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FROM THE EDITORS

The 1948 cover photograph captures much of the spirit of post-War Florida and suggests much about where the state was heading in the years to come. During World War II, women and blacks had entered new arenas - including sports as well as industry and the army - in unprecedented numbers. Wartime experiences and postwar optimism encouraged these groups to seek the social, political, economic, and educational changes that would assure them equal opportunity. The photographic essay, "Public Schools in Southwest Florida, Part II," by Milly St. Julien, illustrates both the tremendous progress made in public education from 1920 to 1950 and the continued obstacles to equal opportunity resulting from racial segregation. (On desegregation in local schools, see Volume 7:1, Spring/Summer 1985).

Several prize-winning articles in this issue focus on the struggle for change between 1920 and the present. The decade of the 1920s was a period of material progress and social tension throughout the United States. "Prohibition in Tampa" by Frank Alduino reveals the forces behind prohibition and the problems of its enforcement. This article won second place in the 1985 Tampa Bay History Essay Contest. The article by Nell C. Weidenbach, which received honorable mention in the 1985 contest, relates the impact of bridges on the development of Fort Myers between 1924 and 1964. The issue’s lead essay by Josephine King Evans, winner of the 1986 Tampa Bay History Essay Contest, traces the history of the Florida Mental Health Institute. She views FMHI as a symbol of 1960’s-era reforms, through which innovative and humanitarian mental health programs were introduced to Florida.

This issue also includes the memoirs of Kate Barnwell Williams, a pioneer woman who struggled to survive in frontier Florida and who left behind 122 direct descendants at her death in 1950. Book reviews, announcements, and information on the 1987 Tampa Bay History Essay Contest complete the volume.

This issue marks the beginning of Tampa Bay History’s ninth year of publication. Survival of the journal depends largely on the continued support of subscribers, on the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of South Florida, and on our Board of Advisors. We especially want to thank all of our readers who have responded to our first price increase in nine years by renewing subscriptions and by encouraging friends to subscribe as well. We hope you will enjoy this issue, packed with Essay Contest winners, and that a few of you may be inspired to enter this year’s contest.
“We as a Nation have long neglected the mentally ill,” John F. Kennedy announced to Congress in 1963.\(^1\) To remedy this, the President proposed a bold new approach that would supplant “the cold mercy of custodial isolation” with “the open warmth of community concern.”\(^2\) Born of this bold new approach, the Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) at the University of South Florida symbolizes the humanism of Kennedy’s compassionate appeal. Although it did not officially open until 1974, the Institute was conceived in the 1960s and reflects the social-political reform of that decade.

The history of mental health institutions stretches back at least to the Romans. Demonology characterized the view of mental illness in this era; wicked spirits invaded individuals and transformed them into creatures of evil. Typical treatment focused upon punishment: beating, burning, and other tortures. The first known mental institution, a house for lunatics, was established by the Romans at Byzantium in the 4th century A.D., and before 700 A.D. there were insane asylums in England and the Middle East. By the 13th century there were similar facilities in Spain and Germany; in these institutions inmates were regarded as dangerous and deserving of extreme punishment. Not until the French Revolution in 1789 did treatment of mentally ill persons drastically improve when they were recognized, at last, as being truly sick rather than possessed. Influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, this new “moral” treatment was symbolized by the physician Phillipe Pinel “striking the chains” from inmates of asylums in France.\(^3\)

This new humanitarianism, however, succumbed to pressures of the industrial revolution. Urbanization and weakening of the family unit increasingly thrust the problems of deviants (including the mentally ill) on state and city governments. The methods employed by the state included prison, the poor farm, and the workhouse. Exported to America, these expedient remedies were fully embraced, and mentally ill persons in the New World were confined in prisons and poor-houses, or auctioned off to the highest bidder.

Then, in the mid-1800s, reformers began to argue that insanity was symptomatic of a sick society rather than a sick person. They sought to improve the quality of life for mental patients. State hospitals, the second major revolution in treatment of the mentally ill, resulted from this era of reform. Contending that urban living conditions aggravated mental illness, Dorothea Dix argued successfully to have these state institutions located in rural areas establishing a tradition that would play a pivotal role in the later history of FMHI.

In the early years, these hospitals emphasized an effective restorative treatment including good nutrition and a cheerful environment. But with the passage of time, meager funding, overcrowding, and poorly-trained staff took their toll. By the late 19th century, recovery rates
plummeted, and earlier optimism degenerated into a widespread feeling of hopelessness; old methods of restraint were revived, and warehousing of the mentally ill began.⁴

Treatment continued to decline until the early twentieth century. Then, as part of the larger movement for progressive reform, mental health care underwent a third revolutionary change; rehumanized, it focused more upon individual treatment, notably psychoanalysis. Perhaps in no other country in the world was Sigmund Freud’s influence so powerful as in the United States, not only in establishing a relationship between mental disorders and the social system but also in encouraging long-term scientific research.⁵ Clifford Beers’ expose of mental institutions also contributed to more humane treatment in this period. A former patient, he organized the mental hygiene movement and crusaded for reform.

Emphasis on individualized treatment, however, was accompanied by an increased patient load in institutions because of the expanded role of the state. Overcrowding, understaffing, limited funding, and isolated locations all contributed to a gradual deterioration of treatment. Disconnected from the communities they served, state mental hospitals became known as “snakepits” where society confined the undesirable. Florida was no exception. Poorly staffed state hospitals in rural Chattahoochee, Arcadia, West Hollywood, and Macclenny were overflowing; permanent confinement became the accepted treatment. Such was the state of affairs when John F. Kennedy made his passionate appeal for a “bold new approach” to mental illness.⁶

Kennedy’s speech was the first message concerning mental illness ever delivered by an American president. In it, he contended that the nation’s mental health system should take responsibility for everyone’s mental health. Perhaps more importantly, Kennedy claimed that most mental problems resided in the environment and not in the individual. Accordingly, Kennedy’s “bold new approach” emphasized treatments that focused on improving harmful environmental conditions and on rehabilitating individuals to function in society. Modernized training of mental health staff and intensified research into the causes of mental disorders completed the President’s proposal.⁷ Legislators responded to Kennedy’s passionate appeal with passage of the Community Mental Health Centers Act in October, 1963, less than a month before the President’s death.

Central to this legislation was the placement of mental health centers in areas according to population needs. Each center would serve “principally those persons who live in or near the particular community in which the facility is located.”⁸ To this end the United States was to be divided into some 1,500 catchment (or population) areas of from 75,000 to 200,000 persons each; these areas were to be ranked according to mental health needs, and a proportionate number of mental health centers would be constructed.⁹

These centers would emphasize both preventive and comprehensive services to entire catchment areas rather than individuals. Innovative treatment would include both brief psychotherapy and crisis intervention, the latter based on direct community involvement. Mental health practitioners were to cooperate with teachers, religious leaders, social workers, and public health personnel not only to prevent crises but also to educate the population about mental
illness. Research into the causes of mental disorders and training of mental health staff comprised the other provisions of the Community Mental Health Centers Act.¹⁰

The implementation of the legislation in Florida was begun with a $25,000 survey of the mental health needs of the state commissioned by the 1961 legislature. Conducted by the American Psychiatric Association and completed in 1963, the study recommended that four all-purpose mental health facilities be constructed in urban areas of the state, including one in Tampa.¹¹ Based upon the recommendation of Dr. W.D. Rogers, director of the division of mental health, State Representative Woodie Liles of Plant City announced plans in 1964 for a 500-bed mental hospital in the Tampa Bay area. “It ought to be built near the University of South Florida in a medical complex with the school’s medical college and a proposed Veteran’s Administration Hospital,” said Liles.¹² Funding for the facility was assured when one year later the legislative committee on mental health which Liles chaired appropriated 2.2 million dollars to begin construction in the Tampa Bay area. According to Liles, “We’ve been traveling the state and we think here is the greatest need.”¹³

FMHI was not to be established without a struggle, however. Representative Liles did not reckon with the dominant block in the legislature. Despite massive population growth in the
cities of south Florida, political power remained in the vise-like grip of rural northern counties. Notorious for its inequitably apportioned legislature, Florida suffered from both outdated laws and steady migration from country to city. Repeated efforts at re-districting had failed, and legislators from sparsely settled northern counties continued to hold power. Rural and conservative, this faction was labeled “the Pork Chop Gang” by James Clendinen, the Tampa Tribune editor, because they were “fighting for pork,” rather than principle. 14

Rural pork chop power asserted itself just one week after Representative Liles announced the Tampa location when Senate President James E. (Nick) Connor introduced a bill designating a site near his home town of Brooksville for the new mental health facility. Protesting this move, the Tampa Times editorialized that “it is common practice today to develop these institutions in large population centers where doctors are available and where they would offer the greatest amount of service to outpatients.” 15 “Don’t Cheat the Ill” pleaded an editorial in the Tampa Tribune, which condemned Senator Connor and “the Pork Chop Gang” for “trying to nail down an institutional payroll” for their district at the expense of the mentally ill. 16 Responding to this criticism, Connor commented, “This is the wrong time for a family fight in the Tampa Bay area.” Adding that the proposed USF medical school needed both votes and appropriations, Connor warned, “They are going to have to have some strong help to get those things.” 17 Initially expediency prevailed. Both the Hernando County site and USF’s medical school were approved by the legislature in 1965 even though such action was contrary to the “bold new approach” of locating treatment facilities where they were most needed. 18 Despite the fact that Hillsborough County (with 397,000 people) led the rest of Florida in commitment of persons to mental institutions, the new 6 million dollar facility appeared headed for oblivion in Hernando County (with a population of 11,000). 19 Thus, on this unpropitious note ended the first chapter in the story of FMHI’s struggle for existence.

Nicknamed “Hernando’s Hideaway,” the mental health facility originally planned for Tampa was still a controversial issue one year after Governor Haydon Burns had signed the Connor measure into law. Dr. Moke Wayne Williams, president-elect of the Florida Mental Health Association, protested the decision, labelling Florida’s legislative action the “essence of stupidity.” Lashing out at the Pork Chop Gang which had forced the mental health facility into the old, isolated institutional mold, Williams argued that the action “set our mental health program back to those snakepit and human warehouse days—bricks without brains.” 20 But
Despite his strong protest, the State cabinet proceeded according to plan and selected a site for construction two miles north of Brooksville on land provided by the county.

