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# *Eduardo Manrara*

"The Cigar Manufacturing Prince  
of the Nation"

By TONY PIZZO

**Member of the Advisory Council to the  
Bureau of Historic Sites and Properties,  
Division of Archives, History and Records  
Management**

At 8 o'clock in the morning on May 2, 1912 a spring day in Gotham, N.Y., Eduardo Manrara, surrounded by his wife, daughter, and four sons met his final hour. The end had come to the business and financial titan of Tampa in his seventieth year. Manrara had been the real "mover and shaker" in converting Tampa from a village into a modern city.

The day after Manrara's death, The Tribune editorialized: "Tampa Loses a Friend... He was probably more than any other man responsible for Tampa's start citywide. He found it a mere hamlet, and he helped establish here an industry that gave Tampa its first solid foundation and made it industrially important. In practically all of the enterprises which took part in the commercial awakening of the city, Mr. Manrara had a leading, if not the leading, part. He became a staunch believer in Tampa from the time of his first visit, and he knew no limit in efforts for its upbuilding ... In the history of Tampa, the name of Manrara will always occupy a prominent place."

It is regrettable that sixty-two years after Manrara's death, his memory is but an echo - nothing more tangible. Nevertheless, Manrara passed this way, and because he did, and because of his contribution to our community, we are deeply indebted to him. In later years his contemporaries referred to



Eduardo Manrara, the protege of Vicente Martinez Ybor. The young man from Puerto Principe, Cuba, became an industrial and financial leader of pioneer Tampa.



The first "horseless carriage" was brought to Tampa by Manrara in 1901. The above scene is at the intersection of Franklin and Zack.

Manrara as "the man forgotten by history." It is hoped that his memory will be resurrected from the abyss of time, and his name placed on its deserving pedestal among the great men of Tampa.

### **Joins V. M. Ybor**

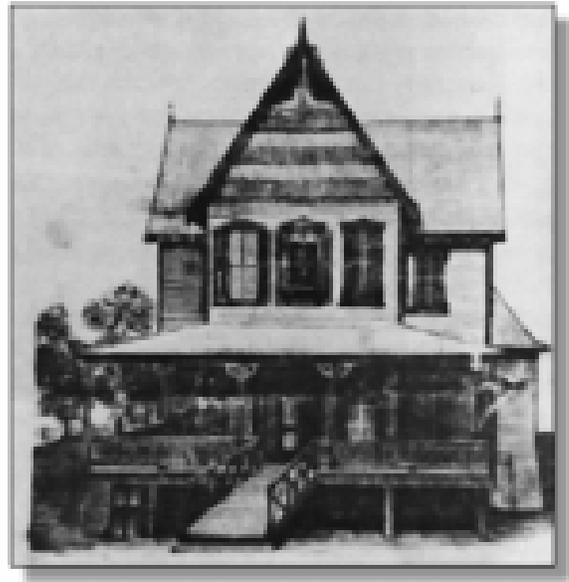
Eduardo Manrara was born in Puerto Principe, Cuba, in 1842. After studying in local schools, he became a clerk in a banking house. This experience would in later years hold him in good stead. Vincente Martinez Ybor, the tobacco tycoon of the time, became acquainted with the much younger Manrara in Havana, and immediately recognized his exceptional talents in finance and commerce, as well as his rapport with people. The acquaintance led to a life-time partnership in business between the two men.

Because of the political upheaval caused by the start of the Ten Year War in 1869, and Ybor's life being in constant danger for his sympathetic views in the cause of Cuban freedom, Ybor was prompted to move his Principe de Gales factory to Key West, Florida.

Ybor was so pleased with the thirty year old Manrara, that in 1872, he took him in as a member of the firm. At the same time he took in his son, Edward R. M. Ybor, as an



Manrara's Ybor City home after remodeling. It was located at the rear of El Bien Publico Clinic on Ninth Avenue. It was razed by Urban Renewal in the 1960's.  
(Photo by the author)



The Ybor City Land and Improvement Co.'s first office building. This attractive, gingerbread frame edifice was constructed in 1887, on the Southeast corner of 14th Street and 9th Avenue. The A. A. Gonzalez Clinic and Hospital now is located on the site. Notice entrance to cellar at left. (This old print is from the author's private collection.)

associate. Ybor and Manrara were the perfect business combination. Their most famous brand was El Principe De Gales, which had world-wide fame, and other superfine labels were Flor de Madrid, La Perla, and El Triunfo. Since the move to Key West, Ybor was followed by other cigar manufacturers.

