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Tampa's Most Raucous Roarin' Decade: The 1920s

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The Roarin’ Twenties is the label usually applied to the noisy days of the decade of the 1920s. Paul Sann wrote a fine book on those times which he entitled, The Lawless Decade. The period was dubbed "The Jazz Age" by F. Scott Fitzgerald. And journalism’s angry man, Westbrook Pegler, gave it the colorful tab of "The Era of Wonderful Nonsense." To others, it was the Whoopee Era, the Age of Hoopla, "the Get-Rich-Quick Era," and sports writers raved about the 20s as "The Golden Age" of sports.

Florida - and Tampa - were in the spotlight during those zany times because of the incredible Florida real estate boom when speculators and tourists discovered our great state and poured in here in their Tin Lizzies, and by train and by ship.

In Tampa, the decade opened on an unhappy note - and ended on one. At the beginning there was a recession following the prosperous days of World War 1, a time when our shipyards were bustling and economic conditions were upbeat. More than 5,000 men were employed by Oscar Daniels Company and Tampa Dock Company. So, when the shipyards closed with the cease of hostilities, the bottom fell out in this community.

Tampa’s gloom in late 1920 was increased by the business depression which prevailed throughout the nation. The depression, or recession, was short-lived, thankfully, but it was acute while it lasted. By the fall of 1921, the worst of the business slowdown was over.

But, alas, in the meantime, another calamity hit. A general strike in the cigar industry was called. Cigar making, of course, was the
leading business of the Cigar City. And for 10 months, the industry was prostrated by the walkout.

It has been reported that the cigar manufacturers were trying to weaken or destroy the cigar makers' union, which they felt was making unreasonable demands for shorter working hours and higher wages. (Since 1915, the cost of living had increased by 135 percent while wages in the cigar industry had advanced by only 12 percent.)

The International Cigar Makers' Union called the general strike on April 14, 1920. More than 7,600 men quit work. The factories closed; 3,500 other employees were out of work. Without the large cigar payroll, all businesses in Tampa were hurt. The city was paralyzed.

The strike did not end until early in 1921. The union paid out nearly $1 million in strike benefits and found itself near bankruptcy. The 10-month strike was the longest and costliest labor disruption in the industry's history.

In the end, the manufacturers won a victory - the cigar makers were forced to accept an open shop.

Tampa's population at the beginning of the decade was 51,608 - way above the nose count of Miami, a small town which could boast only 30,000 in the 1920 census. Hillsborough County had 88,257 when the period began.

Restless Tampans voted on Oct. 19, 1920, to discard the old councilmanic form of city government after a bitter fight. The city manager form of government was favored. Five outstanding men were chosen as city commissioners to direct the city's affairs at an election on Dec. 7. Charles H. Brown
became mayor-commissioner. The other commissioners were W.A. Adams, W.J. Barritt, V.V. Sharpe, and Maj. Henry E. Snow. Sumter L. Lowry, a leader in the fight for a change, and Dr. L. A. Bize became commissioners in 1921.

The progressive system did much to modernize Tampa. The harbor was developed; the city took over the water system; bridges were built over the Hillsborough River at Fortune, Cass, Platt Streets, and Michigan Avenue (Columbus Drive), and the Lafayette Street (Kennedy Boulevard) Viaduct and the 22nd Street Causeway were completed. The new government reconstructed Bayshore Boulevard, took over the Tampa Bay Casino at the Tampa Bay Hotel for a city auditorium, and erected Tampa Municipal Hospital on new-born Davis Islands.

But this form of government was voted out by dissatisfied citizens in July, 1927. This came after the collapse of the Florida real estate boom. The city was in the doldrums once again - and many residents blamed City Hall for the troubles.

Tampa didn't forget Hillsborough County's 106 servicemen heroes who made the supreme sacrifice in World War I. Indeed, on Jan. 2, 1921, solemn ceremonies dedicated "The Road of Remembrance" - the first such memorial in the nation. The Rotary Club of Tampa, which beautified the roadside of the highway, spending $7,500 for oak trees, oleanders, and other shrubs, conducted the dedication.