Before matters progressed further, however, an event occurred that radically changed the legislature as well as the history of FMHI. In 1966 the United States Supreme Court ordered the reapportionment of Florida’s legislative districts. Under the new district guidelines, young liberals elected by urban constituencies descended upon Tallahassee in 1967 and broke the control of rural counties. Comprised of both Democrats and Republicans, this coterie of urban legislators constituted a working majority with the power to effect reform in government, education, social services, and other areas. Exemplifying the new liberal coalition, State Senator Tom Whittaker, a Democrat from Hillsborough County, spearheaded a drive to prevent construction of the 6 million dollar Hernando hospital.

Immediately, both the Times and the Tribune lent their support, adding yet another argument to those favoring a new urban location. Not only should a mental facility be placed where the patients lived, but also where trained workers might be more readily recruited. Undeniably, more medical talent was available in metropolitan areas. In another Tribune editorial, entitled “Politics Before Patients?”, the paper appealed to the State Cabinet to freeze expenditures on the Brooksville site until the new legislature could re-evaluate the decision. “If politics gives, politics can also take away,” argued the Tribune. Bowing to intense pressure, Governor Claude Kirk, a Republican who had been elected in 1966, ultimately joined forces with Dr. Rogers, state director of mental health, to delay construction of “Hernando’s Hideaway.”

Pork chop politics of an urban variety now surfaced, however, when the newly-apportioned legislators began reconsidering sites for the 6 million dollar facility. Voting down the Brooksville site was a relatively easy task in this urban-controlled legislature, even though it was necessary to approve $162,000 to repay Hernando County for its purchase of land for the hospital. But real difficulty ensued when debate began about where to locate the coveted facility. Testifying before the House State Institution Committee, Dr. Rogers expressed the need for daycare and emergency services for west coast urban residents. Accordingly, Tampa Senator Truett Ott sponsored an amendment to place the hospital in a west coast population center. The east coast legislators had a different agenda. Dade County representative Maxine Baker introduced a bill to have the facility located in her home town of Miami but with a new twist. The 500-bed mental hospital would become a teaching facility affiliated with the University of Miami.

Charges and counter-charges flew as both House and Senate members sought a solution. After long hours of negotiation, a compromise was finally reached: the west coast could have its mental health hospital but only on condition that the next one be located in the Miami area. “Worst kind of pork barrel politics,” charged Senator Dempsey Barron of Panama City. But the compromise held, and in October of 1967 the State Cabinet formally accepted a deed to 43 acres of land on the University of South Florida campus as the new site for the state mental hospital. With this re-location to an urban area, FMHI moved one step closer to becoming a reality.

Urban re-location for the mental hospital, although important, was only part of the “bold new approach” to mental illness. To realize promised social reform, the proposed facility had to
change direction and purpose as well. Roger’s testimony was crucial in bringing this about. What Florida really needed were new treatment strategies and better trained mental health workers, not another warehouse for the mentally ill. Rogers persuaded the 1967 legislature that a modern research facility experimenting with model programs could not only develop new treatment methods but also improve training which would upgrade staff performance in mental health facilities throughout the state.25

Liberal lawmakers liked the idea and pushed it through to enactment; plans for another custodial hospital were transformed into a modern institute dedicated to research and training. Perhaps only Rogers with his long experience in the state mental health system could have effected this radical change. With this achievement he identified himself irrevocably as the driving force behind the future FMHI.26

Originally planned as part of a 60 million dollar medical complex at USF, the new mental health facility not only would provide inpatient and outpatient care but would also conduct applied research. “In conjunction with the new medical school, it will serve as a teaching hospital for the training of psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric aides, and the host of other professionals needed to staff our growing system of community centers,” Secretary of State Tom Adams asserted.27 FMHI, blending elements of training, research, and service would serve as a bridge between the university and the health delivery system. Such facilities were already connected with the University of California and the State University of New York. With model treatment programs, FMHI would give students practical experience with the mentally ill in a living classroom.28 Results of these efforts would be disseminated to other mental health agencies.29 Such was the purpose of the new facility, but first it was necessary to design the proper setting for these creative activities.

“Right now we are working on the master plan which outlines just what the complex will contain and will give an estimate of the cost,” Rogers told the Tribune in August of 1968.30 True to the reform spirit of the 1960s, the new FMHI was designed to look like anything except what it was, a mental health facility. When the architect Frank Valenti presented his design in 1968, he explained, “This institution is geared to allow the patient to interact with other patients and will stress group activity.”31 To this end, much special landscaping was planned, including fountains, a meditation garden, a citrus grove, a shrubbery maze, and a vegetable garden.32 Other features included a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a bowling alley, a theatre, a library, music rooms, and much more. Rising above it all would be a multi-story research tower furnished with the most
modern equipment, including a computer center. Scheduled to be built in three phases, this futuristic mental health complex would be funded by the state. Rogers advised, “We don’t know how much we need yet, but it will run into the millions.”

Once again the future of FMHI was in the hands of the state legislature. “Mental Health Needs Highlight Tax Battle” screamed the Tribune in June of 1969 when the legislature was deliberating the new state budget. Senators from both Dade and Hillsborough counties joined forces to secure funding for the planned mental health institutes in Miami and Tampa. But their hopes dimmed as the legislators struggled with a budget that exceeded anticipated revenue by 71 million dollars. Additional sources of revenue had to be found; proposals included increasing both the sales tax and the tax on automobiles, machinery, and fishing boats. After lengthy discussion, the legislators finally decided upon a constitutional amendment authorizing a bond issue.

This consensus was shattered, however, when only university expansion and construction of buildings for Hillsborough Community College (at the Ybor City site) were earmarked for funding. Senator Louis de la Parte of Tampa and his Hillsborough County group threatened to withhold votes necessary for passage of the amendment. But political horse trading saved the day. In return for his support of the measure, Senator de la Parte received a commitment to mental health funding in 1970, a year that marked the turning point for FMHI.
Prospects looked good for FMHI when the 1970 legislature convened. Governor Kirk’s proposed budget included 11.3 million dollars funding for the mental health facility, and the local press lent strong support both editorially and with a steady stream of articles which kept the Institute in the public eye. Especially optimistic was Tampa’s Senator de la Parte, a leader of the liberal coalition in the legislature. Proud of the FMHI mission to develop new treatment methods, he announced still another innovative technique as the legislative debate began. Outpatient care would be provided for those persons who could not otherwise afford treatment. House mental health subcommittee members seemed cautiously optimistic when they toured the construction site at USF. Later, when the delegation met with the architect and USF officials, Rogers could not resist making one last appeal, “We have a wonderful opportunity here with the medical school right next door,” he declared. “I think we can’t delay any further in training psychiatric workers.” Dr. Rogers, the godfather of FMHI, was anxious to see his creation come to life.

One more hurdle had to be cleared, however, and that obstacle was a formidable one. Realizing that there was strength in numbers, the conservative element in the legislature attempted to form a voting majority. Following the lead of Governor Kirk, Republicans in the legislature joined forces with conservative Democrats to cut the state spending bill, which exceeded anticipated revenue by 113 million dollars. Especially endangered was a 10.5 million dollar appropriation for FMHI. Tampa’s Democratic Representative Terrell Sessums predicted a tough fight in the House. “It’ll be thin, very thin, but I think we’ll be able to get enough votes together.” Liberal forces prevailed, and the conservative coalition crumbled. Democratic Representative Miley Miers of Tallahassee explained, “You rate a man in politics by what he brings home for his own little area and you saw that out here on the floor today.” Democratic leaders had written a bill that had something to please everybody. Not only did FMHI make it through the House, it also survived in the Senate and emerged with a firm appropriation of 7.7 million dollars. With an urban location, a new purpose, and state-appropriated funds, Rogers was ready to begin implementing his plans for the new Institute.

Design modification was the first order of business since 7.7 million dollars was substantially less than what the architects had anticipated. To oversee these changes and to provide on-site supervision of the construction, Rogers appointed Dr. E. Arthur Larson, a psychiatrist on the staff of the Division of Mental Health. A handsome man in his mid-forties, Larson was charismatic, idealistic, and deeply committed to the reform of mental health care. Determined that FMHI would never become a state hospital, Larson acted to preclude that possibility by personally modifying architectural designs. In one instance he narrowed doorways on the blueprints so that they would never conform to hospital standards. Larson had visited mental facilities both within the United States and abroad, and he tried to combine the best features of each in FMHI. For example by engaging an interior decorator to select and coordinate colors and carpeting throughout FMHI, he avoided the cold severity that often prevailed in institutional settings. Very much ahead of his time, Larson had a great impact on the Institute: his design changes prevented FMHI from ever becoming another state institution for warehousing the mentally ill.

Originally planned in three phases, construction began with a complex of buildings for patient living, a dietary facility, and the physical plant; all were completed and occupied in 1974.
for Phase II, the research tower and the administration building, had to be scrapped, however, when bids came in one million dollars over the amount alloted. Deleted, too, were the fountains, gardens, the citrus grove, the shrubbery maze, and other landscaping features. Inflation had eaten up FMHI dollars. Consequently, it was decided to proceed with the final phase of construction, which consisted of a children’s section and a much-modified activities center. Both were completed in 1976. These are the structures that currently comprise FMHI.

Now part of the University of South Florida, the Institute is under the direction of Dr. Jack Zusman. It continues to contribute to the community mental health reform movement by developing new treatment strategies and modernized training methods. Small model care units are designed to serve clients ranging in age from pre-kindergarten to the elderly. Employing behavior modification, family therapy, rehabilitation and other modes of treatment, these programs provide the setting for both training and applied research. Findings are then disseminated to other mental health facilities.
In this way, FMHI fulfills its mission:

To strengthen mental health services throughout the state by providing technical assistance and support services to mental health agencies and mental health professionals.\(^{47}\)

But more than that, FMHI, by emphasizing John F. Kennedy’s “bold new approach” to mental illness, symbolizes the humanism and compassion of the 1960s.
Dr. Jack Zusman, Director, FMHI, 1986.