By the middle of the 1870's Key West had become a leading Havana cigar manufacturing center in the nation, and the largest community in Florida, with a population of eighteen thousand.

By 1885, the labor and political agitators were causing continual disturbances among the cigar-makers, threatening the production of cigars. The situation reached such serious proportions, that Ybor began to consider moving his factory elsewhere. Ignacio Haya, who owned a factory in New York, happened to be visiting Ybor at the time, and was considering moving his factory to a



THE MANRARA BUILDING - The brick building above was the second home of the Ybor City Land and Improvement Co. Notice the sign on the veranda. In 1925, Dr. Jose Ramon Avellanal converted the building into El Bien Publico Clinic. In 1939, Dr. A. A. Gonzalez purchased the clinic, and at a cost of \$75,000, remodelled the building into a 45-bed clinic and hospital.

more suitable climate. Eduardo Manrara, who hated to make boat trips from New York to Key West, had just arrived in Key West after travelling, for the first time, by rail via Tampa. While waiting in Tampa to embark for Key West, Manrara had noted Tampa as an ideal location for making cigars. At this point, Gavino Guterrez, a good friend of both Ybor and Haya, appeared on the scene. Guterrez had just visited the village of Tampa to examine the feasibility of processing jellies and guava paste there. Guterrez came away highly impressed with the future potential of the area. Consequently, Ybor, Haya and Manrara talked with Guterrez about the little town of Tampa. Guterrez enthusiastically pointed out that Tampa had an ideal climate, with the proper, and necessary humidity for the manufacturing of cigars, that Tampa now had rail connections with northern markets, and was only a day away from Cuba, the source of tobacco and working hands. His reasoning impressed Ybor, and Haya, and they and Guterrez came to Tampa to look into the possibilities of establishing a cigar city.

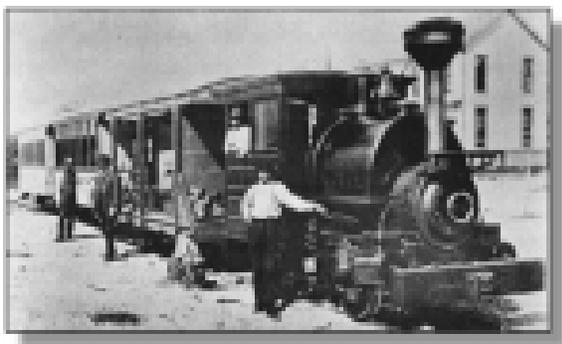
### "Sleepy Little Tampa"

After proposals and counter proposals between the Tampa Board of Trade and Ybor, a tract of land that "was nothing but a series of alligator holes, a little high ground, and dense growth of pine, oak, palmetto and underbrush" was purchased from John T. Lesley, the land baron of Hillsborough County, for five thousand dollars. Ignacio Haya and his partner, Serafin Sanchez, Sr., made ready to move from New York. Ybor returned to Key West to prepare to move his Principe de Gales from the Island.

Eduardo Manrara, young, and very energetic, came to Tampa and immediately set plans in motion for the development of the greatest clear Havana manufacturing center on American soil. Gavio Gutierrez, who was a civil engineer, was retained to survey the land, and plat the town. Later The Tribune commented, "Little thought the inhabitants of sleepy little Tampa of the deep meaning conveyed by the arrival of Eduardo Manrara in 1885. This was the most momentous event in the history of that time." The coming of Manrara, continued The Tribune, "made it possible to call Tampa, the Havana of the United States, and 'made it great.'"



This board and batten house was one of the first residences constructed for cigar workers by the Ybor City Land and Improvement Co. It was located on the north side of Seventh Avenue near Thirteenth Street. It was demolished in the late Thirties. Notice "FOR SALE" sign in the lower righthand corner.

