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# **FROM PATRIOTISM TO MUTUALISM: THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CENTRO ESPAÑOL DE TAMPA, 1891-1903**

by Ana Varela-Lago

For eleven years, the Centro Español stood alone as the representative of the Spanish colony in Tampa. Then, in 1902, a number of its members decided to organize an affiliate of the Centro Asturiano of Havana. Although many members of the new society were originally from the Spanish region of Asturias, the division of the colony was not based solely on regional loyalties. Rather, it was the culmination of a debate over organizational goals that had begun years earlier. This dispute pitted Spaniards concerned with patriotism and national identity against those seeking mutual aid, especially health care.

The formation of Spanish societies in Tampa responded to the hostility of the resurgent Cuban nationalist movement. After the failure of the “Union Española de Mutua Protección y Beneficencia,” a short-lived mutual aid society organized by striking cigarworkers in 1890, the Centro Español was established in 1891. This time, the Spanish cigar manufacturers played a major role, and mutualism gave way to patriotism as the basis of the organization. The building of a clubhouse became a priority in order to provide a home for the members and a display of Spanish national pride. It also created a center where the leaders of the Anglo community, increasingly sympathetic to the activities of the Cuban nationalists, could be educated on the virtues of the “true” Spanish character.

In the following years, the patriotic goals of the society were called into question. The war in Cuba helped to maintain a precarious unity within the Centro Español, but once the war ended in 1898, calls for the transformation of the Centro into a mutual aid society gained strength again. The leadership failed to respond, and in 1902 a number of the members decided to ask the Centro Asturiano in Havana for permission to establish an affiliate in Tampa, which would offer medical assistance to its members. The success of the Centro Asturiano forced the officers of the Centro Español to reconsider their position and agree to transform their organization into a mutual aid society. Once this was done, they attempted to obtain the dissolution of the Tampa affiliate of the Centro Asturiano, but they were unsuccessful. By failing to recognize the strength of the idea of mutualism, the officers of the Centro Español undermined the patriotic unity they had championed, for the Centro lost its claim to be the sole representative of the Spanish community in Tampa.

The Cuban struggle for independence from Spain in the 1890s affected Spaniards living in Tampa in different ways. Although small, the Spanish colony of Tampa was by no means homogeneous. It ranged from prominent cigar manufacturers and successful merchants to salaried workers, from radical anarchists to conservative defenders of Spanish Cuba. Unlike Cubans, Spaniards did not share a common cause which could unite them and overcome political and economic divisions. And, although there was a clear anti-Spanish sentiment at the beginning of the 1890s in the Cuban emigre communities of Tampa and Key West, the Spanish reaction to it was not uniform.



Information on the Spanish colony in Tampa appeared regularly in *Las Novedades*, a Spanish newspaper published in New York.

The increasingly strained relations between Cubans and Spaniards in the 1890s were a consequence of the resurgence of Cuban nationalism following the cigarworkers' strike of 1889 in Key West. This strike was the culmination of years of conflict within the Cuban émigré colony. Cuban workers and their labor leaders, tired of postponing their demands in favor of the cause of Cuba, abandoned the nationalist movement and turned to socialism and anarchism in order to achieve their goals.<sup>1</sup>

On October 11, 1888, the cigarworkers in Key West had organized a union, the "Federación Local de Tabaqueros," with the help of two prominent leaders of the anarchist trade union of Havana, "Alianza Obrera." On February 4, 1889, an agreement was reached between workers and manufacturers to obtain a wage increase of one dollar per thousand cigars and organize a Balance Committee to regulate a schedule of prices for the different brands of cigars being produced. In response to the manufacturers' failure to comply with this agreement, a strike was called in October, beginning at the factory of Eduardo Hidalgo Gato and soon spreading throughout the entire industry in Key West.<sup>2</sup> Strikers received help from other unions in Tampa and Havana, and even from the Spanish government.<sup>3</sup>

Soon after the strike began, the Spanish consul at Key West called for ships to transport strikers back to Havana. In one month, more than 2,000 workers had made the trip from Key West to Havana, and several hundred had gone to Tampa.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the Spanish government sought to break the Cuban stronghold which had been growing in Key West since the beginning of the Ten Years' War in the late 1860s. The industry was almost completely paralyzed for three months, until the manufacturers acceded to the demands of the cigarworkers.

Although the Cuban nationalist movement was weakened by the strike, it soon regained force. The Cuban patriots reacted by launching an attack on Spaniards and anarchists on two fronts: discrediting anarchist philosophy in the press, and stopping Spanish immigration to Key West.<sup>5</sup> On January 14, 1890, once the strike had ended, Cuban patriots gathered at the San Carlos Theater. They organized a committee to visit the different factories and ask their owners not to hire Spanish workers. A vigilante organization, "Partida La Tranca," was formed to patrol the port and make sure no Spaniards set foot on the island. In accordance with this policy, four

Spanish workers were expelled from the factory of Domingo Villamil, and they left for Tampa in search of works.<sup>6</sup>

The Spaniards' arrival in Ybor City coincided with a strike at the factory of Lozano, Pendás & Co.<sup>7</sup> Informed of the actions of the Cubans against their countrymen in Key West, the Spanish strikers decided to refuse any help coming from the Cuban workers and, on January 22, they organized their own strike relief committee. They also decided to write a protest denouncing the Cuban actions against the Spanish workers in Key West. This document, entitled "Al mundo obrero" and signed by 108 Spaniards, condemned the decision of Cubans in Key West to restrict admission of Spaniards to the island. Its authors also accused Cuban workers of attacking the pillars of labor solidarity, and reminded them of the support they had received from the workers in Tampa during their recent strike.<sup>8</sup>

When the strike at Lozano, Pendás ended on January 26, the strike committee was dissolved, but the idea remained among Spaniards of "organizing a respectable and lasting corporation which would allow us to defend ourselves against possible attacks in the future."<sup>9</sup> The three leading signatories of the January 22 protest, Adalberto Ramírez, Modesto Valdés, and Constantino Campos, formed a committee with two other Spaniards, and two weeks later, they recommended the creation of a mutual aid society named "Union Española de Mutua Protección y Beneficencia."<sup>10</sup>