Memorial Highway was a 15-foot wide "boulevard" that ran the 13 ½ miles from Howard Avenue, then the Tampa city limits, to the Pinellas County line. It cost $870,000 to build. Tall monuments were erected at either end, and milestones were placed as markers along the way. The shaft at Howard became a traffic hazard as the number of cars moving in the area increased. Shortly before World War II the monument was moved to a spot alongside what is now Kennedy Boulevard near Dale Mabry, in front of the American Legion Cemetery. The memorial road was rededicated in 1948 by the Rotary Club to honor veterans of World War II, as well as the World War I dead.

The decade was no sooner getting under way than the city felt the ravages of Mother Nature. On October 21, 1921, a hurricane struck - the most violent in the area since the Big Gale of 1848 when a hurricane pushed a fantastic tide of 15 feet into area bays, destroying old Fort Brooke.

In 1921 the bad blow shoved tons of water from the Gulf of Mexico to make a tide of 10.5 feet. The barometer fell to 28.29 inches, lowest on record. Rainfall of 6.48 inches in less than 24 hours had preceded the high winds.

The seawall along Bayshore Boulevard was destroyed in places and water poured into some of the city's finest homes overlooking the bay. Long stretches of the Ballast Point street car line were undermined. And the popular excursion boat S.S. Favorite was washed ashore at Plant Park.

Another wave of great proportions tapped the city in the early 20s with the coming of the so-called Tin Can Tourists, visitors driving homemade mobile trailers and eating out of tin cans. A formal organization, the Tin Can Tourists of the World, was born at DeSoto Park during the 1921-22 season. Annual "convocations" were held for years here and in Arcadia during the winter tourist rush.
When Mayor Charles H. Brown dedicated Radio Station WDAE during a special opening broadcast on May 15, 1922, he called the new medium "the wonder of the age that the human voice can be sent broadcast throughout the country."

A miracle indeed!

WDAE, owned and operated by The Tampa Daily Times, was the first licensed radio station in Florida, and thus today is one of the oldest operating stations in the country - and the oldest in Florida.

This new marvel was the first radio station in the U.S. to broadcast a complete church service: On June 4, 1922, from Tampa's historic First Methodist Church. The Rev. William Frederick Dunkle was pastor, and spoke on the subject, "Who Then Can Be Saved?" In 1927 the First Baptist Church became the first congregation in Tampa to broadcast its Sunday services on a regular basis with a one-year contract. Dr. Claude W. Duke was pastor.

And it was in 1928 and on WDAE that a local legend in his time began his broadcasting career: Sol Fleischman. He stayed with WDAE until television invaded the city at which time he went with WTVT-TV and wrapped up a career spanning more than 45 years on the air in the same community.

Egypt Temple Shrine began its long-running series of Easter Sunrise Services in 1922, staging them at the bandshell in Plant Park for many years, and eventually moving to Al Lopez baseball stadium where they are still held. The services first were broadcast over WDAE in 1925.

It was during the sparkling 1920s that one of Tampa's own was shaking up Hollywood as a leading female star in the silent movies. Her name was Colleen Moore, the city's gift to fandom. Born Kathleen Morrison, she
grew up here in the teen years, living on Magnolia Avenue. She had a burning ambition from childhood to be a movie star—during the Roarin’ Twenties she was just that.

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote: "I was the spark that lit up Flaming Youth ... Colleen Moore was the torch. What little things we are to have caused all that trouble."

Colleen went to the Convent of the Holy Names, now called the Academy of the Holy Names. She had a physical distinction: she had one blue eye and one brown eye.

In her autobiography, Silent Star, she tells of how she got a break that put her on celluloid: "At church one Sunday in November 1917, I heard a verse from the Gospel according to St. Matthew: 'All things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.'

'I asked Mother if this meant if I prayed and absolutely knew that I was going to be an actress, nothing could stand in my way. My mother hesitated, but only for a minute. 'Yes, darling,' she said. 'If you will thoroughly believe, and ask God's help, I'm sure that somehow a miracle will happen, and God himself will send you to Hollywood.'

