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Gary Mormino: My name is Gary Mormino, and I'm talking today with Anthony Pizzo in his lovely home in Davis Islands. Tony, why don't we begin? Why don't you just kind of tell the listeners maybe the first moment where you can remember you became very interested in history? Would you attribute it to any one moment or period that you first acquired a historical interest?

Tony Pizzo: Yes, it happened back around 1948, forty-nine [1949], in that era. We had just organized the Ybor City Rotary Club in 1948.

GM: Mm-hm.

TP: And we became very closely affiliated with the Havana Rotary Club. So, we had trips back and forth, and finally some of the Cubans were wondering why is it that so many Cubans are going to Miami for their vacation when it used to be Tampa? Well, what happened after World War II, we lost the—we had a steamship, the *Cuba* and *Florida* plied between Tampa and Havana, twice a week. And we had real close intercourse with Cubans.

Right after World War II, they—the airplanes and so forth, the connection with Miami—they discovered the beaches of Miami, which were very attractive to them. And then we read in *Time* magazine that Cuban tourism was worth thirty-four million dollars to the Miami area. And we thought, Gee-whiz, we had all these Cubans coming to Tampa. We had ties.

And so, on one of our trips we met a fellow by the name of—he was a newspaperman by the name of Cabus, C-a-b-u-s. And he said to me, he said, “You know, it says Tampa really means more to us than any other town, because it is the cradle of Cuban liberty.” Of course here we are, born and raised in Ybor City and Tampa. We knew very little about the background, how Ybor City came about, or the history or anything. And he

started telling us how José Martí worked and organized the Revolutionary Party here and so on. And we thought, Boy, if Tampa and Ybor City is that important, maybe we could put up historical markers.

And I broached the subject with a Rotarian whose name is Buck. He still lives in—he's in Miami now. His father was one of the big cigar tycoons of the 1890s. And they were well-to-do and a really outstanding family. And Mr. Buck, at the time, was in charge of the (inaudible) institutes of Cuba. They had a following. And also, he was a Rotarian in the Havana Club. And he volunteered to make all these historical markers for us, and put them all over Ybor City. And so he says, "All you need to do is do the research, and we'll write 'em up." We thought, What a fantastic deal that would be!

So I took it upon myself to, you know, find out as much as I could. The way I started—first of all, I went to see some of the old-timers, Cubans that were in their nineties, eighties and nineties. And what I learned from them was unbelievable, you know, that we had such a rich history. And then I started meeting historians in Havana, Cuba. One of the friends that I really admired very much was [Jose Rivero] Muñiz, who has written many books. He has written about the conquistadors in Florida; he wrote a book called *Los Cubanos en Tampa*.

Muñiz sent me a lot of material. In fact, he sent me the first copy of *Los Cubanos en Tampa*, in the Spanish version, which I still cherish. I have it here in my library. And he was able to give me a lot of information that I could never find in the libraries or books or anything like that. And to boot, he also sent me a book published in Ybor City in 1897, in Spanish, about a visitor from Cuba.¹ And he described all of Tampa: (inaudible), the sandy streets, and the Italian column. He described the funerals of the Italians, how the women used to nurse their babies with their breasts hanging out, (laughs) you know, on the porches. And it was like very common. And it impressed him very much. So to me, this is a very invaluable book.

GM: Right. What was Tampa like in forty-eight [1948] when you first set out on this quest?

TP: Well, it was still in its—let's say it was right to that point it was still intact. The people had not moved out.

GM: In Ybor City you're talking about?

TP: Ybor City, yes. The people were still there, the communities, but things were beginning to change. After the war, the prosperity started to increase, and the younger generation had been going to college and they wanted to live in nicer homes. And something happened in 1950 that really started the downfall, or you might say the demise of Ybor City as we really knew it, as a colony of Spaniards, Cubans and Italians.

¹ *Impresiones de un viaje a Tampa*, by Juan G. Pumariega.

And that was that in the downtown area where the, uh—I think they call it Progress Village. That used to be the Negro quarters, and it was called the Scrub. Now, from Nebraska [Avenue] to Central Avenue and from Cass Street to about Harrison [Street], it was a world of its own. No one went in there. It was like a jungle. There were no paved streets. The houses were all framed: very, very old, decadent. And actually, I remember the stories at the time; it was a cesspool in the heart of Tampa. And no one dared go in there, because it was just like a jungle in there. And unfortunately, this started way back in the early days, when Ybor City was established two miles away from the village of Tampa.

The Scrub area came about because we started getting Negroes—from about the 1880s, all these big lumber companies started closing down. And the Negro came to the villages to get jobs, and right in that Scrub area, there was a lumber mill, and they started settling around the lumber mill. And besides that, we started getting Negroes from Key West that actually came from Bahama, from the Bahama Islands. And that's how the black quarters emerged, around that lumber mill. And there was a wilderness between Tampa and Ybor City. And they were right in the middle of it.

So, this Scrub area—up to the 1950s, the city had all grown into one. Ybor City and Tampa were joined, and everything around it was paved. It was a very prosperous community, but that little area in there, nothing was ever done about it. So in 1950, the City of Tampa was able to get some funds to clean out the whole area. And there were a lot of black people who owned property themselves in there. So, they were paid off in pretty good money. And where were they to go? They were being displaced, and they didn't have anywhere to go.

Ybor City was the logical place. And the Latin people saw the great opportunity. The people in the real estate business, they saw a great opportunity, and they gouged the black man. They started selling houses in Ybor City that were really—Ybor City, by 1950, had reached a point where it was really a blighted area. The houses were very old. And the people were moving out into bigger and better homes, and going to better areas. The younger people had become educated and they wanted to live in—it wasn't that they didn't like it there, but there was a question of economy. How could you build a beautiful thirty thousand dollar home in those days in an area that was decayed? And we saw what happened to two or three people who built beautiful homes. The value just deteriorated before us, you know.

To put in a really good example, on Sixteenth Street and Thirteenth Avenue, Fourteenth Avenue, there's a beautiful home today, with yellow brick, built for Dr. Paniello. And he was a good friend of mine. And I asked Dr. Paniello once, "Doctor, why did you build this beautiful home right here in the middle of Ybor City with all the shacks around it?" He says, "Well, I made my money here. These are my people. I want to live amongst them." Sooner or later, his children got out of college and all, and they wanted to live in a better area. And he built another beautiful home in the Interbay section.

And so, this was what was happening. So the real estate people, they went to the black people who were getting their money from the federal government, and they started buying houses in Ybor City. And before long, all the blacks had—just about the whole community had moved into the Ybor City area, and the Latins had a great opportunity. They were getting seven, eight thousand dollars for houses that you wouldn't have paid a thousand dollars [for].

GM: Up to that time, there were few if any blacks living in Ybor City?

TP: There were very few blacks living in Ybor City. The few blacks that lived in Ybor City in the great majority were the blacks from Cuba, which really were very different from the American blacks. To begin with, they were highly educated, and not only formal schooling in Cuba, but also they were cigar makers. And they worked right next to the white cigar makers and they lived right in the white neighborhood. They were mixed. And there was a lot of respect, one for the other. And the Cubans had their own clubs and everything, the black Cubans. They had their own baseball teams. So it was no discrimination between the Latin whites and Cuban blacks. They lived together, they worked together.

GM: How did the Cuban blacks and the American blacks get along once this transition took place?

TP: Well, to begin with, the Cuban blacks—there was a barrier there. Most of the Cuban blacks couldn't speak English. So, that kept them a little bit separate. And also, the Cuban black was actually a lot better educated than the American black. And they just didn't mix that way. They just didn't. The Cuban blacks associated more with the Latins in Ybor City than any other group. There was a good bond of friendship amongst them. So it was a real different situation.

