patios, Persian shrines and French formal gardens flashed through my mind, and at once I directed my energies to carrying out these ideas."25 As Eberson's vision of a fashionable Tampa emerged as a collage of images of ancient cities, Tampa's identity and its sense of place in the mid-twenties was in fact misplaced. For when Eberson envisioned Tampa, the city itself vanished, and he imagined instead an amalgam of Italy, Spain, Persia and France. Eberson said that such a montage of Tampa greatly influenced his design of the Tampa Theatre, an atmospheric picture palace. The Tampa Theatre was designed with the idea of delivering its patrons to paradise by taking them away from the city in which they lived.

The Impact of the Streetcar

The increase in Tampa's industry also meant growth in utilities, communication services and urban improvements. As the city grew in population, business districts and neighborhoods multiplied, and new innovations in communication and transportation systems allowed residents to traverse Tampa's expanding boundaries with relative ease. In 1884, Tampa boasted two telegraph lines. In 1885, a local street railway company laid its rails. By 1887, Tampa Electric Company turned on the city's lights, and by 1889, homes and businesses were using water from a city supply. A bond issue in 1889 financed a 65,000 dollar sewage system and 35,000 dollars for street pavement. By 1890, telephones were ringing in Tampa.26

The appearance of streetcars greatly affected Tampa's residents by reconfiguring Tampa's metropolitan boundaries. In 1892, Tampa Suburban Railroad Company began running street cars across Hillsborough River to Hyde Park, a developing residential area, and Ballast Point, the southern tip of Tampa. In May of 1893, Tampa Street Railway electrified its lines, resulting in a price war between the two companies.27 The price reduction - two cents per person - further increased the possibility for travel throughout the city, fostering more participation in leisure activities outside the home. Schools, churches, and social clubs, for example, chartered the streetcars to commute to Ballast Point Pavilion for picnics and dancing. Sometimes groups rode the cars without a destination, filling the cars with song.28 As the downtown area developed, residents relied upon streetcars to take them to Franklin Street for shopping, dining and entertainment. An indispensable part of urban life, Rabinowitz argues "street cars helped to usher in the golden age of the downtown area."29 Following the 1926 opening of the Tampa Theatre, the Franklin Street streetcar dropped off passengers at the front door of the picture palace.

A symbol of urban maturity, streetcars changed the way citizens experienced the city. The cars expanded the city by increasing passengers' accessibility between the commercial center and developing suburban areas. The cars also contracted the time it took to cross the city and created a reduced sense of geography, a more navigable and efficient Tampa. Besides traversing an expanding city in less time, the streetcar passengers' shift in space-time perception resulted in a cinematic experience of the city. This change, which Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls "panoramic" perception, parallels the characteristics of cinematic viewing. On the train journey, Schivelbusch explains speed caused the foreground to disappear; detaching the traveler from the space that immediately surrounded him. The landscape was no longer experienced intensively (as on horseback); it was perceived impressionistically.30 In a less dramatic way than the railroad car because traveling speed is less, the streetcar created a similar panoramic sensation. Industrial development and urbanization resulted in a need for a streetcar system for Tampa. The cars altered the experience of time and space for its riders, as would cinema during the first few years of the twentieth century. When movie theaters opened along Franklin Street, Tampa residents began experiencing a similar passage of time and space, for watching movies paralleled riding the streetcars that carried them downtown. In a movie theater, as in a streetcar, the passenger/spectator is among others, yet is
actually seated alone. Both the streetcar passenger and the cinematic spectator travel in time and space, explains Giuliana Bruno, "viewing panoramically from a still sitting position through a framed image in motion."31 The streetcar, like railroads, bridges, and exhibition halls, was a literal and metaphorical vehicle for a life in transit. As Bruno explains, they were all "signifiers of a new notion of space and mobility, signs of an industrial era that generated the motion picture."32 In other words, when city dwellers jumped off the streetcars at the door of the Tampa Theatre they did not stop traveling. Instead, the movement continued long after they purchased their movie tickets, for the Tampa Theatre transported its inhabitants to the cosmopolitan and often glamorous world of Hollywood. While Tampa Theatre patrons were growing accustomed to increased urban mobility facilitated by Tampa streetcars, they were also cinematically traveling down other cities' streets, further expanding their perceptual boundaries and expectations of urban space.

Franklin Street: The Center of Display and Commerce

Franklin Street slowly grew into the centerpiece of downtown during the two decades before the turn of the twentieth century. The Spanish-American War had stimulated downtown business growth, but Tampa's population was not large enough to accommodate a magnitude of enterprises, except for those located on Franklin Street. The Branch Opera House, the Binkley Building, and the Hillsborough County Courthouse served as landmarks for retailers who wanted to locate their businesses as near as possible to Franklin Street's emblems of progress. By 1901, Franklin Street's center possessed all of the elements of a modern business district. The Tampa Board of Trade, First National Bank, Exchange National Bank, Citizen's Bank and Trust Company, Southern Loan & Jewelry Company, Tampa Furniture Company, Maas Brothers Department Store, O. Falk's Department Store, and a variety of smaller businesses such as shoe stores, clothing stores, grocery stores, a barber, a tailor, and a fruit stand, lined Tampa's most well traveled street.33 The increasingly robust commercial and retail establishments on Franklin Street became a centripetal force, and other retail and financial institutions sought to situate themselves near this central zone, promising them increased exposure. In the first decades of the twentieth century, peddlers still traveled through residential sections of Tampa selling such items as thread, lace, dress material, pie pans and curtain rods, but citizens soon grew to depend on Franklin Street for its convenience and diversity, as a place for shopping, strolling and social gathering.34 Tampa's Board of Trade created a safer and more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian environment on Franklin Street, reflecting the social needs and consumer demands of the city's citizens. Hard surfaced streets and sidewalks replaced the former pavements of cypress blocks, seashells and rotted wood, increasing the comfort and satisfaction of Franklin Street's travelers.

The topography and the tempo of Franklin Street transformed again in 1912, when the city's first skyscraper office building was erected. The Citizen's Bank Building, the tallest building in Tampa, located in the heart of the area that included Maas Brothers, O. Falk's, Woolworth's, and Kress, established the 700 block of Franklin Street. Distinguishing Tampa from other towns and small cities, the towering and conspicuous Citizen's Bank Building, visible from every street and sidewalk, provided Tampa's citizens with an emblem. The skyscraper symbolically told residents that their city was prospering and Franklin Street was a legitimate financial center. As downtown Tampa prospered and the 1920s drew near, more clothing, shoe and accessory shops sprang up along Franklin Street, complementing the established jewelers, pharmacies, banks, office building and department stores. Hardware stores, fruit sellers, and coffee merchants vacated the street, leaving room for more sophisticated and prosperous businesses such as Wolf Brothers, the men's clothing store. The stage had been built for Tampa's downtown to play out its economic successes, and Franklin Street was prepared for the boom years that were just around the corner.

It was no accident that investors chose Franklin Street in 1926 for the Tampa Theatre's location. Considered the crown jewel of the city, the Tampa Theatre reigned over the department stores and the less significant shops around it. Maas Brothers, O. Falk's, McCrory, Kress, and Woolworth's, clothing stores, jewelry stores, shoe stores,
Madame Himes Beauty Parlor was set up and operating in the lobby of the Tampa Theatre to promote the “It Girl,” screen starlet Clara Bow, and her latest movie, Love Among The Millionaires, which opened in July 1930. (Courtesy of the Burgert Bros. Collection, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.)

Pharmacies, and three small movie theaters - the Victory, the Strand, and the Franklin - all lined Franklin Street when the Tampa Theatre opened its doors.

The department stores, like the streetcars, were also precursors to the cinematic experience for Tampa’s residents. The imaginary gratification of “looking” constructed by the department stores windows and display cases, according to Anne Friedburg, were timeless spaces similar to and precursors of cinema. “The department store, like the arcade before it,” Friedburg explains, “constructed a sheltered refuge for itinerant lookers, a sanctuary for consumption kept separate from the domain of production.”

For Tampa’s middle class residents who were growing accustomed to participating in an increasingly urbanized and commercialized spectator culture, the Tampa Theatre was a paramount spectacle. Like the windows and displays of the department stores surrounding the theatre, imaginary gratification came to the patrons at the Tampa Theatre by gazing at both the films and their surroundings within the theatre. Patrons, for a sum of seventy-five cents, consumed both cinematic images of other cities, countries and historical periods and the antiquated and exotic Mediterranean-elsewhere atmosphere of the theatre. Two decades later, the cinematic relationship between the department store window and the Tampa Theatre was consummated when a local model took a bubble bath in the Sears store window to promote Greer Garson’s 1948 film Julie Misbehaves. Similar to the way they gazed upon the latest fashions on display in the Maas Brothers window, spectators stood behind a rope on the sidewalk watching a model behind glass replicate a scene from an upcoming movie.

Popular Entertainment in the City

When Tampa residents and visitors flocked to the Tampa Theatre in the twenties, the Edison films I saw...
during the 1997 Library of Congress National Film Registry Tour were already a forgotten artifact of an unsophisticated technology. Edison's war films originally were projected on a Vitascope in vaudeville houses at the turn of the century. The Vitascope, the first film projector to show motion pictures onto a screen at a distance, created the conditions for assembling numbers of people into a film viewing audience. The emergence of the Vitascope was “an outgrowth and vital part of city culture,” suggests Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney, “that addressed its spectators as members of a collective and potentially undifferentiated mass public.” But before Vitasecope pictures thrilled audiences in 1896, singing, dancing, comedy skits and novelty acts filled the vaudeville halls. “The vaudeville years from 1880 to 1920, played a critical role in the transformation between popular culture and place,” explains Robert Snyder. A giant step toward the centralized entertainment industry, the shows were usually owned and operated by national chains that leased theaters in cities on the vaudeville circuit. The shows traveled from theater to theater in city after city. Vaudeville players traveling between theaters made it possible for spectators in Brooklyn to see the same show as ticket buyers in the Bronx; thereby enlarging the possibilities for a shared culture among people in different regions.

Though the Vitasecope created the first collective motion picture audience, the desire for public entertainment in American cities grew as quickly as the cities themselves during the last decades of the nineteenth century. A new urban population created by the industrial revolution flocked to circuses, traveling shows, penny arcades and dime museums. The rise of public entertainment was “a by-product of the enormous expansion of the cities,” notes David Nasaw. “Commercial entertainments were, in this period at least, an urban phenomenon.” Paralleling the rapid population growth in Tampa between the years of 1870 and 1920, America's urban population increased from ten million to fifty-four million people, the average income for the industrial worker rose fifty percent, and the cost of living decreased fifty percent. The increase in income along with decrease in work hours resulted in a new generation of workers with leisure time and money.

“Going out was more than escape from the tedium of work,” writes Nasaw, “it was a gateway into a privileged sphere of everyday life. The ability to take time out from work for recreation and public sociability was the dividing line between the old worlds and the new.”

Before the construction of Tampa's first commercial movie theaters, residents enjoyed conventional theatrical performances at the Branch Opera House, but downtown was also a place for other fascinating and less traditional exhibitions. In a vacant store next to Ball's Grocery Store, for instance, a woman sat in an elevated chair and painted china, wrote, sewed and played the piano with her toes. A curio shop, at the corner of Lafayette and Tampa Streets, exhibited hissing reptiles in department store display cases. And at Kress, the new department store, clerks made a show of grinding peanuts for the many spectators who had never seen peanut butter before. These minor spectacles depended on the constant flow of pedestrians and money centered on Franklin Street.

Even before the construction of Tampa's first nickelodeon, residents gathered downtown to watch movies projected on an outside wall of Ball's Grocery, at the corner of Franklin and Madison Street. “The audience would fill the benches on the Court House Square, then overflow to the steps and curbs nearby,” wrote a long time Tampa resident. “Sometimes one of Tampa's vocalists would sing with a picture. The music of the band helped to attract the crowds and made these movie nights seem much more like gala occasions.”

Tampa's first movie theater, a nickelodeon on the east side of Franklin Street, remained popular until the arrival of three corporate theatres in 1912. Downtown nickel theaters hit American city streets like wildfire in 1905. They were a small time business owner's dream. A few adjustments to a storefront – folding chairs, paper covered windows, a piece of canvas for a screen and a projector was all that was needed before a nickelodeon was up and running. Tampa's nickelodeon, housed in a small frame building, charged the routine five cents admission for a half hour long movie. “Of all the pictures I saw there,” remembers Susie Kelly Dean, “the only one I remember was that of a man eating ice cream and sending the audience into gales.
Nickelodeons were generally located on side streets where the rent was cheaper. This kept costs down and attracted a different audience than vaudeville theaters. Nickelodeons opened the door of commercial entertainment to working class families, mothers whose arms were filled with shopping bags, children and single women. While the rise in incomes and decline in work hours contributed to the growth of urban entertainment, nickelodeons were accessible to workers who still had low wages and long hours. The five cent movie was inexpensive enough and short enough for the underpaid and overworked. Because the shows were continuous, workers could go to the theaters after work. For instance, the U.S. Steel Corporation's 12 hour work-day still left time for long lines of overworked steel-mill laborers at the nickelodeon, a 1908 Pittsburgh survey discovered. Part of the nickelodeon's success resulted from their ability to attract both the underpaid and overworked as well as those who were accumulating some disposable income. "By accommodating both kinds of schedules and pocketbooks, the movie theater managed to become - like the saloon, the church, and the fraternal lodge," writes Roy Rosenzweig, "a central working class institution that involved workers on a sustained and regular basis."45

But the nickelodeon could not accommodate the advent of the feature length film. The financial and artistic success of D.W. Griffith's twelve-reel The Birth of a Nation in 1915, forever changed cinematic viewing, resulting in higher ticket prices, reserved seating, scheduled shows and longer runs. As a result of the popularity of feature length films, the space and respectability of movie houses also changed. Only centrally located moving picture theaters could accommodate and afford to show multi-reel films, and exhibiting them in theaters located on valuable urban real estate helped to seal the marriage of middle class audiences and movies. At first, feature length film exhibitors colonized old vaudeville houses, but by the end of 1915 theatre owners were building new opulent venues called picture palaces, which promised to satisfy the yearnings of the new and profitable middle class audience.

The Business of Leisure:
The Tampa Theatre Comes to Town

The construction of the Tampa Theatre was a lavish marker of Tampa's confidence in itself as a city. The economic boom during the first half of the 1920's boosted Tampa's downtown status enough that investors believed that its urban center could and should support an extravagant 1,500 seat movie theater. When the picture palace opened its carved doors to the public on October 15, 1926, Tampa's population, industry and economy was flourishing. The city led the world in phosphate exportation and the manufacturing of high grade Havana cigars. It had the sixteenth largest port in the United States. In the same year the theatre was built, over two thousand new homes, eighty apartment buildings, fourteen churches, fourteen schools and two hospitals were constructed.46 With 159 cigar factories, 382 other industries and a population brimming to more than 200,000, Tampa was considered the commercial center of South Florida. The Tampa Theatre marked the pinnacle of the city's success story during the boom years of the mid-1920s.

"The most beautiful theatre in the south," was built by Consolidated Amusements

Born in 1875, John Eberson came to the United States in the early 1900s, and settled in St. Louis, Missouri. By 1910, he was living in Chicago, and receiving steady work as a theater architect. In 1926, Eberson moved his base of operations to New York City, from where he designed Tampa's "Picture Palace," the Tampa Theatre. His death came in 1965.
The Tampa Theatre was showing the Helen Hayes film *What Every Woman Knows* in 1934, when this large crowd gathered at the entrance on Franklin Street for one of the theatre's popular promotions, Bank Night, held every Friday. (Courtesy of the Bungert Bros. Collection, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.)

Corporation, a cooperative venture comprised of influential businessman associated with downtown Tampa's retail and financial community. Consolidated Amusements constructed a theatre that depended upon the convenience and centrality of a thriving downtown to lure its patrons. Theatre construction began in April of 1925, and for the next 18 months, Tampa contractor G.A. Miller employed multitudes of mechanics, carpenters, artists and decorators who transformed the dream-like architectural design of John Eberson into a reality.

Eberson, the most prolific and well known picture place designer in the world, designed over 1,200 architectural projects, built over five hundred theaters and was credited with the creation of the “atmospheric” theater of which he designed over one hundred. In part, Eberson’s atmospherics were successful because of his innovative designs and because he effectively reproduced classical motifs using inexpensive materials. The statues that adorned his theaters were made from either plaster or staff, an inexpensive material made from plaster and straw. Classical forms reproduced with moderately priced materials lowered construction costs and maintenance for theater owners, and from a seat in the auditorium, the statues appeared to be museum quality pieces. Due to the constraints of the property size, the Tampa Theatre was one of the smallest of Eberson’s designs, but was supposedly one of his favorites. He and wife traveled to Europe themselves to purchase many of the 250,000 dollars worth of antiques that graced the theater on opening night and still remain there today.

Two days before the Tampa Theatre opened, 1,500 seventy-five cent tickets went on sale. All of the tickets for the vigorously anticipated opening were sold within two hours. It is difficult to determine what the fifteen hundred ticket buyers specifically wanted to see opening night, but surely few went home disappointed. Paramount Picture’s *Ace of Cads*, starring Adolf Menjou and Alice Joyce, was the feature film, but the motion picture was touted as only a minimal part of the evening’s entertainment. The 1,500 ticket holders at the
opening night were treated to musical performances – both classical and popular in form, speeches acknowledging the city of Tampa's arrival to the big time with the opening of the Tampa Theatre, and three kinds of film entertainment – comedy, drama and news. But, the theatre patrons sitting in a theatre housing the latest technological advances in popular culture, also found in the opening night program a lesson in high culture.

Like Balaban and Katz, the Tampa Theatre management claimed their palace was for the people; it was for the ticket buyers who “might not know Art, but could feel it.” The theatre provided popular film entertainment, but its design in many ways mimicked a high brow stage theater. In other words, while the theatre was extolled as an affable place for those unacquainted with the graces of high culture, reproductions of classical statuary and explicit instructions included in the opening guide suggest that the theatre’s patrons would not or should not be undisciplined in the virtues of high culture for too long. Many of the program’s pages were dedicated to photographs and instruction about the statuary reproductions found in various niches in the lobby, foyers and auditorium. Simulated masterpieces of Hebe, Hermes, Christopher Columbus, and Diana were only a few of the sculptures described. “The educational and cultural value of these art treasures,” the program explained, “so beautifully enthroned in the grand architectural setting cannot be easily measured. Art, Mythology and History are collaborated in this modern Motion Picture Palace.”49 Most of the program was dedicated to photographs and descriptions of simulated statuary, and the theatre’s design. Hollywood actors such as W.C. Fields, Lillian Gish, Buster Keaton, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks were merely mentioned in a list of names that followed a paragraph claiming an organization of experts selected the films for the theatre.

In addition to photographs, descriptions of simulated statuary, and the theatre’s design, the opening night program dedicated a half page description detailing the theatre’s Air Cooling and Dehumidifying System. The first public building in Tampa to have air conditioning, the program boasted that the system would not only keep “new and fresh air in constant circulation, but removes all foul air and odors instantly.” Anyone familiar with Tampa weather will certainly agree that air conditioning, particularly during the summer months, makes life tolerable; however, the air conditioning system, like the replicas of the classical statues, had important implications for patrons aspiring to separate themselves from the working class.

In the years before the picture palace, the conditions of the inexpensive movie house paralleled the realities of working class life. Floors were dirty, the air stagnant, and rats were almost as plentiful as the spectators. “Spartan, and even unsanitary, conditions make little impression on working-class movie goers; such surroundings were part of their daily lives,” claims Rosenzweig, “but middle class commentators reacted with horror.”52 Part of their shocked reaction was the presence of a large group of working class people who looked and smelled differently from themselves. In order to attract middle class patrons, picture palace owners differentiated their theaters from working class venues by eliminating working class signifiers, such as their odors.
While the air conditioning system at the Tampa Theatre did cool the air, another distinctive quality was its ability to “remove foul air and odor.” In other words, the system helped to eliminate all odors except for that of Tampa’s middle class.

The opening of the Tampa Theatre, doused with simulated finery and riches, created a public space in the center of the city for many Tampa residents who were privately coming to terms with their new found middle class status. “The spirit of its conception, its architecture, its influence, will be the inspiration of many thousands,” the opening night program declared. “The need is here. The people are here.” As the city of Tampa flourished economically during the first half of the 1920s, more and more of the city’s population found themselves living within and aspiring to middle class standards. The industrial and real estate development in Tampa, which created an urban culture, helped to generate the production of social sites of amusement and spectacle for the city’s growing population. “The social spaces of distraction and display became as
vital to urban culture as the spaces of working and living," explains David Harvey. "Social competition with respect to life-style and command over space, always important for upper segments of the bourgeoisie, became more and more important within the mass culture of urbanization, sometimes even masking the role of community in processes of class reproduction."  

Eberson's "atmospherics" reorganized space by transforming the theater's interior into an out-of-doors facade. The Tampa Theatre's auditorium invoked images of exterior Italian courtyards, Spanish patios, Persian shrines and French gardens. The term "atmospheric" as Eberson used it, is fitting for the blurring of inside and outside, yet it is also an appropriate term for the social organization of the space of the Tampa Theatre. "In the space of power, power does not appear as such," writes Lefebvre, "it hides under the organization of space." The Tampa Theatre appears in 1926 as a public space designed to fulfill the social aspirations of the city's middle class; the theatre was an "atmospheric" of mass culture that nevertheless made explicit social distinctions.

**Conclusion**

David Nasaw has convincingly argued that both professionals and blue-collar workers felt an uncertain discomfort in occupying the extravagant halls of the picture palace. Yet, it was a democratic social space, one where everyone had gained entry with the tearing of the ticket, and "all felt equally welcome," says Nasaw, "because all were equally out of place." In the cloak of artificial dusk, surrounded by the exotic signifiers of other countries and epochs, and removed from the familiar sights and sounds of the city, the Tampa Theatre patrons did experience a feeling of being "out of place." Ironically, the theatre built to help secure Tampa's place "on the map" had no coordinates drawn from the city itself. The architectural bricolage of styles and periods forged in a random, but conscious, effort invoked a sense of elsewhere. Yet, the picture palace's dimly lit spectacular montage elicited a feeling of panoramic placelessness that was neither unfamiliar nor discomfiting, for it mimicked an increasingly commonplace logic of a visual society where disparate images could be edited together and understood without explanation. Tampa residents had been learning to see the world this way for several decades.

"The rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impression: These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates," explained Georg Simmel in his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life." Simmel contended that the glut of stimuli found in modern cities transformed the psychic lives of those who lived in them. The panoramic sensation which transformed the street car/train passenger's perception of space and time, the imaginary gratification of "looking" that came to those who gazed at commodities framed in department store windows, the rise of cinema as a popular form of urban entertainment, and the construction of Tampa as a sunny Eden are but a few of the examples of city life that not only subjected city dwellers to a barrage of sensory stimulation but also anticipated the mobility and placelessness engendered in the "atmospheric" picture palace.

The placelessness invoked by the Tampa Theatre may have been disorienting to patrons, but it was not a disagreeable or an entirely unfamiliar sensation. Rather, the picture palace - a remarkable and imaginative passageway - enabled movie goers to gain quick entry to the fantasies on the screen, encouraging them to temporarily escape the experiences of their own lives in the city. The increasingly frantic pace of city life; the regimentation, boredom, and ever accelerating rhythm of industrial work; the crowded, frenzied, and stimulating urban environment, and the multiplying demands and pressing schedules of work and home were but some of the tribulations that Tampa Theatre patrons hoped to temporarily escape as they entered into the picture palace.

Nonetheless, I am reminded as I watch the films during the Film Registry Tour that early film entertainment was not simply an escape from the perils and complexities of city life. The films were often inverted or idealized spectacles of the patrons' everyday lives. In fact, while early motion pictures provided an experiential detour, they frequently transported patrons to other cities, inviting them to reflect and laugh at the cinematic and magnified portrayals of
As we celebrate 60 years as a full service law firm, we salute the

Tampa Historical Society

and its outstanding contributions to the Tampa Bay Community
the complications and absurdities of their own urban lives. Surely audience members chuckled when Harold Lloyd dangled perilously from a skyscraper clock above a congested Los Angeles street in Safety Last. Yet, some of their laughter might have been nervous recognition that they too clung to clocks. And, if movie viewers hooted when a crowd gathered to gleefully observe Laurel and Hardy demolish a stranger's Los Angeles home in Big Business, audience members might have been acknowledging their own moments of uneasy pleasure when the carnivalesque threatened the order of their city streets. Still, these films are comedies and while spectators may have experienced momentary discomfort, the pleasure found in watching these cinematic absurdities was reinforced by the fact that the viewers were sitting in the Tampa Theatre, their displaced bodies far removed from hazardous and cinematic streets of Los Angeles.

In many ways, the opening of the Tampa Theatre in 1926, symbolized the city's dream of four decades earlier. In fact, the theatre's owners were quite cognant about the theatre's place in the city's evolution. "Like Tampa itself, the Tampa Theatre is destined to occupy a place of conspicuous importance in the development of Florida," the opening program announced. "The need is here. The people are here." Yet, as the audiences made their way through an architectural bricolage of European antiquities and manufactured icons of upper class civility, and as they sat in plush red seats watching the frames roll beneath the proscenium, the Tampa Theatre epitomized an atmosphere where its audiences were physically and mentally poised to be anywhere but in Tampa. On the one hand, the Tampa Theatre staged a sense of "placelessness" for a city that was confronting the anxieties and rapid changes of an increasingly industrialized America. On the other hand, each seat in the Tampa Theatre was ushering its audience toward their "sense of place" in a society of consumption and mobility built on the flickering images of a spectator culture. Brochures, magazines, glaring neon, department store windows, and the rise of cinematic entertainment all helped to situate and prepare citizens for more of the same as the twentieth century rolled forward. While the Tampa Theatre coalesced the forces at work in the city's growing consumer society of the twenties, its place in the urban and visual landscape would eventually be superseded by the suburbanization of Tampa in the fifties and sixties. The red velvet seats would remain in place, but the construction of strip malls, drive-in theaters, and movie houses closer to the city's new suburban developments would eventually leave many of the rows in the Tampa Theatre empty. Finally, the advent of television created a new sense of place for spectators. Seated on couches, images flashing before their eyes, viewers turned their television dials, choosing the dreams they wished to privately consume in the security and comfort of their homes.

ENDNOTES

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5. Gomery, 28.
6. Ibid.
7. qtd. in Valenti, 34.
12. Long, 335.
17. Long, 345.
18. Dunn, 21.
20. Dunn, 21.
21. Ibid., 22.
23. Rupertus, 32.
24. Ibid., 32.
32. Ibid., 45.
33. Rupertus, 77.
34. Dean, 42.
38. Ibid., 119.
‘The Negroes are there to stay’: The Development of Tampa’s African-American Community, 1891-1916

Canter Brown, Jr. and Larry Eugene Rivers

As the nineteenth century bustled inexorably toward its close in January 1900, the African-American editor of a religious newspaper turned his attention to thoughts of Florida's fastest growing city and of a key component of that emerging municipality's population. "I am safe in saying that Tampa will be Tampa you know," the Jacksonville Florida Evangelist's lead scribe proclaimed. The journalist then turned his attention to the city's sometimes-troubled race relations. "She always," he continued, "has her share of troubles." Whereupon, he declared without qualification, "Nevertheless, the Negroes are there to stay." The editor thereafter added, almost as afterthought, "The colored stores are doing well."1

In those few words the Evangelist's editor neatly summed up facts crucial to understanding Tampa's past, but those facts and the details pertinent to them have come down to us only as whispers and mostly in forms quite misleading. That circumstance recently has been brought home to the authors by the work of a Florida A&M University colleague. We refer specifically to David H. Jackson's insightful biography of Mississippi's premier turn-of-the century African-American leader, Charles Banks.2 Professor Jackson's point was this. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Banks and his associates built in Mississippi (at Mound Bayou, in Bank's case) communities anchored in vibrant institutions. Their achievements, ones necessarily arising quickly out of the economic destitution of emancipation, included retail businesses, industrial enterprises, schools, libraries, churches, banks, insurance companies, and what have you. What happened to those institutions and the promise they embodied? Here Jackson offered cogent insight. Although white racism supplied plenty of challenge, economic and social changes emerging out of World War One's European commencement and events of subsequent years proved the primary villains. By the mid-to-late 1920s conditions had deteriorated so badly that memory of the achievements already had begun to fade. Soon, most people forgot them.3

The same thing happened at Tampa and in other Florida locales. Until recently, our principal window on that pre-World War One world at Tampa came courtesy of a report prepared in 1927 by J. H. McGrew, Benjamin E. Mays, and Arthur Raper. Although entitled "A Study of Negro Life in Tampa," it subsequently has been known most commonly as "The Raper Report." In chapter after chapter, the authors dissected the community to portray desperate poverty, ailing community institutions, and white disdain.4 Our tendency subsequently has been to assume that, because circumstances ran so dire in 1927, they must have been worse – or, at least, no better – in earlier years.

Fortunately, a number of scholars and local historians recently have begun to rebut that assumption. Among them, in 1979, Otis R. Anthony and Marilyn T. Wade offered their A Collection of Historical Facts About Black Tampa. Anthony revised and updated its content for his 1989 publication, Black Tampa: The Roots of a People. Three important steps forward came in the
next few years. In 1992, Mozella G. Mitchell<br>debuted her _African American Religious<br>History in Tampa Bay_. Julius J. Gordon,<br>two years later, shared his _Afro-Americans<br>of Hillsborough County, Florida, 1870-<br>1890_, while Walter T. Howard and Virginia<br>M. Howard achieved publication in the<br> _Journal of Negro History_ of their essay,<br>“Family, Religion, and Education: A Profile<br>of African-American Life in Tampa, Florida,<br>1900-1930.”

Other publications complemented these<br>initial works. In 1995, for instance, Geof­<br>frey S. Mahlman produced a very helpful<br>master's thesis at the University of South<br>Florida, “Bibliography of Resources Con­<br>cerning the African American Presence in<br>Tampa: 1513-1995.” Finally, in 1997, came<br>the most graphic and popular reminder of<br>Tampa's rich African-American heritage,<br>Rowena Ferrell Brady's _Things Remem­<br>bered: An Album of African-Americans in<br>Tampa_. Through these decades Tampa-area<br>newspapers, too, presented intriguing<br>glimpses. Most notably, the past's echoes<br>repeatedly found voice in the _Tampa Tri­<br>bune's_ “History and Heritage” page written<br>by the award-winning journalist Leland<br>Hawes.

By no means does this listing exhaust re­<br>cent and helpful works. University of South<br>Florida anthropologist Susan D. Greenbaum<br>and her associates, to mention prominent<br>examples, have explored in depth the ori­<br>gins and evolution of the city's Afro-Cuban<br>community. This pathfinding research has<br>taken its most comprehensive form in the<br>2002 publication of Greenbaum's national<br>award-winning _More Than Black: Afro­<br>Cubans in Tampa_, a study of imposing<br>scholarly merit.

The insights offered by these and other<br>contributors, coupled with the availability<br>of newly discovered primary materials, per­<br>mits the first overview of Tampa's late nine­<br>teenth and early twentieth century African­<br>American community to be offered. In at­<br>tempting to provide that overview, however,<br>care must be exercised. Particularly, the au­<br>thors have taken notice (as should readers)<br>of a word of caution shared by Greenbaum.<br>As she has urged all to remember, the lives<br>of thousands of poor and relatively obscure<br>individuals easily are lost or ignored when<br>revisiting achievements on the larger scale.<br>Professor Greenbaum explained further.<br>“The social organization of [Tampa's] African-American community was . . .

complex and fragmented along class lines,” she observed.” By the 1890s, there were six<br>black churches and several chapters of the<br>Masons and Odd Fellows,” she continued.<br>“Membership in these institutions, especially<br>the lodges, was exclusionary and tended to<br>divide the community into defended<br>circles, although there was some degree of<br>connection between these social group­<br>ings.” Greenbaum sensed that only the sto­<br>ries of these prominent individuals and in­<br>tstitutions, if any, ever would be recovered.<br>“The truly poor and transient masses mostly<br>did not belong to lodges,” Greenbaum<br>commented in conclusion, “and often not<br>to churches either.”

Having taken that word of caution, let us<br>also take care about what is meant by refer­<br>ence to “Tampa,” even though the effort will<br>require a brief and taxing foray into statis­<br>tics. Through the 1890s, and into the<br>twentieth century, the city's corporate lim­<br>its remained constricted. While growth<br>within them by 1895 had raised Tampa to<br>the rank of Florida's third largest city<br>(15,634 residents) behind Jacksonville<br>(25,130) and Key West (16,502), actual<br>growth in greater Tampa likely put the<br>municipality in second place.

Census results for 1900 allow precise<br>clarification. By then the city of Tampa had<br>grown only to 15,839 persons, seemingly<br>suggesting an abrupt halt to area growth.<br>This lowered the city's rank within the state<br>to fourth (behind Jacksonville, Pensacola,<br>and Key West, respectively). Jacksonville<br>and Pensacola, meanwhile, had expanded<br>in line with area growth, while Key West's<br>island continued to define its limits. At<br>Tampa, on the other hand, three additional<br>incorporated municipalities now hemmed<br>the city's borders. These included Fort<br>Brooke (incorporated 1885) to the east of<br>East Street and below Sixth Avenue with a<br>population of 587; West Tampa (incorporat­<br>eceived 1895) to the west of the Hillsborough<br>River with 2,355; and East Tampa (incorpo­<br>rated 1897) in the College Hill vicinity with<br>1,522. Only a few miles distant, Port Tampa<br>City (incorporated 1893) on Old Tampa<br>Bay bumped greater Tampa's population by<br>another 1,367 individuals. As a result, and<br>without taking into consideration the resi­<br>dents of unincorporated areas, greater Tampa<br>at the turn of the new century con­<br>tained a population of 21,670, easily placing
the urban core second to Jacksonville's 28,420 total.  

As it turned out, the passage of time served to enhance the confusion as to Tampa's growth and population. The city in 1905, to further consider the point, claimed 22,823 inhabitants, a healthy 44 percent increase over 1900. Meanwhile, Fort Brooke had swelled to 1,392 (137 percent); West Tampa to 3,661 (55 percent); and East Tampa, 2,657 (75 percent). Port Tampa City, meanwhile, lost population, to 1,049 persons. Not until 1907 was Fort Brooke incorporated into the city. East Tampa remained separate until 1911; West Tampa until 1925; and Port Tampa City until decades later.11

The confusion created by this jumble of competing municipal corporations somewhat has affected, as well, our understanding of the magnitude of the African-American community's presence and significance. The Raper Report, an influential example, recited population totals applicable only to the city. Specifically, it noted 4,382 black residents in 1900 (27.7 percent of the total population) and 8,951 (23.7 percent) in 1910. Yet, in 1905, the black community at Fort Brooke came to 476 persons (34 percent); at West Tampa to 648 (18 percent); at East Tampa to 375 (14 percent); and at Port Tampa City to 462 (44 percent). By 1910, the totals again had risen. By that time Fort Brooke and East Tampa had been annexed into the city, but West Tampa then held 967 African-American residents (12 percent) and Port Tampa City, 480 (45 percent).12

Legal boundaries, as will be seen, served at times to work a considerable impact on Tampa's African-American residents, but other divisions also loomed importantly. Professor Greenbaum has spoken to class divisions and, in the case of Afro-Cubans, place of origin as delineating fault lines within the community. The question of place of origin deserves additional comment. Apart from the Afro-Cuban population, black Tampa gained considerably during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from the arrival of other immigrants from lands not too distant but whose cultures left profound influences.