"The next morning I stopped in at church for a few minutes on my way to school, lighted a candle, and with positive knowledge, prayed for God's help. On the night of the ninth day, my miracle happened . . ."

After supper, Colleen's father got a long distance call from his brother, her uncle, in Chicago. He was Walter Howey, editor of the Chicago Examiner, a Hearst newspaper. It seems Howey had done a big favor for D.W. Griffith, the movie mogul in Hollywood. Howey had gotten Griffith's movies, The Birth of A Nation and Intolerance past Chicago's Board of Censors. Griffith wanted to do Howey a favor.

So Uncle Walter asked him to give his niece in Tampa a screen test. He did, and, as they say, the rest is history.

She became a star, all right, and her movies were billed Colleen Moore of Tampa when shown here.

One of the most acid-tongued movie critics of the era was George Jean Nathan. He wrote: "To those who believe Colleen Moore is a greater actress than Greta Garbo, I say you go to your church and I'll go to mine."

Colleen Moore was the number one box office star in 1926 and 1927.

After she accumulated wealth and fame, Colleen Moore put together a real showpiece, a doll house costing a half million of the 1930s'dollars. She carried it on a nationwide tour to raise funds for charities. She showed it here at Maas Brothers in 1938, and I covered the event for The Tampa Daily Times and had lunch with the star. The doll house now reposes in the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

Now in her 80s, the ex-star is the widow of Homer Hargrave, an investment broker, and lives in California.

The headlines in the Tampa Morning Tribune were shocking that morning of Washington's birthday in 1922: Capt. Dale Mabry, popular local air hero in World War
had perished with most of his crew in the crash of the dirigible Roma the day before.

The banners screamed: "34 PERISH WITH DIRIGIBLE ROMA." "Capt. Dale Mabry of Tampa a Victim; Bodies Burned to Crisp When Gas Bag is Exploded by a High Voltage Wire."

Mabry had been one of the officers sent to Italy to pick up the Roma a few months before. The giant 410-foot dirigible had been purchased from Italy for $200,000 to help build up the fleet of the U.S. Air Service. Mabry was piloting the craft the afternoon of February 21 when it collapsed and struck a network of 2,200-volt high tension wires near Norfolk.

When Mabry's body was recovered from the crash scene, his hands were still grasping the wheel of the airship.

A native of Tallahassee, Dale Mabry moved to Tampa and was in the real estate business with his brothers, Giddings E. Mabry and Milton H. Mabry, Jr. He served in France during World War I in the Air Service and made the Army a career afterwards.

Busy, crowded Dale Mabry Highway is named in honor of Capt. Dale Mabry. It was

Gandy Bridge linked Tampa and St. Petersburg in 1924.

-From Hampton Dunn Collection
built during World War II to connect two major air force installations, MacDill Field and Drew Field.

Some other happenings in Tampa in the early 1920s:

West Tampa’s Macfarlane Park was dedicated on Jan. 1, 1921.

In 1923 Tampa’s city limits were extended to include Sulphur Springs, the same year Josiah Richardson, a colorful entrepreneur arrived. First he built the Nebraska Hotel, better known as the Sulphur Springs Hotel and Arcade. It was our first shopping mall, what with its hotel, apartments, the Springs Cafe, Whitehead’s Drug Store, Piggly Wiggly store, bakery, pool ball, barber shop, and a branch of the Sheriff’s office. Indeed, Robert L. Ripley featured the unique structure in his Believe It or Not! cartoon, claiming it to be the world’s only city under one roof.

Those were the rip-roaring days of prohibition, the era of the speakeasy and the moonshine stills. Tampa had its share of them. On Jan. 24, 1924, the staid Rotary Club of Tampa staged its annual Press Breakfast. In announcing it, the president, Teddy Nott, pleaded: "Please, fellows, leave your hip flasks at home when you attend the Press Breakfast."
"Dad" Gandy's dream of a bridge across Old Tampa Bay was labeled a "wild, visionary scheme" at its inception. The skeptics, the scoffers, and the kibitzers had a field day at the expense of the Yankee-bred George S. Gandy when he started talking about his project, but the grand old gentleman lived to bask in the plaudits of those who said it couldn’t be done.

