

1-1-2009

Full Issue

Tampa Bay History

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

Recommended Citation

Tampa Bay History (2009) "Full Issue," *Tampa Bay History*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol23/iss1/1>

This Front Matter is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

: Full Issue

TAMPA BAY

H I S T O R Y

VOLUME 23

2009



TAMPA BAY HISTORY

*Published through a partnership between the Tampa Bay History Center
and the University of South Florida Libraries' Florida Studies Center*

RODNEY KITE-POWELL, EDITOR
SAUNDERS FOUNDATION CURATOR OF HISTORY, TAMPA BAY HISTORY CENTER

ANDREW HUSE, ASSISTANT EDITOR
ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES' SPECIAL
COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT AND FLORIDA STUDIES CENTER

MARK I. GREENBERG, PH.D., BOOK REVIEW EDITOR
DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES' SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
DEPARTMENT AND FLORIDA STUDIES CENTER

EDITORIAL BOARD

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| JACK DAVIS, PH.D. | <i>University of Florida</i> |
| JAMES M. DENHAM, PH.D. | <i>Florida Southern College</i> |
| PAUL DOSAL, PH.D. | <i>University of South Florida</i> |
| MAXINE JONES, PH.D. | <i>Florida State University</i> |
| ROBERT KERSTEIN, PH.D. | <i>University of Tampa</i> |
| JOE KNETSCH, PH.D. | <i>State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection</i> |
| JERALD MILANICH, PH.D. | <i>Florida Museum of Natural History</i> |
| GARY R. MORMINO, PH.D. | <i>Florida Studies Program, University of South Florida</i> |
| SUSAN PARKER, PH.D. | <i>St. Augustine Historical Society</i> |
| CHERYL RODRIGUEZ, PH.D. | <i>University of South Florida</i> |
| AARON SMITH, PH.D. | <i>University of South Florida</i> |
| DORIS WEATHERFORD | <i>Tampa, Florida</i> |

Tampa Bay History (ISSN: 0272-1406) is published annually through a partnership between the Tampa Bay History Center and the Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida Library. The journal is provided complimentary to Tampa Bay History Center members who belong at or above the Supporter membership level. Copies of the current issue of *Tampa Bay History* may be purchased directly from the Tampa Bay History Center at a cost of \$19.95, plus shipping. Back issues (beginning with the 2007 issue) will also be available for purchase.

The journal will be published simultaneously in print and electronic format. The electronic version of the journal is available at www.tampabayhistorycenter.org.

Inquiries in regard to submission of essays for publication should be directed to: Editor, *Tampa Bay History*, c/o Tampa Bay History Center, 801 Old Water Street, Tampa, Florida 33602. Any questions regarding book reviews should be directed to: Book Review Editor, *Tampa Bay History*, c/o Florida Studies Center, University of South Florida, 4202 East Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, Florida 33620.

The content and views expressed within the essays and reviews in *Tampa Bay History* are the sole responsibility of the contributors and are not necessarily the views of the Tampa Bay History Center, the University of South Florida, and/or the staff and editorial board of *Tampa Bay History*.

TAMPA BAY

H I S T O R Y

VOLUME 23
2009

*Published through a partnership between
the Tampa Bay History Center
and the University of South Florida Libraries'
Florida Studies Center*

*T*ABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME 23
2009

FROM THE EDITOR..... IV

THE RISE, FALL, AND REBIRTH OF A MODERN FLORIDA LANDMARK:
A HISTORY OF TAMPA'S FLORIDAN HOTEL I
BRAD MASSEY

THE QUEEN OF THE GULF GOES TO WAR:
THE BELLEVIEW BILTMORE AND WORLD WAR II..... 30
DEIRDRE SCHUSTER

BASEBALL WAS MY LIFE:
THE STORIES OF WEST TAMPA 45
MARY JO MELONE AND ART KEEBLE

BOOK EXCERPT:
THE COLUMBIA RESTAURANT:
CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF HISTORY, CULTURE, AND CUISINE 68
ANDREW T. HUSE

BOOK REVIEWS 72

BOOKS IN BRIEF..... 84

Cover: The baseball diamond at West Tampa's MacFarlane Park hosted countless games through the years. The grandstand was packed for this 1922 game, forcing fans to line the first base line and outfield without the comfort of seats or the safety of fencing. Courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

BOOK REVIEWS

- Purdy, *Florida's People during the Last Ice Age*. By Todd A. Chavez.....72
- Storter and Briggs, *Crackers in the Glade: Life and Times in the Old Everglades*.
By Michael Jepson.....73
- Cassanello and Shell-Weiss, *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration*.
By David Tegeder74
- Warren, *If It Takes All Summer: Martin Luther King, the KKK, and States' Rights in St. Augustine, 1964*. By Barclay Key.....76
- Peck and Wilson, *St. Petersburg's Historic African American Neighborhoods*.
By James A. Schnur78
- Bean, *First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking*.
By Robert E. Snyder.....80
- Hollis, *Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising*.
By Nicole Cox.....82

FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome to the twenty-third edition of *Tampa Bay History*. We are pleased to offer some of the finest and most recent scholarship on Tampa Bay area history. This year's issue contains what turned out to be an accidental theme: "Icons of Tampa Bay." Within these pages you will learn about two iconic hotels – one in Hillsborough County, the other in Pinellas, iconic sports figures and an iconic restaurant. All of these articles, like the topics they represent, add to the current history and culture of our region.

Brad Massey's "A History of the Floridan Hotel" leads off this year's journal. Massey is the winner of the 2009 Leland Hawes Essay Prize in Florida History for Best Graduate paper, an award given annually by the Tampa Bay History Center and the University of South Florida Libraries' Florida Studies Center. The main title of Massey's paper, "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of a Modern Florida Landmark", provides an excellent summation of the downtown Tampa hotel's eighty-three year history. Once the scene of grand parties and grander guests, the hotel eventually fell into a long era of disrepair. Literally saved from both the wrecking ball and demolition by neglect, the hotel is now undergoing extensive restoration by the current owner, who has spent the past several years resurrecting one of Tampa's oldest downtown structures.

Another iconic landmark, Clearwater's Belleview Biltmore hotel, is the subject of the next article. Deirdre Schuster takes a look at a specific period in the Belleview Biltmore's past – when it was home to hundreds of soldiers during World War II. Schuster examines the lives of the soldiers stationed at "The Queen of the Gulf", discovering that while they may have stayed at a luxurious resort, the soldiers were far from mere tourists. As one weary private pointed out: "We have the softest mattresses on our hotel beds but they have to be always ready for inspection, so we can't lie on them. We have a million dollar golf course, but all we do on it is the hardest kinds of exercises and obstacle running. We have lovely green velvet lawns, but we can't walk on them." Many soldiers would return after the war to take advantage of Florida's resort hotels, including the Belleview Biltmore.

This year's cover article focuses on the local influence of America's Pastime – Baseball. Mary Jo Melone and Art Keeble have written a fantastic and comprehensive book on baseball in West Tampa, from the Little League to the Major Leagues. The authors have allowed us to print a portion of their yet-to-be-published book, and we are delighted for the opportunity. Melone and Keeble note that baseball has deep roots in Tampa, dating back into the 1870s, and point out that Tampa has produced more Major League players than any other city in America. From Al Lopez to Lou Piniella, MacFarlane Park to Yankee Stadium, Tampa's place in baseball history is secure.

Included in this year's issue is a special feature for *Tampa Bay History* readers, an excerpt from the newly published book, *The Columbia Restaurant, Celebrating a Century of History, Culture, and Cuisine*. Written by *Tampa Bay History* assistant editor Andrew T. Huse, and published by the University Press of Florida, the new Columbia book provides an excellent and complete history of Florida's oldest restaurant. More than a cookbook (though many of the Columbia's famous recipes are included), the book gives readers a unique insight into the world of the "Gem of Spanish Restaurants", and the six generations of Hernandez and Gonzmart family members who have worked to maintain this iconic restaurant.

We close the journal with an examination of new works in Florida history in our Book Reviews and Books in Brief sections. Avid history buffs have a myriad selection of books to choose from this year, and our reviewers have done a great job evaluating the latest in Florida scholarship.

So sit back and enjoy the 2009 edition of *Tampa Bay History*. We are always looking for new topics to explore, so please contact us if you have an article that you would like to submit for publication.

RODNEY KITE-POWELL, EDITOR

THE RISE, FALL, AND REBIRTH OF A MODERN FLORIDA LANDMARK: A HISTORY OF TAMPA'S FLORIDAN HOTEL

BY BRAD MASSEY

It is the symbol of the city. Perched majestically along the banks of the Hillsborough River, the Tampa Bay Hotel, with its striking “turrets, domes and minarets towering heavenward and glistening in the sun,” is Tampa’s most recognizable landmark.¹ That the Tampa Bay Hotel deserves such accolades is indisputable. Its unapologetic opulence and exotic qualities—where else in the Deep South is there a colossal Moorish Revival structure complete with Islamic crescents—attracted rich and famous Americans during the Gilded Age. Teddy Roosevelt (minus his famous Rough Riders), Babe Ruth, and Sarah Bernhardt were just some of the influential icons who, after a long steam-engine journey to Tampa, found themselves on the grounds of Henry Plant’s luxurious resort.² Preservationists have not overlooked the historical importance of the hotel. In 1972, the Tampa Bay Hotel was one of the first structures in the Tampa Bay area to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Yet, the Tampa Bay Hotel somehow seems oddly out of place. Truth be told, Tampa was never a popular vacation destination. Cigar factories, Latin immigrants, shipyards, and phosphate mines defined Tampa in the early modern era, not sandy beaches and breathtaking sunsets. Tampa was not an idyllic place one visited to relax and retreat from the world. The Tampa Bay Hotel was not reality. It was Henry Plant’s misplaced dream. In fact, during its first seven years of operation, the Gilded Age landmark “rarely filled more than half of its rooms with guests.”³ By 1933, it was both a museum and home to the University of Tampa. Though an architectural

¹ Henry B. Plant Museum, “1891 Tampa Bay Hotel,” http://www.plantmuseum.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=40.

² Henry B. Plant Museum, “Homepage,” <http://www.plantmuseum.com/>.

³ Susan Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure: The Florida Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 280.

BRAD MASSEY teaches courses in American and Florida history at Polk State College. The author would like to thank Professor Gary Mormino for his encouragement and assistance. The author also would like to thank Jude Ryan, Eli Crews, Shiloh Hodges, John Lazarz, William Winikus and Marisa Loya for their helpful suggestions.

gem, the Tampa Bay Hotel was a robber baron's mirage, a fantasy never realized and a symbol of what downtown Tampa never was or would be.

If you stand at the northernmost point of where the Hillsborough River borders the grounds of the old Tampa Bay Hotel and gaze eastward, you will see the true symbol of downtown Tampa: the Floridan Hotel. An examination of the Floridan's history reveals the complex and multifaceted evolution of modern downtown Tampa, something a lifetime spent studying Plant's majestic oddity never could. Conceived in 1925 and constructed in 1926, the Floridan has stood witness to the economic booms and busts that transformed Tampa in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The Floridan Hotel has housed and entertained movie stars, the poverty-stricken, professional athletes, college students, GIs, and the mentally ill. It has witnessed the demolition of Tampa's first high-rises and the construction of forty-story skyscrapers. The Floridan is one of the last remaining downtown high-rises built during the 1920s real-estate boom because it successfully evolved and adapted, while others stagnated and met the wrecking ball. The story of the Floridan is the story of modern downtown Tampa.

The Construction of the Floridan Hotel and the Creation of Modern Downtown Tampa

"The Floridan is the truest mark of Tampa's progress...and the forerunner of the Greater Tampa of the future."

—*Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 23, 1927

The story of the Floridan begins not in the Gilded Age, but in the Roaring Twenties. Like other American cities, Tampa enjoyed a period of economic expansion and opportunity during the Jazz Age that forever changed the city. Those who visited Tampa in the early 1880s would likely not even recognize the city if they visited in 1930. Between 1920 and 1930, Tampa underwent a boom in both its population and geographical size. In the 1920s, Tampa's population increased from 51,608 to 101,162 due to annexations of local communities such as West Tampa and northern suburban areas, immigration, and migration. By the time the Roaring Twenties came to a close, Tampa was Florida's third-largest city.⁴ The former small seaport town, which some fifty years earlier had suffered wild swings in its minuscule population thanks to fear-inspiring outbreaks of yellow fever, was fast growing up.

Economic and infrastructural changes accompanied Tampa's growth in the 1920s. Although Tampa's local economy was still largely dependent on the trademark cigar industry in 1930, the percentage of Tampa's workforce laboring in cigar factories

⁴ In 1880, only 720 people lived in Tampa (Robert Kerstein, *Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001], 17, 52-53).

decreased from 50 percent in 1910 to 25 percent by 1930.⁵ In the 1920s, many Tampans found themselves employed in new industries and many businessmen found themselves overnight guests in the expanding city. These factors led to Tampa's development as a commercial and business center. In an effort to accommodate the hundreds of businessmen and other travelers flocking to Tampa in the 1920s, plans for high-rise buildings in downtown were drawn up and structural foundations were being laid for Tampa's first skyscrapers. On January 17, 1926, the *Tampa Daily Times* reported that Tampa's downtown skyline was to be "enhanced" by new buildings valued at more than \$100 million in the coming year. Tampa boosters declared that 1926 would prove the "greatest construction year in the city's history."⁶ Their words were prophetic. The First National Bank building, the Tampa Terrace Hotel, and a handful of other newly constructed high-rise buildings transformed the Tampa skyline by the time residents celebrated New Year's Eve on December 31, 1926.

The opportunity to cash in on the downtown Tampa building mania did not escape the attention of one enterprising Tampa businessman.⁷ By 1925, Allen Simms had already lived quite an interesting life. At the age of thirteen, Simms ran away from home and attempted to make it on his own in the frigid Canadian hinterlands.⁸ Newly independent, Allen Simms soon found work as a lumberjack; his responsibilities included "driving" fallen timber down the Le Proc River to lumber-processing plants. For his trouble and risking life and limb, Simms was paid thirty-five dollars a month. Later he attended business college for two years, and in 1912, at the age of twenty-three, he arrived in Tampa. Shortly thereafter, Simms embarked on a lifelong career as a Florida real-estate developer, only taking a hiatus in 1917, when, with his business interests suffering, he abandoned his civilian life and enlisted in the Canadian army. After fighting the Germans until World War I ended in November 1918, Simms returned to Tampa. There he picked up where he had left off, a decision that would alter the face of downtown Tampa's north end.⁹

It did not take Simms long to get back on his feet. By 1927, he had successfully built a real-estate empire. According to the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, Allen Simms's story was one of "ups and downs, of fortunes accumulated and fortunes lost, of opposition to be overcome and advantages to be sought, all resulting in his now owning and controlling projects valued at more than \$20,000,000." Simms was not exaggerating when he claimed he "saw the possibilities of the state, its wonderfully fertile soil and its marvelous climate, and knew that it was destined to become great."¹⁰

⁵ Ibid, 53.

⁶ "Downtown Building Program Will Involve More Than \$100,000,000," *Tampa Daily Times*, January 17, 1926.

⁷ Kerstein, *Politics and Growth*, 53.

⁸ "Life Story of A. J. Simms Shows Vision of Man Who Saw Tampa's Great Future," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 17, 1926.

⁹ Karl Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Print Company, 1950), 383.

¹⁰ "Life Story of A. J. Simms Shows Vision of Man Who Saw Tampa's Great Future."



Courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System

Construction workers pause for the camera in this October 19, 1926 circuit photograph. The whole city was enjoying a building boom, but the bottom would soon drop out.

By the end of his career, Simms had been involved in more than one thousand real-estate projects in the Tampa Bay region.

Simms was an ambitious visionary. In 1925, he conceived plans to build not only one of the finest hotels in Tampa, but also Florida's tallest structure. The project was huge. The Hotel Floridan was to be an eighteen-story architectural masterpiece adorned with opulent furnishings meant to attract both Tampa's visitors and local businesses. To help get the project off the ground, Simms created the Tampa Commercial Hotel Company. As general manager and secretary of the new company, Simms hired the renowned local architect Francis J. Kennard to design Florida's tallest building.¹¹ Construction of the Floridan began shortly thereafter.¹² Throughout 1926, Tampa residents eagerly watched as Floridan work crews quickly erected a gigantic steel skeleton and began to piece together the record-breaking, awe-inspiring structure.

On January 15, 1927, the Floridan opened for business. According to the *Tampa Tribune*, the cost of building and furnishing the Floridan stood at approximately \$3 million, a colossal sum for 1927. The completion of Florida's tallest building, and Tampa's tallest for forty years, was a marvel, and its owners wanted all to know the tremendous effort, expense, and expertise that was invested. The *Tampa Tribune* reported, "builders, architects and equippers of the hotel unite in the declaration that

¹¹ Francis J. Kennard designed the Hotel Belleview in Belleair, the Tampa Bay Hotel Casino, the Fort Myers Hotel and other Florida architectural gems (Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure*, 276, 281, 304).

¹² Grismer, *A History of the City of Tampa*, 264.

it is one of the most modern and complete commercial dwellings in the South.”¹³ From top to bottom the hotel was 240 feet. The frame was constructed of steel beams, while the veneer was a mixture of limestone, granite, and terra-cotta brick.¹⁴ The structure was so large that more than 500,000 gallons of paint, stain, and varnish reportedly were used during construction.¹⁵ Atop the Floridan reigned a gigantic cutting-edge red neon sign that unashamedly publicized the prominence of the behemoth. With gargantuan six-foot letters illuminated by 660 fifty-watt lamps, the sign could allegedly be seen for miles in every direction.¹⁶

Excesses were not limited to the Floridan's exterior. The hotel's lobby was “furnished in rich luxurious out fittings,” and adorned with marble to give the “spacious room a rich aspect.” Tying the lobby, dining hall, and lounge together were crystal chandeliers, musical entertainment that floated through the air, Hartford Saxony rugs, and “furniture of Spanish design.”¹⁷ Floridan management boasted of the hotel's four hundred well-furnished guest rooms, but the public spaces, namely the dining hall, lounge, and lobby, were what characterized the Floridan's grace and charm. The Floridan had lived up to its billing. Simms's vision for Florida's tallest hotel had become a reality.

Floridan management publicized in the *Tampa Tribune* that the hotel's formal public opening would take place Saturday, January 29, with a reception from 7:00 p.m. to midnight. Entertainment was to be provided by the Blue Steele orchestra.¹⁸ In celebration of the formal opening, nearly an entire section of the January 23 *Tampa Sunday Tribune* was dedicated to showcasing the Floridan's grandeur. Articles and advertisements chronicling the Floridan's elaborate dining hall, lobby, lounge, and “quality construction” were published, along with some more revealing facts about Tampa's goliath and its offerings.¹⁹

In their effort to portray the Floridan as a modern hotel, Floridan management publicized that they happily welcomed and accommodated motorists and their Tin Lizzies. On the day the Floridan Hotel announced its formal opening, readers of the *Tampa Tribune* learned that the “newest and most modern garage” in downtown Tampa, appropriately named the Floridan Garage, had recently opened. Owners

¹³ “18-Story Structure Tallest Commercial Dwelling in Florida,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

¹⁴ Teresa Maio and David Rigney, *The Floridan Hotel Designation Report and Analysis to the Tampa City Council*, Historic Tampa/Hillsborough County Preservation Board publication, 5.

¹⁵ “Tampa Paint Concern Does Interior Work Shown in New Hotel,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

¹⁶ “Tampan Designs Huge Sign on New Floridan,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

¹⁷ “18-Story Structure Tallest Commercial Dwelling in Florida.”

¹⁸ “Formal Opening of the Floridan Hotel,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

¹⁹ “Quality Construction Makes Floridan Hotel High Type Structure,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

**Floridan Hotel Is Opened
With Heavy Registration**

**Elaborate Reception
on Jan. 29 to Mark
Its Completion.**

The Floridan, Tampa's 400-room skyscraper hotel, was opened today at 7 a. m. with a heavy registration. Initial registrations were those of J. Morris Keely and H. A. I. Boggs, traveling men who have been regular patrons for 15 years of hotels operated by Peter P. Schutt, the Floridan's manager.

The main dining room, which was opened at 11:30 a. m., will be operated continuously. All day service in the main dining room will be maintained until Monday, when the coffee shop will be opened.

The Gyro club of Tampa initiated the banquet room, holding the first luncheon there.

Ten floors of the hotel are available at this time. Others are rapidly being opened. Equipment is arriving by every train, according to Mr. Schutt, and is being installed as rapidly as a force of expert workmen can place it.

The formal opening of the hotel has been set for Saturday, Jan. 23.

**Baby Born at Sea
Is Presented With
Free Trip to Italy**

New York, Jan. 20.—Because Lydia Bellach, 9 days old, was born at sea, she will be permitted to make a round trip to Italy free of charge any time she chooses.

The child was born while her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bellach, were returning from a visit to Italy. When the vessel on which they traveled docked in Brooklyn yesterday, Giuseppe Cosulich, New York head of the Cosulich line, presented the parents with a certificate entitling the child to free travel because, he said, she was the first baby born on a Cosulich liner in 1927.

**HOPE GIVEN UP
FOR RECOVERY
OF PARMELY**

Courtesy of USF Tampa Special Collections

The January 20, 1927 *Tampa Daily Times* headline shows the eagerness with which the opening of the Floridan Hotel was anticipated by Tampa's residents and visitors.

era in the South. However, what made the Floridan unique was that the segregationist policies would apply to the hotel staff as well as the guests. "All-White Personnel Serves New Floridan" read the *Tampa Tribune* headline. Floridan management reported that during the time between their initial and formal public grand opening, the use of white bellhops and white waitresses, "while an innovation in the south has proved quite popular."²¹ Photos of seven white Floridan employees were published just above the article in an apparent attempt to drive home the point. The Floridan was offering an all-white experience that management believed would appeal to those considering dining, sleeping, meeting, and socializing at the hotel.

²⁰ "New Floridan Garage Opens for Business at Cass and Ashley," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

²¹ "All-White Personnel Serves New Floridan," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, January 23, 1927.

of the 150-space garage located just a couple of city blocks from the Hotel Floridan publicly invited Floridan guests to utilize its parking accommodations and service center. Besides parking, the Floridan Garage offered car washing, twenty-four-hour valet attendants, gas, and "one of the most complete and well furnished women's rest rooms" in town.²⁰

Floridan publicists proudly highlighted one last feature of Tampa's new landmark: complete segregation. That the luxurious Floridan was going to be a "white guests only" hotel was never in question, seeing as the 1920s marked the midpoint of the Jim Crow

The formal opening of the Floridan was a success. The hotel was modern, luxurious, and comfortable. In the coming decades, it would provide accommodations and entertainment for a plethora of guests. Movie stars, musicians, professional athletes, and businessmen would funnel through the doors and congregate in the lobby, lounge, and dining hall in the coming years. Simms's vision had come to pass, and the Floridan's future looked bright.

The Golden Era: 1927-1968

"Everyone wanted to be seen here."

—Floridan bartender Gus Arencibia

Even though it was foreseeable and perhaps inevitable, the bursting of the Florida land bubble in the mid- to late 1920s blindsided many Floridians. Arguably the air began leaking out of the bubble when, nationwide, papers reported the capsizing of the *Prinz Valdemar* in Miami's port, a substantial increase in railroad shipping fees on goods bound for Florida, and successive hurricanes that caused widespread carnage. The national publicity highlighted the perils of Florida land investments. Whatever the causes, the days of rampant land speculation and real-estate binder boys in Florida were over. In fact, between "1926 and 1930, the assessed value of real estate in Florida dropped from \$623 to \$441 million."²²

Tampa was not exempt from the slowdown. Suddenly, construction in downtown Tampa slowed to a crawl as the entire nation sank into the Great Depression. One of the victims of the economic downturn was Simms's Tampa Commercial Hotel Company. Reeling from the economic effects of the bust, the Tampa Commercial Hotel Company relinquished control of the Hotel Floridan to Collier Florida Hotels Inc., which had also purchased the Tampa Terrace Hotel, the Floridan's 1920s upscale counterpart, just down the street. Likely distraught at the loss of his monumental project, Simms may have taken solace in the fact that a capable and well-funded custodian had acquired the Floridan.²³

The Hotel Floridan successfully survived the economic downturn under Collier's management. In fact, from the late 1920s to the 1950s, the Floridan housed and entertained some of Tampa's most influential visitors, corporations, and civic groups. In the fall of 1929, Hollywood star Lupe Vélez enjoyed the splendor of the Floridan's penthouse, lobby, and lounge while filming the early talkie *Hell Harbor* in nearby Rocky Point. The making of the film was a public-relations and economic windfall for both the Floridan and Tampa. The decision to film in Tampa allegedly funneled more than \$250,000 into "Tampa trade channels."²⁴ The filming of *Hell*

²² Teresa Maio and David Rigney, *The Floridan Hotel Designation Report*, 16.

²³ Grismer, *A History of the City of Tampa*, 264.

²⁴ W. Scott Christopher. *Tampa's People with a Purpose* (Tampa: Greater Tampa



Courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System

The first guests of the Flóridan relax in the hotel lobby on opening day, January 20, 1927, while hotel employees stand at the ready.

