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[Transcriber's Note: Interview starts mid-sentence.]

Gary Mormino (GM): —and Hampton Dunn in his lovely home in Carrollwood. And Hampton, why don't we start? We were discussing just a minute ago one of the legendary figures of Tampa—indeed Florida, in newspaper circles—Mr. D.B. McKay.¹ He called himself the Colonel, is that right? Colonel D.B. McKay.

Hampton Dunn (HD): Colonel, yeah.

GM: Would you reminisce for a few minutes about the Colonel and your relationship with him?

HD: Yes, indeed, I would be glad to. He was a man I admire very much. When I came to Tampa—actually, I didn't get—I came down here in 1935, in the fall of thirty-five [1935] and went to the University of Tampa. [I] had a full scholarship to handle the publicity for the Spartans of the day. And this was in the depth of the Depression, and man, I needed any help I could get. And before the end of that year while I was working full time at the old *Tampa Daily Times*, which was Mr. McKay's paper.

GM: Right.

HD: However, he had—in 1933, Ralph Nicholson and David Smiley had come to town and had an option to buy the *Times*, a five-year thing it was. But they had taken over operation of the paper. And Mr. McKay was still around and would write an occasional editorial. And in 1938, the Smiley-Nicholson took up the option and actually bought the *Times*, and Mr. McKay was out. But he was a grand old gentleman. He was a good-

¹ Donald Brenham McKay (1868-1960) served two terms as mayor of Tampa, from 1910 to 1920 and from 1928 to 1931. He was appointed County Historian in 1949 and wrote numerous historical articles for the *Tampa Tribune*.

looking guy: big, rather heavy-set, and pretty white hair and a perfect Southern gentleman that you could know. And he was of the old-line family around here, McKays. I'm not sure that he was born in Tampa, but he certainly had lived here an awful long time. He came to the *Times*, I think, prior to the Spanish-American War of 1898.

GM: Right.

HD: Must have been 1940 or forty-one [1941] when MacDill [Air Force Base] got started.² I interviewed Mr. McKay about Tampa during the Spanish-American War days. At that time he was editor of the *Tampa Times* then. But he was a kindly gentleman and certainly public-spirited. I think he really liked politics as much as he liked newspapers.

GM: Was he not a five-time mayor?

HD: Three times.

GM: Three-time mayor.

HD: But I think the total is sixteen years in all.

GM: Right.

HD: And he spent so much time in politics that he started letting the paper run down.

GM: Right.

HD: I believe it got in debt to the International Banking Company, and that's how this Smiley-Nicholson came in here without a dime and took it over. But Mr. McKay was always active in the Elks Club. And he used to spend a lot of time down there.

GM: Right.

HD: And I visited with him quite a bit. What I like about him, there was, as you say, a giant in journalism and I was just a brand new cub reporter. I mean, the greenest there was. And yet he was very gentle, very kind to me—

GM: And how old were you in thirty-five [1935], when you arrived in Tampa?

HD: I was nineteen or so.

GM: Nineteen. And you began a full-time job with the *Tampa Times*?

HD: That's right. It lasted twenty-two years.

² During the Spanish-American War (1898), because of its strategic location, Tampa was chosen as a rendezvous point for troops heading south to help Cuba gain independence from Spain. Official records report a formal dedication date of MacDill AFB as April 16, 1941.

GM: Give us kind of a capsule description of Tampa. First of all, where did you come from? And then kind of a capsule description, and your first impressions of Tampa.

HD: Yeah. Well, I was born and reared in Florida, Citrus County, about sixty miles [north] in a little town of Floral City. The county seat is Inverness. I was born and reared there. My father was a phosphate miner, and that was in the mining days when we were living there. I graduated from high school there, then went up to Mercer University up in Macon, Georgia, and had gone back for a second year when I got this offer to come down here.

The university was brand new. It had moved over into the old Tampa Bay Hotel in 1933 and became a full, four-year college at that time.³ This was 1935, so it was still brand new.

GM: Had they made the complete adjustment over? Were there remnants of the hotel there?

HD: Oh, yeah. There was still a lot of the furniture, the old wicker chairs. And they were using a lot of it. Some of the football players and everybody on scholarship, including me, lived up in what was called the Rat's Nest—Rat Hole, which is the old servants' quarters. It seemed—I remember the first time I went back there I thought it was miles and miles and miles up, back steps and all that. But it was some of the old—yeah, some of the old bedroom furniture and all this was being used. But they were, bit by bit, converting it into an educational institution.

The first president was Fred Spaulding, who had been principal of Hillsborough High School. They started it as a junior college at night at Hillsborough High School, and then in thirty-three [1933] when it was incorporated into a full four-year college, they moved over to the university.

GM: Right.

HD: And used the old—mainly the first floor as the classrooms and offices, administrative offices.

GM: Was Tampa a big town to you, coming from Citrus County?

HD: Oh, yeah. It was a big town. Yeah. It was a big city.

GM: (laughs)

HD: It certainly was, because Floral City was maybe five hundred, six hundred people. In Tampa, I believe in 1920, there was little over a hundred thousand, maybe. Or in 1930, rather. And it had streetcars, you know, and to me that was always a sign of a big city.

³ Tampa Bay Hotel is now Plant Hall at the Henry B. Plant Museum, a U.S. National Historic Landmark.

GM: Right.

HD: And the downtown was bustling. It had all of the stores. All the stores were down there and it was—everybody worked a full week. I mean, Monday through Saturday. And I worked even more than that, because as a reporter for an afternoon newspaper, we'd have to get up and get going early. And I would be—I'd check in at maybe seven o'clock, go by the police station or the sheriff's office or by the hospital and check that on the way in. And we worked all day long. Our last edition came out about 4:30. And then there's always night meetings to go to and things to cover. And if you're on a story, you stay with it.

GM: What was your first salary? Do you remember?

HD: Yes, I do remember. (laughs)

GM: (laughs)

HD: It started as a little probation. It was, like, ten dollars a week. And then I went on the payroll at \$12.50. And soon I got it all the way up to fifteen dollars. And—

GM: A 50 percent increase.

HD: Oh, yeah, we'd go—yeah, that's right. I think we would be increased in increments of about two dollars and a half a week.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: And I was young. I was single. But we got along.