Ethnographer Viola B. Muse explained the circumstances in a 1936 report prepared for the Federal Writers' Project. "A small but notable group among Tampa's Negro population are the British West Indians, of whom there are a few hundred in the city," she began. "These people came from the Bahamas, Trinidad, Jamaica and other British possessions." Warming to her subject, Muse continued. "Their habits and customs differ widely from the American, and they have militant, uncompromising natures," she recorded. "The 'British subject,' as they prefer being called, are a more progressive group generally than the American Negroes to be found in Tampa." Muse concluded, "They guard jealously all the possible rights they can enjoy, are constantly on the alert for civic improvements and force themselves into leadership in any group with which they are connected."13

The West Indian emigrants left numerous legacies in Tampa, such as St. James Episcopal Church (founded 1891-1892), but the community's impact ranged far wider than its small numbers would suggest. The experiences of James William and Marion E. Matthews Rogers, and their descendants, offer a useful case study. Each claimed the Bahamas Islands as their native land. On the other hand, they were living at Key West when they met and, in 1893, married. Then, seeing greater chance for prosperity in Tampa's burgeoning cigar industry than in Key West's struggling economy, the couple soon relocated to the city's new suburb of West Tampa. James secured work as a cigar maker. Marion supplemented the family income baking pastries.14

Community involvement came naturally to James and Marion Rogers. "Race pride shown through, with an awareness and determination that the sorry conditions that had developed in the American South did not represent the only possibility for Black men and women," a descendant recalled. With more time available to contribute than did James enjoy, Marion especially launched herself into worthwhile causes. She pressed issues of community importance, oftentimes alongside teacher and fellow Bahamian Christina Johnson Meacham. They and others donated countless hours and days on behalf of better schools, protection of constitutionally mandated rights, and other concerns.15

Knowledge of their experiences helps us, at least in part, to understand why in the early twentieth century black Tampans would strive to build in their city a southern center for resistance to the encroachments
of Jim Crow racial discrimination. Not surprisingly, Marion Rogers and Christina Meacham helped, during 1914-1917, to found one of the South’s first branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Two generations later, James and Marion’s grandson, Tampa-born Robert W. Saunders Sr., championed at the risk of his own life many of his grandmother’s causes. He did so as the NAACP’s field secretary for the Florida Conference of Branches during 1952-1966, the heart of the state’s civil rights era.16

But the civil rights fights of the 1950s and 1960s lay far in a distant and uncertain future to Tampans in the early 1890s. The local African-American community then remained small (in 1890, about 1,600 persons), although it stood on the verge of unprecedented growth. Exact figures are difficult to ascertain, but by 1897 or 1898, the total would triple at least. Tampa as a whole was growing along with the transportation, tourism, cigar, and construction industries, which directly or indirectly offered employment for black workers. Additionally, in February 1895, a terrible freeze wiped out the farms and citrus groves of peninsula residents, both black and white. Significant numbers of persons ruined in Tampa’s vicinity soon opted for urban life. “Many were poor people from nearby rural areas,” Susan Greenbaum has observed, “drawn by opportunities in the city.”18

Several indices graphically portray the resultant community expansion. To cite one, Geoffrey Mohlman calculated from Tampa city directories that the four black-owned businesses mentioned in 1886 had grown to twenty-one seven years later. By 1899, the figure stood at seventy-four, if not higher. At that time, he reckoned, ten or more separate individuals or firms operated restaurants, grocery stores, and barbershops. Similarly, Curtis Welch computed the number of organized churches. The seven mentioned in 1893 (up from four in 1886) included Beulah First Baptist (Harrison St. near Pierce), Bowman ME, South (1008 Constant St.), St. James Mission Episcopal (Constant St. beyond Central), St. Joseph’s CME (E. Bay St. corner of Constant), St. Paul AME (1100 Marion St.), and Zion AMEZ [Mt. Sinai AME Zion] (902 Nebraska Ave.). To these six congregations, Welch, for 1899, added Ebenezer Baptist [in 1904 renamed Bethel] (1217 Simmons St.), Primitive Baptist (at the foot of Twigg St. and Ft. Brooke St.), Tabernacle Baptist (1010 Highland Avenue), and Allen Temple AME (Ybor City).19

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“Tampa is rapidly growing to be the metropolis of the state, [and it] lately bonded for two hundred thousand dollars for public improvements with an ever growing interest in the tobacco industry,” one AMEZ official advertised in his church’s national newspaper in 1894. “We have the finest and best appointed church edifice in this growing city,” he added with understandable pride.20

Developers had begun subdividing the Scrub by the 1870s, laying out regular street grids. While long-time businessmen...
such as barber Daniel E. Walker or restaurateur Steward Jackson might prefer to maintain their premises in the city's downtown, most newcomers in the 1890s opted to open for trade on Central Avenue, the Scrub's principal business street, or else on some nearby way such as Scott or Emery. The locale would remain the heart of black Tampa until its destruction in the mid-1970s. "The area included stores, restaurants, churches, lodges, professional offices, insurance companies, newspapers, and night clubs," one scholar of the neighborhood related. "Within this community, business, religious, and civic leaders mobilized resources to achieve common goals, including organizing resistance to segregation and discriminatory laws."21

The Central Avenue scholar did not exaggerate. Tampa's black community in the early and mid 1890s drew to it dozens of individuals and families of distinction statewide and nationally. Church leaders included Baptist pioneer preacher Prince McKnight, the guiding spirit behind Beulah Baptist; AMEZ elders and Florida church founders Joseph Sexton, Thomas Darley, and Warren C. Vesta; and AME luminaries such as Robert Meacham and Benjamin W. "Bulley" Wiley. Many of them, including Vesta, Meacham, and Wiley had served honorably in public office. Meacham, a long-time state senator, had come within a hair's breadth of the governor's chair and service in Congress. In fact, at least one local man remained in public office in greater Tampa into the early 1890s. Daniel E. Walker sat on the Fort Brooke town council until his death in 1893.22

Professional men arrived as well. Several attorneys already had offered their services prior to 1890. Researcher Julius J. Gordon named Peter W. Bryant, Sam King, and Thomas McKnight. F.C. Thomas had founded the Southern Progress newspaper in 1886, and four years later was practicing law while operating his People's Real Estate & Loan Agency. Then, in 1892, one-time Monroe County judge and Howard University trained lawyer James Dean arrived in town from Key West. During his sojourn before moving on to Jacksonville, Dean pursued his profession before the bar while also serving Harlem Academy as its principal.23

When Zachariah D. Green (sometimes spelled Greene) achieved admission to the bar in 1899, though, the event may have
constituted a milestone for the city's budding professional class. Green not only enjoyed a formal legal education, he remained in the community for years thereafter. The attorney and businessman represented a varied clientele and additionally took a prominent role in civic affairs.24

When it came to licensed medical doctors, the record remains somewhat hazier than for attorneys. Dr. Alexander H. Darnes of Jacksonville and Tallahassee's William John Gunn had established their practices by 1882, with others following in Florida's major towns within a few years. At Tampa Dr. M.J. Anderson, who arrived locally in the mid- to late-1890s, certainly can claim pioneer status. He may not have been the very first African-American physician to practice locally, but, as was true with Green for the lawyers, Anderson proved more durable in his residence and the pursuit of his professional goals than any who may have preceded him.25

The Republicans' return to the White House in March 1897, under President William McKinley, further enhanced the local professional community by allowing at least a few African-Americans to occupy local federal offices, something rarely seen during the 1893-1897 administration of Democratic President Grover Cleveland. The lucrative salaries permitted numerous black families comfortable lives. Lee R. Thomas' situation provides a case on point. Having departed economically depressed Madison County at age nineteen, Thomas had made his way to Tampa in 1884 to find work as a hotel waiter. Active in St. Paul AME Church and local masonic lodges, he particularly stood out for his loyalty to the Republican Party. Thomas's reward came in 1897 with appointment to a position in the customs service, where he remained employed for twelve years. His economic situation and local prestige elevated. Accordingly, in 1899, Thomas was asked to take over from Thomas McKnight as supervisor of the Harlem Academy, the most prestigious of local African-American schools.26

That reminds us not to forget the educators, male and female. Many of the most prominent teachers hailed from old families. Christina Johnson (later Meacham), Charlotte Bryant, Emma Bryant, Iola Brumick, Mamie Brumick, Catherine Hamilton, Lilla Hamilton, Amelia Sally, and Lilla Walker could be numbered among those already serving as educators or preparing to do so. It must be noted, though, that newcomers such as James H. Hargrett had commenced to lend new standards of professionalism to community schools. A native of Wakulla County and graduate of what would become Florida A&M University, Hargrett had begun to practice his craft locally by the mid-1890s.27

That many local students actually were benefitting greatly from the labors of African-American educators seemed evident to those present in the 1890s. Public schools such as Harlem Academy, rebuilt next to the present location of St. Paul AME Church following an April 1892 fire, achieved good results. St. James Episcopal Church had inaugurated a parochial school to compete with Harlem Academy as early as 1892. Two years later area Roman Catholics followed step with the establishment of a "colored school" on the grounds of Tampa's original First Methodist Church on Morgan Street.28

The educational progress, while satisfying within the African-American community, prompted fierce reaction within certain segments of the white population. As also had been the case with Harlem Academy, one or more local whites, angered that blacks enjoyed solid educational opportunities, vented their resentments by burning the Catholic school to the ground soon after it opened. In this instance, as at Harlem, they failed to achieve their ultimate purpose. Within eight months St. Peter Claver school had reopened at 1401 Governor Street with eighty students, most of whom were not Roman Catholic. By 1895, the institution guaranteed a nine-month term. Thanks to the ministrations of Holy Name Sisters who conducted classes, many graduates, such as Blanche Armwood and Jessie Shevere, went on to outstanding careers as educators and community builders.29

The community's determination to rebuild its schools in the face of racist arson spoke volumes about its cohesiveness, sense of purpose, and forward thinking. Iola Brumick — whose shoemaker father Henry Brumick had served on Tampa's town council in 1876-1877, and a decade later on the construction committee for the burned Harlem Academy building — recalled the times. "We had the use of this building barely three years [when] some
unspeakably despicable scoundrel set it on fire and it was completely destroyed in three hours," she related. "We watched our achievement representing years of hard work and self-denial go up in flames and smoke and our hearts were heavy indeed."30

Broken hearts soon gave way to a commitment to rebuild. "The ministers of the Negro churches came to the rescue – they tendered the use of the church buildings, and the offer was accepted by the school board," Brumick explained further. "This arrangement continued three years, until funds had been raised and a new building was erected." She concluded, "We raised $2500 for this building and the school board sold some property and added $1600 to the fund."31

Among those contributing to the rebuilding of Harlem Academy and who helped make up the leadership ranks of the African-American community were skilled workers, artisans, and craftsmen. Many owned small businesses, but others earned the respect of and a modicum of appreciation from white employers. John Robert Hall may not have been typical of them, but his upward mobility illustrates, as did Lee R. Thomas', the opportunities available in rapidly expanding greater Tampa.32

Hall's modest arrival at Tampa occurred about 1897, when the Mississippi native had not yet reached thirty years of age. Attempting to make his way as a laborer and stevedore, he discovered that he possessed a gift for securing foundations for bridges and large buildings by pile driving in shifting local sand and soil. As the years progressed, Hall earned credit for preparing solid foundations for major projects, sometimes after whites had failed at the task. These projects included the Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Boulevard) bridge, the Garcia Avenue bridge, the twelve-story Citizens Bank building, and numerous other projects. With the economic security provided by his labors, Hall immersed himself in community projects, faithfully served local fraternal orders, backed Tyer Temple Methodist Episcopal Church, and forthrightly defended the Republican Party and its candidates. He remained a respected member of the community until his death in 1946.33

Of course, John Robert Hall, and the African-American community generally, encountered numerous obstacles along the way, and it was during the years 1898-1900 that many were put in their path. In 1898, the Spanish-American War and the influx of black troopers destined for service in Cuba brought a deluge of business. Jobs opened up over night. In turn, the promise of good pay drew to the vicinity hundreds of young men from other locales in Florida who, temporarily, swelled the community's size. One of them, Andrew Jackson Ferrell, left a brief remembrance. "Our country community of Ocala then had a large contingent of young men at Tampa because of the Spanish-American War (which our country was engaged in at the time)," he recorded. "So all our large boys were attracted to Port Tampa by the 25 cents per hour paid to laborers." Ferrell added, "I first stayed in Port Tampa until February 1899, but then went back to Ocala."34

The downside from the move to Tampa were the troopers' reactions to the bitter taste of local discrimination. "Our fellows think it is h__ to have a fight in defense of people who are so prejudiced," one soldier wrote from Tampa. "They are determined to make these crackers 'walk Spanish' while here or else be treated as men." The June 1898 riot that ensued and the events
occurring in its aftermath have been well reported by Willard Gatewood, Brent R. Weisman, and others. Suffice it here to say that saloons, cafes, and other businesses in Fort Brooke and Ybor City suffered damage, while the black community prepared for white reaction.35

A second problem emerged from the fact that the war ended quickly. Those temporarily sojourning in greater Tampa departed at the same time as did many Cuban-born cigar makers who opted to return to their native land. Tampa’s economy, for the time being, dipped into the doldrums. The shock may have wiped out dozens of businesses. Geoffrey Mohlman’s research offers evidence. It revealed only forty-four concerns in operation in 1901, as opposed to seventy-four two years earlier. Contributing to this slump, the city’s principal financial benefactor, Henry Plant, died in 1899. The demise of the man called the “King of Florida” stirred local confusion as his heirs, who mostly felt few ties to Tampa, litigated his vast estate. Within a few years Plant’s magnificent Tampa Bay Hotel had closed, gifting city fathers with the problem of what to do with a now-empty resort made world famous by Spanish-American War correspondents.36

What cloud does not have its silver lining, though? The war had forced the Plant System to upgrade its rail lines, at the taxpayers’ expense of course. This permitted Ybor City and West Tampa cigar factories easier and cheaper access to the national market at a time when cigar smoking reached new levels of popularity. Accordingly, Ybor City’s economy launched itself, given a few ups and downs, on a twenty-year boom with West Tampa benefitting generously from the same dynamics. The resultant prosperity lifted many in the African-American community as the years passed, but it also had an unintended – and especially important – result.37

That result concerned Tampa’s now-longstanding connection with music. Already at the century’s end, the community’s musical heritage stretched back for decades. The churches, of course, had integrated music into their services and ceremonies from the time of their establishment, and St. Paul AME had obtained an organ by 1883. Additionally, bands of various kinds had coalesced, especially within fraternal organizations. The Tampa Colored Orchestra, featuring Jay Gould on the bass violin, entertained, as well, by 1891.38

But, something new loomed on the horizon in 1899. At Jacksonville, a club owner and would-be vaudeville impresario named Patrick H. Chappelle noticed how tobacco was building up his town’s chief competitor. “Tampa is a city which has a number of large cigar factories,” he explained, “their pay roll averages about $50,000.00 per week, among Cubans, Spaniards and Americans.” This fact seemed to offer just the opportunity Chappelle had been seeking. In partnership with a Mr. Donaldson, he relocated to Tampa in the late summer or fall. The Indianapolis Freeman, an organ associated closely with the black entertainment business, reported the results in June 1900. “They opened the Mascotte Theatre-Saloon at Tampa, Fla.,” the article revealed. “The performances given soon became town talk and the theatre was crowded nightly.” It continued, “The success made at this house prompted them

They had seen or heard about Tampa during the war. Following a return to the quieter world at home, though, they found themselves compelled to return to the growing city and to grow with it. Once back at Tampa in 1901, [Andrew J.] Ferrell’s fortunes, not unusually, took a decided turn for the best. “My father . . . worked as a pilot of the steamship Manatee [until] 1905,” daughter Rowena Ferrell Brady recalled. “He became the only Negro in the state of Florida to hold a Master’s license for navigation of steam vessels of unlimited tonnage in inland waters of the United States.” She added: “In 1905, he was named as clerk for the U.S. Customs Service in Tampa and served in the capacity until 1922. During that time he became very active in civic affairs.”
to open the Buckingham Theatre at Ft. Brooke, Fla.” The item concluded, “These theaters have proven themselves to be miniature gold mines.”

The Freeman probably did not overstate the situation by very much. Although the Mascotte – located in the city of Tampa at the corner of Pierce and Polk Streets – competed with long-time establishments such as John Saulter’s Central Avenue saloon and Saulter’s brother-in-law William D. Walker’s place on Nebraska Avenue, it did so with a difference. Chappelle’s club immediately drew name acts, including the Mahara’s Minstrel Festival with its featured bandmaster W.C. Handy. The site posed a problem, though, because conservative white city of Tampa officials easily could restrain performances or close the club entirely for perceived moral infractions. So, Chappelle opened his second venue at 416 Fifth Avenue in Fort Brooke, where rules tended to be either nonexistent or enforced with a high degree of flexibility. By March 1900, the Buckingham boomed, thanks to a racially mixed audience that defied the region’s Jim Crow racial restrictions. “The house is crowded to the doors every night with Cubans, Spaniards, Negroes, and white people,” Chappelle boasted. He added, “Business is fine.”

Success pursued Chappelle with alacrity. Maintaining bases at Tampa and Jacksonville, he expanded into music publishing along with his musical director Joseph Levy, specializing at first in “the latest rag-time compositions.” Quickly, he developed touring companies at Tampa that eventually enchanted audiences throughout the nation. So great was his success that, after he died at Jacksonville in 1911, thousands lined the streets for a funeral procession composed of well over five hundred persons. By then, it was said that he was the “wealthiest colored citizen in Jacksonville.” One newspaper remarked, “In city and state and all over the South, the name of Pat Chappelle was familiar.”

Chappelle’s daring and entrepreneurial ability set Tampa in the national spotlight, so far as black vaudeville was concerned, encouraging the establishment of numerous other clubs and bringing to the area most of the nation’s premier African-American entertainers. Jazz and blues resounded through the nights. Local men, in fact, organized the successful combo The Jazzmen about 1910, with The Syncopaters following. Eventually, Central Avenue emerged as the focus of the excitement. Along its length, Henry “Red” Clinton, Cannonball and Nat Adderly, Ray Charles, and many others learned their craft as they incurred a silent debt to Patrick Henry Chappelle.

Another silver lining to the cloud that underlay the century’s-end concerned men such as Andrew J. Ferrell. They had seen or heard about Tampa during the war. Following a return to the quieter world at home, though, they found themselves compelled to return to the growing city and to grow with it. Once back at Tampa in 1901, Ferrell’s fortunes, not unusually, took a decided turn for the best. “My father . . . worked as a pilot of the steamship Manatee [until] 1905,” daughter Rowena Ferrell Brady recalled. “He became the only Negro in the state of Florida to hold a Master’s license for navigation of steam vessels of unlimited tonnage in inland waters of the United States.” She added: “In 1905, he was named as clerk for the U.S. Customs Service in Tampa and served in the capacity until 1922. During that time he became very active in civic affairs.”

Ferrell’s return symbolized renewed growth that asserted itself in the early 1900s; and at the same time, his elevation to federal employee status suggested another event of significance to the community that had occurred during the lull following the Spanish-American War. The situation arose when the position of deputy collector of internal revenue for the Port of Tampa came open in 1898. The McKinley administration, casting about for the right man to fill the slot, turned to one of Florida’s most distinguished African-Americans, Joseph Newman Clinton. The job carried immense prestige locally, added to which the new man, Clinton, reported only to another black man, Joseph E. Lee of Jacksonville, who served as collector of internal revenue for Florida.

Clinton’s presence, even absent his title, lent prestige to the community. A son of AMEZ bishop Joseph Jackson Clinton, Henry had graduated from Lincoln University before relocating to Florida, in the mid-1870s, to teach at Gainesville. Quickly delving into Republican politics, he sat in the Florida House of Representatives during its 1885 session and also occupied numerous local political offices in Alachua County. An
inspector of customs at Pensacola by 1889, he embraced the AMEZ ministry and had occupied the role of presiding elder by 1892. Incidentally, Clinton fathered Tampa's future musical great "Red" Clinton.45

Clinton's tenure as deputy collector at Tampa did not represent a first for African-Americans - Henry W. Harmon and Thomas McKnight both had held the job in the 1870s - but it did serve as a precedent for the prestigious arrival a few years later of Henry Wilkins Chandler. Chandler, a Maine native, university graduate, teacher, and lawyer, also had established a home in Florida in the mid-1870s (in Chandler's case at Ocala). A Republican activist as well, Chandler adroitly served in numerous local offices and in the Florida Senate, before running in 1888 as the Republican nominee for secretary of state. In 1908, his eyes turned to Tampa where the position of inspector of customs awaited him. He occupied the position until terminated, as was Clinton, by Woodrow Wilson's administration in 1913.46

It turned out that the Tampa community urgently required the political skills possessed by such former officeholders. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War riot, race relations had remained sensitive at best. This was demonstrated in mid-1899 when editor M.J. Christopher of the Union Labor Recorder was murdered by a white policeman. Joseph N. Clinton helped to lead the resulting protests, while five thousand individuals tried to attend Christopher's funeral at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Ugly events followed, leading up to 1903, when one black youth was castrated by whites for embracing a white girl. Several months later another man suffered the same fate before being lynched.47

These conditions forced the community to utilize its potential political power to ensure a degree of adequate and fair law enforcement. As had been the case since the early 1870s, many residents turned for leadership to Thomas McKnight, about whom a word or two of background is in order. A Hernando County native (his family had been held in slavery on the Frierson plantation), Tom McKnight had relocated to Tampa within a year or two following the Civil War's end. Immediately active in Republican Party affairs, he also captained the local black militia company organized in 1870, earning him the continuing title of Captain McKnight. Over the years he served in several significant United States government positions, while immersing himself in political and community affairs. Given changing fortunes as the years progressed, McKnight operated a steamboat and an oyster business, practiced law, served as a hack driver, and labored as a stevedore. Through it all, he remained highly visible as the principal champion of Tampa's African-American population.48

As the community's traditional leader, McKnight faced serious challenges in those early years of the twentieth century. Social and political reverberations from local labor violence, such as that connected with Ybor City's 1901 La Resistencia strike, complicated his task, as did white resentment of high black voter turnout. McKnight's plan, under the circumstances, made sense. He simply backed candidates - especially mayoral candidates - with whom he could bargain regarding African-American needs, particularly as to law enforcement. It appeared as early as 1901 that he had achieved a major success. In those days, prior to the La Resistencia strike, and heightened local divisions, reformers, workers, socialists, and black Republicans could join to elect a mayor. In 1901, the candidate was Frank Wing. Wing, for his part, repaid the support by backing a plan to create an official Greater Tampa by merging East Tampa, West Tampa, and Fort Brooke with the city of Tampa. The initiative also eliminated poll tax payments as prerequisites for voting. The combined and enlarged electorate then would have insured political dominance by the coalition that had backed the mayor, conferring real influence on McKnight and other African-Americans. Much of the local white power structure, led by lawyer and businessman Peter O. Knight, reacted apoplectically. Those men convinced the Florida legislature to kill the measure that, Knight insisted, would wreck and bankrupt the city.49

Following this setback and the 1901 La Resistencia strike, McKnight felt constrained to charter a more moderate course. In 1902, he and his Watchman Club associates - including T.C. Williams, Pierce L. Hamilton, Eugene Gill, H.M. Moore, and Richard McCloud - backed mayoral candidate James McKay Jr., a descendant of an old and very well-known family long seen as friendly to African-American and, sometimes,
Republican causes. McKay won. Yet, the mayor's tenure of office disappointed. Unfortunately, the city police department— all white then for only a few years—seemingly acquiesced to the incidents of racial violence mentioned earlier. This and other factors led to McKay's retirement from politics and to further searching by McKnight for the right man for the job.50

As he journeyed peripatetically through the mire of Tampa politics, McKnight's clout and that of the black community mounted impressively. Over twice as many voters turned out in the 1902 election as had four years earlier. By 1904, 22.5 percent of all registered voters in the city were black, and African-American candidates for justice of the peace and city council felt sufficiently optimistic to announce for office. In 1906, the percentage reached nearly one-quarter of the electorate. Businessman William D. Walker seriously considered a run for the city council, and black organizations played a crucial role in electing William Frecker as mayor in what then was billed as "the most hotly contested election in the history of Tampa's municipal politics."51

Clara Fordham Frye, wife of barber Sherman Frye, had supplemented the family income since her arrival in Tampa six years earlier by working as a nurse, sometimes for the D.B. McKay family and, perhaps, on occasion...at McKnight's hospital. In any event, the urgent need spurred Frye into taking patients into her Tampa Heights home. Quickly, Clara Frye's "hospital" opened across from her home at 1615 Lamar Avenue. Once McKay became mayor in 1910, Frye received his support, and her hospital emerged as the African-American community's principal health care facility.

The crest came in 1908, but political disaster followed closely behind. McKnight's health had begun to fail by then, but others had emerged to fill the leadership vacuum. John R. Hall stood among them, but so, too, did ministers D.A. Perrin, J.L. Moore, and S.J. Johnson, attorney Charles H. Alston, longtime resident James Hamilton, and others. They felt particularly emboldened because, although Mayor Frecker had disappointed them in many respects, he had carried through on a promise to annex Fort Brooke and its black voters into the city. Now, the Negro Protective League showered its support upon McKnight's old favorite Frank Wing, receiving in return Wing's commitment, in the words of University of Tampa political historian Robert Kerstein, "that he would not appoint a chief of police who was unsatisfactory to Tampa's Negro population." In June, Wing bested Frecker in an election at which voters cast more than four thousand ballots. Meanwhile, lawyer Zachariah D. Green nearly made the race for municipal judge, losing his place on the ballot only after considerable maneuvering on the part of white officials.52

All of this proved far too much for many white businessmen and civic leaders, a fact that produced dire consequences for African-Americans. Led by Donald B. McKay, a nephew of Mayor James McKay Jr., many white leaders organized themselves in August 1908 as the White Municipal Party. As one newspaper put it, they feared that the "purchasable negro vote" would control future elections. Subsequently, their party announced its intention to "prevent the future operation of the Negro vote as a balance of power in municipal elections." Historian Pam Iorio explained the results. "From that beginning," she observed, "a primary system for Tampa city elections was designed with the White Municipal Party as the only participating party." At the 1910 election, with black voters essentially excluded from the meaningful portion of the election contest, McKay narrowly defeated Frecker for mayor and launched himself upon decades of local political power.53

The virtual elimination of African-Americans from political influence at Tampa coincided with growing social rigidity stemming from the spread of legally enforced Jim Crow racial discrimination. This problem had surfaced quite visibly in 1904 and 1905 with the Tampa Electric Company's off-and-on attempts to segregate riders on its streetcars. Resistance to the attempts came immediately and loudly. One public incident occurred when a white man...
complained to a black woman passenger that she was seated improperly. "The female African resented the remark of Mr. [Theodore] Kennedy and began pouring out a torrent of abuse at him and the white people in general," the *Tampa Morning Tribune* related. "She told him she was as good as he was," the report added, "that the company gave her as much right on the cars as the 'white trash' and that she wouldn't allow any 'cow-faced cracker' to throw off on her." Kennedy then struck the woman, after which both parties were arrested. A police court judge sentenced the woman to pay a $2.50 fine, but doubled the amount for Kennedy, insisting that "no language, under the law, authorized a blow." The *Tribune* warned, "The decision . . . was taken as a great vindication by the Negroes . . . and will undoubtedly lead to further and probably more serious trouble."

Nonetheless, Tampa Electric Company backed off its new policy in 1904, thanks to the resistance, but state mandates the following year required separation on streetcars. Interestingly, Peter O. Knight cautioned the company about enforcement. "Their money is as good as ours," he argued, "and we must be careful and not have any boycott of our lines here, which may be precipitated by indiscreet action upon the part of the conductors." Nancy A. Hewitt studied what then occurred. "In the long run," she concluded, "the difficulties of separating out Black and white riders, given the large and militant Cuban population, may have forced Tampa Electric Company to institute a more flexible policy of enforcement in Tampa, lessening the sting of Jim Crow for Blacks as well as Latins."

Compromises such as Tampa Electric Company’s may have marked everyday life in many instances, but the reality of Jim Crow persisted as leaders strove to discover some way for the community to protect and enhance itself while ministering to its own unfulfilled needs. As far as ministering to its needs was concerned, fraternal and masonic lodges, insurance companies such as Jacksonville’s black-owned Afro-American Industrial Insurance Company, and mutual benefit associations offered some protection and comfort. Local white officeholders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had proved especially reluctant, though, to provide health-care services even for whites. Their interest in services for blacks ran even cooler.

Once more Thomas McKnight came forth to offer leadership in the years of the century’s turn, this time for better health care and what later generations would refer to as social security. His labors in that regard had commenced in late 1899, so that by January 1900 a newspaper could report, "The hospital and orphan home for the old folks and orphan children, which is being erected in Tampa, is advancing, and when finished will be a credit to the race and an honor to President T.A. McKnight." The item added, "He is the man for the position." Donald B. McKay recalled in later years that McKnight "erected a three-story building on Nebraska Avenue (still standing [as of 1950]) as a home for aged indigent Negroes."

McKnight sought funding for the combination hospital, orphanage, and old folks home wherever he could find it. Iola Brumick recalled that many of those who earlier had worked with McKnight to raise funds to rebuild Harlem Academy now aided the new cause. McKnight also took advantage of his political pull to secure at least minimal funding from the city and county. Minutes reveal that, shortly after each election, McKnight petitioned for additional assistance. By 1906, he hoped to erect a new and larger facility “for the care of the aged, decrepit, and the orphans of the colored people.” White city council members, increasingly resentful of any requests for support from the black community, nonetheless considered the petition even though they
refused to permit McKnight to appear before them. By early 1907, though, McKnight's deteriorating health and a cutoff of city and county funds spelled the effort's end. "I ran a colored people's hospital for the poor people, which I ran for over five years," McKnight recorded in 1911, "and I sold it about five years ago."58 Closure of McKnight's facility left the ever-growing community in a dilemma of deadly dimensions. Even some whites expressed concern. Meanwhile, in May 1907, the Union League Association launched a fundraising campaign for a "hospital and home to relieve the sick and poor." Events soon overtook the initiative. Clara Fordham Frye, wife of barber Sherman Frye, had supplemented the family income since her arrival in Tampa six years earlier by working as a nurse, sometimes for the D.B. McKay family and, perhaps, on occasion - and the record is not clear here - at McKnight's hospital. In any event, the urgent need spurred Frye into taking patients into her Tampa Heights home. Quickly, Clara Frye's "hospital" opened across from her home at 1615 Lamar Avenue. Once McKay became mayor in 1910, Frye received his support, and her hospital emerged as the African-American community's principal health care facility.59

The health care crisis vividly pointed out the community's unmet and growing needs as the twentieth century entered its second decade. Those needs clearly required attention, since the opening of Tampa as a deep-water port in 1908-1909 fueled city expansion and promised to swell the African-American community. Sadly, Thomas McKnight's years-long decline, and subsequent death in 1912, created a void, as mentioned earlier, that required others to step forward. As it turned out, two overlapping groups particularly aided in providing the new men and new ideas suited for and required by the new century. They were the Odd Fellows and the federal workforce.60

The International Order of Odd Fellows had enjoyed a long history within the community. Founded in 1884, Land of Flowers Lodge No. 2505 listed many of Tampa's leading black ministers, businessmen, and government employees on its rolls or, as one member put it, the lodge encompassed "a large number of our best colored people." The order's national grand secretary explained its principles in 1899. "Odd Fellowship demands the practice of benevolence and charity," C.H. Brooks declared, "and in order to impress these duties upon the mind and furnish incentives to action in those moments of relaxation to which all men are subject, it has instituted solemn ceremonies, ordained frequent meetings, and formed a language of signs - all designed to produce a habit of benevolence, and by educating the moral faculties, promote the well-being of society." Brooks added, "The pecuniary contributions of the members... constitute a fund for the exclusive purpose of relieving the sick, burying the dead, educating the orphan, and protecting and assisting the widow." Associated closely with the lodge in its early years were Joseph A. Walker, William D. Walker, George A. Sheehy, Lee R. Thomas, I.H.N. Smith, and E.M. Roberts.61

From about 1889, the lodge's headquarters offered the African-American community a center for activism and an unofficial "city hall." Rebuilt on a grander scale in the early 1900s at the corner of Central Avenue and Scott Street, the edifice represented, according to one observer, "the largest Negro-owned building south of Jacksonville." By then the headquarters building served two lodges, and their combined memberships intended it to be imposing in its grandeur. "The labor was largely donated by members of the lodge," Violet B. Muse recorded, "who were eager to create a monument in the structure." From the new building's doors in 1905, Odd Fellows state convention delegates marched on Tampa's city hall to protest streetcar segregation, with local officers urging voters to pay their poll taxes and vote. This act merely highlighted the lodges' commitment.62

By the time the new Odd Fellows hall had reached completion, Tampa's circle of black federal employees had begun to expand. Joseph N. Clinton found positions within the treasury department and customs service for individuals of promise such as Andrew J. Ferrell, while in 1902, the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt allowed postal employment for persons passing a civil service examination. Edwin J. Moore made it on the first try that year, with others to follow.63 Meanwhile, the upper strata of Tampa's black society, just the people who would have joined the Odd Fellows or held a
federal position, enjoyed increasing affluence as a result of their labors and investments. One AME Church official found herself surprised by the degree of affluence during a 1909 visit. "The colored people own beautiful homes in this city," she informed readers of the church's national magazine, "and may be found in all walks of life." Marie Carter continued: "I was really entertained in the magnificent home of Mr. and Mrs. W.G. Gordon, 610 Kay St. . . . Mr. Gordon, my kind host, owns and controls a large grocery store and meat market, sending out groceries to all parts of Tampa."64

Large success had come to at least a few, as the story of Rachel Williams and her family illustrates. Widowed, but with some property, five children, and a willingness "to work indefatigably for their welfare and education," she had relocated from Madison, Florida, to Tampa in the early 1900s. In 1906, with her help, son J. Andrew Williams founded Williams Cigar Company at 1111 Scott Street. Five years later the concern shipped product "all over the United States" and claimed to be "the largest Afro-American cigar company in existence." When Rachel Williams passed away in 1915, son David Hendricks was "proprietor of the popular ice cream and confectionary store of Central avenue," son Robert L. Williams was "proprietor of the Scott Street Department Store," son William F. Williams was "the most trusted cigar maker of Boltz-Clymer Co., a white concern"; and son Joshua Williams also worked as a cigar maker. "Her sons are among the most prominent citizens of Tampa," her obituary proclaimed.65

Not to stray too far from the subject, but Rachel Williams's personal achievements do raise a significant point. Women labored mightily at many occupations, including running substantial businesses. In 1904, Marie Carter discovered that fact, as well, on one of her visits to Tampa. "I was well cared for at the home of Mrs. Mattie Lee, widow of the well known Mr. William Lee, who owned one of the largest livery, feed and sale stables [and] undertaking and embalming [concerns] in this city," she observed. "His widow is running the business [now]," Carter concluded, "with great success."66

A growing and increasingly affluent middle class, better educational grounding and opportunities, a framework for networking and organization, and mounting community problems combined to produce a series of organizations and associations not directly intended as political bodies but rather dedicated to improvement of race and living conditions in practical and mostly nonpolitical ways.

The ideology that lay behind many of these practical efforts stemmed directly from Booker T. Washington's philosophy. The famed educator and race spokesman long had enjoyed popularity at Tampa. In 1895, for example, Mathew McDuffie, rector of St. James Episcopal Church, had led a delegation to Atlanta to hear Washington deliver the Cotton States Exposition speech that proclaimed his great "Atlanta Compromise." Tampans quickly had supported the Florida Negro Business League following its 1906 establishment, and the previous year Thomas McKnight, D.H. Perrin, Thomas B. Walker, R.D. Lewis, J.L. Moore, and G.K. Ford had backed inviting Washington to speak at the state fair. That dream saw its realization in 1912, when Washington finally addressed eager Tampans. "There is no greater enemy to the state today, be he white or black," he informed them following postman George S. Middleton's introduction, than the man who would spend his time and energy in stirring up racial strife." Afterward, the party adjourned for a "delicious Spanish supper" before its distinguished members enjoyed some of J. Andrew Williams's fine cigars.67

A hint of the future direction of these groups and associations surfaced in early 1909 when local backers organized a Negro State Fair Association at Beulah Baptist Church. Intended to reach throughout the state, the association aimed to offer African-Americans "a chance to show and demonstrate his work and ability to the world." Robert W. Saunders Sr., whose grandmother Marion Rogers participated in the planning, related her comments that the association's request for a "Negro Day" at the state fair by no means indicated acceptance of Jim Crow restrictions. "They didn't want a segregated department," he remembered, "but used it to show off black accomplishments." Officers of the association included postman Middleton, Dr. J.B. Green, attorney Charles H. Alston, undertaker C.W. Patterson, and customs inspector A.J. Ferrell.68

The next year a similar organization coalesced based upon a small group of postal
workers. They intended to promote literary discussion and presentations, as well as to encourage scholarship. Naming themselves the Paul Laurence Dunbar Literary Society, the group became a sounding board for community concerns and for planning to address those concerns, an eventuality that echoed the experience in numerous other urban communities in the South. Leaders such as Joseph N. Clinton and Henry W. Chandler supported and counseled the gatherings. Mayor D.B. McKay accepted the need to address them as did Young Men's Christian Association executive J.M. Graham. In the years that followed its creation, and among other projects, the activist group sponsored fund raisers that permitted establishment of a library for the Harlem Academy. Members as of 1915 included Middleton, Joseph McCray, William J. Walker, Daniel Webster Perkins, F.S. Perdoma, J.T. King, Wade Perrin, A.J. Graham, H.F. Lester, and H.W. Daniel. 69

Tampa women acted in a similar vein, as also had their counterparts in many other southern cities. In February 1912, for instance, the Phyllis Wheatley Art Club organized “to do some new and effective work along the line of uplift work.” Particularly, its members proposed to “promote interest in Negro art and literature and to assist in the uplift of the mental, physical, and moral life of Negro womanhood in Tampa.” Club members entertained Mrs. Booker T. Washington when she visited in March 1913, opened an art school, endeavored to provide financial support for Clara Frye Hospital, and engaged in numerous other initiatives. Geraldine Williams served as their first president, with Rachel Williams, Mattie Norton, Addie Walker, and Charlotte Bryant active as well. 70

A number of similar clubs and circles followed in the art club’s wake. Many formed within churches such as Beulah Baptist, Bethel Baptist, and St. Paul AME, but others stood alone. One of them deserves special mention. Just when the Harriet Tubman Mother’s Club came into existence is not known nor are the names of its members. Descriptions of two of its projects have come to light. In March 1914, the group launched a campaign “whereby the Negro woman is to be taught how to keep her yard in first-class condition.” More importantly, and two months earlier, the club opened Tampa’s first African-American kindergarten. Located in the home of Sarah Powell Ferrell (Mrs. A.J. Ferrell), the enterprise was said in its formative stages to be “meeting with much success.” 71

When the kindergarten opened, a new men’s organization already had begun to establish itself as a major community force. Founded in 1912, by postman Edwin J. Moore, the Afro-American Civic League first vowed to “have the disreputable white[-owned] houses removed from the Negro section of the city” and to agitate for “a new high school and playground for our children.” The effort picked up support from the Tampa Tribune, which ran columns penned by Moore. Under the club’s auspices, Moore and A.J. Prince also began publishing in January 1915 a community magazine entitled The Afro-American Monthly. M.P. Chappelle, who was endeavoring in his spare time to charter a bank, served as business manager. Geraldine Williams edited the women’s department. 72

That year, in the late fall, one of the league’s first dreams came true. The Hillsborough County High School for Colored
Students opened. “[It] is one of the finest structures of its kind in the state,” Geraldine Williams recorded. “It was secured for the colored people through the agitation of the Afro-American Civic League, of which Prof. E.J. Moore was the founder.” She added, “Prof. P.B. Peters recently of Mississippi is the principal.”

