1980

Those Hell-Raisin' Tampa Newspapers

Hampton Dunn

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune/vol6/iss1/6

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sunland Tribune by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Traditionally, throughout the more than 125 years of journalism in Tampa, the local newspapers have been a hard-hitting, aggressive, highly-competitive, hell-raising adversary press.

Because of this leadership, much of it highly inspiring, the city has developed soundly from a tiny fishing village to a flourishing, teeming metropolis thriving on a solid base of commerce and industry and tourism.

Newspapering in Tampa began quietly in the ante-bellum days preceding the Civil War. Two men, M. Whit Smith and the Rev. Cooley Sumner Reynolds in 1853 began planning the establishment of a newspaper here.¹ The town was enjoying a little boom at the time, so publication was delayed by difficulty in finding office space in fast-growing Tampa.² Finally, in late December the enterprising publishers brought in a small flat-bed press and several fonts of type.
On Jan. 10, 1854, the first issue of the *Tampa Herald* appeared. Smith and Reynolds had ventured this way from around Lake City in Columbia County, Florida. Little is known of Smith, who sold his interest in the *Herald* in November, 1854, to Dr. J. S. Jones, also of Columbia County.

The Reverend Mr. Reynolds was born in Belfast, N.Y., in 1830, attended college and was an ordained Baptist minister. He came to Florida for his health in 1845, the year the peninsula was admitted to statehood. Reynolds must have shed his interest about the time Smith did. From here he had newspaper ventures in Palatka and Key West and in 1857 was in Ocala publishing the *Florida Home Companion*, a literary magazine.

**Twin Careers**

Hampton Dunn, for 10 years managing editor of The Tampa Daily Times, is shown answering questions following his lecture on "Those Hell-Raisin' Tampa Newspapers" at Hillsborough Community College on May 28, 1980. The talk was one in 6 series sponsored by the Tampa Historical Society, of which Dunn is a founder and past president. The bronze nameplate shown behind the speaker was mounted at the entrance of The Times' building at Franklin and Washington Streets for many years and was recently rescued from oblivion by Dunn.

- Photo by NELSON MEDINA
Throughout his life, Cooley Reynolds, a member of the well-known Brandon family, was torn between two callings, his clerical duties first and foremost, and as a writer and publisher, second. After the Civil War, Reynolds turned up in Clearwater and there in 1873 he established the city’s first newspaper, the *Clear Water Times.* The preacher publisher founded the Midway Baptist Church, now the Calvary Baptist Church, in 1866. Reynolds, who had come to the state as a very sick man, died in 1901 at the age of 71 years.

Also involved in the publishing of Tampa’s first newspaper, the *Herald,* was Henry A. Crane. The newsman left Tampa and joined the Union forces in Key West during the Civil War, while his son, Judge H. L. Crane, served as a Confederate soldier through the conflict.

When Jones took over the *Tampa Herald* he changed its name to the *Florida Peninsular* and in August, 1855, sold it to Simon Turman, Jr., saying in the editorial column that he was forced to sell because "it did not pay sufficient to support my family." Three years later William J. Spencer bought an interest in the paper.

### The Indian Terrors

In the 1850’s, the Third Seminole War, also known as "Billy Bowlegs War", raged in the central part of Florida. Editors of the *Peninsular* were alert to the terrors of the day and complained about the lack of support from the Federal government. An editorial in 1855 commented on the aroused state of the settlers at the time:

The Indians have violated every treaty and now occupy no middle ground - they are in an open state of hostility and hurl defiance into our very teeth.

It is high time the United States Government, which is the boast of every American, a government which has the fear and respect of all civilized nations, should assert her supremacy in her own Territory, and teach these marauding outlaws that their repeated outrages have rendered forbearance no longer a virtue, and administer rebuke so richly merited that will rid Florida of this non-amalgamating and dangerous population, and enable her to stand out renewed, invigorated and regenerated to compete with her sister states.
Advertisements in the pioneer newspapers were as interesting as the news column. Here’s one from the Florida Peninsular in August, 1856:

"Notice. -The undersigned has several Negroes, washerwomen, cooks, nurses and field hands, for hire or sale. Any person desirous of hiring or purchasing can obtain any information by applying at this office or to the undersigned on the west side of the Hillsborough River opposite Tampa. D. J. Thomas."9

Mr. McKay pointed out in his Pioneer Florida volume the difficulties and discomforts of travel into and out of Tampa, as reflected in an ad in the Peninsular in 1856:

"Safe travelling assured - U.S. Mail, Palatka to Tampa, via Orange Springs, Ocala, Augusta, Pierceville, etc., by stage. Leave Palatka and Tampa on Mondays and Thursdays; arrive in Tampa and Palatka on Wednesdays and Saturdays. A good and efficient guard has been furnished by the state for the protection of the mails and passengers from Tampa as far as is needed, and stands are provided at convenient places, so that the public can rely on being carried through with comparative comfort and safety. H. L. Hart, proprietor."10

The newspapers of the early days often published poetry. Here was an offering in the...
Peninsular from a rhymester who took a fling at the fashions of the day:

"Youngster, spare that girl!
Kiss not those lips so meek,
Unruffled let the fair locks curl
Upon the maiden’s cheek
Believe her quite a saint
Her looks are all divine.
Her rosy hue is paint,
Her form is crinoline.11

In 1858, the Florida Peninsular busily reported the calamity of the yellow fever scourge which hit the city. There were 275 cases reported in Tampa alone and 30 died. The newspaper reported: "Our city is almost depopulated and presents more the appearance of a church yard than a thriving business place.12

A New Newspaper

One editor of the Peninsular under publisher Spencer was Alfonso DeLaunay, who left in early 1860 and was succeeded by Simon Turman, Jr.