GM: What was Tampa like? How would you describe Tampa? Tell me your most vivid impressions.

HD: Well, I was always impressed with the port and all the big ships coming in. I was impressed with the streetcars and the big stores. And I guess an impression that I got was when I was a boy growing up, we did come to Tampa. I had relatives [that] lived here, and I did come to Tampa. And I remember as a real young fellow, maybe just in high school, coming out here with my brother one night and saw all of those neon lights and all the bright lights. And man, that was really, really attractive to a cracker country boy. But I thought, like, it was a big, bustling growing city, and I sort of felt like being in on the action.

GM: Ybor City?

HD: Ybor City at that time had its character as strictly a Latin area. And of course the Columbia Restaurant was still—was big then, and the House of Las Novedades. I think

the Spanish park was going in. There was a lot of stores, a lot of action, a lot of activity. And the real Latin flavor. And at that time you had cigar factories going too, the cigar factories. And at that time, there was also a red-light district out there.

GM: The Scrub, or was this a different—?

HD: No, this was where the house of ill-repute [was].

GM: Oh. Well, was there—?

HD: An area—

GM: An area called the Scrub, though? Or was that receded—?

HD: Oh, the Scrub was in the Central Avenue, where the blacks lived.

GM: Yeah, right, right.

HD: Yeah. That was just to the west of the Ybor City area.

GM: Now, as a lost country boy, did you have any hesitation going into Ybor City in the thirties [1930s]? What was the impression from the Anglo community?

HD: It didn't bother me at all. I was—ignorance is bliss, you know, and maybe I wasn't aware there was any problem. And yeah, I used to go out there by myself and never had any real fears. Of course, now we get into the fact that there was a lot of crime and gambling. There was gambling going on, wide open, really. And, uh—

GM: In what forms?

HD: Mainly the sale of *bolita*.⁴ And then they also had the wheels and other games in back rooms. And also, for a short period there in the thirties [1930s], was the slot machines.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: Which was—actually, they were legalized, by the—I think it was the 1935 legislature. And it created such a stink that they repealed that the next year.⁵

GM: Any one particular group control crime in Tampa?

HD: Yeah. The old Charlie Wall gang is what they called it. Charlie Wall was the black sheep of a very prominent [family].⁶

⁴ A type of lottery, very popular in Tampa during the early twentieth century.

⁵ Slot machines were legalized in Tampa from 1935-1937, with the hope of boosting revenues during the Depression.

⁶ Charlie Wall was the reputed kingpin of Tampa's illegal *bolita* operations.

GM: This was Perry Wall and family and—⁷

HD: They were all families, then and now. The top people are related.

GM: And the Lykes too, is that right?⁸

HD: That's right. And—

GM: So, Charlie Wall was a criminal.

HD: Charlie Wall. And he was an educated gentleman, a very intelligent man. But he stayed in the life of the gambling thing and once testified to grand jury that he was the overlord of the underworld as some started saying. And he actually was. During the 1930s, his machine began running. It was a political-gambling combine.

Pat Whitaker was the great criminal lawyer and was—I don't think he was related to Charlie Wall, but he was certainly his attorney. And he was in the state senate. And really, one of the greatest lawyers I have ever seen in action. The man was eloquent, and he used [every] trick in the book to sway a jury. He had a brother named Tom; he was the brain. He would research and feed the Pat the legal background and Pat would do all the theatrics.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: He was very, very able. I believe—now, there are others who can probably give you a better fix on this, but it's my impression that the Spanish people were in charge of the gambling. They seemed to have control. And then as time went by, there seemed to be a transition and a takeover by the Italians.

GM: Was this [Santo] Trafficante in this group, or was this somebody else?

HD: Uh—Red Italiano, and yeah, that's right. It was—

GM: Charlie Wall was killed, wasn't he?

HD: Yeah, Charlie Wall was killed [in 1955]. But maybe it wasn't by one of the gangsters. It might have been by somebody in his camp.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: He had a bodyguard named Scarface Rivera, who's still around town.

⁷ Perry Wall (1867-1944) was mayor of Tampa from 1924 to 1928. He also served on the Tampa City Council and the Hillsborough County School Board, and was Tampa Harbormaster from 1932 to 1936.

⁸ The Lykes are a very prominent Tampa family who were at one point the largest landowners in Florida. They were also the owners of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company.

GM: Is that right? Do you think he might be interested in an interview?

HD: I am going to give you some names that you might—yeah. There's a pen right there.

GM: I am taking it that Scarface is not his real name. (chuckles)

HD: No, Scar—what was his first name? It will come to me, but—

GM: Yeah. Okay, I'll check—

HD: —Rivera.

GM: What would you say the transition was made when the Latin elements took over? What year was it around?

HD: You mean originally?

GM: Yeah, right. Ballpark figure.

HD: Charlie himself was part of the Spanish. I mean, that was when the Spanish was in charge. And I don't know—I guess. I really don't know about the very early days, but I would guess that this *bolita* game would be funding the cigar factories in and around the turn of the century.

GM: Would you say that—?

HD: When it got highly organized and became such a big business, it could have been coming with the Prohibition days, and of course it would be in the twenties [1920s] and thirties [1930s].

GM: From your perspective, would you say that the power of the Tampa mobsters emanated outward? I mean, was this a local power control, or did they have influence in the state or Miami?

HD: It was always my impression that it was pretty much a local—they might have had some ties with Havana, might have. Of course, as we got into the Italian influence, there has always been suspicion and accusations that it was part of the mafia on a nationwide basis—I mean a worldwide basis.

In 1951 when the Kefauver Committee came to town and they hauled in a lot of the politicians, they had on display at the Kefauver hearing a poster showing organized gambling in Tampa.⁹ And it shows a number racket, narcotics, some public officials and unsolved murders. This is a traumatic display.

⁹ The Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce, headed by Senator Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.). The committee traveled across the country from 1950 to 1951 investigating corruption and organized crime.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: And there they listed some of the twenty-two or more unsolved murders we had starting in the early thirties [1930s] and continuing right up into—well, up into World War II. Then after that was a couple more.

GM: Right.

HD: But most of these occurred in the thirties [1930s] there, starting about 1933. Once he

George Pozzetta: That's Charlie Wall.

HD: Yeah.

GP: See, what day—1944?