Photograph courtesy FMHI

2 Ibid., p. 265.


5 Plaut and Rubenstein, 195; Bell, p. ix.


Interview with Lillian Barry, Executive Secretary, FMHI. Tampa, Florida, March 21, 1986.


Barry Interview, March 21, 1986.

Interview with Carol Foster, Medical Records Manager, FMHI. March 19, 1986.


Ibid., p. 9.

Interview with Earl Henry, Director of Physical Plant, FMHI. Tampa, Florida, March 17, 1986.

Jordan, p. 9.


Foster Interview, March 19, 1986.

Interview with El Creel, Business Manager, FMHI. August 16, 1985.

Henry Interview, March 17, 1986.

Creel Interview, August 16, 1985.

Foster Interview, March 19, 1986.

Creel Interview, August 16, 1985.

Tampa in 1880 was a sleepy southern town of 720 people. By 1920, however, it was transformed into a modern thriving city with a population of over 50,000. Despite its rapid growth and the influx of outsiders, Tampa retained its predominantly southern norms and morals. Nowhere was this adherence to tradition more evident than in the city’s acceptance of the prohibition of alcohol after World War I. But Tampa’s cultivation of the tourist trade, physical accessibility to rumrunners, and civic corruption combined to make this southern boom town leak like a sieve in the 1920s.

The prohibition of alcohol was an attempt by reformers to legislate morality and impose sobriety upon the citizenry of the nation. The movement against demon rum was led by various temperance organizations and fundamentalist Protestant churches. Locally, these groups exerted considerable political pressure on Tampa’s state representatives to outlaw the sale and consumption of intoxicating beverages.

Tampa’s response to the prohibition movement had added dimensions because of the city’s pluralistic composition. Tampa was populated not only by whites and blacks, like most southern cities, but also by a third distinct group—the Latins. The massive influx of Cubans, Spaniards and Italians had come after 1885 in the wake of Tampa’s cigar industry. By 1920 Latins, concentrated in the Ybor City district, accounted for 38 percent of the city’s total population. In addition, West Tampa, which was annexed in 1924, was a predominantly Latin community.

Before 1885 there were no restrictions on the sale or consumption of intoxicating beverages in Tampa or the rest of the state. If a Tampan wanted a drink, he visited his favorite saloon, which usually enticed him with free lunches and pretty saloon girls. For purchases by the bottle or in greater bulk, consumers could go to numerous general merchandising stores and choose from a wide selection. In 1885 the liberal, unregulated dispensing of liquor came to an end throughout most of Florida when the state legislature added Article Nineteen to the Florida constitution. This was the famous local option provision which permitted each county to decide whether to prohibit the sale of liquor. On the first referendum held in 1887, Hillsborough County voted to remain “wet,” in part because of the desire to attract Latin immigrants to work in the budding cigar industry.

In 1910 temperance groups pressured Florida’s legislature into placing a statewide prohibition amendment before the electorate. With immigrants barred from voting, and forceful campaigns launched by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and other “dry” advocates, a majority of Tampa’s citizens voted to prohibit the sale of intoxicating beverages throughout Florida. Despite their triumph in Hillsborough County, prohibition forces lost the statewide battle. A majority of Floridians voted against the proposal to change the local-option provision. Tampa remained legally wet for eight more years.
Disheartened, but not admitting defeat, the “drys” continued their crusade against alcohol. Their perseverance paid off in 1918, when Tampa voters joined an overwhelming majority of other Floridians in support of a statewide prohibition referendum. Prior to the plebiscite, Hillsborough and Pinellas were the only two wet counties in the state. Because 1918 was an off-year election, voter interest was low. Of the 5,300 eligible voters in Tampa, only 2,359 bothered to cast their ballots. Such general apathy explained why the dry forces easily defeated their wet opponents by well over a three to one margin. The drys had a cause, and they were not apathetic. Even Ybor City and West Tampa, two traditionally wet strongholds, voted to outlaw alcohol.\(^5\)

The 1918 referendum represented a decisive victory for Florida’s “Cracker Messiah,” Governor Sidney J. Catts. An ex-Baptist preacher and notorious Catholic-baiter, Catts was a fervid advocate of prohibition. In 1916 he had scoured the countryside in his Model-T Ford, campaigning to become governor and rid Florida of the evil of alcohol. This political outsider (he was originally from Alabama) pulled off a small miracle by defeating his opposition in the Democratic primary. He easily defeated his Republican opposition in the general election.\(^5\)

Because of the unexpected election results, liquor dealers in Tampa became active. They scurried to sell and distribute as much of their merchandise as possible before the state implemented the provisions mandated by the referendum. The indiscreet, but legal, acts of the city’s liquor wholesalers infuriated the governor. In order to combat the sale of alcohol in Hillsborough County, Catts called an extra session of the Florida legislature. This decision naturally received enthusiastic praise from state's ardent prohibitionists, but other segments of the population condemned the step.
The governor’s plan to assemble lawmakers incensed many of Tampa’s fiscal conservatives. Although most of the city fathers favored prohibition measures, they believed the session, expected to cost well over $50,000, was unnecessary, especially since the regular body was scheduled to meet in only four months. Led by the Tampa Tribune, many prominent business and community leaders publicly attacked the governor. Dr. L. A. Blize, a leading banker, declared: “Personally, I do not care how quickly the liquor evil is wiped off the face of the earth. I think the quicker the better. But it is an unnecessary burden on the taxpayers to call a special session of the legislature.”

Nevertheless, Florida legislators met in late November 1918 to draft the necessary statutes for statewide prohibition as mandated by the referendum. One of the more moderate positions at the session was taken by the senate’s presiding officer, John Johnson. A resident of the tiny agricultural community of Suwannee, Johnson openly professed his belief in temperance. Yet he took a courageous stand against his self-righteous colleagues by opposing all of the anti-liquor measures under consideration. The senate president firmly objected to the practice of putting a man in felon’s stripes simply because he was intoxicated. With the exception of Johnson, and perhaps one or two others, the legislature worked in an atmosphere of almost complete unanimity. In only thirteen days, lawmakers not only passed provisions nullifying local option, but also enacted the Emergency Liquor Bill. All the legislative delegates from Tampa voted for these bills with two, Doyle Carlton, chairman of the Joint Committee on Temperance and future governor of the state, and George Wilder, speaker of the house, playing paramount roles steering the measures through the legislature.

The first prohibition bill to become law was the Emergency Liquor Act. Catts insisted on its passage because a state law prohibiting the importation of more than one quart of liquor a month from a wet to a dry county had been recently ruled unconstitutional by Florida’s high tribunal. The Emergency Liquor Act was designed to supersede the court’s decision and destroy the liquor trade in Tampa. In anticipation of statewide prohibition on January 1, 1919, Tampa’s liquor wholesalers were feverishly shipping large quantities of alcohol throughout the state.

On the same day it adopted the Emergency Liquor Act, the Florida legislature ratified the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. However, in approving national prohibition, the legislators ignored a state law and acted illegally. According to the Florida constitution, a federal amendment could be ratified only by those members of the state senate who were elected and
actually serving at the time Congress sent an amendment to the state. When the Florida senate received the Eighteenth Amendment, only one-half of its members were eligible to vote on the proposal. Nevertheless, the legislators enthusiastically embraced the constitutional change. As a result, Florida became the fifteenth of the required thirty-six states to ratify national prohibition.9

The last of the anti-liquor laws passed during the extra session implemented statewide prohibition and thus destroyed the local option. The main bill that emerged “prohibited the manufacture, sale, barter, or exchange of alcohol; the transportation into or from one point to another within the state; and the possession of alcohol, or any other intoxicating beverages.” It also levied a $500 fine or a six-month prison term for the first offense, and it mandated a $5,000 fine or a three-year prison sentence for the second offense. Much to the chagrin of radical prohibitionists, a handful of maverick legislators managed to retain the use of alcohol for medical, sacramental, and pharmaceutical purposes.10

For the next thirteen years, many Floridians made a mockery of the prohibition laws. Even otherwise honest citizens disregarded them. Miami and Tampa, in particular, became two of the wettest spots in the United States.11

The Emergency Liquor Act, intended to stop the flow of alcohol before the initiation of statewide prohibition, was largely ignored by Tampa’s authorities and citizens. Liquor dealers continued their trade and few of them encountered legal problems. The first violator of Florida’s temporary restraining law was apparently J. E. Goodwin of Tampa. He was arrested in Orlando and charged with transporting liquor from Tampa to Orange county. Also caught thumbing his nose at the new law was Elmo Ceconi, a prominent liquor wholesaler in Ybor City. Ceconi was arrested trying to smuggle high-grade whiskey into Tampa concealed in orange crates.12

On New Year’s Day, 1919, Tampans awoke to a cold, blustery morning to find their city legally dry. The day before, crowds of drinkers, anticipating a long “dry spell,” cleaned out package stores in the city. Many people went from store to store begging for the chance to buy the last bottle. One enterprising Tampan, owner of the Maryland Package Store, capitalized on his neighbors’ unquenchable thirst by auctioning off his remaining stock at incredibly inflated prices. Elmo Ceconi gave out cigars to customers, declaring that he could have sold another 150 cases of spirits had they been on hand. Downtown at the St. Louis Cafe, the doors were open, but a sign above the entrance read “sold out.” “All over town it was the same, these [liquor] establishments looked much like a doomed man who was trying to do all he could to make the best of his last day,” the Tribune reported.13

A pervading atmosphere of gloom spread throughout Tampa as countless numbers of saloons closed. To fill the void, speakeasies appeared, surreptitiously dispensing liquor to all who could afford it. With the help of local law enforcement officials, speakeasies flourished in the city. Except for a brief period immediately following the advent of statewide prohibition, they generally operated free of police interference.14