On Nov. 20, 1924, Gandy gave one of the briefest, and perhaps best, speeches at a dedication - just four words: "The bridge is built!"

His dream started in 1904. He was about to get it going when World War I intervened. After the war he couldn’t get financing, so he decided to "go public." Promoter Eugene M. Elliott put on a razzle-dazzle sales blitz and sold $2 million in stock in 122 days.

Gov. Cary A. Hardee came down for the opening, and Sara Keller Hobbs - "Miss Tampa" - cut the ribbon.

Prior to the opening of this toll span, it took several hours by slow-moving automobile to make the long trip around the north end of the bay and then journey down to St. Petersburg. Gandy Bridge became an important link between Tampa and St. Petersburg.

The tolls stayed on until 1944 during World War II. Then U.S. Senator Claude Pepper was engaged in a heated campaign for re-election and needed a "gimmick" to bail him out of trouble. He seized on the goal of freeing Gandy Bridge and Davis Causeway for military personnel commuting between Tampa and the beaches. He called on his pal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to use his war powers to confiscate the bridge. FDR did - and Pepper was re-elected.
because of a hefty vote in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties.

The mid '20s truly were exciting times in Tampa and elsewhere in Florida during the real estate boom.

Some of the city's most prestigious neighborhoods were developed starting in 1924. A.J. Simms unveiled his New Suburb Beautiful and Parkland Estates. He also altered the downtown skyline by building the tallest structure, the Floridan Hotel - a building today dwarfed by the new skyline.

Palma Ceia was promoted during these days. So was Temple Terrace on land formerly owned by Chicago's Mrs. Potter Palmer. Forest Hills was subdivided by B.L. Hamner who brought in then world's heavyweight boxing champion, Jack Dempsey, to draw crowds on sales days.

The gorgeous Tampa Terrace Hotel went up downtown and the attractive Bayshore Royal Hotel became the Bayshore's first high rise. The old Olive Hotel expanded and changed its name to the Thomas Jefferson Hotel.

Col. Wallace F. Stovall, founder of the Tampa Tribune in the 1890s, was a dynamic figure in the city during the boom days. He sold the newspaper to a syndicate in 1925 at which time the circulation totaled 29,100. Then Stovall set about to create a new skyline for the city's downtown. He built the 12-story Wallace S. Building, the 7-story Stovall Office Building and the 8-story Stovall Professional Building. He backed his son, Wallace O. Stovall in publishing a third daily newspaper for the city, The Tampa Telegraph, but it survived only eight months. Another newspaper, The Globe, an afternoon tabloid, commenced publication in
November 1925 and suspended publication in June 1926.

The First National Bank’s 13-story building went up in 1926.

West Tampa, which had been incorporated in 1893, was annexed to the City of Tampa in 1925.

The most imaginative developer in the boom days was a hometown "boy," D.P. Davis, who put together the Davis Islands development. A one-time carrier boy for The Tampa Daily Times, Davis made money in Miami early in the boom where he saw them dredging in islands and millionaires paying fabulous prices for the new land. Davis got the idea to fill in two grassy keys in sight of downtown Tampa and calling them Davis Islands. He sold lots, 300 of them, yet under water, with first day’s sales reaching $1.68 million. His project was an instant success - Tampa Municipal Hospital, the Mirasol Hotel, the Palmerin, Davis Islands Coliseum and the Davis Islands Country Club.

Davis went to St. Augustine from here and started another enterprise when the boom collapsed and virtually broke him. He decided to take a transatlantic cruise aboard the steamship Majestic. En route he disappeared overboard. His death was debated, whether it was accidental or a suicide. It happened that he had bought a $300,000 life insurance policy from a fledgling firm, the Victory National Life, founded by Sumter L. Lowry and which eventually became Gulf Life Insurance Company. Lowry investigated Davis’ death and decided to pay off the policy. Later, he wrote in his memoirs that this act "gave the public a lot of confidence in my brand new insurance company."