GM: Could anything to have been done to prevent, as you call it, the demise of Ybor City? Even once this black migration took place?

TP: Well, after— To go in sequence, after the blacks moved in, then a few years later, this urban renewal project was adopted. And for some reason the state of Florida could not take advantage of it, because it said that our constitution didn't allow us to use this kind of money to clear areas and so on. But anyway, the Fowler, White firm—Mr. Cody Fowler—and Milo Smith, city planner, they went to the Supreme Court. And they presented the case for the City of Tampa before the Supreme Court. They used Ybor City as the bridge, or the wedge, to get the law authorized. Daytona had tried it and they were turned down. Other cities had tried it.

So, Milo Smith asked me if I would make a map of the city of Tampa showing all of the historical areas, the buildings, which I still have—I still have that map. That map of the city with all of the historical information was presented, and so because of history the Supreme Court judged that it was all right. So the whole state of Florida—after that, all the cities were able to use urban renewal money.

So, the first urban renewal project was really the Ybor City project. But it was held in advance until they cleared out the back of the [Tampa] Union Station, Marilyn Avenue project. That was the first area. See, all those apartment houses for blacks, that was the first project that was used for urban renewal. The second project was the waterfront where the Hixon Convention Center is. All of that was railroad warehouses and railroad tracks. So that was number two project. But the project that made it really possible was the Ybor City program, by being a historic area. That came third.

When they started building in Ybor City, the blacks were moved out again, and they were scattered to the four winds. A lot of them went into the Tampa Heights area. So the people from the Tampa Heights area started—there was another shift of population. And so now you have the Ybor City area, from let's say Columbus Drive to Seventh Avenue, from Twenty-Second Street to Nebraska—it's all practically empty. There's nothing left there. So they really scattered the people all over the city.

Urban renewal was a good thing, but it was poorly, poorly planned. They should have been divided in a way that—what they should have done was take a block at a time, rebuild, and have the people keep their property and let them stay. We could have had beautiful Spanish-type cottages, and even today there is a lot of nostalgia for Ybor City. And people were still dreaming of the old days. They wished that somehow they could have all stayed there. But the circumstances didn't permit it. And so urban renewal just went in there and roughshod cleaned everything out. A lot of the big buildings that should have been preserved were not preserved. There were some very beautiful big buildings that are irreplaceable.

GM: Do you remember any specific incidents?

TP: Yes. I'll give you first like the Number 4 Fire Station. We were going to turn that into a museum. The politicians worked up a fast deal, and before we knew it the thing in twenty-four hours were down, because the junior college and what have you wanted to take the land, see. And this was part of the—the people who were involved with it I think were MDA, or whatever project that was.

GM: What's MDA?

TP: Model Cities—

GM: Oh, Model Cities Development.

TP: Either that, or—well, Tallow, I think, is in charge right now, at the head of it. But that was a real sad thing. And then on Fifteenth Street and Ninth Avenue you had two beautiful brick buildings with a lot of wrought iron, and they just tore those down.

GM: Who was responsible for this?

TP: Urban renewal.

GM: So what—

TP: At the time, we were trying to save the balconies on Seventh Avenue. We were trying to save the buildings. But we weren't organized. You didn't have that fever going at that time of preservation. The only group doing any kind of preservation was the Ybor City Rotary Club.

GM: We're talking early fifties [1950s]?

TP: Yes, that's correct.

GM: What's your reaction to the kind of sardonic statement that a lot of people make that urban renewal means urban removal?

TP: That's right, that's correct. Urban renewal ruined many American cities. In fact, urban renewal just had complete disregard of the welfare of humanity for the changing of a physical aspect of a community, which, to me, was wrong. If you go to Chicago or New York, you'll see what they have done there, and many other cities [as well].

GM: Now, who should we blame? I mean, should we blame faceless bureaucrats in Washington or were these Tampa people running it here?

TP: Congress.

GM: Congress?

TP: Congress. Of course, it goes through every level. It started in Congress because the law was formulated—ill-formulated, let's put it that way. They had no regard for humanity. If a blighted area needed to be raised, that's all it spelled out. It had to go. It didn't take into account historic buildings. It didn't take into account the welfare of the poor or anything. They just paid everybody off and you found yourself another house. And they displaced people indiscriminately, which was wrong.

Congress passed the law, and then all the way down on the local level, there were other axes to grind. They tore up buildings because it was to their advantage. The more buildings they tore down, I imagine, the more money they were able to get. They wanted to prolong the project and so on. So, on the local level, a lot of things were done that were wrong. They were actually, in my book, dishonest. Not that they stole money, but they didn't care about the community's welfare.

GM: Would—some people might argue—

TP: They had people that came from out of town into Tampa to live who had no feeling for Tampa. But they were in a position to conduct the business of that bureaucracy. And

there was no feeling for the welfare or the history or the past of the community. And this has happened. I'm not mentioning names, but, uh—

GM: Sure.

TP: I was pretty well involved. To a certain degree I fought like a one-man fire department trying to preserve things, like the El Pasaje building, for example. They had a beautiful balcony on the second floor. One day I saw it was gone, and I went to see the owners. And the old lady said, "Well, we just didn't want it to fall, and we got it in the back of the yard and so—" Well, anyway, she said they were going to replace it. It never was replaced. To me, that's one of the most—next to the Tampa Bay Hotel, El Pasaje is the second most historic building in Tampa.

GM: Do you think she was pressured?

TP: She was probably in her late eighties, and her husband was in—I mean, her husband had been a doctor. They were a very prominent family, Dr. Avellanal. The son was living in Mexico, and so I imagine that she was probably having a hard time making ends meet by this time. And she was trying to run El Pasaje as a hotel, and probably she had financial problems. The easiest way was to take it down and not replace it. That's what I mean. But anyway, that was a sad thing.

Another time, I drove up south Fourteenth Street, and I saw the Ybor Factory and the original fountain was gone. And we inquired, and finally [we found out that] somebody had taken the fountain. It took reporters from the [*Tampa*] *Tribune* with stories and so on, but they found the fountain. And the man said, "Well, it was given to me by one of the executives of the factory," and this, that and the other. We went to see the executives and they said, "Well, it was a mistake. We're sorry, but that's the truth."

So I went to see Nick Nuccio,² and I told him, I say—at the time they had project going. They were going to—you see, let me digress here. In 1950, they had a bond issued, a fifty million dollar bond issued, to build a convention center and clear all of that area. So—

GM: Curtis Hixon [Hall]?

TP: Curtis Hixon, right. So we went to the Ybor City Rotary Club, called a meeting of all the people that were really the leading citizens of the community, and we had an evening meeting and a nice dinner at the Columbia Restaurant. And we broached the subject that out of the fifty million, we wanted one million dollars earmarked for Ybor City. And we got the million dollars. The city fathers and all of the leading community leaders and everybody agreed that something should be done. So we had a million dollars earmarked for Ybor City, and we were going to redo all of Seventh Avenue and really, you know, try to revive it.

² Nick Nuccio (1901-1989) was mayor of Tampa from 1956 to 1959, and again from 1963 to 1967. He also served on the Tampa City Council and the Hillsborough County Commission before becoming mayor.

Well, what happened was we had an election year coming up, and the city representatives who were running for reelection, they didn't want to up the budget. And things got so involved that they had public meetings, and they—Ybor City became a pawn. So, what they did, they dipped into the one million dollars, the measly one million out of the fifty million, and took six hundred thousand. That way they didn't up the budget, because they were afraid that the people would vote against it. This is true history.