Harbor was such a monumental event that Florida governor Doyle Carlton traveled all the way down from Tallahassee to personally greet Vélez as she stepped off the train in downtown Tampa. The event was good for the newspaper business as well, with local gossip columns chronicling every move of the film's star, and subsequently exploding when Vélez's love interest, fellow Hollywood star Gary Cooper, came to town.²⁵

Mary Jim Scott, whose father managed the Flóridan for thirty years, was fortunate enough to get an insider's glimpse of the hotel during the 1930s. Mary and her family moved into a top-floor Flóridan apartment in 1932, where she spent many of her childhood days gallivanting around the Flóridan's rooftop fishpond, playing with children whose parents were staying in the hotel, and eating her meals in the opulent dining room. When interviewed by a *Tampa Tribune* reporter in 1994, Mary

Chamber of Commerce, 1993), 86.

²⁵ Leland Hawes, "When Stars Were the Talk of the Town," *Tampa Tribune*, April 9, 2000 (NewsBank).

recalled seeing Charlton Heston, Cincinnati Reds players, and other famous and distinguished guests while living in the hotel. "All my friends loved...to come spend the night," insisted Scott. And why not? Although many considered the Tampa Terrace Hotel to be the swankiest hotel in town, many famous Tampa visitors found themselves staying, dining, or drinking at the Floridan on at least one occasion.²⁶

Many Tampa teenagers believed the Floridan accommodated its most important guest in 1955: Elvis Presley. Nearly forty-one years after "The King's" death, Wanda Sprung still vividly recalled Elvis's visit to Tampa in 1955. A friend of Sprung's, a Floridan bellhop, told her what room Elvis was staying in at the hotel. The then-thirteen-year-old raced to the hotel and promptly waited outside the room for the King to materialize. When he appeared, he saw her and, during a moment that must have felt like a dream to the awestruck fan, gave her a royal kiss. "I probably didn't wash my face for a month," reminisced Sprung when asked about the fairy-tale moment.²⁷

Although the famous guests that stayed and played at the Floridan at times mesmerized Sprung and other Bay area residents, perhaps the most exciting era in the hotel's history was ushered in when hordes of World War II-era servicemen were ordered to Tampa in the 1940s. In July 1939, the *Tampa Tribune* reported "WE GET THE BIG AIR BASE." "The US Army had acquired 6,400 acres" on Tampa's Catfish Point and "Congress appropriated over \$3 million" to construct a military installation.²⁸ From 1939 to 1941, thousands of servicemen and servicewomen found themselves stationed in Tampa while the war in Europe heated up.

"I got off the bus in civilian clothes and walked into the bar at the Floridan Hotel. I needed a cold drink. This military policeman entered the bar and was going around looking for GIs and telling them to get to the base. Our world had just changed."²⁹ Mark Orr was one of several GIs to learn of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, while inside the Hotel Floridan. The day of "infamy" that forever changed U.S. foreign policy and the lives of all Americans directly led to an explosion in the number of GIs in Tampa. Between 1941 and 1945, thousands more servicemen and servicewomen found themselves stationed in Tampa as the war raged in Europe and the Pacific. Many of these men and women socialized with family members, love interests, and friends in the lobby, dining hall, lounge, and rooms of Tampa's landmark hotel.

The Floridan lounge was the place to be for fun-loving servicemen stationed in Tampa during the war years. The lounge quickly became a center of downtown

²⁶ Kelly Gardner, "Restoration Eludes Tampa's 1st Skyscraper," *Tampa Tribune*, June 20, 1994 (NewsBank).

²⁷ Philip Morgan, "Woman Makes Room in Her Life for Elvis," *Tampa Tribune*, January 8, 1996 (NewsBank).

²⁸ Gary Mormino, *Hillsborough County Goes to War: The Home Front, 1940-1950* (Tampa: Tampa Bay History Center, 2001), 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

Tampa's social scene, its dance floors, and bands drawing big crowds.³⁰ Gus Arencibia, Floridan bartender from 1943 to 1959, vividly remembered those days. A wartime beer at the Floridan cost thirty-five cents. While the GIs drank and socialized, Arencibia raked in ten to fifteen dollars per night in tips, saving enough to place a down payment on a house in 1944. Bar business was so heavy on the weekends during periods of Arcencibia's tenure as bartender that he had to save seats for the regulars by placing a drink and change in front of stools. Arencibia insisted that "people seldom got drunk...one or two drinks was it. But everyone wanted to be seen here." He did recall, however, driving soldiers home who had missed the bus back to MacDill Air Force Base. Thousands of GIs stationed in Tampa meant a packed bar for Arencibia and Floridan management.³¹

Ruth Ruth also had fond members of the Floridan lounge, but for different, albeit not unique, reasons. It was in February 1945 that the then-twenty-two-year-old Ruth Motz met and shortly thereafter married twenty-one-year-old First Lieutenant John Ruth in Palm Beach, Florida. After they were married, John Ruth was ordered to Phoenix. On the long drive to Phoenix, the couple stayed one night, an abbreviated honeymoon of sorts, at the Floridan Hotel. They welcomed their first son, David, into the world exactly nine months to the day after their one-night Floridan stay. No, Ruth's experience was not unique at all. In fact, during World War II the Floridan bar—officially called the Sapphire Room but unofficially dubbed the "Surefire Room," a name that paid homage to its reputation as a place for meeting friendly, single, female visitors—was a GI mainstay.³² Staff Sgt. Robert Schnurr, while stationed in Tampa during the war, took his future wife on dates to the Floridan. Longtime Tampa resident Ann Thompson, while in the company of "some officers from nearby MacDill and Drew fields," had her first drink at the Floridan lounge. Schnurr and Thompson weren't alone in their experiences. Many other GIs and full-time Tampa residents visited, stayed, and played in the Floridan's dining hall, lounge, and rooms.³³

While awkward to admit, wartime was high time for the Hotel Floridan. From 1939 to 1946, the hotel's lounge, rooms, and dining hall spilled over with locals and servicemen from all over the country. By the summer of 1946, downtown Tampa's north Franklin Street was the Tampa Bay area's most expensive and hopping locale. Downtown Tampa "stood at its zenith" in the summer of 1946.³⁴ People from

³⁰ Harry Crumppacker, "A Plane a Day in Tampa Bay," *Tampa Tribune*, September 25, 1994 (NewsBank).

³¹ Janis Froelich, "Lodged in Memory," *Tampa Tribune*, May 26, 2005 (NewsBank).

³² Daniel Ruth, "John You Gotta Meet This Girl," *Tampa Tribune*, February 15, 1995 (NewsBank).

³³ Leland Hawes, "Life Went on after Crash," *Tampa Tribune*, May 26, 1996 (NewsBank); Gardner, "Restoration Eludes Tampa's 1st Skyscraper."

³⁴ Gary Mormino, "Downtown Ruled '46 Boom Era," *Tampa Tribune*, September 8, 1996 (NewsBank).

around the region traveled to downtown's north end to shop at the Maas Brothers department store, socialize, and be seen—and the towering Floridan was in the center of the action. The twelve principal organizers of the Floridan Hotel Operating Company, who had acquired a majority stake in the hotel in the boom year 1943, must have been very pleased with their acquisition. Downtown Tampa had boomed during the war, but after the surrender of Germany and Japan, Tampa residents began to wonder what the future held for downtown.

After the war, downtown Tampa and the Floridan enjoyed continued prosperity for more than twenty years. IBM, the Florida Association of Colleges and Universities, the Florida Association of Realtors, and other corporations, clubs and civic associations all held meetings and banquets at the Hotel Floridan from the mid-1940s to the 1960s. Football icon Paul “Bear” Bryant visited the Floridan as the star “principal speaker” at a Tampa Sports Club banquet in 1968.³⁵ The Floridan's elaborate dining hall, lounge, lobby, ample meeting spaces, and convenient location still drew crowds. The 1960s, however, marked a crucial turning point for the Floridan and other businesses in downtown Tampa's north end.

The post–World War II economic boom that fueled downtown Tampa's economic growth and expansion had slowed by 1960. From the 1920s to the mid-1950s, downtown was the social and economic hub of Tampa. By the late 1950s, it was clear that the spokes were beginning to break off. Downtown buildings started to deteriorate as the area's reputation as the social and business center of the region was undermined. The once-bustling businesses on north Franklin Street began losing patrons. By the late 1960s, many of downtown Tampa's north end businesses had folded or fled the area. Exacerbating the problem was the fact that many new Tampa businesses were centering operations in rapidly expanding suburban centers, such as the newly created West Shore business district. The new shopping plazas and office buildings being constructed in South Tampa and other area suburbs were undermining downtown Tampa's north end retail and other businesses.³⁶

During this period, the Floridan and other downtown businesses fought to attract patrons and remain profitable. In 1962, the *St. Petersburg Times* reported that the Hotel Floridan, Tampa Terrace Hotel, Maas Brothers department store building, and other downtown sites would be undergoing renovations. Floridan management hoped to install a fourth-floor swimming pool and a parking garage. Both were attempts to offer the same accommodations as newly built suburban hotels and motels. The estimated price of the renovations was approximately \$1.2 million.³⁷ The plan seemed a sound investment. After all, in the early 1960s, when many other downtown buildings were boarded up, the Floridan was still a linchpin of the Tampa social scene. In fact, the *St. Petersburg Times* listed it “among Tampa's more

³⁵ “Sporty Night in Tampa,” *St. Petersburg Times*, January 22, 1968.

³⁶ Kerstein, *Politics and Growth*, 132.

³⁷ “Tampa Remodels Downtown Areas,” *St. Petersburg Times*, August 6, 1962.

active” nightspots in October 1963.³⁸ Its 1963 renovation plan was the spark of a trend. Between 1963 and 1989, the Floridan underwent many alterations in an attempt to keep the hotel marketable and profitable, but ultimately none successfully rejuvenated the Floridan.

Although the Floridan remained an active nightspot and continued to host banquets, luncheons, and meetings, it was struggling financially. The problem was, unlike the dining hall, lobby, and lounge, the Floridan’s rooms failed to continue to attract guests. The 11 x 14 foot rooms, which were once the norm in elegant hotels, were now unfashionable. Out-of-town visitors coming to the Floridan to attend events often chose to stay elsewhere. It was clear the Floridan needed to reinvent itself. Failing to do so could lead to a meeting with the wrecking ball. How real was the prospect of demolition? In 1967, the Tampa Terrace Hotel, the Floridan’s swanky 1920s counterpart and downtown neighbor, was demolished to make room for a parking lot.³⁹

The Heart of Florida Corporation believed the Floridan could be reinvented and made profitable. In 1966, Heart purchased the hotel from Floridan Hotel of Tampa Inc., for a reported \$1.5 million. The plan was to “concentrate on commercial and convention trade,” while “offering special rates to residents in certain age groups.” Heart hoped to fill the Floridan’s small guest rooms with senior citizens while continuing banquet and conference-hall operations.⁴⁰ The plan failed. By late 1968, the Floridan was in foreclosure. Soon thereafter the famous dining hall and lounge were closed, and in June 1969, hotel operations at the Floridan ceased.⁴¹ With demolition crews busy destroying the majority of downtown Tampa’s 1920s boom-era buildings, the Floridan’s future looked dire.

Graceless Aging

“When a TV hits the ground from the 5th floor, you really hear it.”
—Floridan Hotel desk clerk

At the dawn of the 1970s, the fortunes of the Hotel Floridan had set. The hotel that had once proudly reigned as the tallest building in the state and accommodated twentieth-century American cultural icons Elvis Presley, Charlton Heston, Lupe Vélez, Gary Cooper, and Paul “Bear” Bryant was now a college dormitory. The dining hall and lounge were closed. The live music ceased. The party appeared to be

³⁸ “There’s a Hot Time in the Old Town Each Night,” *St. Petersburg Times*, October 15, 1963.

³⁹ Leland Hawes, “From ‘the Terrace,’” *Tampa Tribune*, June 6, 1999 (NewsBank).

⁴⁰ “Floridan Hotel in Downtown Tampa Sold,” *St. Petersburg Times*, March 15, 1966.

⁴¹ “Landmark Floridan Will Close Doors,” *Tampa Tribune Saturday*, August 21, 1971.



Courtesy of USF Tampa Special Collections

A group of Floridan employees, including doormen, bellhops and pages, pose in front of the hotel around the time of its opening. Such amenities were a thing of the past by the 1970s.

over. Of course, the demise of the great hotel did not occur overnight. It was clear to most Tampa residents by the early 1960s that the Floridan may have had its best days behind it. The only thing keeping the hotel from closing its doors was the contract the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company, controller of the hotel after its foreclosure, penned with Patricia Stevens Career College. The college had agreed to lease floors eight through sixteen for student housing.⁴² By 1970, it seemed to many that use as a dormitory facility was all the Floridan's 11 x 14 foot rooms were good for.

In September 1971, Nora Allen became one of the Patricia Stevens Career College students who called the Floridan home. "It was obviously an older building even in 1971...but I wouldn't describe it as dilapidated," recalled Nora when asked about the condition of the Floridan during her residency. To her, the Floridan was more than adequate. "I can tell you that I liked my room a lot," said Allen. Adding to Allen's excitement was the fact that she shared a room with fellow classmate and former Miss Florida 1971, Susan Aileen Deaton.

According to Allen, the downtown streets surrounding the Floridan were teeming with pedestrians during the daytime hours in late 1971 and early 1972. "I can remember the sidewalks being filled with people rushing to get to their destinations. I didn't have a car at the time and so I walked everywhere I went. It was a nice time to

⁴² Ibid.

be living in downtown Tampa,” Allen fondly recalled.⁴³ It seemed to Allen and others that maybe the Hotel Floridan had found its niche and would survive.

The problem, however, was that the tenant agreement between Patricia Stevens College and the Floridan’s management was only temporary, and downtown’s twenty-four-hour foot traffic and businesses continued their decline. In 1971, the college cancelled its lease, and all students were moved out by late 1972.⁴⁴ Upon the cancellation, the few remaining permanent Floridan residents, which Penn and the college had agreed could stay, were given thirty days to vacate the premises. “We will sell to anyone interested,” proclaimed a representative of Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company, which, having owned the hotel since its 1968 foreclosure, now wished to sever its ties with the deteriorating landmark.⁴⁵

Although Penn wanted out, some investors still viewed the Floridan as a viable commodity that just needed some tender loving care. One week after the *Tampa Tribune* reported that the Floridan was available to anyone interested, the paper announced that A.C. Kavli, a businessman who had successfully remodeled and modernized the Orange Court Motor Lodge in downtown Orlando, was interested in purchasing and refurbishing the Tampa icon.⁴⁶ For \$351,000 the hotel was his, and shortly thereafter, Tampa residents saw construction crews making some renovations to the structure.

Kalvi’s plan to revive the landmark appeared sound on paper. During the 1970s and 1980s, Tampa’s downtown skyline soared thanks to the construction of several new high-rises. Whereas a mere “594,183 square feet of new downtown office space was constructed between 1960 and 1969,” between 1970 and 1990 downtown Tampa saw the creation of “over 3 million more square feet.” The twenty-year period witnessed the construction of several downtown buildings of more than thirty stories. Kalvi must have anticipated the coming expansion in 1971 and believed that a renovated and modernized Hotel Floridan could capitalize on it. The new downtown development was problematic, however, for two reasons. First, all of the new buildings were located in downtown’s south end, which was several blocks from the Floridan. Second, instead of increasing the twenty-four-hour foot traffic in downtown and creating a market for a rejuvenated Floridan, the new buildings worked to quicken the rapid evaporation of the residential character of downtown Tampa. “Downtown Tampa is an extreme case of a daytime-only center city,” admitted a municipal official in 1978 when listing the drawbacks of Tampa’s central business district. This was true. In fact, when One Laurel Place was constructed on the outskirts of downtown Tampa’s north end near the Hillsborough River in 1982, it adopted the mantra “The One Place to Live in Downtown.” This was not

⁴³ Nora Allen interview, January 23, 2009.

⁴⁴ “Landmark Floridan Will Close Doors.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ben Blackman, “Floridan May be Reopened,” *Tampa Times*, August 28, 1971.

true. There was one other place to live downtown: the fallen Floridan. After Kavli's acquisition of the Floridan, only minor renovations were completed. Thus instead of undergoing a rebirth, the hotel became a low-rent downtown dwelling for Tampa's transients, drifters, and social misfits.⁴⁷

By the late 1970s, the Floridan gained a reputation as a violent and dangerous flophouse, thanks to a series of bizarre and criminal events. In February 1978, a man was savagely beaten during a mugging in a Floridan elevator. The robber was allegedly so enraged upon discovering his victim had no cash, he brutally beat his victim, who later was forced to literally crawl out of the elevator when it stopped at the fourteenth floor.⁴⁸ The assailant escaped through the lobby and onto the desolate nighttime streets of downtown's north end. He was never apprehended.

Later that same year, the Floridan endured one of two fires that solidified its reputation as a dangerous place. A hotel resident, Ramona Refour, was responsible for the first blaze according to Tampa firefighters. The official report stated that a lit cigarette carelessly placed next to a Floridan mattress sparked the blaze. Fortunately, Refour awoke in time to escape the blaze and all other guests were safely evacuated. Unfortunately for the Floridan, the fire was reported by local news outlets and provided further evidence of the hotel's sad state. Officials estimated the damage at nearly ten thousand dollars.⁴⁹ Although Floridan management declined to release any official vacancy statistics, a resident of the hotel reported that three weeks ago the hotel was fully occupied, the evidence being the posting of a "no vacancy" sign. Despite its condition and reputation, the Floridan was staying afloat.

The second fire to mar the Floridan began the morning of June 20, 1980. The fire, which was of "suspicious origins," according to the fire department, began in a first-floor linen room. Several emergency vehicles responded to the "three-alarm" alert and were able to get the fire under control in minutes. Three of the hotels occupants were treated for smoke inhalation at Tampa General Hospital and released.⁵⁰ After the fire, a hotel spokesman stated that 179 of the 400 rooms were occupied. A survey of the hotel following the fire estimated the damages at twenty thousand dollars.⁵¹

With the Floridan seemingly coming, or burning, apart at the seams, all eyes were focused on the hotel's management. Many Tampa residents believed that only management officials had the ability to save the Tampa landmark. The Floridan's management, however, seemed content with the status quo. In 1980, the Tampa fire

⁴⁷ *Centennial 1960 to 1994*, "City on the Move," *Tampa Tribune-Times*, September 25, 1994.

⁴⁸ "Man Beaten in Elevator in Robbery Attempt," *Tampa Times*, February 20, 1978.

⁴⁹ Charles Hendrick, "Small Fire Evacuates Floridan," *Tampa Tribune*, June 16, 1978.

⁵⁰ August Stoebler, "Smoke Victim," *Tampa Times*, June 19, 1980.

⁵¹ Donna Newsome, "Hotel Fire's Origin 'Suspicious,'" *Tampa Tribune*, June 20, 1980.

marshal ordered “the Floridan Hotel to correct 20 odd fire hazards found there in each of the last six inspections.” Management refused. “None of this s--- is really serious,” exclaimed James Britton, the Floridan’s manager. The violations that appeared on the Tampa fire marshal’s reports revealed not just the dangers of staying at the once-majestic hotel, but also how far it had fallen. If management officials were unwilling to install fire doors, exit and emergency lights, as well as repair holes in the walls to stop the potential spread of smoke and fire, then clearly they would not, for the foreseeable future, be rehabbing the hotel.⁵²

The Floridan was in a tailspin. While fires broke out, safety hazards were ignored, more rooms sat vacant, and no renovation plans were publicized, new stories of strange and criminal occurrences further damaged the icon’s reputation. On September 12, 1980, a fifty-one-year-old man “jumped or fell” to his death “from his 10th floor room at the Floridan,” according to Tampa police.⁵³ The man, who carried identification from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and Schenectady, New York, had checked into the Floridan earlier and was found dead on the sidewalk below around midnight. No witnesses came forward, and details of the man’s death plunge remained a mystery.

In 1981, several amenities of one Floridan room were flung out of a window and onto the downtown sidewalks below. On March 20, Tampa police were called to the hotel at 7:00 a.m., when a man began shouting at hotel employees and, apparently wishing to do some renovating of his own, started throwing his fifth-floor room’s furniture and other items out of the window. By the time the seventy-nine-year-old, four foot, three inch Chicagoan was through redecorating, a TV set, mattress, Bible, and other items had smashed into the downtown sidewalk. The hotel desk clerk reported the man “opened the window—he was nice enough to do that—and then just started throwing everything out.... When a TV hits the ground from the 5th floor, you really hear it.” Upon arriving and ascending to the man’s Floridan abode, the police requested the man open the door and when he failed to do so, kicked it in and beheld the diminutive old man standing in the room brandishing a knife. The man, however, wisely avoided a struggle and was willingly taken into police custody “as a mentally ill person.”⁵⁴

The Chicagoan was not the only interesting and disturbed character to spend time in the Floridan. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a host of colorful characters stayed in the decaying old structure. A few local reporters made pilgrimages to the hotel to chronicle the residents’ stories and lives, and to see what had become of the once-luxurious hotel.

⁵² Richard Bockman, “Hotel Manager: Hazards Don’t Warrant Correction,” *Tampa Times*, December 1, 1980.

⁵³ “Man Dies Following 10-Story Hotel Fall,” *Tampa Times*, September 12, 1980.

⁵⁴ “Man Throws Furniture from Hotel Window,” *Tampa Times*, March 20, 1981.

In 1978, Karen Lachenauer, a freelance writer, decided to spend thirteen April days and nights in the hotel, during which time she kept a diary. In it, she chronicled the state of the hotel and its “varied clientele, from transients to entrenched old-timers.”⁵⁵ For the miniscule sum of thirty-five dollars a week, the reporter was able live in a room on the fourteenth floor and soak in the unique charm of the 1920s boom-era hotel and its clientele. Floridan charms reported by Lachenauer included a ban on nonpaying guests, a policy made clear via a sign stating, “No visitors above the lobby level,” required advance payments for both renters and overnight guests, vending machines that produced moon pies and “tepid machine coffee,” and elevators with expired inspection notices that bit down on slow-moving elderly visitors. During her stay, Lachenauer encountered a confused and malnourished elderly woman, a pimp, gamblers, and prostitutes who checked into the hotel and knocked on doors all night long looking for potential clients.⁵⁶ The days of refined modernity and opulence were clearly over at the Hotel Floridan.

Tampa Tribune reporter Vanessa Orlando found some of the characters staying in the Floridan in 1981 to be just as colorful as those Lachenauer had encountered in 1978. Orlando found old men telling World War II stories in the lobby, a woman who had lived in the hotel for eight years and who refused to socialize, staying “behind her locked door at night,” and a friendly fifteen-year-old named Allen who, living in the hotel with his mother, subsisted on fast-food and vending-machine fare. Despite the diversity, all the Floridan residents she encountered did have one thing in common: they were paying customers. Their patronage, and the patronage of the overnight guests, was keeping the Floridan’s doors open. The hotel was still profitable. James Britton, the hotel’s manager, stated, “although the hotel has gone through a kind of graceless aging, it’s still a successful, money-making business.” When asked whether it bothered him to witness the deterioration of the old icon, Britton stated, “Well as someone once said, I cry all the way to the bank.”⁵⁷

Delusions of Grandeur and Final Checkout

“You get roaches, like mobile mints waiting on your pillow.”

–*Tampa Tribune* reporter Paul Wilborn

It was an inspiring and ambitious plan. Scott Fetterhoff, a University of South Florida architecture student, must have experienced an epiphany when he created his architectural master’s thesis project in 1983. His vision: create the “Floridan Square.” The Floridan Square project proposed linking the Hotel Floridan to a newly

⁵⁵ Karen Lachenauer, “Inside the Floridan Hotel: Excerpts from a Resident’s Diary,” *Tampa Tribune* edition: “Florida Accent,” May 28, 1978.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Vanessa Orlando, “Floridan Hotel: Variety of Characters Register at Historic Downtown Landmark,” *Tampa Tribune-Times*, August 2, 1981.



Tampa Bay History Center Collection

Postcard view of the Floridan Hotel, with an inset image of the famed Sapphire Room, dating from the 1940s.

constructed downtown office building and retail space. Fetterhoff argued that the key to the project was restoring the Floridan to its former greatness and ensuring that it not be converted into office space. "You couldn't appreciate the grandness of it as an office structure," argued Fetterhoff.⁵⁸ The architectural models were built, the plan was publicized, but the Floridan did not change. Instead, it continued for the next six years to provide shelter for low-income transients and outcasts.

The same year that Fetterhoff's vision was publicized, Jude Ryan, a child-abuse investigator for Florida's Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, visited the Floridan twice. Someone had reported an incidence of child neglect on the part of a Hotel Floridan resident, and Ryan was sent to investigate the allegation. His personal account of his 1983 visits to the downtown icon revealed that things at the Floridan had not changed. When asked who he had seen in the Floridan in 1983, Ryan said, "People who would otherwise be homeless...and who had nothing to do." After his uncertain ascent up a "scary elevator" and his passage through "dimly lit" narrow hallways, Ryan approached the room that his clients called home. Upon entering the room, Ryan beheld a family of four living in a cramped room whose "mattress was standing on its side." The room was "not filthy," stated Ryan, but he got the impression that the "place had not been renovated in a long long time." Although the parents were exonerated of the neglect charges, the Floridan was clearly not the ideal place to raise a family.⁵⁹

Ryan's experiences, and those of other Floridan visitors illustrated that by the early 1980s the Floridan had hit rock bottom. However, behind-the-scenes events were taking place that would forever alter the Floridan's destiny. In December 1985, A.C. Kavli, the hotel's owner since 1971, died. Upon his death, the Floridan was placed in the hands of a Minneapolis trust, which immediately put the hotel up for sale.⁶⁰ Would the hotel be sold to someone or some entity interested in restoration? Would Fetterhoff's vision become a reality? As it stood, the Floridan was a place where you could book a room for fourteen dollars per night. The Floridan's patrons, admirers, and detractors were all eagerly anticipating and pondering what the future would hold for the historic landmark.