During the early days of state prohibition, state and local officials attempted to dry up Tampa, mainly to appease the city’s prohibitionists. The chief of police, Major Frank Williams, a World War I military hero with a reputation for doing the sensational, led a concerted effort to eradicate
Smuggling was never completely eradicated. This truckful of illegal liquor was confiscated by authorities in Tampa in 1927.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.
local manufacturing and consumption of alcohol. In a rare display of force, the police conducted several successful raids. The first places targeted were gambling joints and houses of prostitution located on Fifteenth Street and Sixth Avenue, where illicit liquor flowed freely. Another victim of Williams’ dragnet was Maximo Gonzalez, owner of a coffee shop on Michigan Street and Sixth Avenue. The raid netted $10,000 worth of alcohol, ranging from cheap moonshine whiskey to expensive imported wines. Also impounded were brushes, glue, empty half and full pint bottles and labels of Old Cutler and Mumms. It seems that Gonzalez had been deceiving his customers by selling low grade moonshine as high quality whiskey.15

With the arrival of national prohibition in January 1920, Florida officials were no longer solely responsible for the enforcement of the liquor laws. Tampa was assigned six federal agents whose only task was to enforce the federal anti-liquor statute, known as the Volstead Act. Shortly after their arrival, the “G-Men” supervised a spectacular raid on a distilling operation in Mango, just outside Tampa. The federal agents had placed stills, deep in the swamps at the headwaters of the
Hillsborough River, under surveillance and set a trap for the bootleggers. When the agents moved in to make arrests, a gun battle ensued which left one moonshiner dead.16

The “Daddy” of the early moonshiners was a colorful character named William Flynn. A coppersmith before venturing into the more lucrative liquor business, Flynn had an impressive three-still operation which supplied most of West Tampa. After Flynn’s arrest for violating the Volstead Act, a federal agent called the operation “one of the biggest bouquets in the lapels of the federal officers’ coats in many moons. It being another step, and a big one, toward stamping out illicit distilling in Hillsborough County.”17

The initial series of intensive raids lasted only a short time. Thereafter, effective enforcement became nearly impossible for a number of reasons. By the 1920s Tampa was fast becoming a tourist attraction, and visitors were spending large amounts of money in the city. In order to avoid unnecessarily antagonizing free-spending Northerners, Tampa authorities more often than not ignored the anti-liquor laws. Pragmatism prevailed as officials feared that Tampa might lose
a vital source of income to neighboring cities. Commenting on the impact of tourism on local reinforcement, a federal official wryly noted in the early 1930s: “Numerous sheriffs, mayors, and other officials... espouse the cause of prohibition and believe in vigorous enforcement thereof—at least during the drowsy summer months when the tourist army has departed.”  

Another factor hindering enforcement of prohibition was Tampa’s geography. Located near the Gulf Coast, which has numerous tiny inlets, Tampa was not far from Caribbean islands where liquor could be purchased legally and cheaply. Rumrunners could buy a case of whiskey in Bimini for eighteen dollars, bring it into Tampa and sell it for as high as $100. On any given night, every conceivable type of craft operated off Tampa Bay, bringing in unlawful liquor. 

A few captains of these clandestine boats deceived the Coast Guard by inventing ingenious ways to disguise their cargo. Some boat owners built a second or false bottom where large amounts of alcohol were kept. If approached by authorities, the smugglers pulled a lever that opened a trap door and dumped the stock into the water. Another popular invention was the submersion tank, a long cigar-shaped metal tank filled with liquor and chained underneath a vessel. A rum ship carrying one or more of these imperceptible, floatable devices would enter a harbor and tie up. At night the tanks would then be cut loose and towed ashore by a small boat. In case of detection, they were easy to cut adrift.

Most of the “rummies” coming into Tampa smuggled their goods in a “ham,” which was a package containing six bottles in a burlap bag, padded with straw and paper. If a prohibition agent came too close, the packages were thrown overboard. With a little luck, they were retrieved later on since they floated. Occasionally these hams washed ashore on Tampa’s beaches, making beach-combing a pleasurable and sometimes lucrative experience.

Another reason why Tampa gained the reputation as being one of the “leakiest spots” in the nation was because of the extensive corruption among law enforcement personnel. Crooked enforcement agents were present at both the local and the federal levels. From the onset of the noble experiment, low pay and poor morale made Tampa police, as well as their federal counterparts, susceptible to bribery. Police payoffs were a common practice. Although it is impossible to determine the extent of this corruption, the Tampa Tribune contained numerous reports of police improprieties. It was neither uncommon for confiscated liquor to disappear mysteriously from police headquarters nor rare for impounded distilling equipment to vanish from police custody. Even policemen on duty were occasionally arrested for violating the liquor laws. In October 1929, Thomas Chevis, a city detective, was arrested by federal agents for possessing alcohol. The illegal brew was found in his police car. Chevis, who pleaded innocent to the charge, protested that he had bought the bottle as part of an on-going investigation of a speakeasy. In a decision that was common in such cases, Chevis was acquitted.

The most sensational liquor trial in Tampa’s history showed how corruption had infiltrated the ranks of the police. The 1929 case involved Augustine Lopez, a justice of the peace, and constables Hemp Smith and Henry Hidalgo, all from West Tampa. The trio was arrested and charged with conspiracy and attempting to extort a bribe by concocting a false liquor charge against a West Tampan. The accused allegedly offered to drop the complaint in exchange for a sizeable sum of money. In a spectacular trial, members of the police department, as well as
moonshiners and rumrunners, testified that graft and corruption were widespread among local police. An owner of one roadhouse, who initially paid off enforcement agents, told jury members that when he refused to pay increased “protection” money, his establishment was continuously raided until it became unprofitable.22

Local policemen did not have a monopoly on corruption resulting from prohibition. Rumors of payoffs and bribes to federal prohibition agents began to surface when the Florida Brewing
Company, located on Thirteen Street and Fifth Avenue, was raided. The brewery, once the pride and joy of Tampa, was valued at over $750,000. At its peak the company employed some one thousand people. Initially, the brewery was closed by the federal government as a wartime conservation measure. It briefly reopened after World War I, but it closed in 1919 in conformity with the statewide ban on alcohol. At first, the owner of the brewery, Salvador Ybor, a son of the founder of Ybor City, contemplated converting his plant to make non-alcoholic products such as industrial alcohol, corn syrup, vinegar and near-beer. However, disregarding such legal options, Ybor decided to brew 5.5 beer. The operation went undisturbed for five years. In 1924, federal agents raided the brewery and arrested Ybor, along with his general manager, George Willis, for violating the Volstead Act and attempting to bribe a federal official.

As the investigation developed, Willis readily acknowledged that he was brewing illegal beer. Yet he adamantly denied that he, or anyone else at the plant, had tried to bribe federal agents. Willis swore that they had solicited him for money. In return, the agents promised not to interfere with the manufacture, sale, or transportation of the locally brewed beer. Ybor, after a short trial, was sentenced to six months in jail for passing a fifty dollar bill to a prohibition officer. However, he never served a single day in jail, thanks to a benevolent judge who commuted his sentence.23

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to effective enforcement of the liquor laws was the reluctance of Tampans to adhere to prohibition. This generalization applies, of course, to much of Florida and the United States, but it was particularly true of Tampa. To the Latins, alcohol and its use were part of their culture. No law, no matter how repressive, could stop the Latin population from drinking alcoholic beverages. Non-Latins, whatever their cultural heritage, willingly joined in the illicit trade.

Overall, prohibition had a negligible effect on the people of Tampa. While temperance advocates celebrated their symbolic victory, Tampans went right on purchasing and drinking liquor, as if prohibition never existed. The only major difference between the wet and dry areas in the city was that previously legitimate saloons, restaurants and liquor stores were forced to sell their goods covertly. This not only lowered the quality of the alcohol products and inflated their price, but it also made criminals out of otherwise honest, law-abiding citizens and improved the opportunities and profits of those with criminal intentions. Thus, the attempt to legislate morality failed in Tampa.
These whiskey caches were uncovered by authorities at 1014 10th Avenue in 1931.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.


4 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 15, 1918.

5 Ibid., November 6, 1918.


7 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 17, 1918.

8 Ibid., November 26-27, December 5, 1918.

9 Ibid., December 5, 1918.

10 Ibid.


12 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 29, 1918.

13 Ibid., January 1, 1919.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., August 7, 1919.

16 Ibid., May 1, 1920.

17 Ibid., October 23, 1920.


21 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 18, 1929.

22 Ibid., October 24, 1929. At the conclusion of the trial, Judge Petteway instructed the jury to return a verdict of acquittal based on a legal technicality.

23 Ibid., November 5, 1924.
FORT MYERS: FROM RAFTS TO BRIDGES
IN FORTY YEARS

by Nell Colcord Weidenbach

The Caloosahatchee, a gem among rivers, is a familiar sight to motorists approaching South Florida via the Gulf coast. Since Florida was first burped up from the briny deep in some vague prehistoric era, the wide blue waters of the “River Beautiful” have been drifted upon, poled across, swum in, fought for, used and misused. The pirate “Black Caesar” knew the river well. Ponce de Leon explored it greedily. Seminoles and soldiers played cat and mouse in its coves for many years.

For centuries, anybody who wanted to cross the river in the vicinity of today’s Fort Myers was forced to swim or float, like the ‘gators and the manatees, in its shallow waters. The early settlers on the north shore floated in sailboats to do their grocery shopping in Fort Myers on the south
shore. Many a pioneer who suddenly “lost his breeze” found himself stranded in the middle of the mile-wide river until long after the general store was battened down for the night.

Fort Myers was still in its infancy when Captain Peter Nelson began a ferryboat operation in 1887. At that time, train service from the North terminated at Punta Gorda. Ongoing passengers completed the journey to Fort Myers by steamer launch or on a primitive hack line that came to a dead-end at the Caloosahatchee’s north shore, the only alternative being a long detour via the Alva bridge some twenty-six miles upstream. Captain Nelson’s ferry was a welcome addition that brought newcomers and locals across to the tiny outpost on the south side. Eventually, R. A. Gillis and then Santa Vivas replaced the captain, as the ferry was continued (sometimes by sail, sometimes by poling) until 1924.