So, the following year when the election came along, Nick Nuccio lost to Julian Lane.³ And Julian Lane—we went to see him, and we said, “Look, there's so much money.” And Julian Lane agreed with us and he redid our cemetery, beautified it, built a mall with the four hundred thousand.

So out of the four hundred thousand, not only was the cemetery beautified, as it is today, but also the old original lampposts that were there were taken down during the Curtis Hixon administration,⁴ and they were given to schools and to hospitals, TB [tuberculosis] hospital. They were scattered all over. Some of them were even taken over to the—you had lake places. But those lampposts! We fought to keep the lampposts, but would you believe that the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce wanted to have a new type of lamps, and actually told the city, Yeah, take them out. The Ybor Rotary Club was against it, and we wanted to keep the old lampposts.

So, when Mayor Lane decided to redo all of Seventh Avenue, then he hired Milo Smith to be the planner of what to do. And one day I get a call from Milo. He said, “Tony, we want to put up fountains, and we want to put the old lampposts back. Where can we find one?” And I said, “Well, I think you can get one at the Orange Grove Grammar School. They'll lend you one.” Well, to make a long story short, in redoing all of Seventh Avenue, the city had to pay a thousand dollars for each lamppost, which we had—you know, and they were no longer the original ones. So that was another lost cause.

And the fountain I was telling you about, the Ybor fountain? They wanted to put up fountains. I said, “We got one fountain, we can make a mold and then we can go ahead and [have it copied] at the foundry at Six Mile Creek. We can give the man who had the fountain a copy of it, put the original back at the Ybor Factory, and then the city will have a fountain for the mall.” And that's what we did. And right back here in my yard, you'll see a copy of that fountain. And I wish now I had bought more than just one, because at that time in the sixties [1960s], I paid only 150 dollars for that beautiful fountain.

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: And so that's the way things went along, and of course Mayor Lane fixed it all up because it had never been used. And then four years later, Nick Nuccio came along as mayor. Lane lost out, and later he ran and became senator, state senator.

³ Julian Lane (1914-1997) was mayor of Tampa from 1959 to 1963.

⁴ Curtis Hixon (1891-1956) was mayor of Tampa from 1943 until his death in 1956.

GM: What period saw the greatest amount of property removal and housing removal in Ybor City? Was it fifties [1950s], sixties [1960s], seventies [1970s]?

TP: It was in the sixties [1960s]. I think it was about the middle sixties [1960s] when everything went to pot. But I want to go back to the historical markers.

GM: Uh-huh. Sure.

TP: So, I went to Cuba. We had, you know, done all of the research, and we found out that José Martí had come here in 1891. He had made about seventeen trips. The basics of the Cuban Revolutionary Party were actually drawn up right here in Ybor City. The Cuban Revolutionary Party was ratified at the Maceo Cubano on Thirteenth Street and Seventh Avenue. That's where José Martí made his two most famous speeches of his career. And, uh, the speeches are called "*Para Cuba que sufre o para bien de todos*," and the other speech was "*Los pinos nuevos*."

At any rate, we found that we had taken a tremendous part in the liberation of Cuba. The Cubans were being trained here, the volunteers. The rebels were being trained here. There was a hotel on Ninth Avenue and Sixteenth Street where the Golden Eagles Club used to be, which today is the Labor Temple.

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: And right on the corner was a hotel called Hotel Victoria; that was a stopping place for all the rebels who came in to be trained in Ybor City, and then clandestinely they would be sent to Cuba to fight. We found that José Martí—during his time here, they tried to poison him at one time. And there were a lot of incidents that happened. You cannot write Cuban history without talking about Ybor City and what Ybor City did. The workers in the factories—that included Cubans and Spaniards, Italians—most of them gave one day's pay every week to the cause of Cuban liberty. And they called that a *día de la patria*.

So [for] all of these things, we have made markers. The first marker that was put up was the marker in front of the Ybor Factory. It's a beautiful stone, and it was put up by the Ybor City Rotary Club. I think it was 1949. That was our first marker.

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: And of course then [Fidel] Castro came in, and our project went completely [in] disarray. We never were able to get anything out of Cuba. All of our friends left Cuba and moved to the States. So what we did—by this time, it had become a very personal project to me, because I had done all of the research. And we had a foundry on the Hillsborough River that I went to talk to, and I'm trying to think of the man's name. He was very, very nice. He said, "Tony, I'll make those markers for seventy-five dollars apiece."

Well, he made about—well, what I did to raise the money. I went to about twenty-five business houses. I said, “Look, this is a historical marker. We’re thinking if you’ll donate the money for a marker, we’ll erect it ‘By the Tampa Electric Company,’ ‘By the *Tampa Tribune* Company.’” I went to all of the major corporations, and nobody turned me down. So, I was able to raise the money and had the plaques all put up. And then we made it an official project of the Ybor City Rotary Club, because I didn’t want to do it as an individual. I went before the board of directors of the club, and I said, “I have got this ready to go.” And so the Ybor City Rotary Club adopted, or sponsored it. But the research had been done, the money had been gathered, and the city cooperated in putting up the markers.

Well, he started off—the markers were made at seventy-five dollars apiece, but after the first ten, he said, “I can’t do it. You’ve got to pay a hundred.” So, we went a hundred. Later, he went to 150. And of course today, they’re being made in Ohio. All of the markers that are being made today are being made in Ohio. And they cost 450 dollars apiece.

GM: Is that right? Well— (laughs)

TP: We are still putting up markers. My guess is that I personally have been involved with more than forty historical markers that have been put up, not only in Ybor City but all over Tampa.

GM: How many more do you expect will go up?

TP: I hope to continue as long as I live. And I have several markers that I would like to see put up. One of them is on Captain Joseph Fry. He is the first Anglo-Saxon, or the first citizen, born in the community of Tampa in 1826, which was nothing but Fort Brooke. And Captain Joseph Fry went to Annapolis; he became a naval officer and fought in the Civil War on the side of the South. And in 1872 he became captain of a ship called the *Virginus*. And as captain of the *Virginus* they were taking arms, ammunition, and rebels to Cuba in 1872. That was during the Ten Years’ War, the first revolution, you might say, of Cuba.⁵

They were captured by the Spaniards, and Captain Fry and half of the—well, most of the Cubans and half of the crew had been executed. And a British warship [HMS *Niobe*] came into Santiago de Cuba when they heard what was going on. They came there from Jamaica. And Captain [Sir Lambert] Lorraine was the name of the English captain. And he said, “If you don’t stop the executions, we will bombard the city of Santiago.” So they stopped it. But by this time, Captain Fry had been executed.

Several of the younger rebels like Ruben and Garcia, who finally came to Tampa as a grown man, they made history in the community. They were spared because they were

⁵ The Ten Years’ War (1868-1878) was the first of three liberation wars Cuba fought against Spain.

youngsters. But the people of America were so grateful to the English captain that the state of Arizona presented him with a gold brick. And on the gold brick they put, “Blood is thicker than water.” Yeah. It’s quite a history, which I’m trying to tell you, Gary. The first child born in Tampa died for Cuban liberty. And that is a story.

GM: The Virginia Dare of Tampa.⁶

TP: You might say.

GM: Right.

TP: That’s right. He was born June 14, 1826. And, as you know, the fort was established in January of 1824. So it was two years later after the fort was established; that’s before the Seminole War.⁷

GM: Who was the oldest individual you’ve talked to? Who lived here the earliest? You ever talked to someone that lived here before Ybor City?

