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Hugh MacFarlane: West Tampa Pioneer

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The last quarter of the nineteenth century was one of the most dramatic times of change in American History; when the 1890 census declared the frontier was officially closed, the nation was the world's largest industrial giant. Immigrants arrived by the hundreds of thousands annually, filling cities and farmlands in the North, East and West. The South, still suffering from the ravages of the Civil War and Reconstruction, was predominantly agrarian, but historians have given little attention to the industrial development which emerged in the South. It has been only in the last decade that historical researchers have seriously studied southern economic development, and an area of surprising interest has been Florida's tobacco industry and its entrepreneurs.

By 1900, cigar production lead all other Florida industries in the number of laborers employed, salaries paid to workers, and state revenue collected. When the 1868 Cuban Civil War erupted, several major cigar manufacturers fled to Key West and New York, and later, to Jacksonville, Pensacola, Marti City (Ocala) and the Tampa Bay area. While Don Vicente Martinez Ybor and his business friend Ignacio Haya initiated Tampa’s cigar center, Ybor City, another lesser known but nonetheless significant individual who furthered Tampa’s economic growth was Colonel Hugh Macfarlane.

A Success Story

Macfarlane’s life was a success story; his departure from Scotland to his settlement and pioneer efforts in the Tampa Bay area, signified the immigrant whose dream for success in America became a reality as well as an invaluable benefit to his city, state, and
newly adopted nation. Hugh Campbell Macfarlane was born in Pollock Shaws, Renefewshire, Scotland, December 28, 1851. At the age of fourteen, his parents migrated to the United States, arriving first at Fall River, Massachusetts. They soon resettled about 100 miles north of St. Paul, Minnesota, where Hugh attended St. John’s College. He then moved, alone, to Boston, where he was employed as a newspaper reporter before enrolling full time as a law student at Boston University. Upon graduation, he was admitted to the Massachusetts bar, and opened law offices in Fall River. Soon after opening practice, Macfarlane married a girl known only as "Miss Brown" by family members. The marriage was a short one; after giving birth to a son, James, the couple were divorced, and Hugh decided to begin a new life by moving to New Orleans. It was in the sunny Southern city that Macfarlane first heard about Tampa, a tiny coastal village along Florida’s west coast. Stories of the village evidently intrigued him, since he decided to move to the sleepy Gulf Coast settlement in 1884, when he was thirty three years of age.

Macfarlane arrived at a crucial time to Tampa’s history; it was on the verge of transforming into a major southern port with the arrival of the cigar manufacturers Ybor, Haya and other leading producers of fine quality cigars. Macfarlane quickly blended into the local political activities, joining prominent Tampans in organizing the Tampa Board of Trade, May 7, 1885. Unquestionably, the Board’s most important accomplishment was its inducements to lure cigar manufacturers to Tampa. As a member of the Board of Trade, Macfarlane heard the
requests for information concerning Tampa's climate, transportation facilities and local support to their industries. His legal advice and assistance made him a well respected member to Tampa's "Old Guard" families on the Board.

**Appointed Attorney**

The energetic Macfarlane wasted little time in his new hometown. By 1887, he was appointed Tampa's city attorney for a three year term. In 1890, his legal abilities were honored when Governor Henry Laurens Mitchell appointed him as the state's attorney for the sixth judicial circuit, a great honor to be bestowed upon a Florida newcomer. With his career as a successful attorney assured, Macfarlane diversified his involvements in Tampa by investing in real estate and the cigar industry.

While serving as city attorney, Macfarlane witnessed the tremendous growth and incredibly rapid transformation of Tampa into a world renowned cigar center. The recently completed Plant railroad gave Tampa markets access to the nation; expansion of shipping interests, and the phenomenal expansion of Ybor City's immigrant population convinced him to capitalize on real estate investments and cigar making. He purchased two hundred acres of land which was nothing more than a combination of marsh and wilderness in the late 1880's. Located on the west bank of the Hillsborough River, the acreage was quickly transformed into West Tampa, the area's second industrial community. After surveying
the land, it was divided into realty subdivisions. Macfarlane and associates then constructed an iron drawbridge in 1892 over the Hillsborough River. Known as the Fortune Street Bridge, and constructed at the cost of $30,000, it was the lifeline of prosperity for the new community. He next financially assisted the Consumers Power and Light Company to implement the construction of a streetcar line. With subdivided land and access to Tampa, Macfarlane was prepared to compete with the rival Ybor City. He devised a plan to make West Tampa more appealing through the offer of free factories to manufacturers wishing to settle in his community. (Ybor offered only ten-year free leases to manufacturers who delayed payment on their factories.) Leases were given to manufacturers, provided they agreed to bring specific numbers of workers with them who would either rent, lease, or purchase their homes from Macfarlane.

**West Tampa Booms**

The young businessman also took advantage of labor unrest between Cuban laborers and Spanish factory owners in Key West. Because of its proximity to Cuba, Key West was a hotbed of rumors concerning atrocities against
native Cubans by Spanish authorities. Key West Cubans reacted by striking or protesting in Spanish owned factories. Capitalizing on the strife, Macfarlane and several businessmen arrived as a delegation to the island city, offering a new location for a cigar center, free from the dissension of Key West. As a consequence, West Tampa boomed. By 1895, more than 2,000 persons, mostly Cubans, resided in West Tampa. It was incorporated as a city that same year, avoiding incorporation into the Anglo controlled Tampa until 1924. West Tampa was a community dominated by Cubans; its first mayor was Fernando Figueredo (who was later the treasurer for the island of Cuba.) Howard Avenue (named after Macfarlane’s second son) was a thriving street, with Cuban shops, social clubs and cigar homes surrounding it. There was another surge of prosperity in 1899, when ten leading clever Havana manufacturers from Havana located in West Tampa, bolstering its economic development, population, and stature as a cigar center.

Macfarlane Park

After West Tampa’s success, Macfarlane devoted his time between real estate interests and law practice, serving as the top criminal lawyer of the state. He always maintained a personal interest in the laborers and citizens of West Tampa, giving generously, often without publicity, to both individuals and organizations. In 1908, he contributed forty acres of drained land for the formation of Macfarlane Park. In 1912, he diligently assisted to receive assistance from his fellow Scottish immigrants’ foundation for the construction of two Andrew Carnegie libraries, one in Tampa, the other in West Tampa. His community participation included membership in several fraternal orders: the West Tampa Board of Public Works, Port Commissioners, and a life member of the Rocky Point Golf Club. In addition, he main-
tained membership in local, state and national bar associations.

Soon after his arrival to Tampa, Hugh Macfarlane married Frances I. Pettingrill. They had two children: Howard P. and Mary E. (Hoyt). His son from his first marriage, James, occasionally visited Florida, but maintained his residence in Fall River, Massachusetts.

Enriched His Community

The family grew and prospered together in Tampa, becoming important in both economic and social circles. Hugh maintained his prosperous legal career throughout his lifetime and was noted as a gifted orator, "whose appearance in the courtroom brought an aura of respect from all present." Mr. "West Tampa" remained active in law until his death at his residence January 7, 1935. His obituary fondly described him as having the "canniness of a Scot, the resourcefulness of an American, and the genuine wit and wisdom of a Florida Cracker." Indeed, his life as a Florida Pioneer enriched not only his local community but also his state and nation.