

6-1-1995

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Recommended Citation

Culp, Susan O'Brien (1995) "For the Duration: Women's Roles in St. Petersburg and Tampa during World War II," *Tampa Bay History*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol17/iss1/4>

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FOR THE DURATION: WOMEN'S ROLES IN ST. PETERSBURG AND TAMPA DURING WORLD WAR II

by Susan O'Brien Culp

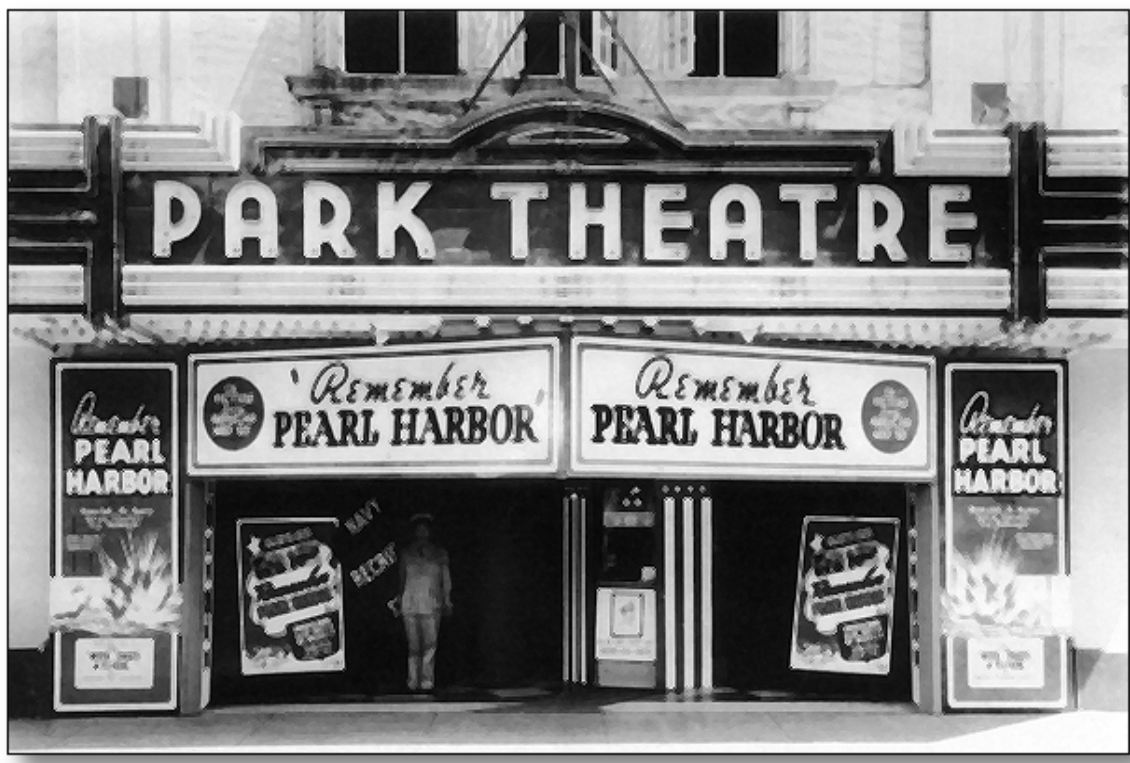
War has often allowed women to do things that have traditionally been unthinkable in times of peace. However, rapid changes in women's roles and their status in society during wartime seem to revert to more traditional concepts with the signing of the armistice. The American Revolution appears to have had little emancipating effect on women despite their proven records in managing the farms and businesses of their fathers and husbands who marched to war. It sometimes seems that the only positive contribution of the Civil War was that it made nursing an acceptable profession for respectable women. Although the Fifteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution as a result of the war, women continued to be denied their rights as citizens.

World War I brought an uprising of fervent patriotism that did not exclude women, who were intent on "doing their part." But they were assigned, in the majority of cases, to work in a volunteer and civilian capacity. Even when women were allowed to enlist in the Navy and Marine Corps near the end of the conflict few saw overseas duty. Navy and Marine work for women was largely clerical. With America's emergence as an industrial society, the participation of women in the labor force, especially in time of war, was beginning to be seen as necessary; however, American society assigned distinct roles to men and women. These roles could change temporarily in time of national need, as they did during World War I, but the traditional American emphasis on women as wives and mothers remained in effect. Despite this fixed image, the war efforts of American women helped them win their right to vote. War accomplished for women's suffrage what peace and reason had failed to do.¹

During the 1940s, when America became the "arsenal of defense," women came out of their homes to make the weapons and supplies that were needed. In record numbers, they left the kitchen for defense plants and military service. Others stayed at home, but they did it in circumstances that were altered by the war.

The ideal American woman of the prewar years had it drilled into her that her prime responsibility was to her family. However, the attack on Pearl Harbor undermined this view. Industry needed women in jobs previously reserved for men. When the War Manpower Commission and the Office of War Information initiated a policy of selling the war to women, their image underwent a major transformation. By 1943, the "ideal" woman worked.² If this represented a new image, it was only "for the duration," because women were expected to return to their place in the home when the war ended. As a result of these conflicting expectations, scholars debate how much difference World War II made in the lives of American women.