DeLaunay immediately started to seek backing for a new paper which he got from his brother, St. John DeLaunay, and O. C. Drew, who became the publishers of the Sunny South which hit the streets on Jan. 29, 1861.13

In the prelude to the Civil War, the Tampa newspapers practiced jingoism, stirring up the Southerners against events nationally.

On the election of Abraham Lincoln as President, William J. Spencer editorialized in the Florida Peninsular.

"The election of Abraham Lincoln as president . . . is beyond per-adventure. Will you submit to a black Republican administration?

Will you become pensioners of Black Republicanism for the right to hold and protect your property? Will you sacrifice your honor and sell your birthright for a mess of pottage?"14

Turman was a native of Ohio but he was just as fiery a rebel as was DeLauney, a native Virginian. In a December, 1860, issue of the Peninsular, Turman told of Tampa women appearing at a states’ rights meeting with blue cockades in their hats, "a token" he said, "of resistance to abolition rule-an appropriate, graceful little emblem that evinces the true spirit of the wearers.15

War is Inevitable

And then on March 16, 1861, after Lincoln’s inaugural, Turman wrote:

"War is inevitable. Mr. Lincoln’s inaugural address cannot be regarded but as a declaration of war. It is so received and welcomed by all portions of the South. Southern patriots should not rejoice at the prospect - nor should they shrink from the maintenance of their rights in consequence of its awful prospect. If we are not prepared now to
establish and maintain our freedom, time will not gain us strength; and if through a lack of patriotism we miss the goal of Southern independence, the sooner we submit to the condition of serfdom the less galling will be our chains. If war must follow secession, the sooner it is inaugurated the better for the South. When the first blow is struck, the border states will take position with their Sisters who have abandoned the Old Union and then will the Confederate States of America be impregnable. Lincoln may back down from his position but we have no idea such will be the case until he has smelled Southern powder.  

Because of the war, the Florida Peninsular was forced to suspend publication on May 25, 1861. Publisher Spence enlisted in the Confederate army and became a private in Company F, 1st Florida Cavalry. While serving in Kentucky, he was stricken with typhoid fever and died in Frankfort on Oct. 27, 1862, at the age of 23.  

**Resumes Publication**

During the war the press and type of newspaper were taken into the country so the Yankees could not find them. When the war ended, the equipment was brought back to Tampa and publication was resumed on April 28, 1866 by William Spencer’s two brothers, John Edward and Thomas K. A couple months later, John Spencer became ill. He had contracted dysentery while serving in the 4th Regiment, Florida Volunteers. He died June 30, 1866.  

Thomas Spencer carried on the paper, which was Democratic. In 1868, it got a Republican competitor, The True Southerner, claiming to be the "official" paper of the Sixth Judicial Circuit. This was in the Carpetbagger days. The newspaper was short-lived, however. It had little support from the populace and no advertising and after the November elections, died a sudden death.

Whereupon, the Republicans still wanted a newspaper mouthpiece in Tampa for the next national election, in 1872, and so they purchased a controlling interest in the Peninsular. The Democratic editor retired and the new editor, G. R. Mobley, announced that the paper would become Republican. This change of complexion of the newspaper
proved fatal, and the newspaper soon collapsed.  

'A Black Republican'

Meanwhile, during the Reconstruction period, there had risen to prominence in the community one James T. Magbee. A native Georgian, he had served in the Confederate army during the war, but after the fighting he became, for reasons unknown, a "black Republican", a "11 scalawag", a Southern turncoat who joined the northern oppressors. Governor Harrison Reed, a Republican, appointed Magbee to be Judge of the Sixth Circuit which covered the West Coast from Brooksville to Key West.
Grismer relates an incident which showed that Magbee had few friends among the Democrats in town:

“... And when he (Magbee) fell dead drunk in the sandy street at Franklin and Washington, on Nov. 16, 1871, a group of townsmen poured molasses and corn over him. The delectable mixture was soon discovered by roaming hogs. They rooted him around until they ripped off nearly all his clothes. Hours later, the judge sobered enough to get up and go home. He suspected James E. Lipscomb of having planned the outrage and charged him with contempt. On the hearing day, Lipscomb went to court armed with a shotgun. He pointed it at the judge and pulled the trigger. But just then E. A. Clarke struck the

THE TIMES BUILDING WAS LANDMARK NOW GONE

The home of The Tampa Daily Times and Radio Station WDAE was all decked out for Gasparilla when this photo was taken, probably, in the 1950s. The structure at Franklin and Washington Streets was the first brick building in Tampa. Originally it was First National Bank. In recent years, after The Times sold to The Tribune in 1958, the building was occupied by the Merchants’ Association of Tampa. But now it is gone - razed in 1980 to make way for the Tampa Center Project.

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION
barrel and the load of buckshot went into the ceiling. Although he escaped, Magbee was so frightened that he dismissed the case.21

Under threat of impeachment, Magbee resigned his post in 1874, after serving six years. He then launched into the newspaper publishing business. He called his the *Tampa Guardian*. The masthead proclaimed it would be "Independent in Everything, Neutral in Nothing." Magbee continued publishing it until his death on Dec. 12, 1885.22 H. J. Cooper and C. H. Baxter carried on the paper until Dec. 8, 1886, when Cooper announced the publication would cease. One employee of Magbee was D. B. McKay, later to become a legend in Tampa journalism, who started as an apprentice in the printing business on the *Guardian*. "To me," McKay was to write years later, "the old fellow (Magbee) was always kindly and generous."23

'Stolen' Election

The Democrats of the county were without a journalistic voice for a couple of years and in 1876 a significant election was coming up. Support was forthcoming to finance Thomas K. Spencer in a new paper. Thus, on March 2, 1876, appeared a new weekly called the *Sunland Tribune*. A Tampa physician with a flair for journalism, Dr. John P. Wall, was editor.24 Dr. Wall was a member of a pioneer Florida family and was a versatile man of many talents.