TP: Yes, but they are all gone. I’m trying to think. I have talked to so many people.

GM: Who’s the most interesting character you ever talked to?

TP: You know, I have his picture, and I am sitting with him. He was very old in 1948. And somewhere or other, I have his name written down. But he was very, very old. And he had come here in Ybor when Mr. [Vicente Martinez] Ybor came. And he told me a lot of stories.

I also talked to a man whose name was Tynor, and he was born in Tampa. When I talked to him in the 1940s, he was in his eighties. And I never forget it. It was one evening, we were sitting on the curbstone out in Gary, and he was telling me the story of the Spanish-American War here: all about the saloons and how wild they were, the soldiers, and all of the prostitutes.

And, of course, I used to visit D.B. [Donald Brenham] McKay a lot. You know, he died in the early sixties [1960s], and he was ninety-four years old. He was probably, in my book, the greatest citizen that ever was born in Tampa. Really, the greatest name in my book is D.B. McKay. He was a courageous man, a very talented man, served as mayor of Tampa for several terms.⁸ He contributed towards the history of pioneer Florida. In his late days—years, rather—he published a Sunday page called “Pioneer Florida” in the *Tribune*. Invaluable information was preserved because of him.

⁶ Virginia Dare (1587-?) was the first English child born in America, to settlers in the Roanoke Colony.

⁷ Pizzo is referring to the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). In December 1835, troops from Fort Brooke were killed in the Dade Massacre, which was the event that started the war.

⁸ McKay (1868-1960) served as mayor for two terms, from 1910 to 1920 and from 1928 to 1931.

I came across a story in the *Tribune* in 1887 about the yellow fever epidemic. He was running the newspaper then. He didn't own it at that time; he was just running it—a young man. The *Tribune* said that in 1887 you could shoot a shotgun down the street. You just didn't find anybody. Everybody took off—

GM: (laughs)

TP: —because they went into the woods. They thought it was safer in the woods, so everybody left town. The competitor of D.B. McKay's newspaper, the other newspaper, wrote that by golly, everybody had gone. But Mr. McKay stayed right here during the epidemic, and he kept putting that paper out.

GM: Was this [Wallace F.] Stovall, or was he McKay's boss?

TP: No, at the time Stovall hadn't come in yet.

GM: Oh, okay.

TP: Before the *Tribune* had to—I know that there was a *Tampa Daily Tribune*, and there was a—

GM: The *Morning Tribune*.

TP: Well, no. The *Tribune*—see, the *Tampa Daily Tribune* then changed into the *Tribune*.

GM: Oh, okay.

TP: I think it must have been the *Guardian*, the other newspaper. And, of course, the little papers were at each other's throats all of the time. They couldn't stand each other. The opposition should have complemented him; in those days he was really something.

GM: From your conversations with these pioneers, would Tampa have been a good place to live in the 1870s or eighties [1880s]?

TP: Well, in the 1870s, Tampa was really in a doldrums. Things were bad. Tampa had shrunk in population. And the 1870s was probably the worst part. There was nothing going on here. It was an isolated community. Progress was at a standstill. But those that lived here seemed to have enjoyed it. There was a lot of game, a lot of fishing. It was quiet. The weather was beautiful. It was also really lovely. And there were those who didn't see much prosperity.

We had an influx in the 1870s. Not a very big influx in population, but we had a lot people come from the state of Nebraska. And we never could figure out what brought them from Nebraska to Tampa.

GM: That why Nebraska Avenue was named?

TP: Probably had something to do with it, because they started developing orange groves along Nebraska Avenue.

GM: Is that right?

TP: If you take from Seventh Avenue to Columbus Drive, Nebraska Avenue was a dirt road with orange groves on both sides.

GM: Uh-huh. Right.

TP: There's a lot of little interesting anecdotes that we discovered in the pioneer days of Tampa. For instance, downtown Tampa, most of the square—you know, the squares?—were mostly orange groves with little buildings on them.

GM: Right, yeah.

TP: When they just started building the Tampa Bay Hotel, they started bringing in shells from a mound out here at Bullfrog Creek and the Alafia [River]. So a lot of the mounds are right under the Tampa Bay Hotel there, the shells. They used to put them on barges, and they used to fill barrels with the shells. One of the barges capsized right by the Tampa Bay Hotel on the river, and all the shells went into the river. They had an awful time getting the shells all out of there.

Also, when they started developing the downtown area after 1891, some of the orange trees were transplanted on the grounds of the Tampa Bay Hotel.

GM: Right.

TP: Just like they did there in Ybor City. That area on Thirteenth Street and Columbus Drive, in the 1890s, used to be called Morey—M-o-r-e-y—Morey Heights. He was a developer, a real estate developer. From Columbus Drive on out, everything was wilderness. But there were orange groves in that area, so they had to take the orange trees out.

A lot of the orange trees were transplanted on Bayshore Boulevard where the Spanish Club built the Centro Español Public Hospital. And until recently, until they sold the hospital and it was torn down—and that's a crime. If you see pictures of that hospital, the architecture—that's one of the crimes of Tampa, when they tore down that hospital. Anyway, a lot of the orange trees were still there when they tore down the building. Now they put a complex of apartments up; they call it Bayshore Trace. And that was where the hospital was located. But, uh—

GM: What do you say when someone says “progress”?

TP: Yeah, progress.

GM: How do you answer?

TP: I believe in progress, and I believe that some changes have to be made, but I think there is a limit to it. You take for example today, the Latin clubs: the new generation is not interested. What functions have the club today when you have got all this Medicare; you've got policies you can buy. You know, the Latin clubs started as mutual aid societies, and they served a tremendous purpose. Latin people are a very proud people. They never got on the welfare rolls. No one from Ybor City would go on the welfare roll. The club took care of it. In other words, the Italians took care of the Italians; the Spaniards did the same thing. The Cuban Club finally emerged also.

And what I was going to say is you take the Cuban Club—it's one the most aesthetically beautiful buildings in Tampa, yet the club is not able to get—financially keep the building in first-class shape. And that building should be forever preserved. So should the Italian Club and the Centro Español.

You take the West Tampa area. You go up Howard [Avenue] and Cherry [Street] and you'll see the Centro Español building. It's gone to pot, but it's still beautiful. That building should never be torn down. And there again, you have the same situation in West Tampa. This building stands out like a sore thumb in a wilderness of shacks. Those buildings—all those wooden shacks today were built in the 1890s and the early part of the century. And I can't see how a lot of those houses—I know there are a lot of rental units there, and I know we have minimum housing, but I still can't see how we promote people to live in some of those houses.

If urban renewal was in existence today, I am in full accord that West Tampa certainly needs it, because the houses are unlivable. And that building stands right in the middle of all this, which served its purpose at one time. So, preservation I definitely believe in. Gary, that's one of the reasons I organized this historical society. You know, the Tampa Historical Society. I became the first president. It's going gangbusters today.

GM: What do you see—reminisce—as your finest jewel, your best historical accomplishment?

TP: Physically?

GM: Physically or emotionally, intellectually; whatever you choose.

TP: Well, I am very proud that I organized the historical society. Very proud, because I could see what happened. There were people who were—especially descendants of many old pioneer families who built the city, and to them it was something of why hadn't we done this before? And today we have some of the most prominent families, and people from all walks of life are involved in the historical society. And this, naturally, gives me tremendous pleasure. And now our headquarters—we're able to obtain the cottage that

Peter O. Knight⁹ built as a honeymoon cottage, and that's going to be our headquarters. We've been raising funds, and we have obtained quite an amount of money and it's all being put back into it. We're really proud of that. We have tremendous people, especially young ladies, that are doing a great job. So, the historical society has been a blessing to Tampa, and I'm really proud of that.