Then came that “DAY TO TOP ALL DAYS,” March 12, 1924. Triple-decked headlines in the *Fort Myers Press* joyously proclaimed:

WATER CARNIVAL—BRIDGE CELEBRATION EDITION
ENTHUSIASM KEYNOTE OF BRIDGE DEDICATION
ALL ROADS LEAD TO FT. MYERS TODAY AS CELEBRATION BEGINS

Local citizens crowd the Alva Bridge, 1914.

Photograph courtesy of the Fort Myers Historical Museum.
Three days earlier a motorcade had begun to form upstate at High Springs, north of Gainesville, gaining momentum as it jostled southward. On the second day, the procession resumed at Tampa, and on the final day it came from Punta Gorda.

In the meantime, a boxed announcement had appeared on the front page of the *Fort Myers Press*: “Every car in Ft. Myers should be in this motorcade.” They were indeed! “Motor cars! Big ones, little ones, old ones, new ones, all sizes and shapes and styles made their way to East Fort Myers to the foot of the Caloosahatchee Bridge to welcome the coming of the motorcade from the north,” reported the *Press*. “For a mile and a half beyond the bridge, both sides of the road were lined with ‘em.”

Shortly after five o’clock on the historic Saturday, three cars containing thirteen people left the south shore and started across the dangerously narrow bridge (only sixteen feet wide), which seemed to disappear into nothingness a mile or more in the distance. As they drove slowly along, they had to wait while the final planks were put in place. As the Press reported, “Some of the lumber over which the party drove Saturday afternoon had been in logs at 11:00 o’clock that morning.”

The crowds, flanked by a large coterie of famous guests, were wined and dined in every way known to southern hospitality and good public relations. Mayor Walter Kaune of East Fort Myers and Mayor Vernon Widerquist of Fort Myers cooperated in all aspects of the celebration, including the presentation of the keys of their cities to participants in the motorcade. “Pyramids of delicious roast beef and other eatables” were served by the citizens of East Fort Myers at a massive buffet supper sponsored by the ladies of the city. The Grand Mardi Gras was directed by Fred Phillips, providing “all that is artistic in drollery and good cheer.”

The celebration featured a variety of entertainment during the fun-filled day. Attractions included a speed boat regatta, a swim and athletic meet, auto polo, music by the Fort Myers Concert Band, floats galore, and even a covey of bucking mules. Hoagland’s Hippodrome appeared at the Fair Grounds, and a delegation of Seminole Indians from deep in the Everglades performed their famed Green Corn Dance on First Street prior to the Grand Costume Ball. Even the bridge toll to Crescent Beach (as Fort Myers Beach used to be named) was cancelled for the day.

When night came, the throngs of celebrants could not all be accommodated in the hotels and homes of the two towns. In anticipation of just such a situation, a thousand cots had been set up to take care of the overflow.

Fort Myers finally had a bridge and lost no time in reaping benefits from its newest link to the outside world. “The trickle of people who had rolled south in postwar days had become a flood of tens of thousands in 1924,” one writer later noted. As expected, a number of visitors who witnessed the bridge had come to stay. “From the standpoint of publicity alone, the bridge celebration is worth thousands of dollars to Fort Myers,” the local newspaper candidly commented.

Newspapers elsewhere in Florida helped publicize the occasion. The city editor of the *Tampa Tribune* "wrote some mighty good stories. . .which meant much to Fort Myers,” according to the
Fort Myers Press. The Miami Herald touted “the great West Coast Highway and Tamiami Trail Jubilee Motorcade.” (The new bridge was viewed by Miamians as an important link in the dream to connect the East Coast and the West Coast by a road through the unexplored Everglades.)

The year 1924 proved a turning point in the advancement of Fort Myers. The Pythian Building (now known as the Richards Building) was soon to soar to a heady four-stories in height. It was overshadowed by the Franklin Arms Hotel, the town’s first real “skyscraper”; this was an eight-story addition to the hotel which had been developed from the historic old Hill House. The Atlantic Coast Line passenger train station opened. Within a year, building permits jumped from $502,750 to $2,794,075. Real estate sales boomed so high that in a single day transactions totalling $2,528,000 were recorded.

A scant seven years later, on February 11, 1931, the original bridge was ingloriously demoted and became known thereafter as the “old wooden bridge.” At the same time, a gala headline in The Fort Myers Press proudly proclaimed: “THOMAS EDISON BRIDGE OFFICIALLY DEDICATED AT CEREMONIES TODAY.”

The first bridge stretched across the Caloosahatchee River at Fremont Street, 1924.

Photograph courtesy of the Fort Myers Historical Museum.
The opening of the second bridge was heralded by a birthday celebration for the “patron saint” of the city. Since Thomas Edison was observing his eighty-fourth birthday, the formal ceremonies were kept as brief and simple as possible “in order that the aged inventor may not become fatigued.” Mrs. Edison approved the dedication plans submitted by the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. “Oratory will be barred,” was the promise, with a few remarks by Governor Doyle Carlton to be the only speech on the program.

The Edison party was escorted to the parade area by a bevy of local high school girls. Other parade highlights included Seminole Indians from their Everglades reservation and the Tamiami Trail Blazers—a rugged group of twenty-six local men who had pioneered a route through the trackless Everglades in 1923, arriving in Miami after three harrowing weeks in their model-T Fords. Other celebrities, who underlined the importance of the occasion by their presence, included Cyrus H. K. Curtis, editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*, tire magnate Harvey S. Firestone, Imperial Potentate of the Shriners Esten B. Fletcher, famed architect Nat Gaillard Walker, and Dan Beard, foster father of the Boy Scouts of America. Pioneer Ruth Parker trotted on horseback, just as she had some fifty years before when she had served as Edison’s telegraph messenger. In fact, the city was thronged with visitors from far and wide.
The star of the show was the beloved Mr. Edison, who personally cut the official ribbon to open the bridge. He probably never knew that, in the excitement, somebody had neglected to supply a proper ribbon. Paul Ley, local manager of the telephone company later recalled the near-crisis:

The American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps, of which I was a member, participated in the ceremonies. Col. Dixon of the Corps was in charge of flags, decorations, etc., and had made arrangements with the M. Flossie Hill Co. to pick up the ribbon.

We were assembled at about mid-point of the bridge when some one realized we had no ribbon. Time was getting close! As I had parked my car on the bridge approach, I was elected to make a dash to the store three blocks away. I made it back with just minutes to spare.4

Thomas Edison untying the knot that officially opened Edison Bridge, 1931.

From Bamboo and Sailing Ships by Floronce Fritz.
The embarrassment of the forgotten ribbon soon paled, however, in the enormity of another oversight which was called to the attention of the whole world by Robert Ripley of “Believe It or Not” fame. The $700,000 bridge, bearing the name of the great inventor of the electric light, had no lights! In due time, the lights were installed and motorists have been crossing the bridge safely everafter.⁵

The filled-in riverfront and new Yacht Basin in the early 1940s with the Edison Bridge (right background) next to Royal Palm Hotel Pier.

Photograph from Yesterday’s Fort Myers by Marion Godown and Alberta Rawchuck.
Governor Carlton’s brief remarks on that historic day underlined the long-range importance of the bridge. “Facilities for transportation are dominant factors in the economic, social, and political life of a people and in the development of a community,” he observed.

In 1964, only forty years after the Caloosahatchee was first opened to vehicular traffic, still another downtown span opened. A few blocks west of the “old” Edison Bridge, the new $2,607,366 structure soared to dizzy heights before coming to earth at a brand new overpass intersection near the heart of Fort Myers, where the Tootie McGregor landmark fountain used to be. For awhile, it appeared that the bridge might have to make a U-turn and go back where it came from; the final right-of-way for the south approach was not secured until six weeks after the span had been completed, inspected and officially accepted.

Unlike the cooperative efforts of the earlier bridges, unprecedented controversy accompanied this newest bridge from the date of its inception in 1957. The State Road Department, on the advice of consulting engineers, recommended the location which ultimately was accepted. Mayor George M. French of Fort Myers initially said that he would veto any deed to a right-of-way across the river bottom because he was adamantly opposed to any mid-town site. Councilman Newt Goodwin of East Fort Myers “threatened to raise an army to march on City Hall protesting the downtown location.” (He understandably preferred Palmetto Street in East Fort Myers.) Three days after Road Board member Al Rogero announced that the bridge contract would definitely be let, Mayor French revealed that he was studying the possibility of tunnelling under the river instead of bridging it, but he failed to block the project.

Even the naming of the bridge was in dispute. Officially, in an unofficial sort of way, the name was alleged to be “The Bridge of Light.” Others bitterly called it “Rogero’s Folly.” The local newspaper referred to it alternately as the new Caloosahatchee bridge, “the new four-lane span,” or simply “the bridge.”

The opening of the bridge also engendered confusion. On Wednesday, April 29, 1964, local headlines proclaimed: “NEW CALOOSAHATCHEE BRIDGE SCHEDULED TO OPEN FRIDAY.” On Friday morning, however, a small boxed announcement bore the headline: “NOT TODAY—MAYBE TOMORROW.” The scheduled opening had been abruptly cancelled late the previous day. With the postponement, disgusted city officials “threw up their hands and said there would be no further announcements of any kind by the city concerning the opening of the bridge.” The following day, a small insert in the New Press laconically announced: “AT LAST—IT’S OPEN!”

Unlike its two predecessors, the newest bridge went into operation with little fanfare. One disbelieving resident commented, “I never heard of opening anything worth a couple of million dollars without some sort of ceremony.” Another citizen, who had seen the arrival of all the bridges during the forty-year period, remarked scathingly, “They had a to-do at both the Sanibel Causeway and the Cape Coral bridge downriver. But this one opens by having some unknown state official take down a barricade!”
Although unheralded, the opening of a new bridge promised another era of growth like those that had accompanied “the Old Wooden Bridge” and “the Old Edison Bridge.” Again in 1964, South Florida citizens braced themselves for a boom. It was not long in coming.