Editor Wall filled the new newspaper with editorials lauding the Democratic Presidential hopeful, Samuel J. Tilden, and forecast the nation would be ruined if Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republican, were elected. Editor Magbee over on the *Guardian* was supporting Hayes. It was the 1876 election where the Democrats returned to power in Florida, while at the same time the state went for Hayes in a hotly disputed election in which election fraud charges were plentiful. It's been said Florida was one of the three Southern states where the election was "stolen" for Hayes.

Dr. Wall carried on editorial battles with other editors around the state. He so infuriated Col. Frank Harris, editor and owner of the *Ocala Banner*, that the colonel challenged him to fight a duel. The challenge was accepted, but Dr. Wall stated that under the code, as the challenged party, he had the right to name the place and weapons for the encounter. He named Mrs. Bunch's Cowpens, near the
WHEN NEWSPAPERS PUT OUT ‘EXTRAS’

. . . WAR in Headlines 5 ½ Inches High.

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION
Tampa slaughter pens on Six Mile Creek, as the place and shovels as the weapons. The state roared with laughter - and no more was heard of the due.25

A Historical Society?

It was the Sunland Tribune that first suggested that Tampa form a Historical Society. In its issue of Jan. 19, 1882, under a major headline, "TAMPA SHOULD HAVE A HISTORICAL SOCIETY WITHOUT DELAY" displayed a story quoting Judge J. G. Knapp of Hillsborough County as follows:

"Ponce de Leon landed at Tampa Bay and started his march through the wilderness in search for the Fountain of Youth. This is one reason why Tampa should have a Historical Society. We reflect - how long will it be before not a vestige of the history (of our past) will remain, unless snatched from irretrievable loss by the men and women of the present day. And we ask and receive no answer. Who shall do it?"26

It was 89 years later, in 1971, before a Tampa Historical Society actually was organized! The Society began a Journal of its own in July, 1974, and named it the Sunland Tribune.

The original Sunland Tribune changed its name to The Tampa Tribune on March 1, 1883. It editorially continued to fight for city improvements. With glee, it reported the negotiations that brought the cigar industry to Tampa in 1885. Reported the Tribune: "The benefits that would insure to Tampa from the establishment of such an industry cannot be too deeply impressed upon our citizens. The firm of Sanchez & Haya employs 125 cigar makers and can give employment to any number of little boys and girls as strippers."27

Panic Stricken City

Tampa was swept by another epidemic of yellow fever in 1887. The city was panic stricken. Hundreds fled to the country. Among those who fled was then Editor of the Tampa Tribune, G. M. Mathes. A young printer-reporter, D. B. McKay, was left in charge of the paper - he continued to publish it, aided only by two Negroes who furnished the motive power for the press. Several days later McKay wrote: "Our city is desolate and distressfully quiet. Nearly all the business houses are closed and only a handful of our businessmen remain." Tar barrels were placed at each street corner and lighted in the hope that the penetrating smoke would kill the deadly germs. The disease spread, however, and by January, 1888, when the last death occurred, about 750 had lost their lives.28
The first paper to be published on a daily basis in Tampa was the *Tampa Daily News* which started in 1887 with 0. H. Jackson as the editor and proprietor. Many people called it the *Daily Kicker* because Jackson was a chronic faultfinder. Mr. McKay recalled that Jackson "had the ability as a writer and plenty of courage."

One controversy in which the *News* engaged was about the location of the first bridge over the Hillsborough River. F. A. Salomonson and associates applied for the right to erect a toll-bridge at Whiting Street, but the *News* advocated a free bridge at Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Boulevard). The South Florida Railroad Co. claimed that it owned the foot of Lafayette Street - that it was included in the grant of river-front property by the city council to induce Henry B. Plant to extend his railroad to Tampa, but Jackson contended that the council had no legal right to give away city property. He was sustained in this contention by Col. Hugh C. Macfarlane, city attorney, and the city proceeded to build a wooden drawbridge at Lafayette Street. Salomonson and associates abandoned their project.

First 'Real' Daily

McKay once wrote that after Editor Jackson died that he (McKay) bought the little paper, the *News*, and published it for several months. But he had an opportunity for a business out of town, so he sold the paper to G. M. Mathes. "Before he (Mathes) had made his first payment," McKay wrote, "without my knowledge or consent, he moved the plant to Ybor City and it was destroyed in the great conflagration which reduced two-thirds of the cigar town to ashes."

Tampa got its first "real" daily a short time after the demise of the *News*. Harvey Judson Cooper, who had been hired by Judge Magbee to refurbish the unsavory *Guardian*, changed its name to the *Journal*. Both the *Journal* and the *Weekly Tribune* blossomed out as dailies, according to McKay, and led a meager existence until 1893 when a group of businessmen purchased and consolidated the papers as *The Tampa Daily Times* with Cooper as general manager.

The fall before, in 1892, a number of leading citizens of Tampa met to discuss the establishment of a paper that would be a credit to the city and a powerful factor in the development of the South Florida metropolis and surrounding territory. Credit for the idea is given to Col. S. A. Jones. The Colonel, an ex-Confederate officer, was the grandfather of George A. Smathers, who served Florida as U.S. Senator for several terms, and thus the great-grandfather of Bruce A. Smathers, who served in the Florida Legislature and as Secretary of State. Colonel Jones took ill soon after launching the newspaper idea and moved to Waynesville, N.C.

**Papers Consolidated**

At a meeting held Feb. 1, 1893, the amount of capital was fixed at $25,000 and a board of directors was elected, composed of Jones, A. J. Knight, W. B. Henderson, H. J. Cooper and W. A. Morrison. Jones was named president, Knight secretary and T. C. Taliaferro, treasurer.