When the recommendation was discussed at a meeting on February 12, some members, primarily the anarchists, opposed the national character of the society. The discussion became so heated that the meeting was finally called off and rescheduled for a week later. On February 19, despite opposition, the recommendation of the committee was approved by the majority of those present. The "Union Española de Mutua Protección y Beneficencia" was finally established.<sup>11</sup>

Little is known of the development of the "Union Española," but it may well have shared some of the characteristics of the "Union Española de Beneficencia Mutua," a Spanish mutual aid society founded in New Orleans in 1868. After all, Adalberto Ramírez, one of the organizers of the "Unión Española" in Tampa, had been the secretary of the "Union Española" in New Orleans for several years. The Spanish society in New Orleans offered its members a whole range of medical and death benefits for a basic monthly fee of one dollar, plus a twenty-five cent quarterly supplement.<sup>12</sup>

The disappearance of the "Union Española" in Tampa in 1890 can be seen as evidence of the divisions within the Spanish colony at that time. The society failed to appeal to two important groups within the Spanish colony: the anarchists and the cigar manufacturers. The anarchists rejected its national character, and there is no evidence that the cigar manufacturers looked favorably on a group committed to workers' mutual aid. In fact, Spanish employers may well have viewed it as a threat to "El Porvenir," the mutual aid society that Enrique Pendás and other cigar manufacturers had founded in 1888.<sup>13</sup>

During the months following the 1890 strikes, tensions between Cubans and Spaniards increased both in Key West and Tampa. In Key West, the members of the vigilante society "La Tranca" patrolled the port in search of Spaniards, who, when found, were beaten and forced to

leave the island. Spanish consular representatives complained to the Secretary of State about the inaction of the American authorities, but soon Spanish officials, too, became targets of Cuban attacks.<sup>14</sup> In July 1890, the interim Spanish consul in Key West, Oswaldo A. Carr, was threatened with death by friends of an alleged criminal for whom Spain was seeking extradition from the United States.<sup>15</sup> The new consul, Francisco de Baguer, arrived in September. But, a month later, following an attack by a Cuban cigarmaker, he closed the consulate, to protest the light fine imposed on the aggressor by the justice of the peace, a Cuban, who had ruled in the case.<sup>16</sup>

In Tampa, Spaniards also came under a variety of pressures. According to the testimony of Bautista Martínez Balbontín, a successful Spanish merchant, Spanish workers were not employed in certain cigar factories, Spanish merchants were boycotted, and a prominent Spanish cigar manufacturer, Ignacio Haya, was even stoned in the street while strolling with his wife in Ybor City.<sup>17</sup> When Spanish anarchists paraded in commemoration of the Haymarket martyrs, on May 1, 1891, they aggravated their Cuban neighbors with their cries of “¡Viva España!” The Cubans, in turn, responded with a demonstration of their own, ostensibly to celebrate the fourth anniversary of their arrival in Tampa, to the cries of “¡Viva Cuba Independiente!” Days later, two Cuban patriot clubs were formed: “Los Independientes de Tampa” and “Ignacio Agramonte.” The latter was instrumental in organizing the visit of Jose Martí to Tampa the following November.<sup>18</sup>

By April 1891, Spaniards were again discussing the organization of a society. This time, the initiative gained the support of two of the most prominent cigar manufacturers in Tampa - Ignacio Haya and Enrique Pendás. Their offers of land and money to built the clubhouse did much to energize the colony. On September 7, 1891, the Centro Español was established as a “Society of Instruction and Recreation,” with Ignacio Haya as president, Enrique Pendás as treasurer, and Adalberto Ramírez, one of the founders of the “Union Española,” as vice president.<sup>19</sup>

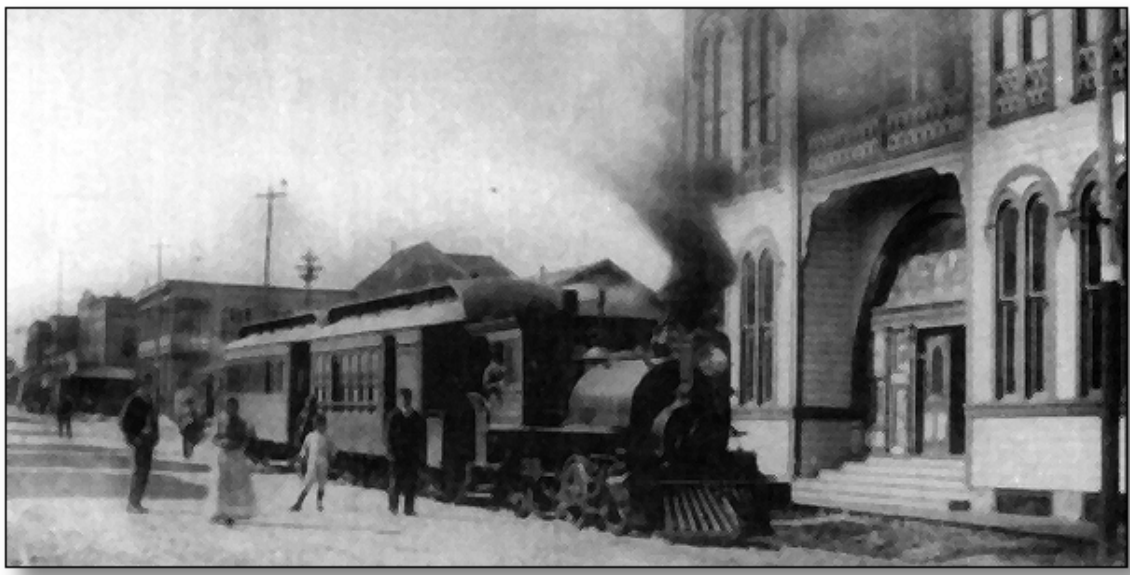
The Centro Español was more a political organization than a national one. Membership was open to Spaniards and non-Spaniards alike, provided “they be loyal to Spain and to its prestige in America.”<sup>20</sup> This was a clear response to the growing anti-Spanish sentiment of the Cuban nationalists, but in Tampa the Centro had to confront the anti-Spanish sentiment of the Americans as well. The presence of Mayor Duff Post and other city officials in the Cuban celebrations of the anniversary of the outbreak of the Ten Years’ War provoked Spanish outrage. For weeks, the press in Spain reported on anti-Spanish demonstrations in Tampa and pressed the government to ask for an explanation from the United States. Although a Spanish correspondent from Key West minimized the incident, he did complain of the inaction of the American authorities against the fund-raising activities of the different Cuban clubs which openly admitted the funds would be used to start a new revolution against Spain. Anticipating the role Tampa would play as a port of embarkation for filibustering expeditions, the correspondent thought it advisable to elevate the rank of the Spanish diplomatic representation in the city.<sup>21</sup> It was in the context of this debate, in a letter to the editor of the *Tampa Tribune*, that a Spaniard mentioned plans for the erection of the Centro Español clubhouse and hinted at some of its goals: “a Spanish Casino is going to be built here which will prove extremely useful to the Spanish residents, an ornament to the city of Tampa and a useful institution where American visitors can