On February 27, 1987, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that a small group of investors was seriously considering purchasing the Floridan. By March 20, 1987, a deal was struck. For a reported \$2.75 million, the Amerivest Corp., headquartered in Tampa, purchased the hotel. In a *Tampa Tribune* story, Amerivest publicly announced its plan to spend \$15 million to restore the Tampa icon to its former glory. "We want to make it the same type of hotel it was at one time," exclaimed Marilyn Proctor, vice president and operations manager for Amerivest Corp. Amerivest estimated

⁵⁸ Leland Hawes, "The Floridan Hotel: Filled with the Faded Beauty of Tampa History," *Tampa Tribune*, May 7, 1983.

⁵⁹ Jude Ryan interview, December 2, 2008.

⁶⁰ Stephanie Tripp, "Investor Group Checking out Floridan Hotel," *Tampa Tribune*, February 27, 1987.

renovations would take approximately two years, would be done “one floor at a time,” and that hotel operations would continue throughout the process. When asked about the hotel’s location in the fast deteriorating and desolate north end of Tampa’s downtown district, Proctor stated that it was in a “viable area” that Amerivest believed would be undergoing “a lot of renovation” in the future.⁶¹

The future seemed bright for those hoping for a Floridan return to glory. The new owners of the Floridan proposed to refurbish the Floridan and construct a new space for the Maas Brothers department store, which had been a downtown Tampa mainstay since the late 1800s, but was facing infrastructural and financial hardships thanks to the post–World War II exodus of downtown businesses, patrons, and residents. Amerivest desired to purchase nearby land in order to build a parking garage and a potential 100,000 square feet of retail space, and wanted Maas Brothers to move into approximately 45,000 square feet of the new space. A meeting was set up between Amerivest representative Wally Knight and Maas Brothers president Frank Harvey to “discuss the proposal.” The plan did not end with the Maas Brothers building; it also called for a four-story convention center, “40,000 square feet of meeting space, a health club and a swimming pool.” Although talks with property owners and historic preservationists were still ongoing, it seemed as though a version of Fetterhoff’s vision might materialize.⁶²

Sadly for champions of the Floridan, it was not to be. The plans for the hotel and downtown Tampa’s north end remained mere mirages. On January 5, 1988, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that the relationship between the Hotel Floridan’s principal owners had soured. With several lawsuits pending “concerning the Floridan and together properties owned by Comer and Weis,” Amerivest’s plans to renovate the Floridan and transform downtown’s north end halted.⁶³

Nevertheless, the Floridan’s doors remained propped open, and a peculiar cast of characters continued to call the relic home. In 1989, the Floridan’s guest list included Gene Lewis, a retired Army vet who spent his days smoking “nonfilter cigarettes and reading paperback adventure novels.” Lewis told a reporter the story of how he had wandered to the Floridan from the Tampa Amtrak station more than five years ago and that he did not plan on leaving. Frank Slattery, an Irishman who had seen the Floridan in its glory days, was another full-time resident. I have “lost a life-long battle with the bottle,” said the man who called the Floridan home. There was also Ted Robinson, who, while “caressing a can of malt liquor” in the Floridan’s bar, told *Tampa Tribune* reporter Paul Wilborn the story of how he ended up at the Floridan. On Thanksgiving Day in 1976, his wife “asked the sheriff’s office to help

⁶¹ Stephanie Tripp, “Investors Purchase Floridan,” *Tampa Tribune*, March 20, 1987.

⁶² Stephanie Tripp, “Floridan Developer Hopes to Lure Maas to New Spot,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 1, 1987.

⁶³ Stephanie Tripp, “Floridan Partner Forces Group into Bankruptcy,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 5, 1988.

[him] relocate.” After officers drew their guns and persuaded him to get in a taxi, he was dropped off at the entrance of the hotel where he would become a permanent resident. What kept them at the Floridan? Perhaps the Floridan’s motto, “The price is right,” said it all. In 1989, you could get a room at the Floridan for “\$19 a night or \$75 a week—payable in advance.”⁶⁴

While Gene Lewis, Ted Robinson, and Frank Slattery were living in the Floridan, the hotel found itself on the auction block. In December 1988, the grandiose plans of the Amerivest Corp. were officially laid to rest. Hillsborough County notified the operators of the hotel that they had until Christmas Eve to find a buyer. Stephen Weis, who was then running the hotel under a bankruptcy agreement, told the *Tampa Tribune* he was “not optimistic about finding a buyer.” One of the problems, according to some onlookers and prospective buyers, was the obvious fact that the Floridan was simply in an unfavorable location. Because the Floridan was several blocks north of downtown Tampa’s newer buildings and convention center, potential investors were wary. Many feared that this disinterest would lead to the destruction of one of Florida’s most historic, yet still unprotected, buildings.⁶⁵

On December 14, 1988, a hotel that had once accommodated Elvis Presley, Paul “Bear” Bryant, and Gary Cooper was sold at auction for ten thousand dollars to Sity International Inc., which had purchased the \$2.5 million mortgage from Amerivest two months prior to the auction.⁶⁶ The Floridan had indisputably lost not only its polish, but its paint as well. It was a shell of its former self. Upon selling the hotel, the Amerivest Corp. had racked up \$3.3 million “in outstanding loans, interest and fees.” Sity International Inc. was tightlipped when asked by a reporter about its plans for the old hotel. They did, however, assure residents and employees of the Floridan that they had no immediate plans to close it. This was good news for Floridan residents with no other place to go. Sity certainly had financial reasons for keeping the hotel open in the short term. According to a Floridan employee, about 80 percent of the hotel’s rooms were occupied. Obviously, the Floridan was still a potentially profitable entity, but with competition from newer hotels in the West Shore district and the south end of downtown, whether or not the Floridan could or would be redeemed remained unknown.⁶⁷

On September 1, 1989, guests and permanent residents of the Floridan strode, ran, walked, or stumbled into the hotel’s lobby to be greeted with the following message:

⁶⁴ Paul Wilborn, “Final Checkout Nears at the Floridan,” *Tampa Tribune*, September 14, 1989.

⁶⁵ Stephanie Tripp, “Auction to Decide Floridan Hotel’s future—If Any,” *Tampa Tribune*, December 12, 1988;

Stephanie Tripp, “Floridan Hotel’s Future Uncertain after Sale,” *Tampa Tribune*, December 15, 1988.

⁶⁶ Bernice Stengle, “Japanese Developers Are Buyers of Tampa Hotel,” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 26, 1989 (NewsBank).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

“ATTENTION: HOTEL GUESTS. WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT AS OF OCTOBER 1, 1989, THE FLORIDAN HOTEL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS TO ALL OCCUPANTS, DUE TO FUTURE HOTEL RENOVATION... TO OUR WEEKLY GUESTS, WE WISH TO EXPRESS OUR THANKS FOR YOUR EXTENSIVE PATRONAGE AND HOPE THAT THIS WILL PROVIDE SUFFICIENT TIME TO RELOCATE.”

The Hotel Floridan, whose continuous sixty-two-year hotel operations had outlasted the continuous operations streaks of local landmark hotels the Don CeSar, the Tampa Terrace, the Vinoy, and Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel, was closing its doors. Final checkout for Gene Lewis, Frank Slattery, Ted Robinson, and other Floridan residents had arrived. Robinson was one resident who said he would miss the old hotel. Peter Saunders, a house painter and USF student who was living at the Floridan, also lamented the loss of his digs. “It's strange. This place is more than bricks and mortar. . . . If Ernest Hemingway was around, he would write a book on it.” Other residents likely didn't hold the Floridan in the same high regard. Paul Wilborn, the *Tribune* reporter, said that for nineteen dollars a night, Floridan guests got roaches on their pillows, a “plastic trash can in the corner that says ‘Hilton’ and a 15-inch color television set with an antenna made from a coat hanger.” Floridan amenities also included toilets with brown water and faulty air-conditioning. Even in the face of such uninviting accommodations, many Floridan residents were in no hurry to relocate. But now they had to, and they only had thirty days to do so, a difficult proposition for those who lacked the means to pay apartment security deposits, as well as first and last month's rent.⁶⁸

Sity's failure to publicize a future plan for the Floridan likely intensified longtime residents' exasperation. Although the sign in the lobby stated that the hotel would be closing for renovations, work crews were not seen in or around the hotel. Steve Anderson, the attorney representing Sity, stated that the group decided to close the hotel and expel the residents rather than bring the hotel up to specs. “There were some changes in the fire safety laws a couple of years ago that had some pretty tough deadlines to meet in terms of sprinkler systems, fire-alarm systems, [and] fire partitions...[these] changes in the law really were cost-prohibitive for a facility that was being kept open temporarily.” Anderson argued that the owners of the Floridan decided that closing the icon down was the only economically viable option. The Floridan was no longer profitable in its current state. The closure of the Floridan marked the end of an era and led to the exodus of a large portion of Tampa's downtown residents. The nighttime streets of downtown's north end, which were close to desolate after five with the Floridan open, would soon mirror a black hole.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Wilborn, “Final Checkout Nears at the Floridan”.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Resurrection?

“It’s just a matter of time before the right person with the right formula comes along.”

—Casey Ellison, assistant manager, The Beck Group, April 9, 2004

The block sign erected in 1994 said it all. A sign that had once proudly displayed the name of the once-luxurious hotel in big, bold letters now had another phrase affixed: “FOR SALE.” The years from 1989 to 1994 were not kind to the Hotel Floridan. Like many other buildings in downtown Tampa’s north end, the Floridan remained boarded up and mothballed. The only visible residents of the Floridan were the vultures that circled above and perched themselves upon the 1920s relic day and night. The demise of the Floridan was now obvious to all who drove past, and its abandonment and desolation paralleled that of downtown Tampa’s north end. Developers, city politicians, and business leaders, for all their good intentions, were unsuccessful in their attempts to rejuvenate downtown’s north end and secure renovation for the Floridan. Under the ownership of Sity International Corporation, the Floridan sat neglected, and downtown’s north end, including the once-booming north Franklin Street, was a virtual ghost town.

Sity’s hopes of resurrecting the hotel had been dashed by 1994, and the company wanted out. It was simply a question of cost. In 1994, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that preservation experts estimated that it would “cost between \$14 million and \$17 million” to renovate the Floridan. Unfortunately, this figure did not include the cost of purchasing the hotel, which Sity International was attempting to unload for \$4 million. Approximately \$20 million to purchase and renovate the old hotel appeared on the surface to be a princely sum to many potential buyers. Yet, there were rumblings in 1994 that some parties were expressing an interest in acquiring and resurrecting the Floridan. If this were true, the 1994 prediction of former Floridan patron Hampton Dunn that the Floridan “may be too far gone... I don’t know if it will ever come back as the elegant thing it was,” may not have been prophetic after all.⁷⁰

Those who for years had kept their fingers crossed in hope that one day someone would buy the now-vacant and infested Floridan must have had irrepressible smiles when they read the November 30, 1995, *Tampa Tribune* headline: “Hotel Developer to Renovate 1927 Landmark.” Grand Heritage Hotels Inc. announced on November 30 its plans to restore the boarded-up and mothballed Hotel Floridan. City leaders were optimistic. Tampa Downtown Partnership chairwoman Marsha Rydberg told reporters: “We’ve got a company that’s got a track record. These are people that are professionals.”⁷¹ Grand Heritage had specialized in renovating and refurbishing old

⁷⁰ Gardner, “Restoration Eludes Tampa’s 1st Skyscraper”.

⁷¹ Jean Gruss, “Hotel Developer Plans to Renovate 1927 Landmark,” *Tampa Tri-*



Tampa Bay History Center Collection

Lewis Ellsworth snapped this photo of downtown Tampa's north end in the late 1950s. Business owners were already "modernizing" their buildings with neon signs and stucco.

hotels in order to transform them into "thriving, high-profile destinations in their communities."⁷² They successfully owned and operated fifty-two hotels located in both the United States and Europe.⁷³

In December 1995, *Tampa Tribune* reporters called Floridan boosters, former patrons and well-wishers, to solicit memories about the hotel's golden era for a story anticipating its resurgence. The usual suspects were interviewed: Mary Jim Scott, who had lived in the Floridan while her father served as manager; Hampton Dunn, and other longtime Tampa residents with fond memories. Grand Heritage used the *Tampa Tribune* story to publicize its Floridan plans. The company, who had purchased the hotel for \$3 million, planned to redesign the hotel's layout. The new specs called for 225 rooms, approximately half as many as before, and an average daily room rate of ninety-two dollars, a substantial increase from the nineteen-dollar stays of six years prior. Grand Heritage also hoped to lease space on the ground floor to outside businesses in hopes of attracting an "upscale restaurant" and a coffee shop. An exclusive club, dubbed the Heritage Club, boasting "private elevator access, luxurious suites, a floor concierge, fluffy towels and linens, hair dryers, complimentary beverages and international newspapers" was to adorn the Floridan's top floor. Grand

bune, November 30, 1995 (NewsBank).

⁷² Grand Heritage Hotel Group, "About," <http://www.grandheritage.com/about.htm>.

⁷³ Gruss, "Hotel Developer Plans to Renovate 1927 Landmark".

Heritage expected to hire two hundred full-time employees. The company also planned to apply for a local landmark historic designation and have the hotel placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Officially designating the hotel would give Grand Heritage the opportunity to “take advantage of about \$6 million in local and federal incentives.”⁷⁴

The two pivotal pieces were now in place: an established, motivated owner and a spectacular \$16 million plan. All that was left to do was finalize the deal. The deal was scheduled to be closed within weeks of the November 30, 1995, *Tampa Tribune* article. Once the papers had been signed and the renovation completed, the newly reinvented Floridan would both increase foot traffic in northern downtown and be the first step to rejuvenating the district.⁷⁵

Hammering, sawing, catcalling, and swearing were just some of the things Tampa's downtown employees probably expected to hear from construction crews in 1996 when walking past the Floridan. Instead, they heard nothing. By April 1996, the deal that was allegedly within weeks of being closed on November 30, 1995, had yet to be finalized. By May 1996, it had officially fallen through. What went wrong? The *Tampa Tribune* reported that delays in getting a \$9.9 million federal loan, and the city's unwillingness to give a cash advance on the loan, led to the deal's demise. Grand Heritage never purchased the hotel. Other suitors followed. Bayshore Property Corporation and MHI Hotels Inc. each penned prospective deals to renovate the Floridan in 1996, with MHI wishing to make the Floridan a four-star hotel.⁷⁶ Neither came to fruition. While the Don CeSar and the Vinoy enjoyed their resurgence, the Hotel Floridan remained shuttered.⁷⁷

The Floridan did manage to achieve one important milestone in 1996. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This was a momentous event for local preservationists and Floridan admirers. Designation, however, did not guarantee that the Floridan would be preserved, much less renovated and reopened. No legal action could be taken by the government to force Sity to commence renovations. This was problematic because the longer the Floridan remained shuttered, the more likely it was to be condemned and ordered demolished by code-enforcement officers concerned that it posed a threat to public safety.

In August 1997, Sity finally unloaded the hotel. The Floridan's new suitor was Capital LLC, which announced to the *St. Petersburg Times* on August 13, 1997, its plan to renovate the hotel and have it reopened in a mere sixteen months. Like previous potential renovators, Capital hoped to reopen the Floridan as a full-

⁷⁴ Jean Gruss, “Empty Old Hotel Houses Many Fond Memories,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 1, 1995 (NewsBank).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jean Gruss, “Floridan Registers Another Developer,” *Tampa Tribune*, September 14, 1996 (NewsBank).

⁷⁷ Jean Gruss, “Floridan Hotel Developer Lets Deadline Pass,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 14, 1996 (NewsBank).

service hotel, not a condo or office building. Capital LLC planned \$23 million in renovations, which was to be financed in part by the long-promised \$9.9 million loan from “the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in exchange for a mortgage on the [planned] parking lot and the land beneath, along with the lien on all the furniture, fixtures and equipment in the hotel itself.” Like his political predecessors, Mayor Dick Greco was optimistic about the future of the Floridan and downtown Tampa’s barren north end: “I expect to see that end of town changing considerably. This is good news for the city as far as I am concerned.”⁷⁸ His optimism was misplaced.

Unlike Grand Heritage, Bayshore Property, and MHI Hotels, the Capital LLC did purchase the Floridan, after the city agreed to guarantee the \$9.9 million federal loan; with the stipulation that ownership of the proposed parking garage would pass to the city if the project fell into bankruptcy.⁷⁹ Capital soon hired two New York architecture firms, the Hillier Group and Diana Agrest Architects, to create plans for the hotel. The design plans called for a 350-space parking garage, “225 spacious guest rooms, restaurants, meeting rooms and a rooftop health spa with a lap pool.” The goal was to make the Floridan a “business-class” hotel.⁸⁰ New developments in downtown made Capital’s plans for a modernized Floridan appear feasible. A Marriott was under construction on Ashley Drive, just a few blocks away in north downtown, and a Radisson along the Hillsborough River was being renovated. It appeared the resuscitation of downtown Tampa’s north end had finally begun. The demand was seemingly in place, and the environment was welcoming for hotel and business construction. The following year, the city agreed to loan Capital \$10 million dollars to renovate the hotel.⁸¹ Tampa residents and city leaders waited anxiously for hammering to commence.⁸²

In 2001, more than three years after Capital had purchased the hotel, the Floridan reached another major milestone. It was condemned. Capital did not even begin rudimentary renovations during their first three years of ownership. During this period, the building began to literally crumble before the eyes of Tampa’s residents. The Tampa code-enforcement office condemned the building when small fragments of its façade came crashing down in 2001. The public demolition order resulting from the hotel’s neglect prompted Capital to hire a local contractor to repair portions of the building, but the repairs, which included patching the leaky roof, removing the neon rooftop sign, and securing “windows and other items on

⁷⁸ Charles Hoskinson, “Derelict Hotel Gets Another Shot at Restoration,” *St. Petersburg Times* August 1, 1997 (NewsBank).

⁷⁹ Joe Henderson, “Fund Request May Rekindle Dropped Floridan Project,” *Tampa Tribune*, April 11, 1997, (NewsBank).

⁸⁰ Jean Gruss, “Floridan Project Heats Up,” *Tampa Tribune*, October 22, 1997.

⁸¹ David Pedreira, “Council OKs Renovations, Ybor Garage,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 15, 1998 (NewsBank).

⁸² Gruss, “Floridan Project Heats Up.”

the building's facade, so that items attached to the building don't end up on the sidewalk or street," were mere band-aids on a building that needed major surgery. Capital made the necessary repairs and the building appeared to be stabilized, thereby avoiding forced demolition.⁸³ The Floridan, however, remained mothballed and Tampa's vultures continued to use its rooftop as a perch. It also remained on Tampa's code-enforcement department's condemned list. Capital would not prove to be the savior of the Floridan.

In April 2004, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that Capital was looking to sell the Floridan. The announcement was unsurprising. Since purchasing the building in 1997, all Capital had done was structurally secure the building to avoid forced demolition. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which undermined America's tourist and hospitality industries, undercut Capital's business operations. The Beck Group, a Tampa contractor hired by Capital to begin the renovation process in 2001, never started the daunting, expansive, and expensive endeavor of restoring the Floridan to its past glory. The good news was that there were a few interested buyers. "We are showing it to prospective buyers at least once a month," said a Beck employee affiliated with the Floridan. The building was reportedly still structurally sound, "savable" in the words of one person involved in the project, and could be reincarnated as a grand hotel, office building, or condo.⁸⁴

In April 2006, after twenty-eight days of demolition, the construction crew was done. They had successfully demolished one of the oldest and most recognizable buildings in downtown Tampa.⁸⁵ Was it a surprise that the old Maas Brothers building, which sat just a few blocks away from the Hotel Floridan, was demolished? Certainly not—the building had never been designated a historic landmark by either local or national preservationists, and it had been shuttered since 1991. Nevertheless, when the structure was torn down to make way for a condo development, the historic character and distinctiveness of Tampa's downtown was altered forever.⁸⁶

For years, politicians and developers had been predicting that in the near future the citizens of Tampa would witness the rejuvenation of downtown Tampa's north end. By 2007, it appeared the resurrection was at hand and could be summed up in a single word: condos. The condo-building craze that defined Florida's urban development in the 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century struck downtown Tampa with a vengeance. New condos in Channelside, south downtown, and even downtown's north end, sprang up between 2000 and 2008. By 2007, the Floridan

⁸³ David Simanoff, "Rooms for Improvement," *Tampa Tribune*, March 27, 2001 (NewsBank).

⁸⁴ Cal Cronan, "Floridan Hotel Owners Wait for the Right Buyer to Come Along," *Tampa Bay Business Journal*, April 9, 2004, Special Report, 15.

⁸⁵ David Simanoff, "Maas Bros. Store Once Was Tampa," *Tampa Tribune*, April 11, 2006 (NewsBank).

⁸⁶ "Old Maas Brothers site being cleared for condos," *Tampa Bay Business Journal*, February 13, 2006 (<http://www.bizjournals.com/tampabay/stories/2006/02/13/daily15.html>).

had new neighbors. The Residences of Franklin Street, Skypoint, and the Art Center Lofts, all residential projects, were open by 2007. Two other condo projects, the Arlington and the Element, were also in the works. Even though many of the new condo units remained unoccupied after construction was completed, new businesses were slow to move in, and sidewalk traffic only slightly increased, Tampa's north end was undergoing a residential transformation.

In 2005, Antonios Markopoulos got in on the action when he purchased the iconic Hotel Floridan for \$6 million. Like his many predecessors, he wanted to transform the dilapidated Floridan into a luxurious business hotel. City officials, like their many predecessors, said this time was different. They were right. One advantage that Markopoulos had over his Floridan forefathers was capital. In 2004, Markopoulos sold four hotels he owned, including one on nearby Clearwater Beach, for \$40 million.⁸⁷ He was looking for a new project and had cash to spend. The Floridan reportedly caught Markopoulos's eye when he was driving around downtown Tampa in early 2005. Within a month of touring the Floridan, Markopoulos outbid six other interested parties to secure the right to revive the fallen icon.⁸⁸ It seemed to outsiders that the two essential elements—excess capital and a motivated owner—were in place. The only question was whether or not the Floridan's new savior had the will and the patience to make the Tampa landmark his Lazarus.

"UNSHUTTERED," exclaimed a *Tampa Tribune* headline on August 6, 2005. Markopoulos wasted no time. Just a matter of months after purchasing the Floridan, work crews began "cleaning and patching up the downtown building." Lisa Shasteen, a Markopoulos representative affiliated with the project, told the *Tampa Tribune*, "unlike the others, Markopoulos won't need to seek" or wait for financing. The days of patiently waiting for a \$9.9 million federal loan to materialize were over. It was estimated that the renovations would take between eighteen and twenty-four months after the initial cleanup, and would cost an estimated \$16 to \$20 million. The good news was that workers found the building to be in "remarkably good shape."⁸⁹

The ambitious but slow-moving Floridan renovation project has continued from 2005 through the present. Paperwork had to be filed, plans had to be approved by city commissioners, and discoveries had to be made, but work had commenced, and the Floridan's renaissance had begun. "I can't say exactly, but you wouldn't believe how much this renovation is costing—millions, millions," stated Shasteen, who added that a year alone was spent working on the ceiling of the hotel lobby.⁹⁰ The Floridan's new owner was sparing no expense.

In March 2005, Lisa Shasteen and Antonios Markopoulos stumbled upon

⁸⁷ Randy Diamond, "Developer Proposes Comeback for Floridan," *Tampa Tribune*, April 21, 2005.

⁸⁸ Steve Huettel, "Unshuttered," *Tampa Tribune*, August 6, 2005.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Richard Mullins, "Floridan Being Pieced Together," *Tampa Tribune*, October 19, 2008 (NewsBank).

the Floridan's original neon rooftop sign while touring the hotel. It had been stowed away in a storage space on the hotel's top floor and forgotten. In October 2008, it was returned to its original location atop the hotel. Tampa eagerly holds its breath in the hope that the red neon glow will soon illuminate the downtown sky the night of the Floridan's official reopening, symbolizing the hotel's and the neighborhood's return to prominence.⁹¹

⁹¹ Janis Froelich, "Floridan Hotel's Sign to Shine Again," *Tampa Tribune*, December 3, 2005 (NewsBank).

THE QUEEN OF THE GULF
GOES TO WAR: THE BELLEVIEW BILTMORE
AND WORLD WAR II

BY DEIRDRE SCHUSTER

Recruit William Tordoff walked out of the room he shared with seven other trainees, turned right, and strolled down the elegant staircase to the even grander foyer of the Belleview Biltmore, often called the Queen of the Gulf. At twenty years old, Bill was one of thousands drafted into the Army Air Corps and trained at the Belleview Biltmore during World War II. A self-described farm boy from Iowa, he could not help but be slightly in awe of the grand lady who housed him while he trained for almost two months before being sent off to “fight the Japs.” On this particular day in January 1943, it was cool enough to wear an overcoat, but he knew it would warm up considerably in the area known as the Sparkling City. The training grounds, once a world-renowned golf course, were muddy in places, with tree trunks, fences, and other objects to be used in training young men for war. For two days in a row, other trainees had been pulled out to act as drill instructor. Today was Bill’s turn. The officer in charge asked, “Why haven’t you been DI yet, recruit?” Bill’s reply was one any visitor to the Sunshine State might make on a day that was going to turn out to be a “hot one”: “Bad enough to be drilling in the hot sun. I don’t want to be yelling things, too!”