The next thing that I am very proud of is the José Martí Park. I don't want to sound braggadocious, but I'll never forget an elderly Negro man, a Spanish-Cuban Negro, coming and pointing to the old shack. He said, "That's where José Martí lived." That's where that Negro woman Paulina Pedroso had her boardinghouse. And when they tried to poison Martí, she said, "You are going to live here. This is going to be your headquarters, and my husband is going to be your bodyguard."

When I heard all of this, I did research to make sure that the old gentleman was right. And so I went before the Rotary Club, and we formed a committee to either preserve the building—but the building was so far gone—either that or do something with the historic areas. We made many trips to Cuba. We were offered lumber by Cuban companies. We were offered money by Cuban patriots who really believed that something should be done. Newspaper people started coming in from Cuba and stories started being written about it, and it became about the most historic thing through the fifties [1950s]. There's nothing but stories.

And finally what had—to make a long story short, we made many trips and we saw President [Fulgencio] Batista twice; the committee went. In the committee we had Doyle Carlton, former governor of Florida;¹⁰ we had Tony Grimaldi and Johnny Diaz—those were the stalwarts—and Curtis Hixon, mayor of Tampa. We went and we have a picture with the president of Cuba, Batista. And he pledged to give us money. And he said, "I am going to give you twenty-five thousand dollars."

But the house—he sent architects from Cuba here. They studied the building. The building was riddled with termites. It was so far gone you really would have had to build it all over [for it] to be preserved. So we said, "Why don't we make a little park?" And we made—I have the original plans on what the park was supposed to look like.

Anyway, on the second trip, Batista's deputy placed the money. And he said, "We'll send you the money." Well we waited about two or three months, and nothing happened. And in the meantime, the building catches fire, and it was saved. So we took a picture of the building, shown partially burnt, sent it to all of the newspapers in Cuba, and then every newspaper in Cuba ran the picture. "José Martí's house is going to be razed. It's been burnt. It's not going to be preserved." And things got so hot in Cuba over that one

⁹ Peter O. Knight (1865-1946) was a prominent lawyer in Tampa who founded the Holland & Knight law firm and the Tampa Electric Company. He also served as mayor of Fort Myers and in the Florida legislature in the 1880s.

¹⁰ Doyle Carlton Senior (1885-1972) was Florida governor from 1929 to 1933.

building that—this is believe it or not—President Batista called a special session of congress and they appropriated, officially, the money for the house.

GM: Is that right?

TP: When the money was sent here, it was sent to the Cuban consul in charge here. He formed his own committee, changed the plans and put up the project. Of course, I raised hell. I went to see him and I said, “That’s a very dirty way to do things.”

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

GM: Tony, as we start a new day, you had just brought up an interesting point. What are your feelings when you look at all of the historical activity going on in Tampa right now? There appears to be a real resurgence of historical interest among the young, among preservationists, historians at USF and Hillsborough Community College and Gainesville and Tallahassee. You’re deluged by phone calls. What’s your feeling about this when you think back [to] when you were alone in forty-eight [1948]?

TP: I think it’s a wonderful thing to see young people today have really a pride of heritage, and they are very inquisitive as to their roots. This has come about in the last few years, but I think that people should have—

We’re a nation of nationalities, you know. The only real Americans are the Indians. And I think that now I find in all ethnic groups, whoever you talk to, they seem to want to go back to their roots. You hear about trips, people making trips to the old country to see where the village is where their ancestors came from. I think this is good. You have to be proud of what you are. And of course, that doesn’t mean that because you’re proud of your heritage that you’re neglecting your Americanism. Your citizenship is, after all—you’re born here and you love this country. I don’t think anything will ever take its place.

But roots are very important. I think that they do something for your character. They make you feel proud because regardless of what country you pick, every country has its own merit and its own heritage that everyone can be proud of their own heritage. So, I think it is a good thing for all Americans to be proud of their source, where they came from.

And of course, things have changed in that area. Like I was telling you a few minutes ago, why can’t my children be like I am? I speak three languages that I have spoken all my life. I was brought up in an environment that is so different today. My children—the environment has changed. They don’t have the background that I have. I’m not saying this is good or bad. It’s just that we’re in a changing world. And it’s constant. The only thing that’s permanent is change. And the environment is—education has changed in itself.

And, of course, the neighborhoods have changed. A lot of the—well, the big influx of immigrants happened at the turn of the century. We haven’t had really another influx of

immigrants, except for lately from Vietnam or Southeast Asia. But the second or third generation eventually will lose a certain amount of that heritage. It's inevitable. That doesn't mean that you couldn't be a fifth generation Italian or Spaniard and not be proud that your roots are Spanish or Italian. But that's the way it is in America. We're a melting pot.

GM: To follow this up, what do you think if you were to look ahead twenty-five years from now, fifty years from now, maybe a hundred years from now? What will Ybor City be like? What will Tampa be like, historically?

TP: Well, I think fifty years from now—even today, Ybor City is not what it was twenty-five years ago. I see that area changing to the point—the eastern part of Tampa is heavily industrialized out towards that area. We see growth going to the north and northwest. The northeast area with Plant City and Lake Thonotosassa, that eventually will hit its growth, too—unfortunately, because I think that growth is not the best thing for any community.

But there was an article in the *Tribune* this morning that this is happening all over the United States. We're having a population explosion, and there aren't enough houses and we keep growing short. As far as Ybor City, remember that Ybor City was a company town. It was established by Mr. Ybor and Mr. [Ignacio] Haya. They brought the workers here; primarily there were Cubans, with a sprinkling of Spaniards. And then, of course, the Italians started coming soon thereafter, and they came in pretty good size quantities.

But you had a unique area in Ybor City where you had three [groups] and some crackers—you know, Americans—in the area, and it made a very unique neighborhood. For maybe fifty years, that area never changed. It had its own Italian newspapers, Spanish newspapers, and movie theaters. It had legitimate theaters, like opera houses. Companies were brought in by the Italian Club. And it was—the three big clubs were the Cuban Club, the Italian Club and the Spanish Club—and of course the Centro Asturiano, which is also Spanish.

But in themselves, there was a rivalry. It was not an obscene rivalry. It wasn't a rivalry of hatred or anything. But if one club built a beautiful clubhouse, the other clubs would want to have an even more beautiful one. It was because the people were very proud, you know.

But what they did, they got involved with the theater. They brought in—some of the best talent of Spain came into Tampa, [or] from Italy. The Cubans were so close; it was an overnight boat ride, you know. And they had a lot of legitimate acting brought in from Cuba. That was very easy to do. And in the early days they used to even bring in opera singers. I remember one in the 1880s was a lady by the name Lecci, L-e-c-c-i. And they called her a Cuban.

GM: (laughs)

TP: She was naturally Italian; she was a great opera singer. But because she was very popular in Havana and took Havana by storm, the Cubans—remember that the Cubans had a very close relationship with Havana. Newspapers were being sold here from Havana. Not only that, you had two ships plying back and forth per week.

GM: I think our listeners would really enjoy if you could paint a picture of what you consider the high watermark of Ybor City and what a stroll down Seventh Avenue would be like. What time period would you say was the pinnacle of Ybor City?