**Ignacio Haya, a cigar manufacturer, was the first president of Tampa's Centro Español.**

Photograph courtesy of Thomas Vance and L. Glenn Westfall.





**The first Centro Español clubhouse on Seventh Avenue in Ybor City was inaugurated in 1892.**

Photograph from *Centro Español de Tampa* by Victoriano Manteiga.

be received, and where they will probably learn to appreciate the Spanish character and their citizenship.”<sup>22</sup>

Days before the formal inauguration of the building in June 1892, the president, Ignacio Haya, explained its purpose to visitors. “It was erected firstly to unite the Spanish colony of Tampa, and secondly to create a center for recreation and instruction,” Haya declared. “It is our intention to have familiar gatherings once a week and classes in the English and Spanish languages. Instruction will be given in the branches of literature and science, so that this may become to its members a temple of learning, wisdom and honor.”<sup>23</sup> One observer underscored the relevance of the date, 1892, and saw the effort of the Spaniards as evidence of the spirit of the “Iberian race,” “descendants of those heroes who after four hundred years are still the admiration of the world.”<sup>24</sup>

In spite of these bright prospects, a year after the opening of the clubhouse, the Centro Español had lost a quarter of its founding members, and it faced a dire economic situation. The financial problems were eased somewhat by the organization, in 1893, of the Spanish Casino Stock Company which became the proprietor of the clubhouse.<sup>25</sup> But the Centro’s difficulty in paying back the debt to the Spanish Casino led to many conflicts between the two institutions during the following years. At the heart of the problem was the failure of the Centro Español to increase its membership. Although its intention had been to unite the Spanish colony, it failed to do so, even during the years of the war in Cuba when patriotism ran high. It was during that time that the first attempts were made to broaden the services offered to its members to include medical assistance, initiating the process that would finally divide the society.

The Cuban uprising that began on February 24, 1895, provoked a crisis in the Spanish Government and brought about changes in Spain's diplomatic representation in the United States. In order to monitor the activities of the Cuban patriots more effectively, the Spanish consular agency in Tampa was elevated to the rank of consulate in July 1895. At its head was Pedro Solís y Arias, who was named an honorary member and perpetual honorary president of Tampa's Centro Español.<sup>26</sup>

Following the outbreak of the war in Cuba, the patriotic character of the Centro Español became increasingly evident. On February 2, 1895, the Centro Español had organized a banquet to honor the officers of the warship *Nueva España*, a Spanish torpedo-boat that was patrolling the coast of the Gulf of Mexico after the events in Fernandina had sounded the alarm in Spanish quarters about the imminence of a Cuban insurrection.<sup>27</sup> On May 22, 1895, the Centro Español sent a petition to the Spanish Secretary of State asking that the diplomatic representation of Spain in Washington (a Plenipotenciary Ministry) be elevated to the rank of Embassy.<sup>28</sup>

As the Cuban émigré communities supported the Cuban fighters, so members of the Centro Español united to support their country, though less successfully. In 1896, Spaniards in Mexico established a patriotic subscription to buy ships for the Spanish squadron. They proposed to pay a voluntary tax, for a period of ten years, of at least fifty cents a month. According to their plan, Spanish communities would organize patriotic juntas and send their collections to a central junta instituted in each of their countries of residence. The central juntas, in turn, would forward the collections to a committee representing the patriotic juntas in Madrid. This committee would be in contact with the Spanish government to make use of the money to respond effectively to the needs of the navy.<sup>29</sup>

The Spanish consular representatives were given the task of encouraging Spaniards to support this project. In March 1896, Pedro Solís addressed the officials of the Centro Español who, in turn, took charge of gathering the colony in a meeting at the beginning of April. But it was not until August 4 that a patriotic junta was established in Tampa. The "Junta Patriótica de la colonia Española de Tampa" was closely tied to the Centro Español. Of the five officials of the junta's board of directors three belonged to the board of directors of the Centro Español, and the other two were prominent cigar manufacturers and members of the Centro Español, although not office holders at the time.<sup>30</sup>

The prominence of its officials and the impetus of the first meeting did not guarantee the success of the junta for, on November 12, a new patriotic junta was organized. On that date, a provisional committee gathered the colony at the Centro Español and asked for the election of a permanent committee and for the approval of principles to carry out the collection of funds.<sup>31</sup> The "Comité Patriótica Español para aumento de la Escuadra," as it was called, voted to organize a weekly collection among its members of at least ten cents each and to deposit the funds in the Citizens Bank. Following the meeting, a collection was made with the encouraging result of \$520.<sup>32</sup>

During the following weeks, the "Comité Patriótica" met several times and organized collections in different factories. It also sent a delegation to raise money in Port Tampa, and it asked for contributions from prominent Spaniards in Tampa, Saint Augustine, and Thomasville.