Arriving in January 1943, Bill would have his “butt worked off” by the marching, drilling, and “playing soldier” that taught these fresh recruits how to be soldiers. Every one of them was proud to serve. Bill had fought a 4-F designation, meaning that he was physically unfit for duty; an earlier car accident made his neck “crackle” with movement, but he swore it didn’t hurt. The Army doctors let him in, and he left his wife, Erma, and three-month-old baby on Christmas night 1942. Overall, his stay at the Belleview was enjoyable, even though some of his training caused sore spots. On one occasion, the trainees had to jump into a ravine to elude

DEIRDRE SCHUSTER is a teacher at Countryside High School, where she currently teaches Holocaust Studies, Anthropology, and AP Human Geography. She earned degrees from St. Petersburg College and the University of Central Florida and is currently a graduate student in the Florida Studies Program at the University of South Florida - St. Petersburg.



Tampa Bay History Center Collection

The Belleview Biltmore is shown in all its glory in this 1939 postcard. Soldiers would soon replace vacationers at the grand hotel.

“the enemy.” What they did not know was that Florida’s ravines are filled with prickly things called sandspurs. Bill spent the weekend picking out the sandspurs and was more careful where he jumped in the future. It was all part of a soldier’s training to “look before you leap.”¹

The Belleview Biltmore, built in 1897 by railroad magnate Henry Plant as a 145-room winter-season hotel, was a grand resort with 425 rooms by the time the Army Air Corps leased the building and grounds from owner Arnold Kirkeby. A self-sufficient resort with its own post office that also served the nearby town of Belleair, it proved the perfect spot to barrack the overflow of military staff from MacDill and Drew Fields in Tampa, Florida. On the Gulf coast and near the sparkling city of Clearwater, the Belleview, along with the Fort Harrison Hotel and the Gray Moss Inn, housed more than three thousand soldiers for over a year. With the soldiers training on the grounds of the resort, as well as drilling in front of city hall, local civilians were inexorably drawn into the life of the military. Dimouts, rationing, and rat patrols became the order of the day along with weekly parties and special entertainment events. Crime dropped, and juvenile delinquents had little to do with the arrival of so many men in uniform. Pinellas County itself was transformed with men from the Army Air Corps, Marines (in Dunedin), and Coast Guard (in Tarpon Springs).

The Belleview was sold to Kirkeby in 1939 after a number of resorts had gone bankrupt and closed. The Belleview was luckier, with its own stockholders

¹ William Tordoff, interview by Deirdre Schuster, 21 November 2008.

keeping it open until the sale. When Kirkeby leased the Queen to the Army, a quick inventory had to be done. Clint Mitchell was a teenager when he helped to move out furnishings from the hotel. “The only things left were a bed, a dresser, and a nightstand. Everything else went. Lamps, chandeliers, pictures, everything.” The beautiful wallpaper and carved wood moldings would prove to be a beautiful backdrop for many men who previously would never have even dreamed of staying in the Belleview Biltmore.² August 1942 was the turning point for the Belleview as thousands of trainees came over from MacDill Air Force Base. Pam Dubov’s father, stationed at MacDill, was envious of those trainees who were able to stay at the Belleview.³ Furnishings, pictures, rugs, and other items were sold, placed in other Kirkeby hotels, or put into storage in the Weaver Grocery warehouse in Clearwater.⁴ The government and Kirkeby made no provision for maintenance of the hotel. Fire was always a worry in the large wooden structure (the world’s largest occupied wood frame structure), and the soldiers maintained a fire watch. Eventually, the Army would install a \$200,000 sprinkler system. It was finished the day the Army moved out and is still in use today. According to current manager Tom Bouchard, the system is up to code and ready to be used, if needed.⁵

As the soldiers prepared to be moved into the Belleview on August 2, 1942, the Army was negotiating the use of two other hotels in the area: the Fort Harrison Hotel and the Gray Moss Inn. The original four hundred soldiers, transferred from the St. Petersburg Replacement Training Center, were part of a permanent unit to be stationed at the Belleview (to become the Group C Replacement Training Center). The 918 and 588 Special School Squadrons were to be “instructed in the rudiments of army life.” This included the usual basic training in military law and customs, as well as first aid and sex hygiene. After this three-week course of training, the recruits were to be sent to various places depending upon their abilities. The first wave of soldiers was also in charge of getting the Belleview ready for use.⁶ The list of hometowns of the soldiers that passed through the Belleview was as varied as its resort guest list. In addition to St. Louis, Kansas City, Sioux Falls, Omaha, Keesler Field, Hollywood, and L.A., there were trainees from China, England, and a “full-blooded Piute Indian, from Flagstaff.” Private John Truehorse was described as “one boy that can really say he’s a full blooded American.”⁷

With the arrival of more soldiers and officers, commanding officer Colonel Floyd E. Lindley expressed some displeasure with the fact that his officers could not find affordable housing in the Clearwater area; therefore, they would stay at

² Clinton Mitchell, interview by Deirdre Schuster, 26 November 2008.

³ Pam Dubov, interview by Deirdre Schuster, 10 December 2008.

⁴ “Belleview Is About Ready for Army,” *Clearwater Sun*, 5 August 1942.

⁵ Tom Bouchard and Sharon Delahanty interview, 11 November 2008.

⁶ “1,000 More Are Due Next Week,” *Clearwater Sun*, 6 August 1942.

⁷ Floyd P. Jones, “Strictly G.I.,” *Clearwater Sun*, 7 March 1943. Chick Rosnick, “Six—Oh!—Nine,” *Clearwater Sun*, 21 March 1943.

the Bellevue, as it was “sufficient for all officers” until the rents came down in the area.⁸ Throughout August the central job at the Bellevue was “policing the grounds, trimming hedges, mowing the lawns, weeding,” and other jobs that would return the resort to its appearance as it had been “at the height of the tourist season in winters past.”⁹ Once that was accomplished, the Bellevue was opened for a public viewing. Citizens who could only dream of being admitted to the posh resort were suddenly welcome to view the grand Queen. However, visitors to the open house were only allowed to view the main floor, as the upstairs floors and cottages housed the soldiers. The Army Air Corps’ fifty-eight-piece band played music, the military police controlled traffic patterns, and a “time-honored retreat ceremony” and parade entertained the general populace on the Bellevue’s “two swanky golf courses.”¹⁰ During their off time, soldiers made their way to the downtown area, crowding Cleveland Avenue’s restaurants and shops.¹¹ As soldiers from Squadron 588 were transferred to the Fort Harrison and Gray Moss and the 413 was added to the Bellevue area businesses began to boom and changes were needed in regulations and hours.

Among the concerns that arose in the Sparkling City over the use of the three hotels was the lost revenue from the tourist industry.¹² In one article printed by the *Clearwater Sun*, state hotel commissioner Hunter G. Johnson and Chamber of Commerce secretary Fred J. Lee assured tourists that more than one hundred hotels were still available for those wishing to “find sleeping accommodations in Florida, to fit any purse.” The *Clearwater Sun* ran a full-page ad throughout the season with a question-and-answer page that included information regarding recreational facilities, beach use, blackouts, and transportation.¹³

Along with tourist issues, the city had to contend with liquor laws and business hours. Colonel Lindley requested that the hours for liquor stores be altered so that no beer or liquor could be sold after midnight on any night or at all on Sunday. A limit on package goods was also requested. The sheriff, Todd Tucker, attended the meeting to ensure that he could get other cities to cooperate with the request.¹⁴ In the end, Lindley gained some measure of control. Dealers were not allowed to sell liquor, beer, or wine after midnight, seven days a week. Servicemen were banned from buying alcohol before five in the evening, except on Saturday and Sundays, and hard liquor was banned for everyone from midnight Saturday to eight o’clock Monday morning. The package sale ban was also adopted in an attempt to keep the

⁸ “More Soldiers Arrive at Bellevue,” *Clearwater Sun*, 10 August 1942.

⁹ “More Soldiers Arrive at Bellevue,” *Clearwater Sun*, 12 August 1942.

¹⁰ “Open House at Bellevue Sunday,” *Clearwater Sun*, 19 August 1942. “Householder to See Bellevue Ceremonies,” *Clearwater Sun*, 23 August 1942.

¹¹ “Air Corps Men at Two Hotels in City,” *Clearwater Sun*, 16 August 1942.

¹² “Army Men Due at Gray Moss Inn Aug. 11,” *Clearwater Sun*, 2 August 1942.

¹³ “Hotelmen Move to Scotch Rumor,” *Clearwater Sun*, 20 August 1942 and “As Usual Clearwater Welcomes Its Winter Visitors with the Usual Vacation Facilities,” *Clearwater Sun*, November 1942.

¹⁴ “City to Hear Army Liquor Request,” *Clearwater Sun*, 17 August 1942.



Tampa Bay History Center Collection

South view of the Belleview Biltmore. The hotel grounds were used for a variety of training exercises, as well as offering a peaceful oasis during the soldiers' off hours.

soldiers from stocking up for parties in their rooms.¹⁵

Time not spent drinking was taken up with shopping in Clearwater's stores. Usual hours ended at six o'clock in the evening. This proved to be a problem for soldiers who did not get off duty until five. In order to give the servicemen time to shop for "certain commodities," one store stayed open until seven. This sparked a discussion with the Chamber of Commerce and led to other stores following suit.¹⁶

The relationship between soldiers and civilians was reciprocal. As shops and restaurants altered life for soldiers, the soldiers gave back with entertainment. Some would say that boxing, wrestling, and team sports like baseball and basketball were part of the training of a good soldier, keeping him fit and able to fight the enemy. Beginning in October 1942, the Army began taking on the Marines from Dunedin in the boxing ring at the Municipal Auditorium. What exactly was there to do for recreation for the Army Air Corps in the area? As Private R. W. McClure answered in the local paper, "the Athletic and Recreation unit of Squadron 413 at the Belleview Biltmore Hotel has the answer." Free game periods, calisthenics, and sports were all available to "make conditioning a pleasure and a booster of morale." He even quoted another private from Oklahoma, Jack Powell: "If the fellows at home could see this, they'd all be in the air force."¹⁷ And why not, when a person would get to stay in

¹⁵ "Placards List Liquor Rules," *Clearwater Sun*, 20 August 1942.

¹⁶ "Army Affects Hours of Stores," *Clearwater Sun*, 11 October 1942.

¹⁷ "Recreation for Air Forces Is Varied," *Clearwater Sun*, 25 September 1942.

a luxurious resort, be entertained, and have activities scheduled by the Clearwater Civilian Defense Council? Writing and reading rooms, games, pool and ping pong tables, juke boxes, radios, and dancing were available every day, in addition to art instruction, dancing instruction, and basketball and volleyball.¹⁸

As the holidays approached, local families were asked to provide a bit of home for the recruits. “Want a Soldier for Thanksgiving?” “Pumpkin Pies for Soldiers Wanted”—these were some of the articles printed in the local papers. Giving back for all that they received, the Army Air Corps staged shows and parades for civilians, as well as aided in fighting fires and preventing rat infestations.¹⁹ Armistice Day, November 11, brought the largest military parade in the history of the Clearwater area, with more than one thousand soldiers from the Air Corps, Marines, and Coast Guard in attendance. The local high schools, Clearwater and Largo, also participated. The parade began at exactly ten in the morning on Cleveland Street and Garden Avenue and proceeded west to the Municipal Auditorium for a program that included the sale of war bonds and stamps.²⁰

As Christmas drew near, the combined forces of the 588, 413, and 918 squadrons put on boxing shows, as well as a variety show at the Municipal Auditorium. Private George E. Reedy Jr. acted as master of ceremonies and introduced acts that included a group of cross-dressing soldiers that vastly amused the spectators.²¹ Roaring with laughter, families went home to celebrate the holiday. Astonishingly, Christmas 1942 proved to be a rather quiet time, with no DUIs given, no “large hauls made in jook joints,” and “only two negro youths . . . brought before [the] Magistrate on charges of fighting.” The reason given for this was that people were either too busy, did not have gas or tires to go anywhere, or were in the military.²²

Everything was not all rosy, though. In addition to soldiers making friends and getting shipped out to areas unknown, there were a few accidents at the Belleview. On December 17, the *Clearwater Sun* reported the death of Private Edward H. Douglas, aged twenty-two. He had been missing from the 918 for two days before his body was found at the bottom of an elevator shaft. A military investigation was under way, and the general belief was that it was an accident.²³ The following February there was an incident with a private from the 918 and the Southland Special on the ACL Railroad. Alex Ramsey either fell or put his own leg on the track, losing his right foot above the ankle. When aid arrived, they found the private with a tourniquet formed from his own belt. The engineer and fireman of the train did not see anything, but a Pullman

¹⁸ “Recreation for Servicemen,” *Clearwater Sun*, various dates throughout 1942 and 1943.

¹⁹ The largest forest fire at that time, in an area northeast of Dunedin, forced Fire Chief Martin to confer with the Army Air Corps official regarding aid to fight the fires. The cause was lack of rain in the area over an extended time. “Army to Aid in Woods Fires,” *Clearwater Sun*, 6 November 1942.

²⁰ “Greatest Military Parade Here Marks Armistice Day,” *Clearwater Sun*, 12 November 1942.

²¹ “Soldiers Give Show for Civilians,” *Clearwater Sun*, 23 December 1942. Dates for the Thanksgiving articles were 24 November 1942 and 25 November 1942.

²² “Xmas Quietest in Years—Russell,” *Clearwater Sun*, 27 December 1942.

²³ “Pvt. Douglas Dies at Belleair,” *Clearwater Sun*, 17 December 1942.

porter reported witnessing the private “stick his foot under the train.” Newspaper accounts have various examples of soldiers having a “gay, old time,” but according to Bill Tordoff, there was no time for trainees to have any fun. This begs the question of whether Private Ramsey had been looking for a way out.²⁴

The New Year brought in a new outlet for the troops in the Sparkling City: the *Clearwater Sun* ran columns created by the units. It began with “Dots ‘n Dashes from 588,” written by Private L. A. Leacacos at Fort Harrison, telling stories of life as a soldier.²⁵ Civilians in the area had an immense amount of curiosity, and rumors abounded in the area. One major rumor surrounded the issue of food. Some in the area suspected the Army of wasting food, a rumor that may have gotten its start from civilians looking in the Army’s garbage cans. As Bill Tordoff remembers from his KP duty: “we had a garbage can full of those Swiss steaks. We had to throw them out.”²⁶ Within a one-week period at the end of March 1943, the Army met the rumors head on in the *Clearwater Sun*. Captain Alfred Truitt prepared an article firmly denying that they were wasting food. As head of public relations, Truitt did a fine job explaining how serving a large number of people can create large problems. He compared the mess cook with “Mrs. Housewife,” reminding women in the area how difficult it is to cook for just one family with shortages and rationing. People were reminded that there was a war going on and “recruits undergoing a strenuous physical training program must be adequately fed.... Soldiers are rationed, too.” Some people were even complaining that the soldiers were taking food away from civilians by eating in the area restaurants, causing prepared food to be thrown into the garbage. To this Truitt responded that what was not served was used the next day and suggested that there might be those in the area who were trying to “stir up dissatisfaction,” which would be more dangerous than just rumors.²⁷

The following day, “a serious-faced Army officer,” along with the County Health Department, inspected area restaurants and other “eating places” in an effort to ensure that Army men were taken care of with regard to their diets.²⁸ Another article restating the explanation for supposed food waste was printed with even more detail regarding the Army menu. The comparison was made again to the housewife trying to serve her child nutritious vegetables that he may not like, such as spinach. Readers were asked to imagine the amount left over to be retained and used in the next meal until it is “spoiled or completely inedible,” at which time it would then be thrown away.²⁹ Soldiers, however, were asked to eat at their training centers by order of Colonel Eugene R. Householder. Not to be seen as making any concessions to complaining civilians, the Army ran another article in the *Sun*, this one with a new

²⁴ “Soldier Loses Foot under Train,” *Clearwater Sun*, 21 February 1943.

²⁵ Pvt. L.A. Leacacos, “Dots ‘n Dashes From 588,” *Clearwater Sun*, 1 December 1942, p 5.

²⁶ Tordoff interview.

²⁷ “Rumors of Army Wasting Food Here Are Denied,” *Clearwater Sun*, 28 March 1943.

²⁸ “Army Suspects Eating Places,” *Clearwater Sun*, 29 March 1943.

²⁹ “Army Says Foods Not Wasted at Base Here,” *Clearwater Sun*, 30 March 1943.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

War Poster produced by the U. S. Government during World War II. Posters like this encouraged Americans to support the soldiers during wartime shortages.

tone of reprimand. The Army reminded readers once again that there was a war and that the military had a certain way of doing things. What they did and how they did it was often classified and was not the public's business.

In war and peace, the Army in this country confines itself to the important business of training troops. That's a big enough job. Whatever explanation it may make to the general public of its operations includes only that unclassified information which will not impede the effectiveness of this training program. However, it does attempt to describe to the citizens at home all they are entitled to know about what is, after all, a civilian Army preparing to defend and fight for the common good.

The article continued to remind the public that "far from 'living off the fat of the land,'" soldiers were having to ration, too. It also explained that mess preparations had changed as the number of men eating there had changed. Perhaps there had been some waste in the beginning, but it had been curtailed according to the number of men actually eating there.³⁰

At the request of Colonel Levy and Captain Truitt, county officials dined at the Belleview the next day. After dining on "roast beef, Irish potatoes, gravy, corn, carrots, cold slaw, hot chocolate, raisin bread and a cup cake," the mayor and members of the Chamber of Commerce went on a tour of the facility. What they saw confirmed what the Army had claimed and gave no basis to the rumors circulating the town. When they asked why they were given the tour, the answer was given: "if the public was not firmly in back of the army now, think what might happen if conditions got worse and the civilians were not backing the army." Ultimately, the *Sun* concluded that the "Army Wastes Less Food Than Millionaires," comparing the current use to that when it was a millionaires' resort.³¹ Added to this was the fact that the Army was salvaging everything possible: raked leaves for fertilizer, meat picked to the bones for soup, tin cans, fats, and greases.³²

With this outbreak of criticism, the halcyon days of the military in the Sparkling City seem to have ended. The weekly boxing programs, which had started as an outlet for soldiers and entertainment for civilians, were ended. The Army fights had been so popular that no fewer than one thousand fans crowded the arena on any given evening. However, the ring had broken down, with no funds to secure another one. On top of the monetary issue came more criticism of the Army. Some citizens complained that the fighters were living the high life while their own boys were training elsewhere, enduring long days with no respite from hard labor. What these civilians seem to have forgotten was that the Army fighters trained for the fights on

³⁰ "Soldiers Asked to Eat at Post at Meal Time," *Clearwater Sun*, 21 March 1943.

³¹ "Army Wastes Less Food Than Millionaires," *Clearwater Sun*, 4 April 1943.

³² "Army Leads Way in Salvaging," *Clearwater Sun*, 4 April 1943.

their own time after their own long and tedious military days. Whatever the issue, the decision was made to have fights at the Belleview for the Army only.³³

With renewed criticism and the war continuing for longer than expected, the Army attempted to convince the public of its usefulness. The month of March proved to be rat-infested in Clearwater, with the city sanitary inspector, T. L. Boteler, reporting that the rat population was on the increase. Merchants reported that as many as fifty young chickens had been killed by the rats. They requested that the Army aid in the hunting of the rats, as well as start an antirat campaign to educate the public. To this end, two privates were sent out on various evenings to search for where the rats were living and discover what could be done to eradicate the unwanted “saboteurs!”³⁴

The public had been kept aware of life at the training centers through the columns printed in the *Sun*. By reading “Inside the 918 Gate” and “On the Beam with 413th” the civilian population was informed of military life. Starting in January 1943, the *Sun* published these columns weekly. A couple of days apart, Staff Sergeant Chick Rosnick from the 918 and Private George E. Reedy Jr. from the 413 showered the people with news from the training lines at the Belleview. Rosnick, a physical trainer at the center, began his column answering “how does it feel to live in the swankiest hotel in the country?” The answer came from “Private X”:

It's like this. We have the softest mattresses on our hotel beds but they have to be always ready for inspection, so we can't lie on them. We have a million dollar golf course, but all we do on it is the hardest kinds of exercises and obstacle running. We have beautiful green tennis courts, but that's where we air our beds after carrying them down five flights of stairs. We have a spacious and fully equipped Recreation Room to be used in our leisure time, but I've forgotten what 'leisure time' means. We have lovely green velvet lawns, but we can't walk on them. We have a telephone in every room, but we can't talk through them. We're pounding out feet when the beautiful dawn breaks and we're knocked out when the glorious sun sets.

Other stories to lift the spirits of those training came, but at the same time proved the Army meant business.³⁵ Soldiers at the Belleview could visualize what it would be like if no war were being waged. While eating in the Belleview Dining Hall with its stained-glass windows or observing human nature in the A&R Recreation Hall, soldiers picked up a number of stories ranging from philosophy to favorite authors and women. One thing that occupied the mind of a rookie was “the delightful,

³³ “Army Puts Halt to Weekly Programs,” *Clearwater Sun*, 28 March 1943.

³⁴ “Army May Aid in Anti-rat Campaign,” *Clearwater Sun*, 17 March 1943, “Merchants Ask for Anti-rat Ordinance,” *Clearwater Sun*, 19 March 1943. George Loudon made the comment in the latter article that, “Rats are destroying hundreds of pounds of food right here in Clearwater,” and “Rats are our worst saboteurs!”

³⁵ Chick Rosnick, “Inside the 918 Gate,” *Clearwater Sun*, 10 January 1943.



Tampa Bay History Center Collection

Clearwater's Gray Moss Inn, pictured here, and the Fort Harrison Hotel would also house troops during World War II. Businesses boomed with the presence of thousands of soldiers in the area.

charming and exciting girl in a downtown drug store," or "the new girl at Reid's who dresses the hamburgers with quotations from Shakespeare."³⁶

With the troops in town delighting the young girls, where were the civilian boys to get their dates? Delmar Harris, a Clearwater High School student at the time, muses how the high school girls dated the soldiers, making it necessary for the high school boys to get dates from girls in Tampa. The streets of Clearwater would be crowded with people as they went to the dances and other forms of entertainment in the Auditorium. Harris recalls that the "big affairs were good entertainment."³⁷ Rosnick supported this when he reported that the fights and entertainment provided at the Auditorium created a "close knit" relationship between the "men of service and the community."³⁸ There were also times when Rosnick would act as matchmaker. In the March 14 column, he espoused the virtues of one lieutenant who had "reached the stage where he longs for home cooking and the sight of a little child." He also had a "most likeable personality," making him "Clearwater's Eligible Bachelor Number One...Clearwater Girls! TAKE OVER."³⁹

As "winter" settled in, the weather proved perfect for the soldiers to take advantage of the golf course not being used as an obstacle course. Sergeants and

³⁶ Rosnick, 19 January 1943.

³⁷ Delmar Harris, interview by Deirdre Schuster, 3 December 2008.

³⁸ Rosnick, 24 January 1943.

³⁹ Rosnick, "Six—Oh!—Nine," *Clearwater Sun*, 14 March 1943.

privates played a round together, proving that it was difficult to punish a soldier at the Bellevue. Restricting a man to the “base” instead of letting him go in to town provided him with all sort of activities. There was the War Theater—located in the hotel—athletic facilities and games, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Let’s also not forget the grounds themselves for roaming and enjoying the wonderful atmosphere of the Sparkling City. Sitting in their rooms at night, the soldiers could listen to the bugler—Hollywood’s own Bob Candrea, who recorded trumpet sounds for Paramount Pictures. Even eating at the Bellevue had its advantages. Private First Class Joe Reese became “stymied by a tangerine.” Apparently early for a date, he sat down in the Servicemen’s Center and noticed some tangerines. He “calmly peeled” and ate one, then another. He “lingered for a third . . . loosened his belt, took off his blouse, and sat down to the table with the biggest pile of tangerines.” After consuming forty-four of the luscious citrus, he declared that he would never eat another tangerine as long as he lived! It’s a wonder more boys didn’t join up just for the chance to stay at the Bellevue.⁴⁰

In March 1943, the squadron numbers were changed, and a new one was added at the Bellevue: 413, under the command of Captain I. J. Richard, became Group 601; 918, under Captain Frank Pruitt, became Group 609; and the new Group 612, under Captain George Dix, had the privilege of billeting in tents on the golf course north of the garage. With these changes came changes of the column names, too. “Inside the 918 Gate” turned into “Six—Oh!—Nine,” and “On the Beam with 413” became “Strictly G.I.” Staff Sergeant. Chick Rosnick continued to write the column under the new name. However, George Reedy, after a short stay in the Don Ce-Sar Hospital, was shipped out to Officer Candidate School. Private Floyd P. Jones took over for one week before finding “vital work elsewhere: radio,” so Privates Thomas L. Johnson and H. N. “Lucky” Rogers took over the last two installments of “Strictly G.I.” The last column appeared on March 21, and Rosnick’s column disappeared after the April 4 installment.