HD: Yeah. No, that's—he was shot at then. I think he was killed later on. Uh—yeah. That was attempted assassination. And that was—he was killed later on. I'd say in the late forties [1940s] or maybe the fifties [1950s], the early fifties [1950s]. But this shows—the first one was Angelo Massaro. And then it gets Mrs. Fernando Cerrara, I believe. Then you get into really the big ones.

There was a gambling house here called Tito and Rubio—Tito and Eddie. And Tito was killed, Gus Paris was killed, Eddie Virillo was killed, Mario Pearle, Ignacio Antinori—a whole string of unsolved murders. And these were done in professional gangland style. These guys were knocked off, and whoever was at that meant to get them and them only. They'd shoot a gangster with his wife seated right in the same car seat with him. They wouldn't touch her, but they would do a real thorough and complete job on them.

GM: Do you think Tampa had the impression of a pretty wide open town?

HD: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was wide open. There was some drug traffic. But in those days, was nothing like we have today, you know. (laughs)

GM: Right, yeah.

HD: But any of it was feared in those days, and there was some of it going on. And I think Charlie Wall was mixed up in that, in the very early part. But they did have a lot of these backroom parlors, gambling parlors. And *bolita*, man, that was available everywhere. I mean, a very sophisticated ladies living in Hyde Park could get *bolita* from their maids. And it seemed like everybody was doing it.

GM: Right. One description you haven't given so far—right, in thirty-five [1935]. This was, according to historical periods, still in the Depression. Was this obvious in Tampa?

HD: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, because what happened in was in 1929 the Citizens Bank, which was an old established financial institution and the real rock of the community, [crashed]. People had their life savings in there, and phew! One morning it went and closed its doors. And many people lost their life savings. I know people today who didn't get to go to college, because all of their monies went down the drain with the closing of that bank. And then there were certain others that went under: the First National and the Exchange.

GM: The Collins family had one or two, right?

HD: What's that?

GM: The Collins family? Do you believe—?

HD: Yeah, yeah.

GM: Right.

HD: But of course then the stock market blew in October of twenty-nine [1929] and they went from worse to really bad after that because they—and when President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt took over in 1933, he immediately set about trying to pull the country together again, and he started a lot of these relief programs: WPA [Works Progress Administration] and FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration] and PWA [Public Works Administration] and all the alphabet. The jobs were really, really hard to come by. There was a lot of unemployment here.

GM: There were lines—soup lines?

HD: Soup lines, absolutely. And the biggest employer, I guess, was the WPA. The WPA was a make-work thing. For a project, they would have to get a local sponsor to put up their small portion of the funds and the costs and the federal government made up the rest. They did a lot of good, really, and you always hear jokes about them sitting around resting on their shovels. Well, I am sure there was a lot of that (inaudible) going on.

But there was also a lot accomplished. One thing they did, they re-roofed the old Tampa Bay Hotel. They built the Bayshore Boulevard seawall. They built Peter O. Knight Airport and an administration building. All over town, you'll find projects that have (inaudible).

R.E.L. Chancey became mayor in 1933.¹⁰ So, he was up for re-election in nineteen—well, maybe it was 1931 when he became mayor. I guess it was. And in 1935 he was up for re-election, and I called it “Tampa's lawless day”—September 3, 1945. Here's a story I

¹⁰ Robert E. Lee Chancey (1880-1948) was elected mayor in 1931 and served until 1943. He was also Hillsborough County Solicitor before becoming mayor, and was president of the Hillsborough County Bar Association.

wrote for the *Tampa Tribune* on September 1, 1963. This is when it all came to a climax.

GM: (inaudible)

HD: We'll talk about that in a minute, because this was a confrontation between the city forces and the county forces in a struggle to take over the politics of the community and, with it, all of the gambling concessions.

GP: Who represented what faction?

HD: Well, Chancey was the incumbent mayor, so he was the city. And D.B. McKay, who had been the mayor, was trying to make a comeback. And he had the county courthouse crowd lined up because he was sheriff. And they all—in those days, we did have all kinds of frauds, election frauds and fraudulent registrations and actually had hot precincts and stealing of the ballot boxes and just everything. We were really at rock bottom, and it was obvious that we were going to have a collision that day between the two forces. The governor called out the National Guard. And to top it all off, we had a hurricane that day. It ripped in here, and this was September 1935. Mr. Chancey was re-elected.

GP: Is that the hurricane that went through the Keys and—is that the one?¹¹

HD: Uh, this one came up—yeah, that's right.

GP: That was the same one, though?

HD: It whipped on around into the Gulf into—it wasn't—it was more of a storm by the time it hit here, but it was pretty bad, and the rains and all. By the way, I had a narrative of the day's events that I just got from the National Guard headquarters.

GM: Is that right?

HD: Yeah. Telling about the National Guard's role in trying to keep peace that day.

GM: How did you do that, just by writing the National Guard?

HD: Well, my friend up there in the headquarters and I hoped to be thinking about putting that into the *Sunland Tribune*.

GM: Sure. Sure.

HD: Uh—

GM: To explain this, to kind of focus in on this issue from some kind of perspective, how

¹¹ The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane, which made landfall in the Florida Keys as a category 5 hurricane on September 2, 1935. As of 2009, it is the strongest hurricane to make landfall in the United States, and the third strongest Atlantic Ocean hurricane on record.

would you describe the city power structure in 1935, you know, as a reporter? Where did power really lie in Tampa?

HD: Well, I would say at that time, that was when Pat Whitaker was really the top man and Charlie Wall was really in the background.

GM: So the mob, you say, would really be the real power?

HD: Yeah. Yeah. Because they had control of the voting apparatus, for one thing. It was just you had no assurance that your vote would count or would be counted in those days.

GM: Right.

HD: So after this we hit rock bottom and good citizens became alarmed, and the newspaper, both of them, said, "This is enough. We're going to do something about this." And they did. They started a movement—the Civitan Club started a movement that bought voting machines, for one thing.

GM: How did people vote prior to that?

HD: Uh—paper ballot—

GM: Paper ballot.

HD: —which were easy to doctor and easy to steal and easy to substitute. And—

GP: Were there cases of dropping acid down into the boxes and burning the paper?

HD: Everything you can think of. Yes, that happened. And of course, after the polls closed and the lights would suddenly go out and there would be a quick shuffle in the papers and it was—

GM: Was this common knowledge?