Some credit probably also is due to the civic league for encouraging the publication of a new newspaper within the community. Numerous black-owned papers had graced Tampa since the mid-1880s, with the Intelligencer and the Florida Recorder reaching readers in the early 1910s. All had suspended publication, though, by 1915. To remedy the situation, AME minister Marcellus D. Potter, in April or early May, offered the first issue of the Tampa Bulletin, which would continue to inform local readers into the 1950s. By the end of its first decade of service, the Bulletin circulated six thousand copies per issue and was considered one of the ten best African-American newspapers published in the United States.

Another key community improvement organization, one tied directly to Dr. Washington and his National Negro Business League, made its appearance in 1914. Perhaps growing out of an investment club known as the Twenty Sons of Progress, the Negro Board of Trade first convened at the Odd Fellows Hall on March eleventh. W.H. Gordon spearheaded the group. “The plan is to unite the negroes of the city in various lines of business, together with the professional men of the Negro race, in an organization working for the betterment of their business conditions,” he explained. Gordon added, “After a thorough investigation of the conditions of the city of Tampa, among the negroes, and knowing the good that a negro board of trade can do in alleviating these conditions, we have called the business and professional men of the city together.” Edwin J. Moore, Lee R. Thomas, Walter A. Armwood, Joseph N. Clinton, Dr. George P. Norton, Rev. S.A. Williams, A.W. White, J.J. Hendry, M.P. Chappelle, A.J. Ferrell, Edward McRae, C.W. Patterson, J. Andrew Williams, E.R. Rolf, D.A. Perrin, G.S. Middleton, R.L. Williams, A.E. Ashley, and A.J. Prince assisted.

These were heady times, with new and apparently major business concerns announcing themselves regularly. Walter Armwood’s Gem Drug Store at 1308 Central Avenue, to cite an example, offered black Tampans their first modern pharmacy. Dr. A.H. Attaway, former president of Edward Waters College, inaugurated a large grocery and meat market. Attorney Daniel W. Perkins hung out his shingle, while dentist Dr. Breland Brumick was seen “in our midst again.” Sisters Rowena and Carrie Perrin proved their sense of the times by welcoming customers to their new “5, 10, and 25-cent store” in the Perrin Building on Central Avenue. Meanwhile, sixteen agents of the Afro-American Insurance Company circulated from its Tampa’s offices. At the “clean and classical” Maceo motion picture theater at Central and Emery, which had entertained ticket buyers since 1911, “Thursday afternoon matinee dances” now beguiled “the younger set.” The Tampa Colored Giants baseball team thrilled fans, as well, during games at Plant Park.

Construction and innovation appeared seemingly at every turn. To offer just a few examples, sanctuaries for St. Paul and Mt. Carmel AME Churches were rising from the ground. At Allen Temple AME Church beautiful new windows greeted worshippers, and Reverend Potter enjoyed the comforts of a new parsonage. Bethel Baptist, with over five hundred members, drew plans for a $30,000 structure “for various purposes.” St. Peter Claver’s chapel on Governor Street neared completion. Additionally, Mrs. Henry Clinton and Mrs. Maymie Rose, having subdivided their acreage at Sulphur Springs and in Seminole Heights, encouraged new home construction. While the hammers pounded, Blanche Armwood Perkins pursued innovation by implementing her famed domestic science program in the public schools. When Armwood could find the time, she and Inez Alston also helped to lead the Florida Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs.

Yet, a number of Tampans realized that business and prosperity for some masked the true problems of the day and proved willing to act upon the concerns in a direct fashion. Some of the impetus came from West Tampa. There in April 1915, the Reverend Charles S. Sturgis inquired how he could convert his chapter of the American Benevolent Association into a branch of the militant NAACP, an organization which then possessed little southern presence. Mail carrier H.E. Lester followed up in June, writing to W.E.B. DuBois and asking for
aid in organizing a branch, but an official who responded cautioned Lester not to move too quickly and advised only “local” affiliation.

Some additional part of the impetus may have derived from east of the Hillsborough River, although connections with West Tampa through cigar makers such as James W. Rogers and his wife Marion Rogers may have been involved. The focal group for reform grew from the congregation of St. James Episcopal Church, whose West Indian (especially Bahamian) members were well known for their insistence on greater protection of the law. They organized in 1914 the St. George British Overseas Club of Tampa to provide themselves with a network and mutual support. The club’s numerous activities for member families were presided over by A.J. Williamson, with H.H. Lightborn, G.W. Adderly, Miss L.V. Hall, and Mrs. Gertrude Adderly backing him.

It took until 1917 for the NAACP to accede to the 1915 wishes of Tampans, and that event came only after Florida native James Weldon Johnson became the organization’s first full-time field secretary. Johnson returned to Florida early in 1917, visited Tampa, and granted a charter signed by Daniel W. Perkins, president; Dr. Jacob White, vice president; Mrs. Christina Johnson Meacham, secretary, and Joseph N. Clinton, treasurer. Soon, attorney Perkins had gathered 107 members around him, and NAACP secretary Roy Nash had wired, “Heartiest Congratulations. You’ve broken the record for new branches.”

The history of Tampa’s African-American community from 1891 to 1916 obviously involves a story far more complex than the one communicated in these pages. Still, the story presented here seems to validate well Professor David Jackson’s thesis of pre-World War One community building and to illustrate vividly that the 1920s Raper Report addressed a community far changed from the one that graced Tampa just a decade earlier. As additional information comes to light, perhaps the lives and events that helped to make Tampa the great and diverse city that it has become can be told with even greater clarity.
ENDNOTES

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17. Regarding Tampa's African-American community as of 1891 and its development to that point, see Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr., "Rejoicing in their Freedom," The Development of Tampa's African-American Community in the Post-Civil


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27. Brady, Things Remembered, 71; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 28, 1896; Tallahassee Daily Democrat February 15, March 6, 1919.


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38. New York Globe, December 8, 1883; Tampa Weekly Journal, September 18, 1890; Tampa Tribune, June 15, 1891.

39. Indianapolis Freeman, October 14, 1899, June 30, 1900.

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41. Indianapolis Freeman, April 7, 14, 28, May 19, June 30, 1900, November 25, 1911; New York Age, November 16, 1911.


43. Brady, Things Remembered, 11; Brown and Brown, Family Records, 78-81.


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64. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, 142-47.


67. *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, October 29, 1950; *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, February 6, December 4, 1902; City of Tampa City Council Minutes, Book 6, 408, 428, Book 7, 42, 162, 168, 182, 184, 194, 204, City of Tampa Archives, Tampa; Hillsborough County Commission Minutes, Book H, 538, Book I, 24, Hillsborough County Records Center, Tampa; Thomas Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, 154.


73. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 5, 8, 1909; personal interview, Robert W. Saunders Sr., by Canter Brown, Jr., October 21, 1996 (notes in collection of Canter Brown, Jr.).


75. *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 17, March 23, 1912, April 5, 1913; March 14, 1914. See also Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*.


78. *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 4, 1915.


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In Search of D.P. Davis: A Biographical Study of One of Florida's Premier Real Estate Promoters

Rodney Kite-Powell

Florida's 1920s real estate boom caused a sensation across the United States. Hundreds of thousands of people, more mobile than ever in their Ford Flivvers, Oldsmobile 8s and Studebakers, took to newly constructed highways and headed south into an anticipated paradise. They searched for palm-lined streets paved with gold - year-round sunshine with profits sprouting from the sandy soil.

A profusion of real estate pitchmen awaited the southbound throng, hoping to separate fools from their money. From this frenzy of hucksters emerged several legitimate developers who earnestly desired to reshape the landscape of Florida. The names Carl Graham Fisher, Addison and Wilson Mizner and George E. Merrick readily come to mind when one considers the pantheon of the Florida land boom. More often than not, one Florida real estate mogul is relegated to second-tier status or neglected altogether. This is unfortunate considering the man's accomplishments: numerous developments in Miami, completion of a development in Cocoa Beach, a $30,000,000 Davis Islands development in Tampa's Hillsborough Bay and near completion of a $60,000,000 Davis Shores project on Anastasia Island in St. Augustine. This man, David Paul Davis, accomplished all of this between 1920 and 1926. More unusual still, he was a Florida native and dabbler in real estate as early as 1907.1

Davis disappeared from Florida's real estate boom as quickly as it had begun. His death in 1926, ruled an accidental drowning, resulted from a fall out of a stateroom window of the luxury liner Majestic. The ship's captain ordered an immediate search of the dark Atlantic waters. The ship circled continuously for over an hour, search lights scanning every inch of ocean within sight, but to no avail.

Biographers have continued to search for Davis through the years, but they, too, have been stymied - not by darkness and deep water, but by the incredible stories concocted during his lifetime, some of which Davis himself manufactured in an effort to create and promote his own image. His life is shrouded in the kind of myths that could only be created out of the frenzy of the Florida land boom. Any biographer of Davis must look past the myths and propaganda and attempt to locate the truth. This study is a search for the real David Paul Davis.

The Davis Family

David Paul Davis was born on November 29, 1885 in the north Florida town of Green Cove Springs, the county seat of Clay County, to Gertrude M. Davis and her husband, George Riley Davis. The small town, situated on the western bank of the St. Johns River about 25 miles south of Jacksonville, supported trade and tourism between the big river and the agricultural towns of north central Florida. The major draw to Green Cove Springs was the springs themselves, thought to hold incredible medicinal powers. A large resort, the Clarendon House, catered to weary northerners attempting to escape their harsh winter climate.2

David was a second generation Floridian. His paternal grandfather, George Mercer Davis, came to Florida from South Carolina...
in 1853. Florida was among the newest states in the Union at the time, earning statehood in 1845. Settlers such as Davis streamed south to stake their claim in America's vast southernmost frontier. For most of those new arrivals, Florida only went as far south as Lake George, the source of the St. Johns River – to them, North Florida was Florida.

Born on April 26, 1832, George Mercer Davis came to Palatka, Florida as a talented 21-year-old carpenter. Among his first major contributions to his new hometown were the hand-hewn rafters he supplied for St. Mark's Episcopal Church in 1854. That same year, Davis married fellow South Carolinian Martha A. Baisden. The marriage took place in Palatka on May 5, with William Collier presiding. Eleven months later, in April 1855, the Davises welcomed their first child into the family. Harriet ‘Hattie’ Davis was the first of eight children born to George and Martha Davis.

The second Davis child, George Riley Davis, arrived January 15, 1857. Like his sister, George Riley was born in Palatka. By this time, Palatka boasted many features befitting a growing town, including a sawmill, churches, a school and bustling trade. This growth was hampered by a damaging freeze in the winter of 1857. While not as severe as the freezes of 1835 or 1894-95, the drop in temperature drove many farmers out of business and kept tourists out of town.

Palatka soon recovered, but for some reason the Davis family chose to leave sometime between 1857 and 1860, going upriver to the new settlement of Welaka, on the eastern bank of the St. Johns River, 20 miles south of Palatka and 75 miles south of Jacksonville. Welaka, whose name is derived from a Seminole word meaning “chain of lakes” (an apt description of the St. Johns), had an economy similar to Palatka’s. The poet Sidney Lanier, who traveled throughout Florida in the early 1870s, described this portion of the St. Johns River:

“Twenty miles above [Palatka], on the east bank, one hundred miles [sic] from Jacksonville, is Welaka, the site of an old Indian village, and subsequently of a Spanish settlement. Here the St. Johns narrows to a third of a mile in width. [...] Immediately opposite Welaka is the mouth of the Ocklawaha River.”

According to the 1860 Federal Census, the family’s new land held a value of $1,000, plus an additional $500 in personal property. George Mercer Davis also reported a different occupation, that of farmer. No details exist to explain why Davis switched from being a carpenter to working the land, or even that he completely gave up carpentry. The census does reveal that the Davis family lived better than most of their neighbors. Of the 66 total families enumerated in Welaka, only 14 held more real estate and 25 owned more personal property. The census also lists a third child, one year old Nancy Davis. It is believed that she died in 1860 – likely a casualty of Florida’s high infant mortality rate during this time – though it is not known for sure.

**War Between the States**

The relative peace and progress enjoyed by the Davis family, like that of almost every family in Florida, if not the south, would soon be shattered. Long simmering national tensions between north and south finally boiled over with the November 6, 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln. South Carolina was the first state to secede from the union in protest over the election, followed by Mississippi on January 9, 1861. The next day, Florida’s secession convention voted to leave the union. Soon, Florida would join a new nation, the Confederate States of America, headed by Jefferson Davis, a West Point graduate with a distinguished military record, U.S. congressman from his home state of Mississippi, secretary of war, twice U.S. senator, and president of the Confederacy.

The Davis family became caught up in this early surge of southern patriotism. When their fourth child was born in 1862, they named the boy Jeff, giving him the same name as the Confederate president. The family had returned to Palatka by this time, though nothing exists in the historic record to explain the move.

George Mercer Davis enlisted in the Confederate Army as a member of the 1st Partisan Rangers Battalion on August 2, 1862 in Palatka, along with 44 of his neighbors. His unit’s designation would change to Company B, 2nd Florida Infantry Battalion (IB) on June 24, 1863. By that time, Davis had seen light action in the defense of his state. That would soon change.
Davis and the 2nd Florida IB fought in two more engagements in Florida, both at Fort Brooke (Tampa), in late 1863. In May 1864, the battalion was transferred out of Florida's military department and into Finegan's Brigade, Mahone's Division, 3rd Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. Davis now found himself in the middle of the war— he and the 2nd Florida IB fought in the Battle of Cold Harbor (Virginia, June 1-3, 1864) and participated in the ill-fated defense of Petersburg (Virginia, June 1864 – April 1865), two of the bloodiest engagements of the war.10

Perhaps the most overwhelming period of Davis' service in the Civil War was the Union siege of Petersburg, which began in June 1864. Davis' unit had again been reorganized, this time just prior to his arrival at Petersburg. Now a member of Company G, 10th Florida Infantry, Davis and his fellow Confederates defended the Virginia city against Union attack. The besieged Rebels were at an extreme disadvantage; they were outnumbered, out gunned, hungry and poorly equipped.11

Arguably the most significant episode of the siege was the Battle of the Crater, July 30, 1864. Union soldiers of the 48th Pennsylvania, led by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Pleasants, dug a 511 foot tunnel underneath the Confederate lines. The former anthracite coal miners then dug a 75 foot powder chamber running parallel to, and 20 feet below, the Rebel positions. The chamber was filled with explosives and, at 4:44 a.m. on July 30, 1864, the command was given to blow it up. The initial blast, which opened up a crater nearly a quarter acre in size, killed or wounded 278 Confederate soldiers. The Rebels quickly regrouped and began pouring a merciless fire down on Union troops, who had crowded into the crater in an attempt to get through the Confederate lines. By 9:30 a.m. the battle was over. Total losses for the morning were 4,000 Union soldiers dead, wounded or missing, and 1,300 Confederate casualties, most of them wounded. The battle was a Confederate victory, but the morale of both sides sank in the aftermath. Unlike elsewhere along the Petersburg siege lines, there would be no more informal truces near the crater, and sniper activity, always a problem, "continued from dawn to dusk, along that portion of the line."12

Eventually the rigors of military service, the prolonged separation from his wife and children, and the growing hopelessness of the Confederate cause, would drive Davis to desert the siege lines at Petersburg on August 22, 1864. He did not go alone. With him were Sergeant David A. Dunham and Private Alexander L. Davis, both of whom enlisted with Davis in Palatka two years before. Two other Palatkans, Privates John Green and Lewis Roberts, were killed at Petersburg before Davis' desertion. The three deserters, soon captured by Federal soldiers, took an oath renouncing the Confederate cause and pledging their allegiance to the United States, and with their removal to Philadelphia, the war, for them, was over.13

While George was away on the battlefront, Martha kept things together on the home front. Palatka was not ravaged physically, but it did see its share of adversity. The most intense episode occurred very early in the war, on October 7, 1862. The Union gunboat USS Cimarron arrived at Palatka to evacuate Union sympathizers from the area. The commander of the gunboat, Maxwell Woodhull, was told by former Florida governor William A. Moseley (who lived near Palatka) that no Confederate soldiers remained in the vicinity. At the same time, the gunboat's crew saw "armed and mounted men" in the center of town, near the present-day site of Westview Cemetery. The gun crews fired several shells and dispersed the small Rebel presence. Woodhull, infuriated at the lie Governor Moseley had just told, gave the order to torch the town. Palatka was saved by a northern transplant, Mary Emily Boyd, who assured the Union commander that Moseley did not know about Confederate military movements and convinced Woodhull to spare the town.14

A Time to Rebuild

George, like countless other disillusioned southerners, eventually made his way back home and began his life again of work and family. North Florida felt very acutely the ravages of war, but it also experienced a fairly rapid recovery. Settlers and tourists soon trod where armies previously marched, and that unstoppable artery, the St. Johns River, would again pump life into Putnam County. Davis' family began to reflect this rapid growth, adding four more children during the next five years.
Green Cove Springs, Florida, 1885. (Courtesy of the map collection at www.loc.gov, American Memory, map collection - GCS, county seat.)

The first post-bellum arrival was Charles, born in Palatka in 1867. Alice, born the following year, came next. When the census taker arrived at the Davis family's Palatka home for the 1870 enumeration, he found the seven member family led by 39 year-old George, who had returned to work as a carpenter. Martha, 41 at the time of the census, still held the responsibility of “keeping house” with help from 15-year-old Harriet who, with her brothers George and Jeff, attended school. The two youngest, Charles and Alice, were not yet school age.

It is unfortunate that the 1870 census does not list real estate or personal property values for anyone in Putnam County, making it impossible at this point to see how the Davis family fared financially in the decade following the 1860 enumeration. It can be assumed that they, like other Floridians of the time, were putting their lives back together as best they could.

Ten years later, the Putnam County census taker counted seven members of the Davis family once again. There were some changes, though. Gone were George Riley, now aged 23, and his brother Jeff, who either left the house or passed away in the intervening 10 years. Replacing them in the household, still led by carpenter George, were nine year old Sarah and seven year old Howell Anderson. Remaining at home was the oldest child, Harriet, still unmarried at age 25. She undoubtedly helped her mother with house keeping and child rearing responsibilities. Those responsibilities were compounded by seven renters sharing space in the Davis home. The 1880s would prove to be successful in many ways for the Davis family. Three children, Harriet, George Riley and Sarah, would each marry and have children, and George Mercer Davis would find financial success right in his own backyard.

Harriet was courted by, and married, a local preacher named William Armistead. Eighteen years her senior, Armistead appears as one of the borders at the Davis home in the 1880 census. The Virginia-born minister married Harriet on December 29, 1881, in a ceremony officiated by George K. Allen.

Little is known about the marriage of George Riley Davis – not even Gertrude’s maiden name is known at this time. According to the 1900 Federal Census, Gertrude was born in Cuba in September 1867, making her 10 years younger than George. The chart also lists the duration of
marriage – seventeen years. This places their marriage date to 1883 or possibly 1882.18

Record of Sarah Davis’ marriage can be found in the Putnam County marriage book. She married Samuel L. Lyon on May 29, 1889, at Palatka’s First Baptist Church.19

In 1883, 52 year-old George Mercer Davis began manufacturing cypress tanks and cisterns by hand in a small shop behind the family home, located at the corner of Lemon and 5th Streets. The business continued to grow, and by 1892 Davis was joined by his youngest child, Howell, and the concern became known as G.M. Davis & Son. The following year, they built a factory three blocks from the original location, adding steel tower construction to their list of services. Their partnership would last until George Mercer Davis’ death on June 11, 1896.20

George Riley Davis and Family

Some time between 1870 and 1880, likely later in the decade, George Riley Davis left home to begin his own life. He settled in Green Cove Springs, approximately 30 miles down river from Palatka in neighboring Clay County. He does not appear in the 1880 census of either Clay or Putnam Counties, but that does not mean he did not live in one or the other area. George Riley is thought to have operated a steamboat along the St. Johns, carrying passengers and freight along the north-flowing river. However, he may have traveled as far south as Cuba, Gertrude’s birthplace, or to Key West, one of Florida’s largest cities during this era and a haven for Cuban exiles fleeing the Ten Years War (1868-1878), Cuba’s first revolution against Spain.21

It is around this time, between 1882 and 1884, that George and Gertrude were married and had their first child, Elizabeth. In another unfortunate twist of history, the State of Florida Census for 1885 is incomplete, with several counties, including Clay County, presumably lost forever. Putnam County’s census was preserved, though, and the elder Davis family is listed. What is known is that in Green Cove Springs, on November 29 of that ill-fated census year, George and Gertrude welcomed their second child into the family – a son they named David Paul.22

Guide books of the late 19th century painted Florida as a paradise. One of these, Rambler’s Guide to Florida, described Green Cove Springs from the vantage point of the St. Johns River:

“On rounding Magnolia Point, the steamer enters a beautiful bay where, in full view, lies Green Cove Springs, the Saratoga of the St. Johns. It is already a favorite resort, which possesses several of the best hotels in Florida. Its importance is assured...”23

Despite Rambler’s bucolic description, George Riley Davis decided to move his young family, in 1895, from Green Cove Springs to another fast-growing town – a city, in fact – located on Florida’s west coast. North Florida had just endured the worst winter on record – two successive freezes, the first in December 1894 and the second two months later, virtually wiped out Florida’s citrus industry north of Orlando. This had to have had an affect on the Davis family and George Davis’ boating enterprise, of which citrus growers were major contributors. With his steam boating experience on the St. Johns, Davis landed a job with the Favorite Line of steamers, plying the warm waters of Tampa Bay as an engineer aboard the Manatee.24

The Davis Family in Tampa

Tampa, the county seat of Hillsborough County, and the Davis’ new hometown, has a long history. The town grew along the northern boundary of a Federal military reservation known as Fort Brooke, established in 1824. The fort lay at the mouth of the Hillsborough River and at the top of Hillsborough Bay. The first post office (1831) officially named the village Tampa Bay, but the name was soon shortened to Tampa. The meaning and origin of the name has been debated for years, with no consensus, but a strong theory has it as the name of a native village (sometimes spelled Tampa) on the bay.25

The first town plots were laid out in the 1830s by Judge Augustus Steele, but these were invalidated by the United States government because they included Fort Brooke property. In 1847, the government reduced the size of the fort and donated the excess land to Hillsborough County. The land was
platted for sale, the proceeds of which would fund the construction of a new county courthouse in Tampa. Tampa received a city charter from the State of Florida on December 15, 1855. Prosperity seemed certain, but national politics held different plans for Tampa and Hillsborough County.

The Confederate Army, taking control of Fort Brooke from Union forces in 1861, held the fort throughout most of the Civil War. It was shelled by Union warships on several occasions and was captured briefly in a battle from October 16-18, 1863. After scouting the area for a day, the Union troops found nothing of use and abandoned the area. Federal troops returned in 1865 as occupation troops.

In the years immediately following the war, the only profitable (legal) ventures in the Tampa area were fishing, logging and cattle ranching. As early as the 1850s, cattle traders established a trade route between Florida and Cuba, and this trade resumed shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War. Cubans paid for the cattle in gold, not inflation-prone paper money, so area ranchers soon were back on their feet. Florida, and Tampa, however, struggled financially for almost two decades. Finally, in 1881, relief was on the northern horizon. Henry Bradley Plant, the railroad industrialist, wanted to bring his new railroad south, and he selected Tampa as his railhead. The railroad arrived in 1884, and the following year construction began on Tampa's first two cigar factories, Sanchez y Haya and V.M. Ybor and Co., in a new suburb - Ybor City. The railroad and cigars would forever transform Tampa like nothing else had. Plant improved the fledgling port at the southwestern tip of the Interbay Peninsula, and soon livestock, products and people were being shipped from Port Tampa to and from ports throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

Hillsborough County's population grew, as did its prosperity. The 1880s saw Tampa's population rise from 720 people in 1880 to 5,532 people just ten years later. Immigrants from Cuba, Spain, Germany and Italy came to work in the cigar factories of Ybor City and, later, West Tampa. Tens, and later hundreds, of millions of hand rolled cigars were produced in Tampa factories every year.

The same year that Ybor and Haya opened their factories, 1886, pebble phosphate was discovered in the Peace River in Polk County, Florida. Phosphate was later discovered in the Hillsborough River and in the largely undeveloped southern portion of Hillsborough County. Though not mentioned as frequently as the cigar industry and the railroad, the phosphate industry outlasted both in production and revenue. Tampa in 1895 still lagged behind Jacksonville, Key West and Pensacola in population, but it was rapidly gaining ground. By the time George Davis brought his family to the fast-growing town, two more boys had been added. Charles E., born in 1890, and Milton H., born two years later, rounded out the Davis brood.

Just three years after arriving in Tampa, the Davis' were witness to one of the young city's greatest spectacles, the arrival and encampment of United States soldiers on their way to Cuba and the Spanish-American War. Over 30,000 soldiers descended on Tampa, which then had a population that hovered around 15,000. People were everywhere, and military campsites sprang up all over town. The Manatee, with Davis as its engineer, undeniably carried an increased load of sightseers, and potentially was pressed into use by a harried quartermaster corps desperately in need of quality boats and qualified boatmen. Many private citizens profited, and stories abound that Dave Davis, at 13, took part in the profiteering.

In 1899, the Davises rented a house at 406 Madison Street in downtown Tampa, which at the time was still as much residential as business district. They moved the following year to a rental home at 208 Pierce Street. The three Davis boys, David, Charles and Milton, were listed as students and their father served as an engineer on a steamboat, most likely the Manatee. The Davis' only daughter, Elizabeth, is not listed in the census. The sixteen-year-old apparently lived away from home, possibly at a boarding or religious school.

In 1901, sixteen-year-old Dave, as he was coming to be called, worked as a clerk at the law firm of Macfarlane & Raney and paid rent in his parent's Pierce Street home. Two years later he served as a mate, probably aboard his father's steamship. He, along with his father, sister and brothers, moved into a rented home at 606 Jackson Street. Around this time, probably in 1901 or 1902, Gertrude either passed away or divorced George. She is not listed in the 1903 city directory, nor any other
George Riley Davis, David Paul Davis’ father, was an engineer for over 20 years with the Favorite Line of steamers plying the waters of Tampa Bay. He likely served aboard this steamboat, the Manatee, shown docked at Pass-a-Grille, ca. 1912. His 18 year-old son, Dave, may have worked in 1903 as a mate with his father aboard the same ship. (Courtesy of the Florida State Archives.)

directory or census thereafter. Gertrude’s departure may also explain Elizabeth’s reappearance.29

By 1904, Davis gained employment with the firm of Knight & Wall, one of the largest hardware and sporting goods businesses in the state. In addition, the company held the exclusive contract to sell firearms in the newly liberated nation of Cuba. A group photograph of Knight & Wall’s sales staff in 1904 gives us our first look at Davis’ appearance. He is an uncomfortable looking 19 year-old, wearing an ill-fitting suit and misshapen hat. He is the shortest person in the photograph, except for the young boy seated at the bottom of the frame. Yet he still has a look of confidence, possibly even arrogance – a look seemingly inappropriate for a man of his limited means. Davis stayed at Knight & Wall until 1905 or 1906.30

On November 7, 1906, Elizabeth Davis, now 22 years-old, married 23 year-old George Henry Hodgson, a lumber dealer who lived a little more than a block away from the Davis family. The wedding took place in the newly constructed Sacred Heart Church, located in the center of Tampa’s downtown. Elizabeth and George would maintain a close relationship with Dave and the rest of the Davises.31

In 1907, Dave formed a partnership with Robertson T. Arnold and formed the real estate firm of Davis & Arnold, located in the American National Bank Building at 616 Franklin Street in downtown Tampa. This early venture into Tampa real estate was short lived, however, because by 1908 Davis worked as a bookkeeper at the Sanchez & Hermanos cigar factory in West Tampa. Around this same time, in late 1907 or early 1908, George Davis married for a second time. His new bride, Kathryn, was 15 years younger than George.32

It is possible, though improbable, that even at this early date, and still in his early 20s, Dave had his mind set on developing
David Paul Davis, a nineteen year-old salesman for Tampa's Knight & Wall hardware company is pictured in this 1904 photograph with other members of the firm's sales staff. Information provided on the cabinet card photograph identifies the men standing in front from left as: Franze (Frank) Vogel, W.H.G. Scott, Jas. G. Anderson, E.H. Lester, F.M. Cooper, David P. Davis and Luther Campbell. John Youdell is sitting in front. Standing on the left in the back doorway is Sidney Beach, and Budge Morse, brother of Mrs. Fred Thomson, is the standing between Cooper and Davis. The handwritten copy states, “This was the wholesale and retail salesforce of Knight & Wall Co. 1904. Mr. E.H. Lester and Mr. W.M. (sic) Scott were outside salesmen. Size of store at this time was 60’ x 90’. These people are standing at the main entrance. Please Return Property of F. M. Cooper.” (Courtesy of the Tampa Bay History Center Collection.)

Big and Little Grassy Islands, the small deserted keys at the mouth of the river in Hillsborough Bay. The Army Corps of Engineers enlarged a portion of the Little Grassy Island to form Seddon Island in 1905. Now known as Harbour Island, Seddon Island was developed as a phosphate and lumber depot by the Seaboard Air Line railroad as a part of the city's wharf expansion and channel dredging projects. What affect that had on Davis is unknown. Certainly, however, he was aware of the geographical area and rising value of property on the west side of the Hillsborough River and on the shoreline of Hillsborough Bay.33

Davis' historical trail fades after his stint as a bookkeeper. Conjecture and myths fill the void left in the absence of fact. It is speculated that Davis traveled to Texas or California, made a fortune in the Panama Canal Zone, or sold land in Gainesville, Florida (to pay his way through the
University of Florida, no less). In 1971, a reporter for the *Tampa Daily Times* asked Milton Davis to explain his brother’s whereabouts for this time period. Milton responded, “I was the one who went to Panama. D.P. went to Buenos Aires [Argentina] to run a cattle business. He was there about a year.”

There is no evidence to confirm or refute any or all of these assertions, but usually the simplest theory is the true one. Davis, in search of new prospects, probably traveled the state, perhaps even the southeast or his mother’s native Cuba - as previously mentioned, Knight & Wall, one of Davis’ previous employers, had extensive connections in Cuba. Unfortunately, without the discovery of a journal, diary or other personal papers owned by Davis, we will probably never know where he spent those missing years.

**Davis in Jacksonville**

Davis reappears in official records with his marriage to a 24 year-old Tennessean named Marjorie H. Merritt, in Jacksonville, Florida on November 11, 1915. According to Jacksonville’s city directory, Davis worked as an independent real estate agent during that year. Apparently real estate did not work out, because in 1916 he worked as a salesman at C.F. Cole Shoe Company. He and Marjorie also welcomed their first child into the world, George Riley Davis II.

The following year, Davis was an officer with the All Star Features Company. All Star Features operated a film exchange, shipping motion picture films to and from the various movie theaters in Jacksonville. The company’s president, James W. Edmondson, also headed two Jacksonville-based investment companies. How the 31 year-old Davis went from being a shoe salesman one year to being the vice president of a film distribution company the next will seemingly never be known.

The United States was embroiled in the first world war at this same time, and Jacksonville’s Camp Johnston housed thousands of soldiers preparing to fight in the trenches of France and Germany. It is often stated that Davis operated a commissary, or more to the point, a hot dog stand, across from the camp’s entrance. While it is possible, the theory seems highly unlikely. Though probably not doling out hot dogs and cokes to hungry doughboys, Davis did participate in at least one war-related event. He registered for the military draft, waiting until the final registration day to do so.

Davis remained with All Star Features until 1919. Office work, or any other “regular” job, never seemed to satisfy him. If his past proves anything, it is that he was an impatient individual and always had at least a glancing eye for real estate. He needed a place that suited his natural abilities, talents and interests, and Jacksonville was not it. At this same time, thousands of people began cascading down from the Northeast and Midwest into south Florida, in search of sunshine, orange trees and their own slice of Florida’s promised paradise.

Davis knew opportunity abounded with all of these new arrivals. So, with Marjorie and George II, Davis headed south on the Dixie Highway to Florida’s original Magic City, Miami. The young Davis family arrived in Miami and by 1920 Dave, who soon went by his initials D.P., had turned his attention to South Florida’s emerging real estate market. This, his third foray into land sales, would prove to be a success.

**DP in Miami**

Miami found itself in the midst of a real estate boom at the close of the Great War. Several factors contributed to the astonishing development of Florida’s southern, Atlantic coastline. Personal transportation had been revolutionized by the appearance of affordable automobiles and the construction of new roads, connecting not only Florida with its neighboring states, but also cities and towns within the state. This combined seamlessly with the emergence of a new American middle class that had both extra time and extra money. Florida’s notoriously low land prices provided the necessary catalyst, offering an excellent opportunity for people willing to suffer through the heat and mosquitoes - two facets of tropical Florida that had not yet been conquered.

Miami, before Davis and a multitude of other developers arrived, was an outpost in the wilds of south Florida. Henry Flagler’s railroad brought civilization and some brave tourists to Miami with the opening of his rail line on April 21, 1896. The young city continued to grow through the end...
of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The first developers of Miami properties, specifically in Miami Beach, were the Lummus brothers, John and James. They were followed by John Collins and, in 1912, by Carl Graham Fisher.

Fisher, the one most frequently associated with the Florida Boom in Miami, also constructed the Dixie Highway, linking south Florida with the large population centers of the Midwest and Northeast. Davis praised the pioneering developer in 1924, telling the *Tampa Morning Tribune* that "Miami did not begin to make its magic strides until Carl Fisher had bought Miami Beach, a stretch of dreary sandland, and converted it into a fairyland of beauty."40

By 1920, tourists and immigrants were pouring into Miami and south Florida. Well-built roads, the benefit of a new state roads department and the Federal Road Aid Act, carried Florida's growing populous more efficiently, and in far more directions, and greater distances than the railroad ever could. Miami's population almost doubled between 1913 and 1919. The Lummus brothers, with Collins and Thomas Pancoast, started a streetcar line between Miami and Miami Beach in 1919, facilitating access to the respective cities and providing a leisurely sight-seeing tour as well. Another innovation in Miami was the creation of "Binder Boys." Noted by their quick cadence and snappy attire (collectively, they kept the golf knickers industry in business through the 1920s), they would purchase lots with a 30 day binder for ten percent of the total cost. That binder could be sold and resold, rising in value each time, before it came due. Historian William Rogers notes that "at one time Miami had 25,000 such street brokers." By their sheer numbers, they contributed greatly to Miami's meteoric population increase.41

Neither Davis, nor Merrick or the Mizner brothers, were in the first group of Miami land speculators, but they did watch and learn from them. Davis, particularly, noticed what worked and what did not. While the foundations were laid by others, Davis applied his own abilities and went to work building his own corner of paradise — which he would subdivide and make available for twenty percent down.