The end of the columns coincided with the intense criticism that the Army was facing from the civilian population. After reprimanding the public on the reason for soldiers training in the first place, the Army seems to have taken a 180-degree turn. Instead of cooperating and giving out information, the Army just stopped sharing particulars of the soldiers. One last article elucidated exactly what was going on at the Bellevue. Soldiers were in the program for an extended time so they could be trained in the additional skills needed in the war. Defense against chemical attacks, bayonet drills, grenade practice, camouflage and concealment were added. It was explained that the war was revealing the need for new skills against a new enemy. Digging trenches and creating other types and methods of concealment were now part of the training regimen. To aid in the proper method of attack and defense with

⁴⁰ Rosnick, 8 February 1943; 14 February 1943. There was also an organ player—Edward Angulo. Unfortunately, there was no organ (21 February 1943).

a bayonet, a natural obstacle course was laid out on the Belleview grounds. Trainees had to hurdle barriers such as fallen trees, ditches, and muddy streams before coming face to face with the “enemy”—a straw dummy. Lectures on military rank, bearing, responsibility, appearance, and behavior were also part of the course.⁴¹

Earlier in 1943, Colonel Levy had escorted a group of county and city officials through the course and offered to let them try it out. “Like a swarm of bees,” they crawled and hurdled and ran through the course, denying the reality that one is not, truly, as young as he feels. As the physical trainer watched them leave with smiles of success on their faces, he knew what the morning would bring: “aching muscles, returned sciaticas, preschedule lumbagos, charley horses, rheumatisms, cramps, and a return of one-time athletic injuries. Today they played ‘soldiers at the front’” tomorrow they would decide with resignation and assurance that their future soldiering would be done on the home front.⁴²

For the soldiers, just as for the civilians that day, training was not all bad. Bill Tordoff fondly recalls marching out of the Belleview to the courses for training, all the while singing cadences he can sing with verve still today:

Around her neck she wore a yellow ribbon
 She wore it in the springtime
 And in the month of May
 And if you ask me why the heck she wore it
 She wore it for her soldier who was far, far away
 Far away, far away
 She wore it for her soldier
 Who was far, far away

Another favorite was:

There sits a preacher sittin’ on a log,
 With a finger on the trigger and his eye on a hog.
 Amen! Amen!

The months following the criticism were full of rumors regarding the training centers being moved out to Lincoln, Nebraska. Confirmation of two Miami basic training centers moving to Mississippi and Texas came, with the leadership at the Belleair and Clearwater centers remaining silent. Even Senator Claude Pepper knew nothing. The Chamber of Commerce began the effort to find out exactly how the removal of the soldiers would affect the economy of the area.⁴³ As dredging of the bay opposite the Belleview in June was taking place, Congressman Lex Green commented that if the Army did move out of the hotels, some other federal project would take

⁴¹ “Army Tells of Making Rookies into Soldiers,” *Clearwater Sun*, 6 April 1943.

⁴² Rosnick, “Inside the 918 Gate,” 8 February 1943.

⁴³ “Army Is Silent about Rumors of Moving,” *Clearwater Sun*, 17 May 1943.



Courtesy of the Florida State Archives

Aerial view of the Belleview Biltmore, including the hotel grounds and golf course. Soldiers would cover almost every inch of the grounds during their training exercises at the resort.

their place.⁴⁴

Two weeks later, the Army cancelled the three one-year contracts in the area, along with hotels in the St. Petersburg and Miami areas.⁴⁵ Contrary to a *Tampa Tribune* article in 1970, the Belleview was not leased for three years, only one.⁴⁶ Along with the Fort Harrison and the Gray Moss, there were three one-year contracts that ended in the summer of 1943. Through all the criticism, the fact remains that having the armed forces in the area provided an economic boost. Utility receipts increased, as did post office receipts. Even though soldier's letters were mailed for free, parcel post and registered mail increased by more than 90 percent. During the first six months of the year, stamp revenues went up by \$2 million. Movie revenues and local businesses also saw an increase in profits. Any revenue lost from the vacating of the three hotels was expected to be replaced with revenues from other Army installations nearby in Dunedin, Oldsmar, and Largo. To that end, the Clearwater Transit Company was planning on extending bus service to those areas.⁴⁷

In August 1943, all three hotels were turned back over to their owners, and

⁴⁴ "Dredging in Bay near Belleview," *Clearwater Sun*, 7 June 1943.

⁴⁵ "Army Cancels Three Hotel Contracts," *Clearwater Sun*, 20 June 1943.

⁴⁶ Roy Bertke, "'Great White Queen' Still Reigns," *Tampa Tribune*, 27 December 1970.

⁴⁷ "Armed Forces Aid in Showing Record Business," *Clearwater Sun*, 28 June 1943.

plans were made to reopen for the winter season. The Gray Moss Inn was scheduled to reopen on October 1, and the Fort Harrison Hotel would open December 15.⁴⁸ The grand “White Queen of the Gulf” would not be so lucky. Even though losses at the hotel were “amazingly small,” after inspection by the Army and Kirkeby agents, the decision was made by Arnold Kirkeby to sell the hotel to local land baron Ed C. Wright for \$275,000 at auction. The Belleview remained closed during Wright’s ownership, but was renovated and sold to Bernie Powell. It reopened on January 10, 1947 and continued to prosper as the socially elite came back.⁴⁹ Clint Mitchell remembers working on the Belleview before the Army arrived and after it was sold to Powell.

The owner of Clearwater Paint Company, Mitchell has a memory that is long and clear. Youthful at eighty-one years of age, he eats breakfast and shoots the bull every Wednesday morning in a Largo diner. He recalls that there were catacombs under the Belleview Biltmore through which all the servants had to pass. To get to them, one had to travel on a little dirt road, reminiscent of a castle in Europe. Painting the Queen took time and money. To help expedite the effort, local decorators were called out and asked to decorate a room, often in the cottages. Once done, Powell would have a party at which the decorators were “advertised.” This ingenious plan saved the owners of the Belleview thousands of dollars.⁵⁰

Delmar Harris also remembers the Belleview as a young boy. He recalls one incident with the catacombs just before the military took possession. “There was a long trail under the hotel and in this tunnel they found a cache of German military rifles. It was a pretty good, high stack with Norwegian writing on the cases. Don’t know what they did with them, but there were always German tourists hanging around the tennis courts.”⁵¹ This could be a reason why the military moved in to the Belleview in the first place. As an easily reached and isolated location on the Gulf coast, the Belleview was ripe for espionage.

Today the Queen is ready for renovation—or, rather, restoration. Legg Mason purchased the Belleview in 2007 after Japanese owners threatened to level the historic heart of pine hotel. Local citizens successfully fought the danger. On May 1, 2009, the Belleview closed its doors for two years, and nothing will be left untouched. The glass nouveau entrance will come down, and the stage in the Starlight Room will be removed, along with a kitchen. Paint, wallpaper, and carpets will all be replaced in an attempt to restore the Belleview to its former glory. One thing that won’t change is the aura of majesty that she has always emanated.

⁴⁸ “Belleair Hotel May Reopen This Season,” *Clearwater Sun*, 6 August 1943.

⁴⁹ Prudy Taylor Board and Esther B. Colcord, *The Belleview Mido Resort Hotel: A Century of Hospitality* (Virginia Beach: Donning, 1996).

⁵⁰ Clinton Mitchell, interview by Deirdre Schuster, 26 November 2008.

⁵¹ Delmar Harris interview.

BASEBALL WAS MY LIFE: THE STORIES OF WEST TAMPA

BY MARY JO MELONE AND ART KEEBLE

TAMPA, A BASEBALL MECCA

You can stand where they stood. You can see what they saw. You can picture the old man who sold deviled crabs at the gate, the gamblers who shouted from the stands that they had ten dollars at stake on your next play. If you stand still long enough on some of Tampa's baseball fields, you can hear the crowds cheering, or, because nobody is all that polite in the ball field, booing. And if you try, you can reach back to the days of El Señor, Al Lopez, the city's first Hall of Famer, and imagine the fantasies he fired in young men who wanted to do what he did, some of whom succeeded beyond what they ever dreamed.

Sure, Tampa made cigars. But it also exports young men with 90-mile-per-hour pitches and arms that can grasp anything airborne and legs that pass in a blur as they fly around the bases. Tampa makes baseball players too.

You probably know the big names and the lore: How Babe Ruth supposedly hit his longest home run here. How two Tampa boys—Tony La Russa (Oakland A's) and Lou Piniella (Cincinnati Reds)—faced off as managers of opposing teams in the 1990 World Series. And how two high school teammates—Tino Martinez (New York Yankees) and Luis Gonzalez (Arizona Diamondbacks)—battled it out in the 2001 World Series, with Gonzalez's hit winning the series. You know the others too—Gooden, Boggs, McGriff, Madagan, and Bell, for starters. Many are left out. Tampa has produced at least sixty major league players who made millions in vast stadiums and who are alternately cussed and praised by sportswriters.

MARY JO MELONE is a free-lance writer who spent many years as a metro columnist for the *St. Petersburg Times*. From Pennsylvania, she attended Barnard College in New York, worked for a while as a radio reporter, and now is a true Tampan who lives with her daughter, one dog, and three cats in West Tampa. She didn't start out as a baseball fan, but fell in love with the stories of the men who made the game.

ART KEEBLE has been the director of the Arts Council of Hillsborough County for 25 years. Keeble is a graduate from the University of Tennessee with a degree in Journalism. He grew up watching baseball with his father, an avid New York Yankees fan, and collected over 350 1956 Bowman baseball cards. His childhood bat is enshrined in a weaving that hangs in the Hillsborough County Center. He still has his love and ball.

But these famous men are not at the heart of this story. Tampa produced such an extraordinary array of pro ball players because the city has an extraordinary passion for baseball, and much of that passion began in three places: Ybor City, West Tampa, and Belmont Heights, on city-run fields—Cuscaden Park in Ybor City, MacFarlane Park in West Tampa, and Cyrus Green in East Tampa. The city's social landscape was mirrored at these ball parks. Anglo and Latin (Spanish, Cuban, and Italian) kids played mostly at Cuscaden Park and MacFarlane Park. The black kids played at Belmont Heights. Sometimes the whites played at Belmont, but the black teams were rarely allowed to go to Cuscaden and MacFarlane.

Older boys, teenagers, and grown men played in amateur leagues. They played in semi-pro leagues. They played on weekday nights and twice on Sunday. They played on teams sponsored by Ybor's ethnic clubs. They played for teams backed by hardware stores and dry cleaners. Some got to the minor league teams only to find out they weren't good enough; they would come home again—but they never stopped playing. Still others, as unimaginable as it seems now, flew to Havana to play, and Havana teams flew back to Tampa. Some of them made it in the major leagues.

The connection with Cuba was a natural since Cuban immigration to Tampa had started the cigar industry a few decades earlier. Families with connections to the old country came to Tampa to roll cigars, and the industry thrived in the early days. Tampa cigars were prized by smokers all over the world, and they were made mostly with Cuban tobacco, the favorite of cigar connoisseurs.

But all that came to an end with the arrival of Castro in 1959. The decline of Tampa's baseball leagues was set in motion. Television and air-conditioning let people stay inside and away from the clammy night. Suburbs sprouted, and ball players, who were beginning to have their own families, had a chance to move to the new suburbs, providing their children more than they ever had, except the love of the game.

Sadly, though, you should know that as you read this and examine the photographs, you're getting just fragments of a much larger story. Teams of Ybor City cigar workers were playing Anglo teams almost as soon as the cigar workers arrived in the late 1880s. This passion for baseball is a century-old Tampa tradition.

Baseball was first organized in Tampa in 1878 by Thomas P. Crichton, son of Tampa's Civil War-era mayor. The only players wearing gloves were the pitcher and the catcher. The games were free since expenses were paid by merchants and other businesses. Teams from other towns, especially Sanford and Jacksonville, would play in Tampa and draw sizeable crowds.

As the sport grew in popularity, it offered an easy, if not inexpensive, marketing opportunity. More and more businesses started fielding teams. As diverse as Tampa's population was, teams came from such places as Columbia Coffee, Empire Body Shop, Vogue Cleaners and Laundry, and Popular Bakery.

In 1938, the Intersocial League was formed in Ybor City to play in Cuscaden



Hillsborough County Collection, Tampa Bay History Center

This photograph, taken in 1885, is one of the earliest known images of a Tampa baseball team. Note the three different lettering styles for 'Tampa'.

Park. The league was comprised of local social clubs—the Italian Club, the Cuban Club, the Centro Asturiano, and the Loyal Knights. Games were on Sunday afternoons, and, after lights were put in some years later, on Thursday nights. The games would draw as many as two thousand during regular season and up to four thousand in the playoffs.

Wes Singletary writes that many of the players were Italians who went to military service by 1943. As a result, the teams changed as did coaching and management. Marcelo Maseda played for Centro Asturiano but took the manager role with the Knights, but not for long. A new man named Louis Piniella became leader. His brother-in-law, Joe Magadan, joined him. If those names sound familiar, it's because their sons became two of Tampa's most popular major league players—Lou Piniella and Dave Magadan.¹

It is probable that more professional baseball players came from the Intersocial

¹ Wes Singletary, "The Inter-Social League: 1943 Season", *Sunland Tribune*, vol. XVIII (Tampa: Tampa Historical Society, November 1992), 82.

League than any league anywhere. A reasonable list would be Al Lopez, Lou Piniella, Bucky De La Torre, Benny Fernandez, Bitsy Mott, Faustino Casares, Manuel Seone, Joe Benito, Joe Moran, Lou Garcia, Monty Lopez, Jesus Corrales, Roland Acosta, Fermin Montes de Oca, Joe Tomlinson, Bob Dowling, Bob Lavendera, Lenny Pecou, Jack Henry, Eloy Fernandez, Sam Sinardi, Mike Dominguez, Ernest Rubio, Chelo Castillo, Sindo Valle, Raymond Rodriguez, Robert Guerra, Chip Clemente, Indio Jiminez, Bobby Cline, Indio Prieto, Peaches Hernandez, and Manuel Onis.²

The Chicago Cubs moved their spring training site to Tampa in 1913, and they stayed until 1916. The Boston Red Sox came in 1919, the Washington Senators in 1920, the Detroit Tigers in 1930, the Cincinnati Reds in the 1940s, and the Chicago White Sox in the 1950s. The New York Yankees came in 1996 and never left.³

Here are the stories of many of the players who created Tampa's astonishing baseball legacy. Let's get started. Let's play ball.

TAMPA SMOKERS

The name and the image will be with us forever: the red and white jersey, with the final curve of the last *s* in the Tampa Smokers' name trailing to the left like smoke, and imprinted on the smoke, a cigar. If you are devoted enough and have the money, you can buy a copy of the jersey on the Web for the stiff price of \$173.68. How they calculate the price down to the penny is anybody's guess.

Other teams, and other moments, may be better remembered than the Smokers: think of Babe Ruth knocking out that celebrated home run at Plant Field, of course, or Johnny Bench, years later, crouched behind the plate at Al Lopez Field. But no team is so identified with Tampa. Lopez started his baseball career with the team in 1925. He was all of sixteen. Suddenly he was making \$150 a month. "I couldn't believe it," he later said. "I would have played for nothing."⁴

The Smokers played off and on again for twenty years between 1919 and 1954. As with the Tampa Bay Rays now, we're accustomed to having a pro team to root for. Back then, it was the Smokers, and only the Smokers. The team packed as many as eight thousand people into the stands at Plant Field, where the University of Tampa stands today. In the last years of the team, between 1947 and 1954, the Smokers played a 140-game season from April through September in the Florida International League. The league included teams from St. Petersburg, Lakeland, Miami, Miami Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, and finally, Havana. There was no rivalry like the rivalry with Havana. So many people here were of Cuban descent that loyalties were fiercely divided and debated. Passions ran so high that the

² List provided by the *Tampa Tribune* Sports Department, Tampa Bay History Center Collection.

³ Kevin M. McCarthy, *Baseball in Florida* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1996), Appendix D, 223.

⁴ Singletary, "The Early Career of Al Lopez", *Tampa Bay History*, Spring/Summer 1994 (Tampa: University of South Florida, Department of History, 1994), 8.



Courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System

The Tampa Smokers baseball team pose together at Plant Field at the beginning of the 1924 season. A young man named Al Lopez would join the team the following year.

field had to be roped off from the stands so fans wouldn't go dashing onto it.

Charlie Cuellar, a Smokers' pitcher, was a Cuban native, and he knew how tough the Cubans could be. But, on one steamy day in 1947, Cuellar led the Smokers, and their fans, to their feet, when he pitched a shut-out against the Cubans, as the Cubans had just done to them. The Smokers won 5-0. "It was really such a big rivalry. The Tampa fans later rewarded me with a special day, and the team gave me an engraved watch for the victory."

The Tampa fans had other passions, the rich stuff that is also part of the city's history. Another Smoker, Bitsy Mott, recalled, "People would sit out behind right field and gamble. They would bet money on every pitch and every batter and everything."

The Smokers were a professional team, unaffiliated with any major league organization, although some of its players did go on to the majors. The team disbanded in 1954, when the Cuban team pulled out of the league. The Cubans had just about the best team in league, remembers Lou Garcia, who played in one spring training with the Smokers. With the Cuban team gone, interest in the Smokers simply faded.

LITTLE LEAGUE HISTORY

Little League baseball began in 1939 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Carl Stotz wanted a sport for boys to teach them fair play and teamwork. The first teams were sponsored by local businesses—Jumbo Pretzel, Lycoming Dairy, and Lundy Lumber. In the first game, played on June 6, 1939, Lundy Lumber defeated Lycoming Dairy 23-8, but Lycoming came back to win the season. From that humble beginning, Little League baseball grew to almost 200,000 teams in every U.S. state and over eighty countries around the world. In 2007, there were more than 2.3 million players worldwide.

Little League baseball is divided into six divisions based on the age of the players: Tee Ball (ages five to eight), Minors (ages seven to nine), Little (ages nine to twelve), Junior (ages thirteen to fourteen), Senior (ages fourteen to sixteen) and Big (ages sixteen to eighteen).

The best-known event in Little League is the annual Little League Baseball World Series, held every August in Williamsport, although there are world series games for Junior, Senior, and Big leagues as well. In 1953, the Little League World Series was televised for the first time, with Jim McKay providing the play-by-play for CBS television and Howard Cosell for ABC radio. By 1955, there was a Little League organization in each of the forty-eight states. George W. Bush played as a catcher for the Cubs of the Central Little League in Midland, Texas, the first Little League player to become president of the United States.

WEST TAMPA COMES ALIVE

The boys of summer made it their passion, and some great players came from those early days. But there was nothing like the passion that grew in West Tampa. Being locked in a neighborhood and not eligible for other leagues, West Tampa Little League grew like a fever once a few dedicated people put their muscle and money into making a team of their own.

The players for the West Tampa Little League were sons of cigar workers, plumbers, mail carriers, electricians, and a couple of former baseball players from the minor leagues. Wives and mothers were part of the team as well, cooking for and feeding the people who built the little playground. They were fans of Al Lopez, Tampa's most revered baseball star and were determined to make a place for themselves in the story of baseball in Tampa.

With a stolen brick or two, a long weekend of laying concrete and building bleachers, a home-cooked hot dog, a borrowed ice chest, a community meeting, a couple of men who wanted it more than anything, and a bunch of kids who had no idea what was ahead of them, West Tampa baseball was born. It was the 1960s, when most of the country was organizing into highly polarized political groups, Elvis was the king, and Vietnam was on everyone's mind. Not so in West Tampa. Parents there had a plan for their kids, and it was baseball, family, neighborhood, and baseball. There was no question that an eight-year-old boy wouldn't play, or try to play, baseball.

The ball park had been there, right next to MacFarlane Park, since 1916, but by the 1960s, it was seldom used. It was a sandy, overgrown wasteland that had been ignored for years. Negligence had left it for dead as the neighborhood grew and lived around it. When the baseball fever struck in West Tampa, the neglected field became a garden waiting to be tilled. And tilled it was. The seeds of West Tampa Little League were sown. From those beginnings, that little park—which has grown into four fields—has spawned some of baseball’s most honored players.

A LEGEND IS BORN: FRANK CACCIATORE

“You know what? Those were the best years of our lives. All the Little League years we spent over there at the park. I could have rented this house, because we lived over there.”

– Alice Cacciatore, wife of Frank Cacciatore

Frank Cacciatore grew up a few houses away from Ybor City’s Cuscaden Park, where the Intersocial League played. The league was *the* place to play in the 1930s and 1940s, but Frank had other ideas. “We had another league; we called it the municipal league. We used to play on Sunday mornings. I played in the municipal league because the Intersocial played on Sunday afternoons. And we used to have what we called tea dances on Sunday afternoons at the Centro Español ballroom in Ybor City, where Centro Ybor is now. And that’s where I met my wife.

“The dances were from four to eight, with a big band like Don Francisco, and that’s where you went to meet girls, and so I opted to play in the municipal leagues so I could play in the mornings, and then I could still go to the tea dances.”

But if Frank Cacciatore ever had the idea that baseball would take a back seat in his life, the thought didn’t survive the years. It was 1962. His nephew couldn’t play baseball in the Bayshore Little League because he didn’t live in the neighborhood. He had a friend, Frank Mendez, whose son was playing in Riverside Little League, also outside of West Tampa. They started talking to each other. Then they talked to the man who oversaw all of Tampa Little League. He told Frank Cacciatore and Frank Mendez to hold a meeting, organize themselves. “So I made the pamphlets,” Frank Cacciatore recalls, “and Frank passed them out to the schools around here. We got to the meeting—we had about sixty people that showed up, and I was embarrassed because I thought we would have three hundred people, and I kind of apologized to [the league official], and he told me, ‘Man, you got a great crowd here.’ He said, ‘organize right now.’”

By then they had already hooked up with Tapi Rodriquez, the mailman who had his finger in every community organization in the neighborhood. He was West Tampa’s de facto mayor. “Tapi agreed that if he would become president, that he would drop all other organizations that he belonged to and would concentrate on Little League. So we made Tapi president, and Frank Mendez became vice president, and I became the player agent. I was the one who organized all the meetings for the



Courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System

This is the uncropped image from the cover of this year's journal. Fans found seating wherever they could during games in this era.

registration of the league. And so we had registrations and so forth. I had to check all the birth certificates, to make sure that they were all Little League age, and that they lived in the boundaries."

Then they had to find a field. "We were going to get this little park behind the Armory. Now they call it Vila Brothers Park. We could have only put up one field in there, but it happened that MacFarlane had a diamond there. The municipal league used to play ball in that diamond."

And so, after some discussion, West Tampa got its baseball field, across Spruce Street from MacFarlane Park. The rest was up to the parents of West Tampa Little League.

"We never had a lack of people to do work. That never happened here," Cacciatore remembers. Strangers couldn't figure out why. He once sat down with some people with Tampa Bay Little League, now a power league in the city. "I said, 'look, how much do you charge for registration? They said, 'Twenty-five dollars.' Well, twenty-five dollars back in that time was a lot of money. You got three kids, that's seventy-five dollars. We used to charge one dollar, and we used to forfeit the registration if they didn't have it. We used to give them a slip of paper, you know, what can you do to help us? They felt kind of obligated. Can you work the concession

stand, can you do carpentry work, can you lay blocks? We looked at the form, and we needed a block layer, well, here's a guy who can lay blocks. And we'd say, 'Hey, listen, we're going to build the dugouts, and we need somebody to lay blocks,' and he says, 'Okay, I'll be there.' He gave his Sunday to laying blocks."

For the backstop at the Little League field, there was an abandoned tennis court at MacFarlane Park. Frank and his comrades took all the wire that surrounded the court, Tapi took it to his buddies at Southeast Galvanizing to be reglazed for free, and there was the backstop. It was a little unusual since it was chain-link and the holes were smaller and the wire was thicker than a normal baseball backstop. But the price was right. The league was off and running.

"We organized in 1962, and believe it or not, we played for the district championship that year. We played with North Seminole, which was a big league, big program. They beat us in the finals. So West Tampa was from the very beginning becoming popularized. From then on, we were kind of a power.

"In 1968, I took the team to the World Series, it was the senior team, and we finished second." His son, Frank—now a hitting coach for a Philadelphia Phillies farm club in Reading, Pa.—was the pitcher, who ran into a serious patch of bad luck. "He got a splinter in his foot playing around here. But he never said anything. So when we're at the World Series, all of a sudden his foot swells up, the foot got infected, and [the doctor] had to lance it, to get the splinter out.

"This threw out our whole pitching rotation. We had to start with a thirteen-year-old. He was a thirteen-year-old playing with fifteen-year-olds. He was kind of wild, and we lost a game on account of that, so we got in the losers' bracket. So we fought our way out of the losers' bracket all the way to the winners' bracket, to the finals. We played this team from New York. They had a pitcher that pitched against us—he became a quarterback for the Chicago Bears. Like I said, we fought our way to the finals, but we lost six to four." His belief that West Tampa was the best team in the series has never faded.

Along the way, there were spaghetti dinner fund-raisers. There wasn't much order then, not many rules. Kids would sell tickets to the spaghetti dinners and give the money to their coaches, who handed it over to Frank Cacciatore. That's how West Tampa Little League finally got a bank account. "I used to have a golf sock, and I used to stick the money in my golf sock and throw it in the trunk. I said, 'I think I have quite a bit of money stuck in that sock.' We got it on the kitchen table, and it was six hundred, seven hundred dollars. I had this much money and I didn't even know it. She [his wife, Alice] went and opened an account for West Tampa Little League at Central Bank."

It was just one more sign of how important an institution the league had become. The moms—many of them side by side with high school girlfriends who had not left the neighborhood—formed their own auxiliary. One woman, who banged away with a cowbell during games, had her own method of working the stands. Says Cacciatore: "She would stand there in front of you and wouldn't move

until you gave money. One time we were having a tournament, and she picked up \$155. Man, that was incredible!”