By December 10, it had gathered the first \$1,000 which was sent to the central junta in New York. Five months later, a second remittance, of \$1,200, was sent to New York.<sup>33</sup> Although larger than those reported by most other Spanish communities in the United States, these amounts could not compare with those gathered by the Cuban émigré communities in Florida. Fernando Figueredo, general agent of the Cuban Revolutionary Party in Tampa and mayor of West Tampa, estimated that the Cuban cigarworkers of Key West and Tampa (including Ybor City and West Tampa) were collecting around \$50,000 a month for the revolution.<sup>34</sup>

Aware of the support the revolution received from the Cuban cigarworkers, General Valeriano Weyler, governor general of Cuba, issued a decree in May 1896, banning the export of tobacco leaf from Cuba. This decree was presented in Spanish circles as a defensive measure to protect the industry within Cuba, which was suffering shortages of raw material due to the destruction caused by the war. Outside these circles, the measure was taken to be aimed at stopping the main source of revenue for the Cuban independence movement the wages of the Cuban cigarworkers in the U. S.

Leaders of the Centro Español were shocked when the *Tampa Daily Times* reported that the secretary of the society, José Fernández, on behalf of 3,000 Spaniards, had presented a complaint to the Spanish government regarding the Weyler decree. The secretary denied it and explained that, as correspondent of the Spanish newspaper *El Heraldo de Madrid*, he had merely sent a report on the effect of the Weyler decree in Tampa. Although the Centro Español initially supported Weyler's policies, by March 1897 the situation was so critical that the society actually considered sending a committee to Cuba to ask the government to revoke the decree.<sup>35</sup>

General Weyler was named honorary president of the “Comité Patriótica” in August 1897. On November 8, the Comité recorded its last meeting after a new board had been elected.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the Spanish prime minister, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, leader of the Conservative Party, had been assassinated in August by an Italian anarchist. As a result, the leader of the Liberal Party became prime minister. His government named a new governor general, and announced plans to grant Cuba autonomy at the beginning of 1898. Among the measures taken by the new governor general of Cuba was the lifting of the tobacco embargo in January 1898.

Relations between Spaniards and Cubans in Tampa during the years of the war in Cuba, although by no means friendly, seemed to have improved since the organization of the Centro Español in 1891.<sup>37</sup> It was with the support of Cuban votes that Spaniards were elected to the Tampa city council. Among those elected was Adalberto Ramírez, the vice president of the Centro Español.<sup>38</sup> In 1897, when Ramírez, then president of the Centro Español, wrote to *Las Novedades* to report on the funeral ceremonies in honor of Cánovas del Castillo, he made a point of noting that the Cuban community had respected the Spaniards' grief and had not organized any public demonstration of support for the assassins.<sup>39</sup>

As events developed during 1898, Spaniards in Tampa became nervous. Even though the city council passed a resolution guaranteeing protection to them and their property, Spaniards did not feel secure. One member proposed to the Centro Español that the Spanish colony should hire a group of deputy sheriffs for protection.<sup>40</sup>

On April 14, 1898, the Spanish consul informed the Centro that he would try to obtain a ship to transport those Spaniards who would want to leave, since the outbreak of hostilities with the United States was imminent. The Centro Español called a meeting of cigar manufacturers to find out what their response would be if war broke out. Eleven cigar companies pledged to remain open. The Centro's officers also asked state authorities to guarantee their protection as the city council had done, and they received encouragement from Florida's governor. Together these assurances had a positive effect. Of the nearly four hundred Spaniards who had registered with the Spanish consul to be repatriated, only one hundred and fifty did eventually leave Tampa. Most of them, according to the *Tribune*, were people with no means of support who planned to enlist in the Spanish army.<sup>41</sup>

The declaration of war between Spain and the United States caused the departure of Spanish diplomatic representatives.<sup>42</sup> When the Spanish consulate in Tampa closed, the Centro Español officers decided to close their clubhouse. The president, Adalberto Ramírez, urged members to keep paying their dues in order to maintain the building and pay the salaries of the guards.<sup>43</sup> The precautions taken by the board of directors did not prevent American troops from occupying the clubhouse, which had been denounced as a center of conspiracy. The troops left the following day, thanks to the good offices of Tampa's mayor and the lawyer M. G. Gibbons, who accompanied Adalberto Ramírez and Bautista M. Balbontín to the Tampa Bay Hotel to talk with General Shafter.<sup>44</sup>