Like most every aspect of his life, the story of how Davis first started selling real estate in Miami is more parable than history. The basic story is as follows: Davis came across a development that had been "languishing" on the market. While not in the most advantageous location, with a little perseverance and a lot of advertising, Davis sold every available lot within days, making a tidy profit for his efforts.42

While there is undoubtedly some truth to the story, Davis' publicity machine, which went into overdrive after 1924, probably embellished the truth and enhanced the original details. Davis did begin selling land that was thought too difficult to sell because it sat 2.5 miles from the city center. He then opened his own company, United Realty, and started his first development, a business district dubbed Commercial Biltmore. This property lay in the greater Buena Vista subdivision, located just north of Miami's city limits, 2.5 miles from city hall. It is possible that Buena Vista, or at least a section of it, is the fabled "languishing" property. Regardless, Davis made Commercial Biltmore a success with the same qualities later attributed to him in both fact and fiction. He knew the importance of advertising and promotion, but more importantly, he understood the benefit of providing complete infrastructure with his subdivisions. For Commercial Biltmore, that infrastructure included wide streets, curbing, sidewalks, water and sewer service and lush landscaping. The business district included stores, most notably Moore Furniture Company, a theater and business offices. Davis did not use the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture that would become synonymous with the Florida Boom. Instead, his architects used a local vernacular style with Colonial and Federal influences.43

Before Commercial Biltmore neared completion, Davis began developing the adjacent property in a residential section appropriately called Biltmore. The architectural styles within Biltmore reflected those of his neighboring development, and the homes were constructed in the bungalow style, widely popular at the time. As with all of his properties, past, present and future, Davis followed the axiom location, location, location. In reflecting on his Miami properties, Davis said that he always tried to chose "the most strategically located property in big and growing population centers," then focus on the "improvements," be they streets, landscaping or light poles, or the buildings themselves.44
In addition to Commercial Biltmore and residential Biltmore, Davis started sales on another residential project in the greater Buena Vista section, Shadowlawn. Located within the former Broadmoor subdivision, Shadowlawn boasted features that were becoming ubiquitous – wide, curbed streets, spacious sidewalks and an abundance of tropical plants. Shadow Drive, the neighborhood’s main thoroughfare, featured a stone-faced set of entry columns, providing an air of class and individuality to an otherwise ordinary subdivision.45

The two Biltmores quickly neared completion at the close of 1921. Businesses began moving in to the newly constructed edifices and some, like Moore Furniture Company, hosted elaborate grand opening celebrations. Families began moving into homes, though many empty lots were still being sold back and forth between a growing cadre of land speculators. Though Davis undoubtedly participated in this fervent resale market, United Realty declared that every lot in all three developments was sold.
The Moore Furniture Company was built near the intersection of 40th Street and NE 2nd Avenue (Biscayne Boulevard) in the business district of Davis’ Commercial Biltmore subdivision. Photo ca.1921. (Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives Collection.)

out, at an average cost of $2,500.46

The Miami papers were filled with two very different types of stories throughout January 1922. While Hollywood funny man turned outcast Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle endured his retrial on career-ending rape and murder charges, Davis prepared for a media blitz that would further boost the developer’s career. The fortunes of the two men, both in their mid-30s, were going in completely opposite directions.

Print ads for United Realty’s newest subdivision, unimaginatively titled Shadowlawn Extension, began January 11, 1922. This first ad covered the two center pages of the Herald. In it, Davis touted his previous successes, promising that Shadowlawn Extension would bring the same results. He included photographic proof of the progress of his earlier projects, featuring all 35 completed structures within the developments.47

The same day that United Realty placed the two page advertisement, the Herald printed an anonymous “news” article featuring Davis and his new development. This was a fairly common ploy used by savvy developers at the time. The first sentence of the story is just a tease for the “most unusual advertisement on the two center pages of this morning’s edition.” The story quotes only one source, United Realty’s publicist J.A. Riach, who probably wrote the piece himself. Riach speaks in reverence about Davis and “the thorough going manner in which [he] does his development work. He bothers more about the quality of the work than he does about the cost.” The pitch-man then complements the city of Miami and the Herald, relating the story about how United Realty did not need to go out of town to Jacksonville or Savannah for graphics work. Instead, “right here in Miami in the Miami Herald office, it was all
turned out for us.” The story closes with a final quote from Riach:

“It is to my mind fortunate for Miami that a man of the type of Mr. Davis, happened to take the helm in the development of such an important section as he has in the composite properties. The phenomenal success he has had is the natural result to be expected of such a comprehensive program.”

Another tactic used to gain the public’s trust was the use of an independent, professional organization to lend an air of legitimacy to a particular project. Just four days prior to Davis’ mass marketing, the Miami Realty Board placed an ad of their own in the Herald. In it, they warned the real estate-buying public about “unscrupulous hucksters and real estate conmen” who were preying on unwitting buyers throughout Miami. To combat this, the realty board printed their code of ethics and assured the public that all members of the Miami Realty Board adhered to these rules or faced expulsion from the organization. The code, among other things, forbade “sensational and unethical methods of selling and advertising Miami real estate” and railed against “the molestation of Miami citizens and visitors on the streets, sidewalks and street corners” by these knickers-clad shysters.

It is impossible to know whether Davis influenced the timing of this, and similar, advertisements placed by the Miami Realty Board in the months of January and February. At the very least, he took notice and made sure to include the “Member, Miami Realty Board” seal on all four corners of every ad he placed for Shadowlawn Extension. Davis peppered the Herald on a daily basis with ad copy, maintaining either a full or half page advertisement for his latest development from January 11 through February 20. Each ad had subtle differences,
focusing on a different point or targeting a different demographic.50

One of the most common tactics used during the month-long promotional siege were references to his other projects, which of course were in “close proximity” to the new venture. Davis also repeatedly mentioned how close Shadowlawn Extension was to the Buena Vista terminus of Miami’s streetcar system (a three minute walk) and how his company would take reservations for the day that sales would begin – January 18. Among the promises were a 70-foot wide avenue, off of Biscayne Boulevard, leading to the new neighborhood and, of course, fantastic profits to the investor wise enough to buy early.51

The advertising reached its zenith on January 18, with the second straight day of full-page ads. Buyers had been advised for the past week that, unlike most of Miami’s land sales, the sale of Shadowlawn Extension would not be an auction: The lots had a fixed price of $1500, first come, first served. Davis’ ad on the 18th closed with the ominous admonition, “Do it now – Tomorrow will never arrive.”52

Despite the apocalyptic warning, tomorrow did arrive, bringing with it news of another United Realty success. As with the announcement of land sales on the 11th, the January 19 edition of the Herald featured an unattributed article relating the news of Davis and his development. The headline touted “Davis Subdivision Opening Sale Big,” and the story went into detail about the development and the people who bought there. The subhead spoke of “Home People,” locals, who were the main buyers of lots. This was a theme which would be repeated in subsequent United Realty ads. Unlike the previous article, Davis himself is quoted in the January 19 piece. He, too, was impressed with the number of Miamians who purchased lots in his subdivision, stating:

“a significant fact is that the folks who bought our lots are all home folks. It makes me feel gratified that those who have been here, and are Miamians, and who ought to know values, have come out to buy where they are getting values for their money.”53

Davis and United Realty placed advertisements, usually one half or one third of a page in size, in the Herald through the entire sales period of Shadowlawn Extension, which concluded on February 20. These ads exhorted those who had yet to buy to go out and see the project, assuring them that once they see it they will do as the “home folks” had done and snap up a lot or two. The ads also relayed a reassuring tone, speaking of the profits on resale and on the value of Shadowlawn Extension as an investment, perhaps even for “your 14 year old” who, when he turns 21 will “have a lot of his own.” Davis’ efforts paid off and Shadowlawn Extension, like his earlier investments, was an unqualified success.54

The year 1922, while providing a financial windfall for Davis, also took something very dear away from him. His wife, Marjorie, died while giving birth to their second child, a boy named David Paul Davis, Jr. It is unimaginable how Davis, at the peak of his professional life, felt as his personal life seemed to fall apart. The baby survived the ordeal, and Davis would pull himself together and finish his real estate projects. But, he did not do it alone. He asked his younger brother, Milton, along with Milton’s wife Louise, to come to Miami and help him with his developments and, probably, with his wounded family. Milton went to Miami and, though he worked for a different company, Fidelity Realty, their offices were less than a half mile apart. They spent 1923 working on D.P’s projects, which would expand to include the Alta Vista and Bellaire subdivisions.55

After his wife’s death, Davis began to indulge in the excesses that marked the Jazz Age of the Roaring 20s. Flouting prohibition was central to this, and Davis excelled at it. He also began seeing a woman named Lucille Zehring, one of movie producer Mack Sennett’s “Bathing Beauties.” Another product of the free-wheeling 20s, Zehring would play a very pivotal role in Davis’ future.56

Davis had to realize that, despite his accomplishments in Miami, he could not compete with developments like Fisher’s Miami Beach or Merrick’s Coral Gables, or for that matter Addison Mizner’s Boca Raton, which still lay in the not-so-distant future. Once again, Davis began to look elsewhere for new opportunities. He did not need to look farther than Florida’s Gulf Coast and Tampa, which itself was caught up in Florida’s land boom. In addition, with
the exception of Milton who was in Miami, Davis' immediate family lived in the bustling west coast city, and he could rely on them to help care for his two young boys.

Perhaps as important, Davis knew of the possibilities that Tampa held. Transportation, be it by rail, ship, automobile or even airplane, fostered a growth on par with that of Miami. Davis felt that Tampa, unlike Miami, would cater to both a vacation market and a business market, meaning more year-round residents and, consequently, a greater need for quality housing near the city's business center. The problem was that all of Tampa's available real estate close to the city center had long been sold and developed—at least the land above sea level.

Davis heard of a plan that would change that, and the city of Tampa, forever. Burt L. Hamner, a Tampa real estate developer and owner of BL Hamner Realty Corporation, had conceived of the idea in 1921 of developing the mudflats in Hillsborough Bay. He was likely too busy at the time developing Temple Terraces and Temple Terrace Estates, a subdivision named for the Temple orange, to devote any energy toward this new idea. Located north of Tampa in what is now the City of Temple Terrace, the development catered to the "weekend farmer" who could leave the city to a restful, Mediterranean Revival style home among the orange groves. The island development would share Temple Terrace's architecture, but not its lifestyle.57

Hamner likely contacted Davis in late 1922 or early 1923 about beginning what would become Davis Islands. During a Tampa Rotary Club lunch in early 1923, Hamner described "in minute detail" his idea for an island development. Club members, at the time, claimed he had a "vivid imagination."58

Davis and his two boys left Miami in January 1924, almost exactly four years after his arrival. He left behind six thriving communities and, in a more practical sense, he retained his business office which he renamed D.P. Davis, Inc.59

Cocoa Interlude

One facet of Davis' real estate career that has not been covered by previous biographers is his possible involvement in a development on the Indian River in the City of Cocoa, 205 miles due north of Miami. This new subdivision, Carleton Terrace, was designed and put to paper in March 1924 by the Miami engineering firm of Watson & Garris. The plat, filed in Brevard County the following month, on April 21, 1924, featured the hallmarks associated with Davis and other high-class developers of the period: broad streets with exotic names situated close to a body of water. A small development, the neighborhood consisted of only 14 streets, including the Dixie Highway, which ran north-south through the eastern portion of the subdivision.60

Davis allegedly partnered with a local company, Trafford Realty Company, on this project, but there is very little primary evidence to tie Davis to Carleton Terrace. No link has been established between Davis and Trafford at this time, either. Circumstantial evidence, however, does provide some insight. One characteristic of the development, its street names, strengthens the theory that Davis was at least partially behind the development. The names Biltmore, Bellaire and Dade may reflect his past experiences in Miami, as does Lucerne, a street name Carleton Terrace shares with Miami Beach and Davis Islands in Tampa. Still, Davis' name does not appear anywhere on the original plat or the addition to Carleton Terrace, filed January 13, 1925. An examination of the Cocoa newspapers of the time did not reveal any extra details.61

Today, the neighborhood carries the same layout and, with few exceptions, the streets retain their original names. Additionally, 22 homes dating from the heady days of Florida's boom are still standing.62

Davis Family Remains in Tampa

While Davis traveled around the state, and possibly out of the country, his family remained in Tampa. By 1913, George and Kathryn Davis owned a home, located at 207 South Boulevard in the Hyde Park neighborhood. D.P.'s brothers, as well as other families, would occasionally rent rooms in the Davis house. If anyone cared to look, the mud flats that would become Davis Islands could be seen from the roof of the South Boulevard home.63

Tampa, like Miami to the south, experienced a building and population boom following the first world war. The city climbed past all but Jacksonville in the
state's population rankings, propelled by the cigar industry and valuable war-time shipbuilding contracts. Tampa's corporate limits expanded in 1923 with the annexation of Seminole Heights, Sulphur Springs and Gary neighborhoods. By the time Davis arrived back in 1924, Tampa boasted a metropolitan population of over 124,000 people, and the cigar industry, still the city's largest employer, produced half a billion cigars annually — all made by hand — making Tampa the cigar capital of the world. Tampa's statistics would report even bigger gains in 1925 with the addition of West Tampa, a cigar making enclave and formerly a separate municipality, and Davis' new creation in Hillsborough Bay, Davis Islands.64

Before They Were 'The Islands'

The two islands Davis used as the nucleus for his development had been known by a variety of names throughout Tampa's history. They first appeared, nameless, on the earliest Spanish maps of Tampa and Hillsborough Bays. The islands were included as part of the Fort Brooke military reservation, and it is probably during the fort years that the larger of the two islands picked up its first name, Depot Key. Various other names, all describing a particular feature of the islands, appeared through the years, including Rabbit Island, Big and Little Islands, Grassy Islands and, eventually, Big Grassy and Little Grassy Islands.65

The first recorded sale of either of the bay islands came on April 18, 1860, when William Whitaker purchased the southern tip of Depot Key (Big Grassy Island), a total of 6.3 acres, for $1 per acre. Little Grassy Island, and the remainder of Depot Key, were purchased in 1881. W.C. Brown purchased 16.3 acre Little Grassy Island for the same price per acre as Whitaker paid 21 years before. Brown and William B. Henderson teamed up to purchase a large portion (69.75 acres) of Big Grassy Island from the state for 90¢ per acre. The remainder of the island, 28.5 acres, was purchased by the town of Tampa at the same price. Brown and Henderson, in turn, obtained a 99 year lease for the city's portion for $20 a year.66

During one of the first channel dredging projects of the 1880s, cypress tree stumps were discovered in eight feet of water a few yards south of Big Grassy Island, illustrating that the whole bay used to be above sea level during the last Ice Age. Another channel dredging project, begun in the early 1900s, bisected Little Grassy Island, creating Seddon Island on the east side of the channel and a remnant of Little Grassy Island on the west side. Little Grassy Island usually disappeared under a strong high tide, but Big Grassy Island generally remained dry. Both islands were completely covered by water during the 1921 Hurricane.67

Tampa's city council, on June 8, 1920, offered a referendum to the city's voters asking whether they would support the purchase of Little Grassy Island for use as a city park. In an incredibly tight vote, the referendum passed 694 – 692. Though non-binding, the city agreed with the majority and purchased Little Grassy Island from Mary E. Brown, widow of W.C. Brown, on May 9, 1921, for $25,000.68

Many histories of Tampa and Davis Islands recant stories of Boy Scout troops going out to the bay islands for camp outs. Davis and his brothers, according to Milton, also ventured out onto the scrub-covered mud flats, catching crabs and frying fish instead of attending school.69

A Revolutionary Development

Davis, pardon the cliche, had even bigger fish to fry when he returned to Tampa in January 1924. He intended to put Hamner's bay island plan into motion, but a variety of obstacles confronted him before this could be accomplished. Davis first needed to meet with the city's leadership, both political and financial, to insure the islands investment and development was a viable and legal proposition. Tampa's mayor and city commission readily endorsed the plan, as did the Board of Trade, the city's most powerful business organization, and Peter O. Knight, the city's most powerful civic leader.70

The next step centered on land acquisition and a contract with the city which would sell him Little Grassy Island plus the city's share in Big Grassy Island, and allow him to fill in the submerged lands surrounding them. Negotiations between Davis, represented by Giddings Mabry from the prominent Tampa law firm Mabry, Reaves and Carlton, and the city were surprisingly public, with the Tampa Morning Tribune
covering their progress on an almost daily basis. The two parties quickly came to terms, with approval by the city commission the final hurdle.

Some public opposition did exist. A small, but wealthy and influential group of residents who lived on or near Bayshore Boulevard objected to Davis’ plans because they would be detrimental to their view of Hillsborough Bay. These residents, led by Dr. Louis A. Bize, who in addition to his medical practice also served as president of Citizens Bank and Trust, outlined their complaints and position in a letter sent to Tampa city commissioners on February 12, 1924. The Bayshore residents’ view corridor was not the extent of their problems with the Davis project. Their letter outlined six points of “protest” to the city commission. The first four stated that the city had no right under Florida law to sell the riparian (under water) rights to Davis, or any other developer, for the purpose of filling in. The fifth point served as an appeal to the environmentalists on the commission (there were none), explaining that the development “would be a spoilation of a great portion of Hillsboro [sic] Bay, the greatest natural attraction in the vicinity of said city.” They ended with a general attack on the contract itself, which Bize and his neighbors saw as “vague, uncertain, indefinite, and fails to provide limitations against additional encroachments upon the lands held in trust by the City of Tampa and the State of Florida.”

Though submitted by eight people, the neighborhood contingent kept their protest to one page. In contrast, Karl Whitaker, powerful local lawyer and future city attorney, wrote a 12 page epistle, attacking the proposed contract point by point. Whitaker began by explaining he does not “care at this time to enter into a discussion as to the merits or demerits of the so called Davis Development Project.” Whitaker then outlined what he would like to see happen to Little Grassy Islands, a park similar to one in Miami’s Biscayne Bay.

From there he went on to dissect the draft agreement, with comments ranging from the legalities and limits of the project to the wording of certain parts of the contract to the size and dimensions of planned city park space to the small number of limitations placed on Davis and his development. While the city did adopt some of Whitaker’s suggestions in this regard, such as the prohibition of “railroad terminals,” they did not include a covenant restricting “persons of African descent” from buying property within the Davis Islands neighborhood. The appearance of such a covenant would not have been unusual in 1924, but it was not expressly detailed in the final contract.

A number of people and organizations supported Davis’ proposed island development. As previously mentioned, the Board of Trade strongly backed the idea, as did the Optimist Club of Tampa and numerous other business people, especially real estate agents and builders. Even Bize warmed to the prospect of the islands’ development.

While wrangling with the city and citizenship over his proposed contract and development, Davis also went about the task of purchasing the non-public portions of Big Grassy Island from the Brown, Henderson and Whitaker estates. Davis and his attorney negotiated the purchase of the Brown and Henderson portion of Big Grassy Island for $100,000, or $1433.69 an acre. He was not as fortunate in his dealing with the Whitaker Estate, of which Karl Whitaker was an important part. Davis finally purchased the 6.3 acres of Big Grassy Island for $50,000 – $7936.50 an acre. Following the mantra of the times, if Whitaker could not stop progress, he would at least profit from it.

City commissioners signed the completed contract with Davis on February 26, 1924. The contract, though slightly altered through the efforts of both Bize and Whitaker, still heavily favored Davis. It began with the sale of the city’s rights to Little Grassy Island, its share of Big Grassy Island, and all of the surrounding submerged land, for $200,000.

Restrictive covenants occupied the second section of the contract. Included among them were no “manufacturing plants, wholesale purposes shipyards; steam-railways or railway terminals, or commercial docks or wharves.” The city also forbid “buildings or structures” or “any fill ... west of the west boundary of said property.” It does not mention any other boundary restrictions, which was one of the issues Whitaker brought up. It is not known why the contract was written this way, but Davis did not exceed any of the boundaries of the original sale.
The contract then goes into a brief description of the project, calling it a “high-class residential subdivision,” which included a bridge to it and parks within it. Both would be deeded to the city under the parameters of the contract.78

The $200,000 Davis paid the city for its portions of the islands would come as a surety bond, which would be returned to him in stages. The city would release $100,000 “if and when the said bridge shall be constructed and the seawall and fills herein provided for shall be 50% complete, the city may accept a deed to the said bridge and fifty-five (55) acres of parks.” Davis would receive the rest when “said seawalls and fills herein provided for shall be completed.”79

City code stipulated that a contract of this scope must be ratified by the citizenry within 90 days, so a referendum was set for April 22. The voting public overwhelmingly approved the contract, with 1,313 voting for and just 50 voting against.80

The $200,000 surety bond Davis placed with the city provides an interesting look into the 1920s Florida land boom. Davis did not use his own money, but instead allowed investors, including two sitting Tampa city commissioners, to purchase bonds of varying amounts, totaling $225,281.25. A wide variety of people held these bonds, and the bonds themselves held a range of values. A total of 82 people, from business owners to window dressers, attorneys to teachers, real estate men to physicians, laid their money down, apparently convinced of the Davis project’s success. Investments, in the form of promissory notes, ranged from $1875 to $5000. No consistent pattern exists connecting the 82 investors, though they are possibly linked through the Board of Trade. Another probable connection is Peter O. Knight, who was an owner or investor in a number of the businesses represented in the tally of note-signers.81

Both city commissioners, W.A. Adams and W. J. Barritt, were late investors, placing their money in after the required $200,000 mark had been met. While there are records of money exchanges from 1924-1926, there is no evidence that any of these notes were returned or discontinued when the Davis contract was finally fulfilled in 1928.82

A section of Davis’ contract with the city stipulated that he had the “right to acquire, at his own expense a judicial determination of the City’s right to grant to him the rights herein set forth.” His attorneys brought the issue through the court system to the State Supreme Court, which ruled on September 9, 1924, that the city did have the right to sell not only land but also the submerged areas around that land.83

While Davis’ legal case wound its way through Florida’s court system, work began on lining up the necessary contractors to bring Davis and Hamner’s dream to life. Davis signed a $2 million contract with Northern Dredge and Dock Company to pump 9 million cubic yards of sand from the bottom of Hillsborough Bay onto Big and Little Grassy Islands, creating Davis Islands. While he promised the city an expensive permanent bridge to the development, he needed a quick and cheap temporary bridge just to get men, machines, mules and materials to the site. The temporary bridge opened November 8, 1924, thirty-five days after land sales began for Davis Islands. The following day’s Morning Tribune featured a photograph of Davis’ business partner, A. Y. Milam, with two year old David P. Davis, Jr. in his arms, the first people to drive onto Davis Islands. Within days after completion of the temporary bridge, photographers and sightseers joined the construction crews on the ever-growing and rapidly developing property.84

When Davis announced details of his plan to build “Florida’s Supreme $30,000,000 Development,” the response from prospective buyers was overwhelming. Davis used the experience he gained in Miami and applied it well to the new Tampa venture. He opened a sales office in a very prominent downtown location, 502 Franklin Street. One of the legends of the time relates that Davis chose this site because it previously housed Drowdy’s Corner, a candy store whose windows he enviously stared through as a boy.85

The sales office was awash in plans, schematics and promotional materials detailing the future look, feel and functions of Davis Islands. A 40 foot by 20 foot, 3-dimensional model of the project, designed and constructed by noted artist Harry Bierce and his staff, filled the center of the office. The model, like most everything else Davis did, was billed as “the world’s largest.”86

The Davis Islands development would encompass three separate islands and would
be a city within itself, created for the new America booming all around. Built with both the automobile and pedestrian in mind, Davis Islands would have wide, curving streets, and the main thoroughfare, Davis Boulevard, would have roomy sidewalks running along both sides. Landscape design responsibilities were given to Frank Button, a widely respected and nationally recognized landscape architect.86

Residential properties would take a variety of forms. While homes dominated the drafting boards of Islands architects, other housing options existed for seasonal and year-round residents. These multi-family residences, both apartments and hotels, were restricted to Davis Boulevard and a few streets close to that central corridor. All structures built on the Islands would follow design guidelines established by Davis’ company, D.P. Davis Properties. These rules, though greatly relaxed, would last until 1956.87

Davis planned the Islands development so that it would widen from north (closest to the mainland) to south. Davis Boulevard splits into East and West Davis Boulevards, then reunite at the bottom of the islands to form South Davis Boulevard. West and South Davis Boulevards were reserved exclusively for homes, while East Davis was predominantly apartments, hotels and the business district.

The streets winding through Davis Islands carry a themed naming system. To further immerse residents and visitors into the islands scheme, all right of ways, except Davis Boulevard, were named after islands or bodies of water. They would also follow a loose alphabetical pattern, from north to south (Adalia to Susquehanna), with none more than 500 yards from the water.88

Relaxation and athletics were other important facets of the Davis Islands plan. Tennis courts and a nine-hole golf course, each with its own clubhouse, covered a considerable portion of the islands. The tennis courts were situated within the 55 acre city park, which Davis named Marjorie Park in honor of his deceased wife. A Roman Pool and Yacht Basin rounded out the Davis Islands recreational landscape.89
Davis Islands Becomes Reality

Davis launched, in the summer of 1924, a sales campaign unparalleled in the area’s history. He continuously touted Davis Islands in half- and full-page newspaper advertisements in Tampa’s morning and evening papers. The term ‘mass media’ had just entered the national lexicon in 1923, and Davis well understood its power. He bought time on Tampa’s flagship radio station, WDAE, and insured his ads found their way into all manner of Tampa tourism and promotional publications. He also sponsored, in 1926, publication of Kenneth Roberts’ Florida, a history of the state.

Another step toward making Davis Islands a reality was the formation of D.P. Davis Properties, Inc. Davis knew the importance of connecting with the right people. In Tampa, that meant Peter O. Knight. In Florida, it meant Arthur Y. Milam. When Davis incorporated his new investment company, he placed Milam in the vice president’s chair. Milam, a Jacksonville attorney, had entered Florida’s House of Representatives the previous year and would, in 1925 assume the position of speaker of the house. Milam held both political and financial power and, with his brother Robert Richerson Milam, himself a Jacksonville attorney and future president of the Florida Bar Association, added state-wide credibility and clout to the Davis organization.

Everything Davis did in the summer of 1924 led up to his ultimate goal – the beginning of land sales on Davis Islands. Davis spent lavishly on elaborate brochures, a fleet of buses and vast improvements, costing an estimated $10,000, to the Franklin Street sales office. With the final design of the islands complete, maps were created showing lot locations. Davis divided the development into eight sections, six of which carried a name describing a particular feature or its proximity to nearby landmarks. The Hyde Park Section, at the northern end of the islands closest to Hyde Park, the Bay Circle Section, just southwest of the Hyde Park Section, named for its proximity to the bay and the circular street pattern, the South Park Section, at the southern end of Marjorie Park, the Hotel Section, so named for the Davis Arms Hotel, which was never built, the Yacht Club Section, named for the Yacht Club which, too, was not built, and the Country Club Section, including five of the nine holes of the Davis Islands Golf Course and its clubhouse. The southern end of the islands, though platted, did not carry section names. Land sales, Davis decided, would go
The Davis Islands Coliseum, completed in 1925, was the largest project Davis originally conceived for the islands development. Located on Danube, the Coliseum was destroyed by fire in the mid-1970s. (Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives.)

one section at a time. The fateful first day of sales was finally at hand.92

The first sale of lots, the Hyde Park Section, came on October 4, 1924, less than four weeks after the favorable Florida Supreme Court ruling. The results of that first day's land sales are well documented—all available lots, a total of 300, sold within three hours at an average cost of $5,610 per lot. Hardly any of those lots were above sea level, let alone graded and ready to build on. Some speculators waited in line for 40 hours for the opportunity to buy into the yet unbuilt islands. Total sales for that day reached an overwhelming $1,683,000. More interesting was the staggering resale of those same lots, some reportedly made inside the Franklin Street sales office between the first owners and eager prospects still waiting in line.93

Davis encouraged everyone to view his emerging paradise. Like many other real estate developers of the time, Davis owned a fleet of buses on which prospective buyers could tour Davis Islands. The buses, especially painted with the D.P. Davis Properties logo, brought people from as far away as Sarasota, Orlando and even Miami. Prospective buyers received colorful brochures, booklets and photographs showing how all of their dreams could come true, just by buying property on Davis Islands. Venetian style canals, luxurious homes, boating and waterfront grandeur all were depicted on lithographed pages within leather-bound booklets.

Davis created a carnival-like atmosphere around his sales promotions, hosting boat races around the Islands and along Bayshore Boulevard, airplane exhibitions with stunt flyers, sports celebrities such as Olympic swimmer Helen Wainwright, who swam a lap around Davis Islands, plus tennis tournaments and golf lessons from tour professionals Bobby Cruickshank and Johnny Farrell.95

The fervor created by the first land sale carried into the next, when lots in the Bay Circle Section went on the market on October 13, 1924. This feat repeated itself each time lots came on the open market. As in Miami, Davis made sure to mention that many lots were purchased by "home folks" who knew a good investment when they saw it. Realizing the need to not flood that lucrative market, Davis spaced out the sales from days to weeks apart, allowing the property values to increase each time.96

Resales between individual buyers contributed to the frenzy of Florida's land boom, and the action surrounding Davis Islands proved no exception. Davis
This page from "Life on Davis Islands, Tampa in the Bay," produced by D.P. Davis Properties in 1925, is an example of the elaborate sales brochures used at the start of Davis' Tampa project. Expensive to produce, these marketing tools employed fanciful, original artwork and design, flowery language and a high quality paper to sell Davis' development in its early stages. Sales brochures in the post-Davis period were produced with a smaller budget and lacked the richness of Davis' original, entrepreneurial flair. (Courtesy of the Tampa Bay History Center Collection.)
understood the importance of resales, both in how they maintained interest in his property and how they enhanced his own bottom line. He could raise the price on his own lots and, in theory, could also participate in the resale market himself. After October 15, 1924, resales were the only method of acquiring land on Davis Islands.

Many of the promises made by Davis and his company were realized, such as the golf course, hotels, apartments, canals and parks. One key aspect of the Islands plan, a business district, was also completed. Billed by Davis as “congruous with the plan of establishing on Davis Islands an ideal residential city complete in itself,” the business section centered around the Bay Isle Building, located at 238 East Davis Boulevard and designed by noted Tampa architect M. Leo Elliot. Elliot followed Davis’ requirement that the building “harmonize architecturally with the surrounding Island beauty.” Completed in 1925, the Bay Isle Building is still the anchor of the Islands’ business community.

Diagonally across East Davis Boulevard from the Bay Isle Building sat another commercial structure. Little is known about this second business building, except that it contained eleven store fronts; four facing Biscayne Avenue, five facing East Davis Boulevard and two opening south toward the neighboring property. A central arcade traversed the large building, which occupied four lots. The only evidence of this structure lies within the pages of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company’s maps of Davis Islands. It is possible that this part of the commercial plan never existed. The words “from plans” run beneath the schematic of the building on the Sanborn map. Aerial photographs from the time are not clear enough to determine if this mystery structure actually stood on the southeast corner of East Davis and Biscayne.

The Islands’ plan included several hotel and apartment projects. The most noticeable are the Mirasol, Palazzo Firenze (Palace of Florence), Palmarin Hotel (now known as Hudson Manor) and the Spanish Apartments. The Mirasol, Davis Islands’ tallest building, sits at the end of a canal and has its own yacht basin. The Palace of Florence drew its inspiration from the Palazzo Vecchino in Florence, Italy. Designed by Athos Menebun and M. Leo Elliot for Philip Lacata of the Tampa Investment Company, the Palace of Florence incorporated a variety of materials, such as terra cotta, wrought iron and stucco and boasted a tower on each end of the front elevation.

Some early residential buildings, notably the Biscayne Hotel, Bachelor Apartments and Venetian Apartments, have since been demolished. Others, such as the Augustine and Columbia Apartments on Columbia Drive, and the Flora Dora Apartments and Boulevard Apartments on Davis Boulevard are still occupied. The Merry Makers Club, situated on land given to the club by Davis on the corner of Danube and Barbados, represents the only social club
originally planned for the Islands.

The Davis Islands Coliseum, completed in 1925, embodied the largest project originally planned for the community. Funded through the sale of stock certificates, the Coliseum housed concerts, auto shows, conventions and many other events within its large auditorium — among the largest of its kind in the southeastern United States.

Located on Danube, the Davis Islands Coliseum was destroyed by fire in the mid-1970s.

Among the forgotten buildings on the islands is the Davis Islands Garage. Located at the northern tip of the main island near the site of the original tennis courts, the garage reinforces the notion that Davis Islands was designed for people with automobiles. Part storage facility, part repair shop, the Davis Islands Garage fits architecturally, thematically and functionally into Davis’ idea for a self-sufficient planned community.

Blessed, in early 1925, with success, cash and an extraordinary ego, Davis cast his determined stare in a more personal direction. One of the enduring stories regarding Davis at this time centers around what seemed an absurd assertion, that he would marry the next Queen of Gasparilla, who had not even been named yet. Davis once again, the legend goes, showed he could accomplish anything he truly desired, marrying 22 year-old Elizabeth Nelson, Queen Gasparilla XVII, on October, 10, 1925. Davis, who had recently turned 41, allegedly made this claim over a glass of champagne early in 1925, probably in January, possibly even on New Year’s Eve.

Gasparilla, Tampa’s version of Mardi Gras, starred members of Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla, made up of Tampa’s business elite, in pirate garb “invading” the city. In a more traditional sense, Gasparilla also was a social scene, complete with an annual grand ball and coronation of a king and queen. The king came out of the Krewe’s membership and usually was in his 40s or 50s, while the queen was the daughter of a Krewe member, usually in her teens or 20s.

The names chosen for the court of

Tampa’s Gasparilla celebration and Florida State Fair provided a perfect promotional opportunity for Davis. The Davis Islands’ float, shown on the track of the old fairgrounds site on North Boulevard, created publicity and interest in his Islands in the Bay, and put the development in front of thousands of Tampa citizens as well as tourists from throughout the state. (Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System, Burgert Bros. Collection.)
Gasparilla are kept secret, but they are decided in advance of the Coronation Ball. Davis had a number of connections within the Krewe, and it is quite likely that he knew Nelson would be named queen. The real question is did he know her before then, and did they have a secret relationship; did he have an unrequited desire for her, using his boast to gain her interest and attention; did he even care who the queen would be? We will probably never know.

Elizabeth Nelson was not the only woman in Davis’ life. According to Milton Davis, D.P. Davis’ marriage to Nelson was designed to make Zehring, his true love, jealous. Davis and Zehring maintained a long distance, on and off relationship which apparently was in an “off” stage.100

Davis and Nelson divorced and remarried in the span of eight weeks. Rumor and innuendo flew as to the reasons why the couple’s relationship was particularly stormy. By this time, Davis had developed a substantial drinking problem, an unintended consequence of prohibition colliding with the Jazz Age. Like many of his time, including Carl Fisher, Davis enjoyed the advantage Florida’s coastline afforded bootleggers bringing illicit alcohol into the state. While no evidence exists showing Davis’ drinking affected his work, contemporaries acknowledge that it brought out his melancholy side and greatly affected his personal life.101

Davis Shores, St. Augustine, Florida

Despite his success in Tampa, and partly because of it, Davis grew restless once again. Just as the Hillsborough Bay project was a successful progression for Davis to take following his Miami experiences, Davis Islands became a stepping stone to an even more ambitious project. That project, Davis Shores in St. Augustine, arguably led to his financial downfall and untimely death.