There were other incredible events at West Tampa Little League. Tino Martinez, Luis Gonzalez, and Fred McGriff all played there at the same time. Frank Cacciatore remembers Martinez the best: “I saw Tino hitting when he was fourteen years old, and I said, ‘You can’t teach that.’ He had natural ability. And I played softball with Tino’s father, he was a softball pitcher, and although his father knew baseball, he didn’t know enough to teach Tino to hit that way.”

Frank Cacciatore worked for West Tampa Little League for twenty-six years, until 1990. The years passed, the playing fields languished, but no longer. Younger men, with baseball memories, have taken the place of Frank Cacciatore and are working now to revive what he and so many others built.

I ANNOUNCED THE GAMES: MARK BEIRO

Mark Beiro is now fifty-eight and legally blind. Diabetic retinopathy has robbed him of his sight. But his memories of West Tampa Little League are as vivid and detailed as a photograph. Baseball, baseball, baseball. In West Tampa, Little League was everything. Picture this:

Mark is standing in the shade of a press box that was built on top of the concession stand by the fathers of West Tampa Little League. He is, as he would say, a snot-nosed kid—all of thirteen, and he’s announcing the game, not just identifying the players or keeping score. He’s got his mouth poised in front of the big microphone, and he’s doing play-by-play, just the way they did it in the major leagues. As his voice booms across the field, he looks and sees mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmothers and grandfathers, cheering on their kids.

This was in the 1960s. Families were strong. Parents paid attention. Children who stepped out of line knew punishment was coming at home. But that was home. The streets were alive with the shouts of children playing the game of games. Beiro remembers: “Since we were old enough to walk, wear a glove and swing a bat, I think, everybody in our neighborhood, that’s what we did. Baseball was our pastime. It didn’t have to be America’s. It was West Tampa’s.

“Summertime, we would say that was our first home—we just ate at home,” Beiro says. “We were into the game, we knew the science of the game, we knew where we had to be in any particular game situation. Our head was in the game.”

But some players were better than others. Mark Beiro knew pretty soon he was one of the others.

“I couldn’t hit a ball if you put it on a tripod,” he said. “I played second base, I could play the outfield, but I had no arm. I wasn’t a particularly good hitter...I was OK. Speed was my thing, I was very fast. Most guys would get thrown out on a grounder, but I could run it out. I didn’t get very many hits. I think I only had one home run in my life.”

“The people I grew up with and shared baseball on the field made me what I

am today. I knew I could never play on the same level as those guys.”

West Tampa baseball didn't begin until 1962. Before that, Wellswood had the team, and West Tampa kids had to go there to play. “I was ten years old in 1961, and we were playing city recreation baseball in a local park. It was called RYL—Recreational Youth League—and it made you feel grown up to say, ‘I play RYL.’” All the kids would report to the park, the park director would put together a team, cram them into three cars, and go to playgrounds around the city to play another RYL.

There was a field next to MacFarlane Park. But it wasn't Little League yet; it was just a ball field. Kids of all sorts played, and neighbors would come with lawn chairs to watch these no-name teams. Parents didn't have anything else to do, so they would come to that park to watch kids play. Nowhere else in the city did that happen. “We used to ask, ‘Who are these people out here?’ Someone would say, ‘Oh, that's my grandfather, my grandmother.’ Nowhere else.”

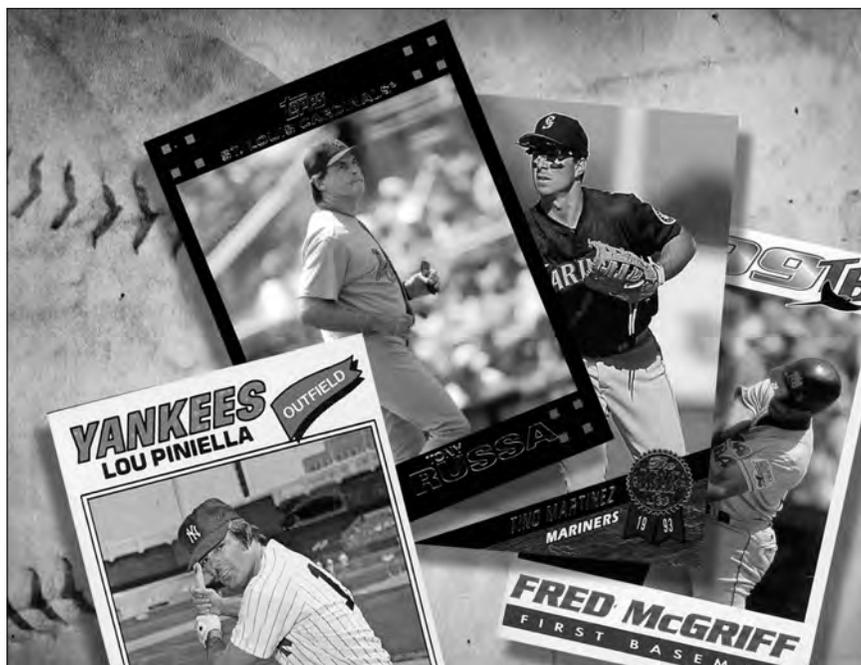
In order to play organized baseball, the West Tampa kids went to Wellswood. They got uniforms. Fathers in West Tampa like Tapi Rodriquez, Jack Russo, Frank Mendez, and Frank Cacciatore got together and created something magical—West Tampa Little League.

One off-night, there was a gathering at the ball field. The stands were full since letters had been sent inviting people to the meeting. Tapi Rodriquez went to a microphone at the pitcher's mound and announced that the league needed to have a spaghetti dinner as a fund-raiser. “A grocer would stand up and say, ‘I donate five pounds of ground meat.’ Another person, [from] Alessi Bakery, said, ‘We'll donate the desserts.’ A printer would say, ‘I'll print the tickets,’ and someone else said, ‘I'll buy an ad on the back of the ticket.’ Everything's donated—all these businesses, they were involved. We were lucky, and when it was all over, the Sunday afternoon of the dinner, the park would be filled with cars of people.”

“I was so bad that I didn't even make the Little League Majors...eleven- and twelve- year-olds. Nine- and ten-year-olds played in the Minors. There was one twelve-year-old on my team who could hit home runs like Babe Ruth, so we won a lot of games.” Later on, leagues were created for kids from thirteen to fourteen and from fifteen to sixteen. Beiro played with John Tamargo, who went on to play with the St. Louis Cardinals and the San Francisco Giants. He was the only one from Beiro's age group who made it big.

When he was twelve, Beiro put down the bat and picked up the big microphone of the stadium's public address system. “I always wanted to be an announcer, anyway,” he said. He'd listened to major league announcers at night at home on the radio, and he decided he could do what they did. He didn't just do the score. He did the play-by-play for the action on the Little League field. The kids loved it. Not so some of the adults. “Hey, shut up!” one of the coaches said. “Why are you doing play-by-play on the PA? People can see what's going on. What's the matter with you?”

Generally, one of the fathers would simply announce who was batting and their position. Another father would keep the box score. That was it. “At first, I put



Baseball cards courtesy of Graham Kite-Powell

A few of the more famous men to come out of West Tampa and make it at the Major League level. Over seventy Tampa natives have played in the majors since Al Lopez's debut in 1928.

the scores up on the big board. I got a free soda and hot dog. I would tally the scores as the game was going on, which no one else did. I went to a father, George Ramos, and asked if I could at least try doing the announcing. He talked to someone and thought it was a good idea. Danny Henriquez was an older boy who was announcing so I asked if I could help him. He was Wally Cleaver, and I was the Beaver. He asked if I wanted to try and that was it. We became best friends. We joked and laughed all the time. His sister and I were voted Wittiest Girl and Boy in ninth grade.”

Even at that young age, Beiro had his radio announcer heroes—Harry Caray and Jack Buck. His house on Dewey Street was very close to the one next door, and the bedroom windows were beside each other. His bedroom was near that of two buddies who lived next door. They would listen to baseball games at night and yell back and forth to one another. “Hey,” one of the parents would yell, “you guys go to sleep.” But they would continue to talk until plans were made for playing ball the next day.

His favorite team was the Chicago White Sox because of Al Lopez. “When I was a boy, in my house and in my neighborhood...Al Lopez was everything. If Al Lopez could do what he did, we could do it. He was our patron saint. It was the way

he conducted himself. Mayor Sandy Freedman said at the dedication of Al Lopez Park that of all the men she had met in her public life, Al Lopez was the only name who evoked no adverse reaction. He never looked for adulation. My father used to call me over to the radio and say, ‘Come here, son, Al Lopez is managing.’”

“Al was everything a person should be, his gentlemanly ways, his love of family, his love of community, his loyalty to friends. Every one of these are things that were bestowed on all of us as kids. Everyone who knew him and everyone who knew of him revered Al Lopez. If you talk to Lou Piniella and Tony La Russa, they will have nothing but reverence for Al. When they were growing up, their parents took them to meet Al Lopez. My proudest moment in sports talk radio was interviewing Al Lopez.”

Mark finally impressed the critics. He was a little crazy, but it helped. “I used to get me two speakers and walk up the ladder [to the press box] like a moron, instead of taking one up, and then the other... Then I’d come down the ladder, and then I’d go pick up this huge amplifier, and I’d go up the ladder again. It was very heavy, and I set it up in the booth. I was ready to go—there was something godly about it. You’re overseeing the whole thing you know, you feel so above it all, and you are.

“I was one of the few guys who could announce and keep score at the same time, even when we got an electronic board. My scorekeeping was considered the Bible. I didn’t want to interfere with the concentration of the players, but I heard from the kids on the bench that they like to hear details. So I would say, ‘Gonzalez hits a line drive to short,’ and wait for the shortstop to actually catch it. Then, ‘Ferrera makes a long throw to first, and he is out.’ The mothers and fathers loved it.”

He announced all the games of Luis Gonzalez and Tino Martinez, as well as Joe Magadan and his brother Dave. Fred McGriff was known as Friendly Freddy McGriff as a kid.

Along the way, West Tampa broke the race barrier. “You don’t realize this as a kid. When we played out of town in Dade City or Zephyrhills, West Tampa got a lot of disputed calls because of Hispanic players. We were told, let the fathers handle it. Those teams were very good, but when you saw West Tampa and Belmont Heights play, it was magnificent. Robert Saunders, Jr. was the first black to play for West Tampa, and we didn’t think about it. We had grown up with the Little Rascals, and there was always a black kid in the neighborhood.”

“We didn’t see segregation since we weren’t white, and it was not unusual. We always saw the colored water fountains in the stores, and just accepted it. By the time I was in the seventh grade, it was changing. If you went to Dade City or other cracker country, people told me, ‘you better watch out.’ We never played much of the white leagues because they mostly lost after the first games, including the ones from Palma Ceia and South Tampa. Hillsborough County had more Little League teams than any other place in the world. Tapi Rodriguez was the leader of all that.”

When asked if he could tell that Gonzalez and Martinez were destined for greatness, he said, “To tell you the truth, I was more surprised at the number of these



Photo from the authors' collection

Members of the 1967 West Tampa Little League pose at the Little League World Series in Williamsport, PA. West Tampa teams would return to the next three LLWS tournaments, winning it all in 1970.

kids that didn't make the majors. There were so many kids playing that had such great talent that the shame was that they didn't make it. Tino's brother, Rene, now a vice president of Heritage Bank in Tampa, was a hell of a ball player."

One that sticks out in his mind is a kid named Ricky Alfonso. "Ricky was the greatest twelve-year-old ball player I ever saw. His nickname was the Cat. He hit a ball one night that was just like the movie *The Natural*. The ball went over the lights, across a big equipment building behind the field and finally came down near the swimming pool across the park. I think he was at second base and the ball was still in the air. It was incredible."

"In West Tampa, the lucky thing that we had, and I do mean lucky, is that we had so many parents who were involved in our lives. Parents aren't involved today like then. We had to send volunteers home because we didn't need them. And some of the volunteers didn't even have a family member playing in the game. That's just how it was in West Tampa."

The twelve-year-olds finished seventh in the world only three years after the league was created, then they went back two years later and finished fifth in the world—1965 and 1967. Then, the Senior League was created for fourteen- to fifteen-year-olds. They went to the World Series in 1968 and 1969, where they

finished second, and then in 1970, they won it all. A few years later, the teams from Belmont Heights would go to the World Series six times, winning in 1982.

Why does Hillsborough County grow baseball players like roses? Beiro thinks it was the leaders who taught kids at the Boys Club, in recreation leagues, in high schools. They were committed and gave guidance, they were wise and cared for the kids. Tampa is a baseball city.

Beiro graduated from Leto High School in 1969 and went to work at the American Can Company in Ybor City where his father worked. But he continued to freelance as an announcer. He worked in professional wrestling while still doing baseball.

Along the way, Beiro approached a Tampa man, Mitchell Mick, who was building a network of radio stations across the country that would broadcast local championship games. Soon, Beiro was working side by side with Mick, who also owned the Tampa Tarpons, an affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds.

When West Tampa Little League rose to championship levels, Mick went to the team and said that he wanted to put the games on the air, but the team would have to raise sponsorship dollars. The parents could hear their kids playing in important tournaments. The stations were very local frequency like WHBO and WALT radio, and the games were always played in the daytime. The parents came through.

In the afternoon of the games, you could walk down any street in West Tampa and not miss one play of the game, because it was on the radio in every house.

Together Beiro and Mick went to the 1975 Little League World Championship when Belmont Heights was competing, but lost. That year, there were nine different world championships in the United States at stake. Little League, Senior League, Girl's Softball, among others, and Tampa had five teams in the series. No other city had ever done that. None of the Tampa teams won, but it was still a record-setting statistic.

Beiro's affiliation with Mick was secure as he announced baseball for his network (ISI Sports Network) for some time to come, and sports broadcasting became his career. Although Mick later had him do a game from time to time Beiro largely quit announcing Little League in 1979 to become the announcer at Tampa's jai alai fronton. The announcing for West Tampa Little League prepared him for the rest of his career. He became a much-sought-after boxing announcer in matches all over the country. Despite his blindness, he still does some work in the ring. He introduces the fighters in the ring and then, after the fight, announces the decision. He writes the boxers' statistics with a magic marker in letters big enough that he can see, and then memorizes them. After the fight, the attendants tell him the scores of the judges, and he remembers them to announce the winner. He also became a sports talk-show host on WFLA Radio.

Beiro is now facing his disability. He announces local boxing with his wife sitting beside him reading the program into his ear. He can't do on-the-air announcing anymore. He says, "It gets back to that West Tampa thing—I have friends, family

and people who care deeply about me. They support me.”

One day he ran into an acquaintance who had been in jail for some time, and the guy said, “Hey, Mark. When I was in the lock-up, I used to see you on boxing. And I would tell everyone, ‘I know that guy, he’s from the neighborhood.’ And no one would believe me.” Beiro said, “It’s funny how West Tampa people respond to fame. They never forget.” For the opening day of West Tampa Little League each year, he is the emcee.

He remembers the game between Arizona Diamondbacks and the New York Yankees, when Luis Gonzales and Tino Martinez faced off in the 2001 World Series. Gonzales got the game-winning hit. Luis was standing at first base after the hit, and Tino was playing first base and congratulating him. The next day, Luis said, “I hope all the old guys in the coffee shops in West Tampa are reading their newspapers this morning and celebrating with me, that I got the winning hit.”

Beiro’s talent was just of a different sort, one of a kind. It’s hard to understand why he never tried to make the majors as an announcer. He says he wasn’t good at self-promotion. He seems to have no regrets. And he doesn’t look back — unless you count what he holds in his heart for West Tampa, and Dewey Street, where he grew up, around kids who played the game with him and who are, in his memory, unchanged.

WEST TAMPA UMPIRE: GEORGE TAMARGO

George Tamargo looks back at West Tampa Little League as the place that shaped his character. His father, Tony, like so many others, helped build the field. Local businesses, like the West Tampa Optimist Club, Alessi Bakery, and Latin American Furniture, supported the team. The kids all had shirts and caps, or, when they were old enough, full uniforms, gloves, and shoes made of kangaroo skin. Everybody knew everybody else. Coaches laid down the rules, and parents backed them up. Family was everything. During All-Star games, parents took the day off from work to see their kids play.

“They taught us community, they taught us respect. They taught us how to be young men at an early age. They taught us that you had to earn everything in life. Nothing was given to you. You had to work hard. Understand that [the park] was built by our fathers. They would steal construction-site equipment and blocks and stuff to build these things. They would spend their Saturdays and Sundays building concession stands, roofs, fences, side walls.

“And they showed you a sense of responsibility, for you to be somebody, or least to have respect for yourself. You had to learn the good and the bad and make the right choices. And if an adult told you anything, it was ‘yes, ma’am,’ or ‘yes sir.’

“The coach tells you to run. If not, then don’t play baseball. If he tells you to pick up the bats, pick them up. You knew you had to do what you were told. You might not like it or agree with it, but you had to do it. In my life, he was right. My parents are still right. In that way, they prepared you for the tough roads in life.

“And you knew if you were going to be any good. I knew who was better than me at the age of six! And I knew who wasn’t better than me. And when we got to our teenage years, getting ready for high school, I knew I wasn’t going to be a high school ball player. I wasn’t good enough. I knew my role at the team—that’s why I became an umpire, to stay with them.”

He got paid pretty well, for the times, \$8.50 per game. “And gas was all of twenty-five cents a gallon! You do five of those and you’ve got cash money. You do three or four a week and on Saturdays you do four of them, and you go to the bar!”

His umpiring took him places—minor leagues, and spring training for the Cincinnati Reds. He was hardly grown, and it showed. He remembers one particular game when he was standing among the greats.

“Johnny Bench is catching, Fred Norman was on the mound, Pete Rose [then with the Phillies] is up to bat, and... this is the God’s honest truth. There’s a man on first. I get into my position. Norman releases the pitch, Bench catches the ball, I haven’t called ball or strike. Bench turns around, Rose steps out of the box and looks at me and says, ‘What the hell is it?’ ‘What the f— do I know? I didn’t see it,’ I said. ‘Tell him to throw it again.’ It was the first screwball I’d ever seen and I didn’t know what it was.”

Tamargo has a restaurant, a Mr. Empanada franchise on Gandy Boulevard. He is a stocky man, a natural-born storyteller with the personality of a cheerful bulldog. At West Tampa, he says, he grew up in other ways as well.

“You’re thirteen, fourteen, and you started noticing women. We were more interested in girls than in practicing or playing. We did both. The girls would go see us play, and we would take a walk out there by the swimming pool behind center field of the big league team. You found a dark spot, and your teenage years began.”

Baseball even led him to love. Tamargo’s wife, Cynthia, tells the story best: “I was the team statistician at Tampa Catholic, and he was the umpire. He was chewing tobacco, and spitting, just all gross and nasty. He was twenty and I was seventeen, and he was an older man as far as I was concerned. I much preferred some of the ball players I went to school with. But the coach was always encouraging me to talk to him. He said, ‘Why don’t you give Georgie a smooch?’ He says he told the coach, ‘If



Photo from the authors’ collection

George Tamargo enjoyed an interesting, if brief, career as an umpire for high school, college, and minor league baseball.

I ever get her to go out with me, she'll marry me.'

"So then, a couple of years passed, and I graduated, and I went to the University of Tampa as the team statistician, and he was umpiring there. We had a game at Redland, now the Yankees minor league practice field. It was the minor league field for the Cincinnati Reds. At that same time, it was used for Hillsborough Community College baseball. UT was playing HCC at the Redlands. He was umpiring the game. By then, I was attracted to him. He was on the field and singing some stupid song, it was a Frank Sinatra song, he was acting silly, and his smile kind of captivated me, and I thought, 'He's not so bad after all.'

"After the game, I pretended I couldn't unlock my car. So he came over to help me. In the meantime, I asked him if he wanted to go with me to a party that night. He said yes. I jiggled the key a little bit and unlocked my car. I met him at the party, I think. That was sort of our first date. The next night we went out again, and that was it. A month later we were engaged. A year and a day later, we were married."

It was a true West Tampa moment. After the wedding at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, they took a ride in a friend's white Cadillac. It was like going on a pilgrimage. They stopped at every important place in their lives. "We went to his house," Cynthia Tamargo said. "Then we drove to West Tampa Little League, then MacFarlane Park, then the West Tampa Boys Club, the house I grew up in, and then we went to the hall."

The reception hall was the Letter Carriers Union Hall on Cypress Street. Eight hundred people showed up. It was another community event in the life of West Tampa.

Like other men who played there, George Tamargo believes there will never be a place like West Tampa baseball, where the game brought everybody together, no matter what. But you can probably tell by now that baseball was not Tamargo's true love. He even gave up umpiring for it. The game came in second to that girl who once got grossed out by his tobacco chewing and spitting. George and Cynthia Tamargo have four children. As of April 17, 2009, they were married thirty-three years.

A FAMILY AFFAIR: DAVE MAGADAN

Dave Magadan is quiet, soft-spoken. He doesn't strut his stuff in the macho manner of many professional ball players. He doesn't brag, although he could.

His career on the field, minors and majors, lasted eighteen years, mostly with the Mets, but also the Mariners, the Marlins, the Astros, the Cubs, and Oakland before he retired in 2001 from the San Diego Padres. He went on to be a coach in the Padres organization and moved to the Boston Red Sox, where he was named hitting coach in 2006. Magadan must know what he's doing. The Sox won the World Series in 2007. The team made it to the American League championship series—they were defeated by the Rays—in 2008.

And he comes from what you might call a small dynasty. His father, Joe, was one of the standouts of the Intersocial League. Lou Piniella is his cousin, and his

godfather. And he got his start in West Tampa Little League.

“I started even before Little League age. My brother is older than me, five and a half years...I would go to practices with my father, when he was coaching my older brother, and I would play with the older kids at the practice, and hit and field and all that stuff. And when I became of age to start playing Little League, my father started coaching me. I was probably seven years old.”

Magadan, a Jesuit graduate, played straight through at West Tampa Little League until he was eighteen, when he switched to American Legion Post 248, also located at the West Tampa field. The team won the American Legion World Series that year. He was selected as the game's MVP.

Through it all, his parents were his mainstay in baseball. They were devoted to West Tampa Little League. They were devoted to sports, and their kids. “I never stayed with a babysitter my whole life, never. If we couldn't go, if me and my brother couldn't go where they were going, they wouldn't go. We were their life.”

His father was so dedicated that he took a job as an accountant for a produce company that allowed him to come home in time for Dave to practice. His father pitched, pitched, pitched, and Dave hit, hit, hit. Now and then, father would take son to Cuscaden Park to tell him about the highlights of his own career. “He used to tell me about some of the balls that he would hit, and how far he had hit them...He was very proud of that part of his life.”

Magadan practiced every day, played games twice a week. When he wasn't playing, he was playing made-up games with his friends. One was cup ball. The boys would gather up several soda cups and crunch them into a ball. A pitcher threw it, and the hitter had to hit the ball with his hand. And they played another game called hot box. The game was played on two bases: “There would be two kids on each base, and the kid that's running would get in the middle and you'd do a hot box, like a run-down, and you try to get them out. You'd throw the ball to the other kid, and you try and tag the kid between the bases out. If you can't, you throw it back to the other kid—you try to get them out, and if the kid was safe, he'd get a point.”

Games like this are apparently unique to Tampa. “I've talked to other guys throughout the years that I've played with in pro ball or coached, and they have no idea what hot box or cup ball is.” And they probably had no idea of what it was like coming up in West Tampa, when five hundred to six hundred kids participated each season.

“It was a destination place for kids in that era—when there were practices, every field had teams on it. I can remember that as I got older, you would practice every day, but you can only be on the field on two out of the four practice days. The other two days you'd be in the cage because there just wasn't enough physical space to be able to accommodate all the teams.

“We were known throughout the city as being the noisy fans of West Tampa. Whenever we played another Little League team, when teams would come to West Tampa, the stands were full, and all the way down the fences on left field, down the

right field line and in the outfield you had fans sitting in lawn chairs.”

And they knew talent. Like Tino Martinez. “I remember going to his games when he was twelve, and I was probably eighteen, seventeen years old, and that was an event, because he was so good, and he was so much bigger than the other kids, and he was hitting the ball so much further than the other kids. When his team was playing, it was standing room only.”

Meanwhile, his cousin Lou, twenty years older, was never far from his mind. He and his family sometimes attended Piniella’s games. The lesson was indelible. “What it did for me was that he made me feel the dream was attainable, to know that somebody in our family made it to the major leagues and played and was successful and had a long career. . . . I think it gave me the confidence to think that this could happen to me, because it had happened to him.”

His father taught him the nuts and bolts of baseball. His mother gave him heart. But he took his time going to the majors. First, he went to college at the University of Alabama: “I just didn’t think I was ready, maturity wise. I’d never really been away from home, and in pro ball, it’s a stark reality. As soon as you start playing pro ball, you are thrown into the lion’s den. You’ve got to perform. There’s no grace period. Going to college, I felt like it eased me into being away from home, and you got the fall schedule, which is very light and you get your feet wet, and then eventually the spring season comes around, and so I just thought it was easier transition to go to college than to sign professionally.”

Magadan looks at the West Tampa Little League as wistfully as others who remember the glory days. Unlike some other professional ball players who have apparently forgotten their roots, he said he’d be willing to help out with the field to keep the memories alive and to give a new generation of kids the experience that meant so much to him.

GILBERT CUESTA

“The only pay is the kids. . . . They come up to you thirty years later, and you’re walking down the street, and they say, ‘Coach Cuesta,’ and they give you a hug. It’s hard to place who they are, but they know you.”