A thrilling event in the Plant Park bandshell during the mid ’20s was the appearance of Col. Harold B. Bachman and his "Million Dollar Band." His was one of the top units in the era of traveling concert bands. It played the winter seasons of 1921-1923 in
the old Flagler Park bandshell in West Palm Beach and moved over to Tampa and Plant Park for the 1925-1927 winter seasons, at the height of the real estate boom. The colonel estimated he conducted more than 900 concerts from these two bandstands. The Tampa contract called for 13 concerts a week.

Typical weekday audiences would run about 1,000 in the afternoons and up to 2,500 at the evening concerts. Sunday afternoon audiences of between 4,000-5,000 were not unusual. These Sunday concerts were broadcast over Radio Station WDAE to additional thousands of listeners.

During the summer Bachman’s band was on the Chautauqua circuit, traveling all over the United States. A part of his agreement with the Tampa Board of Trade was that he would advertise Tampa on his tours. During one summer season, for example, his band played 108 towns in the Southern and Mid-Western states. The Bachman Band contract was not renewed after the 1927 season because the Florida real estate boom had burst.

The band got its name from an incident during World War I. Bachman carried his military musicians to France for a tour at the front to entertain the soldiers. A general said after one concert that the music was "worth a million dollars to my men."

Bachman also was an Army musician in World War II. After that he became director of Fightin’ Gator Band of the University of Florida and was director emeritus when he died in 1972.

Some other events of 1926 in Tampa:

The 22nd Street Causeway was completed and was named in honor of Panfilo de Narvaez, early Spanish explorer of these parts.

The Platt and Cass Street bridges were completed. The original design of the Platt Street bridge resembled that of London bridge with tall buildings on a span forming towers. Contracts also were let that year for the Fortune Street and Michigan Avenue (Columbus Drive) spans.

The Municipal Auditorium (now McKay Auditorium) was opened.

Airmail service to Tampa was inaugurated to Tampa on April 1, 1926. Mrs. Elizabeth Barnard was the postmaster.

"When you realize we can take you, your package or letter from Tampa to Miami in three hours when the fastest train requires almost 14 hours; and when we can travel by air between here and Jacksonville in one-third time it requires by rail, does not this comparison give you an entirely new picture of the many advantages of commercial aviation?"

- Advertising Brochure
Florida Airways, 1926

In 1926, a Tampa-based airline, Florida Airways, was awarded the route between Jacksonville and Miami to carry contract air mail, the first issued in Florida. The postmaster general was authorized to pay $3 per pound per mile for the transportation of mail.

Florida Airways was the baby of Capt. Eddie V. Rickenbacker, a World War I "ace." Three of his fellow war buddies, Reed M. Chambers, Ray Brooks and Jack Harding, joined in the venture, which got a big financial assist from Percy A. Rockefeller and other wealthy friends.
The daily service began on April 1, 1926. The firm had a fleet of Ford-Stout monoplanes dubbed, "Miss Tampa," "Miss Fort Myers," "Miss Miami," "Miss Jacksonville" and so forth.

The going wasn't easy. Ray Brooks was interviewed by Warren J. Brown, author of Florida's Aviation History in Lakeland in 1980, and recalled:

"The Tampa field was supposed to be one mile square and free of tree stumps. Instead, we found a small scale forest. We had to hire prisoners and use employees to dig up the stumps."

On a trip into Fort Myers on March 13, 1926, the Miss Tampa was inspected by inventor Thomas A. Edison and his wife, but they did not take a flight.

The service of Florida Airways was short-lived. It operated only nine months and carried 939 passengers, flew 282,908 miles, had 12 forced landings - and Captain Rickenbacker was a quarter of a million dollars in debt, which he later made good. He was back in Florida nine years later, in 1935, this time as an official and later president of Eastern Air Lines.

Billed on its opening as "The South's Most Beautiful Theater," the opulent Tampa Theatre opened on October 15, 1926. It was planned by John Eberson, master of movie-palace architecture. The interior of the Tampa successfully incorporated an exotic "exterior" environment, complete with manufactured stars and clouds, and eclectic combinations of Classical and Mediterranean Revival architecture.