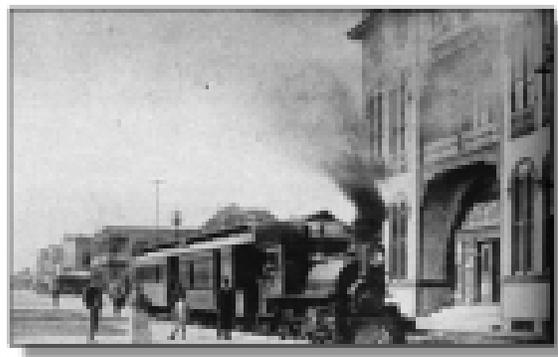


The Tampa Street Railway Co., established by Ybor and Manrara in 1886, was the first common carrier in the history of Tampa. The passenger cars were built in Tampa by C. E. Purcell. The line connected the little hamlets of Tampa and Ybor City. Eduardo Manrara is shown standing in business-suit, and derby. Tam pans referred to the railroad as "the dummy line," and Yborcitenos called it "el tren urbano." The first accident victim, and there were many, of the mini-train was a highly prized bird-dog owned by E. P. Gibson.

Negotiations for bringing other factories were at once commenced. This project soon began to show such wonderful development, that on October 10, 1886, Manrara spearheaded the formation of the Ybor City Land and Improvement Company. The officers of this corporation were Vicente Martinez Ybor, President; Eduardo Manrara, Vice President; George T. Chamberlain, Secretary and Treasurer. Peter O. Knight, the twenty-one year old legal prodigy was retained as attorney for the firm.

### **Builds El Pasaje**

The Ybor City Land and Improvement, Company, to encourage factories to move to Ybor City, donated land, a large three story cigar factory building, and a fine residence for the firm manager, to the following cigar manufacturing companies: Lozano, Pendas & Co.; Trujillo and Benemelis; Gonzales, Mora & Co.; Arguelles, Lopez & Bro.; Jose M. Diaz & Bro.; and Creagh, Gudnecht & Co. These factories were built in modern



A scene in 1892, of sandy Seventh Avenue, looking west from Sixteenth Street. The unique Moorish type frame building was the first club-house of El Centro Espanol. The rail-line had just received its new Philadelphia factory-built coaches, replacing the "homemade" cars shown in the earlier photograph.

style and fitted with elevators, fine tile bath-rooms and brick cellars.

During the first year of the development of the settlement, the Ybor City Land and Improvement Company built a building for its offices on the site of the A. A. Gonzalez Clinic, a bank building, a hotel, the Cherokee Club, now called El Pasaje, and one hundred and sixty-seven cottages for cigar workers. These homes were rented or sold on the installment plan. This was the beginning of the home- credit-plan, and the first development of an instant town in the history of Florida. Ybor City emerged as a separate settlement boasting a system of water-works, fire department, police department, sanitary department, and street cars. More than half a million dollars had been spent by the Ybor City Land and Improvement Company to develop Ybor City. The success of Ybor City changed Tampa, from a predominantly agrarian, small port town , to an industrial center.

"The Ybor City Land and Improvement Company", wrote the Tribune, "had been the greatest vital power that has aided in the



The Principe de Gales (The Prince of Wales) cigar box label as redesigned in 1899 by the Ybor-Manrara Co. shown above is the first tin-cigar-box used in Tampa history. (Author's collection)

advancement of this section of the state, and more especially in the growth and prosperity of Tampa."

During the fabulous eighties, Tampa got its first street railway. This transportation system was financed by the immense funds of Vicente Martinez Ybor and Eduardo Manrara. The company was called the Tampa Street Railway. The line commenced operations in 1886, with C. E. Purcell as general manager. It connected Ybor City, running through a scrub area, to Tampa proper. The line was three and one-half miles long; three feet three inches gauge, and owned eight small cars and three wood-burning steam engines. The fare was five cents and it ran 4t on a once in a while" basis. Side tracks were run to the doors of every factory in Ybor City, and cigars and tobacco were hauled to and from the railroad depots and steamship wharfs. After the railway started operations, the Tampa Tribune. gloated; "Tampa can now take its place among the most progressive cities of America."

### **Annexed In 1887**

Ybor City was annexed into the City of Tampa in 1887, and was designated, for political purposes only, as the Fourth Ward. In 1894, Manrara organized the Ybor City Building and Loan Association as an adjunct to the Ybor City Land and Improvement Company to provide cigar workers an opportunity of obtaining homes and becoming property owners. The association met with remarkable success. The funds extended by the Association, contributed greatly in the beautifying of Ybor City with fine cottages, handsome residences, business buildings, and halls, and quarters for fraternal and benevolent societies. The Ybor City Building and Loan Association was headed by Emilo Pons as President. He had served for a long time as the superintendent of the Ybor-Manrara Co.