Karen Anderson, a leading women's historian, contends that the war marked an important turning point, for it began to make acceptable the notion that women could combine home roles and paid employment; however, she remains concerned that women's secondary status within the labor force did not improve significantly. Anderson concludes that any historical picture of the war years as a period of unrivalled economic opportunity and social advance requires consid-

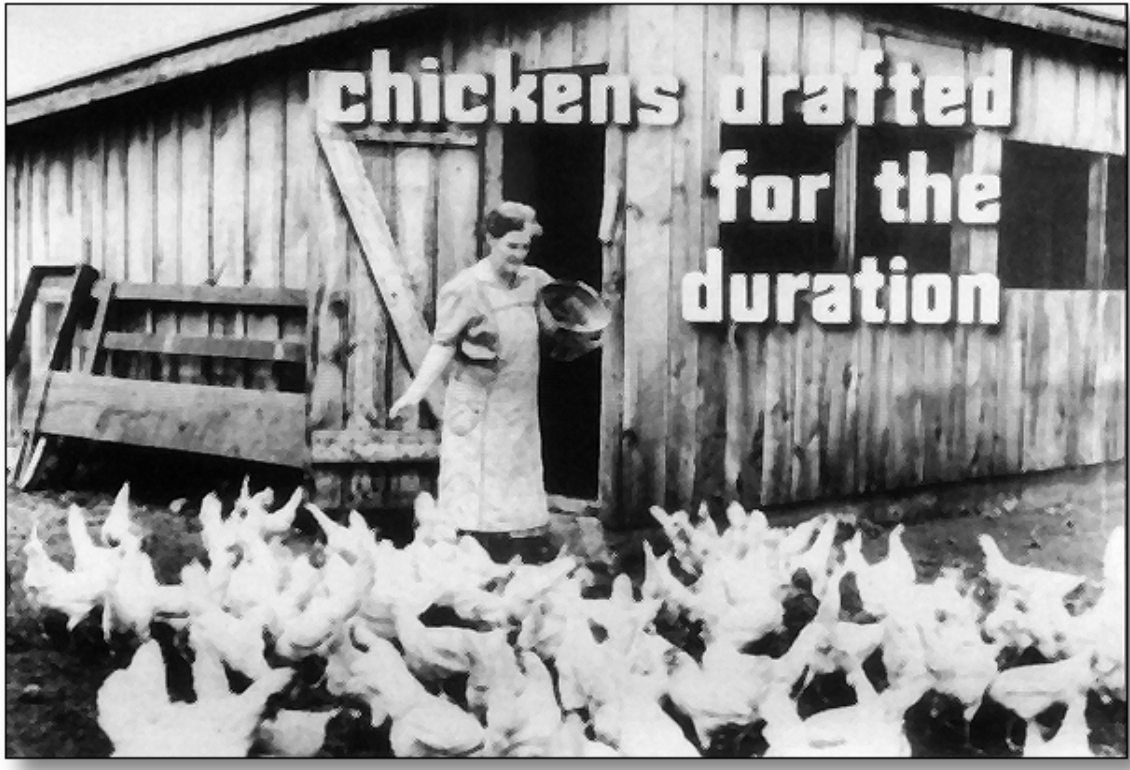


A double-billing at a Tampa movie theatre sent the messages “Remember Pearl Harbor” and “Wife Takes a Flyer” to people on the homefront.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

erable qualification. She believes that prejudice continued to define the extent of change. As an example, no issue generated a greater emotional response than that of marital fidelity on the part of servicemen’s wives. A patriotic literature condoned infidelity on the part of the husband as inevitable, but society demanded the wife be faithful. The double standard persisted throughout the war.³ Many found adhering to such a high standard of conduct difficult, if not impossible to maintain. The wartime reaction to the possibility of increased social and sexual freedom mirrored a similar response to all changes in women’s roles fostered by the war. Although the war offered women new opportunities for independence and challenged prevailing stereotypes about their emotional and physical makeup, it also promoted a return to traditional family roles once the war was over.

Ruth Milkman maintains that wartime ideology continued to be based on prewar conservative values for it was the intention of capitalists to maintain gender divisions within the labor force even while hiring women to fill men’s jobs. Milkman believes that job segregation is fundamental to gender inequality for low wages help to maintain an economic dependence on men. Despite this, she believes World War II was a major turning point in the history of American working women. Wartime mobilization and demands swept aside the barrier of traditional sexual division of labor.⁴



Even chickens were “drafted for the duration,” according to this frame from a filmstrip produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Photograph from *American Women and World War II* by Doris Weatherford.

Maureen Honey theorizes that World War II had a positive effect on women's roles in society. Honey does not minimize the negative aspects of the propaganda of the era. For example, the notion that women have a right to be treated as individuals ran counter to the major goal of war propaganda that advocated a collective spirit of self-sacrifice on the home front. The media also portrayed women war workers as patriots who would eagerly leave paid work to start families after the war. Honey, however, rejects the view that women were manipulated into and out of the labor force by propagandists. The most important factor in women taking a job was financial incentive. Both the government and industry miscalculated when they assumed all women would want to quit their jobs after the war. Despite the many myths propagated, one of the most dramatic changes brought about by the war was the positive image of married women workers, including the notion that homework and factory work could be combined with some success. Whatever the desired motives of World War II propaganda, it gave a positive image of women's nontraditional and professional roles. Honey offers a valid hypothesis when she claims that the Office of War Information (OWI) was not successful in manipulating most women into and out of the workforce. The reasons for women to join the workforce were as diverse as the diversity among individual women. That women “bought” wartime propaganda is not as clear a picture as previously theorized.⁵



Government posters like this called on housewives to enter the labor force.