When new, the showplace boasted 1,500 seats, a 20-piece orchestra, the "Mighty Wurlitzer" organ first played by Eddie Weaver and later by Eddie Ford, the first commercial air conditioning in Tampa, and 10,000 light bulbs! During the depression of the 1930s, it continued to fill its big auditorium with such crowd-pullers as "Screeno" and "Bank Night."

In the 1960s, attendance plunged when suburban theatres drew movie crowds to shopping centers. In 1976, the Smyrna-Halifax Corporation donated the theater to the City of Tampa. A grand re-opening took place on January 22, 1977. The Arts Council now manages and programs the entertainment. The theater is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Roarin' 20s rolled on in 1927 as Josiah Richardson constructed the 225-foot tall Sulphur Springs water tower on Florida Avenue at the Hillsborough River. The entire structure is on solid rock over a boiling spring. Today the tower stores the artesian well-water which still supplies a small area in Sulphur Springs.

The Florida Avenue bridge was completed in January, 1927. Prior to this the only means of traffic across the river, going north and south, was over the very narrow bridge on Nebraska Avenue, which was so constructed that traffic going north had to stop to allow south-going cars to pass, and vice versa.

A terrible crime enraged the community in 1927. Five members of the Merrill family were murdered by a man named Benjamin Franklin Levins. A crying, one-year-old baby boy was found lying underneath the bed. He evidently had fallen out of bed and was missed by the killer.

The public was incensed. A large mob formed outside the Hillsborough County Jail, intent on lynching the murderer. Some
of the mob disarmed police and deputies trying to control the situation. The 116th Field Artillery was called out, with Col. Sumter L. Lowry and Col. Homer W. Hesterly in charge. The situation was described as "completely out of hand" when the troops arrived on the scene. Machine guns were put in place, even the mob had one. Shots were exchanged. The crowd finally became convinced the law meant business - and dissipated.

In 1927 "Lucky Lindy" Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic Ocean alone in a small plane and landed in Paris, after a 33-hour flight. Other aviators around the country got in on the craze and tried to set new aviation records.

So it was that a couple of aerial daredevils from Lakeland schemed to be the first to fly a passenger across the ocean - and the passenger was a woman! George Haldeman, a flight instructor, and his beauteous student pilot, Ruth Elder, set out to accomplish this feat.

The long journey began from old Drew Field in Tampa on Sept. 12. Congressman J. Herbert Drane came over from Lakeland to wish them well. Finally on Oct. 11, at 5:05 p.m., the couple took off from New York in their American Girl for the transatlantic hop to Paris.

The next day their plane developed an oil-tank leak. Realizing they weren't going to make it across the ocean, they looked for a ship, saw the Dutch SS Barendrecht, dropped a note asking for direction, finally abandoned the plane about 250 miles northwest of Cape Finestra, Spain.

Haldeman and Miss Elder were rescued by the ship, arrived in Paris to a hero's welcome, and when they returned to the U.S., were met and entertained by President Coolidge in the White House.

Haldeman continued active in aviation until his death in 1982. At the time of his passing, he was a consultant on the controversial B-1 bomber.

Miss Elder, dubbed the "Miss America of Aviation," made movies, married six times, made a lot of money and spent it all. She died in 1977, in San Francisco.

Tampa got its second high school in 1927: Plant High was built with funds raised by a bond issue in 1925.

Hillsborough High moved into its sparkling new Gothic looking building on Central Avenue in 1928. The structure cost $1 million.

The HHS-PHS football rivalry began in November 1928. More than 4,000 watched Hillsborough whip the outmanned Panthers, 33-6, in the game that started a rivalry as tradition-rich as any in the country.

The year 1928 was marked by the opening of the Tamiami Trail, an engineering marvel that connected the west and east coasts of Florida from Tampa to Miami.

A fight for a Tampa-Miami road link dated back to 1915. In April 1923, a group calling themselves "Trailblazers" attempted to cross the dense Everglades. The party disappeared for days and airplanes searched for them. Two Tampans - Frank Whitman and Russell Kay - were in the group. The missing explorers received nationwide publicity. Finally, Seminole Indians located the party and escorted it to Miami.
Famed inventor Thomas A. Edison of Fort Myers had sent a bottle of grape juice tied with a white ribbon by the "Trailblazers." The bottle was to be delivered to William Jennings Bryan, the great prohibitionist and three times Democratic nominee for President of the U.S., who was busy selling real estate in Coral Gables.

