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TURN TO GREATNESS

By HAMPTON DUNN

One fine spring day in 1885 the sleepy village of Tampa woke up.

That was the day, May 7th, when a body of inspired citizens organized an enthusiastic Board of Trade which set about to transform a tiny fishing hamlet into a productive metropolis.

The citizens were no longer content to reside in a faded military outpost by the water, an isolated spot with deep sandy streets, a few board sidewalks, frame buildings and no industry or commerce to speak of.

The truth is at that moment the rank and file of citizens were not aware that the community stood on the threshold of development. Henry B. Plant had brought his railroad from Sanford a year earlier, providing a lifeline to the outside world. Tampa would no longer have to depend on a creaky stage coach from Gainesville, or on even slower boats from Key West or Cedar Keys, or ox-cart transportation over primitive trails.

A fabulous new industry was just a-borning: phosphate pebbles had been discovered in Tampa Bay.

Even though the platform was set for action, the civic performers had been hesitant- to swing out. Most of the local folk had lived through a long period of gloom. Tampa appeared doomed to dry up and blow away, what with the closing of Fort Brooke, the military installation which had been the reason for the town's existence in the first place. Indeed, in the period of the 1870's ... the "dismal decade", if you please ... the village had shrunken to something like 726



Dr. John P. Wall

souls when the 1880 census was taken. But with the advent of Plant's railroad, growth came suddenly, a population explosion as it were. By 1885, Tampa's population had multiplied to nearly 3,000 residents.

That's the way it was, on that May 7th, when a mass meeting was called at Branch's Opera House for the purpose of forming a Board of Trade, predecessor to today's Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce. The top people were on hand, and twenty-seven early birds were enrolled as charter members that first meeting. There were dentists, physicians, druggists, printers, painters, storekeepers, insurance and real estate men, watchmakers and jewelers.

Dr. John P. Wall, a highly respected medic and an outstanding Floridian was chosen to lead these boosters in their crucial first year. There was a big job to be done in Tampa, so the townspeople gave it to their busiest man.

**PLAN
of
TAMPA
1886**

By John Jackson, L.S.

Drawn in February





Captain John T. Lesley



Vicente Martinez Ybor

Those pioneers moved swiftly and accomplished much. In its first year of operation, the Board of Trade compiled a fantastic record. What a year! The force of civic activity in 1885 provided a pivot for the area's history.

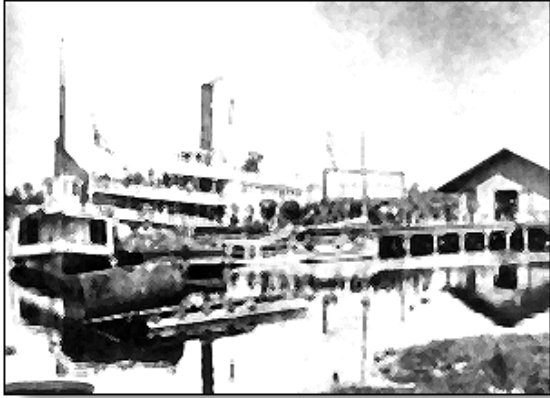


The Tampa Board of Trade thrived in its formative years and by 1885, it issued "stock" to its members, this certificate issued to E.M. Hendry, prominent Tampan. J.H. Fessenden was president and H.J. Cooper was secretary-treasurer.

-photo from Ham ton Dunn Collection

They led the movement to support a city water works, obtained an ice-factory and erected a bridge across the Hillsborough River to facilitate construction of the Plant Hotel. In addition, the civic leaders knocked down opposition to the hotel project, which had been ridiculed by some and fought by a few downtown merchants who wanted the hostelry built on the east side of the river where the people were. The Board of Trade pitched a lavish gala reception and banquet for Mr. and Mrs. Plant to show the town's appreciation of Plant's contributions to progress and was successful in obtaining its first major industry - the Ybor cigar factory - thereby saving the town's lone bank which seemed certain to fold momentarily.