Photograph from *Mobilizing Women for War* by Leila J. Rupp.

Doris Weatherford believes the changes in women's roles during the war were not temporary. Weatherford contends the historical status of women permanently changed. Sixty-six women were captured at Corregidor and spent the next three years in a Manila prison camp. Their lives and their perceptions of their roles in society may be perceived as changing permanently. While thousands of military nurses faced death and suffering on a scale they had never encountered before, they served by choice as volunteers. Thousands of others left the nursing profession for industrial jobs. Despite years of education and experience, they found they could earn more as defense-plant trainees, and they changed their occupation. Black women were not permitted, however, to serve as nurses in the military until 1945 and, in the civilian sector, were not allowed in "white" hospitals other than in the most menial of jobs. The war did little to improve the status of women doctors, but for nurses it was a career boom. Nurses were no longer looked on as servants of the wealthy and menial duties were dropped.⁶

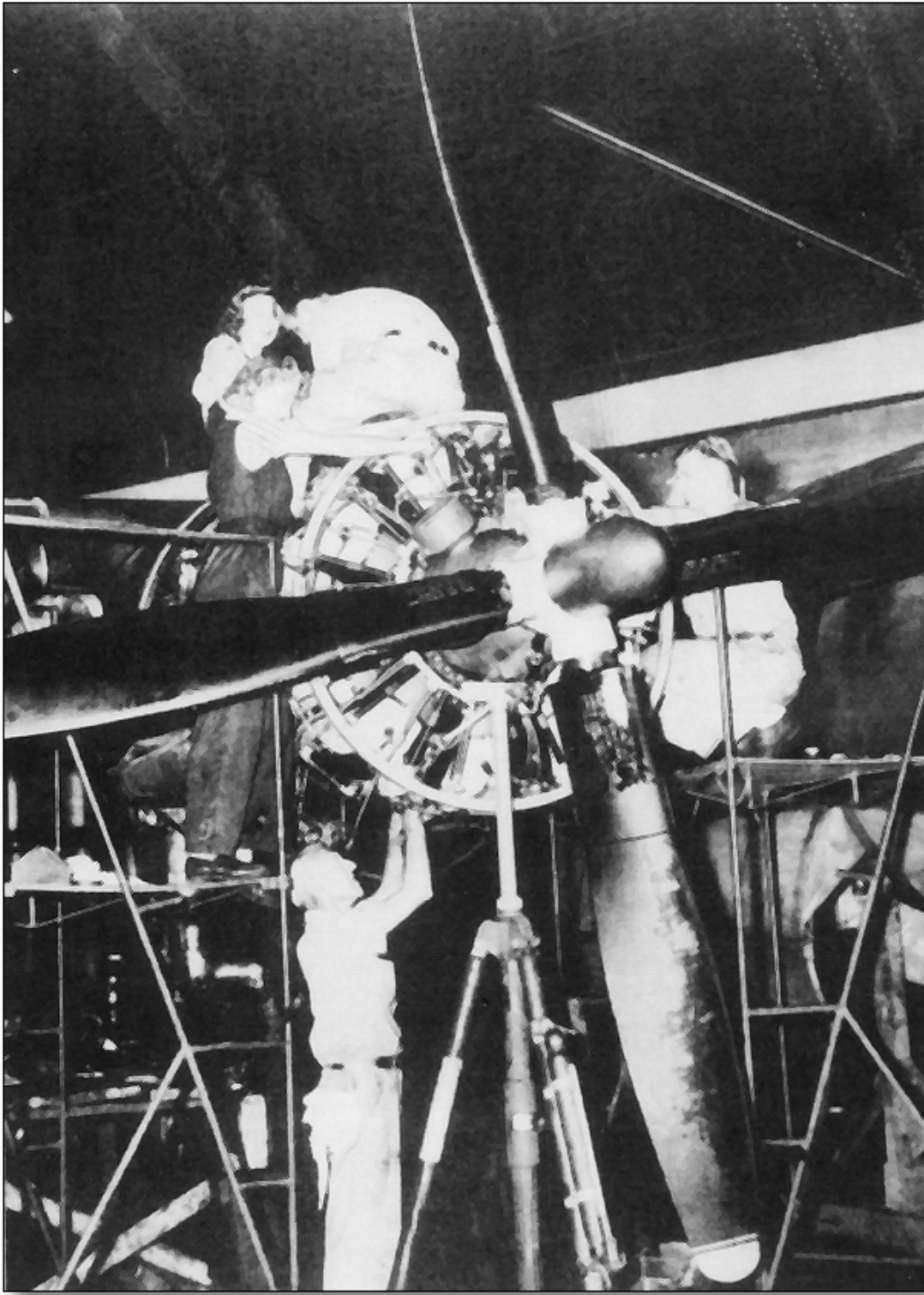
In her stunning book of interviews with women, Sherma Gluck shows how World War II changed American women. For black women, the war was a turning point. As Fanny Christina Hill, a black woman determined to live the American dream, states, "Hitler got us out of the white folk's kitchen."⁷ Gluck asks for historians not to debate the degree of change resulting from wartime experiences, but to study the process of change. Wartime experiences meant different things to different women, and it affected them differently. She feels that change has a private face that historians have difficulty grasping. If it is true that most women working in industry lost their jobs at the end of the war, many bought their own homes and held on to them. Moreover, war work challenged the prevailing definition of womanhood. Gluck's oral histories give insight into women's attitudes and feelings about work.⁸