TP: I think that the late twenties [1920s] and early thirties [1930s] probably was the peak of the Ybor City culture and the peak of Ybor City as a Latin and colorful community, because after World War II, then things began to change. When the war was over and many of the Latin boys came back, most of them went to college, and by that time, that generation, that period, they were getting highly educated. And they wanted to—Ybor City was becoming a blighted area. Remember, most of the houses had been built in the eighties [1880s] and nineties [1890s]. And so to build a new house you would build in a neighborhood that it would—the prices would hold up. Then is when you start seeing a change in Ybor City.

But up to about 1950, it was still pretty well intact. After that was the demise of Ybor. After 1950, you could see the beginning of the end. And that, I think, was inevitable because after all, let's not say it was only Latins. It doesn't matter who it is. Any neighborhood that begins to deteriorate, people are going to eventually move out because they want—the children, they grow up, get married, they want to have a new home.

Now remember, Tampa Heights, which was adjacent to Ybor City and just north of downtown Tampa—that was the most plush neighborhood in Tampa. And the most eminent citizens all lived in Tampa Heights. They had beautiful Victorian homes. I have many pictures of them. But in time, my generation, those that lived in the areas of the Anglo-Saxon families, they all left there and started moving into Hyde Park because the land value was higher. And people do want a change. It's like styles in clothes. Neighborhoods change. I think that it's a miracle Ybor lasted as long as it did.

GM: The Irish comic—I don't know if you remember Mr. Dooley—¹¹

TP: Yeah.

GM: He once said the reason he didn't like history [was] because historians, all they do is study what nations died of and he liked to know what they lived of. Let's talk maybe about the—you know, what you remember about the vibrant sides of Ybor City. Again, take us down that stroll down Seventh Avenue.

¹¹ Mr. Dooley is a fictitious Irish immigrant character created by newspaper writer and satirist Finley Peter Dunn. Mr. Dooley was a bartender in a working class Irish neighborhood in Chicago who commented on political and social issues. Dunn's columns were syndicated nationwide and were extremely popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; they were also collected into several books.

TP: Well, as I was coming up as a child—I was born in 1912. Now, all the—not only the senior citizens, but the generation before mine, they were all immigrants—

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: —the great majority. So, I was in an environment that was so different than, let's say, twenty years later. You know, after my generation started coming into its own. It was a different world. They all spoke Italian or Spanish, or the Cubans spoke their language. They were oriented to the club. The club was the mecca. The whole soul of the Italian life was the Italian Club and the activities of the Italian Club, and the same thing with the Spanish clubs and the Cuban Club.

But those clubs had things going on. They had beautiful libraries, they subscribed to many newspapers from foreign countries and from the north. I remember one particular newspaper came, the *Correo de America*, and even a lot of Italians subscribed to it. But the Italian Club had regular weekly dances, beautiful ballroom. They had legitimate theater.

There was so much going on. And the whole social focus was with the clubs. And some of the activities in the summertime were picnics out in the countryside. All of the clubs did this and this was very enjoyable. And Rocky Point was very popular, Ballast Point was very popular, De Soto Park in Palmetto Beach. And a little later on they started having big picnics on the Alafia River and Bullfrog—*Finca Destal*, they called it, Bullfrog Creek. They were very happy days.

But if the Italian Club gave a picnic, it didn't mean only Italians went. You know, the whole community would go. And that was true with Spanish picnics and Cuban Club picnics and all.

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: And Seventh Avenue was a vibrant main drag. Seventh Avenue probably surpassed Franklin Street at one time. The best shops in Tampa were on Seventh Avenue. And payday was on Saturday, so you can imagine thousands of cigar makers getting their pay on Saturday afternoon. They go home, take a bath and get dressed up in their best finery, and walk up and down Seventh Avenue. And there were cafes all up and down.

pause in recording

TP: All the shops on Seventh Avenue, they kept open on Saturdays until eleven o'clock. And if there was a dance going on on Saturday night, if one of the clubs had a dance, they didn't start their dance till eleven o'clock.

GM: (laughs) Is that right?

TP: Yes. And do you know that customers still come down to this day? A lot of the Latin clubs still start their dances at ten and eleven o'clock at night, which today really doesn't fit. And they wanted all of the employees—clerks and so on—to be able to attend the dances.

GM: Would you find an Anglo on Seventh Avenue in 1930?

TP: Well, you used to find them on Saturday morning. They used to come in on—see, you must remember Hillsborough County was very rural until the forties [1940s]. And Ybor City was a very fine shopping center. And the crackers—that was what we called the farm people—would come in; they used to have caravans of wagons full of their families. Everybody would come in and go shopping all up and down Seventh Avenue. Then by the afternoon they would take off and go back home, because they had quite a ways to travel. And then in the evening, then the Latins came in, so Seventh Avenue was a big day on Saturday. They had a big day. And, uh—

GM: Any ethnic distinctions that you might see on the avenue? For instance, would Italians dress up just like Cubans? And would Cubans talk to Spaniards?

TP: Well, no. They all dressed up more or less the same. They did all their shopping in the same stores and the styles were being followed, the American pattern of dress and so on. However, there were restaurants; on Saturday night all of the restaurants would be crowded. And it wasn't like it was—you know, today they have two or three restaurants. In those days, you had two or three restaurants on every block!

GM: (laughs)

TP: And they had pastries. And they served coffee, the old Cuban style. You know, they used to boil the milk—had a coffee pot—

GM: Café con leche.

TP: Oh, yeah. And the waiter would come along and say, "Do you want it *oscuro*—dark—or medium or light?" And he would pour the coffee according with the milk, you know?

GM: Uh-huh. Any notable exceptions? There was Las Novedades—do you want to elaborate any?

TP: Well, Las Novedades was originally in the middle of the block where—between Fourteenth and Fifteenth on the north side—and it was a unique restaurant. It reminded me very much of a European restaurant. A lot people were very sad when they moved out of there and built a modern type of Spanish motif or a Moorish accent. But it's strange that the Spaniards who owned the Spanish restaurants always tried to—they were from northern Spain, and yet they all went for the southern Spain architecture, the Moorish accent, you know.

GM: That's interesting, yeah.

TP: But I imagine that's typical of Spain; everybody does it.

GM: I suppose it's a commentary on the times that it's a gay bar now. I mean— (laughs)

TP: Oh, that's very sad. Actually, one of the things that really made a lot of people very, very upset was the closing of Las Novedades. I still believe that something could have been done to save that restaurant, but there was no desire.

GM: Was Columbia [Restaurant] always a jewel of Ybor City?

TP: Uh, the Columbia Restaurant was opened in 1903. And it opened up as a saloon, a little café. They had a bar, which is still there. And they had—they served pastries and so on. It was a regular coffee shop, or a bistro or a cantina, if you want to call it that.

What made Twenty-Second Street in the early days very popular—it really was a crossroads. Twenty-Second Street wasn't called Twenty-Second Street in those days. It had a name. In the early days it was called Livingston Avenue.

GM: Twenty-Second was?

TP: Twenty-Second Street. And then they changed the name. When they finally cut a road down to Hooker's Point and started developing Palmetto Beach and the streetcar line was built down there to De Soto Park, then that area became very popular and the crossroad became a very popular place.

Then every morning on Twenty-Second Street—they used to call it the Seminole Corner. And now the reason they called it the Seminole and the Italians used to call it the *Seminol*. I often wondered what the heck that meant and then all of a sudden it hit me that it meant Seminole.

GM: Not in the week but in the Indian [sense]?

TP: Well if you hear it in Italian or Latin *Seminol*, *Seminol*. It didn't sound [like] "Seminole." I thought maybe it was an Italian name they gave it or something.