HD: Oh, yeah, it was common knowledge. And the prosecutors would make stabs at you. They really made no inroads into cleaning it up. There was no real cleanup. Although there was a young prosecutor then named Rex Farrior, who came in at that time.¹² I believe he was appointed after Dave Sholtz became governor, which would have been 1937, I guess.¹³ Rex was active in his campaign and became the prosecutor and was a very vigorous prosecutor in his early days. He prosecuted the flogging cases, which happened in that time. Later on he was—he continued, and he continued after the Italian group came in. And he was criticized by the Kefauver Committee for not doing his job.

¹² J. Rex Farrior was Hillsborough County's State Attorney from 1942-1948.

¹³ David Sholtz (1891-1953) was Florida's governor from 1933 to 1937. He also served one term in the Florida House of Representatives, and was State Attorney from 1919 to 1921.

GM: For not doing his job?

HD: Yeah.

GM: Do you have any speculation as to what happened?

HD: Why he didn't do his job?

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: Well, he was getting older and not as aggressive, and of course he was accused of being friendly with some of them—with some of the Italian mob.

GP: When did he retire from that state attorney's position?

HD: Nineteen fifty-one, or right after the Kefauver Committee.

GM: Right.

HD: Incidentally, he is still around town.

GM: He's next—

HD: For an interview—

GM: We've already contacted him.

HD: And if anybody really knows politics around here, I don't know how much he'll tell you—

GM: Right.

HD: He certainly should be interviewed. There's a lot of people like him. John Parkhill ought to be interviewed. I saw in John in Tallahassee the other day. He is a lawyer. He was part of the—he's related to Charlie Wall, and is part of the—sort of an understudy of Pat Whitaker. Very able lawyer, and one of the most eloquent speakers I know.

John ran against Rex [for state attorney] after World War II, in 1948, I guess it was. And you want to interview John, how much he'll tell you—

GM: Sometimes what people won't tell you is indicative of—

HD: Yeah, that's right. Another lawyer in town that you'll want to interview is Manuel Garcia. (inaudible)

GM: That's funny. He, uh—you know his mother just died?

HD: Oh, yeah.

GM: And I have been trying to get hold of him for—I called Friday and his mother had just died that day, and the funeral was today.

HD: Oh, I didn't know. I didn't realize that had happened. He's—

GM: (inaudible)

HD: He's—certainly was a part of the problem. (laughs)

GM: Right.

HD: At least, he was in on the action. And how much he'll tell you, I don't know. Now let me tell you somebody else that you ought to get, and that is Jerry McLeod. Jerry McLeod was sheriff.¹⁴

GM: M-c-e-l-e-d? Or l-o-e?

HD: No. It's M-c-L-e-o-d.

GM: M-c-L—

HD: —e-o-d.

GM: Okay. I got it.

HD: I have got his phone number at the office. Jerry used to have my job at the *Times*; he was managing editor of the *Tampa Times*. Way back there, he ran a campaign for Doyle Carlton for governor in 1948.¹⁵ Carlton was from Tampa. And then he got involved in politics and he was appointed as sheriff.

GM: He was sheriff for a while?

HD: Yeah, he was sheriff.

GM: Typical transition from newspaper life, I suppose.

HD: Yeah.

GM: (laughs)

¹⁴ McLeod was sheriff from 1935 to 1941.

¹⁵ Doyle Carlton, Sr. (1885-1972) was governor of Florida from 1929 to 1933. His son, Doyle Carlton, Jr. (1922-2003) was a state senator from 1952 to 1960, and ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1960.

HD: Well, he also was WPA administrator at the time.

GM: Oh, right.

HD: But Jerry knows that politics thing backwards and forwards during this period that you're talking about.

GM: It's always good to get two or three different perspectives, you know.

HD: Yeah, he was part of it. And I haven't seen him—I have been talking to him about doing a history of newspapers and newspaper guys, and so I hope we get that done.

Now there was a sheriff named Joughin. J-o-u-g-h-i-n. R.T. Joughin.¹⁶ His daughter is still around, and her name is Lou Dovi.

GM: I have gotten—I have—she is in the school system, right?

HD: Yeah, right.

GM: I have communicated with her.

HD: She may shed some light on his—

GM: I have come across her.

HD: —politics.

GM: Yeah. Okay, going back to Tampa for a second, how would you describe the political power base of Tampa in economic terms? Can you identify some groups? How about economically? Like, Tampa has the impression of being a cigar town. Did the cigar workers or cigar owners have any clout or say-so in the politics of the town?

HD: They may have had some influence, but I wouldn't say they are the leaders. They—I always felt they were pretty much tended to their own business, and that is being cigar manufacturers.

GM: Right.

HD: Now, their workers, every one of those were the patrons of the *bolita* industry.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: And they may or may not have been part of all these shenanigans down at the polls and that sort of thing. But, uh—

¹⁶ Robert T. Joughin was Hillsborough County Sheriff from 1929 to 1933.

GM: Ybor City now strikes an outsider that there would be great opportunities for block voting. Where you had a lot of immigrants, it would be easy to organize. Was it a ward? Was there clout there?

HD: Precinct by precinct? You mean precinct bosses and all that?

GM: Right. I am assuming they were all Democrats.

HD: Yeah, they were. Everybody was a Democrat.

GM: Right. Did they vote—first of all, I guess—

HD: There was some Socialist influence during the period.

GM: Right. Yeah. We'll talk about that later.

HD: Generally it was; yeah, they were all registered Democrats. Everybody was registered Democrat. We didn't have—we just had a handful of Republicans here, up until World War II.

GM: Right. So the real fights were primary fights.

HD: Yeah.

GM: Was Ybor City considered a powerful ward or a group of precincts?

HD: Well, sure it was, because first of all, your city limits were restricted for so many years that it ended on the west side on Howard Avenue. All over—Palma Ceia and all these other developments, Beach Park and all those—had been built up or were building up, but it was not until after World War II that we expanded the city limits. And so, it was a very condensed city. Therefore, an area like Ybor City and West Tampa—Latin people—say what you will, they were interested in—politics excites them. And they would be there and they would be voting. And maybe some Anglo-Saxons would be apathetic. So, they were pretty powerful.