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1 This account of events in 1924 is based on the *Fort Myers Press*, February 4, 11, 25; March 5, 10, 12, 13, 19, 1924. The current *Fort Myers News Press* was not formed until June 1931, as a result of the merger of the *Fort Myers Press* and the *Fort Myers Tropical News*.

2 Florence Fritz, *Unknown Florida* (Miami, University of Miami Press, 1963), 139.

3 This account of events in 1931 is based on the *Fort Myers Press*, February 5, 6, 10-12, 1931.


6 Ibid., 188.

7 This account of events in 1964 is based on the *Fort Myers News Press*, April 29-May 1, 1964.
PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA, PART II: A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

by Milly St. Julien

“Public Schools in Southwest Florida, Part I” traced the development of educational institutions and programs from the 1880s to the 1920s. In this period, the transition from classrooms housed in churches and town halls or located out-of-doors to the construction of distinct school buildings occurred. A variety of courses were added to the basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, including domestic science, natural science, and physical education. Open air buses allowed children from outlying areas to attend classes. Still, school attendance was highest in the elementary grades. The number of graduating seniors in most local high schools remained small until after the Great Depression.

The second part of this photographic essay shows continued progress in school construction and curriculum from the 1920s through World War II. Yet it also illustrates the problems posed by racial segregation. Increasingly, Florida blacks sought educational opportunities despite the inadequate facilities and inferior resources provided for them by county school boards. The photographs of teachers and students presented here indicate the pride that blacks took in their educational achievements, perhaps all the greater for the obstacles they confronted.

In the same era, the programs available to white students expanded in both rural and urban areas. Teacher training institutes, music and other fine arts classes, school patrols, and intercollegiate athletics provided a well-rounded educational experience for many Floridians. For both blacks and whites, schools became symbols of community progress as local businesses advertised in school yearbooks, neighbors gathered on school grounds for festive occasions, spectators cheered the feats of school athletes, and chambers of commerce celebrated the attractions of local school systems.
These two photographs, taken in the small community of Nocatee, Desoto County, illustrate the typical progression of early Florida school construction, from simple wooden buildings to more substantial modern structures. The top photograph shows the Methodist Episcopal Church (left) and the two-story wooden high school (right). The bottom photograph shows the modern brick structure which replaced the old school.

Photograph courtesy of George Lane, Jr.
Beginning around the turn of the century, the state of Florida established several teacher training institutes. Pictured here is the DeSoto County Teacher Training Class of 1920.

Photograph courtesy of George Lane, Jr.
Even in rural areas, training in the fine arts was available to Florida students. Shown here, a group of DeSoto County music students pose with their young, female instructors, c. 1920. While it was common to find music ensembles in high school, it was less so in the lower grades.

Photograph courtesy of George Lane, Jr.
The 1924 DeSoto County High School Orchestra and its pet mascot (lower left). Note the inclusion of a banjo for an unusual mix of folk and orchestral instruments.

Photograph courtesy of George Lane, Jr.
Although not a public school, the Out-of-Door school of Siesta Key was one of the most unique educational institutions established in this area. The brainchild of Miss Fanneal Harrison, the school was built in 1924 and catered to local and out-of-state students. Shown above, members of a science class explore the mechanics of a Model-T Ford.

Photograph courtesy of the Sarasota Historical Society.
Dressed in casual clothing suitable for Florida’s warm, humid climate, students of the Out-of-Door school study current events using a world map painted on an outside wall.

Photograph courtesy of the Sarasota Historical Society.
In 1926, the members of Sarasota’s first School Boy Patrol gathered for a group portrait on the steps of the Sarasota County Court House. From left to right: (Front row) James “Bod” Baggett, Tony Self, Dan Townsend, unknown; (Second row) Martin Lichte, Lewis Combs, Roma Taylor, Jr., Roswell Gocio; (Third row) unknown, Eston Matheny, unknown, Fred Wooley; (Fourth row) Gordon Byre, Robert Rhoades, Gordon Fraeunheim, Ted Healy; (Top row) State Organizer unidentified, Chief S. Tilden Davis, Mayor E. J. Bacon and Professor T. W. Yarbrough (Sarasota High School).

Photograph courtesy of Sarasota Historical Society.
Looking stylish in their uniforms, members of the 1928 Largo High School Band pose for their portrait. Years later, this school would become known for its world champion band.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park Museum.
As any fan of the 1920’s and 1930’s motion pictures would know, ukuleles were the craze of the younger generation. As proof that Florida students were in “tune” with their Hollywood idols, this portrait of the Sarasota High Uke Club represents an extra-curricular activity based on the popularity of a contemporary fad. Interestingly, the club was made up entirely of girls.

Photograph courtesy of Sarasota Historical Society.
Looking dapper in their school sweaters, DeSoto County High School athletes line up for a school photograph, c. 1925.

Photograph courtesy of George Lane, Jr.
A message to the students of Sarasota High School is conveyed in a 1935 Florida Power and Light Company advertisement placed in the school’s yearbook.

Photograph courtesy of Sarasota Historical Society.
Basketball was a popular sport among Floridians in the early twentieth century. Pictured above is the 1937 Bradenton High School girls’ basketball team which went on to win the South Florida Basketball Championship.

Photograph courtesy of Manatee County Historical Society.
Until 1954, Florida operated a segregated or dual school system. Black and white children were educated in separate but supposedly equal school facilities. For blacks as well as whites, the local school served an important function in community life. Shown above, a Tampa crowd gathers to watch the grand march at Lomax School’s May Day Celebration, May 3, 1937.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.
May Day was an exciting holiday for students, black and white, with many festivities sponsored by their schools. Pictured above, the Dobyville School’s May Day King and Queen along with their court attendants, May 3, 1937.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.
Segregated schools meant segregated faculties. Local black schools were taught and administered by black educators who were paid salaries markedly inferior to those paid their white counterparts. In 1937, one local educator, Noah W. Griffin, challenged the practice of pay discrimination. Griffin, who held a Masters degree, was one of the most highly educated teachers in the Florida public school system. The principal of Gibb High School in St. Petersburg, Griffin filed a salary equalization suit against the Pinellas County school board. The courts decided in favor of the county, ruling that there was no basis for state interference. Subsequently, Griffin was dismissed from his position and effectively blacklisted throughout Florida. Despite his superior qualifications, he was unable to secure a pedagogical position anywhere in the state. Eventually, Griffin left Florida and became the regional director for the NAACP in Washington, Oregon, and California. Griffin’s blacklisting was still in evidence many years later. The 1960 Pinellas county school’s Fifty Year Anniversary Celebration publication omitted all reference to his service in the Pinellas educational system.

Photograph from History of the Florida State Teachers Association by Leedell W. Neyland and Gilbert L. Porter.
A poised and happy-looking class portrait of Tampa’s George Washington Carver Junior High School graduates, June 6, 1945. The school was located at 1143 LaSalle Street, Tampa.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.
The faculty of Booker T. Washington High School displaying a school trophy, May 23, 1946.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.
On May 23, 1946, the Booker T. Washington High School Honor students sat for a group portrait. During the post World War II era these talented young men and women still faced the barriers of segregation and racial discrimination. The top of their class in school, they were yet second class citizens in southern society.
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“THIS IS THE STORY OF MY LIFE”
by Kate Barnwell Williams

Introduction

In the 1960’s, historians began to focus increasing attention on the past lives of common men and women. Often forced to rely on statistical information, such as census data or court records, or on descriptions provided by more wealthy and more literate neighbors, the historian is rarely able to recapture the thoughts and words of the historically “inarticulate.” The document printed here, an autobiographical fragment written by Kate Barnwell Williams in 1927, illuminates the life of one common woman and her family. The tale is fascinating if heart-rending and reveals that at least in frontier Florida so-called common folk often performed extraordinary feats to survive.

Mary Catherine (Kate) Barnwell was born in Alabama in 1861 and settled with her family in the Tampa Bay area following the Civil War. After a series of moves, the family established itself on a farm near Fort Ogden where Kate lived until her marriage to Isaiah Williams in 1880. Upon marriage, she assisted her husband in running the family business—a sawmill in Fort Ogden. Despite the hard physical labor demanded of her, she bore seven children in the first seven years of marriage. At this point her memoir ends.

When Mrs. Mary (Kate) Williams died in April 1950, at the age of 88, she was a resident of Fort Myers. She left 122 direct descendants, including 10 living sons and daughters. This hearty pioneer woman left as well this first-hand account of her early years.

Milly St. Julien discovered the original manuscript in the Florida Historical society collection housed at USF Special Collections and, with the aid of Marion Godown of Tallahassee, was able to verify and illustrate the events recounted on the following pages.

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I will try to write my past life.

I was once a happy little girl. I was born in Clark Co., Alabama, August 21, 1861. My name was Mary Catherine Barnwell, but I was called Kattie. I was the happy little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. K. Barnwell. My mother was Miss Mary Frances Massey. She was born in McKinley, Alabama, July 4, 1840; and my father was born July 28, 1825. He was born in Georgia, but his father moved to Alabama when father was only six weeks old.

My father was raised in Alabama and when he became a man he was a farmer. He owned six hundred and fifty acres of land, most of which was in one farm. He owned forty-seven negroes. He had paid a large sum of money for most of them. He owned two hundred head of hogs, twenty-one mules, eighty goats, one hundred head of sheep, and twenty-one fine Milch cows.
My father made a lot of money and we were well fixed. He was a big-stand Mason, and my mother was highly respected. I had one sister, Sallie E. Barnwell. She was born the 16th of July, 1858.

My father and mother never had to do any work of any kind, and had a servant for my sister and myself. We never knew what it was to take a bath or dress ourselves.

So the Civil War commenced, after my father was independent and when I was just a little girl. My father was sent off to the war, but the doctors examined him and found he was disabled to fight. So they sent him home to see after the women and children; see that the provisions were equally divided; and see that they had a doctor and proper care in case of sickness.

