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Incentives Helped to Build West Tampa

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Not until Henry B. Plant brought his railroad across Florida to Tampa in 1884 did the then small village make a unified effort to attract manufacturing. When engineer Gavino Guiterrez suggested Tampa as a site to Vicente Martinez Ybor and Ignacio Haya for their cigar factories, they met a receptive, newly organized Board of Trade. The community leadership agreed to put up $4,000 as a part payment on the land, and Ybor City was assured. And the town’s only bank - forerunner of the First Florida Bank - decided there was a future here. By 1886, an amazing prosperity began to transform Tampa. Businessman decided to extend their investments.

Hugh Campbell Macfarlane, a canny Scottish lawyer in town only a few years, began assembling land west of the Hillsborough River with the idea of forming a company to help develop a new cigar manufacturing area. (At that time all the area west of the river was designated as West Tampa. It was not until later that the name and exact location of West Tampa were definitely established.)

As a result of a Key West strike in the fall of 1889 the factory of A. Del Pino and Company suffered the loss of tobacco on hand, causing the factory to cease operation temporarily. Sometime between 1890 and 1892 the Del Pino brothers made their way to West Tampa.
By 1892 Macfarlane was offering to construct buildings and to donate land for cigar factories to those proprietors who might want to establish their businesses in West Tampa. A. (for Antonio) Del Pino and Company arrived about that time, the first to accept his offer.

The Del Pino factory at Main Street and Howard Avenue was finished and making the first cigars in West Tampa by June 15, 1892. The survey of West Tampa made for Macfarlane and dated April 7, 1892, shows the first 120 acres he purchased Nov. 27, 1886. It designates the major north-south street as Pino Avenue (which later became Howard Avenue). Two other streets were given the Del Pino brothers’ first names, Gaspar and Antonio.

In August of 1892, while Gaspar Del Pino was visiting his sick mother in Key West, he rounded up more cigar workers for his factory, and they returned to Tampa with him.

With the opening of this first cigar factory in West Tampa, a section of the growing area was called "Pino City." When a fire hit West Tampa in April 1904, the section along Howard Avenue from Chestnut to Pine Streets was called Pino City.

A. Del Pino and Company failed financially, and the factory building was returned to Macfarlane July 23, 1894. The O’Halloran Cigar Company, also a Key West firm, occupied the factory building Dec. 3, 1894. It burned Oct. 3, 1901, with Francisco Milian, the mayor of West Tampa, among those witnessing the blaze (West Tampa had no fire department at the time).
Another factory from Key West opened its doors on the west bank of the Hillsborough River by the end of 1892, Julius Ellinger and Co. This gave employment to hundreds of workers. A small community called "El Barrio de Elinche" - Ellinger's Community - grew up by the side of the factory closest to Tampa's downtown business district.

Close to this new cigar factory Macfarlane and his partners financed a bridge across the Hillsborough River, the iron Fortune Street drawbridge. And to enable workers living east of the river to commute (as well as to help downtown merchants), the Macfarlane Company helped start a streetcar route from downtown Tampa into West Tampa, as part of the Consumers Electric Light and Power Company system. This company already had linked downtown to Ybor City, so this made it much easier to travel from West Tampa to Ybor City. The founders and principal stockholders of Consumers were Vicente Martinez Ybor, his son Eduardo, and Eduardo Manrara.

In 1892 the building of new factories in Ybor City was at a standstill. No factories had been started for several years, and no efforts were then going on to attract new manufacturers to Tampa. But with the development of West Tampa, a new impetus was given to the cigar industry. Business leaders in Ybor City, not wishing to be outdone by their young neighbor, began offering inducements to new manufacturers also. Thus, the entire Tampa area reaped the benefit.

West Tampa's pace picked up in 1893, with establishment of another new factory, C.F. Arnsworth and Company. Gradually a stream of important companies solidified the industry: Cuesta-Rey (1896); Berriman Brothers, which later became Morgan Cigar Co. (1903); A. Santaella (1904); Pendas and Alvarez (1909) and others. By 1900 cigar manufacturing was Florida's leading industry.

Many small homes for cigar workers were needed near the factories. George Benjamin constructed numerous $400 houses within walking distance of commercial and employment centers.

On a more elegant level, a contract was let to J.H. Drew on April 27, 1894, to build five residences ranging in price from $1,250 to $2,000. One of the homes was for cigar manufacturer Teodoro Perez, another for his brother and still another for his factory foreman. Two others were built for manufacturers named Pompez and Napolis, who had factories off Main Street.

Within the cigar industry, an unusual occupation developed - "el lector" (the reader). These men read news and literature in Spanish to the factory workers. Highly regarded in the community, the lectores were paid by the workers who contributed weekly sums collected by an intermediary, "el presidente." The collections at times amounted to $80 a week for the reader.