—Gilbert Cuesta

It’s a family affair. Gilbert Cuesta’s cousin John coached the West Tampa senior league team that won the 1970 Little League World Series. His other cousin, Pop, is the legendary coach at Jefferson High School. But it was Gilbert who probably shaped more young baseball talent than either of his cousins.

“My father and Pop’s father came to Tampa from Spain when he was nineteen,” Gil Cuesta said. “They actually went to live with John’s father for a while. After I was born, we lived on Spruce Street and then when I was twelve or thirteen, Daddy built a house on Cherry Street just two blocks from the West Tampa ball field.”

“I went to Jefferson High School. I was pretty small, like five foot five inches, and I tried to play football, and they said I was too little. Once I got out of high

school, I sprouted and started playing baseball. I played second base for about twelve years in the West Tampa municipal league. We played every Sunday.”

“I started too late. I wish I had started early, like Tony La Russa. He was just average, but every Saturday and Sunday, when we were playing football in the park, Tony would be with his father at the baseball diamond throwing ground balls and everything. That’s how he made it to the majors, because he was such a good defensive player.”

Cuesta worked for Seven Up Bottling Co. as warehouse manager for fifteen years, but gave it up when he got involved with Little League. It was Pop who got Gil into West Tampa Little League when it became too much for him in the mid-1960s: “Pop was going to the University of Tampa, and I think he needed another year to get his degree. So he called me up and said, ‘Man, I need some help with this Little League team.’ And I said, ‘I don’t know much about coaching.’ He said, ‘Come over and help me,’ so I helped him for a year, and the next year he landed the job at Jefferson. He said, ‘It’s all yours now.’ So I got hooked, and I’ve been there close to forty years now.”

Cuesta has coached at every level of play at West Tampa. He must have some magic as a coach, even though everything he knows about it he learned only from watching other coaches.

“I think you can teach more from ten to twelve than you can when they’re up at a higher level. At ten or twelve if you start doing the right things that you’re supposed to do, you can start developing. When you’re already up at fourteen or fifteen, if you haven’t developed skills, or getting there, it’s tough to start to teach it.

“There’s all kinds of kids, and you have to teach them all different. Some kids, you have to bring along real slow. You just can’t say, ‘You should have done this!’ You just bring them along real slow, and eventually they catch on. If a kid is average in ability, you can mold him into being a decent ball player. You don’t have to have great talent. I think all the years I coached over there, they always used to say I had the best hitting teams because we worked hard.

“Back then, you scheduled practice, and every kid would come. You had twelve kids, you had twelve every day. And when you have twelve every day, you can do a lot of stuff that you can’t do when they’re not there. You can get four guys to hit and eight guys out there (in the field), and they’re playing real games, and you get to teach them a lot more than they can learn when there are only nine. You catch a fly ball, you catch a ground ball. I always took a test, to make sure the kids enjoyed it. At the middle of the season, I would get all the kids, and I would say, ‘Look, I think we’ve probably been working too hard. You guys want to take a couple days off?’ ‘No, no,’ they’d say. They wanted to practice. I assumed that when that happened, they were happy.”

He became a second father to some of them. “The kids know when you’re being fair to them, and when you treat them right. They know that, and they respect it. You want to teach them that it’s only a game, and that you can learn a lot by being

on a team, and then you try to teach them all you can about baseball.”

Some kids don't need all that much help. “You can tell right away. I can see the way a kid throws the ball, or how he holds the bat, and you can tell right away he's going to be a decent ball player.”

Take the case of a kid named Tino Martinez.

“I was good friends with his father. I knew him real well, and Tino started off the season, when he was twelve, he wasn't hitting very good. And his father called me one day and said, ‘You think you could work with Tino to see what's wrong with him?’ and I said, ‘Sure man, I'll meet you at the park on Sunday.’ So we went to the park, we went over to the bigger field—the majors is like 200 feet, and we went to the other field, I think it's 240. And I warmed up. I threw batting practice for years and years, and I used to throw pretty good. So Tino got up there, and I started throwing them, and it was like shots all over the world! I said, ‘I'll show this guy one time. I'll throw him a change-up, because those kids aren't used to change ups.’ And he parked it over the fence, and I said, ‘Man, there's nothing wrong with Tino!’ From that day on, he hit so many home runs that year. His father actually got mad at me one day. I was already a game up, and the season was almost over. Tino came up. They had a guy on second, and I was up only two runs. I walked Tino intentionally, and his father got mad at me, because I wouldn't let him hit. And I said, ‘Man, you've got to realize I'm trying to watch out for my kids. They're trying to win, too.’”

Tino was a pitcher in his early days before moving to first base, where he would play the rest of his career. “Tino was a good pitcher. He was strong. His younger brother, Tony, used to catch. Tino threw so hard that Tony would put sponges in his mitt.”

And Cuesta coached Martinez, as well as Luis Gonzalez and Fred McGriff. “Luis was a very good hitter and a good fielder. He was a pretty decent size for Little League. He gave me a pair of cleats that I still have in my car. He said ‘try them on,’ and they fit me, size 10 ½, and I have used them for years playing football and whatever on Sundays. I probably could get some money for those things.” McGriff went on to the major leagues to fall just seven home runs short of the storied 500-club. McGriff hit as many home runs as Lou Gehrig. But when McGriff was a kid, there was no hint of what was to come.

“You know,” says Cuesta, “he's had all those home runs in the major leagues, and he never hit a home run until he got to high school. He never had a home run in Little League, and that's a short fence, and he never had one in the seniors.

“Fred had been playing for the Yellow Jackets in Carver City, but his mother wasn't happy with the way things were going, so he got a release to come to West Tampa. He was the nicest kid. I used to take him home every day after practice. I guess we had a good relationship and he looked up to me.”

He remembers Sammy Militello, who went to Jefferson High School and was drafted by the Yankees in 1982: “I don't know what happened to Sammy. He was a heck of a pitcher, and all of a sudden—I think it was mental mostly. He lost control.

He had all the ingredients to be a good major league player, but he went up there, had a pretty good first year, and then all of a sudden he couldn't throw a strike, so they let him go.

"I can't imagine fifty or sixty thousand people yelling and you have to have the mental toughness to focus on what you are doing." He compares it to being a high school basketball star who takes his girl to the fair and wants to win her a teddy bear at the basketball concession. When the barker yells, "Hey, watch him," he misses three shots in a row. The pressure is tough.

Some young men excel at football where they get tackled, run over, and knocked side to side, but put them in front of a baseball coming at 70 miles an hour and they panic. Cuesta says: "Sometimes a kid can take a hit, and he'll be scared forever. I just finished coaching my grandson, who is twelve, and he got hit by the hardest-throwing kid in West Tampa at least five times. He's tough and shakes it off. But some of the kids get hit one time and they start staying away from the plate. I guess it's something in your mind that you are not going to be afraid. You try to teach them...look, it if hits you, it's just going to hurt for a little bit, and some shake it off, other kids don't."

Gil Cuesta has eased his pace some, but only some. "Up to the last year, I could still throw batting practice pretty hard. But my arm is starting to slow down. I think I can still probably throw, but I don't throw anywhere near as hard as I used to, but I still have a lot of control. If you have control, then you're not going to be hitting the kids when they're taking batting practice. They learn to get confident, and they can stand up against anybody."

Now he's coaching his five-year-old grandson in T-ball. "I can tell you he's going to be good. He can already throw the ball very good, and he hits very good."

He thinks of quitting coaching. It's only been forty years. But he's not ready yet. He doesn't know what he'd do with his time. "It would be a lot of boring days," he says.

Forty years, and he never got paid a dime.

"The only pay is the kids. They come up to you, thirty years later, and you're walking down the street, and they say, 'Coach Cuesta!' and they give you a hug. It's hard to place who they are, but they know you."

*Editor's note: We are pleased that the University Press of Florida has allowed us to print an excerpt from *The Columbia Restaurant: Celebrating a Century of History, Culture, and Cuisine*, by Andrew T. Huse (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) pp. 74-76.*

PARADE FEVER

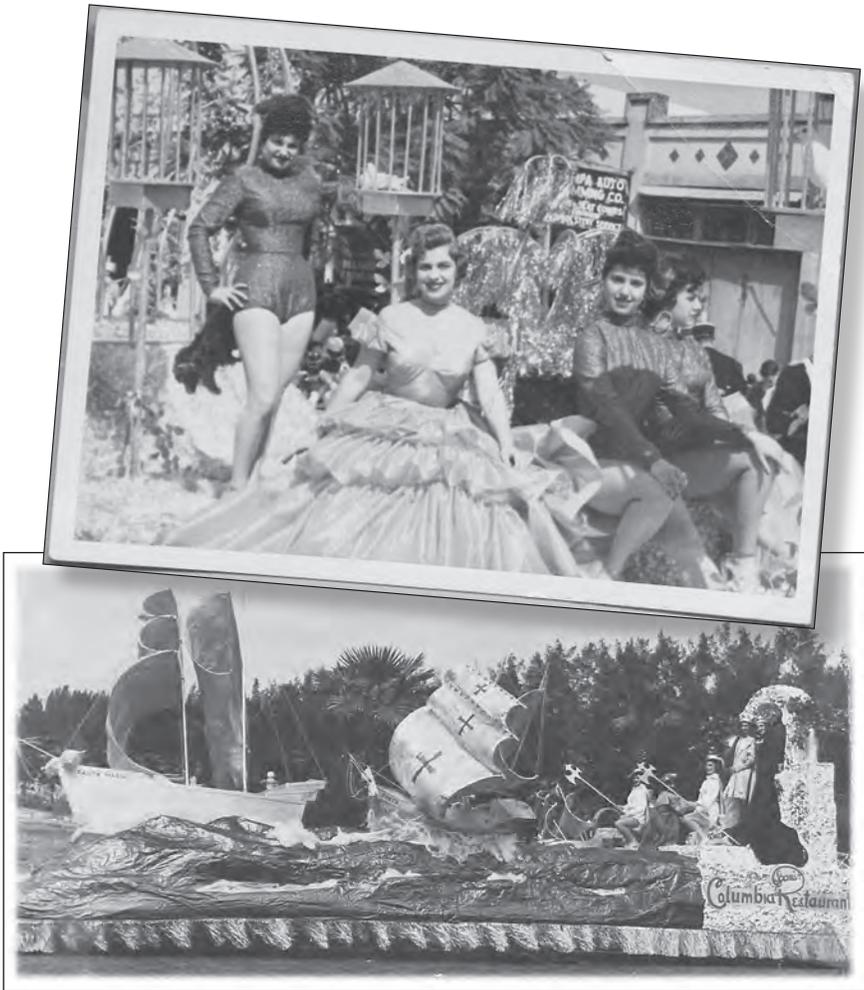
Columbia owner Casimiro Hernandez caught parade fever in 1937, never to find a cure. After he expanded the restaurant with the Don Quixote and Patio rooms, he wanted publicity. In the days before television, parades offered businesses the opportunity to employ live-action advertising. The local parade circuit provided a promising and treacherous route for the Columbia's many floats. "Running the largest Spanish restaurant in America often seems simple compared to entering one float in a parade," *Tampa Tribune* writer and Columbia PR man Paul Wilder confessed. "Sketches have to be rushed, pretty girls have to be hunted to add decoration to the float, schedules have to be worked out, all sorts of things."

Although they won prizes around the state, the Columbia's floats seemed to be jinxed. In Sarasota, a driver rear-ended a float depicting Columbus' three caravels. Casimiro once built a float so tall it smashed into an awning on Tampa's Franklin Street. On another occasion, a float would not fit through an underpass and snagged power lines wherever it went. It took Casimiro's steel determination to persist in such ruin, float by float.

The war and gasoline rationing stopped floats in 1942, but parades crisscrossed Florida again four years later. The Columbia did amazing things with tin foil and papier-mâché. No theme was too fanciful or ambitious. Casimiro ordered the construction of dragons, genies emerging from bottles, seascapes with "live mermaids," and surf-tossed beaches.

In 1946, the Columbia's annual Gasparilla float cost about \$1,000 to construct. It weighed three tons. A later float held a piano and orchestra. Another contained a replica of the Patio's fountain. A live girl's face peered out from the papier-mâché statue. A float depicting the struggle between Don Quixote and a windmill required six weeks of labor.

ANDREW T. HUSE writes, teaches, and lectures about food culture in Florida. He is librarian at the University of South Florida Special Collections Department and Florida Studies Center.



Courtesy of USF Tampa Special Collections, Gonzmart Family/Columbia Restaurant Collection

(top) The posing ladies and caged birds on the Columbia's fiftieth anniversary float, 1955; Columbus and his caravels sailed again in this elaborate parade float, circa 1950. Many of the Columbia's floats met unfortunate ends.

It is also notable just how many things could go wrong in so many places. Most Florida cities celebrated winter festivals with parades, and Casimiro entered Columbia floats in as many as possible. So many tired paraders once sat on a float it dragged along the street. On other occasions, it ran out of gas on the way to Sarasota; the masts of Columbus's three ships had to be lowered to pass safely under power lines; and the engine overheated during a St. Petersburg parade, billowing smoke and alarming spectators.

During another parade in St. Petersburg, a float's gas line became clogged. A resourceful crew member stretched himself under the open hood and poured gas into the carburetor so the float could pass the reviewing stand under its own power. On another occasion, the zipper broke on a girl's dress. Instead of basking in glory, she spent the rest of the parade sitting on the back of the float, huddled in a coat.

One of the more ambitious floats—"Love's Young Dream"—met an unfortunate end during Tampa's Gasparilla parade. It passed the reviewing stand in Plant Park without incident. After being parked in a warehouse at Drew Park for two hours, it caught fire. Crews scrambled to drive other floats away from the smoke and flames. Harry Burnett, who built the float, burned his hands trying to smother the flames. The fire department kindly avoided spraying undamaged parts of the float.

With the help of his wife, Burnett patched up the float, replacing cardboard and floral paper in time for the Knight parade the next day. The cosmetically restored float made the starting line. Then, the generator failed. Without lights and music, the float would serve little purpose in the nighttime parade. The crew from the Pan-American Airways float helped install a new generator.

"Love's Young Dream" shone bright that night until the new generator died three blocks from the end of the route. The embattled float went to Winter Haven the next week. "If anything happens, we apologize in advance right now," management explained. "You just can't out figure the obstinacy of inanimate floats."

Every year, the Columbia's parade floats demonstrated Casimiro's dogged determination to soldier on. He eliminated flimsy building materials such as tissue and tinsel. In 1950, he resolved to build new floats to serve multiple parades.

Preparation paid off the next year, when Casimiro equipped his float with a fire extinguisher. In a Sarasota parade, a nearby float caught fire at the starting line. The Columbia saved the day by suppressing the flames until firefighters arrived. Shortly afterward, the float trouble officially ended: During a Strawberry Festival parade in Plant City, no crashes took place, nothing caught fire, and nothing broke down. Not a single mishap occurred.

Perhaps the jinx just skipped a few years. In the Gasparilla parade of 1955, four birds in cages adorned the restaurant's massive 50th anniversary float. Bystanders along the parade route watched one of the homing pigeons slip between the bars and fly away, presumably home, wherever that was. The crew then tied the others in place so they wouldn't finish the parade with four empty cages. Undeterred, Casimiro doubled the contingent of birds for the Knight parade that year.

In 1956, he left nothing to chance. He equipped the float with two generators—one for the float and one for the truck—to provide illumination during the Knight parade. Of course, the unthinkable happened. While flamenco dancers cavorted around thatched Cuban huts, all the lights on the float suddenly went out. One of the generators had died, and so did the Columbia's illuminated entry into the Knight parade. "We at the Columbia, you may guess, were just crushed, plain crushed," Wilder wrote. "The parade is over now, and things are beginning to look bright again."

Spanish Bean Soup

This is the soup that made the Columbia famous for food. The Columbia's founder, Casimiro Hernandez Sr., adapted his version from the heavy, multi-course cocido madrilenò stew of Spain. He served parts of the original altogether for a new version. By the 1920s, newspapers boasted of Tampa's three great delights: sunshine, cigars, and soup. For a thicker soup, stew it long.

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>½ pound garbanzo beans (chickpeas), dried</i> | <i>1 onion, finely chopped</i> |
| <i>1 ham bone</i> | <i>1 chorizo (Spanish sausage), sliced in thin rounds</i> |
| <i>1 beef bone</i> | <i>2 potatoes, peeled and cut in quarters</i> |
| <i>2 quarts water</i> | <i>Pinch of saffron</i> |
| <i>1 tablespoon salt</i> | <i>½ teaspoon paprika</i> |
| <i>¼ pound salt pork, cut in thin strips</i> | |

Wash garbanzos. Soak overnight with 1 tablespoon salt in enough water to cover beans. Drain the salted water from the beans. Place beans in 4-quart soup kettle; add 2 quarts of water, ham and beef bones. Cook for 45 minutes over low heat, skimming foam from the top. Fry salt pork slowly in a skillet. Add chopped onion and sauté lightly. Add to beans along with potatoes, paprika and saffron. Add salt to taste. When potatoes are tender, remove from heat and add chorizo. Serve hot in deep soup bowls. Serves 4.

BOOK REVIEWS

Florida's People during the Last Ice Age. By Barbara A. Purdy (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. xx, 136 pp. List of figures, foreword, preface, acknowledgments, introduction, illustrations, maps, B/W photographs, bibliography, index. \$29.95, cloth)

Students approaching the study of Florida's Paleoindians for the first time are well advised to consult Barbara A. Purdy's *Florida's People during the Last Ice Age* for a concise and carefully documented overview of the field. Similarly, researchers focusing on later periods in Florida archaeology will find a useful summary of key past research as well as current evidence concerning the presence of humans in the region during the Late Glacial Period.

Purdy begins her work with an overview of the Paleoindian research conducted during the one hundred years from 1850 to 1950. Her synthesis reveals some of the emerging trends and changing theoretical paradigms in Florida archaeology that contributed to the general development of American archaeology. Consistent with the remaining sections of the book, Purdy illustrates important concepts by detailing in clear, nontechnical language the results of work conducted at key sites—in the case of this historical overview, five sites with significant and lasting importance.

The bulk of the remaining content of the book covers research conducted during the period 1950 to present on people using Clovis projectile points who were engaged in hunting large Ice Age animals some 14,000 YBP (Years Before Present). Florida's unique karst environment contributed to the fact that a firm understanding of this period awaited the development of scuba diving technology and methods—a significant proportion of the information concerning this period comes from springs and sinkholes. Readers residing in Florida will likely enjoy her treatment of such sites as Wakulla Springs and Silver Springs as she summarizes the evidence of work in these and other sites. In the process, she reveals distant human experiences in what would appear as an alien landscape dominated by large mammals and a greatly lowered sea level but today functions as tourist destinations or state parks.

Chapter 3 addresses the question of evidence for the presence of humans in Florida prior to the classically defined Paleoindians (i.e., before 14,000 YBP). Although this has long been an unsettled issue, Purdy concludes that her research at the Container Corporation of America site in Marion County suggests that it is “the only site in Florida so far where in situ materials have been reported to date to a Pre-Paleoindian time period, although at some of the sites on the Aucilla and Wacissa

ivers, a few deeply recovered organic specimens have yielded dates ranging from approximately 18,000 to 30,000 years old” (115).

In the last two chapters of the book, Purdy addresses the challenges confronting archaeologists studying the Paleoindians and briefly recommends future research directions. Particularly intriguing is her question, “Is it a coincidence that beveled ivory points from Florida are identical to those of the Upper Paleolithic 30,000 years ago in the Old World?” (121). The book’s bibliography is an excellent inventory of the key research in the field and serves as a guide to anyone who requires a greater depth of understanding of this formative period in the peopling of Florida.

TODD A. CHAVEZ
University of South Florida

Crackers in the Glade: Life and Times in the Old Everglades. By Rob Storter and Betty Savidge Briggs (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007. Paperback edition. xxiv, 127 pp. Foreword, introduction, maps, photographs, illustrations, notes. \$22.95, paper)

In anthropology, there are several different terms for the kind of knowledge revealed through *Crackers in the Glade*. Various referred to as “folkways,” “traditional knowledge,” or “traditional ecological knowledge,” this type of understanding is often contrasted with more scientific and formal knowledge. Yet we often have neither formal nor traditional knowledge with which to understand the ecology or lifeways that surround us. In this edited volume of memoirs by her grandfather Rob Storter, Betty Savidge Briggs gives us both visual and written documentation of life and times in the old Everglades.

Throughout this wonderfully edited volume, Storter provides not only his knowledge and vision of a vast and often unforgiving environment, but insight into a wilderness culture that few will experience again. His memories and the accompanying drawings provide a glimpse not only of a bountiful land, but also of the culture of an enduring frontier life that still resonates with some residents of a few small fishing villages near the Florida Everglades. Recognizing the fragile nature of his environment and its quickly vanishing way of life, Storter chronicles both with fascinating detail in his journals.

This portrait of a pioneering life in Southwest Florida is a testament to the resilience of the early settlers of this land. The harsh environment forged a tough and hardy group of people who depended upon each other and a faith that played an important role in many ways. He traveled many miles to attend a semi-annual Pentecostal retreat where he met his first wife in 1916, only to see her pass away the following July while at the same retreat. Amazingly, he met his second wife at the

same semi-annual retreat a few years later.

This record of daily life in coastal Florida provides insight into a changing landscape and society in transition as modern inventions began to transform a way of life. As a lifelong fisherman and hunter, Storter describes the transition from a subsistence lifestyle of the past to the more industrial and commercial means of livelihood of the present. Unfortunately, with this transition he must also describe the slow demise of the ecology and environment he so admired and loved.

Using his “primitive” artwork that goes beyond a merely stylistic portrayal of the environment, Rob depicts many aspects of daily life with exquisite detail. His drawings with written descriptions resemble the field notes of an ethnographer, as Storter detailed not only the landscape in which he lived but the culture as well. Drawings of plants and animals along with descriptions of their use and misuse provide a hint of the bountiful resources that were once a part of vast sea of grass. Whether in a drawing of a roseate spoonbill or of swimming away from an alligator, these depictions offer a priceless snapshot of the past.

The memoirs of Storter’s second wife Marilea add a more complete picture of family life as she describes the necessities of providing for invalids and the sick, fetching groceries, making ketchup and canning tomatoes, or the perils of pregnancy and childbirth. Life in the Everglades was hard for both sexes, and the addition of Marilea’s memoirs are integral to an understanding of families, friends, and the various roles of both females and males growing up in those times.

Few individuals have the foresight and ability to chronicle their daily lives with such talent and attention to detail. Some writers and artists spend many years learning to accomplish what Rob Storter has provided through his journals and artwork, and Floridians are lucky to have the benefit of his memories and drawings. Whether Storter’s work represents formal or informal knowledge, it makes an immense contribution, with beauty and grace, to an understanding of both the Everglades and its culture during the early years of settlement in that harsh land.

MICHAEL JEPSON

NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, St. Petersburg

Florida’s Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration. Edited by Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xii, 286 pp. List of acronyms, foreword, acknowledgments, editors and contributors, index. \$69.95, cloth)

Florida’s Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration offers an engaging collection of essays that explore the richness of Florida’s labor history. Spanning an enormous breadth

of time, these nine chapters underscore the importance of ethnicity, race, class, and gender in understanding the most fundamental human experience—work. At the same time, they examine important issues that move beyond what used to be the perennial problem of exceptionalism in the literature of Florida's past, namely the Sunshine State's "place" in the broader patterns of southern and United States history. Florida's early history as both a slave state and a frontier region offers opportunities to study the changing nature of labor within a larger system of racial and social control on the periphery of the American South and, indeed, the larger Atlantic world. More recently, Florida's rapid growth and migration, ethnic diversity, and expanding tourist and service economy are more in keeping with the experience—or, as the case may be, coming experience—of other deindustrializing sunbelt states. From this perspective, these essays suggest that Florida stands at the center of an emerging interdisciplinary and comparative approach to labor history.

Three chapters examine life and labor in the difficult and exploitative environment of colonial and antebellum Florida. Tamara Spike's essay on Indian tribute labor under Spanish rule reveals how corn production not only dramatically changed Timucuan social, cultural, and religious practices, but also their diet and food production, which ultimately created a weaker, more sedentary population. Edward Baptist argues that much of Florida's antebellum history was far from a static world of plantation paternalism but instead a frontier experience of cotton and sugar slave labor camps that pushed African American workers beyond measure. And for those who escaped the bonds of servitude, Brent Weisman reveals the struggles of Black Seminoles, who were forced to negotiate "multiple worlds simultaneously" (66).

Workers in postbellum and early twentieth-century Florida faced similar hurdles as the worlds of race and labor became increasingly constrained. Mark Howard Long's piece on Henry Sanford's effort to create a citrus empire on the back of Swedish indentured labor provides a fascinating glimpse of an alternative solution to the "labor problem" following emancipation. Robert Cassanello takes a broader view, both temporally and geographically, examining how race and gender shaped the labor movement across the state in terms of legislation, private associations, and labor organizations from 1900 to 1920. And Thomas Castillo's article on chauffeuring in Miami reveals how new technology—in this case, the automobile—made work and racial segregation problematic as the popular tourist destination quickly divided into two cities, one white and one black, at the turn of the twentieth century. Far from challenging segregation, black drivers and community leaders had to embrace the color line to secure employment across town. While to some degree they redrew the line in their favor, black deference and accommodation ironically strengthened the emerging racial order.