This was the year the Board of Trade prompted the U.S. Government to speedy settlement of its claims upon land formerly occupied by Fort Brooke so that the growth of the town would not be retarded. Congress was memorialized for an appropriation for a survey of our ship's channel and a fund



Tampa's waterfront showed much activity in 1885, when the community's population was given as 600. That's a Morgan Line steamer docked at the foot of Jackson Street.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



This rare photo shows a yacht race on the Hillsborough River in 1885. Scene is about where the Platt Street Bridge now crosses, with Hyde Park seen at right, and the grassy keys which became Davis Islands are shown in background.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



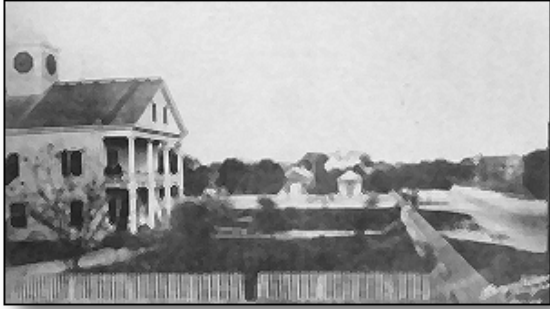
This was Tampa in 1885, the year the Board of Trade was organized. This is Florida Avenue, looking south from the Palmetto Hotel. Ruts made in the heavy sand by ox carts and mule teams are plainly shown.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



T.C. Taliaferro came down from Jacksonville in 1883 and opened a bank in this shack on Washington Street, near Franklin Street. Its first name was the Bank of Tampa and it later became the First National Bank of Tampa. (Some artist printed the name in this photo). Taliaferro soon became discouraged and was ready to go back to Jacksonville when the Board of Trade succeeded in obtaining the cigar industry with its lucrative payroll for Tampa.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



This handsome Hillsborough County Court House was erected in 1885, and served the community for 30 years. The home of Capt. James McKay, Jr., is shown at the right.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



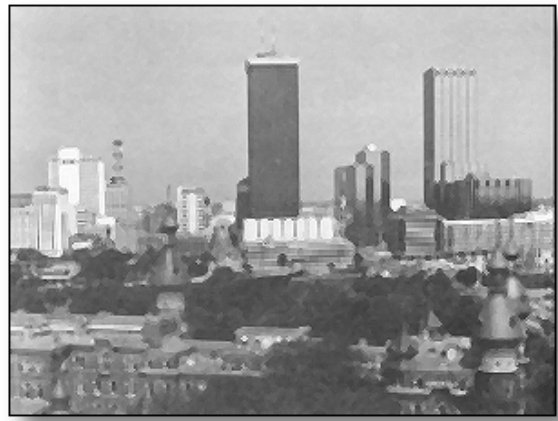
Henry B. Plant brought his railroad to Tampa in 1884 and extended it to Port Tampa where he built the Port Tampa Inn. Guests could fish out of their windows, or go boating around the hotel. The docks served Plant's steamship line.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



The Bank of Tampa erected the city's first brick building in 1886 at Franklin and Washington Streets. Note the deep sand streets. When the photographer came around, everybody got into the picture, including that dude atop the structure. Building later was used by The Tampa Daily Times until it was sold to The Tampa Tribune in 1958. Then it became the home of the Merchants Association of Tampa. The structure was torn down to make way for "the quad block" in the 1970s.

-photo from Hampton Dunn Collection



As the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 1985, the city looks like this with more skyscrapers coming. The University of Tampa, formerly the Tampa Bay Hotel, is shown in foreground.

-Bryn-Alan photo from Hampton Dunn Collection

raising effort provided relief for victims of the then recent conflagration in Key West.

Surely, this year was the turning point in the area's history.

Much of the success of the early days of the Board of Trade undoubtedly was due to the enlightened leadership furnished by that human dynamo, Dr. Wall. This incredible man, a former editor of the Sunland Tribune, a former mayor of Tampa, was in the forefront of every progressive move, reached the climax of his colorful public service career in that year 1885.