The next day the *Tampa Journal* was purchased for $3,500 and on the following day the *Tampa Tribune* was bought for $3,430. Cooper was elected general manager with the munificent salary of $75 a month.

In the latter part of 1898, *The Times* was in financial trouble. Cooper called D. B. McKay into his office. *The Times* was "broke"; there wasn't enough money in the till to pay for an incoming shipment of newsprint. Cooper had
been offered a job in Cuba and McKay could have the management contract for the amount of Cooper’s moving expenses to Havana. McKay walked over to the Court House where he borrowed the needed $500 from former Gov. Henry L. Mitchell, who was then serving as Clerk of Circuit Court. Within a year, The Times was on a sound basis and was speedily buying out the local businessmen who had stock in it. It took McKay until 1922 to buy up the last stock and become the sole owner.

**McKay Interviewed**

In 1940, I interviewed Mr. McKay about the Spanish-American War days in Tampa and he told me this story:

"The office of the old Florida Brewery was robbed and the next morning an insignia of the 69th New York Regiment was found on the floor. I published the story including about the insignia. I was working 18 to 20 hours a day then and late that night I was sitting at my desk at the top of the stairs in The Times building.

"About 11 o’clock a colonel and chief surgeon came up the stairs drunk as they could be. They wanted to know who published the story. I told them I did and they said, "You have insulted the 69th New York Regiment and we demand an immediate retraction!"

"That afternoon a soldier had hocked me an old service revolver and it was lying on my desk. I saw the officers reaching for their pistols. I knew it was a matter of who shot first, so I lifted mine off the desk. They didn’t run down the stairs - they fell down!

"The next afternoon while riding out in Ybor City, I had the pleasure of seeing the colonel and the surgeon being arrested for drunkeness."

**Native Tampan**

During the Spanish-American War period in 1898 there was published for a time in Ybor City a newspaper called El Mosquito, and its purpose was to promote Cuban independence.

McKay, of course, is one of the giants in Tampa journalism and was a legend in his time. He owned The Times until 1933 when he gave a lease-option to David E. Smiley and Ralph Nicholson, who acquired ownership in 1938. Simultaneous with being publisher, McKay served four terms as Mayor of Tampa, a total of 14 years.

McKay was a native Tampan, born in 1868, the son of John A. McKay and grandson of Capt. James McKay, pioneer Floridian. He was a hard-hitting, out-spoken editor who voiced his opinions on the burning issues of the day. He slapped around his rival, The Tampa Tribune, which returned in kind.

While he was serving as Mayor, McKay didn’t give much time to his paper, in fact in the four-year term ending in 1931 he averaged less than 10 minutes a day around The Times office.

**The Boss Is Back**

And so, it was a happy day for the Times people one day in 1931, after he had been defeated for reelection by R. E. L. Chancey. The lead editorial in The Tampa Daily Times that day was signed by "The Times Force" and was entitled, ""The Boss is Back." Excerpts from this unusual editorial:

"Things were different around The Times plant yesterday. Every employee had his or her regular task to perform, but somehow it came easier. There was an indefinable something in the
atmosphere that was at once inspiring and invigorating. Something that has been missing for close to four years now. The boss was back.

"Only those who know the boss of The Times can know what that means. Someone has said that the people of Tampa are of two classes concerning D. B. McKay. That one of the classes does not know him, and maligns him; that the other of them know him, and loves him. We know him. He is boss; just the same, he is a fine, sympathetic friend. The humblest member of the force can approach him any time, on anything, and be confident of considerate audience...

"We know that he is a straight shooter and every son and daughter of us is glad the boss is back. We believe in him. You do too, if you know him as we do."

Over at the Tribune, the editors welcomed McKay back to the active ranks of publishing and cautiously commended him for his service as Mayor. But it couldn't help taking swipe at the outgoing Mayor:

"... We indulge the hope that, having held for many years the highest honor his city could bestow upon him, the owner and publisher of the Times will make the newspaper an unselfish and unprejudiced power for the upbuilding of Tampa - and not permit it to be used as a medium of captious detraction and obstruction to the man and the administration called by the people to succeed him and his."

McKay came back swinging. In an editorial reply, he thanked the Tribune for its "generous" tribute, but added:

"... (The president and editor of The Times resents, however, the last sentence of that article - in which the Tribune attempts to prescribe what shall be the editorial policy of The Times - as a bit of meddling in something with which the Tribune has nothing to do.

"It is the firm conviction of this paper that Mr. Chancey was dishonestly nominated for the mayorship ..."

The editorial reassured that The Times would fully cooperate with the new administration, and then added:

"In its way The Times shall continue to do its very best to aid in Tampa’s growth, progress and upbuilding - as it has through all these years. There are reasons. First, its owner was born and reared here, has spent his entire life here and his all and the paper’s all are invested here. Second, whenever it fails to do so it will forfeit its right to existence."

"Whether it suits in some quarters or not, The Times emphatically reserved the right to formulate and pursue its own policies."

When McKay was Mayor, he leaned over backwards to be fair to reporters of the Tribune in releasing news from his office. They City Hall reporter for the Tribune was Dudley V. Haddock, who once wrote about the experience stating that McKay was fair. "A lesser man would have taken advantage of the opportunity to hamstring the opposition and it is understandable why old time Tribune
men retain for him the most profound love and respect. Truly, he was our dearest enemy.”

Fair to The Press

Covering the Mayor's office for The Times during some of McKay's service was V. M. (Red) Newton, Jr., who later moved over to The Tribune and became its managing editor. "Red" wrote about it in 1960 on the occasion of McKay's 92nd birthday anniversary:

"... I was covering City Hall for The Times, and Mr. McKay - then Mayor of Tampa - was leaning over backwards to give first break on important stories to my opposition, the Tribune.