GM: The question that strikes me not too—

HD: Particularly because they had rigged those precincts.

GM: Right. Granted those facts, why didn't the Latins have their own power broker for Nick Nuccio?¹⁷ Now it would seem like they had the votes there that they could have run that candidate as mayor, but Nuccio was not elected until late fifties [1950s], early sixties [1960s]. Why didn't the Latins get their own—?

¹⁷ Nick Nuccio (1901-1989) was a two-term mayor of Tampa, from 1956 to 1959 and from 1963 to 1967. He also served on the Tampa City Council and the Hillsborough County Commission.

HD: Well, they had ties with Chancey. I believe his wife was Latin. So they had some connections that way. McKay, I think had some—either a real friendly alliance with them or kinship, so they—it was always an Anglo-Saxon name, as you say. I don't think there was any Latin mayor before Nuccio was there.

GM: Right. And Nuccio, although he was county commissioner about this time—

HD: And now we've got everybody running has a Latin name. (laughs) Nuccio, many years ago, was on the city council. And then he got on the county commission. And then he ran for mayor. He was county commissioner for many, many years.

GM: Right, right. What—?

HD: And in those days it was all—I believe county commissioner is elected by their ward, by their districts. And he had the Latin districts, so he had a continuing—

GM: Right.

HD: —incumbency there.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: And he was awfully hard to unseat.

GM: Uh-huh. Right. (to GP) Do you have any questions right now, or—?

GP: Yeah. You were talking about Ybor City. Did they have a tradition of block voting? Were they pretty well almost unanimous on their choices?

HD: They were—yeah, there would be evidence of block voting. Now, of course, you had poll tax up until the late thirties [1930s]. And somebody had paid to pay that dollar for them, if they didn't pay it. So they were corralled and made part of the system.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: So there was a lot of—

GM: Well, according to what you say, it didn't really make any difference whether they voted or not.

HD: Well, that's right. (laughs)

GM: Were you aware as a newspaper reporter that you had pretty much free access, or was it a kind of a joke? I mean, did you have any clout, or did they try to hide things from you while you were trying to report this?

HD: Remember that I was just starting in 1936. And so, I was a real novice, and didn't have any real important (inaudible) until maybe thirty-eight [1938], thirty-nine [1939]. You know, when I was covering the police station. Of course, I wasn't—I remember they were always having grand jury investigations and a lot of noise making going on. And I remember, I think it might have been 1940. Now, as a police reporter, I was covering these unsolved murders all the time, these gangland murders. And it was not unusual at all to be called in the middle of the night and [they say] "We just had another killing out here."

So, I was aware of all that. I remember one time the grand jury, they were investigating gambling. And they would make a big noise about it, but nothing ever came of it. I remember they recessed and they were—they issued a list of twenty-two places that were selling gambling tickets, *bolita* tickets. And they had made a big noise about cleaning up the fun stuff before we come back into session three weeks later.

And so on one afternoon, before the grand jury was supposed to come back, I took that list over to every one of those twenty-two places and bought *bolita*. It was the first time I had ever bought. I never gambled then or now. And I really didn't know how to even order. But I bought *bolita* at every one of the places, twenty-two of them. They hadn't closed up. They weren't closed up the next day.

GM: Our listeners will want to know if you won on any of the tickets that you bought.

HD: Unfortunately, I didn't win. (laughs) You know, I did not win. Sorry about that. I remember they had Jerry McLeod on the panel. I was up there one noontime with my photographer from the *Times*. Of course you can't get into a grand jury; you really just have to smell around and figure out what's going on, and hope somebody will leak it to you.

I remember at a noon recess one day, I went out to the old courthouse there where the grand jury was meeting. And it was the afternoon, so everybody was out to lunch and the judge was out. But they were beginning to stagger and straggle back in. Jerry McLeod was the sheriff and they had—they called him in. And he was sitting and two or three of the grand jurors were sitting there. And Sam—Wally Davis was our photographer, and I was out there. I told Wally to take a picture of the sheriff, and he did. And, boy, the guy jumped up, and he was a real tough fellow and really just hollered at us. "Give me that film right now!"

Well, I was—Wally looked at me for what to do. I was a novice, as I said, and green, and here's this high sheriff demanding the film. And so I told him, "Let him have it." If it happened today, I'd say, "Heck with it. No. No way!" If I had to grab and run out, I sure would. But in those days, I really didn't know.

GM: Right.

HD: And I remember a very prominent citizen was on the grand jury and sitting there just

guffawing it while that was going on. So, it was pretty rough covering it.

GM: Did any of your peers actually get locked up?

HD: I don't recall any of them really getting locked up, no. They seemed to—they were pretty smart. It would be bad business for them to rough up newspaper guys and it would be bad business to rough up public officials.

GM: Well, I guess a seamier question, were any of your peers—your paper or rival papers—in the pocket of those forces? You know, like on the payroll.

HD: Oh, were they ever?

GM: Yeah.

HD: I don't believe so. I don't—I am almost convinced—maybe in the twenties [1920s], during the height of the Prohibition and all of that. But from 1935 to now, I don't know of any newspaper guy that was on the payroll. Now, I may be naïve and a lot of it might have been going on, but I don't—I am sort of proud of the caliber of guys that we had in both newspapers. And I really don't believe—I can't think of any that might have been on the pay.

GM: Uh-huh. Let me change the tape.

pause in recording

HD: But that was after Jerry McLeod became a politician and was involved with the operation of the day. I can't say what happened there. But Bob, he was the managing editor of the newspaper. I don't know what he was involved with on the take.

GM: What were the rewards for political power in Tampa? Why so much concern over controlling it? I guess the question is obvious, but from your perspective?

HD: I'm sure that the corrupt politician found the gambling concession quite attractive.

GM: Okay. Gambling would be one. Patronage, was there considerable patronage in Tampa?

HD: Oh, yeah, particularly during the Depression days, when people were without a job and didn't have a friend. Just generally—just as today, they are power-mad, and they like to run things. We sure had politicians. I guess we still do, but it was rough times.

GM: Were there any—what would you do when a typical election came? What was your job during this period, thirty-six [1936], thirty-eight [1938]? And were you actually covering the election at all? And do you remember, I guess, any anecdotes that, like, illustrated these points?