The same day Davis completed sales on Davis Islands’ lots, and just five days after his marriage to Nelson, he announced plans for a new development on St. Augustine’s Anastasia Island in northeast Florida. As in Tampa, St. Augustine’s newspapers heralded the news of a new Davis development as a magical elixir. The Evening Record’s banner front page headline stated simply “Davis to Develop Here.”102

St. Augustine’s history is as storied as any place in the United States. Established in 1565 by Spanish conquistador Pedro Menendez de Aviles, it is the oldest city in the United States. Both fought over and neglected through the years, St. Augustine always maintained a presence on Florida’s northeast coast, holding the mouth of the Mantanzas River as it enters the Atlantic Ocean.103

More a point of entry than a place to stay, St. Augustine still attracted her share of characters. The city served as Henry Flagler’s Florida foothold in the 1880s, but was roundly rejected in favor of her southern sisters during the early portion of Florida’s Land Boom. Davis, born just 30 miles west of the Ancient City, planned to change that.104

If Davis’ plan for Davis Islands seemed ambitious, the one he held for Davis Shores appeared close to impossible. Davis asserted he would spend $60,000,000 on the Shores project, twice his pledge for Davis Islands. The design featured a $1,500,000 hotel, $250,000 country club, a yacht club and a Roman pool complete with a casino, each costing $200,000 and two 18-hole golf courses, all crisscrossed by 50 miles of streets and 100 miles of sidewalks. Each lot was designed to border a golf course or the water. Unfortunately for Davis, few of these plans would actually materialize.105

Why did Davis decide to start a large scale real estate project in St. Augustine? Previous developers, going back to Flagler, viewed the old city as merely a gateway into Florida. Davis was seemingly going in reverse, from Miami to Tampa to St. Augustine. Part of the reason for this lies with his partner, A.Y. Milam. Milam, along with J. Clifford R. Foster, Adjutant General of the State of Florida, put the idea into Davis’ mind. Jacksonville financiers, undoubtedly the Milam brothers and/or their associates, backed the project with a $250,000 investment. Davis placed Foster in charge of acquiring the land, a total of 1,500 acres covering the northeastern portion of Anastasia Island.106

The early press regarding Davis Shores always mentioned the historic importance of St. Augustine, as well as its beauty and charm. Davis admitted that it would be a daunting task to integrate Davis Shores into the existing architecture of St. Augustine, which the reader of early press articles was constantly reminded lay only 2,200 feet
Davis, in front with hat in-hand, is pictured in 1925, with A.Y. Milam and two unidentified men at the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine. His Davis Shores development, with a cost promoted to be $60 million, was located across the Mantanzas River from the Castillo. In the picture inset, Davis is shown with a larger group including A.Y. Milam and W.R. Kenan, Jr. (Photograph courtesy of the Hillsborough County Collection, Tampa Bay History Center.)
A beautifully-rendered architectural drawing of the St. Augustine Yacht Club, planned by Davis to be built as part of his Davis Shores development, never was constructed. Like so many of the failed dreams for Davis Shores, the yacht club was part of an ambitious, near impossible undertaking by a developer driven by ambition and dreams. (Courtesy of the Tampa Bay History Center Collection.)

away. Advertisements for Davis Shores demonstrated his belief that the company was up to the challenge.107

Organization of Davis Shores' corporate structure would follow the appearance of Davis Islands, with Davis and the Milam brothers in the top positions. Davis held the office of president, with A.Y. Milam as vice president and R.R. Milam as general manager. A host of other positions filled out the corporate flow chart, including architects, accountants, engineers and stenographers.108

Davis wanted to build the Davis Shores' office on St. Augustine's main plaza, an area held sacred by many St. Augustinians. They sued and won, forcing Davis to consider a spot south of the plaza on Aviles Street. That office would never be built.109

The first stage of land sales began November 14, 1925. Within a few hours, all available lots sold for a total of $16,268,000. The first 100 days of operation, Davis crowed, brought in a total of $50,000,000 in sales. Unfortunately for Davis, that was the perceived value of the land, not the amount of money actually flowing into Davis Properties' coffers.110

A "world record" dredging contract, which would go on non-stop until all 13,000,000 cubic feet of fill was in place, began on Halloween 1925, fifteen days prior to the first sale of land. Ultimately, it would be Davis who was haunted by the specter, rather than the spectacle, of Davis Shores.111

"The Bubble Bursts"

Economic signposts in the mid-1920s pointed toward a drop in real estate activity. The year 1926 began with news of slow real estate sales, a condition which did not worry Davis or most other Florida developers. But, as the temperature rose from winter to spring, so did the problems. Instead of receiving an expected $4 million in second payments on Davis Islands property, only $30,000 in mortgage payments arrived. Both Davis Islands and Davis Shores had sold out by this time, and resales were moving slowly. In short, Davis had a serious cash flow problem.112

Con men had so infested the Florida real estate market, stealing millions of dollars from hapless investors across the United States, that potential buyers grew very skittish. Northern banks, too, grew skiddish of Florida investments. The stance they
took against any Florida real estate investment soon spread across the country. The state of Ohio passed “blue sky” laws that, according to historian James Covington,

“forbade certain firms to sell Florida real estate in Ohio. Walter J. Greenbaum, Chicago investment banker, said that other states should follow Ohio’s lead for ‘this Southern land boom is a fertile field for pirates of promotion.’”

Though not a “pirate of promotion,” Davis’ luck changed as well, with more and more investors defaulting on their loans, starving him of much needed cash. Davis was not alone in his fall from realty grace. The entire Florida real estate market began a steady decline in 1926. “By October 1925 the ... boom peaked. By February 1926, the New York Times reported a ‘hull.’ By July, the Nation reported a ‘collapse: ‘The world’s greatest poker game, played with building lots instead of chips, is over. And the players are now ... paying up.’” Tampa realtors felt the sting, which is reflected in the city directories of the time. In 1926, there were over 850 companies and individuals listed in the Tampa City Directory under its various real estate listings. The realtors covered Hillsborough County and west Central Florida, with a few touting investments in South Florida. Eighty-two of these companies placed real estate ads in the directory’s special advertising section, up from 74 in 1925.

Davis Shores continued to draw away all available resources, resulting in slower construction on Davis Islands. An overall shortage of building materials made matters worse. Davis had little choice but to sell his Tampa investment.

Davis Sells his Islands

The failure of a project on the scale of Davis Islands would be catastrophic to Tampa, both in terms of pride and prosperity. A considerable number of important people bought into the Islands’ potential, and now the situation looked bleak. Though it is not known which bank or banks Davis utilized for deposits and credit, it can be assumed, given his problems with Bize, that it was not the Citizens Bank and Trust Company. That leaves two other large banks, First National and Exchange National Banks. First National had direct ties with Jacksonville and, potentially, with the Milam brothers, and Knight served as a vice president of Exchange.

Either way, Knight, who at the time was president of Tampa Electric Company, had an intense interest in keeping Davis Islands afloat. Despite stories to the contrary, the dredging project was far from completion, roads still awaited paving, and large improvements such as the pool and the promised bridge still lay years in the future.

Knight convinced the Boston engineering firm of Stone & Webster, owners of Tampa Electric, to purchase Davis Islands. Stone & Webster formed a new subsidiary, Davis Islands Investment Company, which in turn purchased Davis Islands on August 2, 1926. Davis received 49% of the stock in the new company, which he immediately used as collateral on a $250,000 loan so work could continue on Davis Shores. This amount proved far too small to plug the gapping holes in Davis’ St. Augustine financing — Davis Shores was simply too expensive.

Casualties of The Boom

Davis would not live to see either of his monumental projects, Davis Islands or Davis Shores, to completion. Stories of Davis’ death always include some measure of mystery. The only undisputed facts are that he went overboard and drowned on October 12, 1926, while en route to Europe aboard the ocean liner Majestic and that Zehring accompanied him on the voyage. What is in question is how he ended up in the water; by accidentally falling out of a state room window, being pushed out or jumping out to end his own life. A multitude of stories fill the void.

Victory National Life Insurance Company, founded by Sumter Lowry (a member of Tampa’s City Commission in 1924), sold Davis a $300,000 policy a few months before his death. Davis held policies with other insurance companies, and, since his body was not recovered, some felt that Davis faked his own death. Lowry, “anxious to make a reputation for paying claims promptly,” hired an investigator, who, in Lowry’s words:

“went to England and talked to the Cunard Line offices. They established
the fact that a reliable steward had been standing outside Mr. Davis' cabin and he heard voices in the cabin. In a few minutes one of the parties in the cabin rushed out and said that Mr. Davis had gone overboard.

The steward had seen Mr. Davis go in the cabin and he had never left his position at the door until the announcement was made that Mr. Davis was lost. He rushed in the cabin which was small and it would have been impossible for a man to hide himself in. The cabin was empty. D.P. Davis was gone.  

Lowry paid out the claim based on the investigator's conclusion that Davis was indeed dead.

Lowry's findings regarding Davis' death did not assuage all doubts on the subject. Many felt that Davis leapt overboard to end his life. Chief among this theory's proponents was the captain of the Majestic. Another who thought Davis killed himself was Jerome McLeod, who had joined D.P. Davis Properties in 1925 as assistant publicity director after a stint at the Tampa Daily Times. "He got drunk," McLeod told a later interviewer, and "when he got drunk he got maudlin." A third story comes from a steward who stood outside Davis' room and overheard an argument between Davis and Zehring. The Majestic's employee claimed Davis said, "I can go on living or end it. I can make money or spend it. It all depends on you." The statement was punctuated by a loud splash. This runs somewhat counter to the testimony given Lowry, in which the steward had to be told of Davis' fall by Zehring.

Davis' brother Milton had a different story. While acknowledging D.P. Davis had a drinking problem, he believed his death was an accident. Milton traveled to New York City to speak with Zehring about his brother's final moments. Milton, who claimed D.P. probably intended to divorce his second wife and marry his girlfriend, restated Zehring's recollection: "Lucille said there had been a party and D.P. was sitting in an open porthole, one of those big ones. It was storming outside, and he blew out the window. She said she started to scream and grab his leg, but it was blown out of her hands. That's what happened."

There are a variety of problems and inconsistencies with each of these stories. Some say that Davis and Zehring were alone while others say there was a party. The Majestic was the largest ship in the world, a sister to the Titanic, and undoubtedly had "large portholes." Davis was a small man, but could he really sit in one of them and then be "blown overboard?" Could the steward standing outside of the closed stateroom door hear a loud splash that occurred away from the ship and potentially dozens of yards below the open window? The idea that Davis booked passage with a large party, including Davis Properties' employees, raises doubt that the intent of the voyage was to divorce his wife.
Major Henry E. Snow Dies

DEATH COMES AFTER ILLNESS OF ONE MONTH

Pioneer Tampa Was One of Best Known Residents.

Major Henry E. Snow, one of Tampa's best known and best loved citizens, died at Gordon Keller hospital today at 9:15 a.m.

Major Snow became ill at his summer home in Harwichport, Mass., about a month ago. He was brought home last Thursday and for a time seemed to rally, but Sunday afternoon he began failing rapidly. An operation Tuesday morning failed to give him relief, death following this morning.

Mrs. Snow, three sons—Ralph, Everett and Spencer—and a daughter, Mrs. Betty Snow Lauden, were with him at the time of his death.

In addition to his widow and children, Major Snow is survived by two sisters, Mrs. Charles D. Chase and Mrs. Sarah Nickerson, in Harwichport, and three grandchildren here, Dorothy and Freddie Thrower and Barbara Snow.

Funeral services will be held from the residence, 2602 Sunset drive, with the Rev. C. H. H. Branch, pastor of the Hyde Park Presbyterian church, officiating.

DIXIE CHIEFS MEET TO BOOST COTTON PRICES

Former Klan Dragon to Tell of "Graft" Tomorrow.

By The Associated Press
Michigan City, Ind., Oct. 13—Davis C. Stephenson, storm center of the Indiana political situation, was taken from the state prison here this morning and in charge of several guards started for Indianapolis.

By The Associated Press
Indianapolis, Oct. 13—D. C. Stephenson, who has been represented by Thomas H. Adams, publisher of the Vincennes Commercial, as being anxious to reveal a story of alleged political corruption in Indiana, will appear here tomorrow as a witness before the grand jury investigating Adams' charges that there has been wrongdoing among high public officials.

Stephenson's anxiety to tell his tale has been promoted. Adams has declared, by dissatisfaction with steps taken to file an appeal from the life sentence imposed last November upon him when he was convicted of murdering Madge Oberholtzer.

A possibility that concern over his plight has been removed was seen last night when John A. Win...
Ace Slain
Wedding Day

For his own pistol, but not before
drawn, the man who shot him. A short dis-
way, apparently dropped in
shot, was found the pistol from
the bullet had been fired.

The first thought of officers
was to the neighborhood was
an aid in discovering the
ke of the disturbance. They
quickly knew their fellow officer. The
in this case had been to identity of the slayer.

The Negro emptied his gun be-
he was subdued.

D. P. Davis, developer of Davis
Islands and one of the best known real
estate operators in Florida,
drowned when he fell
board from the steamer
Majestic en route to Europe,
according to a message re-
ceived here today by Arthur
Y. Milam, Mr. Davis' business
associate.

The telegram received by Mr.
Milam read:
"Dave lost overboard early
this morning. Ship circled over
an hour. Everything possible
done. No hope. Advise fam-
ily."

(Signed)
Raymond and Monty." signs
of the message, are Raymond
Schindler and F. W. Montayne,
employees of the Davis Islands or-
ganization. Mr. Davis' son

Varied Entertainment.

Today's program afforded the
legionnaires varied forms of enter-

Davis’ drinking problem unquestionably contributed to his untimely death. But, to what degree? Some point to a possible fight with Zehring, others to his overall financial collapse, as reasons why he would commit suicide. Alcohol would inevitably compound those problems. Others, like Davis’ brother, felt that his alcoholism merely put him in the position of hurting himself, intentionally or otherwise.

Murder, too, is a possibility. Some stories relate that Davis had up to $50,000 in cash with him. Others discount this, claiming that he hardly ever kept large amounts of money on him. Motive and opportunity do not seem to be on the side of murder, but no one could lead the life he led without making enemies, especially after losing so much money in such a brief period of time.122

How he fell overboard is still a mystery. Until new evidence is found, any theory regarding Davis’ death is just that, theory.

Davis Islands Awarded

Validation for Davis’ determined plan came in 1927 when the American Association of City Planners awarded its first prize to Davis Islands. The Association pointed favorably to the layout, which,

“embraced sixty streets, representing a total of twenty-seven miles of broad, curving boulevards 60 to 100 feet in width, and several miles of picturesque, winding waterways.

It provided for nearly eleven miles of waterfront locations and a large amount of golf course frontage for fine homes. It was so planned that not any residential lot in the entire property would be more than 500 yards from the water.”123

Though he did not survive to see it, Davis’ dream of a model community became reality. The award was as much for Davis’ visionary planning as it was for Stone & Webster’s continued execution of Davis’ original plan, referred to in the last sentence of the commendation. “The development of these features has continued throughout the property with provision of all utilities enjoyed by the most exclusive residential communities.”124

Stone & Webster Continue Davis’ Vision

Stone & Webster continued construction on Davis Islands in late 1926, with attention focused primarily on infrastructure. The company placed an advertisement in the Tampa Morning Tribune which trumpeted “Dredging Hits Record Speed.” The piece continues, telling of the launching of a “new million dollar contract” just signed with Northern Dredge & Dock Co., the same company Davis originally hired for the project. The new owners of the Islands were eager to get the project back on its feet. “In an endeavor to expedite and complete the dredging at an early date, a provision of the new dredging contract allows a bonus to the dredge company any month that more than 600,000 cubic yards of fill are placed.” Northern Dredge operated six dredges at the site and planned on adding a seventh as soon as possible. The newspaper ad ended with the announcement that “600 workmen have been added, 2,157 ft. of sanitary sewers installed, 2,900 feet of water mains laid, 3,000 feet of gas mains placed and 250 lots graded.”125

Stone & Webster moved their Tampa offices from 101 Tampa Street in downtown to Davis Islands, possibly as a show of support for the Islands’ business district. Their first Islands’ office, in 1927, was located on the corner of Columbia and Barbados. The company moved to the second floor of the Bay Isle Building in 1928. By 1930, however, they abandoned the Islands altogether—a harbinger of things to come.126

Changes in the Dream

With the transfer of ownership from Davis’ D.P. Davis Properties to Stone & Webster’s Davis Islands Incorporated came increased flexibility in the deed restrictions. The Kornell Apartments, completed in 1928, and located at 25 Davis Boulevard, was a radical departure from the Mediterranean style architecture required by Davis. Several residences also deviated from the prescribed style, examples of which still exist at 26 and 116 Adalia.

Davis Islands Incorporated continued construction on the Islands for the benefit of both businesses and private residents. The firm also pursued the internal improvements contained in Davis’ original plans,
which were necessary for the smooth flow of the increasing automobile traffic. The permanent bridge leading to Davis Islands was dedicated in a ceremony on May 16, 1928, featuring Tampa mayor D.B. McKay and Howard G. Philbrook, president of Davis Islands Inc. It took nearly a year and a half to complete the bridge, with a portion of that time spent fighting an injunction by Patrick and Euphemia Kelliher, who claimed the bridge infringed on the riparian rights of their property at 105 Bay Street. The Florida Supreme Court dissolved the injunction, allowing construction to continue.\textsuperscript{128}

Davis Islands Incorporated kept another of Davis' promises with completion of the Davis Islands Pool in 1929. Located on the corner of Columbia Drive and Bosphorous Avenue, the $75,000 swimming pool represented one of the last large-scale projects funded by Davis Islands Incorporated.\textsuperscript{129}

Davis Islands Incorporated continued to advertise the virtues of visiting and living on the Islands, but a reduced marketing budget directed the message to a different target audience. The prospective buyer was not the same one who originally rushed to buy lots on the first day in 1924. In 1928, a Davis Islands brochure titled \textit{Florida's Wonder Spot} still touted the location, convenience, fun and luxury of the property, but the printed piece was produced on a smaller budget than in glory years past. Paper quality, artwork and design were all affected by the low cost approach. Another big difference was the greatly expanded use of photography rather than the fanciful artwork of previous sales brochures. That was probably due as much to the fact that there were more finished buildings to photograph in 1928, as with the cost of creating and printing original drawings.

Flowery language was another casualty of the new times. One of the captions for a photograph of the Mirasol Hotel gives an example of these changes, "The Mirasol - one of the Davis Islands Hotels - where the visitor finds real resort luxury at moderate cost." As a comparison, the hotels in \textit{Life on Davis Islands, Tampa In The Bay}, produced by D.P. Davis Properties in 1925, were "robed in quiet refinement where everyone ... free from care, may enjoy the vitalizing Island life that beckons near at hand." When placed next to each other, the post-Davis version is somewhat lacking. The silvery prose is still present, but it is definitely tarnished.\textsuperscript{131}

The year 1930 dealt the final blow to the old Davis marketing machine. The administration offices moved from 32 Davis Boulevard into space on the second floor of the Bay Isle Building - the offices recently vacated by Stone & Webster. The old Davis Boulevard quarters became the Seaborn Day School that same year.\textsuperscript{132}

Real estate promotion in Tampa, and across Florida, continued its free fall in the latter part of the 1920s. In 1927, only 29 realty companies elected to buy space in the advertising section of Tampa's city directory. The total number of realtors that year plunged by half to 416. Only 292 showed up in the 1928 city directory, with only 21 of those taking out special ads.\textsuperscript{133}

Real estate continued its decline, and by 1930, only 5 real estate companies placed ads in the directory, a 94\% decrease from 1926. The final blow, of course, was the stock market crash on October 29, 1929. The rest of the country was simply joining Florida in economic depression.

With that, all hope for a recovery in Florida real estate was lost. Davis possibly felt the inevitable approaching and did not want to be around to see it. His Islands would again become desirable property, but it would take another world war and another Florida real estate boom, caused by the booming economy and population in the 1950s, for it to happen.

\textbf{Coda}

David Paul Davis was among the most notable casualties of Florida's real estate boom and bust. The bust left countless subdivisions unfinished, often just paved streets leading to nowhere. Eventually, though, all of Davis' properties would prove successful. In Miami, his Commercial Biltmore development has seen new life in the form of the city's fashionable Design District. Davis Islands has continued to be a popular, and profitable address, with some homes selling for a million dollars or more. The same holds true for Davis Shores, though it did not reach completion until the 1950s.

Davis' family experienced the usual mix of success and failure typical to most American families. Both of his brothers worked with him on Davis Islands, with Milton carrying the Davis name to Fort Myers and
Havana, Cuba. Both brothers eventually returned to Davis Islands in retirement, living out their golden years on their big brothers' island.

Their sister, Elizabeth Hodgson, remained in Tampa with her husband until 1949. George Hodgson, Dave's brother-in-law, worked in a variety of capacities for Davis Properties, Davis Islands Incorporated and the Davis Islands Garage. Eventually, the Hodgsons left Tampa, retiring to Bradenton Beach, Florida.  

George Riley Davis, Dave's oldest brother, passed away on February 13, 1930, at the age of 73, after a brief illness. He died at Tampa Municipal Hospital, located at the northern tip of Davis Islands. His youngest brother, Howell Anderson, served two terms as mayor of Palatka and continued their father's business until his death in 1957.  

Dave's sons, George Riley II and David Paul, Jr., were both sent to live "with relatives" in California following their father's death. The junior Davis, at 31 years old, came to Tampa in 1953 to visit family, including his aunt and uncles. He also wanted to see Davis Islands for the first time in twenty-seven years. David, Jr. only had faint memories of his father and his developments, saying, "It is like trying to piece together the hazy fragments of a vague dream."  

Without knowing it, David Paul Davis, Jr. described the burden that weighs on all of his father's biographers. The legends surrounding his life and death are a tangle of public relations stories, selective memory, honest mistakes and outright lies. Sorting through it all and "piecing together" those "hazy fragments" into a coherent history is difficult indeed. Once complete, the substance of the man and the impact he had on his native state are anything but a vague dream.

ENDNOTES

Rodney Kite-Powell has been Curator of the Tampa Bay History Center since 1998, and is a member of the Tampa Historic Preservation Commission. A native and resident of Tampa's Davis Islands, and long-time Davis researcher and historian, Kite-Powell is a Tampa and Hillsborough County historian, and frequent speaker and lecturer. He is the author of three previous articles published in The Sunland Tribune: "The Escape of Judah P. Benjamin, vol. 22, 1996, "Davis Islands: David Paul Davis' Unfulfilled Dream - Davis Islands from October 1926 Until the Crash of 1929," vol. 25, 1999, and "The Continued Evolution of Davis Islands: Paper, Paper Bags and Twine, Woodenware, Galvanized Ware and Paper Specialties.

Established 1911

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4. PCA, biography of George Mercer Davis; Brian E. Michaels, The River Flopes North: A History of Putnam County (Palatka, 1976) 89; Putnam County, Florida: Marriages, 1849-1890. PCA.

5. Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; Population, Putnam County, Florida; obituary of George Riley Davis, Tampa Morning Tribune, February 14, 1930. See Michaels for a description of a Palatka in the 1850s.


7. Eighth Census. The census data does not list what personal property Davis owned. George Mercer Davis does not appear on the census bureau's 1860 Slave Schedule as a slave holder. A Nancy Davis is buried in the Westview Cemetery in Palatka with members of the Davis Family. The only date listed is the year of death, 1860. Also, Nancy Davis is not listed with the rest of the Davis family in the 1870 Federal Census.


10. Sifakis, 16 and 25.


13. Hartman and Coles, pp. 1180-1181. It is unknown whether the two Davises were related.


15. Ninth Census; Tenth Census.

16. Tenth Census. Four of the renters were black, including a father and his two daughters. It is impossible to tell at this time if any of them were former slaves of the Davis family, but it is unlikely.

17. Tenth Census; Putnam County, Florida: Marriages, 1849-1890. PCA.

18. Twelfth Census, Hillsborough County.

19. Marriage book 1, 80, PCA.

20. PCA, biography of George Mercer Davis.

21. Nolan, 192. See Jefferson Brown, Key West: The Old and the New (St. Augustine, 1912; reprinted Gainesville, 1973) for a description of Key West at this time.

22. Twelfth Census, Hillsborough County; Nolan, 192; Duval County, Florida, 1917-18 Civilian Draft Registration. Most sources list David Davis' date of birth as November 1885, with a few giving the precise day, November 29. The only official record obtained thus far that lists his exact date of birth is his World War I draft card. Several attempts, mostly unsuccessful, have been made to obtain birth and marriage records for Davis and his siblings. The 1890 Federal Census for Florida was destroyed by fire with the rest of the 1890 census data at the Commerce Department in Washington, DC on January 10, 1921.


25. There a number of works regarding Tampa's history. Those of note include Karl Grismer, Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida (St. Petersburg, 1950), and Gary R. Mormino and Anthony P. Pizzo, Tampa: The Treasure City (Tulsa, 1983). For an examination of Tampa's 19th century political development, see Curtis Welch, Tampa's Elected Officials (Tampa, 1997).


27. See Mormino and Pizzo, 120-128, for an extensive account of Tampa and the Spanish-American War. For an account of Davis and the Spanish-American War, see Bentley Orrick and Harry L. Crumpacker, The Tampa Tribune: A Century of Florida Journalism (Tampa, 1996) 103, and Nolan, 192.
28. Sholes' Directory of the city of Tampa, 1899 (Savannah, 1899); Twelfth Census, Hillsborough County.

29. Tampa City Directory (Jacksonville), hereinafter cited as TCD, year 1903. An extensive search has been made by the author in an attempt to determine the fate of Gertrude Davis. She is not listed in any cemetery in Hillsborough County, nor is she listed in the available obituary indexes for Tampa.

30. Harner, 49. A reproduction of the cabinet card image of Davis at Knight & Wall appears in this article, as does the information provided on the card's reverse. The original cabinet card is in the collection of the Tampa Bay History Center. Harner states that Davis, "then aged 17, took a full time job in a wholesale and retail hardware store," remaining there for three years.


32. TCD, year 1908; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, Hillsborough County, Florida.

33. Grismer, 224.

34. Grismer, 95; Nolan, 193; Tampa Daily Times, October 20, 1971.


36. JCD, Years 1915 through 1917. The two companies were the Edmunds Investment Co. and Citizens Home Investment Co.

37. See Nolan, 193, for the best retelling of the hotdog stand legend. Duval County, Florida, 1917-18, Civilian Draft Registration. According to USGENWEB, a widely respected, web-based genealogical resource, "some men do not have birth locations listed because they registered on the final draft registration day in 1918 when this information was not recorded." Davis' entry does not include a birth location.


40. Mark S. Foster, Castles in the Sand: The Life and Times of Carl Graham Fisher (Gainesville, 2000), 119, 148-155; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 30, 1924. Foster's work is the most complete treatment of Fisher and his impact on Florida's development in the 1920s.

41. Ibid., 164; Rogers, 293.

42. Nolan, 193; Harner, 50. Nolan asserts that Davis made $40,000 in 10 days. Harner states that Davis "bought into the big Shadowy Lawn development."

43. Miami Herald, January 11, 1922; Tallahassee Daily Democrat, October 1, 1925; Miami City Directory (Jacksonville), hereinafter cited as MCD, year 1921.

44. Miami Herald, January 11, 1922; Tallahassee Daily Democrat, October 1, 1925.


46. Ibid., January 14, 1922.

47. Ibid., January 11, 1922.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., January 7, 1922.

50. Ibid., January 11 through February 20, 1922. Davis did not place an ad in the January 27, 28 or 30 editions of the Herald.
70. Tampa Morning Tribune, February 5, 1924.
71. Letter to the City of Tampa from L. A. Bize, W. E. Dorchester, G. B. Drason, C. J. Marion, India F. Morris, John Anderson, Jr., W. M. Rowlett and John C. Martin, dated February 12, 1924, TARS. Only Bize, Dorchester and Rowlett lived on Bayshore Boulevard. Covington, 28, no. 13, points out that the real problem would not be the view along Bayshore. Instead, "a greater danger would arise when the natural flushing of the bay would be ended by the dredging and terrible odors and peeling of house paint would develop to plague the home owners for many years." While the Islands did interrupt the "natural flushing" of the bay, the Hillsborough River had been dammed years before, impeding its flow into Hillsborough Bay. It did not become a problem until the islands were dredged.
72. Letter to the City of Tampa from Karl Whitaker, dated February 12, 1924, TARS.
73. Ibid.
74. Letter to the City of Tampa from the Optimist Club of Tampa, TARS; W. Scott Christopher, Tampa's People With a Purpose (Tampa, 1993), 70.
75. Grismer, 256. While many sources mention the purchase price and families involved, no one has connected the excessive price the Whitakers charged Davis and Karl Whitaker's opposition to the Island project.
76. Contract between the City of Tampa and David P. Davis, signed February 26, 1924, TARS.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Tampa Morning Tribune, April 23, 1924; Grismer, 256.
81. TARS. A list of all 82 individuals who posted promissory notes is in the Appendix.
82. Ibid.
83. Grismer, 256. The justices were divided 3-2 on the issue.
84. Tampa Morning Tribune, November 9, 1924. Al Burgert, of the Burgert Brothers photography firm, has also claimed to be the first person to cross the temporary bridge onto Davis Islands, doing so on April 22, 1925. Though the Burgert Brothers were contracted by Davis to take extensive photographs of the progress on Davis Islands, the bridge had been open for five months before the photograph of Al Burgert was taken. It may be that it was another bridge on the islands, not the main bridge. See Land Hawes, "How Davis Islands Emerged From the Bay," Tampa Tribune, July 10, 1988, for Burgert's claim.
85. Covington, 28, no. 18. Davis made every effort to mention the cost of his Davis Islands investment. He placed the $30,000,000 price tag in almost every brochure, advertisement and news story produced between 1924 and 1926.
86. Tampa Morning Tribune, November 2, 1924; Tampa Tribune, January 14, 1990; Meyer, 50.
87. Plan of Davis Islands, TBHC. The unbuilt Davis Arms Hotel, which was to be located at the western end of Biscayne Avenue, would have been an exception to the rule of apartments and hotels remaining close to Davis Boulevard.
88. Plan of Davis Islands, TBHC.
89. Ibid.
92. Tampa Morning Tribune, August 26, 1924; Plan of Davis Islands, TBHC. Each newspaper article about the various land sales mentions which section had just been sold.
93. Tampa Morning Tribune, October 5, 1924.
94. See Stewart, 66, for examples of this in South Florida. Photographs of Davis Properties buses are in the collections of both the Tampa Bay History Center and the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System. Examples of these booklets are in the Hillsborough County Collection, TBHC.
95. Covington, 21.
96. Tampa Morning Tribune, October 14, 1924.
98. Covington, 26; Del Acoesta, et al, City of Tampa, Local Historic Landmarks and Local Historic Districts (Tampa, 2003), 15-16. Both Hudson Manor and the Palace of Florence are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and are locally landmarked by the City of Tampa.
100. Ibid.; Milton Davis interview.
101. Orrick and Crumpacker, 116; Milton Davis interview; Foster, 297.
102. St. Augustine Evening Record, October 15, 1925.
104. George Bucer and Jean Parker Westerbury, Oldest City: St. Augustine, Saga of Suarezal (St. Augustine, 1983), 226-227; Foster, 139.
105. Tallahassee's Daily Democrat, November 4, 1925.
106. Ibid., October 17, 1925; Davis Shores file, St. Augustine Historical Society (hereinafter cited as SAHS). Foster's title of Adjutant General was an honorary one, connected with the state's militia system. Davis was also an "officer," a Lieutenant Colonel, in the state's militia under Governor John Martin, see Nolan, 196.
107. Tallahassee's Daily Democrat, October 17, 1925.
108. Davis Shores file, SAHS.
110. Covington, 27.
111. St. Augustine Evening Record, October 15, 1925.
112. Covington, 27.
113. Ibid., 26.
115. For insight into Knight's influence on Tampa's growth, see Robert Kerstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth Century Tampa (Gainesville, 2001).
116. Evidence of the Islands' being incomplete lies in the advertisements placed in the Tampa Morning Tribune after Davis sold the development.


120. Milton Davis interview.

121. All attempts to locate interior photographs of rooms on the ship have been unsuccessful. The Majestic herself was sold to the British navy for training purposes and accidentally burned in the 1930s.

122. Milton Davis interview; Nolan, 225; Orrick and Crumpacker, 116.

123. Hillsborough County Planning Commission, *Davis Islands Plan: Tampa Urban Case Study* (Tampa, no date), 20.

124. Ibid.

125. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 10, 1926.

126. TCD, years 1927 through 1930.

127. The name of the holding company for Davis Islands changed from Davis Islands Investment Company to Davis Islands Incorporated between 1926 and 1928.


129. Ibid., August 25, 1929.


131. D.P. Davis Properties, *Life on Davis Islands, Tampa In The Bay* (Louisville, 1925). Both *Florida's Water Spot and Life on Davis Islands* are in the collections of the Tampa Bay History Center.

132. TCD, year 1930.

133. TCD. Years consulted were 1926 through 1929. In the 1926 directory, there were seven real estate related categories. With a few exceptions, these remained roughly the same through 1929.

134. TCD. The following is the total page count, real estate advertising page count and percentage of pages devoted to advertising, 1926 – 1930: 1926 – 108, 23, 21%; 1927 – 71, 9, 12%; 1928 – 59, 6, 11%; 1929 – 44, 3, 7%; 1930 – 34, 1, 5%.

135. Milton Davis interview.


137. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, February 14, 1930; PCA, biography of Howell A. Davis and Family.

"... being continually in apprehension of an attack from the Indians...":

Tampa Bay In Early 1836

Pamela N. Gibson and Joe Knetsch, Ph.D.

On January 4, 1836, the young Second Lieutenant Benjamin Alvord of the Fourth Infantry wrote to the Quartermaster General of the United States Army, General Thomas Jesup, that the Schooner Motto had just left the post for New Orleans. Its mission was to obtain ammunition for the recently arrived pair of twelve pounders and the small arms then in Fort Brooke. Alvord then added the telling portion: "... being continually in apprehension of an attack from the Indians the commanding officer decides that these materials Furniture &c of Motto cannot be turned over (as no officer can properly leave his command) ..."

Three days prior to this the new commander of the post, Captain Francis S. Belton of Maryland, commented that the defenses of Fort Brooke were recently extended and strengthened and that the original cantonment had been entirely abandoned. The women and children of the casualties of Dade's recent battle were shipped off to New Orleans. Brevet Major John Mountfort, another recent arrival, also noted the improvement of the defensive works which now included a trench, new pickets and blockhouses. The total regular force available to defend the new works and the remains of the nearby village were one hundred and eighty men and officers plus a party of citizen rangers numbering about thirty. One hundred friendly Indians were encamped outside of the works and declared their readiness to fight their brethren. Quoting a letter from "a gentleman attached to Major Mountfort's
command," the *National Intelligencer* allowed the author to declare: "Through the interposition of Providence, I am now alive to let you know it. We are really in the theater of war of the most horrible kind." This same writer was one of the lucky ones scheduled to ride out and overtake Dade's command and join in the march to Fort King. His group was delayed long enough to meet the three survivors, "horribly mangled" who gave them the news of Dade's demise.³

Fort Brooke, on that terrible day, was totally isolated and without means of defense against a massed attack by the Seminoles and their allies. The December 28, 1835 battle had cost the command at Fort Brooke one hundred and twelve men and left only the sparse garrison described above. The fort had been strengthened but the outlying buildings of the nascent village had been destroyed, "in order to afford no cover by which the approach of the foe might be facilitated." Like their colleagues in Key West they had cleared a field of fire and gave the enemy no chance of surprise attack.⁴ The news did not improve with the knowledge of the defeat of the force under General Duncan L. Clinch at the Withlacoochee River on December 31, 1835. There would be no immediate relief by land.

What brought on this isolation, fear and imminent threat of death? One of the major causes of the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) was the constant and consistent lack of understanding between two differing cultures; one European, the other Native American. The government of the United States refused to listen to those who knew the Native American culture best and insisted upon discussing issues and signing treaties with "the chief" of the tribe. It simply ignored the advice that Creek, Seminole and Miccosukee culture relied upon a tribal council in which no individual chief had any power to conduct negotiations and enter treaties without the approval of said council. When the U.S. government agent did not get the answers or lands demanded, he often recommended that the government ignore that "chief" and deal only with someone more pliable. That person would then be recognized as "chief" and new negotiations would be conducted until the desired result was reached. The tribal council was totally ignored. The clan system upon which much of the political power within the Native cultures worked was also brushed aside as so much poppycock. The government and its agents were ethnocentric to the extreme.

The Second Seminole War was, in many ways, a continuation of the First Seminole War and the internecine warfare that followed. The final Indian Agent before the war, Wiley Thompson, continued the government's policies and attempted to get the Seminoles to emigrate from Florida to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. Thompson's manner was haughty and insulting. He continually addressed the Seminole negotiators as if they were the President's children or court appointed wards. After he was killed, on the same day as Dade's force was eliminated, Alligator declared that the warriors danced around his hung scalp and mocked his language and mannerisms. He would no longer insult anyone.⁵

Without belaboring the complex origins of this most brutal war, it is worth noting that the white lust for land, cattle and other property was a major driving force toward war. Recent work by historian Ronald Satz indicates the constant problems that arose with the initiation of the Indian Removal Act and the bureaucracy it created. The lack of staff in Washington to oversee the Indian Agents, often corrupt political appointees, the insufficient funding of the removal by Congress, the parsimonious allotments for the military establishment...
assigned to carry out this policy and the overall planning deficiencies of the government all helped to create an impossible situation. Many of these difficulties began long before Andrew Jackson became president but they did not improve with his, and subsequent, administrations. From the initial confusion over supplying the Indians in Florida, through the contract with Benjamin Chaires, to the insensitive administration of Wiley Thompson, the policy of removal in Florida was replete with errors, confusion and corruption. The final outbreak of war was not a surprise to anyone.