"This plainly showed that a newspaperman could hold public office and still be fair - and not give his paper any advantage. And it was a real challenge to a young newspaperman to have his publisher as Mayor of the city - for I learned to fend for myself in competition...”

Another reporter covering the City Hall during McKay's regime was J. A. (Jock) Murray, now retired and still living in Tampa.

“... I saw Mr. McKay daily, depending on him for the news of the day,” Murray was to recall years later. ... It would have been easy for a man of shorter stature to have turned the big news breaks to his own paper, and not have to read them in the rival Tribune. But he never did ...”

Throughout the decades during the McKay ownership, The Times was a force in community betterment. It recognized the value of the new automobile fad and saw the need for decent roads in Florida. Therefore, it was in 1909, The Times and the newly formed Tampa Automobile Club joined in sponsoring an "endurance race" of automobiles of the day from Tampa to Jacksonville and back in the hopes it would promote a highway network for Florida. It took four days for the hectic journey but did spark interest in road building.

McKay was a progressive publisher, always alert to improving communications. So it was that he quickly gave the “go ahead” to the installation of a radio broadcasting station in the beginning days of that medium. And thus, WDAE, The Times Radio Station, went on the air Feb. 15, 1922 - the first commercially licensed station in Florida.

Coincident with the arrival of the great economic depression of the 1930s, McKay's Times came upon hard times. He was faced with mounting paper company debts and diminished advertising. He also was despondent for another reason as well: The son he had hoped would take over The Times some day had contracted a fatal disease in South America and died.

That's when he leased and later sold The Times to Philadelphians Smiley and Nicholson. McKay returned to newspaper work in 1945, this time with the Tampa Tribune which had been his arch-rival during the years as publisher of The Times. Besought to write his memories of Tampa, he started on what was first to be a few columns of personal reminiscences but which, despite his several attempts to break them off, burgeoned into the Pioneer Florida page. The voluminous works later were compiled into a three-volume Pioneer Florida history.

In 1949, McKay was named County Historian by the newly-created Hillsborough County Historical Commission. He died on Oct. 8,
1960, at the age of 92, one of Tampa's all-time greats of journalism.  

**Powerful Figure**

A parallel powerful figure in Tampa journalism at the time of McKay's active days was his rival Wallace F. Stovall. He was the father of *The Tampa Tribune* as we know it today. He was as fabulous in his own way as was McKay in his.

Wallace Fisher Stovall himself liked to say he started the *Tampa Tribune* with "a big idea and a shirttail full of type."

For Tampa this turned out to be a modest statement, for Stovall's "big ideas" eventually reached far beyond the *Tribune* to construction of the city’s original skyline. Now Tampa is a new city with a new skyline.

Born in Kentucky, in 1869, Stovall discovered ink in his veins when at the age of 17, he moved to Florida and became an apprentice printer on *The Ocala Capitol*. He soon relocated in Palatka and worked first for *The News* and then *The Herald*. Before another birthday had passed, Stovall had become a teen-aged publisher by establishing *The Lake Weir Independent*. Later he returned to Ocala and purchased *The Capitol*. His next move was to Sumterville, where he published *The Sumterville Times*. Stovall was only 21 years old when he established *The Polk County News* at Bartow, but he was a thoroughly experienced businessman.

**Roots In Tampa**

After a short stay in Bartow, the young newspaperman put down his roots in Tampa, in 1893, and from then on he grew as Tampa grew, prospered as Tampa prospered. In those days *The Tampa Times* was the big local paper, master-minded by D. B. McKay, Stovall's first and fiercest competitor in Tampa, with whom he carried on a "30 years war", but later became one of his dearest friends in later life. In the beginning there was not much community interest in the new *Tribune* as Stovall’s big idea had followed on the heels of the purchase and consolidation of the old *Tampa Journal* and a weekly *Tampa Tribune* by *The Tampa Times*. (The first issue of Stovall’s paper appeared as *The Tampa Tribune*, Stovall having preempted the title of one of the recently suspended publications, and *The Times* quickly sought an injunction to prevent him from using it. At the hearing, however, the Court held that he was within his rights in appropriating it since there was no other newspaper of that name in Tampa upon his arrival.)

It was going to cost Stovall $450 to break down his Bartow plant and move the equipment to Tampa and he needed financing - quickly.

**Will Tampa Grow?**

Reflecting on his youth before he died, Stovall said, "When I got here (Tampa), I was banking on the fact that Henry B. Plant was building his fine big Tampa Bay Hotel, and cigar factories were just moving here from Key West. That was enough for me, but do you know nobody was interested in a new newspaper? And they didn’t think the town would grow either."

The young Stovall found a friend in Dr. John P. Wall, erstwhile editor of the old *Sunland Tribune*, who wanted a paper to print his ideas on a new sewer system. Dr. Wall lent Stovall the $450 he needed.

Recounting his early hardships in his farewell editorial published on June 18, 1925 the day he relinquished control of the *Tribune*...
property and, incidentally, became Tampa's first millionaire, Stovall stated:

"I started the Tribune as a four-page, six-column, six-day, bobtail, boiler plate daily and worked as editor, solicitor, typesetter, pressman and circulating manager, besides holding about every other position in the office, doing more work than all the other force, which included only four, performing from 18 to 20 hours work daily, everyday, for a score of years."50

One of the classic stories of Florida journalism revolves around Stovall as the young Tribune publisher. In those days the status symbol of economic health for a newspaper was the award of delinquent tax lists. Of course, The Times, then the political power in the village, was the usual choice. But Stovall, an astute politician himself, eventually wangled the list for the Tribune. In order to do the job he needed more type for his shop. He ordered it, hoping he would be billed and could pay after he was paid by the County Commissioners for publishing the list. But the shipment arrived C. O. D., and Stovall did not have the necessary $350 to save the day. Said Stovall:

"I went to Peter O. Knight (a prominent pioneer Tampa lawyer), and he didn't have any money to lend. But he introduced me to some cigar manufacturers, and they loaned me the money for 30 days, and took a mortgage on everything I had."