Eventually, the big day for the official opening of Tamiami Trail came. It was dedicated on Tuesday night, April 24, 1928, at the Tampa Auditorium. Principal speakers were Gov. John W. Martin, who had run for office on a platform of better roads for Florida; Mayor D.B. McKay, T. Ed Bryan, W.W. Trice, and W.G. Brorein. A motorcade proceeded from Tampa to Miami and stops were made along the way for local celebrations in intermediate cities.

On New Year's Day, 1928, the largest drainage project in Florida, built to serve the Interbay section of Tampa, was completed at a cost of $2,338,000, and extended through 250 subdivisions, comprising 25,000 lots.

For the second time in history, a Tampa man was elected Governor of Florida in 1928. He was Doyle E. Carlton, prominent attorney. He took office in January 1929, and was chief executive for four depression years. During his administration, parimutuel gambling was voted by the Legislature, vetoed by Carlton, and passed over his veto.

Locally, in 1928, L.M. Hatton, Jr., was elected Sheriff of Hillsborough County in a freak election. His mother died on election eve and Hatton was swept into office on a big sympathy vote. The sheriffs tenure lasted only a few months. Governor Carlton fired his fellow townsman, who was accused of corruption. Hatton claimed he was "the victim of one of the rottenest political deals ever handed an officer of this county."

In 1928 there was a big community hassle over whether to repair the 1892 Hillsborough County Court House or to build a new one.

One proposal was for a new 27-story court house and office building, estimated to cost $4.5 million. It would have been the tallest building in Florida at the time.

A syndicate headed by P.O. Wall offered to furnish the county four floors for court rooms and county offices at no cost to the taxpayers on a 99-year lease of the then current court house site at Franklin and Lafayette Streets, Florida Avenue, and Madison Street.

A Bar Association committee, headed by Judge O.K. Reaves, declared the plan would be unconstitutional and the idea was dropped. Another proposal was advanced to convert the Tampa Bay Hotel into a modern courthouse. Several large rooms, namely the lobby, dining room, kitchen, and ball room would be converted into court rooms, the bedrooms into offices.

It was suggested that the county could swap the site of the court house to the City of Tampa for the hotel. That scheme also went down in defeat. A few years later, in 1933, the hotel became the home of newborn University of Tampa.

In 1929 a municipal airport and seaplane base was proposed to be built on an island off Ballast Point in Hillsborough Bay.

The Tampa Daily Times wrote enthusiastically: "Seaplanes would be afforded landing and takeoff directions two miles or longer in all winds - sufficient even for giant flying boats that will be put in operation soon by the New York, Rio &
Buenos Aires Airlines (eventually part of Pan American Airways)."

One hundred sixty acres with 5,420-foot lanes arranged in cross formation were suggested. A 2,660-foot causeway would have linked the island with the mainland, placing the airport 10 minutes from the heart of Tampa by Bayshore Boulevard.

The voters of Tampa approved a $750,000 bond issue to pay for this island air and seaplane base. But alas, the residents along affluent Bayshore Boulevard rose up as one to vigorously oppose the project, saying it would lower property values and cut off their view of the waterfront.

A blue ribbon citizens committee appointed by Mayor D.B. McKay studied the issue and announced it favored the airport at Catfish Point on Interbay Peninsula. But a majority bloc on the City Council stubbornly refused to proceed. The Tampa Tribune turned its editorial guns on the politicians demanding that they go ahead with the plan. The balky councilmen held firm - and plans for the airport were shelved.

And Pan American, thoroughly disgusted with the local politics, said phooey on you, abandoned the idea of establishing a base in Tampa - and went to Miami.

There was more action on the local aviation front in 1929. The nationwide craze for airplane endurance feats reached Tampa. The Florida Citrus Exchange sponsored the Sealdsweet, which was refueled in air by another craft, the Mor-Juice. The planes were named after the Exchange's fruit brands.