GM: But you used to be able to go to Hooker's Point via Twenty-Second Street huh?

TP: Yeah.

GM: Oh, I didn't know that.

TP: Yeah. And Twenty-Second Street became the gathering point for the farmers in the morning. That's where they traded, along Seventh Avenue and Twenty-Second Street.

They'd come in with their wagons and they'd get their produce. And we had a lot of peddlers in the early days, Italian peddlers that peddled vegetables and fruit. They would come in about four o'clock in the morning, and before you know it there were hundreds of wagons there, and the crackers and farmers would come in, sell their wares, and the peddlers would buy. And so the place really was a very active corner for many, many years. And later on, I found out why they called it the *Seminol* Corner. There was a saloon there.

GM: The Seminole Saloon?

TP: The Seminole Saloon. There was, in the early days at Twenty-Second Street—let's say at the turn of the century—it was still a little bit out in the sticks. There weren't too many houses out that way. There were dairies.

GM: Right.

TP: And they had two saloons, and they were very notorious. One was called the Red Lantern Saloon. And the other was the Seminole. And there's a cute story about the Seminole café, or saloon. A black cowboy wandered inside the bar on horseback. He was drunk, and he pointed his gun at the bartender and said, "I want a mug of beer and a mug of beer for my horse."

GM: (laughs)

TP: (laughs) So, we had a touch of the Wild West.

GM: Speaking of other— Now, the area called the Scrub was equally notorious.

TP: Yes. Didn't I tell you last week?

GM: Did we talk about the Scrub? I guess we did. Okay, all right. What about the—there must have been thousands and thousands of young people, teenagers, by the thirties [1930s], by the time you were growing up, your age. Tell us maybe about some courtship patterns on Seventh Avenue. What would young people do?

TP: When my generation came along—this is hard to believe, but my generation, when we were in high school, if we dated a Latin girl, usually we had to have an escort. The mother would go along. Dating started when my generation got into high school. We could date. But we had to take the mothers to the movie with us, or go to the dance—

GM: (laughs) Right.

TP: —take the old lady.

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: I remember going to the dances at the Centro Español, which was really the plush dances of my period. And you'd see all along the wall all the Spanish ladies, and some Italians, with their daughters. And that's the way it was, until when I went to college. Then, when I started coming into Tampa and started dating, things were changing. I was dating Latin girls, and I could take them out without their mothers.

GM: Now, did Italians tend to be stricter or less strict than Cuban girls, for instance?

TP: Of all the three Latin races in Ybor City, the Latins were the strictest of all.

GM: The Italians, you mean?

TP: I mean the Italians. (laughs)

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: Very strict.

GM: And the Cubans were the least strict, I would guess?

TP: The least strict. Now, the Spaniards weren't that strict, but they still had a very strong feeling, like the Italians. They wanted their own to marry to Spaniards, you know. And the Spanish people, because of their position—the cigar industry was owned primarily by Spaniards. And all of the key positions in the factory, like the selector or the foreman and all the better jobs outside of making cigars, the jobs beyond that were always held by Spaniards. Very rarely you found a Cuban or an Italian. And all of the readers were usually Cubans, most of them. And that meant that the key jobs were in the hands of Spaniards. And they were the upper strata of society because they had the money, and they lived in better neighborhoods because they could afford it.

And of course the selector or the packer, these are the fellows that were making twice what the cigar maker was making. The ambition of most of the Spanish mothers was that their daughter would marry one of those fellows, you know. But the Italians, they started coming along, and intermarriage started. But in the early days of intermarriage, the Italians just didn't sit down and take it that easily. They really got pretty rough at times. I've heard of incidences where, actually, either a Spaniard or a Cuban who was courting an Italian girl was absolutely intimidated and told to leave town. And he did. And they did. They meant business. It was that bad.

And there are occasions when an Italian father, after the daughter married a Cuban or a Spaniard—I know of two or three. I won't mention their names; the family is still here. But I am talking about back in the twenties [1920s]. The fathers never talked to their daughters [again]. They resented it that much.

GM: Is that right? Equally familiar to you as thwarted courtships in Ybor City was, of course, the *bolita*. Would you care to refresh the readers about the—

TP: Gambling?

GM: The gambling, right.

TP: Yeah, well, *bolita* came very early with the cigar makers. You know, one of the stipulations Mr. Ybor made when he came here to establish his community—he knew the cigar makers, he knew their habits, their likes and dislikes. The Cuban—particularly the Cuban, who actually was in the great majority; it was Cubans—they weren't good churchgoers. They would all wear the medallion and they believed in God, but when it came to going to church, somehow they weren't that good. That was true with most of the Latins in Ybor City. But there was a reason for all of that.

But anyway, when Mr. Ybor came, he said to the city fathers, "Okay, remember, this community is going to be out in the woods by itself. And I want you to know that I know the Anglo-Saxon spirit of church on Sunday and no gambling and so on." And the Anglo-Saxons, the board of trade, they were so anxious to get the cigar industry into Tampa. It really—Tampa was nothing. With the coming of the industry, they could see the tremendous influx of money and development and so on. So, they said, "Well, they're going to be all by themselves in the country, a little community out there, let them do what they want. If they want to gamble, let them have gambling."

But a little later on, the Anglo-Saxons, when they saw Ybor City developing and saloons open on Sunday and the gambling—they had games of faro and dice and card-playing, and there was even cock-fighting. And so, the religious people of the little town of Tampa, they started opening up little branches out there, and they called them missions. Because they wanted to Christianize the Latins! (laughs)

GM: (laughs)

TP: Anyway, this actually happened, and of course a lot of the Cubans became Baptists and Methodists.

GM: Didn't you once play—as a youngster, play a part in the *bolita* game? Were you a messenger boy or something like that? I thought I heard you say that once.

TP: No. The *Tribune* wrote a story about the area, you know, *bolita*. And see, I was interviewed. When I was going to grammar school I would get through early in the afternoon, and I would sell the *Tampa Times* in the evening up and down Seventh Avenue. And in those days, we had open streetcars, and I would work between Twenty-Second Street to Fourteenth Street, up and down until I got rid of my last newspaper.

In those days, they had casinos. And the most plush of the casinos, or gambling houses, was the Lido on Fourteenth Street. And I described what I saw when I walked in as I was selling my newspapers. It was a regular Las Vegas type of casino. It was very plush, and

it was full of people. They were well dressed, and the women were wearing mink. And they had *bolita* throwing and so on.

Bolita started back in the early part of the century here. It was introduced by a man they called Gallego. He was a Spaniard. And at first, the newspaper people didn't know what *bolita* was, or they didn't understand the game. But there were rumors going all over town about this new type of lottery. And Mr. [Robert] Mugge, who used to be the—probably he brought—well, he did. He brought in the first cartload of Budweiser beer into Tampa. He made a lot of money during the Spanish-American War. He was an importer of beverages, hard liquors; a distributor, in other words. And one day he made a remark. He had seen *bolita* thrown, and the grand jury called him in and said, "We understand you have seen this new game played." He said, "Yes, I have," and he described it all. That was the first description of *bolita* ever published in the paper.

GM: (laughs) What year would this have been?

TP: It must have been about 1903. And then, the paper would write—you know, when things got really—where *bolita* was becoming so popular and so widespread, the paper wrote that on Fourteenth Street between Seventh Avenue and Tenth Avenue there were about six *bolita* joints.

GM: (laughs)

TP: And they started raiding them and so on. And they said—in those days, most of the families had their washing done by black women who took in washing. That was very common. So we had over two hundred washwomen. And the paper said that the husbands of the washwomen are stealing their soap so they can get that nickel and go play it on *bolita*.