In 1823, the Treaty of Moultrie Creek decided the ultimate fate of the Seminoles and the other Native Americans living in Florida. Their final fate was to be removal but for the beginning of United States occupation of Florida, a reservation was decided upon and surveyed by James Gadsden. This army officer had earlier recommended the Tampa Bay area as an ideal position from which to control any possible foreign influences upon the Seminoles and their cohorts. Tampa Bay was ideal from Gadsden's point of view because "The Indians have long been in the habit of keeping up an intercourse and active trade with the Cuban fishermen, and to this cause, principally, has been ascribed the encouragement hitherto given to absconding negroes, and the savage depredations committed on cattle, estates, &c." This constant theme of interdicting trade between the Cuban fishermen on the Florida coast and the Seminoles plays an important role in why Tampa Bay was chosen for the site of Fort Brooke. Gadsden's letter also introduces the problem of the escaped slaves that has been at the center of academic discussions concerning the Seminole Wars. There can be no disputing the fact that this facet of Southern society was a major trigger for the Second Seminole War. With the founding of Fort Brooke in 1824, and the arrival of the agent for dispersing the rations to the Seminoles, the stage was set for the events of 1836.

As noted above, the situation Captain Belton and the garrison at Fort Brooke was desperate. The Florida militia would be of little assistance in the defense of the area, so help could not be expected from this quarter either. By 1835, the militia situation in Florida was, at best, pathetic. Although Governor William P. Duval had requested 240 muskets and 250 rifles for this force in 1832, Florida had received only 198 obsolete firearms from the Federal Government. Assuming that the arms supplied to the militia was a guarantee of effective use was beyond reality. The reality was that the militia of Florida, even with the arms provided by the government or from personal ownership, was neither large enough to handle the situation at hand nor effectively trained in the basic elements of military drill, use of firearms or tactics. At the outbreak of the war, there was not one registered gunsmith in the entire Territory. Belton could not and did not expect any help from this source.

After learning of the fate of Dade's command, Captain Belton had to quickly assemble a resourceful defense. On January 2, 1836, he took the friendly Indians camped outside of the stockade into the service of the United States. This force numbered about ninety to one hundred men and would be used to threaten or attack the rear of the enemy. As it was impossible for emigration of the Indians to take place under the circumstances, the captain felt these friendly Indians would be of "infinite service" to the post. Three days later, Belton wrote to W.C. Bolton, then commanding at Pensacola, "This place is now invested by all the Florida Indians in the Field with a large force of Negroes, particularly from the plantations of Tomoka & Smyrna, as appears from the examination of a prisoner just taken." The captain continued: "The fleet of transports ... are of course, in alarm, & without arms & subject to an attack, & as far as I can judge, from the flanking movements of the Indians, down the bay, they intend either an attack on the island between the Transports & this post, where the friendly Indians families are posted, till they can be shipped." Belton concluded his letter declaring: "We have no communication with any post in Florida & I am of the opinion that 7500 men could not force it at present." He then requested of Bolton all the arms and men he could spare for the defense of Fort Brooke. In a second letter to Bolton, Belton stated: "We are prepared for the most desperate assault they can make, inspired as they are by the action at Withlacoochee on the 28th." While Belton was worried about facing the entire Seminole nation and its allies at Tampa, Governor John Eaton and General
A. Officers' Quarters
B. Mess
C. Dr. Mitchell's Office
D. Company Officers' Quarters
E. Company Staff
F. Artillery Sections
G. Hospital
H. Guard House
I. Public Store House
J. Bake House
K. Stable
L. Guardhouse
M. Commissary
N. Hospital
Richard K. Call were writing out their notes on recent events. Eaton addressed his letter to Secretary of War Lewis Cass on the 7th of January: “Our troops & the Indians (400 in number) have had a fight on the bank of the Amaxura river [Withlacoochee’s old name]. The loss of the Indians is about fifty – no prisoners. The battle lasted for an hour, Gen’l Clinch’s regulars are the principal sufferers. Fifty or sixty are wounded & five or six killed.” The governor then erroneously stated that Wiley Thompson had died in this battle, demonstrating the problems of communication during war on the frontier. Call wrote to Eaton on the same day noting: “The precise strength of the enemy has not been ascertained. It is variously estimated by men of intelligence to be from 1200 to 2000.” The General continued: “… all the Plantations South of Tampa were destroyed. … They have raised the Tomahawk in despair, they are waging a war of extermination and the Safety of our fellow citizens requires that not a moment should be lost in carrying the war into their own country.” Call also observed that the country favored the Indians’ style of warfare and that an army of 2,500 to 3,000 should be immediately sent to the field. Captain Belton, from his isolation in Tampa, could do nothing to prevent the destruction of the plantations south of his position.

Governor Eaton, on the 9th of January, wrote again to Cass hoping for more rapid action from that quarter. He once more related the necessity of disbanding the Spanish fishing ranchos in southern Florida where, he charged, “no doubt aid & encourage the Indians, under their fishing pretext.” Yet, Captain Belton says little at this juncture about Spanish assistance to the Indians. He did not, however, remain idle and penned up in his stockade. On the 12th of January, he led a command out of the post and toward the end of the day captured one Indian. This prisoner was from the Peace River encampment and provided Belton with some information he hitherto had not possessed. The Indian informed the captain that there had been an additional battle fought between the Miccosukees and the militia on the Alachua prairie (Paynes’ Prairie) and that the whites had fled the field [which was substantially correct]. He also opined that another engagement had taken place on the Santa Fe River but offered no specifics. The same prisoner also declared that the Miccosukees were supposed to have attacked Fort Brooke the previous evening, but did not. Belton then informed Roger Jones, adjutant general of the army, that he was affixing bayonets to poles stuck in the ground and covering them with twigs and leaves in the hopes of breaking up any direct assault on the fort. Belton was taking no chances and doing the best job possible under trying circumstances.

Over in Havana harbor, Commander A. J. Dallas also heard the news. As commander of the United States West Indies Squadron he had the responsibility to take charge of any demands made upon him for the defense of the country. He immediately went into action. After ordering all the marines he could spare from the fleet to Tampa Bay, and a detachment of seamen from the fleet to look after the light house at Cape Florida, he headed toward Key West in his flagship, the Constellation. By the 17th of January the marines were on the way to Fort Brooke where they would assist the army and the Territory of Florida until August of 1836. The immediate need was not just for the fleet vessels of the squadron but also shallow draught vessels of the Revenue Service to reach closer to land and penetrate up Florida’s shallow waterways. At the behest of Governor Eaton and Territorial Delegate Joseph White, the Treasury Department was prevailed upon to order its valuable cutters to aid in the military effort. The cutters Dexter, Washington and Dallas were soon doing yeoman’s service and providing much needed relief to coastal inhabitants and the army. Again, one of the missions of the cutters was to intercept any trade between the Spanish fishermen, Cuba and the Indians. Belton was much appreciative of the sending of the marines and the arrival of the cutters because he had discovered a plan to attack the fort by the combined forces of Micanopy, Osceola, and Little Cloud. The arrival of the marines may have been the deciding factor in why this attack did not materialize.

Governor Eaton was also seeking reinforcements for the beleaguered station and had even suggested that the army begin a campaign from Tampa moving down the western side of the peninsula. At the same time he offered the concept of sending troops to Charlotte Harbor and rescuing the inhabitants there, and then sending an
additional force up the Peace or Myacca Rivers in a sort of pincer movement to cut off the Indians in that area. In addition to the inhabitants of the fisheries in Charlotte Harbor, there was also a customs collector, Dr. Crews, and his family stationed there. Crews had already been a few years on the job at the time of the outbreak and knew most of the local Indian and Spanish fishermen. So far removed from any type of military force, he was in immediate danger and Charlotte Harbor was more isolated than Tampa Bay. It was thought that Eaton’s suggested plan of operations would crush the Indians on the west coast and save the inhabitants and collector at the same time. 

The arrival of the marines under Lieutenant N.S. Waldron was one of the more important events in forestalling an attack by the Seminoles and their allies. With detachments from the Constellation and the St. Louis, it was an obvious signal that other troops were on the way. Arriving aboard the Vandalia and the other transports, this force greatly augmented the numbers visible to spies. The Vandalia remained in the harbor, too, which added an imposing spectacle for the attackers to contemplate. With the almost daily arrival of supplies from the numerous transports the Seminole leadership was quick to realize that other troops and ships would soon be in the area. The obvious build up of men and materiel could only mean one thing to this enlightened group, it was time to rethink their strategy.

The obvious landing of the forces of General Edmund P. Gaines at Fort Brooke probably signified the end of any real danger to the fort and nearby settlers. However, his landing almost did away with the post! In a letter to Captain Thomas Webb, commander of the Vandalia, Gaines outlined his immediate plans. In this letter of February 10, 1836, Gaines proposed using the marines and crews of the navy to transfer the men, inhabitants and Indians from the post to the empty transport ships in the harbor for better security. He asked the captain if he would allow this action to take place under the protective guns of his proud ship. Gaines was contemplating using the entire garrison force, including the marines, to go to the relief of the forces at Fort Drane (Clinch’s partially fortified plantation home in northern Marion County). Gaines was still thinking of abandoning the post on the 13th of February when Captain Webb notified Dallas of the proposal. With the arrival of the Louisiana Volunteers under General Persifor Smith, the need for the garrison troops was lessened and it may be presumed that this arrival saved the fort for the time being.

As word of the Seminole attacks in Florida reached the rest of the nation, the people of the neighboring and other southern states began to volunteer for service in Florida. These fresh troops were under few illusions as to the nature of the enemy. In its January 29, 1836 edition, the prominent National Intelligencer noted the tenacity of the Seminoles and their allies: “The Indians themselves, heretofore a conquered people, and from whose energy no danger was apprehended, have been profiting from the false security of the whites. Gaining experience from past defeats, and putting into exercise their whole skill and resources, have on a sudden started up a courageous and determined host.” The paper continued in noting the tactics of the Seminoles: “Nor have these rude sons of the forest displayed any want of skill or foresight; on the contrary, they have manifested a wary dissimulation, celerity of movement, courage in attacking and a skill in retreating, subversive of all our military plans.” This wily enemy of white civilization lay in wait for the volunteers from South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and the District of Columbia. The nation was also getting ready to send in one of its finest generals, Winfield Scott, a true hero of the War of 1812.

Gaines’ force soon left Tampa Bay and headed toward the Withlacoochee where it would meet with great difficulty and be rescued by the very forces it had come to relieve. At the same time, General Winfield Scott was amassing a large force of regulars and volunteers for a push from the eastern portion of the Territory in an elaborate plan to entrap the Seminoles in a three-pronged pincer movement. In early March, Colonel William Lindsay, Second Artillery, arrived in camp and proceeded to organize for the coming campaign. Sent by Scott to move his troops, the marines and a large contingent of Alabama volunteers northward toward the Cove of the Withlacoochee, Lindsay had difficulty from the beginning. By the 13th of March, the column had begun to move out toward the final staging.
area, Chocachatti (near modern Brooksville). On the way, Lindsay decided to construct a post closer to their line of march and ordered the building of Fort Alabama (later the site of Fort Foster). Arriving too late, and wasting time and energy firing guns and scouting the area, the force never made its rendezvous and turned around and headed back to Tampa on the 31st of March. They fought one major skirmish along the way, but accomplished very little except an almost continual quarreling among the volunteers and Colonel Lindsay. This was indicative of what would happen to other grand plans during this war.28

By mid-March 1836, the forces of the United States Army and Navy were working to expand their knowledge of the area and to send out several reconnaissance missions. One of the earliest was led by U.S. Navy Lieutenant Levin M. Powell, who led a detachment of twenty-five men to the shores of the Manatee River. The mission discovered no Indians at the alleged camp, but did see signs of recent activity including a large number of foot prints and cattle tracks. All seemed headed toward the area of Sarasota Bay or further south.29 By the end of the month, the command at Tampa Bay was confident enough to send Lieutenant Powell with a force from the Vandalia northward to the Anclote River after reexamining the Manatee River to the head of boat navigation. Most of the islands between the Manatee River and the Anclote River were explored for recent signs, but, again, they found nothing. Powell attributed the lack of signs on the Anclote Islands to their distance from the mainland, which made them difficult to access.30 The Seminoles and their allies had apparently fled inland to await their next battle.
Charlotte Harbor was examined at the end of March by the U. S. Revenue cutter Washington, under the command of Captain Ezekiel Jones. The command fell in with a number of Indians camped at the mouth of the Myacca River. About twenty-two Indians were seen in one body by the boat under Lieutenant Smith and numerous fires were seen in the distance. The two guides, both from Bunce's fishing ranchos, proceeded ahead of the main body of men and met with three of the "hostile" party. They soon recognized each other and entered into a parley. The two intrepid guides could not, however, ascertain the numbers or size of the other encampments without giving themselves away as enemy spies. On April 2nd, Lieutenant Powell left the Vandalia and proceeded to some of the islands in Charlotte Harbor. Here Powell, "found the inhabitants flying in every direction to escape the fury of the Indians." Upon examination of the collector's house, he found it burnt to the ground and no sign of Dr. Crews or his family. Sailing Master Stephen C. Rowan was then dispatched to the nearest mainland and came upon some of those responsible for the destruction. Rowan immediately attacked this band and reported killing two and taking one captive. The others escaped into the nearby woods where Rowan's small force dared not go. The report filed by Lieutenant Powell indicates that the inhabitants of "Josepa" Island were those he helped to rescue from the clutches of Wy-ho-kee and his band.

Captain M.P. Mix of the U.S.S. Concord wrote on the 30th of April that there were still some inhabitants left at Charlotte Harbor and that little protection could be offered them as the closest units were thirty miles away. He also wrote to A.J. Dallas that: "The Indians are assembling in all directions with a determination, as they threaten, to destroy all of the fisheries in the Bay and to burn the Transports at anchor in Hillsboro Harbor, or such of them as may remain after the departure of the volunteers." Mix was concerned that the troop strength and the condition of the stockade made it possible, in his opinion, for the Indians to succeed. Mix also noted that General Scott had requested that the Concord remain at anchor in the harbor and that Lieutenant Waldron's marines also stay aboard. He declared that a "state of anxiety" existed at Tampa Bay for want of knowledge of the next moves by the Seminoles and their allies. Such a state of anxiety was probably unfounded but it is very understandable given the successes of the Indians in resisting the United States' best generalship.

The high tensions at Tampa Bay were likely to be increased as the news from two other borders reached the area. In Texas, the revolution for independence was drawing much of the national press interest and there was daily discussion as to the role of the United States in that conflict. Many were in favor of sending regular troops into the foray and committing the navy to a full time blockade of Mexico. Regular voyages were undertaken by the navy to gather information and keep a watchful eye on the developments there. Most of these sailings came from the West Indies Squadron, thus drawing away needed naval strength from the Florida coasts. In the north, the revolt in Upper Canada also drew away some of the military attention and forces to guard against any problems arising there. This further depleted the military strength available to fight the Seminoles in Florida. As the total military might of the United States numbered less than ten thousand men at this time, any venture away from the center of action had possible dire consequences.

Even after the scoutings of the Manatee River by the forces under Lieutenant Powell, rumors still persisted about a large force of "Indian negroes" on that waterway. According to the St. Augustine Florida Herald for April 23, 1836: "Three days ago two Indian negroes were taken – from one of whom information was obtained of a negro fort on the Manatee River, about 15 miles south of Tampa Bay. Gen. Eustis had taken up the line of march to attack. It was not known how many negroes are in the fort, but the negro stated there was a large number." Such gossip spread among the territorial newspapers like a wild fire and added greatly to the anxieties of the population.

In mid-April, General Persifor Smith of the Louisiana Volunteers and Captain Ross of the U. S. Marines came on board the Dallas to discuss the coming short campaign up the Myacca River, where the enemy had been previously reported. From April 12th to April 17th the men from the Vandalia, Dallas and other smaller vessels prepared for their adventure. For a while there was some hope that the enemy would be found
but after the troops' departure on the 18th of April, little could be expected. Dr. Crews' body, and that of his assistant, had been found and it was presumed that most of those responsible had already left the area. This was confirmed when General Smith and his forces returned with nothing much to show for their extended efforts. According to the Florida Herald for May 12, 1836, "... there seems to be an opinion that the Indian captured by Lieut. Powell committed the outrage on Dr. Crews, as he was employed in the boat of Dr. C. and was heard to make threats to that effect previously."34

By the end of April Fort Brooke was beginning to take on a familiar appearance. According to one writer, stationed at "Shelton Camp, (16 miles from Tampa Bay)," the fort was a breath of fresh air: "Tampa is a beautiful place, with orange and pride of India trees in blossom, the sight of which was reviving to us thirsty travelers in the desert. The air acted on my lungs like exhilarating gas."35 John Erwin of the Tennessee volunteers also observed the fort: "Fort Brooke situated on Tampa Bay was a military post of considerable importance as it was situated within the hollow of a curve in the bay it was three parts out of the four surrounded by water; its watch towers and sentinel could be seen a mile before reaching it, our camp was one mile north of the fort." Erwin also raved about the abundance of oysters nearby which he claimed made his men "better and fatter immediately."36 These observations differ significantly from those recorded by earlier visitors prior to the change in location. The old fort, at the time of the earliest expeditions against the Seminoles, was described by W.F. Rowles, surgeon for the Creek Volunteers. Writing in the Southron magazine in 1841, the doctor recalled: "The appearance of Fort Brooke during the stay of the Creeks was singularly animating. The Barracks and store houses are built facing the bay and the river Hillsboro, and present long rows of low combustible shanties, some of them whitewashed and neatly piled in with old staves of barrels, tiersces, &c. It was amusing," he continued, "to see the taste and ingenuity of our officers exerted in such a place, with such means, to make their quarters comfortable. The post was guarded by a circle of sentinels. The underbrush cut down for some rods towards the forest and beyond the Hillsboro." He too noted the watch towers and added that many of the tents were lining the old streets among the orange trees. Numerous cannon were to be seen pointing "ominously toward all the approaches."37 Alexander B. Meek noted in his journal the existence of the famed Live Oak trees and the numerous orange trees on the grounds. He compared it favorably to "an ornamental college green" and declared the post impregnable against any possible Indian attack.38 It should be remembered that most of the small settlement had been destroyed to create an open field of fire for the garrison. The settlement contained about thirty or forty families, all of whom were considered quite poor.39

The beginning of May brought on sickness and it was reported that Fort Brooke was no exception. According to the National Intelligencer for May 6, 1836, "There was 400 sick at Tampa Bay, and the climate was getting worse and worse for the Army." This report came on the heels of the Battle of Thonotosassa. Here the forces sent back to Fort Alabama to remove materiel and equipment were fired upon by the Seminoles while attempting to cross Thonotosassa Creek. It was the hardest fighting any of General Scott's forces faced in their time in Florida. Members of the Fourth Infantry and the Second Artillery were joined by the Alabama Volunteers under Colonel William Chisolm in a very spirited battle in which two whites were killed and twenty-five wounded (the majority of them from the volunteer ranks). The loss to the Seminoles and their allies is unknown. The fight lasted about an hour and ended with a charge with fixed bayonets by the regulars and volunteers. The battle also featured the use of cannon to some effect, an unusual occurrence in this war. The Indians had chosen their position well. It was on a curve in the creek lined with dense hammocks. The first fire, as is common in such battles, caused the most damage to the U.S. forces. The men then retired to Fort Brooke to recoup and refurbish themselves.40

May of 1836 not only signaled the onset of the "rainy season," but it also saw the beginning of the agitation to remove the marines back to Pensacola and other naval assignments. Major Henry Wilson, then commanding the fort, refused to release Waldron's marine detachment for other duties. He felt strongly that the security of the post would be compromised if the
Map of Tampa and Hillsborough Bay, showing Fort Brooke in the center at the mouth of the Hillsborough River. (Courtesy of the National Archives Microfilm Collection.)

marines left at this juncture. Captain Mix, of the Concord, disagreed with this assessment. Mix noted that there was a relative lull in activity for the marines and that much of their time was spent guarding William Bunce's rancho at the mouth of the bay. Wilson was waiting for either reinforcements or replacements for Lieutenant Waldron's valuable force. Until such time as either of these alternatives arrived, the major was not about to release the marines. [They did not leave until August of 1836.]41

One of the more humanitarian gestures found in this period of activity involved the removal of the families around Sarasota Bay, known locally as the Caldes Rancho. On May 8th, Lieutenant Charles P. Childs of the revenue cutter Washington was ordered to sail to Sarasota Bay and confer with "Old Caldes" or his son. He was to convey to them the danger to which they were exposed and advise them to move to either Tampa or to Bunce's Rancho were they could be afforded protection. The settlers were not eager to leave their homes and were afraid that the army would separate the families because many of the wives were Indian. Many residents of the settlement had already departed when Childs arrived; he did, however, observe about twenty individuals living there at that time. All were busy loading canoes, which were filled to capacity, and were riding low in the water. The only thing preventing the final departure was the weather.42

Early June found the army clearing out the ever growing shrubs and weeds from the open area. Making the post more inhabitable by larger numbers was also on the agenda of the officers. Gardens which had been neglected had to be tended and some of the early crops harvested. In addition,
three advanced redoubts were constructed at this time. Colonel Lindsay and his force were ordered on to Mobile, and his departure was met with approval by many in camp, especially the remaining troops from Alabama. The only Indian activity reported in early June was that of a few raiding parties who stole a number of cattle during night raids. But it was the sickness that worried Major Wilson, and he observed that the post had only one assistant surgeon, Dr. Reynolds. If this one medical officer should become ill, the remainder of the post would suffer. Like other shortages in the officer corps, the lack of medical officers was a severe handicap for the army serving in remote areas. Wilson requested a second medical officer for the post, however, the post did not receive one while he was in command.43

The usual diseases of the Florida summer hit the troops hard. The various fevers, “bilious,” “black vomit” and intermittent, played havoc on the health of the army and navy. The volunteers also suffered from the climate. Colonel John Warren commanded the Second Military District for the Florida Militia and reported, on June 9th, an outbreak of the “measles” among his troops.44 This is no longer a serious disease in this day and age, but it was deadly to the frontier settlers and military personnel. Mumps, too, made their appearance in Florida in the 1830s but did not reach Tampa Bay. The army, because of the fevers’ appearance in the summer months and the deadly affects it had on the troops, seldom campaigned in the “rainy season” in Florida. Not until Colonel William J. Worth took command in 1841 did Florida see a summer campaign.

The rainy season did bring on new administrative tasks for the commander and garrison at Fort Brooke. Money for the emigration of the Seminoles of Black Dirt's band and others had to be accounted for and rations distributed. Funding and rations for the “suffering inhabitants” also had to be allotted to the settlers seeking refuge in the area. One of the more emotionally difficult tasks remained to be accomplished; the selling of the effects of the soldiers killed in Dade's last battle and settling the debts of the officers, like Captain G.W. Gardiner. The proceeds from the sale of the effects usually went into the company fund handled by the company commander, but receipted through the paymaster general of the army.45 Such tasks were not welcomed by anyone in the company.

Fort Brooke and the settlements near Tampa Bay were relatively safe from the attacks of the Seminoles and their allies at the end of the first campaigns. The war had already seen the defeats of armies under Generals Clinch, Call, Gaines and Scott. Waiting in the future were the terms of Generals Thomas Jesup, Zachary Taylor, Walker Armistead and William Jenkins Worth. Six more years of guerrilla warfare remained ahead for the army, navy, marines and volunteers. The Second Seminole War was to be the longest continually fought and most expensive of all the wars the United States fought with its Native Americans. This war brought glory to none of the political or military leaders and played a role in the increasing agitation against slavery, just then beginning in the northern portion of the nation. The panic and terror in the Tampa Bay area during the first six months of the war subsided into a near routine of shuffling the troops into and out of the territory and seeing to the emigration of most of the Seminoles, blacks and Miccosukees to the west. Those who survived those first months of the war never forgot them. It was a time to try the souls of all men, women and children of both sides.
Dr. Joe Knetsch is a Government Analyst with the Bureau of Survey & Mapping, Division of State Lands with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in Tallahassee. He received his B.S. from Western Michigan University, his M.A. from Florida Atlantic University, and his Ph.D. from Florida State University. Dr. Knetsch has written a number of papers and articles on the history of Florida. In addition he has edited two books, is the author of a text on the history of Florida surveying, and is most recently the author of Florida's Seminole Wars 1817-1859 (Arcadia: 2003) in the Making of America Series from Arcadia Publishing. He has worked as the historian for Florida's Governor and Cabinet, and has served as the State's expert witness in cases involving land titles and navigable waterways. This is the ninth issue of The Sunland Tribune in which Dr. Knetsch's articles have appeared. The Sunland Tribune 18, 1992, featured his first article, "A Surveyor's Life: John Jackson in South Florida.

1. Letters Received by the Office of the Quartermaster General. Book 16, No. 23.A, 1836. Record Group 92, National Archives and Records Service. Copy from the Cooper Kirk Collection, Broward County Historical Commission, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.


5. John T. Sprague, The Origins, Progress and Conclusion of the Florida War (Tampa: Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, 2000), 91. This is a reprint of the original 1848 edition of Sprague with an excellent index and new introduction by the dean of Seminole War studies, John K. Mahon.


7. Chamberlin, Port Brooke, 7.


9. Ibid., 49. The letter, dated July 29, 1824, is from Governor William Pope Duval to the Secretary of War.


12. LRAG. Roll No. 117. Letter of January 5, 1836, Belton to "Commander of the Naval force at Pensacola."

13. Ibid., Second letter of January 5, 1836, Belton to Commanding Officer of the Naval force at Pensacola."


15. LRAG. Roll No. 122. Letter of January 7, 1836, Call to Eaton.


17. LRAG. Roll No. 117. Letter of January 14, 1836, Belton to Jones.


35. Charleston Courier, April 28, 1836.

36. John Erwin Diaries, Memoirs, etc. (Memoir, 1836) Satz's discussion in which Dr. Knetsch's articles have appeared. The Sunland Tribune 18, 1992, featured his first article, "A Surveyor's Life: John Jackson in South Florida."


41. LRAG. Roll 134. Letters of May 8 through 30, mostly those between Mix and Wilson.


43. LRAG. Roll 133. Letter of June 1, 1836, Wilson to Roger Jones. When Dr. Reynolds did finally receive a leave of absence, he was replaced by Dr. Lee, another assistant surgeon. See Wilson's letter of June 7, 1836 on Roll No. 134.


45. LRAG. Roll 128. Letter of July 6, 1836, James Morgan to Roger Jones; and LRAG. Roll 131. Letter of June 25, 1836, William Landers to J. B. Benjamin. (The latter gives an itemized account of Captain Gardiner's debts.)
German Prison Camp
In Dade City, Florida

Charles W. Arnade, Ph.D.

Dade City, the county seat of rural Pasco County, was not atypical of small Florida towns during World War II. Its proximity to Tampa, a little over thirty miles away, might have made Dade City somewhat more aware of the war. Tampa, with its excellent harbor and its new military bases, had become one of Florida's important locations in the war effort.

Dade City had a population of 2,561 people in the 1940 U.S. census, and 2,689 inhabitants in the 1945 Florida census. There were two railroad stations, one for the Atlantic Coast Line and the other for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad. There also was a Greyhound bus station. All three stations were important to the city and relatively busy. But already many people traveled to Tampa by car on well maintained roads. Naturally the war's gas rationing had limited these travels and the railroad and bus were good alternatives. Not many people went to the western part of the county that faces the Gulf of Mexico. That was still a mostly dormant region whereas today it is the most populous part. For example, New Port Richey then had just 923 inhabitants according to the 1945 census, adjacent Port Richey had 219. In the 1940 national census, Pasco County had 13,980 people, but the state census five year later gave the county a population of only 13,729.

The main economy in and around Dade City was citrus, cattle, and lumber. There was a large lumber mill in nearby Lecanto, and in Dade City, a dynamic citrus packing plant called Pasco Packing (which later became part of the Lyle's conglomerate). Dade City was a town of thoroughly Southern rural and political values. Strict racial segregation between "coloreds" and whites was strictly enforced. Whites were predominately of northern European stock. The first, and for long time only, Jewish family were refugees from Germany. The "coloreds" lived mainly across the railroad tracks. There were (as there still are) a considerable number of poor whites, a small but dynamic middle class of Anglo-Saxon roots and values, and a few wealthy families. The latter had achieved their privileged status by acquiring large tracts of land cheaply and converting them to citrus, cattle and lumber. Political power was within the framework of the all encompassing Democratic Party which locally was dominated by a few from the wealthy, mainly land-owning, families.

A noticeable landmark, about six miles west from Dade City, was the Benedictine St. Leo Abbey founded in 1889 (the only Catholic abbey in Florida). The abbey community was in the incorporated city of St. Leo. Adjacent to St. Leo is the town of San Antonio, which was founded as a Catholic colony in 1881, and by the beginning of World War II, had around 500 inhabitants. Both San Antonio and St. Leo, from their beginnings, had a large German ethnic presence. In its earliest days San Antonio had an excellent weekly German newspaper, the Florida Staats-Zeitung (a complete set is in the St. Leo Abbey archives, and a microfilm copy is in the USF Library's Special Collections). During World War II, their roots did not deter those of German origin from rallying around the American flag, as had been the case during World War I when there was considerable sympathy for Germany. Some nostalgia and adherence to German values and culture always continued. The German people, in contrast to the Japanese, were admired. It was Hitler and his accomplices who were detested.

If Dade City was somewhat removed from the war, except for those families who had sons and daughters in the armed forces,
the unexpected establishment of a branch German prison camp on the very outskirts of the town in 1944, with a prisoner population of around 350, brought the war close to home. It certainly was one of the most important events during the war for small, rural Dade City. The camp was located about one mile from downtown, very close to the geographic divide of the “white” and “colored” areas. Somehow this divide still exists today, but to a lesser extent. It is now mostly between poor and affluent. Many of the poor are still blacks, and now include Hispanics, who are more recent arrivals.

In the last three decades Pasco County has had a phenomenal growth, with a 2001 population of 362,658. In the 2000 census, Dade City had 6,100 inhabitants, and the city claimed in January 2003 to have 6,400. It must be stated that the incorporated area of the city is much larger than it was during World War II. The western part of the county, which was sparsely developed at the time of the war, has now become the most populous area. In 2000, New Port Richey had 16,117 inhabitants and nearby Port Richey had 3,021. This means that the Richey urban area now has more inhabitants than the whole county had during World War II.

In 1976, the Pasco County Commission established the Pasco County Historical Preservation Board. This board of members, appointed by the county commission, has diligently designated historical sites and structures, and placed historical markers at selected sites. Two charter members of the board (the author was one) realized that a great number of the 1980s inhabitants of Dade City were unaware of the existence of a wartime German prison camp in Dade City. There remained only a few persons who had seen and had contact with the camp and its prisoners during its years of operation. The two of us suggested, over fifteen years ago, that a historical marker should be placed at the site, though none of the wooden structures of the camp remained. It was a slow process to convince the whole board. When this was accomplished, the historical verification had to be undertaken. The board is very careful that accuracy is attained. In October 1995, the marker was dedicated and one ex-prisoner of the camp came from Germany to attend the ceremony.

When it was decided to place a historical
marker at the camp site, much research had to be done. The preservation board had to rely partially on oral history. There were only a few persons still alive in Dade City who had had contact with the camp and its prisoners, and only a small number of surviving prisoners were known. Since oral history is often unreliable, documentary sources were used to give increased accuracy. When I first found out about the camp in the 1960s, I was given contradictory information, including the actual location of the camp. We were lucky to get the cooperation of Ms. Martha Knapp, a retired teacher, who lives close to Dade City. For some years she had quietly undertaken the collection of data and even contacted some of the surviving Dade City POWs in Germany. At our suggestion, Ms. Knapp's files were donated to the USF Library's Special Collection, and are now identified as the "Knapp Collection." The Special Collections staff professionally arranged the material in two archival boxes, and it is available for public use in the library.

Certainly the Knapp Collection is not all inclusive. For a detailed research article more documentation is required from the U.S. National Archives, and other U.S. government sources, and also from the German military archives. Some statements from the German prisoners are available in the Knapp Collection. A planned reunion several years ago in Dade City of former prisoners did not succeed because of death and old age. The German POW who did return for the placing of the marker in 1995 has recently passed away. The Dade City residents who knew the POWs are also fading from the scene.

It must be stated that the Dade City prison compound was a branch camp administered from the central camp at Camp Blanding, the U.S. National Guard Post established in 1939 in Clay County. Camp Blanding was a huge multipurpose military camp during World War II. The story of the German prison camps in Florida has found a competent historian in Robert D. Billinger, Jr., Ruth Davis Horton Professor of History at Wingate University in North Carolina. About thirty years ago he published his first article in the Florida Historical Quarterly, later reproduced as a chapter in the 1993 book by St. Leo College Press dealing with World War II in Florida. In 1994, he published another article in the FHQ about the mother German prison at Camp Blanding. In 2000, Billinger published the book Hitler's Soldiers in the

Article from the Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, Florida, April 16, 1944.
(Courtesy of the author.)

Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida 1942-1946 (University Press of Florida, The Florida History and Culture Series, Gainesville). [This 263-page book was reviewed by the author in the summer 2001]
Another Nazi prisoner loose from Dade City

Another German prisoner of war was loose on the Florida West Coast yesterday after escaping from the Tampa Tribune association plant in Dade City.

The FBI and county officials joined in a search that spread to Tampa as it was believed the prisoner, Theodor Hermanns, might have jumped a freight train near the packing plant where he was employed.

The FBI said Hanne worked at the plant from 11 o'clock at night to 7 o'clock in the morning, and that he took someone between 8 and 8:15 o'clock in the morning.

He was a German artillery corporal before his capture in July, 1943. Although he speaks German only, he may have obtained enough English lessons in the war prisoner camp at Dade City to make himself understood in English, the FBI said. He had training as a mechanic.

Washed a Patch

At the time of the escape, he was wearing a patch over his right eye to cover a cut, and was wearing blue cap, possibly over a khaki uniform. All his clothes were scuffed with the orange initials, "FW."

He was described as being five feet seven inches tall, and he weighs 150 pounds. He has black hair, fair complexion with a few pimples and bumps on his face. His blonde hair is long, straight, and parted on the right side, hanging over his left eyebrow. His eyebrows are thick.

The FBI said he was not only unfriendly toward his captors, but he was unfriendly with fellow German prisoners.

Hanne is the third prisoner to escape from the Dade City area in recent weeks. Scherer, Gabriel and Harry Fischil, who escaped from a lumber camp north of Dade City early in January, were found locked in a railroad box car in the railroad yard in Jacksonville. Another prisoner, Fritz Droeschler, who escaped from the Orlando air base, was re-taken the same day when he was stopped in Dunedin, a Colleton farm house.

The issue of the "FHQ." It needs to be said that Billinger does not deal specifically with any of the 21 satellite camps distributed all over Florida that were administered from Camp Blanding (near Starke) and Camp Gordon Johnston (near Carabelle in Florida's Panhandle - smaller than Camp Blanding). The Dade City camp is mentioned only in passing as are most of the other satellite camps.

Florida housed about 10,000 German prisoners, representing less than 4% of the 378,000 German POWs in the U.S. It is interesting that few present Florida residents know that the state had POW camps. I teach at least 150 university students every year, and I cannot recall a single one mentioning the existence of these camps. Professor Billinger's excellent, and very readable book, received little publicity and hardly any reviews in Florida newspapers. Local studies of these local POW camps are in order. Historical markers such as the one in Dade City ought to be placed at locations in the other counties where camps existed.

Let me summarize the history of the German World War II POW camp in Dade City. It existed for only two years and usually housed over 300 prisoners. For example, in September 1945, it had 350 men. The first contingent arrived via the Atlantic Coast Line railroad in the spring of 1944. The prisoners - as in most of the other U.S. POW camps - stayed beyond the end of the war in Europe; the last men left the Dade City camp in January 1946. Most, if not all, of the prisoners came from the North African theater of war, remnants of the German Afrika Korps assault force under the command of the legendary General Rommel.