HD: Up until World War II, I don't recall being involved too much in the actual coverage. I mean, I am sure I was. After World War II, I came—I was away in war for four years and I came back in early forty-six [1946] and then I became managing editor, and then directed our news coverage.

GM: I'd like to talk about some of that later. But I do want to talk about that. Have we exhausted—?

GP: No, I got a—

HD: I was mentioning about the WPA and some of the jobs they did, and I also mentioned about Mayor Chancey. In 1939, he ran for re-election a second time. And I did cover the campaign then. I remember that very well, because I was covering the city hall. And he had two opponents. One was a city councilman named Dick Rosenthal—and by the way, I think he's still around.

GM: I have tried to get a hold of him. Tony [Pizzo] has told me about him. Was the one that kept a prostitute as his mistress?

HD: Yeah, he's—

GM: Now, was he also a dentist? Is that right?

HD: Yeah, that's right.

GM: Yeah—

HD: And he was on the city board.

GM: I have been trying to get a hold of him.

HD: He was chairman of the city board for many years. And if you get him—you ought to get him, because he was probably part of the game, too. But he was running for mayor and a fellow named Castiglia, I believe was his name. (inaudible) Thomas Castiglia was a juvenile judge and lawyer.

Anyway, in those days we had what they called a White Municipal Party. No blacks voted. They weren't eligible to vote. And there was no democratic—it was non-partisan. And so the White Municipal Party staged political rallies around town, and Mr. Chancey sort of put himself up above these rough and tough politics. And he ran his own rallies around town and let the party run theirs.

One interesting thing that happened—this goes back to 1928. They always had a big rally over at Plant Park in front of the University of Tampa, the old hotel. Not the field, but Plant Park. They had a big grandstand there.

GM: Could you describe one of the rallies?

HD: Oh, yeah. They were packed in up to ten thousand people there. In those days, you didn't have radio. Well, you did have—WDAE started in 1922, but it never—I don't think there wasn't too much political campaigning by radio until the late twenties [1920s], early thirties [1930s].¹⁸ But in this very hot sheriff's race by 1928, they were having the final rally there in Plant Park.

There was a young fellow wanting a sheriff. And his name was L.M. Hatton, Junior.¹⁹ His father was L.M. Hatton, Senior. He had founded and nursed along and built up Tampa Business College. And I don't know why Hatton wanted to be sheriff, but he was running. He didn't have a prayer; he didn't have a chance. All the old crows were in there, you know, and he was an unknown. But he was a nice-looking guy, and I guess had some charisma.

But that night, he was making his final pitch, speech. And in front out in there, was his mother stood. And while he was making his speech, she collapsed and died. And that created such a sympathy vote that the L.M. Hatton became sheriff—

GM: Is that right?

HD: —in 1929. And as I reconstructed, he was pretty greedy. He couldn't wait to get all of payoff. And they said he had airplanes and a bunch of automobiles and he was pretty arrogant. He would walk in these places downtown and demand his payoff right there. [It] got so bad that his fellow townsman, Governor Carlton, had to fire him. He did. I think he served only six months as sheriff. And then he became—in his later years he was a deputy sheriff, and he's dead now. And he still has some relatives.

But, um—oh, yeah. We were mentioning Chancey running his own campaign. He put out a very beautiful brochure which he called "For Tampa's One Hundred Thousand." That's what our population was. And in it, he listed a lot of his—mayor from 1931 to 1939. A lot contrasts in the things that he had done. Built beautiful Bayshore Boulevard, and they extended it and completed it all the way over to Platt Street during those days, during that administration. And he built a nurse's home, a nurse's quarters there at the hospital. He improved the hospital itself. He built the Tampa Health Department Facility.

He built some—did a lot of urban renewal, public housing, both in the Latin areas and the black areas and some Anglo-Saxon. There was a colored hospital here at the time, Clara Frye. He improved that. He worked on the garbage disposal, water, recreation, built the skating park. All these things are things that he claimed credit for. During those tough Depression years, there was a trailer park, a big city trailer park. That was just some of the Chancey—

¹⁸ WDAE 620 AM is a radio station based in Tampa, which has been in operation since 1922. It is thought to be the first radio station ever to broadcast out of Florida.

¹⁹ Luther M. Hatton, Jr. was Hillsborough County Sheriff for nine months in 1929, before being suspended by Governor Doyle Carlton.

GP: How about Pat Whitaker? What kind of politician was he?

HD: He was hard-hitting, power-mad, a very gifted orator. He knew politics from top to bottom, backwards and forwards, and he had his following. He used to be—they say—I guess it is attributed to him. He stole every election except one and they stole that one from him when he was trying to get Henry Tilman for state senate.

He had a drinking problem. He would stay sober a lot, but then he'd fall off the wagon. But normally, generally, he kept his head and was, as I said, an outstanding speaker and organizer. And with Charlie Wall, kept everybody in line in the underworld. And he also had other ties with a lot of the first citizens of Tampa.

GP: He was very much against Peter O. Knight.²⁰

HD: Oh, very much so. Oh—

GP: Dave Sholtz, also.

HD: Peter O. Knight was his enemy.

GM: Why was that?

HD: Peter O. Knight came in here when Stone and Webster took over Tampa Electric. And he had a lot of political influence himself, Peter O. Knight did. He had his following. He never was personally in politics. When he was in Lee County, I think he did serve in the state senate in Lee County before he came to Tampa. But when he came to Tampa, he was a lawyer, a very outstanding lawyer, and was president of Tampa Electric Company.

I am not real sure why the feud there, but I do know that Pat Whitaker was bound and determined to put him out of business and make it as rough on Tampa Electric as he could. In those days we had the trolley cars that I mentioned, and they were—you could go anywhere in town for a five-cent fare. And Peter O. Knight was very proud of his five-cent fare. Pat Whitaker wanted to spank him, politically and economically, and created in the legislature a Tampa Utilities Board and packed it with Whitaker's people. And they sure enough did spank Tampa Electric with their rates and all that. So there was some bad blood there between [them].

GP: Why does Dave Sholtz seem to be unpopular with a lot of local candidates?

HD: Well, he was a maverick that wasn't supposed to be up there. He slipped in there. He was a young fellow. He had a following among the Jaycees and the men of the day.