The Exchange National Bank of Tampa was organized in 1894, with a capital of one hundred thousand dollars. One of the men to govern its destinies was Eduardo Manrara, who served as president for several years. A branch bank was established in Ybor City, a few years later. The Tribune referred to Manrara, the president of the Exchange National Bank, as "the largest manufacturer of clear Havana cigars in the world, and a man of great enterprise, and integrity."

After the death of Edward R. M. Ybor, a son of Vicente Martinez Ybor, the cigar company became known as V. M. Ybor and Manrara. When the elder Ybor died in 1896, Manrara became the sole proprietor of the factory and continued investing and improving land and property in Ybor City.

### **Heads Tampa Gas Co.**

The Tampa Gas Company was organized in 1896, with Manrara being the heaviest investor, and its first president. This. firm which furnished gas for illuminating, fuel

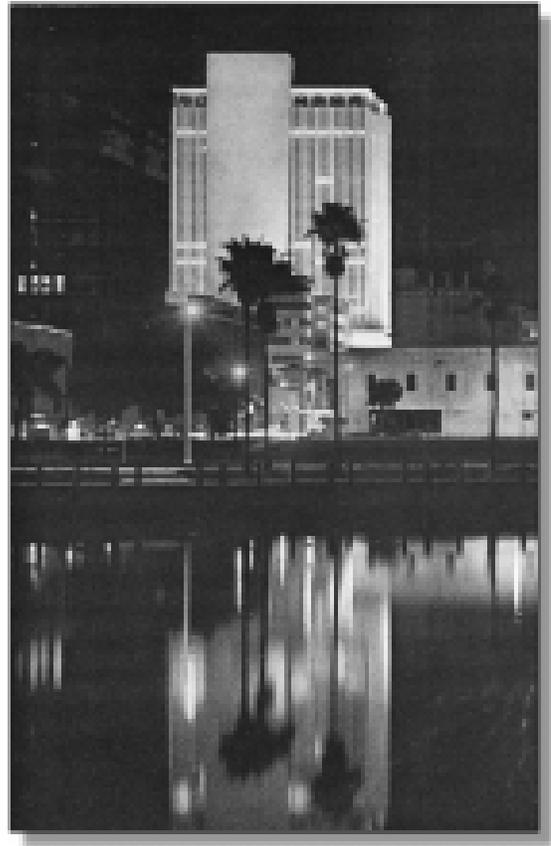
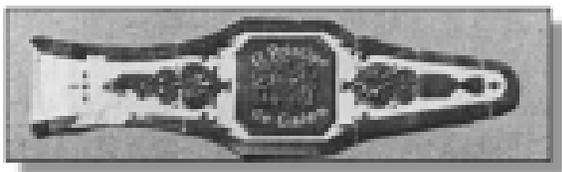
and power purposes started out with a plant and equipment unexcelled in the South. The street lights flickering with bluish flame, Tampans began to enjoy the most popular and cheapest source of illumination in America at that time. Again Tampa moved ahead because of Manrara, this time into the gas-light era.

Manrara's tobacco earned fortune was wisely invested in a variety of enterprises of immense benefit to Tampa. His keen foresight, energy, and perserverance, kept the community constantly developing and up-grading the quality of life. In 1896, Manrara organized the Florida Brewing Company. Its officers were Eduardo Manrara, President; E. W. Codington, Vice President; Hugo Schwab, Secretary and Treasurer (son in-law of Vicente Martinez Ybor); A. C. Moore, General Manager. The company had a capital stock of two hundred thousand dollars.

The brewery building was one of the finest in America, and the first in Florida. It's design was based on the plans of the Castle Brewery in Johannesburg, South Africa. Today, as incongruous as it may seem, the brewery, located on Fifth Avenue and Thirteenth Street, serves as a leaf tobacco warehouse.



El Principe de Gales was famous throughout the world. The mark is now owned by the American Tobacco Co. Shown above is a typical "Vitola" of the 1890's, and below a close-up of the cigar band.