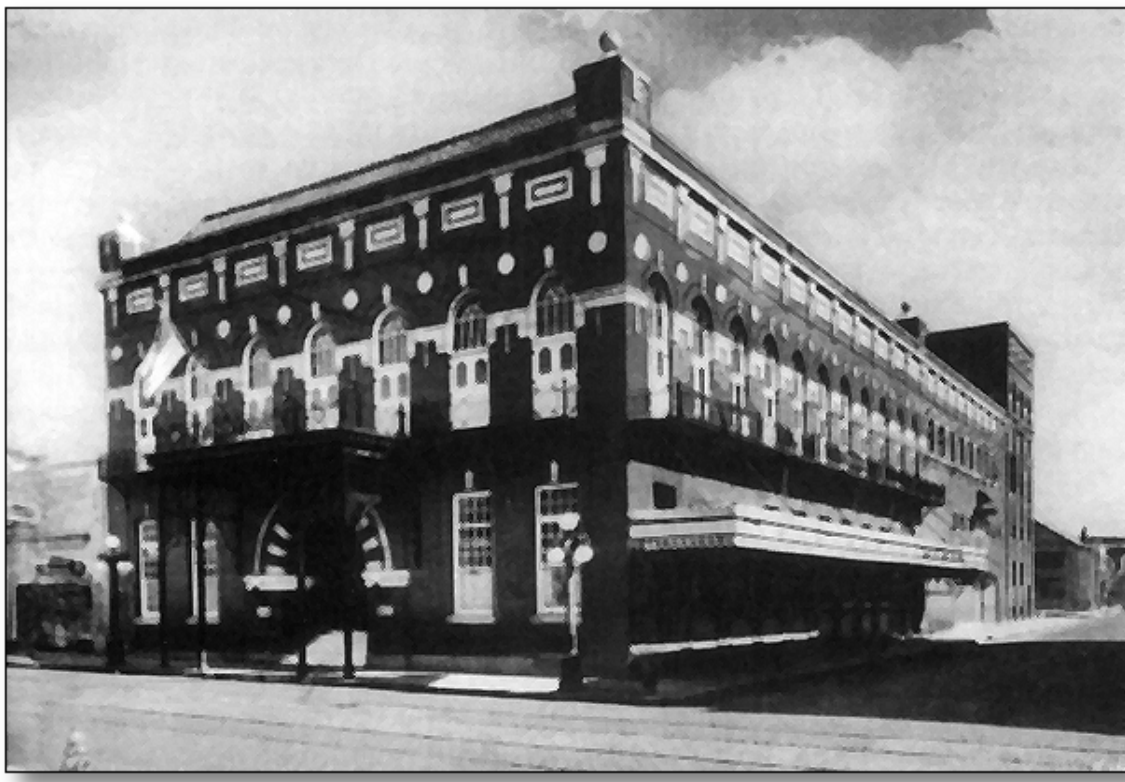
Although the building was closed, the Centro was represented during the war by a committee of three members, the president, the secretary, and the treasurer, who met once a month. From May to August, the Centro lost 193 members, and its revenues were sharply reduced.<sup>45</sup> On August 22, 1898, once the war was over, Adalberto Ramírez addressed the board of directors for the first time since April 23. According to the minutes of the meeting: "He explained that the censurable behavior of the numerous members who had dropped out, abandoning the Centro to its fate, in circumstances in which the national honor and the needs of the colony demanded more cohesion and effort, showed that the existence of the society should be guaranteed by more positive bonds than those of recreation and instruction, and that those bonds could be created by broadening the sphere of action of the Centro as an institution of Mutual Aid."<sup>46</sup> By proposing to expand the benefits of the Centro Español to include medical assistance, he reopened the debate over the transformation of the Centro into a mutual aid society.

It was no accident that Adalberto Ramírez was the one to promote mutualism as the basis for the existence of the Centro Español. During his residence in New Orleans, he had been a prominent member of the Spanish mutual aid society there, the Unión Española de Beneficencia Mutua. Once in Tampa, he had been one of the founders of the Unión Española de Mutua Protección y Beneficencia in 1890. Within the Centro Español, it had been under Ramírez's temporary presidency in 1895 that a relief section was organized and the first cemetery of the Centro Español purchased. These initiatives, however, did not find an enthusiastic response among the wealthier members of the society. In the 1896 annual report to the membership, the secretary of the relief section complained of "the indifference of many who, given their economic position, could sustain it without making great sacrifices. Given the philanthropic character of this section," he argued, "there was no better cause in which a small sum of money could be spent by any member of the Centro Español, and even of the colony ... especially by



**Adalberto Ramírez, president of Tampa's Centro Español, advocated transforming the club into a mutual aid society.**

Photograph from *Centro Español de Tampa* by Victoriano Manteiga.



**Centro Español's ornate brick clubhouse opened in 1912. It still stands on Seventh Avenue in Ybor City.**

Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

those of economic standing, who at every occasion spend their money on things that, perhaps, give as little honor as gain.”<sup>47</sup>

Although the new section was an improvement, there was still no hospital, and those in need of medical treatment had to go to either Cuba or Spain. In March 1896, twenty-seven members petitioned the Centro Español to eliminate, for a period of three months, the two dollar entrance fee. This measure was an attempt “to bring into our society all Spaniards living in Tampa,” which would make it possible, in the future, to build a hospital.<sup>48</sup> The elimination of the entrance fee did not have the expected effect on the membership rolls, and the measure was described as “disastrous” in the annual report written months later.<sup>49</sup>

Membership increased steadily during the years of the war in Cuba, but, even at its best, it barely surpassed three hundred. As a result, the Centro still struggled to meet payments on the clubhouse to the Spanish Casino Stock Company. The expansion of the benefits of the Centro Español to include medical assistance was seen as the best solution for both the growing Spanish immigrant colony in need of health coverage and the inability of the troubled Centro Español to pay its debts. The success of this kind of enterprise had been proven in the numerous mutual aid societies in Cuba.<sup>50</sup> But, as in the organization of the Centro Español itself, the first steps needed the support of the wealthier members of the community.



Once the war was over in 1898, and the last remnants of Spanish colonialism in America had been lost, the patriotic principles under which the Centro had been organized became an anachronism. Ramírez saw this as the appropriate occasion to close a chapter in the history of the Centro Español and begin a new era. His recommendation was discussed and accepted in a general assembly held on September 1, 1898. The first steps were taken to reform the society's by-laws and to reach an agreement with the Spanish mutual aid society "El Porvenir." Although "El Porvenir" rejected a proposed annexation to the Centro, the Centro's board of directors worked on the reforms to the by-laws and presented them to a general assembly on September 27. In that vote members rejected the transformation of the society, and this provoked the resignation of the board of directors a week later.<sup>51</sup> The fear of embarking on what many had long considered a risky undertaking must have been reinforced by the fact that, as a consequence of the Spanish-American War, the membership of the Centro Español was at an all time low of 131. But, despite the very real economic problems, more than the lack of funds explains this caution.