Dade City inhabitants were first informed of the presence of the German prisoners by the local weekly newspaper, the Dade City Banner, of April 14, 1944. The prisoners were put to work at the Pasco Packing citrus plant, and also at the Cummer Sons Cypress Company in nearby Lacoochee, which operated a large lumber mill. They received regular wages, but kept only a percentage while the balance went for the expenses of the camp. It soon became apparent that many of the prisoners were competent professionals who had been drafted into the elite expeditionary army corps that saw service in North Africa. Therefore, they were often asked by their camp supervisors to perform more skilled tasks. For example, a prisoner by the name of Heinz Fried was a talented artist. He painted a mural on the walls of the executive offices of Pasco Packing that is still there today. He also drew a huge orange on the company's old tower. (So far, no photo of the tower with this orange has come to light; there is hope that even-
tually one will be found.) Mr. Fried also sketched local citizens’ portraits, of which two have survived in personal possession.

As in many German prison camps, there was tension and even some minor violence between a few hard core Nazi prisoners and those who opposed them. A few prisoners held strong anti-Nazi sentiments and some even showed sympathy for the Allies. Evidence exists that the Dade City camp was relatively peaceful and, with very exceptions, the inmates cooperative; those who were not were shipped to other camps. The Dade City camp appears to have been one of the most agreeable and one of the least rigid POW camps in the U.S. Escapes were common in German prison camps in the U.S., but most escapees were caught. In Dade City, where prisoners had easy access to the outside, only four tried to escape. Two escaped in the first year and both were located at the nearby Withlacoochee River, where they had leisurely stopped to rest and fish. In January 1945, two more escaped and managed to reach Jacksonville, quite a distance, where they were recaptured. Their punishment was not too severe.

While, theoretically, fraternization with the locals was forbidden, much interaction took place. We are told of invitations for lunch with local families which were arranged in a roundabout way. Locals were curious and interested in Germany and German culture, partly because many of the original settlers in east Pasco County had been of German origin. Many of the prisoners were allowed to go on Sundays to church services at nearby St. Leo Abbey, which welcomed them. From its beginnings the abbey had many monks of German descent. After the mass, the prisoners were asked to join the monks for lunch. Even during the war, food at the abbey was plentiful and tasteful. The Lutheran prisoners went often to the Sunday services at Zion Lutheran Church in Tampa, where they too were well treated. Some local residents complained that the food served in the prison camp was better than they could afford or could obtain. They said that the prison commissary had items such as candy that they couldn’t buy because of rationing. Apparently conditions in the camp deteriorated after Germany’s surrender in 1945, as occurred in other prison camps in the U.S. In January 1946, the last prisoner left Dade City. Most of the Dade City prisoners were transported to Great Britain for further detention, and soon after the prisoners were transferred, the camp was closed. It became part of the history of Dade City and Pasco County, but soon was forgotten. Interest in the camp’s history was resurrected for two reasons: the return of some former prisoners as tourists for nostalgic reasons, and to locate friends they had made as prisoners, and the establishment of the Pasco County Historical Preservation and Restoration Committee in 1976.

The individual histories of the 21 branch German prison camps in Florida, administered from two central camps, still await local research by interested professional or amateur historians, journalists, or students for their theses or papers. Other than the one in Dade City, there were other camps located throughout central Florida in the towns of DeLand, Leesburg, Orlando, Winter Haven, and at Tampa’s Drew Field and MacDill Field. The other camps in north and south Florida ranged from Eglin Field in the Panhandle to Homestead south of Miami. I repeat, the history of these local prison camps is an ideal subject for a college seminar paper or even a master’s thesis. It will require patience and a careful search for data. Those who were prisoners and those who have memories of them are now few; soon they will all be gone. The availability to the public of the once restricted records in the Modern Military Branch Records Group in the U.S. National Archives facilitates such research. Unfortunately, as of this writing, there still are some restrictions limiting use of the German Federal Military Archives in Freiburg, Germany. Here in Dade City, we are lucky to have some oral testimonies of surviving German prisoners. Seven of them gathered in late 1997, in Stuttgart, but their planned 1998 reunion in Dade City did not materialize.

While there were, naturally, common elements in all the branch prison camps, each one had its individuality and uniqueness. These unique characteristics and histories should be found through research and presented in studies of the branch camps. Much information should be included such as the types of prisoners, whether they were captured in the same area, represented the same military branch, or if they were more diverse in other ways. Important, also, is their ideological makeup: fanatical supporters of Hitler, or lukewarm, or opposed to the Nazi regime – as were many in the Dade City
camp. The hierarchy of military ranks needs to be addressed. In the Dade City camp, most were officers. The attitude of the American supervisors (guards) is also important; in Dade City it ranged from correct to friendly. It should also be ascertained why a particular Florida locale was selected; Dade City was selected because of the existence of the large citrus packing plant and the large lumber company in closeby Lacoochee. Both needed workers, and these companies had clout with the government. The prison camp was closed when the American workers returned from the war; the prisoners were then shipped to England. Of pivotal importance is the attitude of the local inhabitants. It was positive in Dade City where many took a liking to Germans and German culture. As said, extensive fraternization took place.

In sum, the presence of a considerable number of Germans POWs in Florida is an interesting, but little known chapter in the state's history. What has been done to unearth the history of the Dade City camp needs to be repeated for the other satellite camps and given some publicity beyond the confines of the locality. Often there is only a short report in the local media, soon to be forgotten. Local history is the very basis of history.

ENDNOTE

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Dr. Arnade received his AA degree (equivalent) from Colegio La Salle, Cochabambs, Bolivia, BA and MA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Ph.D. from the University of Florida. Born in Goerlitz, Germany, Dr. Arnade has been married 54 years to Marjorie J. Arnade, and has eight children, and fourteen grandchildren. Dr. Arnade was a member of the charter faculty at USF, and though now retired after 50 years, continues to teach as one of the longest-serving professors in the Florida state university system.
The young Navy seaman lay snug in his tent among the Antarctic ice. He could hear his captain talk to a scientist in the next tent over. They talked about turning back after spending days reaching the base of the highest point in Antarctica, forbidding Mt. Erebus. The most active volcano in Antarctica, it was the men of the HMS *Nimrod* and Sir Ernest Shackleton's Expedition of 1908 who first braved its snow, ice and sub-zero cold to conquer the 12,500 foot height. "I was a strong, young, dumb guy," the man remembered over forty years later. "And I'm thinking to myself, I'll be damned. I came here to climb this mountain, and I'm gonna climb this mountain, even if I've got to [secretly] slide out of this tent, take my pack and go up that mountain."

Opposition from nature or authority figures rarely fazed Hudson 'Gene' Holloway's determination. "That thought," he said, "that reasoning, kind of went with me all of my life. Yes, there's authority, but I'm my own person, and I was prepared to make my own moves." Holloway must have convinced the captain, because he was allowed to continue the ascent with the one remaining climber. "We went on to climb the mountain..." Thus, in 1958, Holloway conquered the first of many challenges in his life when he looked into the sulfurous red glow at the summit of Mt. Erebus. Legendary explorers such as Scott, Shackleton, Byrd and Sir Edmund Hillary are inexplicably linked to the incredible beauty and unspeakable perils of Antarctic exploration. Only a select few men and women have climbed Erebus.¹

Fifteen years later, at age 35, Hudson 'Gene' Holloway conquered another mountain — he retired a millionaire. It should have been the end of his glorious rags to riches story, but it was only the beginning of a far different tale.

Jarring events ushered the United States into the 1980s. Revolution in Nicaragua, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and a hostage crisis in Iran brought the 1970s to a close. In Florida, the Mariel boatlift of Cuban refugees brought a new sense of urgency to the state. The tourism industry ran hot — and so did the drug trade.

Each age gets the heroes it deserves, and the new Gilded Age of the 1980s required something and someone different. It was a wild time, characterized by heavy deficit spending, dubious trickle-down economics and rising tensions in the Cold War. The hippies of yesteryear gave way to yuppies in search of excess and luxuries.

Tampa did not need more culture—city fathers seemed intent on destroying that. Authentic Florida was beyond passé. Ybor City lay in the ruins of corporate greed and urban renewal. Sprawling agribusiness interests devastated the Everglades. Busch Gardens inexplicably modeled itself on an African theme. Like much of Florida, Tampa specialized in the contrived. What Tampa needed was more: More to look at, more to overwhelm the senses, more food for less money, more exotic animals, more mystery and controversy.

It took a man of the moment to supply exactly what Tampa needed. It took a man of vision to supply such a peculiar concept to Tampa's restaurant market. It was called "The Sea Wolf," one of Tampa's most unusual and beautiful restaurants. Named after a Jack London novel set in the treacherous Pacific, it offered seafood dinners and
fixings of fancy, including antiques, art and animals. In his ambition, Holloway did not set out to just serve Busch Garden’s tourists – he sought open competition with the entertainment giant.

The entertainment did not stop with the Sea Wolf itself. With his freewheeling lifestyle, intoxicated antics and faked death, Holloway went from creating an attraction to being an attraction. This is not just a story of a businessman and his decisions, good and bad. It is a story of modern mythmaking, a story that reveals more about Tampa than it does of any single individual. The cast of characters: a hard-working public thirsty for heroes and novelty; a press that required human lives and stories to keep the media machine buzzing; a business world that hosted criminals as comfortably as gentlemen; and a Tampa so bored with its elite that it welcomed a rowdy newcomer as its pied piper. Only the story of one person can reveal all this and more: Hudson ‘Gene’ Holloway, Tampa’s own Sea Wolf.

Born into poverty in Tampa and partially raised in an oppressive foster home, Holloway grew up living in an old school bus. With his brothers, he helped his father fish for mullet and spent time living in a tarpaper shack on Tampa’s former Henderson Field. He dreamed of greater things and joined the U.S. Navy at the age of seventeen. “At that point in my life,” he said, “I didn’t even know what roast beef was. I thought hamburger was made out of pork.” He worked hard for ten solid years driving trucks after his navy discharge before becoming a successful seafood broker for a company called Standard Brands.

Holloway did not wait long before going into business for himself as a seafood broker. “I remember walking into Morrison’s restaurant chain. I was real apprehensive. Here I am, an uneducated guy walking into a big chain like this, and I see all these guys, these dudes that come and go in their big cars, and I had a yellow Nash Rambler in those days. Am I going to compete against
these people?" His independent career started shortly thereafter with an order for five truckloads of cherries. He arranged a good deal for Morrison’s, and the real challenges and opportunities began. He formed his own brokerage company called International Seafoods.  

Holloway proved himself to be a crafty businessman at the helm of his new venture. He played seafood suppliers against each other and traveled as far as Canada, Mexico and Iceland to find the best prices. Such competitive pricing and quality snagged Holloway some enviable clients, most of them massive chains: Red Lobster, Morrison’s, Maas Brothers, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. On any given day, International Seafoods sent out invoices as big as $1.5 million. When General Mills bought Red Lobster in 1973, they also bought International Seafoods, for over two million dollars. General Mills wrote a special clause into the contract to prevent immediate competition from Holloway: he could not operate in the seafood business for five years.  

Holloway intended to retire to life’s finer things, like fast boats, scuba diving, beautiful cars, skydiving, and gorgeous ladies. He established himself in Lakeland and bought a mansion there. He counted the area’s most prestigious business and political leaders among his friends and partners. An avid skydiver, Holloway met the former Miss Tampa, Debbie Jean Ponton, in 1974, at the Zephyrhills Parachute Center. Although she wasn’t his first love – Holloway had been married three times before – he claims it was “love at first sight.” Holloway’s personal jeweler lavished Ponton with whole racks of rings and bracelets. He picked her up in his private plane to beat Tampa’s swelling traffic jams. Holloway’s beautiful 10,000 square-foot Lakeland home had been featured in several national magazines, including Architectural Digest.  

To escape the hassles of local notoriety, new wife, Holloway dropped all pretense of retirement and embarked on a new journey, a new gamble.  

Gene Holloway seemed destined for great things, but he was not without a dark side. As a young man, Holloway read the Jack London novel The Sea-Wolf. The story concerned a privileged intellectual man shipwrecked in the Pacific. A brilliant and brutish sailor named Wolf Larsen – or the “Sea Wolf” – picks up the luckless protagonist. Once aboard Larsen’s schooner, Ghost, the protagonist leaves behind his physically and morally pampered world for one ruled by the cold indifference of nature and the cruelty of man. It took someone like Gene Holloway to draw inspiration for a business from such a novel. In 1977, Holloway opened a unique restaurant in Lakeland, and he tellingly named it the Sea Wolf. Shunning a sunny Floridian or Caribbean theme, he chose a darker seafaring motif. With incredibly intricate aged woodworking, animals live and stuffed, tasteful art and valuable antiques, the restaurant dazzled. Holloway’s carpenters employed woodworking techniques rarely seen commercially in
the U.S., using rare woods imported from all over the Americas. Using his knowledge and connections in the world of seafood, he obtained his ingredients at reasonable prices and passed them along to his customers. The Lakeland Sea Wolf met with instant success, but Holloway was just warming up to the idea. He confided to his wife that he was planning on “doing something grand that Tampa has never seen before.”8

In 1977, Holloway acquired property just down the street from Busch Gardens. The Treasureland Amusement Park had previously occupied the site. It was about to be replaced with a much larger attraction – the Sea Wolf. It was an ideal location for a flashy, eccentric eatery with low prices catering to the tourist trade. The same seafaring theme applied, but this time with a vengeance. The copious art and antiques were all original. Stained glass – the nation’s largest collection of Tiffany windows, obtained from a church in New York – added soft colors to the ambience. Designer furniture added a further touch of dignity and grace. Manicured gardens and rare birds created a wonderful view from the Garden Room. The décor itself was worth millions, perfectly marrying the rustic and refined. Holloway’s Tampa office, too, reflected his personality. To the right of his heavy wooden desk was a five-foot statue of Satan, reaching out for a soul with clawed hands, wings and horns. Another likeness of Satan hovered above his desk, carved in wood on the wall. Depictions of Christ graced two of the walls. Stained glass windows filtered in a soft, magical aura. Among all the antiques and religious imagery hung a contemporary portrait of a nude woman. Several rocks displayed in a small glass case were keepsakes from the dangerous mountain climbing trip in Antarctica.9

Holloway spared no effort or expense in assembling his dream. Unlike many old moneyed families, Holloway was no stranger to sweat and toil. He worked twelve-hour days supervising construction, manicuring the garden and cleaning. Debbie...
unfailingly supported him, consulted on décor, and kept the books during construction. The Tampa location would take up four times the size of the original. It took over a year to build, all in an age when a pre-fab McDonald's could be slapped together in two weeks.

On January 15, 1978, the Sea Wolf opened in Tampa and the crowds rushed in. In the first two months, the restaurant made a million dollars in sales. "Be prepared," St. Petersburg Times restaurant critic Ruth Gray warned, "to wander around the restaurant along with the masses, because you'll find loads of people." The restaurant's unusual visual attractions made a crowded visit seem worthwhile. Gray continued, "Your visit to the Sea Wolf will seem like an adventure because there is so much to look at. The entrance features a lion statue, plants, etched doors and so much more that it defies memory."

Such heavy crowds pressed in that Holloway employed a number system. Each party would be assigned a number and wait for it to appear on a video screen, a more subdued way to seat people than calling out their names. The first of the waiting areas was a simple lobby, while the second featured large aquariums stocked with a variety of fish, eels and sharks. The Teddy Roosevelt Bar-Lounge processed customers for a third time before seating, where customers gawked at a variety of stuffed animals. A Kodiak bear greeted visitors while a white mountain goat appeared under bright lights in a glass case. A mountain lion caught in mid-leap reached out with his claws to mounted heads of deer. Even with its three lobbies, the Sea Wolf's customers often spilled out onto the parking lot.

Of course, the fact that the food was good and relatively cheap drew repeated visits from locals. It also helped that Tampa had few good, high-profile restaurants at the time. One could start with Escargot Bourguignon, Clams Casino and Key West conch chowder. The Sea Wolf's still-novel salad bar featured marinated vegetables and other high-quality items. Customers found their seafood cooked to perfection. For an entrée, patrons had many choices, among them frog legs, Oysters Rockefeller, Alaskan king crab, and lobsters from Maine and South Africa. The "Shrimp ala Sea Wolf" was a rich pasta offering, with linguini covered with Louisiana shrimp, celery, and mushrooms cooked in a garlic sauce - all topped with bacon and provolone cheese. Customers especially enjoyed strawberry Daiquiris to wash down their dinners. It spoke volumes that Helen and Robert Richards, who made a living as fishermen, and later owned the Seabreeze Restaurant, went to the Sea Wolf whenever they didn't feel like cooking.

By April 1978, the crowds convinced Holloway to implement a $1 million expansion plan that would expand seating to 1,000 and space to 32,000 square feet. He boasted to the press, "I expect to have the largest restaurant in the south and ... one of the major tourist attractions in Florida by the end of next year." Holloway hoped to rival Busch Gardens for the distinction of being Florida's largest tourist attraction, second only to Disney World. Years later, Holloway claimed to have done just that. If his claim was true, the Sea Wolf would have had to attract over 2.4 million visitors that year.

Holloway had plenty to be proud of. His hard work had paid off. He had created an original restaurant concept that worked. Few restaurants in the country consistently drew so many people. The Sea Wolf garnered...
Gene Holloway and his wife, Debbie, promoted the Sea Wolf Restaurant with $5 gas coupons as a promotion during the gas crisis of the 1970s. Notice their pet tiger and cub at the gas pumps as cars line up behind them for free gas. (Photograph courtesy of Debbie Cazin.)

glowing reviews and grossed $5 million in its first year. It became the 8th largest restaurant in the U.S. by sales volume, and the highest-selling seafood restaurant. But as he walked around the sprawling restaurant just three weeks after its opening, he kept thinking to himself, “I could have done so much better.”

Overwhelmed

Holloway tried to run the Sea Wolf like a family, but the business had a way of revealing his dark side, the side that identified with Wolf Larsen. The perceived ineptitude and disloyalty of his workers annoyed him. The restaurant became a massive operation that no one person could run, a trap. Holloway had no one he could trust enough to run it for him. He used cameras to watch his workers. When employees tried to form a union, he fired all of the workers who were involved. One claimed that Holloway violently twisted his arm. Holloway allegedly threatened another with a vicious attack dog. The disgruntled employees picketed the Sea Wolf in protest. For once, Holloway had nothing to say to the press.

Holloway could not afford to ignore the press altogether. Sales fell sharply after his first smashing year in Tampa. If he expected to maintain his high volume, Holloway needed plenty of repeat customers. In a clever promotional campaign, he distributed coupons that allowed patrons to get $2-$5 of gasoline with a restaurant purchase of $20 or more. At the time of a gas shortage and crisis caused by poor U.S. relations with the Middle East, free gas was a very attractive bonus for diners. Holloway concentrated his promotional efforts from

“The loneliness of the man is slowly being borne in upon me. He seems consuming with the tremendous power that is in him and that seems never to have found adequate expression in works. He is as Lucifer would be, were that proud spirit banished to a society of soulless . . . ghosts.”

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week to week on different counties. Somehow he managed to secure enough fuel to fill his three 10,000 gallon tanks. On one Sunday alone, he gave away 650 gallons of gasoline. He blamed the rising cost of gas on weakening sales, but was more than breaking even with the new promotion. Holloway’s campaign paid dividends, and he still had hopes of bringing in $5 million as in the first year of operation. As 1979 wore on, however, the outlook did not look good. Sales continued to decline, and it had little to do with gasoline. With images of the Sea Wolf’s crowded triple lobby, many patrons must have decided they wanted a simpler dining experience. The novelty wore off. Fast.\textsuperscript{16}

Instead of cutting back operations or trying to save money, Holloway announced plans to expand into a larger shopping, dining and entertainment complex. He already had acquired 28 acres for the project that he dubbed “Condor Plaza” – once again modeled on a faraway theme, a bird that never flew over Florida. Holloway had his eye on additional property, because his latest sprawling dream would require considerable land. Besides offices and condominiums, the massive Plaza would include an entertainment complex called Wolf Larsen’s Good Time Emporium; several restaurants; Jack London Square, a shopping village constructed in 16th century Tudor style; and a towering hotel that would stretch sixty stories into the sky. The estimated price tag on Condor Plaza: a whopping $75 million.\textsuperscript{17}

Just as he grew impatient with retirement, Holloway tired of the effort the Sea Wolf required. He began using more and more valium, alcohol and recreational drugs to ease the stress. His marriage suffered from so much strain and the time they spent apart. A part of Holloway wanted to walk away from the entire endeavor, but it was too late for that. He had invested much more than his $2 million General Mills’ fortune on the Sea Wolf. It may have been a monster, but it was his monster. He had obsessed over its construction and perfection for two years, and while his mind told him to let it go, his pride could not disentangle itself from the Sea Wolf.

Gone were the days of twelve-hour shifts and sleeping in his office before the next day’s work. Holloway handed over the office duties to his unswervingly loyal secretary, Pat Patterson. “He was bored, tired with the restaurant,” she remembered. Holloway relished the chase and resented all else. “He wanted to build, build, build,” Patterson said. “I’ve seen him devise things, set up things. He’d be so enthusiastic about getting something operating until opening day, and then he was through with it.” Mrs. Holloway remembered, “It was such a large restaurant to operate and be involved with. It became a situation where neither one of us were in control of our lives.”\textsuperscript{18}

With his enthusiasm and profits waning, Holloway took on a new, more public role as the Sea Wolf’s promoter. Although he never found himself altogether comfortable as pitchman, he did his best. Inspired by the film \textit{Urban Cowboy} and the fashions of an antique dealer friend, Holloway appropriated a wardrobe of cowboy hats, buckskin and fur coats. He’d arrive at the restaurant in full pimp regalia, walking Bamboo, his wife’s pet cougar. He mingled and joked with customers and made novel drinks with crushed Oreos for baseball great Pete Rose and magnate George Steinbrenner. His new role as public relations guru gave him an opportunity to flaunt his fun-loving side. And, his outsized youthfullness. “He never wanted to be old,” secretary Pat Patterson said. “He never wanted to be fat.” He befriended his youngest and most impoverished employees. Holloway promoted eighteen year-old Ronnie Atherton from cook to manager shortly after they met, increasing his salary to over $20,000.

Yet, once again, a dark side lurked behind the friendly veneer. Holloway’s attentions were not free. He asked for favors and staunch loyalty in return. A master manipulator, Holloway boasted of his instinct for immediately sizing people up, how much they would tolerate and how far they could be bent. Patterson remembered, “He would spot it [weakness] immediately. The only thing he respected was strength and he always displayed that himself.” On the one hand, he recruited loyal young stooges. On the other, he kept company with older, disreputable friends, like drug traffickers. Either way, owing Holloway could lead friends and employees down a darker path than they might have bargained for.\textsuperscript{19}

Far away from those dark paths, Holloway often appeared on the television news to promote the Sea Wolf, wrestling his pet cougars and tigers for the cameras.
Behind the playful charade, the Sea Wolf lost money. To rival Busch Gardens, Holloway bought six Clydesdales to tow a carriage around the parking lot. A female employee drove the team of horses while dressed as a New York policeman, gun and all. He bought a full façade of All Angel's Church in New York. Workers unloaded truckloads of sculpted stone for the Condor Plaza that were never unpacked.

Holloway's personal life dissolved into a raucous parade of wild nights, booze and drugs. He drank heavily and went to drag shows at Ybor City's El Goya Lounge, a club for homosexuals, with ladies on both arms. Mrs. Holloway found the situation increasingly intolerable, and left her free-wheeling husband several times. He tested the bounds of civilized behavior but found none. In fact, the people he surrounded himself with encouraged it. He stumbled and urinated in front of the restaurant. He engaged in fire extinguisher fights across the bar. One night, customers found themselves watching Holloway's pet tiger eat pigeons in the garden.

The public responded to his antics and excesses with amused interest, but Holloway felt embattled and paranoid. As he went on with his flashy charade, Holloway plotted to sell the Sea Wolf. He entered into negotiations with at least one interested party, while his bankers applied pressure for their loans to be repaid. Holloway's shady goings-on slowly crept up on him as well, and rumors flew of his involvement in the underworld of drugs and crime. Holloway began buying assault weapons and pistols to augment his antique gun collection. He carried a gun at all times, preferring a hard-hitting .357 revolver. His firearms did not stop a criminal at the Sea Wolf in May of 1980. Customers leaving the restaurant found a gunman in the parking lot breaking into cars and robbing patrons. When fearful customers brought it to an employee's attention, two male workers went outside to stop him. Instead of making a citizen's arrest, the two men were wounded in the gunfire that ensued before the gunman ran off. After so much commotion in the restaurant, Holloway ran outside with a pistol. The perpetrator had already escaped. When interviewed by a newspaper reporter, Holloway said of the employees who were shot, "These two men just prove that all Americans aren't still cowards."21

The distinction was an important one for Holloway. Like many Americans, he became disillusioned when U.S. prestige suffered setbacks during the 1960s and 70s. America had seen disappointment and disgrace at the hands of Communist movements in Vietnam and Nicaragua, the Arab oil embargo and the hostage crisis in Iran. Holloway wanted to see a figure more like Wolf Larsen in the White House: fearing nothing, manipulating all, and carrying a big stick. But he did not imagine Reagan or even Carter as the president with those qualities – he imagined himself.

One day, while participating in a parade in St. Petersburg, Holloway gave an impromptu speech to onlookers. He railed against U.S. weakness abroad and stagnation at home. The spectators cheered him and shouted, "Holloway for President!" Their cheers gave him the idea to run for the nation's highest office. While his wife agreed with some of his political views, she was not amused by his self-nomination. "I tried to talk him out of it," she said. "By then he had gotten on such a big ego trip." Publicity campaign or serious political act, Holloway decided to see where his campaign would lead. "I've never been politically motivated before," Holloway admitted, "but I'm tired of the jellyfish in Washington. I'm tired of this country going downhill because of spineless leaders. Someone has got to stand up and do something."22

Appropriately, Holloway chose to represent Teddy Roosevelt's defunct Bull Moose Party, but he only heeded half of his predecessor's advice. He proposed to carry a big stick, but did not intend to speak softly. He dreamed of a televised ad made in Madison Square Garden, where he would deliver a fiery speech to the empty auditorium, "a combination between Billy Graham and Adolph Hitler." When his speech ended, a lone applause would ring out, and the camera would zoom to the back of the stands, where Uncle Sam stood, pointing at Holloway and intoning, "America needs you, Holloway!" Many thought his bid for the presidency was a joke, but he didn't treat it like one. In April 1980, Holloway sold his Lakeland Sea Wolf and cancelled expansion plans in Tampa to finance his presidential campaign, or so he said. "America is headed for deep trouble," he predicted. "We are faced not only with serious economic and
energy problems at home, but with a decaying respect around the world as a power to be dealt with.” Among his many proposals, Holloway intended to roll back all prices to 1975 levels.23

He probably would have liked to turn his whole life back to “1975 levels.” Since then, his marriage had fallen apart, debts had climbed, dreams had crumbled and his state of mind had spiraled downward. The Sea Wolf’s financial situation deteriorated as quickly as his personal life, beginning when the restaurant’s first comptroller embezzled $75,000 from the restaurant. Contrary to claims of making millions, the Sea Wolf actually lost over $60,000 since its opening in 1979. He was behind on mortgage payments. The November presidential election came and went without Holloway on the ballot. His wife filed for divorce at about the time of the election. Just being Gene Holloway must have seemed like quite a burden to him on one wild night when he ran from his office screaming, “I am Teddy Roosevelt!”24

More than peeved bankers seemed out to get Holloway as his life careened into 1981. A Tampa Tribune article listed a litany of health code complaints against the Sea Wolf. Holloway’s restaurant had been cited by the Hillsborough County Health Department eleven times in two years. A customer found a “tooth-like object” in a seafood casserole, and another found a band-aid in a salad. Others complained of terrible tastes and odors at the Sea Wolf.25

A recurring stink of a different kind haunted Holloway’s personal life. He and
Debbie had patched things up after she had filed for divorce the year before. But on April 24, 1981, Debbie filed again, complaining of threats and abuse to herself and others. A friend later testified that something else led to the breakup: Holloway insisted upon using her pet cougars in a televised skydiving exhibition. She had to flee with her leopard in her car to avoid a televised disaster.26

When the sun rose on April 25, the day after Debbie filed for divorce, flames consumed the couple's car and mansion in Thonotosassa. Finding the burnt house wreaking of gasoline, the police suspected arson and began an investigation. When questioned, Holloway claimed he knew nothing of the fire. The night that Debbie filed for divorce, Holloway threw a party for his employees. After getting a ride to the restaurant, he spent the night in his office.27

Or at least that was his official story when questioned later by police. An associate told a different story, that Holloway had torched the house and called a friend for a ride. "Let's get out of here," Holloway said as he climbed into the pickup truck. "Let that bitch have the farm now." Holloway cancelled his life insurance policy and obtained a new $6 million policy that did not name his wife as a beneficiary. All the time, a Tampa bank was demanding payment on a $585,000 loan.28

Other debts were being collected around town, with more violent consequences. On May 18, police found a strangled corpse in the bushes of a roadside ditch beside State Road 581. The dead man was identified as Robert Walker, leader of the "Walker Organization," a notorious drug ring that
imported huge amounts of marijuana and cocaine from South America. Walker's smugglers flew the drugs into North Tampa Airport in Land O' Lakes. Investigators had long suspected some sort of business relationship between Holloway and Walker.29

The heat finally closed in on Walker in March, when Federal police raided the airport. The police arrested Walker and the courts indicted twenty-one accomplices. Walker's arrest was the kiss of death. To keep him from blowing the lid off the lucrative smuggling ring, gangsters quietly disposed of the dethroned drug lord.30

Zephyrhills pilot Jeffery Lane Searles ran the airport in Walker's absence, but not for long. Holloway and Searles were old skydiving friends, and Searles had been busted a decade before with 3,700 pounds of marijuana. Police arrested another man with Searles that day: James Thrasher, another Holloway associate who assisted in running the airport.31

That summer, Searles made a flight to Phoenix in a Cessna. He visited someone in Phoenix who owed the operation money. When the debtor sold his car to pay back the loan, Searles deposited the check in the Sea Wolf's bank account. Police caught up with Searles in Phoenix and arrested him for running drugs from Tampa to Arizona. When arrested, he listed his occupation as purchasing agent for the Sea Wolf. Searles later skipped bail and resurfaced in the Cayman Islands, operating Apex Consulting Co., an import firm owned by Holloway.32

Because Searles could scarcely run North Tampa Airport from the Cayman Islands, a new owner had to be found. After obtaining the proper licenses, Holloway took over operations of the airport in July with an option to buy. Holloway designated none other than James Thrasher to run the airport, with Searles conveniently in the Cayman Islands running Apex Consulting. For drug trafficking, it was a match made in heaven.33

In June, just before he obtained ownership of the airport, Holloway advertised for armed, karate-trained bodyguards. Instead, he found twenty-year-old Sheree Patterson, who became his girlfriend. She looked just like Debbie. In August, he designated his two Cayman Islands corporations as the beneficiaries of his life insurance. Holloway also liquidated more than $600,000 in assets and took out another $500,000 in loans. Late in August, Holloway met with Jeffery Searles in the Cayman Islands. He brought along girlfriend/bodyguard Sheree Patterson and associate Marlene Padovan, an employee of the North Tampa airport. While Holloway basked in the Caribbean sun, secretary Pat Patterson made final arrangements to sell the Sea Wolf.34

While in the Cayman Islands, there was much to discuss: Holloway had a new plan.

**Overboard**

On August 28, 1981, Holloway left on a trip with girlfriend Sheree Patterson and associates James Thrasher and Marlene Padovan aboard the 44-foot rented yacht *Mamous*. The foursome embarked from Clearwater Marina and stopped for two days at Dinner Key Marina in Miami. After a leisurely cruise to the Keys, they stopped for dinner.35

The evening of September 4 was gentle, mild and moonless. Holloway had been drinking all afternoon. About three miles from the Keys, they enjoyed the dinner Padovan had made. At 9:39 p.m., Holloway went out for some air and tripped on a hatch cover. He pitched over the rail. For a moment, he clung to the rail with his hands, but finally fell into the dark waters. Padovan saw the fall and alerted the others. Thrasher activated a strong spotlight and caught a brief glimpse of Holloway. Just as Thrasher zeroed in on him, the spotlight went out, hampering the search. "He wasn't swimming," Thrasher later testified, "it was more like he was fighting the water."36

With the spotlight erratically blinking on and off, Thrasher lost Holloway in the strong currents. The crew tossed out two life jackets to him, but Thrasher later found both floating empty in the water, along with Holloway's cap. The area is known for strong currents emanating from the Gulf Stream, which flows nearby. The three witnesses later testified that Holloway's swimming suffered from a dislocated shoulder and two cracked ribs incurred in a sandlot football game. Thrasher calmly called the Coast Guard to report the incident. Within two minutes, the Coast Guard dispatched a chopper and boat to the scene to seek out the body. Just as the search parties arrived, they saw a distant profile of another yacht pulling away.37

Patterson became hysterical and hugged a life preserver. Padovan said of Patterson, "She never talked about it. It was like she..."
was in a daze, like she was lost.” A Monroe County sheriff's deputy said, “the sharks and turtles could take care of it [the body].” Holloway's brother Gale spent thousands of dollars searching the waters around the Keys, but found no body. His family prepared for the worst. Holloway was officially "missing" and the press was abuzz with tales of intrigue.36

Back at the Sea Wolf, speculation mounted. A hostess said, “You can ask anybody in this restaurant. Nobody believes he's dead.”39

In any case, the Sea Wolf did not suffer in Holloway's absence, because he no longer ran it. Former Campbell's Soup executive Bob Dourney leased the restaurant on September 2. Two days later, Dourney received a call in the middle of the night saying that Holloway drowned off the Keys. Although the change seemed very sudden, the lease had been in the making for a year. While Holloway ran for president in 1980, he quietly urged Pat Patterson to sell the Sea Wolf. Dourney approached as an interested party and signed the first contract - a lease with an option to buy - in August 1980, for the Sea Wolf and some adjoining property.40

Dourney wanted a large restaurant in the Tampa Bay area because of the region's impressive growth. He had never heard of Holloway until he found the Sea Wolf. He fell in love with the restaurant at first sight: the antiques, the art, the different moody rooms. Dourney did his best to make the Sea Wolf a worthwhile investment. He required employees to take training classes, reduced items on the menu, and started ordering produce locally. Dourney activated a security system and sent a form letter to 10,000 customers, introducing the new management. His improvements turned the restaurant around in one short month. By mid-October, he claimed the Sea Wolf took in 41% more money than it had under Holloway.41

But, Dourney had much more trouble on his hands than a little tinkering at the Sea Wolf. Holloway's departure ushered in a wave of violence and chaos that Dourney couldn't have imagined when he signed the lease. A rash of burglaries began on September 21, when vandals burned papers in the Sea Wolf, stole change from the registers, and ran off with a talking parrot valued at $2000. The culprit of one of the break-ins was later discovered to be Gregory Lee Ponton, Debbie's brother. In October, when a female employee tried to drive home, all the tires on her car fell off. The lug nuts had been removed during her shift.42

Pranks of that sort were the least the female witnesses to Holloway's disappearance had to worry about. While driving her car, a gunman shot at Marlene Padovan about a week after Holloway went missing. Nine days later, another shooting occurred near Sheree Patterson's home, but the gunman had the wrong target. Patterson lived at 1741 West Powhatan Avenue. The gunman shot at a similar-looking woman in a similar-looking car in front of 1731 West Powhatan. Perhaps wisely so, Patterson was far away visiting acquaintances in Tennessee. Authorities would be unable to find her for many months. While the bullets flew, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement opened several investigations of Holloway's associates for a variety of serious crimes. Instead of dodging bullets, Thrasher submitted to a polygraph test for investigators.43

Holloway may have been absent, but his
financial and legal troubles had not fallen overboard with him. After the court declared Holloway an absentee, wife Debbie and secretary Pat Patterson both offered to handle his estate. The presiding judge appointed retired accountant Fred T. Rodgers to the job. Rodgers reportedly told the press, "I don't think I'm going to find a tremendous amount of money." Rodgers did find enough to provide for back pay, some minor debts, and a bill incurred from the purchase of a gold cap for Holloway's pet tiger's tooth. The massive Condor Complex was officially shelved.  

 Gene Goneaway's  
 Escapade  

Holloway never even got wet. He wasn't even onboard the boat when he supposedly fell from it. While the Coast Guard searched off the Keys for a body on September 4, a very much alive Gene Holloway registered at the Hotel Wellington in New York City as James LaRue. He obtained a passport and driver's license that bore that alias. Other than his assumed name, Holloway did very little to change his lifestyle. He seemed utterly unconcerned about being caught, acting as if he never did anything wrong. He made three phone calls to secretary Pat Patterson, after which she mailed payments to American Foundation Life Insurance and other insurance companies.  