One of the most striking themes in Gluck's history is the desire of women to prove themselves. World War II allowed women to "spread their wings" and become self-confident participants in the wider world. The biggest change was that their concept of themselves as women was drastically and permanently altered. Gluck admits this changed consciousness is hard to assess, but it is imperative for historians to attempt the assessment.⁹ Letters written by women during the war reinforce Gluck's contention that World War II changed forever women's view of their roles and status in society. In letter after letter, women expressed pride in their wartime activities and were enthusiastic about the new sense of responsibility and independence they were achieving.¹⁰

No single study can resolve these historical controversies about women's roles in World War II, but this article examines the experiences of women in Tampa and St. Petersburg in an effort to measure the impact of the war.

Tampa became a vital unit of the national defense program in 1939 when MacDill Army Air Field was established. The Works Project Administration supplied more than 2,000 men for the job. Women were still excluded from construction jobs, but when MacDill was finished in 1942, it provided a thousand jobs for both male and female, black and white. Soon it was bringing into the Tampa area a payroll that exceeded even that of the cigar industry.¹¹

In St. Petersburg, the public seemed more concerned with the tourist trade than with military preparedness. An effort to organize a Home Defense Unit, modeled after the Home Guard of Great Britain, failed in May of 1941.¹² St. Petersburg had no industrial plants which could be



Women working alongside men as part of a civilian ground crew repairing a Pratt and Whitney motor at Tampa's MacDill Field.

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Summer 1943).

converted to produce goods needed in a war effort. Its chief business was in providing rooms for winter visitors. Local government did not realize it at the time, but those thousands of empty rooms were to be the economic salvation of St. Petersburg. If Tampa was getting by on "small" government contracts, St. Petersburg was "languishing in the sunshine."¹³

St. Petersburg and Tampa were stunned when the radio relayed the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Hours earlier, both Sunday editions of the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Tampa Morning Tribune* had been delivered to residents. The international news was grim; however, not all of the front pages were devoted to news of impending war. Welders in the Tampa area were planning a strike to settle differences with shipyard management. The strike was scheduled for Monday, December 8.¹⁴ The strike would never occur. Other events were about to claim the attention of the citizens of the Tampa Bay area.

William Powell and Myrna Loy co-starred in "The Shadow of the Thin Man" playing at several theaters in the local area. Sunday matinees were crowded on this last quiet Sunday afternoon. Peace and quiet would soon be rationed "for the duration," a phrase soon familiar to the men and women of the area. Suddenly the lights went on in the theaters as managers stepped in front of their audiences with the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. For several moments, not a sound could be heard. After the message was received, people quietly left their seats. There was no rush nor panic. People just wanted to get home.¹⁵

The war wrought drastic changes in the local economy, although changes came slowly. In St. Petersburg a total of 9,820 young men, ages 21 to 35 inclusive, had registered for the first draft on Wednesday, October 16, 1940. Before the war ended, 6,473 were inducted 5,006 white and 1,467 black residents.¹⁶ Women, of course, were not subject to the draft. When the war started, "womenfolk" (white) in southern cities like St. Petersburg and Tampa generally stayed at home if they were married. If women worked, they could select from low-status jobs available in local papers: housekeeper, seamstress, beautician, saleswomen and waitresses or cooks for the local resort hotels. Color preference predicated every ad and occasionally age and marital status. Black women were in demand as domestics.¹⁷

Pearl Harbor and its horrors awakened the Tampa Bay area to the reality of world conflict. Local air-raid warning service was almost immediately put into effect. The centers were entirely "manned" by volunteers, both men and women, who were to report any flying object showing lights, day or night, and they operated on an around-the-clock schedule. Women answered the phones at the Tampa observation center. However, one resident complained that "young ladies" and soldiers were seen going in and out of the communications center at all hours of the day and night.¹⁸ War or no war, the young women of the Tampa Bay area were obviously running amuck. If they did not know the difference between right and wrong, this guardian of local morals did. Little did the woman realize that other "outrages" were soon to follow.

In some ways, life remained remarkably similar to pre-war days. Morning and afternoon radio programs continued to cater to the housewife. She could turn the dial to "Women in White," "Light of the World," and "Ma Perkins."¹⁹ In St. Petersburg, the American Legion's Women's Auxiliary still collected Bundles for Britain. The League of Women Voters declared the St. Petersburg city stockade to be "a disgrace to the Sunshine City."²⁰ The fact that the stockade was



Women helped entertain troops at Tampa's USO club.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

racially segregated did not seem to upset the ladies, but because the bathrooms were not sexually segregated was an issue that raised feminine hackles. Communal toilets would have to go. In Tampa, the war was no excuse to cancel Hillsborough High School's Senior Play, "Ever Since Eve." The entire football team was starring in the comedy. Tyrone Power and Betty Grable were playing in the movie *A Yank in the R.A.F.* at the Roxy, but now there was no need for adventuresome Tampa youth to join the R.A.F. to see "action." The United States Army Air Corps remained open around the clock for local enlistments.²¹