Spades Called Spades

The mortgage holders actually wanted $500 at the end of 30 days. The lender obtained a writ of attachment and the Sheriff padlocked the Tribune. What happened next is described by Stovall's biographer, Dudley V. Haddock, a former Tribune reporter:

"Once again Wallace offered a demonstration of the kind of stuff of which he was made. Assembling his workers after nightfall, he pried off the lock, entered the plant, drew the shades and went to work upon the next issue of the paper.

"Realizing he was in neck deep with the authorities, Stovall concluded he might as well go down with colors flying. He produced a newspaper such as Tampa never before had seen and probably never will see again. He flayed everything and everybody in town from The Times down to the bank and the gentlemen who stuck him with a note for $500 for a $350 loan. He pyred it onto the Sheriff for having applied the padlock and paid his respects to those individuals who had refused to help him. His pent-up wrath, because of the treatment he had experienced since establishing himself in the community, had boiled over.

"Appearance of the paper threw Tampa into an uproar. Spades had been called spades, stuffed shirts had been unstuffed, pompous balloons had been punctured, and many of the great had been depicted as not-so-great, after all. Some of his targets seethed with anger and never forgot, but great numbers of other Tampans applauded heartily. He had the nerve to shout loudly what they had long desired to say but dared not."51

Stovall was dragged into court immediately for having broken into his plant, but again found a friend upon the bench. Judge Joseph B. Wall - brother of Dr. John P. Wall, who had befriended Stovall upon his arrival in Tampa - had succeeded Judge G. A. Hanson.
and when Stovall faced him, all charges were dismissed on the ground that his youth justified leniency!

Although he figured he was through, Stovall actually had met his turning point with this incident. Hailed into court, Stovall was freed of charges by a kindly judge who put him on probation because of his youth. The Tribune published the list; Stovall paid his debts, and from then on the only way was up.

Stovall wielded his editorial influence to build his community. He obtained a commission form of city government here. He led campaign for acceptance of a Carnegie gift for the public library—which some claimed was "tainted" money. He promoted the State Fair, and his society editor is credited with the proposal for the Gasparilla festival. Stovall pushed for Tampa's port investment. Other projects included the building of Tampa's Union Station and organization of the Old People's Home, the local Humane Society and the Elks Lodge.

'Freak’ Transaction

Stovall sold out his newspaper property at the height of the Florida "boom" in a "freak" transaction. Biographer Haddock reported that historic event:

"Mrs. Lulette Gunby, a long-time acquaintance of the Colonel (Stovall), suggested that he sell the property and, for only $5,000 she finally obtained a 30-day option to purchase it for $1,200,000. The price did not include the building it occupied, which Stovall owned. The Colonel was convinced the option would never be exercised because of the price he had quoted, and many people always will believe he viewed it as an opportunity to pick up $5,000 without risk. Unfortunately, he overlooked the fact that at the time Florida was dealing in big money and that any sum smaller than a million dollars was insignificant. Before the deadline, Mrs. Gunby was successful in organizing a syndicate of which M. W. Lloyd, Tampa realty operator, Dr. L. A. Bize, Tampa banker, and L. B. Skinner, Dunedin and Tampa capitalist, were the principals.

"When it became apparent the group was prepared to purchase the property, and an audit disclosed the Tribune would not net less than $400,000 during the fiscal year ending June 30; Stovall offered Lloyd, spokesman to do so, and the Colonel, increasing his bid step by step, finally got it up tp $200,000. Lloyd replied that if he would raise it to $500,000, he would bring it to the attention of his associates.

"'With that,’ the Colonel related, 'I told him to go to hell.'"52

Stovall then occupied his time with restructuring Tampa’s skyline. With his big profits from the sale, he built the 12-story Wallace S. Building, the seven-story Stovall Office Building and the eight-story Stovall Professional Building. He also backed his son, Wallace O. Stovall, in the establishment of a third daily newspaper for Tampa—the Tampa Telegraph. It ceased publication eight months later.

Out-of-State Publishers

Stovall tried to buy back the Tribune after the collapse of the boom. He offered $800,000, but lost out to a pair of out-of-state publishers, S. E. Thomason of Chicago and John Stewart Bryan, of Richmond, who paid $950,000.
In a statement published in 1960, the late J. C. Council, chairman of the editorial board of the Tribune, recited the role of Stovall in the history of the paper.

Council noted: "Stovall wrote that his paper was not backed by any ring, clique or corporation, and that it would carry the news 'fearlessly and completely'. It always has. It started as a fighting newspaper; it still is. Some have called it a crusading newspaper."

The old "Colonel" died in 1950 at the age of 81. Writing the editorial tribute to Stovall for the Tribune on his death was Edwin D. Lambright, who had been associated with Stovall from his beginning days in Tampa.

"From an association and friendship of 51 years the heart of the writer follows him fondly to his grave," Lambright wrote.

"On the roll of honor of Tampa, the city, Florida, the state, the name of Wallace Fisher Stovall will long survive."

Years later, Lambright recalled how Tampa looked in 1899: "It was far from an attractive town. Most of the streets were sand, most of its sidewalks wooden, and there were no street lights because the dam-source of power had just been blown up. The Tribune was published in a small store-room on North Franklin Street ... There I was greeted by Wallace Stovall, who was the young owner, publisher, editor and entire staff of the paper. He told me if I wanted a job to get inside and get to work."