²⁰ Peter O. Knight (1865-1946) was one of the founding members of the Holland & Knight law firm, who held several political offices in the state and county, including mayor of Fort Myers, state senator, and Hillsborough County State Attorney. He was also the founder of Tampa Electric Company, and was involved with numerous businesses and charitable organizations.

GP: Did the slot machines have anything to do with that?

HD: I'm not clear. I don't remember the detail on that. Seemed to be, because that's when they came in, while he was governor. I don't know. As I say, Rex Farrior was one of his people here. He was a young lawyer and, I think, active in the Jaycees at that time.

GP: What do you recall about his race with Tilman?

HD: Tilman and Whitaker?

GP: Yeah.

HD: I think that happened just before I came, and I don't recall too much about it. But it was one of those (inaudible) contests where the chips were down and chose up sides. And that was when there was a lot that hot ballots. And the whole bit. (inaudible)

GP: And Ybor City was supposedly solid behind Tilman?

HD: Yeah, I'm not—I can't—I don't remember the exact details on that.

GP: Do you recall anything about Henry Tilman later on?

HD: Yes. He was appointed circuit judge by, I think, Fuller Warren, and turned out to be a pretty good judge.²¹ You know, he was fair and knew his law. But he still had the old political smell about him, the political background.

GP: He didn't run for re-election. Why was that?

HD: Uh, what happened? I guess he saw the handwriting on the wall or something. I really don't know.

GP: And then Whitaker came in right after.

HD: Yeah.

GP: He didn't run against him, he just retired.

HD: I think he retired. And I think Raymond Sheldon became the state senator after that. That's my recollection. Raymond Sheldon was a young attorney. He really had no deep organization or any deep anything going for him, except he was a handsome fellow and he was an articulate one, a very eloquent speaker. And he worked and breathed politics. He was sort of one of the white hats there when he first went in. And later he got really, really involved as a politician. He ran in 1944 for governor, but didn't have much of a race.

²¹ Fuller Warren (1905-1973) was governor of Florida from 1949 to 1953.

GP: What was the city election board that Whitaker had back then?

HD: Well, they ran the city elections and they appointed the officials. And they picked the precinct polling places and counted the votes. So there was pretty good unity having the (inaudible) in those days when they did control the votes.

GP: Did Whitaker stay here when he retired?

HD: Yes. He stayed here until his death, which wasn't too many years ago. He sort of faded away. He had a lake place on Halfmoon Lake [in Ocala National Forest]. He used to spend a lot of time out there. There's his son, Pat Junior; I don't know where Pat Junior is.

GP: To talk about the senate election in thirty-four [1934], which you were saying was supposedly—I don't know if you would say stolen in Ybor City, but [it was] decided there, anyway. What do you recall about that?

HD: Well, I only—that was before I was actually in town and before I got involved in newspaper coverage around here. And that was just a hand-me-down reports that Pat always said he stole their other election but Tilman stole the other one from him. The only one where he was honest, they stole it from him in some sense. But they were all pretty much guilty, I think, in those days, of fixing everything they could.

This matter of voting tombstones and all reminds of Congressman Sykes out in west Florida. He told about a little town out there, I guess it was Milton or one of those towns out there, where they did the same thing. They'd built tombstones, and he told about what happened when the night before election day, a couple of these henchmen were out there getting the names off of tombstones. One came to a tombstone there, and it had a foreign name, a Latin name or something. It really didn't fit in with the community there, because they didn't have any other Latins. And the guy jotted down the name anyway, and the other guy says, "Do you think we ought to vote him?" And the other guy says, "Sure. He's entitled to vote just as much as anybody else."

GM: What was Tampa like on the eve of Pearl Harbor? Had we pulled out of the Depression, would you say, by 1941?

HS: Yeah, because several things were happening. In 1939, we got MacDill Field. Uh—

GM: Who was responsible for that? Any one individual?

HD: It was Chancey that took the credit for it.

GM: (laughs) Right.

HD: I remember vividly a picture of him flying back on Eastern Airlines, you know, one of those little old planes they had, and he had his briefcase. And the caption on it the

Tampa Tribune [was] “Brings home the bacon.” There was—I believe there was a task force in the chamber of commerce that acted in getting that. We had all that land out there on the point.

GM: Was that all unoccupied? Is that right?

HD: That’s right. Pretty—

GM: That’s hard to believe.

HD: Yeah. That was where the little community of Rattlesnake was.

GM: Yeah, I’ve heard of it.

HD: Rattlesnake, Florida had a post office out there at the east end of the Gandy Bridge, and this fellow named George End used to hunt rattlesnakes all through there.²²

GM: (inaudible)

HD: Yeah, he made a living out of it. And so they were able to put together this big piece of property. I guess it was kind of hard for the Air Force to find that much property in an urban setting. I guess they needed that for the rail facilities and getting the logistics.

GM: So that was an economic shot in the arm?

HD: Oh, absolutely. And then the shipyards were going full blast. They revved up. We had had shipyards in World War I. And so then came along World War II and this became a really of big, big importance. And then we actually had two shipyards before this.

GM: How about tourism? Was tourism a force in the thirties [1930s] in Tampa?

HD: Not really then, and even today. And I remember seeing a study done by some consultant right after World War II that said Tampa grows as a commercial and industrial center, a trade center, and St. Petersburg would be the tourist community. And that’s the way it developed and that’s the way it continued, although I guess we—because of Busch Gardens and things like that, today we have to be recognized as a pretty good tourism center.

But in those days, we really didn’t make any huge pitch for tourism. We did have a tourist recreation center around there, back of the university with shuffleboards, and picnic tables and a dance hall and things like that. And the city had a tourist department that would register the visitors. But there was no huge influx of them. There was this municipal trailer park and those were the early days of trailers. And we also had them out

²² George End had a mail-order business selling rattlesnake meat, supported by a canning plant, novelty shop, and bar. In 1939, the Rattlesnake Post Office was established at End’s urging, although Rattlesnake was never an official municipality. End died in 1944, after being bitten by a rattlesnake.

a [Fort] DeSoto park out by the Twenty-Second Street Plaza we have there. And this is where the tin-can tourists lived [during] their whole midwinter convocation, [as] we called it. And so we did have some little tourism but it didn't figure too big in—

GM: Right.