Tampa girls were called on to attend three dances for soldiers during the first week of the war. They served as partners for the 114th and 117th field artillery regiments with "acceptable" boys from Alabama and Mississippi. Tampa's own 116th was asked to provide their own dates. The girls had to be registered with the recreation committee of the Defense Council or USO to attend the dance. Chaperons included Defense Mothers, representatives from the Masons and Catholic Church, and assorted Protestant ministers. Tampa Bay's social conventions would be maintained "for the duration."²²

Some inhabitants of the Tampa Bay area did not long remain untouched by the war. Theodore F. Byrd, Jr, was the first Tampan killed in World War II when Japan bombed the Philippine Islands.²³ Mrs. Mildred Westbrook Van Poole, a Junior Hostess at MacDill Field, was notified that her only son, Robert, was killed in Honolulu on December 7. He was only twenty years old.

Mrs. Van Poole was one of the first mothers entitled to place a sad little gold star in her front room window.²⁴ Other gold stars would soon appear in homes throughout the Tampa Bay area. The war would ask much from American women.

The Army soon arrived in St. Petersburg. Although the city had no large industrial plants that could be converted to produce war goods, it did have a wonderful climate, plus an enormous supply of housing. In the spring of 1942, authorities notified city officials that St. Petersburg had been selected as the basic training center for the technical services of the Army Air Corps. Every large hotel was taken over by the military. Only the Suwannee was left for civilians. The Vinoy Park Hotel became the local headquarters of the Army Air Corps. The Don CeSar, on St. Petersburg Beach, was converted into a military hospital. Unlike the requisitioning of the other hotels that threw hundreds of women, both white and black, out of work, the Don CeSar hired local white nurses and, for the first time in the local area, black nurses aids.²⁵

For residents of the area the war meant economic recovery. Women thrown out of work by the military's requisitioning of their hotels soon found other work. Downtown streets were often jammed with marching platoons and armored convoys. World War II accomplished what eight years of the New Deal had failed to accomplish: a sharp decline in unemployment and an end to the economic depression that had crippled the area since 1929. Wartime conditions caused major adjustments in age and gender roles. Retirees, women, teenagers, and even children were called upon to keep city services functioning. Much of the responsibility for maintaining the homefront fell to young and middle-aged women. In addition to working as nurses, teachers, clerical workers, and volunteers, women often found themselves working in previously all-male occupations. In March 1942, St. Petersburg hired eleven women to work as bus and trolley operators.²⁶

By the fall of 1942, 20,000 military men and women had descended upon St. Petersburg. When word came that 15,000 more would soon arrive, a tent city was established in the Jungle area – once a large golf course to the rear of what is now Farragut Academy. Every available room in both Tampa and St. Petersburg was filled. Early in 1942, a midnight curfew became law. Nights were blacked out and car headlights got a green coat of dark paint.²⁷

Despite the dark nights, “flaming youth” returned to both cities in force with the military presence. Army Military Police and Navy Shore Patrol helped keep the peace. Restaurants, bars, and dance halls often filled to overflowing. Local St. Petersburg girls became “Bomb-a-Dears,” and beauty contests were held at the pier to choose Miss Personality – the finalist to compete for “Queen of the Air Force.” Pictures of “pin-ups” graced the pages of the local newspapers. One depicted Miss Georgia next to two planes. She was dressed in very brief white shorts – the brevity of which no doubt highlighted a shortage in material, and she announced her desire to be a ferry bomber for Uncle Sam.²⁸

Despite the seeming laxity of convention, mothers of the area vigilantly safeguarded their daughters' virtue. At the Tampa USO, 1,500 “V-Ettes,” between the ages of eighteen and thirty years, were admitted to dances only upon presentation of registration cards. In addition, three Tampa references had to vouch for a girl's character, and no girl was allowed to leave the building until the dance ended. In spite of these safeguards for the girls' morals, the “V-Ettes”



Local women socializing with military personnel at Tampa's USO building in February 1942.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

were extolled as being “just what the doctor ordered” to cure just about anything that might be wrong with the young serviceman.²⁹

Jobs began to appear in newspapers that requested women for the first time. In addition to the old standbys, requests for female linotype operators, mechanics, and chauffeurs became common. The U. S. Employment Service Office canvassed for women to work as weathermen, pilots, upholsters, and, in the shipyards, as welders.³⁰ Joan of Arc, not Rosie the Riveter, dominated the shipyards. Employment also opened in agriculture. From 1942 until 1945, the government requisitioned all canned and processed fruits for military and Lend Lease purposes. Labor shortages threatened the Tampa citrus and food producing areas. When workers deserted seasonal employment for more stable defense jobs, housewives were recruited to harvest perishable crops. A 1943 survey in Hillsborough County reported that seven out of eleven persons working on farms were females.³¹

Less favorable opportunities for employment existed for black women, who faced both gender and racial prejudice. In St. Petersburg, the unfavorable local job market may have been partially responsible for the proportion of men and women in uniform being higher in the black community than in the white community. All blacks were assigned to segregated units. Only a few black Navy stewards served in the Tampa Bay area. There were few black women serving in uniform in the area. Black domestics and day laborers had been put out of work in large numbers



A woman welder at a Tampa shipyard in April 1943.