Home A Showplace

It should be noted that the home at 4621 Bayshore Boulevard where the Stovall family lived for nearly 30 years is still a showplace in Tampa. In 1977, the Junior League of Tampa selected it as its Decorators' Show House. It rates a spot on the distinctive National Register of Historic Places and when it was built in 1909 contemporary news reports raved that it was "the finest home in the area" and "one of the handsomest homes in Florida." Stovall moved into it in 1915 and lived there until 1943.

A man who was to become a key figure in Tampa journalism joined Stovall in June, 1899. He was Edwin D. (for Dart) Lambright, a native of Brunswick, Ga. Born in that South Georgia town in 1874, Lambright grew up in Brunswick, attended its public schools, subsequently took a course at Emory College, then located in Oxford, but now located at Atlanta. In 1893, he entered the newspaper business at Brunswick as a reporter on a local paper, and displayed such ability that when only 22 years of age he was made editor of the Brunswick Times, and remained with that journal until he came to Tampa.

Lambright fitted in nicely in his new community and new opportunity. He stepped up rapidly to city editor, managing editor and editor. He held the post of editor for almost 60 years, the only break being six years when he was Postmaster of Tampa, under appointment by President Wilson, starting in 1917. He died in 1959 at the age of 85 Lambright was active in many community affairs, including being a charter member of Tampa Lodge No. 708, B.P.O.E. and serving as president of the Tampa Rotary Club. In 1945, he was given the Civitan Award for Outstanding Citizenship.

Real Estate Advertising

In that period immediately following the sale of the Tribune by Stovall to a syndicate of Tampans, another newspaper blossomed here
in addition to *The Tampa Morning Telegraph* which Stovall's son, Wallace O. put out. It was a tabloid called *Tampa Globe*. Born December, 1925; died May, 1926. It, like the *Telegraph*, which had 232 pages in its inaugural issue in October, 1925, flourished from the real estate advertising that accompanied the Florida "boom." But was Tampa big enough for four daily newspapers? Obviously not.

Tampa went through a series of calamities in the second half of the 1920s. Hurricanes in 1926 and 1928, the scourge of the Mediterranean fruit fly hit citrus crops, Wall Street crashed, and Tampa's long sturdy Citizens Bank & Trust Co. closed its doors. Other bank closings followed. A national depression set in.

**McKay In Trouble**

In the early 1930s, ownership of *The Tampa Daily Times* changed hands. In 1933, Publisher McKay apparently was in financial trouble. He also was heavily involved in politics, having served many years as Mayor of the city which left him little time to watch over his newspaper and radio interests. He thus entered into a lease-option arrangement with two newspaper men from the north—David E. Smiley and Ralph Nicholson, who had been successful newsmen in Philadelphia and New York. 58

Smiley, who had been editor of the Ledger newspapers in Philadelphia and the Post in New York and had served as general manager of the North American Newspaper Alliance features service, became president of The Tampa Times Company in partnership with Nicholson. The latter, who had been a reporter and foreign correspondent in Japan for Smiley, became general manager and treasurer of the firm.

I interviewed Mr. Nicholson in 1970 about his career and he told me how he and Smiley came to acquire the Tampa properties without putting up any cash, which they didn't seem to have, in those tough depression days.

'Everybody Was Broke'

This is what he said:

"Well, Hamp, it was a long time ago when we moved from New York to Tampa and acquired Radio Station WDAE and *The Times*. We had a barrel of fun. Everybody was broke, or nearly so. The people were friendly, good-natured. Politics, thick and thin. But no money of any consequence passed hands. And that was the same with the alleged owners of *The Tampa Times*. We really were the owners. We, Dave Smiley and I, acquired those two properties. And, as I believe I explained after a fashion in my autobiography, 59 how the two of us, without any money, could acquire those two properties.

"When we went to tell Mr. R. J. Binnicker of the First National Bank about some of the queer quirks in the method used to come into possession of those two properties, the paper was more nearly broke than I believe the owners knew. D. B. McKay (was) a delightful and honorable gentleman if I ever knew one.

"To start, Dave Smiley and I didn't take any pay. He had his life insurance mortgaged. I sold $3,000 worth of stock in newspapers which kept my partnership afloat for some considerable time."

'Doing It Differently'

In his conversation with me, Mr. Nicholson related what he had said to the banker when Mr. Binnicker was trying to find out how the newcomers were getting the paper and station without any money down.
"We are doing it differently from the way you did," Nicholson told Binnicker. "Because, Mr. Binnicker, you nearly ruined this newspaper. Every time it needed money to stay afloat, it came here and you gave it the money, and we're going to cure that newspaper of such bad habits."

Nicholson also said Binnicker wasn't quite sure that "we hadn't hornswoggled Kenneth McKay, D.B. McKay's brother and lawyer."

The partners pulled it out of the doldrums and in 1938 took up the option to buy.

I went to work for *The Tampa Daily Times* on May 4, 1936, the greenest cub reporter they ever had down there. Mr. McKay was still sitting in his office in the building and occasionally writing editorials. I was pleased that I got to know him quite well in those days. He was that type, a veteran journalist who had time for a greenhorn like me. I admired him very much.

I also admired Mr. Smiley, a great newspaperman if there ever was one. And the most ethical editor I have ever known. He came to Tampa from Philadelphia, where he had been used to tough fights. Immediately, he saw the sordid mess that Tampa was in, struggling under a vicious gambling and political machine in which Charlie Wall was Mr. Big. My old boss, Mr. Smiley, turned his guns on this crowd and began a cleanup that eventually wiped it out.