The Exchange National Bank was organized March 26, 1894. Eduardo Manrara was elected president a few months later and served until 1903. Today, the Exchange National Bank is one of the great financial institutions of the Southeast.

The company marketed the following brands: Florida Special, Export and Bohemia. The brewery became an immediate success with large sales in Florida, Georgia, and selling more beer in Cuba than any brewery in America. With the advent of prohibition, the brewery converted to the production of "near beer."

### First "Horseless Carriage"

In 1899, the Havana-American Company, a consolidation of cigar factories in Tampa, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Key West, was organized with a capital of ten million dollars. Eduardo Manrara was elected Vice President and General Agent of

the corporation. This gigantic organization was intended to eventually consolidate nearly all of the clear Havana cigar factories in the United States. In 1901, the Duke Tobacco Trust, worth more than a half billion dollars, made an active entry into the cigar business, and the Havana-American Co. was sold to the American Cigar Company.

Throughout the years, Manrara's business activities kept him travelling between Tampa, Havana, and New York. He kept a home in each of the cities. In Tampa, he lived on Ninth Avenue between the 14th and 15th Street on the south-side, near the center of the block. Mrs. Manrara preferred to live in New York, and when she was not in Tampa, Manrara made the Cherokee Club his headquarters.

Manrara has the distinction of bringing the first "horseless carriage" to Tampa in 1901. Whenever Manrara drove his car down the streets of Ybor City, the excitement of the people bordered on pandemonium with shouts, "the devil wagon!, the devil wagon!" The populace could not understand why a man of such serious conduct could become involved with such a ridiculous contraption. With his usual foresight, the man who brought the first "devil-wagon" to Tampa, knew that the automobile was here to stay!

Manrara lived during "the time of the titans." This was the period at the close of the century when business buccaneering spawned by the post Civil War years was being replaced by the ascendance of responsible business leaders who believed that business and industry had larger purposes than accumulating wealth. Eduardo Manrara belonged to this breed of men, and Tampa today is better because of him.

# *About the Author*

## **ANTHONY P. PIZZO**

Anthony P. Pizzo was born and raised in Ybor City, the colorful Latin Quarter of Tampa.

Love of history and heritage has kept Tony constantly involved in such matters as research, article writing and historic embellishment projects around the city. He is largely responsible for the placement of 30 historical markers around the Tampa area.

His Latin background and associates plus his meticulous attention to detail and ability to dig up intriguing new facts and situations qualify him richly for his favorite subject - early Tampa.

His contributions to this city have not gone unnoticed or unrecognized. He was appointed first chairman of Ybor City Redevelopment Commission and in 1956 was named Tampa's Outstanding Citizen. In addition he was the first president of the Ybor City Rotary Club, he was one of the organizers of the Pan-American Commission, the fore-runner of the World Trade Council of Tampa. Also helped organize and served as first president of the Tampa Historical Society.

Served for three years, 1972-75, on the board of directors of the Florida Historical Society and is presently serving on the following: The Advisory Council to the Bureau of Historic Sites and Properties', Division of Archives History and Records Management of the State Department of Florida; Chairman of the Hills borough County Historical Commission; the Barrio Latino Commission; Board of Tampa



**Anthony Pizzo**

General Hospital Foundation; Board of Hillsborough County Humane Society; Board of Davis Island Civic Association; Bi-Centennial Commission; and Board of Hillsborough County Museum Committee.

In 1952, the Cuban Government awarded him, La Cruz de Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, the highest honor paid by that government, for his efforts in creating Marti Park on the historic site of 8th Avenue and 13th Street.

In 1973 Ton was resented with the Medal of the Order of Merit by the Italian Republic for his civic contributions reflecting on the rich culture and heritage of the Tampa Italians.

In 1974, the American Association for State and Local History presented Tony with the The National Award of Merit for, "the many years of service and major contributions to an appreciation of the history of Florida and the Tampa area. " The award was presented during the yearly convention of the Florida Historical Society at the University of Florida.

Tony is the author of "Tampa Town"., and is a graduate of Stetson University, who has also honored him. He and his wife Josephine have two sons, Paul and Tony, and reside on Davis Islands. They are members of the University Club, Palma Ceia Golf and Country Club, and the Tampa Yacht and Country Club.

Tony is listed in "Who's Who in the South and Southeast" "Men of Achievement" and "Community Leaders and Noteworthy Americans. "