After the resignation of Adalberto Ramírez and the other members of the board of directors in October 1898, a new board was elected, headed by Vicente Guerra, a prominent cigar manufacturer. He focused on increasing the membership and reducing costs in order to cancel the debt with the Spanish Casino Stock Company. Not before this was achieved would the reorganization of the Centro receive consideration. In 1901 the Centro Español paid the debt. Still, the board of directors responded cautiously to requests presented by some of the members who had loyally waited until the Centro was free of debt to reconsider the expansion of the society.<sup>52</sup> As a last resort, some members of the Centro Español decided in 1902 to seek help from the Centro Asturiano in Havana to establish an affiliate in Tampa, which would provide its members with medical assistance.

The financing of a welfare system of the kind enjoyed by the Spanish immigrants in Cuba was an almost impossible task. There were far fewer Spanish immigrants in Tampa, as compared to those in Havana, and many were of modest means. Without the economic and moral support of the wealthier members of Tampa's Spanish colony, the establishment of an affiliate of Havana's Centro Asturiano was the best possible alternative. It also suited the very mobile population of Spanish workers in Tampa, since it allowed them to enjoy the same social and medical benefits in both locations.

To the officers of the Centro Español, the establishment of an affiliate of the Centro Asturiano seemed to be the solution to the internal divisions within the society over the question of mutualism. Changes in the Centro Español would no longer be necessary if its members could obtain medical assistance by joining the Centro Asturiano. But to many members of the Centro Español it meant they were now in a stronger position than ever before to negotiate with the officers the transformation of the society. They could now leave the Centro Español to join the Centro Asturiano. But, most importantly, they could use the success of the affiliate of the Centro Asturiano as proof of what they had predicted would happen to the Centro Español if it expanded its services to include medical assistance.

The success of the Centro Asturiano in Tampa forced the leaders of the Centro Español to reconsider their position. The Centro's president, Vicente Guerra, wrote to the Tampa affiliate of



**The Sanatorio del Centro Español was a hospital built in 1904 to provide medical services to members of Centro Español. The members paid a modest weekly fee for comprehensive health coverage.**

Photograph courtesy of University of South Florida Special Collections.

the Centro Asturiano of Havana in 1903: “Our members, who in their immense majority belong to that society [Centro Asturiano], believe there is still something which needs improvement; they insist that the Centro Español institute medical assistance for its members, in the best possible conditions, for that will be the best stimulus which our society will offer them in the future, as in the past it was a political one. This [society], understanding that the need has arisen, has decided to satisfy it.”<sup>53</sup>

In their attempts to unite the two societies, the officers of the Centro Español offered “to eliminate any obstacle that could exist, or rectify any mistake made by our part.”<sup>54</sup> At the same time, they appealed to the officers of the Centro Asturiano in Havana to support “the movement towards unity necessary to prevent the regionalism which, though necessary and useful for the great stimulus and better government of the most vital interests of the immense Spanish contingent of that country [Cuba], would cause in this country undesirable effects given the small numbers and the heterogeneous elements that make up this Colony.”<sup>55</sup> In conclusion the officers of the Centro Español hoped that “the Centro Asturiano of Havana ... would not allow itself to interfere in the harmony that this Colony needs to be able to realize in Tampa, in the name of the common fatherland, the task that your meritorious institution had so magnanimously



realized in Havana.”<sup>56</sup> These proposals for unity effectively meant the dissolution of the Centro Asturiano in Tampa, something its officers, as well as those in Havana, adamantly opposed.

In the end, the officers of the Centro Español had to yield to the forces that asked for the club’s transformation into a mutual aid society and abandon their claim to be the sole representatives of a united Spanish community. The differences between the Centro Asturiano and the Centro Español in Tampa did not lie in the regional origin of their members, but instead were the outcome of the long debate over patriotism and mutualism within the Spanish immigrant community. By 1903, the drive for mutual aid, especially health care, had assumed paramount importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald E. Poyo, “*With All and for the Good of All*”: *The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 87-94.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald E. Poyo, “Cuban Emigré Communities in the United States and the Independence of their Homeland, 1852-1895” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1983), 262; L. Glenn Westfall, *Key West: Cigar City U.S.A.* (Key West: The Historic Key West Preservation Board, 1984), 43-45. The failure to carry out the accords signed in Key West on February 4, 1889, was still a cause of strikes in Tampa in later years. *Tampa Tribune*, October 4, 7, 9, 13, 18, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> According to the testimony of Fermín Souto, in Tampa “all the cigar-makers donated a dollar a week for the relief of the cigarmakers on strike at Key West.” Federal Writers’ Project, “History of Ybor City as related by Fermín Souto, Secretary of the Centro Español.” *Social-Ethnic Study of Ybor City, 1935*, vol. II, pt. 1, 203, Special Collections Department, University of South Florida Library.

<sup>4</sup> Poyo, “Cuban Emigré Communities,” 263-64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 321; Gerardo G. Castellanos, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso. Contribución a la Historia de las Emigraciones Cubanas en Estados Unidos* (Havana: Ucar, García y Cía, 1935), 288; *Las Novedades* (New York), “Ingratitud incalificable,” January 30, 1890; ‘La ‘guerra Santa’,” “Carta de Tampa,” February 20, 1890. *Las Novedades* was a Spanish newspaper published in New York. It reported regularly on the activities of the Spanish colony in Tampa, through letters from both its correspondent and the Centro Español, which were usually published under the heading “Carta de Tampa.” Although there are some numbers scattered across the United States, the most complete collection is at the Hemeroteca Municipal in Madrid. All translations in this article are by the author.

<sup>7</sup> *Tampa Journal*, January 14, 15, 17, 27, 1890; *Tampa Tribune*, January 15, 1890.

<sup>8</sup> The entire text was published in *Las Novedades*, “Una protesta,” February 20, 1890. According to this document, workers in Tampa had sent the strikers in Key West more than \$5,000 in cash and over \$1,500 in food. They had also helped over 600 strikers who had made the trip to Tampa.