HD: Of course we had a couple of first-class hotels: the Temple Terrace Hotel and the Floridan Hotel, which had been built here in the boom along with the Hillsborough County.

GM: There was the Alamera—is that how you pronounce it?

HD: Almeria.²³

GM: Almeria—was that still a first-class hotel?

HD: No, no, no. I don't know when it really went out of business. I think it continued operating as a little, small hotel there, maybe on into the thirties [1930s] but it had not been a big factor since before the boom. When the boom came—I'm not sure when the Hillsborough was built, but it [was] probably prior to 1915. But the Terrace and the Floridan became the big hotels. Of course you had the Bay View and the old Desoto Hotel.

GM: And you left in forty-two [1942]?

HD: Forty—yeah, forty-two [1942].

GM: And you came back in forty-six [1946]?

HD: Yeah, I left in January of forty-two [1942].

GM: How had Tampa changed during the five years? I mean, could you see demonstrable changes in Tampa?

HD: Not too much, because they weren't able to build much then. Of course during the war, there was tens of thousands of airmen here. And some post-war planning was going on. But not really a real change before that.

GM: Right. Could you sense what would happen in the next thirty years in 1945 when you came back? I mean, was there this feeling of boom and prosperity?

HD: We knew that it felt differently. It was bound to expand, and a lot of these MacDill guys married our local girls and came back here to live. And then as soon as cars were

²³ The Almeria Hotel, located at the corner of Washington Street and Franklin Street, was built in 1886. It was the first three-story building in Tampa. The hotel was named for Almeria McKay Lykes, matriarch of the Lykes family and daughter of James McKay, Sr., mayor of Tampa from 1859 to 1960. Later, the building became the headquarters for the Lykes Brothers shipping line.

available and the tourists started coming back this way, there was a lot of action. We were confident there would be growth, but nothing—it was hard to see any such thing that we have now. And of course, a lot of this has happened in the last twenty years.

And of course immediately after the war, everything was centered there in downtown. We had a central core. A little after that we started this shopping center business, Britton Plaza and Northgate. I think those came in the late forties [1940s]. And then that started the beginning of the dispersal and then, of course, these outlying subdivisions.

GM: When did downtown Tampa begin to slow?

HD: I'd say right at 1950, right in there. Maybe this shopping center thing was the beginning of it.

GM: When one does this history (inaudible) and all. How about Tampa's racial situation? How would you describe Tampa's racial policies when you arrived in thirty-five [1935]? You know, what was the—?

HD: It was a typical Southern town with segregation [as] the rule, or whatever it was.

GM: Right.

HD: You have—well, the blacks had their living areas and there were no mixed neighborhoods. The blacks did not figure prominently in any political [sense]. There was no—there wasn't anybody who voted in the city elections, and there was very little voting in the county and state elections. I guess there was some. They didn't have the top jobs. You didn't see any—there was no lawyers, no doctors. Maybe if they were doctors they would practice in their own neighborhoods. They had black schools. And even at the courthouse you would have water fountains—one for whites, one for [blacks]; restrooms were the same way. And I think when they built the new courthouse in the 1950s, that was there.

GM: When did you notice things beginning to change? Was there any one moment here that you thought was symbolic?

HD: Well, I think the change began during World War II with the advent—the integration of the services. And after that, I think that's when the movement began. Here the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] got active and the younger blacks began (inaudible). So it came shortly after World War II. It was very slow, and really didn't get rolling until LeRoy Collins was governor.²⁴

GM: That 1967 race riot in Tampa.²⁵ Could it have been avoided?

²⁴ LeRoy Collins (1909-1991) was governor of Florida from 1955 to 1961. He also served in the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate.

²⁵ This riot took place in June 1967. A young African American man, Marvin Chambers, died after being shot by the police, who believed him to be fleeing from the scene of a robbery. This led to several days of rioting in the Central Avenue area.

HD: I don't know. I guess it was a just a buildup of resentment and emotions that just had to come to a head and that's when it exploded, fired by a lot of things happening around the country and changes of attitudes.

GM: Yeah.

HD: But we weren't as bad. I think we had better relations here, generally, than in some of the other cities.

GM: Uh-huh. Right. Any wrap-up questions you have?

GP: I think we have covered everything I wanted to.

GM: Hampton, how would you—looking at Tampa, maybe the hundred years of Tampa, what do you think its salient characteristics have been? What would you pinpoint as the strength of Tampa and also where do you see the future of Tampa? Will we recognize the city fifty years from now?

HD: Well, I think the thing that has been the rallying point of the community has been our transportation, our commerce, and industrial activity. It's sort of been what has kept it going on these years and continues to be. We are the leader of this region, of course, with the phosphate coming through here.

And we've kept pace; we've gotten an airport. Of course the trains, they're dying. Maybe they'll come back now with the gasoline problem. But without network of roads now with our interstates, and we're getting this one going to Miami, that's going to make us another transportation hub. We aren't too far from Disney World.

What's the future? That's hard to envision. It's sort of like you asking about the [period] right after World War II—could you envision what's going on today? Maybe some people did. A lot of studies—

GM: The real estate—

HD: Yeah, the real estate has been active. As long as you've got this wonderful climate, and of course with the fuel thing coming, well, I guess that figures too, you know. It doesn't take as much fuel to keep warm here as it does other places. But everywhere I go—I'm all over the state and speaking to a lot of these tourist communities. And it's just incredible—whole communities up there in my hometown in Citrus County. The biggest town in Citrus County today wasn't even there twenty years ago.

GM: Uh-huh.

HD: But I think as long as we have beautiful weather and as long as we can continue to spread out with these subdivisions—there is this ominous threat with the fuel situation.

How long can you be mobile, as we are and have been? Maybe it's going to have to be pulled back into the downtown part, the central core.

GM: Uh-huh. Right.

HD: Maybe by way of condominiums, and I guess they just will have to develop Seddon Island and just reshape the community as they are doing already. They've completely wiped out the downtown. It is losing its—it has completely lost its character. There's only the old city hall; the Tampa Theatre is soon to be about the only—and the Tampa Hotel—be the only landmarks still visible, right?

GM: Right. Tampa has not been very reverent towards its buildings.

HD: No, they have not been very reverent, that's right.

GM: A city on the move, I guess. Well, I'd like to thank you very much for your time.

HD: It was my pleasure.

end of interview