Mr. Smiley had a staff of youngsters who helped to do the job. One reporter was Joe Grotegut and Joe got into a hot story early in his career. He dug out the story on the Tampa floggings - where some policemen joined some Ku Klux Klansmen in flogging a trio of men with whose political views they did not agree. Joe covered the trials and kept the heat on until the conspirators were convicted. Joe later became assistant managing editor, then went to the Associated Press, *The Miami Herald* and the Daytona Beach newspapers. Finally, he decided that many newspapermen complain about politics and don't do anything about it. So he got into politics, handling the successful campaign of Gov. LeRoy Collins, and holding high positions in his administration.

### Some Great Guys

We had some other great guys on the staff in those early days-Al Chiaramonte, Bill Moody, Charles Fernandez, and others. Ed Ray was the managing editor. I succeeded him in 1949 when Ed moved on. We didn't make much money (nobody did anywhere) but, as Mr. Nicholson said, we "had a barrel of fun" competing with the then powerful *Tampa Tribune* and slugging it out with the ruthless politicians and gangsters.

Smiley and Nicholson had a falling out in 1941 when Nicholson purchased the *New Orleans Item* without his partner. Nicholson resigned from active management of *The Times* and Smiley took full charge. In 1951, the Smiley family bought out Nicholson's interest in The Tampa Times Company.

### Talented Writers

Of course, *The Tribune* had some talented and hard-hitting writers and editors all along. Standouts in my mind are Bill Abbott and Jock Murray. Not only persevering reporters, they were colorful writers. Jock is still living and recently celebrated his 90th birthday anniversary. Along the way there had been Joe Mickler, who advanced to the New York...
newspaper scene in the hey-day of that community's journalism giants.

Many of *The Times* reporters and editors were lured to *The Tribune*. V. M. (Red) Newton Jr., the hell-raising managing editor of *The Tribune* for many years, started his career on *The Times*, first as a correspondent at the University of Florida and later as a sports editor. He was a gifted sports writer and his daily column just sang, it was so entertaining. I don’t believe he was any better in reporting or writing, however, than the present sports editor, Tom McEwen, who also was an alumnus of *The Times*.

A whole army of Timesmen graduated to *The Tribune* in modern years: Yes, Bob Turner, Holmes Alexander, Leo Stalnaker, Tom O’Connor, Leland Hawes, Ed Johnson, Sam Mase, Vernon Bradford, Panky Snow, Paul MacAlester, John Golson, Steve Raymond, Ann McDuffie, Frank Klein, Sam Stickney and a host of others.

**Pulitzer Prize**

*The Tribune* didn’t get all of its talent from *The Times*, it discovered and developed many staffers of its own. One was John Frasca who won the Pulitzer Prize for his articles which helped free a man framed by several Polk County lawmen. Paul Wilder was one of the best feature writers I have known.

**Most Scholarly**

Probably the most scholarly journalist to be developed in town in modern times was James A. Clendinen, currently the editor of *The Tribune*. He came to Tampa in 1935 from the *Clearwater Sun*, covered all the important beats, finally wound up writing editorials. He has written thousands of them, all soundly researched, well written and delivering a powerful punch. He is credited with being one of the most influential men in Florida today. The man really knows how to write, he turns a beautiful phrase, and he is entertaining and educational. He simply must rank at the top of Tampa’s journalism.

Again, I repeat that through the years Tampa’s newspapers have been at the forefront in all movements for the good of the city. They have fought the racketeers, the crooked politicians, and they cleaned up the election machinery to assure honest voting. They have fought for good schools, good roads, hospitals and health facilities, for recreation, for sports, for airports and aviation expansion, for churches and a healthy moral climate. They had not dodged controversy, they had been gutsy in their presentations and they have consistently tried to keep the public informed.

In short, they have, indeed been "Tampa’s Hell-Raisin’ Newspapers."
FOOTNOTES

1 Karl H. Grismer, Tampa (St. Petersburg, Florida, 1950), 122.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid; also, James Scott Hanna, The Brandon Family of Southwest Florida (Leander, Texas, 1968) 98.


5 Hampton Dunn, Yesterday's Clearwater (Miami, 1973), 17.

6 McKay, Pioneer Florida, Vol. 11, 296; Evanell Klintworth Powell, Tampa That Was... (Boynton Beach, Florida 1973), 137.

7 Grismer, Tampa, 122


9 Florida Peninsular, Aug. 6, 1856.

10 Ibid, Nov. 4, 1856.


12 Grismer, Tampa, 127

13 Ibid, 137

14 Florida Peninsular, Nov. 17, 1860.

15 Grismer, Tampa, 137.

16 Ibid, 138.

17 Ibid, 157

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid, 156.

22 Ibid.


24 Grismer, Tampa, 157


33 South Florida, 62.


35 Hampton Dunn, "Soldiers in *Tampa Today Revive Memories of City as 'Army Town' in Gay Nineties," The Tampa Daily Times, June 21, 1940.


37 The Tampa Daily Times, 1931.

38 *Ibid*.

39 *Tampa Morning Tribune, 1931*.

40 The Tampa Daily Times, 1931.

41 Dudley Haddock, Wallace F Stovall, *A Publisher’s Publisher,* (Sarasota, 1949)

42 The Tampa Tribune, *July 31, 1960*.

43 *Ibid*

44 *The Tampa Daily Times, Nov. 22, 1909, June 7, 1924*.


49 Hampton Dunn, "Ode to a Publisher's Publisher", *Tampa Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 7,* September 1969, 11.

50 *Tampa Tribune,* June 18, 1925.

51 Haddock, *Wallace F. Stovall, A Publisher's Publisher,* 13-14.

52 *Ibid*.
53 *Tampa Tribune*, April 17, 1950.


57 *The Tampa Tribune-The Tampa Times*, October 1975.