The negroes were set free and the War ruined us. My father was in poor health, so at the close of the War he called the negroes up and told them that they were free and could go if they wished to. But the negroes told father they all wanted to stay on with him. They said, “Marse Buck,” (that is what they called my father), “you and Miss Mary has been so good to us we can’t leave you. Please, Marse Buck, let us stay on and work for you the same as if we were slaves.” So father told them if they would be as humble and would not give us any trouble he would keep them. So they stayed on and run the farm and was humble and kind to all of us.

Well, my father had lost so much during the War, he worried so much that his and mother's health got worse. So we stayed seven years after the War, and all the doctors told my father if he and mother wanted to live they had better make plans to leave Alabama and come to Florida.

So father told the negroes his health was so bad he would have to leave Alabama and come to Florida for our health.

So they begged father to bring them but he told them he didn’t know how things would be in Florida; that he would come and see how things was, and see how he could manage without them. So he hired a white family in Alabama to come to Florida with us and help see after his business. They were Mr. and Mrs. John Robison. So we left Alabama in December of 1868, and our negroes followed us as far as Clifton, Alabama, and when we got on the steamer they cried and waved their hats and kerchiefs at us as far as they could see us.

The steamer we left on was called the KELSON. She brought us as far as Mobile, Alabama. There we stayed one week. Father had done most all of his trading in Mobile every since he was married as he had to lay in such large orders. So he straightened up all his business in Mobile, and then we left there on the largest steamer that had ever run in southern waters. This steamer was called the REPUBLIC. We came to Cedar Keys on the REPUBLIC and had a fine trip that far. Then the only way we could come to Tampa was on a small sailboat.

So they packed our things on the sailboat and both families started for Tampa. We were out in the Gulf two days, and had no wind to take us very far, so the boat sprang a leak and we were all frightened most to death as not one of our crew could swim. So there was bailing, and priming, to do night and day till we got to Clearwater Harbor, and you can't imagine how proud we were when we all got the chance to get on land once more. The captain had to lay over and fix the
boat, so were all there for a few days. Then when we was ready to sail again, we headed for Tampa so it was not so far and dangerous a trip on into Tampa.

So we got into Tampa about three o’clock in the afternoon. So father and mother went out and found a house and rented it for a while until he could look around and see what was best for him to commence to do, and he got our things off of that terrible boat and fixed us up a little for a few days. That was in December 1868, and at that time Tampa was a very small little town with only two or three stores, and a very few people, and no streets at all but only sand roads with palmetto roots and high scrub-oaks on each side of the roads. It was a terrible looking little town.

But sister and I were happy anyway because the sun shone so pretty and it was warm and nice. Of course you know it is not such a great distance from here to Alabama, but I was always cold-natured and we never have it to snow in Florida, and there was no icicles to come from the top of our house to the ground. That pleased me to be in this country.

My father went out the next few days and looked for a farm. So he found a small place of only sixty acres. He thought that was enough to start with until he could get better acquainted with the

Typical passenger steamer from late 1800’s.

From Atlantic Coastline Railroad: Steam Locomotive, Ships, and History by Richard E. Prince.
country. So he moved out ten miles from Tampa to what they call Selfner now. There was no one within four miles of us except one negro family. They were called the Bob Golsons.

So father took Mr. John Robison, the family he had brought from Alabama with us, and hired five negroes to help us on the farm. The doctors told my father and mother they would be compelled to work out in the sun and air. So father got one of the men to hitch a horse to the plow and bring him up to the house. So that was the first time I had ever seen my father in common clothes and at the plow handles. So my mother had a light hoe and her and father went to their first work, which was for their health. So their health got better and they were getting along fine and making very fine crops. He had a very fine two horse team, two oxen, and a wagon in which our cotton and other produce was hauled to Tampa to sell. He got very good prices for his crops.

We farmed on until in 1872 we had a fine crop, but the houses on the farm was so old and rotten we could scarcely live in them; and I had to walk three miles to school with no houses between my father’s house and the school. I was frightened most to death on the road, and when I saw a bunch of cattle or any wildcats it would scare me most to death. Father sent my sister to Tampa to board as there was better schools in Tampa. There was not much chance to buy books

Bird’s eye view of Cedar Key, Florida in late 1800s.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
Typical Florida farm of the Civil War era.

From *Florida from Indian Trails to the Space Age* by Ruby Leach Carson and Charlton W. Tebeau.
or anything else as the country was most uncivilised. Most all over Florida was the same way at that time I guess.

Well, we had been to Tampa from 1868 and stayed there until 1872. There was a very dry spring and our house was most rotten. There was no lumber to build so father thought times would get better and probably a saw mill might be put up so he could build. But my mother had given one of our negro men a hen that was sitting under the house. She told him he could have the hen and her biddies if he would watch and keep the wildcats and other varmints away from her chickens.

As it was very dry weather in May, it caused us a lot of trouble. The man took a torch of fat-wood and went under the house to see after his hen, and some sparks of fire caught in the dry rotten wood, and, as the wind was high, it caught fire. But we didn’t know it for some time. Father got up about two o’clock in the morning and seen the house was on fire. He woke my mother, sister, and me. We were so frightened we could hardly live. The house had begun to fall in at the doors, so everything we had got burned except two featherbeds and a few other things. So we were left flat. Father never even had pants, shirt, shoes or a hat. So a negro man, Bob Golson, seen the fire and came over to help, but we could do nothing as we had no water. We had to haul all the water we used one mile on a sled with a horse, so it was very bad for all of us.

So Bob Golson told father, “Mr. Barnwell, I is a negro but if you will wear some of my clothes, I will lend you such as you need.” For the yellow fever was raging in Tampa at that time, so poor father could not help himself. So he told Bob that he was almost a millionaire, and now almost a pauper. It most killed my dear parents that he had to wear the negro’s clothes until the quarantine was taken off of Tampa.

So we had a terrible time camping in old outhouses that was on the farm until father could do better. So when the quarantine was lifted off of Tampa father went in to see about getting some clothes and other things we all needed so badly. He wanted to see if he could get some of his Mason friends to help him or lend him money to build another house. Mr. Crane and Mr. Wall was the men. They said to my father: “We are sorry to tell you, Mr. Barnwell, but that land is not yours. We didn’t know you was going to buy that place or we would have told you. But you was a stranger when you came to Tampa, and you bought the place before we knew anything about it.” So they told father that the place belonged to a widow woman, a Mrs. Post, and she was an invalid and had sold that place twice before to get money to raise her children on. And the place could not ever be sold because her husband, before his death, had deeded it to their great-grandchildren. So they said he had just as well leave the place for he could never get it.

So my dear parents were throwed out again. They didn’t know what to do, so their health began to get worse again, but we camped on the old place until he could dispose of his crops. He then went to the house and told my mother he was going to hunt a place.

When he came back he told mother he had struck something that he thought he could make a fortune out of. So he disposed of all his hands except two negro girls to help mother, my sister, and me pick cotton and help fix to move so we could hurry and get to where he thought he could gather the gold again.
I could see a very sad look on dear mother’s face, but I had always had a aplenty up to then and I was always a happy little girl. But I didn’t like the sadness on mother’s face. It made me feel sad when I’d see mother unhappy, but my happiness seemed to change. I am sorry to say, I wasn't happy anymore until I saw dear mother in better health again. She fixed and toiled so hard to get ready to move to that terrible place, Fort Ogden.

So father got everything ready to move by the middle of December in 1872. Then I was in my thirteenth year and sister was in her sixteenth year. She was a beautiful girl with jet black hair. She weighed a hundred and forty-eight pounds, was tall, and of good shape.

Dear father was gone one week to look for a place to move in to that terrible place to start anew with just a little money. So he went into Manatee County to the place called Fort Ogden, and it is still called by the same name yet. So father got acquainted with a merchant there. This was Mr. Zibe King. King had a very small store, the only one in Fort Ogden. Indians would come there with their hides, Alligator and deer hides, or other things they wished to sell or exchange for goods or provisions and all such things as they needed.

Mr. King was also running a Bar Room. Also, King was a Mason, so he decided to help my father out by letting father take the saloon over. There was but a very few people that lived there, but most of what was there liked the whiskey. There was no churches or you hardly ever heard of a minister. So father made arrangements with Mr. King to take the Bar Room and move us to Fort Ogden. It seemed like the move would kill my poor mother, but she did not know what else to do. So father took both teams and fixed up to move right away.

I think it took us most one week to move from near Tampa to Fort Ogden as the roads were most terrible. There would be large palmetto roots and sometimes the wheels of the wagon would not touch the sand for four feet at a time, and then would drop off the roots with a hard

The Ziba King store at Ft. Ogden at the turn of the century.

From *A Pictorial History of Arcadia and DeSoto County* by George Lane, Jr.
jerk. It would most jolt one to death that was not used to hardships. Well, we would drive the
team all day and then camp in the wild woods all night, and let the teams and ourselves rest. We
were never used to wild woods before and I could see such a sad look on dear mother's face. I
was too young to understand things as she did.

So we got to Peace Creek one night and had to camp there as we all had to cross Peace Creek
on a large barge. That was all new to me as we had never seen such before. Next morning we got
ready as early as possible and we crossed the river and got into Fort Ogden late in the afternoon,
all tired out and worried. So father rented a small log cabin with only one room to cook, eat and
sleep in. There were large cracks in the floor and walls.

This was the 15th of December, 1872. It was a miserable cold time. So we had been there just
two weeks when a stork came and brought my mother a little son. He was very frail. Well he
came the 27th of December, 1872, and some of the ladies came in and chinked the cracks of the
floor with paper and rags, and made mother a real mosquito bar out of calico. Well, I was
proud of my little brother because I didn't have a brother. But as mother was so sick and with no
doctors there, I was afraid she would die. After she got well father sold the ox team, and one
horse, and the big wagon and bought us a little home. We had one horse left and he bought a
one-horse wagon to do our work with, and do our hauling. So we thought we would do better
then.