In July 1894 the Macfarlane Investment Company was reorganized with a capital stock of $100,000. The firm owned 307 lots situated near the business center of West Tampa. Directors were realtor William B. Henderson, Congressman Stephen M. Sparkman, contractor J.H. Drew, attorney N.B. Pettingill (Macfarlane's brother-in-law) and businessman George Rae Macfarlane (his brother).

The Tampa Tribune, on Dec. 21, 1894, commented, "The cigar industry of our city is the leading factor in our phenomenal prosperity. $75,000 was paid out for wages last week."
FERNANDO FIGUEREDO arrived in West Tampa in 1894, a hero of the Ten Years War in Cuba. Elected first mayor of the municipality, he served June 21, 1895-June 3, 1897. After the war with Spain, he became Treasurer of Cuba.

GEORGE NELSON BENJAMIN, mayor 1897-1901, came to Tampa in 1875, was a West Tampa developer, bringing in cigar factories and donating land for a park which became the eventual site for Fort Homer Hesterly. He was a native of Indiana.
FRANCISCO MILIAN was elected to nine 1-year terms as mayor beginning June 3, 1901. A lector (reader) at Bustillo Brothers and Diaz cigar factory, he resigned in a dispute. After a sympathy strike and general outcry, he was restored as lector and as mayor.

PEREGRINO REY, mayor 1909-1910, served as president of the West Tampa City Council 16 years. He joined A.L. Cuesta in forming Cuesta-Rey in West Tampa. Rey Park was named in his honor. In 1913 he was decorated by King Alfonso of Spain.
BLAS F. O’HALLORAN, mayor 1917-1921, also served as councilman several terms. A Key West native, he came to Tampa at age 13. O’Halloran was a Selective Service registrar in World War I, in later years with Lord and Fernandez Funeral Home.

ENRIQUE HENRIQUEZ was West Tampa’s last mayor, serving 1921-1924, until West Tampa joined Tampa. Born in Cuba, he held managerial positions, then became owner of Henriquez Cigar Co. in 1917. A councilman since 1907, he was elected mayor without opposition.

Photographs were not available of Hugh Brady, mayor 1910-1912, or of James D. Macfarlane, mayor 1912-1917.
In 1895 Macfarlane joined forces with other investors, including Lee Skinner, Philip Collins, George Benjamin and C.B. Bouton, combining his 200-acre tract of real estate with his associates’ 800 acres. Skinner offered lots at moderate prices, with 20 percent down and monthly payments suited to the workers’ wages.

Although the City of Tampa made several efforts to annex West Tampa, Macfarlane led opposition to a merger. Although Ybor City had joined Tampa in 1887, West Tampa chose to remain independent. On May 18, 1895, a bill passed the State Legislature creating West Tampa as a municipality. The population was officially set at 2,815.

The new city elected Fernando Figueredo as its first mayor. Years before, Figueredo had been a state senator from Monroe County. He had arrived in West Tampa in 1894, a hero of the Ten-Year War in Cuba. A bookkeeper in the O’Halloran factory, he was a close friend of Jose Marti.

The O’Halloran factory proved to be a place of significance in the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain. A message with orders to start the revolution in 1895 was rolled into a fine panetela cigar by co-owner Blas O’Halloran. Gonzalo de Quesada managed to pass the cigar through customs in Havana, then taking the message to Gen. Juan Gualberto Gomez signaling the start of new fighting.

Figueredo led numerous collections for the Cuban cause in West Tampa factories. After his term as mayor and following the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, he returned to Cuba. There he became treasurer of the newly created nation.

Men of differing national origins took part in the governing of West Tampa. Cuban, Spanish, Italian and Anglos were elected to office and had a voice in the development of the city.

Police officers were installed following passage of an ordinance March 10, 1898.

In 1901, Macfarlane warded off another attempt to bring West Tampa into the City of Tampa by annexation.

Since no public school was started in West Tampa until 1905, earlier education efforts took place in private homes or in church sponsored schools.

Sisters of the Holy Name bought lots in Block 56 of Macfarlane Addition from the Macfarlane Investment Company for $3,600 Dec. 9, 1895. The Academy of Holy Names was erected on Albany and Spruce and opened Sept. 14, 1896. Sisters Mary Emeline and Mary Hubert were the first teachers in the brick school. Average attendance was 46.

First Mass was said in the second floor chapel Nov. 29, 1896. In that first year Bishop Moore came from St. Augustine and confirmed 11 children. Several months, during the Spanish-American War in 1898, the academy was used as a hospital.

The first public school was built in 1905 on Tampania between Pine and Cherry Streets. It was named in honor of Angel L. Cuesta, because of his efforts in behalf of education, in 1911. The school continued in use until 1979, and was demolished after a fire in 1984.