The remaining essays explore the role of unionization, immigration, and the state in mid-twentieth-century labor relations. Alex Lichtenstein's work on the communist organization of shipyard, citrus, and cigar workers in the 1930s and 1940s illustrates many of the difficulties in trying to cross racial, ethnic, and gender

barriers. Those lines would only further harden during World War II, according to Cindy Hahamovitch, as the federal government assisted local growers in acquiring foreign, mostly Jamaican, farmworkers. Wartime “emergency measures,” however, became a permanent part of agricultural production in the 1950s as U.S. agricultural interests increasingly relied on temporary foreign workers, who were later replaced by undocumented illegal immigrants, as a solution to the perennial need for cheap labor. Finally, Melanie Shell-Weiss suggests the same pattern emerged as northern lingerie manufacturers migrated southward to Miami, and even farther to Puerto Rico. To lower the cost of doing business, corporations sought an almost exclusively female and Latin labor force. In many respects symbolizing the growing mobility of modern manufacturing, the industry, within a few short decades, moved farther offshore to become part of an international trend toward globalization.

Taken together, these essays offer not only an excellent overview of the current literature, but an introduction to new directions in the field of labor history. As the inaugural volume of the University Press of Florida’s series on working in the Americas, *Florida’s Working-Class Past* has established a high standard for future scholarship.

DAVID TEGEDER
Santa Fe College

If It Takes All Summer: Martin Luther King, the KKK, and States’ Rights in St. Augustine, 1964. By Dan R. Warren (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008. xii, 210 pp. Foreword by Morris Dees, Acknowledgments, introduction, B/W photographs, notes, index. \$29.95, cloth)

Memoirs of the civil rights movement have enticed readers since Martin Luther King Jr. published *Stride toward Freedom* in 1958. In recent years, interest in white southerners’ various perspectives has heightened with the publication of Timothy Tyson’s *Blood Done Sign My Name* and Bob Zellner’s *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek*, to name just two. *If It Takes All Summer* contributes to this conversation by detailing author Dan Warren’s activities related to and perspectives on the racial turmoil that preceded St. Augustine’s quadricentennial celebrations in 1964.

At age thirty-six, Warren was appointed state attorney for the Seventh Judicial Circuit (composed of Volusia, Flagler, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties), an office to which he was elected in his own right in 1962 and again in 1964. He filled another role in 1964, when Governor Farris Bryant designated Warren his “personal representative” in St. Augustine, a special position made possible by a legislative act in 1955 that gave the governor added powers “to deal with racial unrest” (82). In this situation, the exclusion of black people from the committee charged with planning

the city's quadricentennial festivities, not to mention the city's general recalcitrance about desegregating its schools and other public facilities, sparked the "unrest." Demonstrations began in earnest in the summer of 1963, led by local people such as Robert Hayling, a black dentist recently discharged from the U.S. Air Force, and numerous young blacks. Elected officials tried to curb this activism by arresting demonstrators for dubious causes, while white ruffians, often affiliated with the KKK or a nearby gun club, exacerbated tensions. Violence soon followed. In the fall of 1963 alone, Klansmen severely beat Hayling and three acquaintances, and a white man was shot and killed while riding with several Klansmen through a black neighborhood.

These conflicts remained unresolved in 1964 when Hayling invited Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to target St. Augustine. Groups such as the KKK and the National States' Rights Party concurrently descended on the city. As Congress debated what soon became the Civil Rights Act of 1964, local officials perpetuated a "culture of complicity" with white supremacists, thereby preventing thoughtful compromise and progressive reforms (43). Warren entered this cauldron of disparate personalities and activities when he became the governor's personal representative on June 8.

Warren admits that, primarily, he sought to end the demonstrations. Despite there being little or no legal precedent for such an action, he reimpaneled a grand jury and coerced it to create a biracial committee to address the community's racial crises. Next, he sought to establish communication with King to determine the SCLC's objectives in St. Augustine. King, who was arrested on June 11, appeared before the grand jury, but, much to Warren's dismay, he rejected the grand jury's proposal of a thirty-day cooling-off period before the meeting of the biracial committee. By the end of June, when passage of the Civil Rights Act was imminent, King called off demonstrations and left St. Augustine. Before leaving, he urged Warren to aid local black activists who faced criminal charges or unemployment due to their participation in the recent demonstrations, and he insisted that Warren pursue the KKK more actively. Warren concludes that the Civil Rights Act, the success of a federal court case that exposed how the KKK intimidated business owners that complied with the new law, and his prosecution of local Klansmen finally brought a measure of stability to St. Augustine, although he also confesses that racial violence did not cease immediately.

Students of the civil rights movement will find several familiar themes in this volume. Warren makes numerous references to his service in World War II and how that conflict influenced black and white racial attitudes. He repeatedly criticizes the general apathy of white churches and the failure of local officials to provide adequate leadership. Warren marveled at the discipline of activists, especially children, who practiced nonviolent civil disobedience, in stark contrast to the pervasive violence that otherwise seared his memory. In these ways, Warren reiterates what historians and other observers previously documented. The historian David Colburn chronicled many of the same events in *Racial Change and Community Crisis*. Warren frequently

refers to this work as well as to personal recollections, notes, and newspaper clippings. Nevertheless, readers interested in recent Florida history and the civil rights movement will be fascinated by Warren's account. His detailed assessment of legal tensions between local, state, and federal authorities extends well beyond mere recitation.

On a deeper level, this book instructs in subtle ways. Warren heaps praise upon King, but in 1964 Warren was "disappointed and puzzled" by his response to the grand jury's recommendations (119). Readers can sense that his assessment of King likely evolved over time. Although the author was certainly more progressive-minded than many other elected officials around St. Augustine, the self-proclaimed "most powerful political officeholder" in the judicial circuit presumably could have acted much earlier to prevent the crises of 1963-64 (62). Warren, like most white southerners, initially was more concerned with peacekeeping than civil equality, a significant perspective on the civil rights movement that warrants further exploration.

BARCLAY KEY

Western Illinois University

St. Petersburg's Historic African American Neighborhoods. By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson. (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2008. 126 pp. Acknowledgments, introduction, B/W photographs, epilogue, appendices, notes, about the authors. \$19.99, paper)

In July 2002, longtime *St. Petersburg Times* reporter Jon Wilson crafted an impressive journey along St. Petersburg's Twenty-second Street South. Known as "The Deuces," this road served as the historic heart of the African American business community during much of the twentieth century. Six years later, St. Petersburg native Rosalie Peck—a retired social worker and one of the first African American students to integrate St. Petersburg Junior College in 1961—joined Wilson in coauthoring this companion study that examines the "connectivity" within and between the original African American settlements of the Sunshine City.

Peck and Wilson did so much more than compile photographs and craft captions within a sepia-tone cover. Through excellent use of oral histories, photographic archives, newspaper sources, and city directories, they painstakingly reconstructed life in Pepper Town (named for its abundant crops), Methodist Town (later known as Jamestown), and the Gas Plant district (now largely occupied by Tropicana Field) during the years when laws and customs compelled racial segregation. This concise but informative volume offers an important contribution to Tampa Bay regional history that should serve as a springboard for other studies that examine the connectivity between African Americans in St. Petersburg and those who lived elsewhere.

The authors composed a rich narrative in eight thematic chapters. The only missing element is an index. Chapters focus on topics such as educational institutions (primarily Gibbs High School), the role of the church, and how old neighborhoods changed in the years following Jim Crow. Readers unfamiliar with St. Petersburg's history will learn about notable community leaders, including Enoch Davis, Chester James, Rosa Jackson, and James Sanderlin. Younger readers will discover that simplistic geographic labels such as "South St. Pete" fail to offer an accurate portrait of Bartlett Park, Childs Park, Lakeview, and other "Midtown" communities where laws and traditions once prohibited African Americans from settling. Although patterns of residential racial segregation persist, this book reminds readers that integrated neighborhoods in St. Petersburg, Lealman, High Point, and other areas of lower Pinellas are recent phenomena.

Peck and Wilson provided an important foundation for a broader (and long overdue) study of the "connectivity" that once existed between St. Petersburg's African American communities and other segregated settlements in the Tampa Bay region. Hopefully, future scholars will build upon their work to examine interrelationships with places such as the Baskins-Dansville-Ridgecrest area south of Largo, Clearwater's "Greenwood" community, the "Brooklyn" settlement near Safety Harbor, and neighborhoods in Tarpon Springs and Dunedin. For example, no scholarship exists that compares St. Petersburg's "Little Egypt" neighborhood, in the shadow of the Gas Plant, with Brooklyn, a hardscrabble settlement on the proverbial "other side of the tracks" from Safety Harbor. Here residents in dilapidated shacks lacked access to indoor plumbing, postal service, garbage collection, and fire service into the 1970s. One must remember that, even during the throes of Jim Crow, these communities did not exist in absolute isolation.

In her epilogue, Rosalie Peck ponders what has happened to all of the fruits and vegetables in open fields so readily available to satisfy African American residents' hunger during those earlier years when sitting on a green bench along Central Avenue might lead to one's arrest. Old neighborhoods have largely disappeared, old community bonds have suffered disruption, and the "connectivity" once cherished seems entombed under the asphalt parking lots that surround Tropicana Field. The crop she misses the most are mangoes, whose disappearance is reminiscent of the vanishing of the orange groves from much of the Pinellas landscape. The quest by Peck and Wilson to remember and preserve the sweet memories of the mangoes and the lives of those who used to enjoy them will nourish present and future readers with a richer understanding of Pinellas County history. Ms. Peck passed away on 31 July 2009, before she could complete a narrative intended to honor her grandmother. Although she never finished that story, her powerful words in this book will inform future generations of the rich history she witnessed.

JAMES A. SCHNUR

University of South Florida - St. Petersburg

First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking. By Shawn C. Bean (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. x, 193 pp. Acknowledgments, introduction, B/W illustrations, photographs, film listing, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50, cloth)

The era of silent films has received little attention from scholars of Florida cinema. In 1983, Richard Alan Nelson opened the research hatch to cinema production in Florida with his two-volume study *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 1898-1980*, and other scholars, like Susan Doll and David Marrow with *Florida on Film: The Essential Guide to Sunshine State Cinema and Locations* (2007), joined the effort. With his insistence on historical context in *First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking*, Shawn Bean—twice named Writer of the Year by the Florida Magazine Association—takes audiences deeper into the topic.

A 1901 fire in Jacksonville that destroyed 2,368 buildings and left ten thousand people homeless enabled the city to recast itself, just as the 1871 fire had in Chicago and the earthquake of 1906 would do in San Francisco. Henry Klutho, a New York architect inspired first by H. H. Richardson and later by Frank Lloyd Wright, moved his practice to Jacksonville and partnered with an Atlanta architect, J. W. Golucke, to kick-start an architectural renaissance. J. W. Hawkins, Ransom Buffalo, and others followed to create a patchwork of architectural styles—Mission, Neoclassical Revival, Gothic, Romanesque, and Prairie. Filmmakers disgruntled with the inhospitable weather, short outdoor shooting season, sickness, static electricity, and tight and expensive space in the Northeast were looking to relocate.

Jacksonville had several features that proved magnetic to the burgeoning film industry: a moderate climate, 272 sunny days per year, proximity to New York, accessibility by steamship and railroad, inexpensive real estate, access to lumber, grand hotels, low labor costs, a variegated landscape ranging from ocean and beach to sawgrass and forest, a wide variety of architectural styles, receptive public officials (i.e., Jacksonville mayor J.E.T. Bowden), and a stop on burlesque, vaudeville, theater, sports, and other entertainment circuits. The Kalem Company sent the first film crew to the “Gateway City” in 1908 and built the first “location studio” (48) in 1909, predating the first West Coast studio (Nestor Co.) by three years. During its first season in Florida, Kalem produced eighteen films, including *A Florida Feud; or, Love in the Everglades* (1909) and *The Cracker’s Bride* (1909). Other studios—Biograph, Lubin, Vitagraph—followed the migration. By 1914, thirty production companies had set up shop in Jacksonville. By 1930, nearly three hundred movies had been shot in the state. The first Technicolor film, *The Gulf Between*, was made in Jacksonville in 1917. Cinema production brought big names to town—Oliver Hardy, D. W. Griffith, and Mary Pickford. The city advanced cinema aesthetically and technologically, earning the nickname “The World’s Film Capital” (91).

Bean's most significant chapter is on Richard Norman. After making money in soft drinks, "town films" (locally produced movies intended to raise interest in cinema), and comedy plays, the white producer became a pioneer in making black films and molding black culture. "My dad, of course, was a business man. But an underlined thought in his mind was the desire to do something constructive to better race relations," Richard Norman Jr. said. "Through his films he was committed to helping black players live up to their potential and show what they were capable of as performers and human beings" (117). In addition to creating black heroes, Norman also innovated the use of public appearances by the actors, decorative lobby cards, and sexual themes. He cast Bill Pickett, a rodeo cowboy and star of the Miller Brothers Wild West Show, and Anita Bush, a noted actress in black drama, in the benchmark black western *The Bull Dogger* (1922). The advent of sound in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), starring the greatest mammy singer of all time, Al Jolson, brought an end to the silent era.

The implosion of filmmaking in Jacksonville and the switch to Hollywood came as rapidly as had Jacksonville's rise. World War I caused railroads to redirect their services to the military; actors and technicians enlisted; extras were paid low wages; and the cost of living rose. Fly-by-night operations entered the industry and gave it a bad name. The public became irritated by irresponsible stunts such as pulling fire alarms in order to shoot fire engines racing through city streets, and orchestrating a car's plunge off a pier into the St. Johns River without informing observers that the incident was staged. The last straw came in a mob scene staged for *Clarion* (1916) in which extras not only busted up a saloon but also consumed the available whiskey. While the studio paid two thousand dollars for the damage, the "liquor, anger, anarchy, and annihilation scared residents" (97). The election of John Martin as mayor swept in an antifilm administration. And, finally, a ban on indoor public gatherings that was imposed as a result of the flu epidemic of 1918 delivered Jacksonville's film industry its coup de grâce.

Bean's prose can sometimes get the best of him. He employs the inventive phrase "Dixie kakistocracy" (48) to capture Kalem's view of Florida, and he uses the term "tsunami" (93) to describe World War I. There are also times when he goes off on tangents, most notably in his discussion of the first talkie made in Florida, *Hell Harbor* (1930), and of the cult science-fiction movie *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). Bean could have made a more powerful statement about blacks in popular culture, for example, by relating his discussion to other representations of race in the writings of Thomas Dixon, D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), music, and the minstrel show. Nevertheless, *The First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking* is very well written. Illustrated with striking images culled largely from the Florida Photographic Collection in Tallahassee and well researched in collections like the Black Film Center/Archive and the Richard Norman Papers at

Indiana University, the book brings together a great deal of important and interesting information. Bean received a 2009 Gold Medal in nonfiction from the Florida Book Awards for his study, and he was profiled in the magazine of the Florida Humanities Council, *Florida Forum*, which published an excerpt from the book. The acclaim is well deserved.

ROBERT E. SNYDER
University of South Florida

Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising. By Tim Hollis (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. 337 pp. Introduction, color illustrations, bibliography, credits, index. \$34.95, cloth)

To Florida residents, Sunshine State visitors, and Florida history scholars, advertising is an accepted feature of the state's past and present tourism industry. Tim Hollis explains that in previous Florida tourism advertising studies, analysis often overshadows imagery. He reverses this trend in *Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising* by encouraging readers to view this work as "the most elaborate Florida vacation scrapbook ever assembled" (3). Hollis succeeds in this effort, and the postcards, publicity photos, travel brochures, souvenir placemats, and other Florida tourism trappings, many of which are from the author's personal collection, illustrate the colorful history of the state's evolving tourism industry. Readers also learn that the advertisements and attractions highlight what promoters wanted prospective visitors to believe they would experience when choosing Florida as their vacation destination.

The monograph's subtitle describes the work as a "Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising," but Hollis also points out the transitory nature of certain tourism destinations like the Johnny Weissmuller–endorsed Tropical Wonderland, which proved unable to compete with Disney. Brochures and advertisements often imply nothing but glossy successes. The book's captions also reveal a different side to Florida, as interstate construction, larger theme parks, and other forms of development rendered some attractions, like Sanlando Springs, obsolete. Hollis briefly draws attention to another duality of Florida tourism advertising by including a sign for American Beach, the "Negro Ocean Playground" (130). An advertisement for "Paradise Park" encourages viewers to "See Florida's Silver Springs from Paradise Park for Colored People" (179). This imagery reminds readers that not everyone enjoyed equal access to Florida tourism.

After an overview and general introduction to the state's advertising in the first chapter, Hollis divides the book into regional sections that correspond with a 1966 Florida tourism guide. This guide sectioned Florida into seven different regions:

Miracle Strip, Big Bend, Florida's Crown, Grove Coast, Sun Coast, TropiCoast, and the Everglades and Paradise Islands. This structure is effective for both readers who focus on a specific region and those intrigued by the state as a whole. The chapter on the Sun Coast will be of particular interest to researchers of the Tampa Bay area. Hollis notes that the items used in the book "were, almost without exception, designed to sell the Sunshine State to nonresidents" (2), but this work will appeal to a broad audience of individuals who reside in or have ever traveled to Florida.

In keeping with his goal of telling "the story from a visual standpoint" (1), Hollis does not deeply analyze the images, but includes insightful and detailed captions that reiterate common advertising techniques. Two of the themes advertisers repeatedly used were the omnipresence of beautiful women in Florida and the superiority of Florida's weather and environment. Hollis also points out interesting facts that provide readers with more detailed background information about the images. For example, alongside a photograph of an early Florida welcome center, readers learn that Florida was the first state to introduce these centers along popular tourist routes. Some attention is given to the deceptiveness of certain advertisements, such as a postcard that depicted the Citrus Tower in Clermont as a bright orange color.

Selling the Sunshine State highlights the creativity of advertisers and artists who marketed Florida tourism in the pre-computer age. After finishing this nostalgic book, readers cannot help but feel that modern tourism advertising has lost much of the charm, cleverness, and originality that Hollis emphasizes in this collection of Florida tourism memorabilia. The author draws attention to a unique example featured on the cover of the "Official 1962 Florida State Road Department Map" (18), which shows an elaborate sand-sculpture outline of Florida with models perched on the sculpture engaging in different Florida tourism activities such as scuba diving, sunbathing, and golfing. Very little is known about many of the "anonymous geniuses" (2) who crafted images like these, but Hollis points out their significant role in developing Florida's tourism industry.

On a minor note, the captions could have been more helpful in assessing how Florida tourism evolved over time if more of them had included specific or approximate dates. Still, Hollis's book represents a major contribution to the preservation of important cultural artifacts that influenced popular perceptions about the state. Also, these unique images retain what Hollis describes as "drawing power" (2). The advertising introduced during this era of Florida tourism continues to lure millions of visitors to the state each year.

NICOLE COX
University of Florida

BOOKS IN BRIEF

A Brief Guide to Florida's Monuments and Memorials. By Roberta Sandler (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. xiv, 260 pp. Acknowledgments, introduction, B/W photographs, bibliography, index. \$21.95, paper)

Roberta Sandler provides readers with a comprehensive account of the numerous monuments and memorials spread across the state of Florida. Sandler divides the state into seven broad geographic regions, presenting an array of historic sights that beckon readers to visit. These monuments and memorials stand as a testament to Florida's diverse and enchanting past. Native Americans, conquistadores, soldiers, fishermen, politicians, athletes, and teachers are only a smattering of the various groups celebrated by these memorials.

Like Sandler's earlier work, *Guide to Florida Historical Walking Tours* (1996), her new book reads easily and is readily accessible to the general public. Sandler provides readers with brief narratives and background information, as well as photographs, for each historic sight. Even specialists in Florida history should discover new stories, events, and persons while reading this book, as many of Sandler's monuments and memorials commemorate the actions and interactions of everyday people.

Sandler's narratives will surely attract interested readers to some of Florida's most historic places, like the Castillo de San Marcos, the Gamble Plantation, or Fort Jefferson at the Dry Tortugas National Park. Readers of *Tampa Bay History* will likely find Sandler's section on "Central West Florida" of particular interest. Here she describes the monuments that honor the Greater Tampa Bay area's unique past, covering Tarpon Springs' sponge divers, José Martí, and the Ringling Brothers' Circus, among many others.

Though Sandler's book is hardly exhaustive and lacks a critical edge, it will be useful to people who wish to learn more about the commemorative obelisks, statues, murals, and parks that dot Florida's vast landscape.

KYLE BURKE
University of South Florida

Tampa on My Mind. Edited by Kimberly Williams, Gregory Thomas, Ronald Williams, and Cheryl Borman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xvi, 175pp. Foreword by Pam Iorio, introduction by Gary Mormino, B/W and color photographs. \$34.95, cloth)

The University Press of Florida's new picture book *Tampa on My Mind* offers readers a wealth of striking color photographs depicting contemporary Tampa and its environs. Most of the book's pictures are works by award-winning photographer Ronald Williams, supplemented by images from others like Sean Birdsell and Clyde Butcher. *Tampa on My Mind* includes a foreword by Tampa mayor Pam Iorio and features a useful twenty-eight-page survey of the city's history by noted Florida historian Gary R. Mormino. The book is organized in five sections, each illustrating a specific aspect of Tampa: "View from the Outside," "View from the Inside," "City of the Arts," "City by the Sea," and "City in Transition." Each section begins with a concise introduction that provides context for the selection of well-annotated photographs that follows. With its strong visual appeal, *Tampa on My Mind* provides an excellent, readily assimilated introduction to the city and its vicinity for readers new to Tampa, as well as interesting browsing for those already familiar with the area. Kimberly Williams is a history professor at Hillsborough Community College (HCC), and Cheryl Borman is a professor of English at HCC's Ybor City campus. Gregory Thomas, president of Bay Press, is a former dean of student services at HCC.

PAUL EUGEN CAMP, EMERITUS
University of South Florida

Zephyrhills from A to Z. Compiled and edited by Vicki Elkins with Margaret Seppanen (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2008. x, 285 pp. Foreword by Steve Spina, introduction by Kathleen D. Burnside, B/W photographs, city officials of Zephyrhills, 1917-2008, index. \$29.95, cloth)

Zephyrhills from A to Z provides encyclopedic coverage of the history, people, and culture of the city of Zephyrhills, Florida. The alphabetical listing allows a quick search for information and is supported by a comprehensive index. Each article ends with a list of sources that will be helpful to researchers. This well-documented work will be useful and enjoyable both for local residents and for those with a general interest in Florida history.

Zephyrhills from A to Z contains not only general facts but also the stories and recollections of residents past and present. For example, selections detail the lives

of influential citizens, the establishment of the first newspaper, and the growth of the library. The book includes the stories of several families native to the area, local businesses, and events that shaped the city's growth. Articles also highlight former landmarks, such as the water tower that had to be demolished in 1985 after more than fifty years in existence. The images placed throughout—including a 1925 receipt for an electric range from the Zephyrhills Electric Company—skillfully accent the text.

This encyclopedia will provide insightful reading as the compilers succeeded in including articles that will captivate a wide range of readers, and many will enjoy recalling past events and neighbors, and learning facts related to the area.

NAOMI WILLIAMS

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Tampa Bay: A Photographic Portrait. Photography by Robert La Follette, narrative by Karen T. Bartlett (Rockport, Mass.: Twin Lights Publishers, 2008. 128 pp. Introduction, color photographs. \$26.95, cloth)

As one might suspect from its title, this is a picture book portraying the Tampa Bay region. It depicts the beauties and wonders of the area, particularly the built environment of streets, skylines, and buildings. The city of Tampa is of course well represented, but Tampa Bay's other communities are by no means neglected. With beautiful color images by award-winning Tampa photographer Robert La Follette and interesting commentary by well-known travel writer Karen T. Bartlett, this is a coffee table book in the very best sense. If a local chamber of commerce or business wanted to convince someone that the Tampa Bay area was worth a visit, it could hardly do better than to send along a copy of this book. It provides a dynamic, multifaceted collage of the region's skylines, landmarks, attractions, and activities. La Follette's photographs are bright, sharp, and well composed. Bartlett's concise but informative accompanying descriptions admirably set the images in context. Though it includes pictures of some historic sites and structures, the book is really a pictorial survey of the contemporary scene, not a historical work.

PAUL EUGEN CAMP, EMERITUS

University of South Florida

The Tampa Bay History Center's new home is Hillsborough County government's first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certified Building. In keeping with our commitment to green initiatives, the text pages of this publication are printed on Finch Casa Opaque. Finch Casa is 30% post consumer waste recycled paper and is also fully recyclable. In addition, the cover is made from 10% post consumer recycled stock. The journal is printed with 100% soy inks, and all waste during the printing and bindery process is recycled.



NOTES

NOTES

NOTES



The Tampa Bay History Center is a community oriented cultural institution that seeks to enlighten and enhance the lives of the residents and visitors of Tampa and Hillsborough County to the more than 12,000 years of Florida history. The History Center's mission is to serve and educate the community through discovery, preservation and interpretation of the rich cultural heritage of the people of Historic Hillsborough County and the Tampa Bay region and their relation to the state of Florida and the United States.

The Florida Studies Center draws upon the University of South Florida Libraries' extensive Floridiana collections and expertise to promote interdisciplinary teaching and research and to help the Tampa Bay community develop a better understanding of Florida's past, present, and future.





Collier Florida Hotels, Inc. purchased the Floridan Hotel during the real estate bust of the late 1920s. The Floridan maintained its luxurious look and feel during the Depression and on into the 1940s, offering guests a number of amenities unmatched by most of Tampa's hotels.

Tampa Bay History
Volume 23 / 2009

Published through a partnership between the Tampa Bay History Center and the University of South Florida Libraries' Florida Studies Center

<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol23/iss1/1>