That same year, he served as president of the Florida Medical Association, represented Hillsborough County in the State Legislature, and, very importantly, as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention which drafted the basic document that was to continue in effect until January of 1969.

Greatly concerned about public health and the welfare of his fellow Floridians, Dr. Wall crusaded for a State Board of Health. Reaching the pinnacle of oratorical heights, he admonished, "The duty of preserving the health and lives of its citizens from the causes of disease is as incumbent on the state as that of suppressing rapine and murder." A Board of Health was subsequently created at the state level. Dr. Wall played a leading role in fighting the yellow fever epidemic which struck Florida a short time later and was credited with being one of the first to link the scourge to mosquitoes.

Meanwhile, back in Tampa, the Board of Trade at its first session after its organizational meeting named a committee to "do all possible for the success of the election on the City Water works" and planned a public meeting to promote the

project. Captain John T. Lesley, vice chairman of the Board of Trade, delivered an eloquent and forceful address in support of the water works.

Almost immediately, the civic leaders turned their attention to the major problem of the local fishing industry, a lack of ice for packing fish for shipment on Plant's new railroad. The Board of Trade voted to spend \$38 to advertise for ice factories in such papers as the New York Times, the Chicago Inter-Ocean and the Boston Herald. Attracted by the advertisements, an ice plant was soon moving in.

By September, 1885, the Board of Trade presented a 500 signature petition to the county commissioners asking them to build the bridge to serve Plant's hotel. The site selected by a bridge committee later became Lafayette Street (Now John F. Kennedy Boulevard). The wooden span cost \$13,500 and was completed in 1888, dooming the ferry which Jesse Hayden had operated at this point. Hayden, however, had fared well in dealing with Plant, selling the 60 acre hotel site for a good sum. Hayden had acquired the property 20 years before in a swap for a white horse and a wagon.

Construction of the bridge was a precondition for building the Tampa Bay Hotel (now Plant Hall, part of the University of Tampa). Dr. Wall and other civic leaders also brushed aside criticism of the hotel project. Some Tampans claimed the Tampa Bay Hotel would look more at home in Arabian Nights than in what was then considered modern Tampa.

One day in October, it was the 5th, an excited Board of Trade governor called a special meeting. Concise minutes of the meeting tersely tell what was up:

"The meeting was called for the purpose of making some arrangements in order to retain the cigar factory for Tampa. Mr. Ybor who proposes to build the factory here and is about to buy lands from Captain Lesley could not agree on the price, the difference being about \$4,000. On motion it was ordered that the Board of Trade pledge themselves to guarantee Mr. Ybor \$4,000 in land an money provided he (Mr. Ybor) will meet all necessary requirements."

W. C. Brown, A. J. Knight and W. B. Henderson were named as a committee of three to scare up this large sum. The sale price for the 40 acres Ybor liked was \$9,000. It took several months to do it, but the Board of Trade raised the four grand, thus cinching the badly-needed cigar industry for Tampa.

One immediate effect of obtaining the cigar industry was the saving of the city's lone local bank. This was the Bank of Tampa, later to become the First National Bank, started in 1883 as an affiliate of Ambler, Marvin and Stockton of Jacksonville. But business was so slim, the young cashier in charge, T.C. Taliaferro, came within a hair of leaving town. In fact, he'd already packed the fixtures and was ready to return to Jacksonville when the good news came. Mr. Ybor and Mr. Haya called on Banker Taliaferro to assure him the cigar industry was here to stay, and it meant big payrolls for the community. Not only did the Bank of Tampa stay open, but soon it was occupying the first brick structure in town on the southwest corner of Franklin and Washington streets where the Merchants Association building now stands. And the bank received its national charter on May 6, 1886, one day before the first anniversary of the founding of the Board of Trade.

At the crossroads of development, 1885 was the year an obscure fishing village turned toward greatness.