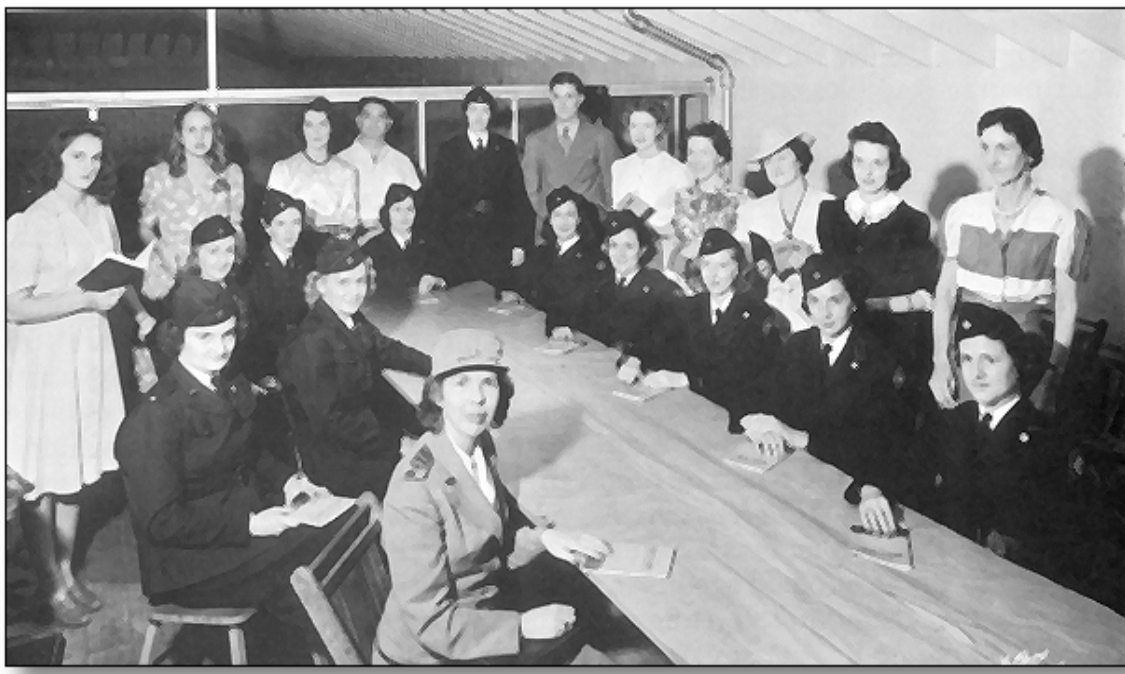
Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

when the hotels closed to civilians. African Americans, however, found job in industries that held government contracts, although there was an unwritten quota system in place in the Tampa Bay area.³²

Substandard housing and schools were the norm. The University of Tampa and St. Petersburg Junior College remained closed to blacks. For 15,000 blacks in St. Petersburg, there were only two doctors and one hospital. There were no public beaches or libraries available for the black population. No law prohibited blacks from sitting on St. Petersburg's famous green benches, but custom suggested otherwise.³³

In November of 1942, local authorities announced a "work or jail" edict. Black men who could not prove employment were threatened with imprisonment. Raids stepped up when there was a shortage of labor. The police were empowered by the city council to act as labor agents for city agencies and other local employers who were short of labor. If black women, or men, objected to this treatment of family members, they were imprisoned. Meanwhile, Tampa duly reported that one young black girl, age ten, had successfully passed her exam for air raid warden.³⁴

Many wives of officers and enlisted men stationed in the area came to stay while their husbands were in training. Often, even when the husbands went overseas, the wives remained in the area. Housing became so acute that the Office of Price Administration put a ceiling on rents



Red Cross workers and volunteers at a 1943 meeting in Tampa.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

to prevent profiteering. The crowded cities brought a record breaking business to stores throughout the year and not, as in the past, only during the winter months.³⁵

If wives from other states were residing in the Tampa Bay area in record numbers, local women were leaving in equally large numbers. Judging from marriage and engagement announcements in the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, it seemed Tampa women rarely married a Tampa man. Tampa Bay women packed their bags, kissed their families goodbye, and following their new husbands, scattered across the United States.³⁶

By the end of 1942, women holding down men's jobs no longer seemed news. What did interest women was fashion. A bobby pin shortage had caused the feather cut to become popular. Besides being attractive, this hairstyle was less likely to become entangled in heavy factory machinery. Women of the Auxiliary Aircraft Warning Service were cautioned to forswear purple lipstick as it had a tendency to give a rather macabre appearance under artificial lighting. In one article, the plunging neckline was extolled for the woman war worker because "it keeps right on pulling in males." Other articles demanded that women war workers be models of good grooming. The absence of articles devoted to the appearance of male war workers suggests no one in the Tampa Bay area cared what men looked like on the job.³⁷

Despite efforts by the Office of War Information to glamorize the role of the female in the military, stories about the "petticoat" army abounded in the printed media. One concern proved groundless; women seldom became PWOP (pregnant without permission). The media delivered mixed messages on women's role in the military. One pictorial essay illustrated a woman marine

jujitsu trainer deftly practicing her craft, while another story featured an “appreciating” visiting male officer checking WACs for straight stocking seams. One episode of “The Sad Sack,” syndicated in both local papers, showed a poor, befuddled enlistee being released for active duty by a woman replacement. His befuddlement was compounded when he found that his “active duty” assignment was to guard an off-limit WAC area. The *New Yorker* magazine, in the October 1942 issue, printed Helen Holenson’s satirical cartoon of a very irate WAVE officer listening to a stereotyped women’s club officer tell her rapt audience, “Miss Whitehead has come to tell us how to amuse sailors.”³⁸