But in time, *bolita* became Tampa's second industry, you might say. It became so widespread. They had *bolita* peddlers or salesmen selling *bolita*, and it was very common through the forties [1940s] to see riders—they used to call them riders—go into offices, doctor's offices, lawyer, even the mayor's office. And they would sell *bolita*, you know?

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: And it was a way of life in Tampa. It wasn't—it got to the point— Well, of course they had to have protection from the city authorities and the county and the state. And somehow, it became so lucrative that for a long time, you know, everybody was involved in it. And it was okay, I guess. And people took it in stride.

But after Prohibition—see, during Prohibition there were Italians who really dominated the Prohibition business. And that doesn't mean that all of the bootleggers were Italians, because every nationality was involved. But the Italians seemed to predominate, and they became very important in that field and very successful. Then, when Prohibition was amended, these same people looked around and they had nowhere to go, nothing to do.

And all of a sudden they realized that the Cubans and Mr. Charlie Wall and other people really had a good thing going in this gambling. So, they started muscling in. And that's when all the shootouts started throughout the thirties [1930s]. And there were some killings and shotguns—

GM: Right.

TP: —and, you know, killings. And finally, by 1950 the paper and the state and (inaudible) and so on, and it all started to go down the drain. And that was the end of *bolita*, the end of the gangsters as far as that goes.

GM: Right. You had mentioned earlier that there was a reason why Ybor City was anticlerical—that is, not very religious. Do you want to elaborate?

TP: The Spaniards, as well as the Sicilians, came from little villages of their own particular country. And the clergy in those villages, they actually ruled the communities. From what I have read and heard and so on, a lot of the clergy would cater to the well-to-do. And the poor, the peasant, the tiller of the soil and all, he could see that it wasn't really what it was supposed to be, you know. The church should look upon every individual equally. It isn't like our church here in America. It was very provincial and the priests played their politics, and those who had nothing that became the immigrants of Ybor City, they resented the way that things were conducted.

I'll give you a good example: If you read Mr. [Angelo] Massari's book,¹² as a young boy he went to church for confession. The priest sat at the head of the altar like he was the king of the community. And everybody would get in line, and the don of the community, any of the well-to-do, the prominent people, they would come in and go straight to the priest to pay tribute. And Mr. Massari said when he saw that, he just got up and never went to confession. Never went to church again. He resented it, because he figured that man should have gotten in line like he did. And he was a young man. These are the resentments that people brought with them. That's true with the Spaniards, because they had the same situation. The clergy just ruled the roost.

GM: Uh-huh, right.

TP: When the Catholic Church was organized, the Spaniards actually were probably the best churchgoers. The Italians were second, the Cubans third. And the—

GM: The women tended to go more than the men?

TP: The women went to church, the children went to church. They went to Catholic school. And the men just didn't, you know?

¹² *The Wonderful Life of Angelo Massari*. Massari was an Italian who immigrated to Tampa around the turn of the century.

GM: Uh-huh.

TP: The Italians were the hardest group to get together. When the Italian church was organized in Ybor City in the 1890s, they brought in a priest from out west because he spoke Italian. They felt with all these Italians here we ought to have an Italian priest. And his main job was to really get people to become churchgoers. He never succeeded in his job with the Italians. In the early twenties [1920s], they organized an Italian church and put it in an Italian community in Eighth Avenue and Twenty-Third Street. I became an altar boy at that church. Until about ten years ago, that church was still in existence.

GM: Yeah. Tony, in conclusion of this really interesting interview, kind of wrap up your thoughts about Tampa, what do you think? If you could capsule Tampa's history in just a short sentence or two, its motto? And what do you think the future holds for Tampa? You know, is there going to be these mutual benefit societies? Will they still be standing fifty years from now? Will we recognize the Tampa of tomorrow like today?

TP: Sadly, I can't see how the mutual aid societies are going to exist. You've got Medicare and you've got government programs going, and you can buy insurance for health care and so on. It goes beyond the mutual aid societies. The mutual aid society as we knew it in the early days—the immigrants, when they started it, it not only took care of their medical needs but it also served as an organization to protect themselves. They were immigrants and they needed help, and if there were problems [there was] the club and unity, there was strength. And this is how they became so well organized. But today, the need is not there.

They used it for politics, too. And every candidate would come to Ybor City and try to get in with the president and the board of directors of the club, because they thought that the Italians would vote in a block, and the Cubans and the Spaniards. They didn't, actually. There was no such thing. People are pretty darn independent. But that's the way many of the key people in the clubs were able to get political plums and jobs, you know. But the clubhouse or the mutual aid societies as we knew them, I think they're facing a drastic change.

GM: Uh-huh. How about Tampa? What do you think? How would you capsule Tampa?

TP: Well, I think Tampa is a unique community, because it's always been cosmopolitan from its very beginning. It started as a fort, and people came; camp followers started settling near the fort. And in the early days you had Cubans already living here—or Spaniards—who were fisherman on the shores of Tampa Bay. You had people from the Canary Islands living here in the early days. You had a few Germans; not many but there were a few Germans. And a Spaniard or two would come in because of Cuba, the relationship, as the districts were so close.

Then, when you had the influx after the hurricane in 1848, the fort had to be rebuilt and a lot of workers came in from St. Augustine. There were no towns that existed in those days outside of Jacksonville, Tallahassee, St. Augustine, and maybe Key West. So, we

started getting a lot—or rather a group, of third- and fourth-generation Italians that came in 1767, during the English period, to establish New Smyrna. So, the descendants—and they spoke Spanish—they started coming into Tampa. So those Italian names are still with us. But they go back to the 1700s.

And so, from the beginning, Tampa was really a polyglot of nationalities. And it always seemed to progress. It had its bad periods, but it kept [going]. The port was very important, the weather was very important. Proximity to Latin America and the cigar industry, I think, is the thing that really gave it its big boost.

And I am not overlooking the railroad. The railroad came into Tampa in 1883. But the railroad was able to make it possible for the cigar industry to come here. And the railroad also brought in a lot of the development of lumber mills and so on. But the cigar industry, when it comes to total money brought into the area, it was really the prize.

I think that Tampa has a tremendous future. And it's going to grow, and I'm afraid it's going to grow beyond the limits that we'd like to see it grow, unfortunately, because of the ecology. You think of how beautiful fishing used to be in our bay and our rivers. And things are changing, and the pollution is affecting our health and the aesthetics of the community. I look at my car every morning, and I wash it almost every day so it's not covered with dust. It's just sad. And sometimes you see some of your palm trees dying from the pollution.

So, progress is fine. But I think there's a limit to anything. But as far as Tampa as a community, it is going to keep growing. I think it has a great future. Geographically, it has a tremendous position.

One of the things that gave Tampa a really big boost, and people don't seem to realize it, was when they opened up the Panama Canal. Tampa became a very popular area. It brought a lot of people in and industry in here and everything, because the [shortest] distance between a good port to the Panama Canal was by rail to Tampa and onto the Panama Canal. In fact, the City of Tampa was so delighted in 1908 or 1910—I don't remember the date exactly—they had one of the biggest functions held by the city in its history when they opened the Panama Canal.

GM: Is that right?

TP: They brought in the first airplanes [that ever] came into Tampa then. They brought in the first dirigible, and they had one full week of festivities, parades and so on. And they called it the Pan-American Exposition. It was a great celebration.

GM: Yeah. Well, Tony, this has really been enjoyable, and I appreciate it. Thanks again.

TP: Had a lot of fun talking about it

End of interview