The long run of the contest was abruptly ended when both planes crashed within minutes of each other the same day. E.A. "Boots" Dempsey, 34, and Stanley Smith, 26, both of St. Louis, crashed on takeoff in their Curtiss Robin aircraft, the Mor-Juice, to refuel the sister ship which was attempting to set an endurance record that would exceed the presently acknowledged mark of 421 consecutive hours in the air. The Sealdsweet had crashed 15 minutes earlier near Kissimmee. Both pilots escaped unharmed.

Several months later the endurance record of 647 hours was set by another pair of pilots in St. Louis.

The Tampa flight was a stunt designed to promote a new airfield for the city to replace the outmoded Drew Field (now Tampa International Airport). The Drew Field land was leased four days after the Sealdsweet and the MorJuice crashed. The city hangar at Drew Field was destroyed by fire later in the year which caused more than $100,000 worth of damage.

The peak year representing the record cigar production in the history of Tampa was in 1929, when 504,753,000 cigars were made.

A historical report on the industry issued in 1939 noted that "despite the decline and unsatisfactory conditions since 1929, the cigar industry still remains the major economic activity in Tampa. However, it is no longer the only important industry in the city…"

"In 1930 the U.S. Census showed 25 percent of the workers in Tampa were engaged in cigar factories, as compared with 56.2 percent in 1910."

In the decade of the '20s, an increase of 121 percent in the annual output of cigars was recorded. The output in 1920 was 227,791,000.
In the gloomy days of 1929, just as the stock market was about to crash and Florida's real estate boom already had collapsed, a company of more than 100 persons from a Hollywood studio swooped into Tampa to make a film.

It was the first all-outdoor, all-talking picture ever produced and it was called Hell Harbor. The location for the filming was Rocky Point near the present-day Rusty Pelican Restaurant. Henry King, famed Hollywood director, was the director of the movie made here which starred a Latin bombshell from Mexico, Lupe Velez. Others featured in the film were Jean Hersholt, John Holland, Gibson Gowland, and Al St. John. Also starred was Tampa's own Rondo Hatton, who swapped a career as reporter for the Tampa Morning Tribune to become a movie actor.

Gov. Doyle E. Carlton, wrote to Henry King: "I am sure that the beauty spots of the State, the long hours of daylight, and delightful weather conditions particularly fit Florida for motion picture work." The Governor added, "We believe this is just the beginning of a big movement."

The Roarin' Twenties were winding down when Tampa experienced "a black day in history." On July 17, 1929, the large, highly respected and trusted Citizens Bank and Trust Company suddenly closed its doors. Hundreds of business concerns had accounts and thousands of individuals had their life savings in the busted bank. In addition, several smaller banks, affiliated with the Citizens, also closed.

Within hours after the news about the Citizens spread around the city, the "run" began on the city's other major banks - the First National, Exchange National, and First Savings & Trust Company.

Tampa's newspapers, business leaders, and civic groups called for calm.

A big to-do was made over the arrival of an airplane flying in from Jacksonville laden with $1 million in cash, rushed here to assure and reassure depositors that their investments were safe. That same evening, another $4 million in Federal Reserve Bank funds was shipped by rail to Tampa. The crisis was weathered.

A few days before this calamity hit Tampa, Gov. Doyle E. Carlton stopped off in Chicago enroute to a governors' conference in Connecticut. He went on the radio there to tell the northern interests that Florida was making adjustments after the real estate boom - preparing for a new day. Yes, the Governor boasted, "The state (of Florida) is as sound as Gibraltar."

The bank closings were just a prelude to the troubles ahead. Soon the bottom dropped out of the stock markets and a massive nationwide depression was launched, destined to last most of the 1930s.

When they counted noses in the 1930 census, Tampa's population totaled 101,161 - approximately twice as much as it was in the 1920 census. Yes, during the Roarin' Twenties, Tampa prospered and developed, and at the end of the decade, the city was on the threshold of becoming a buzzing metropolis. And most of the memories of that era were happy and exciting ones!