Life was the most popular magazine in America during World War II. For the years 1941 to 1943, its editors attempted to cover the role of women in the war seriously. A study of the magazine for those years reveals that in 1941 five cover stories depicted women and the coming war, focusing on Washington, D.C., workers, Army nurses, women air-raid wardens, knitters, and the American housewife. In 1942, seven cover stories that dealt with the importance of women in the war effort, followed by six covers in 1943. Only one cover in 1944 was devoted to women and it explained how models make good mothers. In 1945, the magazine proudly offered thirty years of American women in swimsuits as one of two covers highlighting women. The other cover depicted a beautiful girl lying in the sand. The caption read simply, “Florida.” Of all the women in Florida who worked, sacrificed, defied shortages and rationing to raise their families, this was the Florida girl selected to grace the cover of the most popular magazine in America. Not until the 1970s would magazines again depict the contributions of women to society as they had during the war.

Two of the most famous G.I. pin-ups of World War II were available to show the “ideal” woman of the American fighting man. Rita Hayworth (in a black, silk nightgown) and Betty Grable (in a swim suit) showed the standard of feminine perfection. When, in 1944, Postmaster General Frank C. Walker banned pin-ups from the mails, he earned the fury of American men. No mention is made of the response of the American women.³⁹ It might not be unreasonable to speculate that it included a feeling of relief.

The war years meant rationing and frazzled nerves. Clearwater Beach became the vacation destination for local families who saved enough gasoline. Rationing of gas, tires, and food became a part of the local housewife’s daily life, and life itself became a battle to ensure her family’s comfort. The war pinched Tampa Bay pantries. Canned goods became scarce. Three-day-old coffee grounds could be recycled into candy; uses were also found for the soybean that had previously fed cattle. Recipes called for reduced sugar and shortening and advertisements advocated the substitution of oatmeal for meat. Three hundred Tampa women participated in a weekly radio program, “Women At War,” depicting the part they played in the area war effort. Their roles ranged from housewives, pilots, and weathermen to shipyard workers.⁴⁰

By 1943, *Life* reported that the Nash Kelvinator Corporation was no longer making cars and refrigerators, in order to produce Navy Corsair fighter planes. A full page ad depicting seven apron-clad housewives crawling over a Sherman tank sent the message that natural gas was vital to war production and women must use it wisely. Another entire page warned women to take care of the sheets they had and to “please, please make them last.” The housewife was inundated

with tips on how she could help win the war by being thrifty and sensible. She might even attract a handsome soldier by feeding him a Ritz Cracker, according to the not so subtle message of one ad.⁴¹

By June 1943, local news was returning to the front pages of both papers in the area. As the bombing fury mounted over Germany, a local story of seven vacationers, who suffered burns when their boat caught fire off Honeymoon Island, vied for front-page space. In Tampa, readers encountered a sad story that reported Harvey Lake, a young dairy employee of Mrs. Jeanette Gore, was reclassified 1-A, leaving Mrs. Gore as the sole milker of seventy-eight, apparently desperate, cows.⁴² Help might not have been immediately available to Mrs. Gore, but the dairy industry was about to have its horizons expanded. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported that Mrs. Virginia Mitchell had become Southern Dairies first “lady” milkman. The company qualified its exuberant praise for Mrs. Mitchell with the announcement that this only “for the duration.”⁴³ As 1943 progressed, despite the fact that local railroads were now hiring women as common laborers, more and more articles referred to women’s war work as “temporary.”⁴⁴

These “temporaries” experienced a hard time during the war. Despite O.P.A. rent controls, a desperate young woman welder in the Tampa area advertised for a “comfortable cottage, rent not to exceed \$20.00 a month, furnished,” to accommodate herself and her two sons who had been kept with relatives in Winter Haven. Her plight was not uncommon.⁴⁵

Employment ads continued to show opportunities for women in 1944. As the Allies smashed northward in Italy, women in the Tampa Bay area found new jobs as bartenders, photographers, trolley conductors, bus drivers, bakers, and truck drivers. Women’s clubs were still volunteering millions of hours for the war effort. Navy Mothers were sewing for Navy hospitals and the VFW auxiliary was still collecting Bundles for Britain.⁴⁶

The spring of 1945 marked the beginning of the end of World War II. February had seen the last days of the Ardennes Salient, the recapture of Bougainville and New Guinea. In February, *Life* ran its “Florida” cover that bypassed the housewife, war worker, and woman soldier.⁴⁷ *Life* and Florida looked forward to more traditional days. Wine advertisements now extolled candlelight dinners for reasons that had little to do with fuel shortages. Soon consumer goods became readily available. By December 1945, car ads tempted all the residents of the Tampa Bay area, and women were assured they would have no difficulty obtaining all the cosmetics, coffee, and electric blankets they desired. The Wear-Ever Aluminum Corporation was asking women, “Is there a man in your life?”⁴⁸ In St. Petersburg, new supplies of pineapples made the front page.⁴⁹