<sup>9</sup> *Las Novedades*, “Carta de Tampa,” February 20, 1890.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, February 20, 1890. The other two members of the committee were Fermín Souto and Manuel Pérez. Victoriano Manteiga, *Centro Español de Tampa, Bodas de Oro, 1891-1941. Reseña Histórica de Cincuenta Años* (Tampa, 1941), 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Las Novedades*, “Carta de Tampa,” February 20, March 6, 1890.

<sup>12</sup> *Constitución y Reglamento de la Sociedad Unión Española de Beneficencia Mutua de Nueva Orleans, La.* (New Orleans: Imprenta de M. Capo, 1885); Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (Madrid), Correspondencia Consular, Nueva Orleans, Legajo 1892.

<sup>13</sup> “El Porvenir” had been organized under the leadership of Enrique Pendás, based on the Spanish mutual aid society “La Nacional” of New York City, to which he had belonged before coming to Tampa. Members paid a steep \$6 entrance fee, and \$1.25 monthly. “El Porvenir” provided its members with the services of a physician, but it did not cover hospitalization. José C. Otero, *Acción Española en Tampa. Sus instituciones. Sus hombres. Su industria. Su comercio, etc.* (Ybor City: La Políglota, 1912), 7; Durward Long, “An Immigrant Co-operative Medicine Program in the South, 1887-1963,” *Journal of Southern History*, 31 (November 1965), 424.

<sup>14</sup> *Las Novedades*, “Carta de Tampa,” March 6, 1890. Emilio de Muruaga to James G. Blaine, March 12, 1890, “Notes from the Spanish Legation in the United States to the Department of State, 1790-1906,” National Archives Microfilm Publications, reel 26.

<sup>15</sup> “Notes from the Spanish Legation,” April 18, May 6, 1889, July 21, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, December 24, 1890; *Las Novedades*, November 6, 20, 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Federal Writers’ Project, “Life History of Mr. B. M. Balbontin,” 1939, Special Collections Department, University of South Florida Library.

<sup>18</sup> *Tampa Journal*, May 7, 1891; *Tampa Tribune*, May 6, 1891; José Rivero Muñiz, “Los cubanos en Tampa,” *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, LXXIV (January-June 1958), 47-52.

<sup>19</sup> Manteiga, *Centro Español de Tampa*, 8-10. Fermín Souto, the Secretary of the Centro Espanol for more than two decades, referred to February 11, 1890, as the date on which the committee was formed to organize the Centro Español. In fact, on that date, he and four other Spaniards (note 10), had organized the “Unión Española de Mutua Protección y Beneficencia.” *La Gaceta*, Special Edition, April 27, 1935, in Centro Español Papers, Special Collections Department, University of South Florida Library.

<sup>20</sup> The complete section 7 of the by-laws read: “It is required of all applicants that they be Spaniards by birth and by patriotic inclination or that they be loyal to Spain and to its prestige in America.” Federal Writers’ Project, Social-Ethnic Study of Ybor City, 1935, Vol. II, pt. 1, 148.

<sup>21</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, November 26, 1891; *Las Novedades*, “Cartas de Madrid,” November 26, 1891; “Carta de Cayo Hueso,” December 10, 1891.

<sup>22</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, November 26, 1891.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, June 17, 1892.

<sup>24</sup> *Las Novedades*, “Carta de Tampa,” July 7, 1892.

<sup>25</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, “Memoria que la Junta Directiva, del mismo, presenta a los Sres Socios, de los trabajos llevados a cabo durante el tercer año social” (Tampa: M. D. Cushing, 1893), in Centro Español Papers; Manteiga, *Centro Español de Tampa*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> “Notes from the Spanish Legation,” May 20, September 7, 1895, Centro Español de Tampa, Libro de Actas, May 29, July 22, 1895, Centro Español Papers. Solís had been the Spanish vice consul in New Orleans, before being named interim consul in Key West in November 1890, following the attacks on the Spanish consuls there. (See notes 14 to 16)

<sup>27</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, February 2, 3, 1895. Fernandina was the place in Florida from which three expeditions were to be sent to Cuba with arms and ammunition to begin the revolution. The plan, designed by Martí, was discovered in January 1895, before it could be put into action.

<sup>28</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, May 29, 1895. A draft of the letter is among the Centro Español Papers. The petition was in support of an initiative taken by Jose G. García, the editor of *Las Novedades*. García, a hard-core defender of Spanish rule in Cuba, was involved in various efforts to unite Spaniards in the United States to help Spain. *Las Novedades* received a subsidy of \$750 every three months from the Spanish Legation in Washington. Carlos García Barrón, "Enrique Dupuy de Lôme and the Spanish American War," *The Americas*, XXXVI (July 1979), 56.

<sup>29</sup> *Las Novedades*, "El patriotismo Español en acción," February 13, 1896. The *Nueva España* itself had been a gift of the Spaniards in Mexico to the Spanish navy. It was the product of a subscription by a patriotic junta organized in the aftermath of the Spanish-German conflict over the Caroline Islands in 1885. *Las Novedades*, February 13, 1888.

<sup>30</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, March 31, 1896. The members of the Board of Directors of the Junta Patriótica were: Enrique Pendas, president; Vicente Guerra, vice president; José Fernández, secretary; Marcos Urabayen, vice secretary, and Valentin Bustillo, treasurer. At the time, Vicente Guerra was the president of the Centro Espanol, Jose Fernandez, the secretary, and Marcos Urabayen, the treasurer. Junta Patriotica de la colonia Espanola de Tampa, Libro diario de sus acuerdos, August 4, 1896. The minutes of both the Junta Patriótica de la colonia Espanola en Tampa and its successor, the Comité Patriótica Espanol de Tampa, are in a bound volume which was later reused by the Centro Asturiano as a register book of patients in the Centro Asturiano Hospital. The volume is among the Centro Asturiano Papers in the Special Collections Department, University of South Florida Library.