The press later inferred that Holloway intended to collect a total of $16 million in insurance settlements, but it was not that simple. His "heavy duty" divorce played a major role. When it became clear that Debbie would file for divorce, Holloway moved to cancel the $10 million life insurance policy he bought for her. He assumed that cancellation of the policy would result when he stopped making payments. He now suspects that his broker did not want to lose the large policy, and advised Debbie to continue to make payments. In fact, Debbie's attorney advised her to make the payments to protect herself. Her reckless ex-husband seemed intent on ruining himself through debts to financiers, both legitimate and obscure. If Holloway were to meet a fate similar to the last owner of the North Tampa Airport, Debbie would be ruined as a co-signer of Holloway's mounting debts.  

Holloway obtained a new policy for $6 million, but soon discovered that the old $10 million policy was still in force. He suspected that Debbie had continued to pay the premiums throughout that turbulent summer. "I saw this insurance isn't cancelled out," he remembered, "my life was in danger. If I had not have left, I'd be a dead man. Someone would have gotten to me."  

Besides feeling unsafe, Holloway stood to lose a great deal of money in his upcoming divorce.
I knew there was too much of my assets on the table. I needed to shuffle some things around. I was ticked off with whoever let Debbie know that she needed to start making payments. Even then I knew that if I died, before someone were to pay off that much insurance, they'd probably want to see a body. I devised this plan that it would appear that I was dead, and that would stop the divorce proceedings, and if I got a chance to nail that goddamn insurance company along the way, that would be good too. That way [enemies] wouldn't be trying to nail my ass for $10 million.

The fugitive left the Big Apple with Sherry Patterson on September 30 for Niagara Falls. At one point, Patterson said of his escapade, “This is an impossible dream,” to which Holloway replied, “I know, I know.” He had already been on his “vacation” for four weeks. Frank Salceuski, Holloway’s chauffeur for the trip to Niagara Falls, would say so. The chauffeur must have gotten to know his passenger well before he returned to New York two days later. Salceuski returned to Niagara Falls with the limo a week later with a female friend of his own. The couple stayed at the luxurious Fallway Hotel for two nights, and Holloway paid the bills. Shortly after, the limousine company fired the fun-loving chauffeur.

While at the Fallway, Holloway sought a Canadian home to rent for the winter. On October 13, Stanley and Pat Fox welcomed a smiling American couple into their home. The Americans explained that they had just arrived from the Bahamas. James LaRue was a talker. Instead of a simple business discussion, the elderly Fox’s sat down to a meal of escargot, squid, steak and broccoli, all made by their guests. The Foxes were delighted when Mr. LaRue paid six month’s rent in cash. Although Mr. Fox made objections to conducting business on the Sabbath, he accepted the money. The payment covered their annual migration to Florida.

The Foxes left their house to the LaRues and Holloway had his hideout. One day his lady friend locked the keys in his rental car. Holloway broke the windshield to get the keys. Then she was gone. In need of a new female companion, Holloway went to a posh bar on a Saturday night. He found young, attractive Susan Wall there. A couple of dates later, Holloway spilled the beans about his status as a fugitive. Although she had fought hard to get her male-dominated sanitation job, Wall quit to follow him just ten days after they met.

“My God, what happened to you?” the hotel clerk asked the mysterious man with a bandaged face. The man replied with different stories on several occasions: a fall down a set of stairs, a plane crash, a car crash and a fist-fight. The truth was that on November 5, Holloway disappeared into the office of famous plastic surgeon Dr. Martin Unger. Beneath the bandages, Holloway got a nose job, hair transplant and wrinkles removed around his eyes. When he arrived at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto to recover, he requested a large safety deposit box for his vinyl satchel.

Beginning on November 10, Toronto police staked out Holloway’s room, hoping to collect evidence against drug traffickers. Instead they watched room service cart food to a hotel room for several days. “It was nothing but the best,” Toronto police Sergeant Jim Kellock said, “steak and eggs and fish.” The reclusive bandaged man would not leave his room as long as his face remained bruised.

On November 12, one week after his surgery, the mystery man left the Royal York with his latest female friend, Susan
Wall. As he walked to his car with vinyl satchel in hand, Toronto Police approached him for questioning and searched his car. The man carried $260,000 in cash, a list of Tampa telephone numbers, a Florida driver's license and eleven foil-wrapped nuggets of hashish with a brochure listing illegal drug prices. Holloway was placed under arrest and Toronto police soon found out who their suspect really was. Only then did Holloway discover that his clever alias, James LaRue, was the name of a wanted man in Canada.54

Making Waves

"He turned out to be quite a swell guy," Toronto Police Sergeant Young beamed when asked about Holloway. "He was laughing and joking and communicating well. He's a nice guy, really." Assistant U.S. Attorney Terry Bostic of Tampa could not accept how even the police could like a criminal so much. Bostic said, "My God, I can't believe the guy. It's almost like he's a folk hero. The man has been charged with a serious crime. I see no humor in that." Bankers, insurance brokers, and lawyers didn't find it a laughing matter, either. Perhaps that was why everyone else liked Holloway's story so much.55

When Bostic said, "I don't want to see any kind of circus surrounding the trial," it was far too late. Holloway kept telling interrogators that he swam ashore after his fall from the Mamous and hitchhiked to Niagara Falls. He had also taken to shouting to onlookers, "I love Canada!" But, Canada had had enough of Holloway. The Canadian courts dropped their drug charge so he could be tried for insurance fraud and arson in the United States. After five nights in jail, U.S. authorities shipped him under guard to Tampa.56

Tampa greeted Holloway with a celebration that, while not a hero's welcome, was a celebration nonetheless. "It's been a ball," disc jockey Jack Harris said, "a real neat media thing." A thing it was: not a celebration or protest, but a strange ritual of celebrity. A novelty song called "The Ballad of Gene Goneaway," became overnight WRBQ radio's most requested single. Radio stations held look-alike contests. When the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' offense floundered against Denver at Tampa Stadium, angry fans shouted to Head Coach John McKay, "Send in Holloway."57

Journalists and television reporters found themselves puzzled by the Holloway story, all in an age when reporters seeking the limelight were never at a loss for words. In order to make sense of his allure, journalists resorted to interviews with Tampa area radio disc jockeys. Cleveland Wheeler told reporters, "I think people like outlaws," and he was right. Women found Holloway sexy. "The women at the courthouse are crazy about him," a downtown legal worker said. Another woman swore to the Tribune that she would have traded her house and husband for a chance to run off to Canada with him.59

Steve Otto, who then wrote for the Tampa Times, probed deepest when he observed: "Tampa's rich aren't exactly known for being colorful or especially lavish with their money, except at Gasparilla when the laws on public drunkenness are largely overlooked." Finally, as if in exasperation, Otto complained, "Are we so small time and desperate for heroes that we have to glorify this medium-sized showoff [Holloway] and create the illusion that here is a guy who has done a number on the system so hooray for him?"58

The answer was, of course, yes. The one thing Otto overlooked was the fact that he saw fit to devote a column to the man. Creepy, sleep-inducing bluebloods aside, stressed-out workers across the country wished they could disappear, even if just for a vacation. The wishes of the masses often reflected their grim reality: that the blue-collar middle class was disappearing in America, squeezed between the working poor and an ever-shrinking sliver of filthy rich. While workers could steal a laugh because one guy rocked the boat, disc
jockey Scott Shannon chided, “Talk to the Metropolitan Bank. They don’t think it’s funny.” The cycle of enthusiasm between the icon and the public seemed for a while to feed on itself. Former associate Charles Miranda mused, “Knowing Gene Holloway, it makes me wonder who’s chasing who, and did we capture him or did he capture us.”

One could say that Holloway had captured the public, but they would be ignoring the solemnities of the courtroom. Holloway’s estate still lay in the hands of court-appointed Fred Rodgers. Rodgers only had $15,000 to work with to pay Holloway’s debts. By November, a scant $6,000 remained. “Everything can be salvaged,” Rodgers said, but what could be salvaged depended on the outcome of Holloway’s court cases.

The courts did not wait long before bringing Holloway’s cases forward. On November 23, Holloway was indicted on two counts of federal mail fraud charges and arson relating to the fiery destruction of his house in Thonotosassa. The indictment came before Holloway returned to Tampa to defend himself. He also faced possible charges of obstructing of justice, bank fraud, insurance fraud and conspiracy to make false statements to the Coast Guard. There was even talk of the IRS seizing the Sea Wolf. Holloway pleaded not guilty on December 1. U.S. Attorney Gary Betz thought Holloway “disappeared” because he owed money to a drug smuggling business partner. Allegedly, Holloway planned on paying off his debts with his life insurance proceeds payable upon proof of his death.

Bob Dourney endured a bumpy ride after leasing the restaurant in September. Dourney could only sigh to himself, “Oh well. So much for the low profile. The last thing you want to do when you take over a restaurant is announce there’s a new owner,” he explained. “But one of the first things we found ourselves doing is putting up a billboard out front saying the Sea Wolf is under new management.” Dourney seemed more peeved at the press than at burglars or Holloway. “Especially the way the media played up the so-called fire,” he said. “TV news had us burnt to the ground.” The press also repeatedly said that Holloway still owned the Sea Wolf. “That’s not true,” Dourney snorted. “He owns the property but we [my family] ... signed a five-year lease with him with an option to buy. He may own the property but the restaurant belongs to us.” To emphasize the change in ownership, Mr. Dourney changed the name of the restaurant to Dourney’s Sea Wolf.

The presiding judge lowered Holloway’s bail, and the legend went free. Holloway left the courthouse and a swarm of journalists asked for interviews. “It’s Gene!” a woman squealed. A crowd grew, many holding drinks from a nearby Christmas party. When asked how it felt to be free, he replied with a grin, “I’ve always been free, my man.” He was not likely to be free for long.

When asked at the time if he would change anything about his escapade, Holloway replied, “I really didn’t get to see all of Canada that I wanted. And I want to go back and have my face finished – you know, the sanding.” He planned to write novels and to go to Moscow to take in the Russian ballet. He even thought about joining some mercenaries in a military takeover of Seychelles, a small island nation off the coast of Africa. Holloway should have been thankful he was unable to participate in the coup – it failed miserably.

Then Holloway answered more seriously, “I, perhaps, would have taken my vacation a little differently. [It is] a little dark shadow in my life. But it’s an adventure. And I’m an adventurous person.” As his sun began to set, that “little dark shadow” would lengthen. He went on a coke-snorting and pill-popping binge that lasted five
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months. Debts mounted and the IRS auctioned off $1.2 million of Holloway's antiques.66

On January 18, 1982, Holloway's trial began for alleged insurance fraud and arson connected with his home on Lake Thonotosassa. A swirl of witnesses testified, but for every witness that testified against him, Holloway had someone to contradict their testimony. The evidence seemed to stack up against Holloway. He allegedly backed his Lincoln Continental into the garage, siphoned out the gas and spread it around the house. He removed the vanity plate off the car before the fire, and police found the gas cap in the back seat. Even Holloway's loyal secretary testified that he bragged about setting the fire.67

The jury announced the verdict on January 28, 1982. As a juror read, “Not guilty,” Holloway stood up and clapped loudly four times. His attorneys restrained him from further celebration as the judge threatened to hold him in contempt. The judge then pronounced him not guilty and congratulated him. As he left the courtroom, Holloway let out an unrestrained “Yahoo!” and made his way to a local bar for a tall drink of Jack Daniels whiskey.68

Q: “Why is it that you have not done great things in this world? With the power that is yours you might have risen to any height. Why, with all that wonderful strength, have you not done something? What was wrong? Did you lack ambition? Did you fall under temptation? What was the matter?”

A: “He led a lost cause, and he was not afraid of God’s thunderbolts. God was more powerful . . . But Lucifer was a free spirit. To serve was to suffocate. He preferred suffering in freedom to all happiness of a comfortable servility. He did not care to serve God. He cared to serve nothing. He was no figurehead. He stood on his own legs. He was an individual.”

Lost Fortunes

If Holloway thought he was free from further troubles in the courts, he was wrong. The first trial had tired him out, and he wanted to move on to life’s more pleasurable diversions. At the end of March 1982, Holloway and his three accomplices from the Mamous excursion agreed to a plea bargain. In return, prosecutors struck two accusations, that could not be proven from the ten-count indictment: that Holloway faked his death to get money for drug smuggling, and that he threatened to put out death contracts on uncooperative accomplices.

The day after pleading guilty, the judge sentenced Holloway to the maximum of five years in Federal prison. The charge: wire fraud. After faking his death, he called his secretary, allegedly to tell her to resume payments on his old $6 million insurance policy. “That’s what I went to prison for,” he remembered, “the phone call. I never collected any money, a claim was never made. I plea bargained with them, and that was a mistake.”69

Scheduled to leave for the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, Kentucky, Holloway remained unrepentant. “I’m going to end up making millions and millions of dollars off this,” Holloway enthused. “I’m writing a book.... It’s been said that four different companies want to do movies [on my story]. The people at Marlene’s lawyer’s firm said they would rather watch my story than Dallas on television every week.” When asked what he planned on doing before his incarceration, he said he’d eat a steak dinner, get into his Jacuzzi and “smooch with my Canadian sweetheart.” He couldn’t help adding, “I’m going to get drunk probably on a daily basis and get fatter.”70

Prison must have seemed like therapy when compared to what Bob Dourney
faced. The Sea Wolf floundered into 1982 with none of the crowds the restaurant drew three years before. At the time, Steve Otto of the Tampa Times said that his poor dining experience at Dourney's Sea Wolf was "not unlike going into the haunted mansion at Walt Disney World." The place was dark, nearly empty and all the food was greasy. Dourney had unwisely stopped frying with peanut oil. Holloway admitted later, "I knew before I leased the thing that Dourney wouldn't be able to handle the business. I really wasn't close to anybody — my brothers, I didn't want to get them involved. He made two [monthly] payments, that was it." 71

After just one year at the helm, Dourney was forced out of the Sea Wolf in August 1982 by a friend of Holloway's. New York antiques dealer Martin Ryan had assumed several of Holloway's debts and bought his antiques. Ryan filed a lawsuit alleging that Dourney had fallen behind on payments and forcibly cut Dourney out of the lease. After more legal wrangling, Dourney gave up the lease and moved out of the restaurant in the beginning of 1983. 72

When Ryan moved into the Sea Wolf on January 8, he found the bar taps had been left running, leaving the floors covered in sour beer. Raw meat and food rotted on the floors. The freezers and facilities showed signs of willful destruction and vandalism. "Everything in here, I purchased for him," Ryan boasted. "I stood here when the carpenter's saw were working on the lobby. I've been here since day one. It's a mystifying place. It sort of becomes a part of you." Ryan hired an Atlanta management company to run the Sea Wolf, but had not decided whether or not he wanted to sell it. Ryan knewingly added, "[T]he smartest thing for me to do would be to walk away from it." 73

But Ryan did not walk away. Tampa Tribune food writer Mary Scourtes reviewed the Sea Wolf while Martin Ryan owned it. He made the menu simple and more organized. However, the food quality suffered in the absence of Holloway's seafood connections. While chicken and beef dishes stood out, Scourtes found the seafood bad or tasteless. 74

Far away, Holloway rebounded from an awful first day in the "Federal Pen." He remembered, "I'm laying in bed, it's early in the morning shortly after I arrived. I said, 'I'm going to wake up in just a minute with this all a dream.' And I wake up in the morning and there's a guy [inmate] laying here, and over there some more, and that was a pretty bad moment." The prison's administration put Holloway in charge of the gardens and he planted marigold, zinnias, cockscombs and chrysanthemums. 75

When a prison psychologist wrote his profile of Holloway, he could have been summing up the hopes and fears of an entire generation. "He projects the image of an attractive, egocentric, experimenting adventurer who is willing to try the untried. However, he can also be viewed as a lonely, middle-aged man, overwhelmed by the complexities of his own creations and desperate in his attempt to retain a youthfulness inconsistent with his age." 76

In some respects, the psychologist's profile could not have been more accurate. Holloway said that while in prison, "I decided I was going to spend all my time improving myself." He ran, lifted weights and read books on personal fitness and nutrition. He lost 55 pounds and vowed to quit drinking and drugging for good. There would be no more chicken wings or French fries, either. He incessantly popped three dozen pills daily — mostly vitamins — and read his self-improvement bible, Life Extension. He planned on living to be 150 years old. Clearly, Holloway's habits had changed, but the goal — youth — was the same. 77

Perhaps the most extreme change of all was his new view on relationships. "I thought, what is it with you Holloway," he said, "can't you be loyal to a woman? Without loyalty, you don't have a relationship." His "Canadian sweetheart," Susan Wall, visited him about one thousand times during his stay of almost three years in the Lexington prison facility. Prison officials repeatedly refused to allow him to marry her while incarcerated. But on January 28, 1983, Holloway married his fifth wife in a quiet ceremony in the visiting room. He was 44 years old and she was 28. Back in Tampa, ex-wife Debbie Ponton struggled to pay off the debts she inherited from Holloway. 78

All this time, his fortune was ebbing away. "I thought I was going to be in prison for a year or two," he remembered later.

It turned out that I was there for a maximum of five years. I saw everything disappearing. I see all my lifetime's worth of
work going down the doggone drain. It probably would cause a lot of guys to jump off the bridge. I took it the way it was and it figured it was my fault for being there.  

After a brief transfer to the federal prison camp at Eglin Air Force Base, Holloway returned by bus to the Tampa Bay area in April 1985. He arrived to serve the last few months of his sentence in a work-release program at the Goodwill Industries halfway house in St. Petersburg. With no property and all of his money tied up in litigation, he seemed unperturbed when he visited his old haunt. Martin Ryan had sold the Sea Wolf and a restaurant named the Tobacco Company took its place. 

While visiting the restaurant, Holloway granted an interview to a reporter. He looked back at his disappearance as an ill-conceived idea spawned by an excess of whiskey and drugs. Although he had no regrets, he fumed when asked if the Sea Wolf was built with drug money. “If the feds had anything on me as far as where my money comes from, they’d still have me in prison,” Holloway explained. “When you’re successful, people want cop-outs for why they’re not successful, [like] ‘the reason he’s successful is he’s a crook.’” Holloway soon tired of dwelling on the past. “I’m not dead,” he said with evangelical zeal. “I plan to build other great things. I’m gonna be bigger and greater than I ever was.” He planned a new Sea Wolf and ten other restaurants in the Tampa Bay area, and he had yet to be released from custody. 

The Gambler 

Holloway, the gambler, was far from finished. He told the Tribune that he would seek a presidential pardon from the White House to clear his name. He found himself free in time to watch his most valuable treasures auctioned off to pay debts. Ten days after his release, a Lakeland warehouse put 350 of Holloway’s various antiques on sale to the public. Over one hundred creditors waited in line for a share of the proceeds. “We all lose possessions at one time or another,” Holloway mused. “I’m young. I have the opportunity to make them back.” Holloway must have felt like a lightweight as he watched the auction with just $100 in his pocket. 

Tampa saw the opening of two more Sea Wolves in quick succession, both failing because of lack of capital and friction with business partners. The new restaurants were mere shadows of the old Sea Wolf. Holloway scraped together a few plants and antiques for décor. Reporter Steve Otto could not stay away from the Holloway story for long. While visiting the new Sea Wolf in May, Otto saw Holloway refilling a large pot of chowder. “The chowder is wonderful,” he wrote. “If you want to go over and stare at Gene, be sure to get a bowl of that stuff to do it with, along with one of his blackened grouper steaks.” 

When Otto asked him is he still had a wild side, Holloway admitted, “Well, I’ve still got the fur coat and the feather hat hanging in the closet. But I think maybe I’ll let it stay there ... maybe as a reminder that I did those things, but that was another lifetime.” When asked on another occasion if his past would hurt his new business, he replied, “I served a million people over at the old Sea Wolf. People will come back for a good meal. I owe no apologies to anyone.” Otto, who once criticized the attention Holloway received from the press, saw fit to devote yet another column to the man he called a “show-off.” 

Less than two weeks after Tampa’s final Sea Wolf closed, Holloway grasped at his final straw, and Joe Redner was his name. Redner ran several, popular, adult entertainment clubs in the Tampa Bay area featuring “exotic” female dancers. Moralizing Christians condemned Redner as a messenger of the devil. It was an unholy alliance made in a heathen’s heaven. Holloway, the notorious shadowy businessman modeled after a character in a Jack London novel; and Redner, the man who sold glimpses of flesh as a commodity. Both were legends of sorts. Holloway had been featured on television, radio and in newspapers for deeds good, bad and ugly. Redner fought countless legal battles to stay in business and claimed to have been arrested more than one hundred times. Redner’s supporters often sported “Leave Joe Alone!” bumper stickers on their cars. It seemed strangely appropriate that they became partners in a scheme to open a restaurant and a strip bar in Citrus County. 

In the end, Holloway and Citrus County just didn’t mix, and neither did he and
Redner. They did indeed open a $5 million Sea Wolf in Homosassa. Holloway then became embroiled in a series of legal squabbles that never seemed to abate. Finally, Redner sued Holloway for back rent, the restaurant folded, and Holloway filed for bankruptcy.

He had tried to make it happen again: he used all of his connections, know-how, tricks and cunning, but the magic was gone. The Sea Wolf had sailed its final turbulent voyage.

Conclusion

Holloway heard the news on the radio one day. In 1990, a year after Holloway's final restaurant failed, the old Tampa Sea Wolf building was destroyed by arson in a massive fire. All the aged wood and elaborate carvings went up in smoke, never to return. Holloway drove by the site, but did not stop that day. Instead, several nights later, he gathered some ashes as a souvenir. He would have felt sad, but he had put the restaurant business behind him for good.86

In 1995, the same ill-fated site on Busch Boulevard was home to the $3.2 million China Coast restaurant. The China Coast chain went out of business before construction was complete. Still, the building went up, never to host a meal for anyone. The site remained strangely “cursed,” but Holloway never lingered far away.87

Separated from his Canadian sweetheart and abandoned by his business partners, Holloway stayed true to form and continued his journey alone, just as he had on Mt. Erebus so many years before. In 1992, some friends asked for his help to search an old Caribbean shipwreck for gold. His friends seemed more interested in drinking at the local bars than in finding bars of gold, so he became a lone treasure hunter. He secured sensitive equipment for his boat to scour the waters of the Gulf. Holloway discovered another lucrative treasure as his new career began - meteorites.88

On a hot afternoon in June 2002, Holloway took a cloth bag off of the floor of his SUV. He carefully unwrapped the contents from a series of cloth layers and handed me a heavy, blackened meteorite. He had already sawed off a small sliver, a sample for a California university, and the cut revealed a metal interior as bright and smooth as chrome.

Holloway appeared to share many of the same qualities. His exterior did not have the luster of earlier days, although he still appeared young for his age. It was only when I took a small sliver of the man in the form of an interview that I could see his smooth, shining interior. The beaming smile was unexpected from such a soft-spoken man. His skin slightly weathered by the sun and his arms still thick and strong, perhaps Gene Holloway has finally found his true calling - alas, a treasure-hunting Sea Wolf.

ENDNOTES

Andrew T. Huse earned his M.A. in History from the University of South Florida and is a program assistant and researcher at the USF Libraries Florida Studies Center. He specializes in Florida, Latin America, international affairs, and social history. "Tampa's Own Sea Wolf: Hudson 'Gene' Holloway" is the third of his articles to appear in The Sunland Tribune. "Tampa and World War II: A Culinary Crossroads" and "The Ignoble Experiment: Restaurants and Prohibition in Tampa" appeared in volumes 2001 and 2002, respectively. He co-authored The Seabreeze by the Bay Cookbook and is currently writing a social history of Tampa focused on its restaurants. He is pursuing a degree in library and information science.

1. Interview with Hudson “Gene” Holloway in Tampa, June 6, 2002.
2. Ibid.
4. Holloway interview; “Caging Tampa’s Sea Wolf,” 36; Tampa Daily Times, 1/26/82; Tampa Tribune, 11/18/81.
5. Interview with Debra Cazin at Francesco’s, Tampa, 4/18/2002.
7. Tampa Daily Times, 1/26/82.
8. Cazin interview.
10. St. Petersburg Times, 9/15/78.
11. Holloway interview.
12. Sea Wolf menu, courtesy of Gene Holloway; Phone interview with Helen Richards, 6/7/02; Tampa Daily Times, 4/10/78; St. Petersburg Times, 9/15/78.
13. Tampa Daily Times, 4/10/78.
15. Tampa Tribune, 3/7/79.
18. Tampa Tribune, 9/13/81; Cazin interview.
23. Holloway interview; Holloway campaign literature, USF Special Collections.
25. Tampa Tribune, 3/12/81.
27. Tampa Daily Times, 1/26/82.
29. Tampa Tribune, 9/16/81.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Tampa Daily Times, 10/23/81, 9/23/81; Tampa Tribune, 10/13/81.
34. Tampa Tribune, 11/14/81, 11/19/81, 12/9/81; St. Petersburg Times, 11/14/81; Tampa Daily Times, 3/26/82.
35. Tampa Daily Times, 12/9/81.
40. Tampa Daily Times, 11/20/81, 10/12/81.
41. Ibid.
42. Tampa Daily Times, 10/12/81, 10/22/81.
43. Tampa Daily Times, 10/12/81, 9/24/81; St. Petersburg Times, 11/14/81.
44. Tampa Daily Times, 9/24/81, 10/20/81.
45. Tampa Daily Times, 12/10/81.
46. Interview with Debbie Cazin, in Tampa, July 9, 2003.
47. Interview with Gene Holloway, in Tampa, October 8, 2002.
48. Ibid.
50. Tampa Daily Times, 11/16/81.
52. Tampa Daily Times, 11/14/81, 11/13/81.
54. Ibid., 11/13/81, 5/5/85.
59. Tampa Daily Times, 11/19/81.
63. Tampa Daily Times, 11/20/81.
The Henry B. Plant Museum Opens Its Archives To Reveal Rare Photographs Of The Tampa Bay Hotel

The Victorian Railroad Resort that defined the Elegant Frontier . . .

TAMPA BAY HOTEL - WEST ENTRANCE  Four men are shown in this photograph parked in the driveway of the Tampa Bay Hotel's west entrance. The car is a 1903 Oldsmobile Curved Dash Runabout. Built from 1901-1907 by the Olds Motor Works company of Lansing, Michigan, this Curved Dash may have been sold by Tampa's own Oldsmobile dealer, Fred Ferman, who had been awarded the franchise in 1902. Original cost? $650. Can the two liveried drivers and their passengers in back be identified?
The Tampa Bay Casino, shown in this photo by A. Witteman, NY, from the hotel's 1910 brochure, was constructed on the grounds of the hotel in 1896. The Casino, which stood along the Hillsborough River, was Tampa's first performing arts venue. Famous actors, musicians and entertainers such as John Philip Sousa, Anna Pavlova, Booker T. Washington, Ignace Paderewski, Sarah Bernhardt, Nellie Melba, and Minnie Maddern Fiske were among the celebrities who appeared. Tampa's first full-length movie, *The Birth of a Nation*, complete with a 100-piece orchestra was shown to a packed house in the Casino. Fire destroyed the Casino in 1941.
HOTEL EXTERIOR - EAST SIDE In this 1890 photo of the hotel by DeWaal, the veranda balustrade on the east side of the building is not yet complete. While the Tampa Bay Hotel was under construction, Henry and Margaret Plant traveled extensively in Europe to purchase furnishings for the hotel. Monumental sculptures, Oriental floor vases, French clocks, and opulent furniture, paintings and tapestries are but some of the objects that filled 41 train cars destined for the hotel. Close examination reveals ceramic garden seats placed along the walkway. They can now been seen in the museum’s exhibit The Garden and Garden Furnishings.
The hotel racetrack was the site for horse racing and, by 1904, the parade for the Gasparilla festival that is staged each year in Tampa. In this photo from 1895, the hotel can be seen in the distance across the track. The photographer would be standing near today’s North Boulevard, and the University of Tampa’s Art and Polly Pepin Stadium and new university dormitories are located on this site. Notice the bicycles leaning against the fence, a popular form of transportation in the 1890s.
TAMPA BAY HOTEL BILLBOARD This photograph of a billboard for the Tampa Bay Hotel was taken January 18, 1927, by the Burgert Brothers’ photography studio. Notice the Tampa Bay Hotel billboard, Jack’s Place roadside stand, serving hamburgers, hot dogs, coffee and pies, and the sign for Green Gable Tourist Camp. To date, the street and exact location remain unidentified. Any ideas? Open from December through April, the hotel offered a luxurious oasis from the frozen north.
TENNIS COURTS A Stereoview by Keystone View Co. of the tennis courts in 1899. This card was viewed through a stereoscope, a hand-held device that creates a three-dimensional image of the two pictures. Tennis was a popular sport at the Tampa Bay Hotel. Dr. James Dwight, the “father of lawn tennis,” attended the hotel opening in 1891 to promote the game. The tennis courts were located on the west side of the building; the area is now the University of Tampa staff and faculty parking lot.
HOTEL EXTERIOR—WEST SIDE In this rare 1892 cabinet card by photographer J.C. Field of the west side of the Tampa Bay Hotel, horse-drawn carriages can be seen through the trees. The Tampa Bay Hotel offered a variety of activities to entertain guests. Hunting and fishing were available through the hotel’s own guide. Golf, tennis, horse racing, dancing, boating and swimming were popular as well. The hotel operated for forty
years and hosted such notables as Babe Ruth, Thomas Edison, Teddy Roosevelt, Clara Barton, Winston Churchill, Frederic Remington, Gloria Swanson, Richard Harding Davis, John Jacob Astor, Stephen Crane, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Grover Cleveland, and thousands of nameless affluent and adventurous travelers.
VERANDA - EAST SIDE In an era of conspicuous consumption, prosperous guests who visited the Tampa Bay Hotel delighted in an ambience that matched and even surpassed their everyday surroundings at home. The graceful veranda on the east side of the hotel facing the Hillsborough River was a popular spot for relaxing, visiting, or enjoying an afternoon concert. Plant engaged the services of New York architect J.A. Wood to design the Tampa Bay Hotel. Wood designed a luxurious resort built in the style of a Moorish palace, which emphasized its exotic locale and captured the imagination of its guests. It cost $2.5 million to build and another half-million to furnish. The hotel was the most modern of its day. Electric lighting, private baths, telephones and elevators were some of its amenities. Steel rails embedded in poured concrete floors made the structure virtually fireproof.

(Photographs courtesy of Susan Carter, Curator and Registrar, Henry B. Plant Museum.)
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2003 Deaths of Note

July 9 - JACK MOORE, Ph.D., 69, was the co-recipient of the 1993 D.B. McKay Award. Dr. Moore's academic career stretched more than four decades. A retired professor at the University of South Florida, he was the coauthor of Pioneer Commercial Photography (University Press of Florida, 1992), the story of Tampa's Burgert Bros. photography enterprise and their photographic record of Tampa's history and culture. Dr. Moore was instrumental in the creation of USF's American Studies department and served as its chair for 14 years. The recipient of numerous awards, he was the author of several articles and works of fiction, and books on W.E.B. DuBois and Joe DiMaggio. He retired from USF in 2002.

September 6 - CHARLES E. BENNETT, 92, was the 1989 recipient of the D.B. McKay Award. Mr. Bennett served the Jacksonville area for 44 years in the U.S. House of Representatives. The author of several books on Florida history, including Settlement of Florida, Twelve on the River St. Johns, Florida's "French" Revolution 1793-1795, and Southernmost Battlefields of the Revolution, he was the second longest-tenured member of the House when he retired in 1993. Mr. Bennett, a graduate of the University of Florida law school, and recipient of the Silver and Bronze Stars for heroism in World War II, first entered Congress in 1948, and was proud to have been the sponsor of legislation in 1955 making "In God We Trust" the U.S. motto, and requiring it to be included on all currency and coins. He retired in 1992.

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Hampton Dunn 1973, 1974
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Mrs. Bettie Nelson 1976, 1977
Dr. L. Glenn Westfall 1978
Mrs. Leslie McClain 1979
R. Randolph Stevens 1982, 1983
Richard S. Clarke 1984, 1985
Nancy N. Skemp 1986, 1987
Samuel L. Latimer* 1988
Terry L. Greenhalgh 1989
James Judy 1990
George B. Howell III 1991, 1992
Charles C. Jordan 1993
Mrs. Barbara G. Reeves 1993
Charles A. Brown 1994, 1995
Ralph N. Beaver 1997
Paul R. Pizzo 2001, 2002

*Deceased
Frank R. North, Sr.
Recipient of the 2003 D.B. McKay Award

The 2003 recipient of the D.B. McKay Award is Frank R. North, Sr., Director of Corporate Marketing Communications of the Ferman Motor Car Company.

The 32nd recipient of this prestigious award was born at Bolling Field, Washington, DC., to a career United States Air Force officer. Growing up in a military family, Mr. North traveled the country, lived in seven states, and in Japan, and attended eleven public schools in 12 years. Learning about our nation’s history began at a very early age, and a deep love for Tampa’s history, where his mother was born and parents were married during World War II, was instilled in him from birth; Tampa remained the family’s permanent home address throughout all their travels and military assignments.

Mr. North has enjoyed a diverse and interesting 30-year career in photography, graphic arts, publishing and retail advertising. A fine arts major in college, he began a long association with photography and the exacting production of dye-transfer photographs in the late 1960s. Mr. North worked in the darkroom and behind the camera as a photographer in Florida, New Jersey and New York City until embarking on a career in publishing and retail advertising in 1979. He managed catalog, book and retail advertising production for major specialty retailers, grocers and publishers such as Montgomery Ward, Strawbridge & Clothier, Waldbaums Supermarkets and Hearst Books - which included production of MOTOR Books for the automotive service industry. He was art director and managing editor of a variety of firearms related books and catalogs published by Stoeger Publishing Company, owned by Sako of Finland. He is the author of “Simeon North: The First Fifty Years Of American Firearms,” Shooter’s Bible 1984, 65th Anniversary Edition.

Mr. North joined New Jersey-based Herman’s Sporting Goods, Inc., a W.R. Grace company, in 1984 – then the nation’s largest sporting goods retailer with 245 stores in 39 states – and was head of creative, merchandising services and promotions until 1990, when he relocated to Tampa. He became Vice President/Director of Client Services for Clarity Communications, Inc., a full service advertising agency with clients such as Smith & Asso., Tampa Bay Downs and the Precision automobile dealerships.

He joined the Ferman Motor Car Company in 1998, and oversees all corporate marketing functions, and administers the company’s community relations and charitable funding through the Ferman Community Partnership. Ferman, founded in Tampa in 1895, is the largest, privately-owned automotive retail group on Florida’s West Coast, and is ranked 48th in the nation.

Mr. North is keenly involved with his church, Hyde Park United Methodist, and a number of civic and community organizations including the United Way, Gulf Coast Museum of Art, USF Institute for Research in Art, and the Tampa Bay History Center. In 1992, he joined the board of directors of the Tampa Historical Society, served ten years, and was elected to three terms as president (1998-1999-2000). Mr. North accepted the position of editor of the Society’s annual journal of history, The Sunland Tribune, in 1997, and has volunteered countless hours to its editing, design and production. This year marks his sixth issue.

Mr. North has served on the board of trustees of the Tampa Bay History Center since 1998. He is secretary, chairs the marketing committee and the University of South Florida committee, which oversees the exciting and innovative partnership formed with USF Libraries, Florida Studies Center and the USF Foundation.

Mr. North and his wife, Diane, live in Tampa’s historic Hyde Park neighborhood. Frank is very proud of his two children, Kristin, married to Charles Eugene “Gene” Howes, and Frank R. ‘Chip,’ Jr., a third-generation Henry B. Plant High School graduate and an architecture student at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI.

For his significant contributions to Florida history, Frank R. North, Sr. is the recipient of the Tampa Historical Society’s 2003 D.B. McKay Award.
## Past Recipients of the D.B. McKay Award

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<td>1973</td>
<td>State Senator David McClain</td>
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<td>Circuit Court Judge Lames R. Knott</td>
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<td>Jack Moore* and Robert Snyder</td>
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<td>Dr. James Covington</td>
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<td>Mel Fisher</td>
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<td>Marjory Stoneman Douglas*</td>
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<td>Frank Garcia</td>
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<td>Former Governor Leroy Collins*</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Honorable Dick Greco</td>
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<td>Doyle E. Carlton, Jr.*</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Leland M. Hawes, Jr.</td>
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