Panel of Historians Couldn't Pick Just 10 Most Significant Tampans

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We asked four historians to choose 10 persons who contributed most significantly to Tampa historically.

The historians:

- **Dr. James W. Covington**, writer of numerous articles on the city’s past and Dana professor of history at the University of Tampa.

- **Hampton Dunn**, author of "Yesterday’s Tampa" and numerous other volumes; president-elect of the Florida Historical Society.

- **Dr. Gary Mormino**, co-author of "Tampa, Treasure City," associate professor of history at University of South Florida and executive director of the Florida Historical Society.
-Tony Pizzo, official county historian, author of "Tampa Town," co-author of "Tampa, Treasure City" and founder of the Tampa Historical Society.

Some of their picks are predictable, but some are names you’ve probably never heard. And because they didn’t choose the same people, the list is much longer than 10.

First, the unanimous choices:

-Henry Bradley Plant, the Connecticut railroad magnate who put Tampa on the map by bringing his Plant System railroad here in 1884 and by building the city’s unique structure, the Tampa Bay Hotel, today’s University of Tampa Plant Hall.

-Vicente Martinez Ybor, the Spaniard who made the key decision to open a cigar factory and a land company which pawned the distinctive cigar-making Ybor City in 1885.

-Peter 0. Knight, the Pennsylvanian who came to Tampa in the 1890s, practiced law, became a corporate power broker with statewide clout, a spokesman for utilities, railroads and phosphate companies.

Next, the nearly unanimous choices (three out of four):

-Capt. James McKay, the Scotsman who built the first courthouse, started the cattle shipping trade out of Tampa, served as mayor, and became a blockade runner and Cattle Cavalry leader for the Confederacy.

-Congressman Stephen M. Sparkman, native Floridian who as chairman of the Rivers and Harbors Committee engineered appropriations for the deeper channels that assured Tampa’s port of trade outlets to the world.

-D.B. (Donald Brenham) McKay, four-term mayor of Tampa (1910-20, 1928-31); builder of City Hall and instigator of numerous municipal
improvements; long-time editor-publisher of the Tampa Daily Times. Incidentally, he was a grandson of Capt. James McKay.

A figure who rated nods from two historians was Dr. John P. Wall, mayor, first editor of the Sunland Tribune, first president of the Tampa Board of Trade, physician and one of the first to advance the theory that mosquitoes spread yellow fever.

Dr. Wall fathered Charlie Wall, Tampa’s dominant gambling boss for several decades, who gained a vote in the top 10 from Dr. Gary Mormino. The historian described Charlie Wall as embodying "raw power and impeccable family credentials, which translated into root and core corruption from the 1920s into the 1940s."

Here are some of the other single-vote choices.

Mormino singled out Estevanico de Dorantes, a Moorish slave who "made history by wading ashore in 1528, with the Narvaez expedition, becoming the first black man to explore the U.S. mainland." Estevanico, one of three survivors of that expedition, "symbolizes the enduring black presence in Tampa," Mormino said.

Mormino also chose Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda, the man credited with giving Tampa its name. Fontaneda had lived among the Indians of Southwest Florida for 21 years after his ship wrecked. He gained freedom when Pedro Menendez de Aviles explored Florida.

Fontaneda later wrote an account of his experiences. Among the Indian villages Fontaneda mentioned prominently was "a place called Tampa." Mormino noted that a later author Hispanicized the word to "Tampa."

Covington named Richard Hackley, who built the house on the strategic site near the mouth of the Hillsborough River, which attracted the attention and the occupation of the U.S. Army when it established Fort Brooke in 1824. Had not Hackley cleared the land, another site might have been the initial American settlement here.

Another Covington choice was Nancy Collier Jackson, a member of the first Anglo-American family to settle in the area, a "typical frontier woman." She saw Maj. Francis Dade’s troops depart from Fort Brooke on their ill-fated expedition to Fort King in December 1835, when almost all of them died in an ambush near today’s Bushnell.

Tony Pizzo picked Augustus Steele, the lawyer who spearheaded the creation of
Hillsborough County in 1834 and sponsored one of the first Tampa subdivisions alongside Fort Brooke.

Pizzo also chose three figures prominent in the beginning of Ybor City:

- **John T. Lesley**, seller of the land that became the original settlement; fighter in the Seminole and Civil wars; sheriff; cattle raiser; member of the state constitutional convention of 1885.

- **Ignacio Haya**, Spanish cigar manufacturer whose factory actually went into production sooner than Ybor’s in 1886; first president of Centro Espanol.

- **Eduardo, Manrara**, Ybor’s associate who became an organizer of the Tampa Street Railway Company, Exchange National Bank, Florida Brewing Co., and Tampa Gas Co.

Additionally, Pizzo spotlighted Scotsman **Hugh C. Macfarlane**, founder of West Tampa, city attorney of Tampa and Hillsborough state attorney; and Silas A. Jones, early Tampa promoter who played a key role in bringing Plant to Tampa and in starting the Tampa Board of Trade. (Jones was the grandfather of U.S. Sen. George Smathers.)

Pizzo pointed to **Elizabeth Barnard**, postmaster 1923-33, as the first Tampa woman holding a position of such magnitude. Mrs. Barnard took part in ceremonies when the first airmail flights came to Tampa.

He also named **Clara Frye**, the Tampa nurse who single-handedly started a hospital for blacks when medical care was virtually non-existent for minority races here.

Hampton Dunn cited **Betty Castor** for "significant political breakthroughs for women" as Hillsborough’s first elected woman county commissioner, state senator, president pro tem of the State Senate and more recently as the...

**Wallace F. Stovall**, who established The Tampa Tribune and "provided city leadership for more than 30 years and created Tampa's first real skyline" with buildings in the 1920s.

**Doyle E. Carlton Sr.**, Tampa resident who became governor of Florida during the Depression and provided civic leadership in later years.

Evangelist **Billy Graham**, who received his theological training in Tampa and began his Christian crusades as a student at Florida Bible Institute here.

**James A. Clendinen**, editor of The Tampa Tribune in the post-World War II years "whose incisive editorials pointed the way to progress."

**Dr. John S. Allen**, founding president of the University of South Florida, who "built the institution on a solid foundation."

Covington named **U.S. Rep. Sam Gibbons** for his roles - when he was in the State Legislature - in gaining the University of South Florida for Tampa and in expanding Tampa’s city limits through legislative annexation in 1953.

He also remembers as significant several sets of developers in Tampa’s past:
Alfred R. Swann and Eugene Holtsinger for their Suburb Beautiful which is known as today’s Hyde Park; D.P. Davis, of Davis Islands; and James Taylor of Palma Ceia.

Mormino mentioned Dr. John Gorrie, inventor of the ice machine which led to air conditioning.

“His infernal invention allowed perfidious developers to maul (mall?) our beautiful city,” Mormino wrote. "Tampa changed from a front-porch society to families centered around television, entertainment parlors and backdoor patios."