<sup>31</sup> The officials of the Comité Patriótica were: Pedro Martínez Herrera, president; Silverio Bermúdez, vice president; Severino Martínez, secretary; Manuel Trelles, treasurer; Manuel Arango, Laureano Nosti, Constantino González, José García Miranda, and Francisco R. Díaz. Comité Patriótica Español de Tampa, Libro diario de sus acuerdos, November 12, 1896.

<sup>32</sup> The Citizens Bank was chosen following the advice of Enrique and Jaime Pendás, who did not approve of the sympathies of the representative of the First National Bank towards the Cuban patriots. Comité Patriótica Español de Tampa, Libro diario de sus acuerdos, November 12, 1896; *Las Novedades*, "Pro-filibusterismo en Tampa," March 5, 1896; "Los Españoles de Tampa," December 3, 1896.

<sup>33</sup> Comité Patriótica Español de Tampa, Libro diario de sus acuerdos, December 10, 1896; May 26, 1897; *Las Novedades*, "Los Españoles de Tampa," December 17, 1896; "El patriotismo en acción," June 24, 1897. New York was the seat of the central committee of the Spanish patriotic juntas in the United States. Its secretary, José G. García, was the editor of *Las Novedades*. *Las Novedades*, "Obra patriótica," March 26, April 16, 1896. Within the United States, Spanish patriotic juntas were also organized in New Orleans, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, San Antonio, Saint Louis, West Quincy (Massachusetts), Brunswick (Georgia), and Key West. *Las Novedades*, November 26, 1896; February 11, 18, 1897, March 17, 1898.

<sup>34</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, February 28, 1896.

<sup>35</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, May 20, 1896, April 5, 1897.

<sup>36</sup> The new board of directors was composed of Fermín Palacios, Prudencio Hernández, Manuel Pensado, Peregrino Rey, Pedro Franco, Alejandro Martínez, José Vázquez, Ramón Cueto, Ladislao González, Bonifacio Valero, Emilio Pendás, Manuel Arduengo, Estanislao Azcano, Alejandrino Nistal, José Sánchez, Adrián Bustillo, José Fernández Valdés, and Ramón Carreño. Comité Patriótica Español de Tampa, Libro diario de sus acuerdos, November 8, 1897. It seems that the Comité was functioning at least until the end of the year, since its last remittance to New York (\$1,059.30) was in January 1898. *Las Novedades*, January 12, 1898. In addition to the activities of the patriotic juntas, officials of the Centro Español organized various fund-raising activities to help the Spanish soldiers wounded in the war in Cuba. Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, October 7, November 6, 1895, December 14, 1896.

<sup>37</sup> Joan Marie Steffy, "The Cuban Immigrants of Tampa, Florida. 1886-1898" (M.A. Thesis, University of South Florida, 1974), 81-86.

<sup>38</sup> Adalberto Ramírez served two times in the City Council as councilman from Ybor City. He was first elected on March 6, 1894, and was reelected the following year, while holding the office of vice president of the Centro Español.

<sup>39</sup> When news arrived in Tampa of the assassination, the Centro Español declared three days of mourning. A memorial mass was held at Our Lady of Mercy, in Ybor City, on August 18. *Tampa Tribune*, August 11, 13, 18, 19, 1897; *Las Novedades*, August 26, 1897. The Centro Español sent the widow of Cánovas a silver piece with the inscription: “El Centro Español de Tampa, Estados Unidos de Norte-América, al Patriota Mártir, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo.” *Las Novedades*, “Hermosa ofrenda,” April 7, 1898.

<sup>40</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, April 3, 1898; Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, April 7, 1898.

<sup>41</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, April 15, 1898; *Tampa Tribune*, April 19, 1898.

<sup>42</sup> The Spanish consul in Tampa, Pedro Solís, left for Canada. During the Spanish American War, Spanish interests in the United States were represented by France. Since France did not have a consulate in Tampa, a consular agent was named in the person of Vicente Guerra, a prominent Spanish cigar manufacturer. Vicente Guerra asked the board of directors of the Centro Español to rent the building to house the offices of the French consulate, but the suggestion was not carried out. *Tampa Tribune*, April 22, 1898; Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, May 18, June 6, 1898.

<sup>43</sup> The Centro Español hired two guardians to protect the clubhouse, one by day and one by night. Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, April 23, 1898.

<sup>44</sup> With the approval of the president of the Centro Español, a small guard remained to protect the building against a possible attack, but it left a few days later. Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, June 6, 1898.

<sup>45</sup> The Centro had ended the year 1897 with a record membership of 312; by October 1898 it had a record low of 131 paying members. During the Spanish-American War revenues dropped from \$212.25 in May to \$124 in June, and \$94 in July. Centro Español de Tampa, “Memoria de los trabajos realizados por la Junta Directiva durante el año 1897” (Tampa: M. D. Cushing, 1898); Centro Español de Tampa, “Memoria de los trabajos realizados por la Junta Directiva durante el año 1898” (Tampa, M. D. Cushing, 1899); Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, June 6, July 3, August 3, 1898.

<sup>46</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, August 22, 1898.

<sup>47</sup> Manuscript annual report for the year 1896, Centro Español Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, March, 23, 25, 1896.

<sup>49</sup> Manuscript annual report for the year 1896.

<sup>50</sup> Membership in the Centro Gallego of Havana, for example, increased almost sixfold (from 760 to 4531) in one year, after the Centro decided to include medical benefits among its services. Elwood Warren Shomo, Jr., “The Centros Regionales of Havana, Cuba with Special Emphasis on the History and Services of the Centro Asturiano” (M.A. Thesis, University of Miami, 1959), 82.

<sup>51</sup> Centro Español de Tampa, Actas, September 1, 21, 27, 30, October 3, 6, 1898.

<sup>52</sup> Manteiga, Centro Español de Tampa, 21-23.

<sup>53</sup> Vicente Guerra to the president of the affiliate of the Centro Asturiano of Havana in Tampa, December 23, 1903, Centro Español Papers.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Vicente Guerra to the president of the Centro Asturiano of Havana, December 27, 1903.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.