The St. Joseph Catholic Church began in West Tampa in the late 1890s as a mission of the downtown Sacred Heart Church, with
the Jesuit Order in charge. A contract for $15,000 was let for the building of a plain, wooden structure at Albany and Walnut Street. St. Joseph Church opened in its new building May 3, 1903, with Father Benjamin Roydhouse as its first active pastor. The dedication followed on May 24, 1903.

In 1964 new facilities were built at 3012 Cherry Street, near Gomez, and the old church was torn down. The bell from the old church was brought to the new facility.

From 1895 to 1925, West Tampa grew and prospered. Buildings were constructed to house necessary educational, recreational and benevolent organizations and institutions. In many ways, it became a self-sufficient community economically and socially.

The commercial district centered around the intersection of Main Street and Howard Avenue. It extended from Howard to Albany Avenue on Main Street, and between Walnut and Nassau Streets on Howard.

The people who made up West Tampa could be clearly seen in the dedication of the Free Public Library on Howard Avenue, donated by Andrew Carnegie, on Jan. 1, 1914. American flags were intertwined with the Spanish, Cuban and Italian colors. Speeches alternated from one language to another in the program formally opening the library. Songs were sung in English, Spanish and Italian.

As West Tampa’s business progressed, its city limits expanded to include new homes, and streets and stores took on a better look.

Around 1907, a new subdivision known as "Los Cien" (the One Hundred) was formed. Old timers say it was given this name because 100 families were to pool their money and build homes. In a reorganization dated Sept. 12, 1912 shares were sold in a corporation at $1,000 each and capital was set at $75,000. Full name was Labor Society For Building "Los Cien."

A member could pay as little as $1.75 a week or as much as he desired. This continued until he paid the full amount for his house.

Near West Tampa’s southern city limits, a section was developed that was called "Cacarajicara," for a village and tribe of Indians in Cuba. This area was just south of today’s Interstate 275.

On Jan. 11, 1913, the Centro Espanol Clubhouse at Howard Avenue and Cherry Street opened - the largest and finest of the men’s clubs in the city. This was one of four Centro Espanol buildings in the city, the others being the Ybor City clubhouse and theater, the Ybor City clinic La Benefica and the Bayshore hospital. Spanish Minister Juan Riano Gayangos was present at the opening.

Centro Espanol had been created in 1891 by farsighted men who foresaw the need for medical, recreation, entertainment and social facilities in Ybor City and West Tampa. Its cooperative social medicine plan was one of the first in the United States.

The World War 1 (1914-1918) economy contributed greatly to the growth of the cigar industry generally, and there were 20,000 people employed in more than 100 factories in West Tampa and Ybor City. During the 1920s the industry continued growing, with peaks in 1923 (when more than 500 million cigars were made in Tampa) and again in 1929 (when a new record was set). Payrolls averaged $900,000 a month, rising over $1 million a month in top periods.
Immigration laws underwent drastic changes following World War I, and 1921 quotas limited the numbers of immigrants to 3 percent of that nationality already living in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924 lowered the quota even further, to 2 percent. The number of Spanish immigrants was reduced to just 131 a year, and Cuban immigration almost ceased.

Foreign workers were virtually denied admission. Thus, the Act cut off the infusion of Spanish, Cubans and Italians that had added to the vitality of various nationality groups.

West Tampa came to an end as a separate entity on Jan. 1, 1925, when it was annexed into the City of Tampa. Enrique Hernandez, last mayor of West Tampa, relinquished power at a banquet held at El Pasaje restaurant in Ybor city.

West Tampa was "handed over to the City of Tampa on a silver platter." Col. Hugh Macfarlane, in his speech, said, "We bring you a city in excellent financial condition. We have worked hard to build West Tampa and will work just as hard to build Tampa." He concluded: "We will make Tampa the metropolis of the South, as it was intended to be."

During World War II, many persons left West Tampa, but the mass movement of families from Ybor City to West Tampa more than made up the difference. At war's end, West Tampa's population had doubled, from 5,000 to 11,000. But while population grew, as the years went by, many homes and business establishments began to deteriorate and fall into disrepair.

In recent years, organizations such as the West Tampa Revitalization Corporation, Inc., West Tampa Business Center, Community Redevelopment Agency and the City of Tampa's Office of Redevelopment have recognized the need to reverse the trend.

These organizations, along with other local agencies, are looking for ways to revitalize the blighted areas in West Tampa. Low interest loans and tax credits are among the incentives they are offering to those wanting to rehabilitate older buildings.

Thus, incentives - once a means of bringing in cigar factories - are now being turned into a method for reviving a changed area still proud of its past.