As Johnny came marching home to Tampa and St. Petersburg, engagements and weddings were accorded a separate section in the local newspapers. Tampa Bay women followed their American sisters into domestic bliss. As war work ceased, female war workers were notified their services were no longer required. When businesses reconverted and began to hire again, they gave preference to the returning soldier and to the unemployed male civilian.⁵⁰

The war was over. It seemed the majority of women were about to be transformed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, into that apparently most beautiful and prized of Southern flowers –



This February 1945 cover of *Life* suggested a return to a traditional image of women. The girl selected to represent “Florida” was Amelia Crossland, a 16-year-old student at St. Petersburg High School.

the Magnolia. Whether the “steel” they had acquired from World War II would cease to exist or only remain dormant remains a subject of controversy among historians.⁵¹ While it is true that statistics document women returning to the home and family, they do not tell the whole story. No single statistic shows that women returned to being “traditional” housewives, only that they returned to the home in large numbers.

If women generally made no great permanent gains in the workplace, they became a force to be reckoned with as the most spectacular consumer boom in American history began after the war. Madison Avenue might have tried to manipulate the American woman, but it ignored her at their peril. If the housewife was seen by the media as still “mother” to mankind, she was slowly but surely, becoming a full partner in the family with her husband. This partnership took new forms. The housewife was no longer simply the apron-clad cookie baker of yore. If she remained the oil that greased the gears of the family, she did it in her own car. If she found it necessary to work full or part-time to maintain the level of family life she deemed necessary, she did it and often without the approval of her husband. Adverse media propaganda to the contrary, women began to enjoy earning and spending their own money. Despite what statistics seemed to show, the role of women would never be quite the same after World War II.

¹ William H. Chafe, *American Women: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Role, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 48-65; and Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women For War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 55.

² Rupp, *Mobilizing Women*, 89.

³ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 81, 173-178.

⁴ Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 2, 58.

⁵ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 19, 27, 55, 128, 211.

⁶ Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1990), 17, 18, 20, 30.

⁷ Sherma Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (New York: New American Library, 1987), 23-24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 260-261.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 265-266.

¹⁰ Judy Barrett Letoff and David C. Smith, eds., *Since You Went Away* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145-181.

¹¹ Gary Mormino and Tony Pizzo, *Tampa* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1983), 172-74; Karl Grismer, *Tampa* (St. Petersburg, 1950), 292-94.

¹² Grismer, *Tampa*, 287.

¹³ Raymond O. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream* (Norfolk: Donning Company, 1988), 299.

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- ¹⁴ *St. Petersburg Times*, December 7, 1941, 1; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 7, 1941, 1.
- ¹⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, Extra Edition, December 7, 1941, 9.
- ¹⁶ Karl H. Gismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg: P.K. Smith & Company, 1971), 264-266.
- ¹⁷ *St. Petersburg Times*, Want Ads, December 8, 1941, 6; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, Want Ads, December 8, 1941, 17.
- ¹⁸ Evanell K. Powell, *Tampa That Was* (Boynton Beach: Star Publishing, 1973), 126.
- ¹⁹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 8, 1941, 12.
- ²⁰ *St. Petersburg Times*, December 8, 1941, 13, 14.
- ²¹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 8, 1941, 9, 15.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 10.
- ²³ Powell, *Tampa That Was*, 124.
- ²⁴ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 8, 1941, 17.
- ²⁵ Gismer, *Story of St. Petersburg*, 193; Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 299; The Pinellas County Planning Council], *Pinellas County Historical Background* (Florida: Pinellas County Historical Museum, 1986), 40.
- ²⁶ Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 307.
- ²⁷ Del Marth, *St. Petersburg: Once Upon a Time* (St. Petersburg: City of St. Petersburg, 1976), 27.
- ²⁸ Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 302; Young, *Pinellas Peninsula*, 151; *St. Petersburg Times*, June 7, 1942, Sec. 2, 28.
- ²⁹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942, Mag. Sec., 1.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, Part 2, 4 and 5.
- ³¹ Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), 418; *Miami Herald*, March 21, 1943, 38.
- ³² Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 303.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 307.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 304-305; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942, 13.
- ³⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, June 7, 1942, Sec. 2, 9; Gismer, *Story of St. Petersburg*, 195.
- ³⁶ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942, Part 3, 1-6.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 and 8.
- ³⁸ *This Fabulous Century: 1940-1950*, vol. V (New York: Time-Life Books, 1969), 62-63, 176, 177.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 123-125.
- ⁴⁰ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942. Part 3, 3, and 15, and Part 2, 4.

⁴¹ *Life*, February 15, 1943, 7, 10, 33.

⁴² *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 25, 1943, 1.

⁴³ *St. Petersburg Times*, June 6, 1943, 20.

⁴⁴ Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 307.

⁴⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, June 6, 1943, 3.

⁴⁶ *St. Petersburg Times*, June 1, 1944, Sec. 2, 1; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 17, 1944, 12.

⁴⁷ *Life*, February 5, 1945.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, December 3, 1945, 12-14, 4.

⁴⁹ *St. Petersburg Times*, June 21, 1945, 1.

⁵⁰ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 13, 1945, 4.

⁵¹ *St. Petersburg Times*, June 21, 1945, 14; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 13, 1945, Sec. 2, 1-2.