Father built a log house for his Bar Room. It had large cracks in it and he put wide boards over
the cracks, and built counters. He had a right nice stock of old rye whiskey, Tom gin, peach
brandy, blackberry wine, tobacco, candy, and snuff. My mother hated for him to commence such
business. She told him, "Buck, you are going to ruin our family. I can't bear the thoughts of you
selling whiskey." He said: "Mary, my health is so bad I can do but little work, and it seems like
this is the only thing I can do for a little while anyway."

So he was doing very well at first, but we were not acquainted with the people. The most of
them were very rough people. There was one family that lived about two-thirds of a mile south
of us near Peace River, a Mr. John Johnson and a brother, Guss Johnson. They had two more
brothers, Ben Johnson and Lawrence Johnson, that lived one-and-a-half miles the other side of
us. So, you see, we were just between these two families. They seemed to be good neighbors
and, at first bought a good deal of whiskey, and tobacco, and snuff.

After a while we began to learn that they were a very dangerous set of robbers. We went on the
best we could for a few months. Father always stayed at the Bar and mother would fix his meals
and I would take them to him. One evening the Johnsons all went in and bought drinks and told
father they would be in that night again. They looked around and father felt a little uneasy. So he
told Mr. Ziba King about it next day, and King said the people were watching them very close,
and had found pits dug in Peach Creek swamp where they were killing people's hogs and cattle
and curing it in the pits, and they were taking it up to Bartow and other places, to sell.

So they were being watched more careful. So one night Mother heard shrill whistles on each
side of us. We would not lay down. We lived in a small house about three hundred yards from
the Bar Room. Mother was afraid to go to father as he had his revolver with him. So we sat up all
night, as we could hear them whispering in the corner of our chimney, you might know how we felt. So next morning mother went to the Bar room to see about father, and when she got there, father had been drugged and most dead. A man came along that she had been acquainted with when we lived near Tampa; she said, “Mr. Hayes, come in and see what we can do for my husband, he is most dead.”

So they went to the house and got a blanket and they put father on it and took him to the house to care for him. This gang of thieves had robbed the house of everything in it after they had drugged my father most to death. There were no doctors and very little medicine.

So they arrested the four Johnson men and one woman, and put them in jail. This was in Manatee County then. They were tried out for stealing and robbing houses. They were about as bad as the old John A. Murrell Gang that father knew of years before this happened. So Ben Johnson and his brothers, Guss, and Lawrence, were sent to the pen for a few years, and John Johnson and the woman were turned out. So Mrs. Ben Johnson was afraid to stay at her home, and she wanted to exchange her home to my father for his place so she could be near her brother-in-law, John Johnson.

She had a finer home than father had, but they made the trade. It was one mile further to school and I didn't like that. Father went to farming. He had only ten acres in cultivation then, but that was all he could manage with our help as he never did get over being drugged; it finished raiding(?) his health. He made a great deal of corn, peas, forage for the horse and fine gardens, and he also ran a ferry across Peace Creek. The land was near the creek and was good land.

So we all worked very hard and were satisfied until father, mother, and I got down with Typhoid Fever. There were no doctors there and no medicine to get except caster oil, turpentine, salts, blue mass, and calomel. That was not very good for that fever, but my mother was a fine nurse as she had had to see after our negroes in Alabama, and she would tell sister Sallie to take a list what to do for us in case she got too low or unconscious. Father gave a man one-third of his crop to work and keep the ferry going. It took us a long time to get able to work any more.

Well, after I began to get better my hair all came out. My hair was a dark brown and I hated to be called “Baldhead,” for by this time I was fourteen years old. I looked terrible, but after a while my hair began to come back, and, to my great glory, it was a dark brown and as curly as could be. So by the time I was fifteen years old everyone said I had the prettiest hair they had ever seen. So I was so proud of my beautiful hair. I was a little proud that I had had Typhoid Fever if it do come near killing me.

Well, my little brother got sick; he was never well anyway. So he was the only boy, and we all worshipped him. Father said living so near Peace Creek would kill his son, so he decided to hunt a place on the south side of Peace Creek. He found a place he liked, but no house was on it, and it was four miles from anyone. My sister was eighteen years old and she and I hated to go so far from anyone. So father went over and built a small log house, cleared some land and made a fence, penned some cattle that ran in the range, then moved us over.
Well, it seemed to me like we had begun to go down again. My mother would cry and work so hard to get another start. Well, my sister married a man called Moses(?) or Dick Whidden, in about eight months after we moved over in the wilderness. It came near killing my father and mother to see sister Sallie marry this man. He was quite wealthy, but his character was not a bit good, and he was supposed to be very mean. They were going to run away and marry. Dick went to Pine Level, where the court house was at that time, and got the license. Any girl could get a license to marry in those days at eighteen years old. So father found out they were going to run away and marry. He went to Dick and said: “Dick, I heard you had the license and you and Sallie were going to marry anyway. I told you the day you asked our consent that I could not let you marry her, but a friend of mine told me to-day that you intended to take her to Charlotte Harbor tomorrow and marry; so if you really intend to marry in spite of all we can do, go get a Justice of the Peace and bring him here and marry at my house.”

So, next day he went to Charlotte Harbor, which was twelve miles from us, and brought the Justice of Peace to marry them. That was Judge Decosta(?). My mother cried and grieved most to death because sister didn’t listen to her. But Dick was very cruel to her, and sometimes I would think he whipped her; but if he did she would not tell on him.

After sister Sallie left home there were only father, mother, my little brother, Huball(?) and myself. There was not a home between us and Charlotte Harbor, and four miles the other side of us. So I was very lonely and hardly ever saw anyone for over a year after we moved to this range, only cattle hunters. So after a year I got acquainted with A.J. Knight, and I was only sixteen years old but I was lonely. I was always proud to see him. He was a very handsome young man and very wealthy.

Then I got acquainted with M.F. Mizelle. He was very nice and wealthy also. Mr. Knight would correspond with me, as it was twenty-five miles to his father's house and no way to travel in those days except on horseback or on an ox-cart, and the roads were very rough. Once in a while one would have a buggy, but they were only the well-to-do people.

Mr. Knight had to go off on some business for his father, and he wrote me a letter and told me he would be gone nearly a month to see after his father's cattle. He wrote me a nice sweet letter:

“Pine Level, Manatee Co.,
Aug. 2, 1876.

Dear Miss Kattie:

I am called away to see after father's herd of cattle. I will be gone several weeks out in the range. How I will miss those beautiful brown eyes and beautiful curls of hair! But when this you see remember me, and I will be thinking of my brown-eyed queen. I will go through flood and flame for thee, my darling, my brown-eyed queen.

Your loving one,

A.J. Knight”
Mr. M.F. Mizelle was my lover also. You see, I lived in the wilderness and two rich young men were always so kind to me. I really could not tell which one I loved best. Mr. Knight was gone three weeks, and when he came back I was at Pine Level at a large camp meeting. Mr. Knight was with me through this meeting, seeing I was with the best. My father was not well and I had only one small brother; so mother had to stay with father and she let me go to Pine Level, which was twenty-four miles away, to stay with one of her friends, Mrs. Taft Langford. She was always very kind and nice to me.

One night after the camp meeting broke up Mr. Knight came over to see me, and he said: “Miss Kattie, I want to ask you a question to-night. I will tell you that my father is going to send me to Tampa to study law. Just to think that I am to be a lawyer is disgusting to me. Miss Kattie, I want to ask you to-night if you will be my wife. If you will be my wife I will take you in my buggy tonight to the Court House and get a license, and we will get married tonight and I won’t have to go to Tampa to study law. What says you?”

I said, “Oh, Mr. Knight, I never dreamed of such. Do you really think I could do such a thing as to ride with you two miles in as dark and stormy a night as this, and my dear father and mother not knowing anything about what I am doing? Mr. Knight, I could never do one thing that my parents didn’t know, but I ask you to please forgive me for I cannot do this. I am very sorry you have to go to Tampa to study something against your wishes.” He bade me good-bye and I missed him very much.

So Mr. M.F. Mizelle was all I had to see after me when I was away and mother couldn’t go with me. I was getting to be quite a young lady then and most girls were jealous of me because I had such beautiful curly hair. One day he and I were riding horseback, and I was thrilled to have such a fine young man by my side. Mr. Mizelle went with me quite a while. He had been acquainted with me for some time. Then he said: “Miss Kattie, you know how much I think of you. Will you be my wife?”

I don’t know what struck me. I was not expecting this, and before I could think I told him no. This set my heart on fire when I spoke this fatal word. It most killed me when he spoke and said, “Miss Kattie, this is the flattest kicking I have ever got.” I tried to say, “I didn’t mean to say that to you, Mr. Mizelle,” but something kept me from uttering a word, Say, don’t you think I was a terrible fool: two fine rich young men tried to get me to marry them, and I didn’t?
I just thought that after my father had become poor, that these young men were just trying to flatter me. I just would not risk myself to prove whether they meant to marry me or not, but I was grieved. When I would lay in my bed at nights I would think, “Oh, well, it must be a lottery. This is a fatal blow I have done all myself. How can I bear to go through life after making this last terrible mistake?” It most killed me.

Mr. Mizelle continued to go with me for quite a while, and looked after me. He was nice and kind all the way through until the day I married. Mr. Isaiah Williams came to our house for years. He came to see my sister Sallie long before she married. She didn’t like him, but he was a real nice looking man, hardworking and honest. He ran a very large saw mill for his father. So after sister Sallie married he kept coming. I was only thirteen years old when my sister and I met him. He kept coming around. I was not grown and, of course, I thought he was coming to see father. But he came until I was eighteen years old or a little after. He asked me one day if he could come to see me.

I was so well acquainted with him, I told him yes. So he came on for four months. Then one day he took me on such a surprise. He raised my bonnet and asked me if I would be his wife. I never dreamed of him asking that question. I was shocked, but not an unpleasant shock. I said: “I will have to study about this a while.” He said, “How long?” I told him two weeks. So he never came for two weeks. Then he asked me what I intended to tell him. Oh, I made out like I didn’t know what he meant.

So he said, “You told me you would tell me whether you would be my wife or not today.” Well, I didn’t want to marry him, but I told him I would be his wife. I can never tell why I told him; guess it was my lot. So we set the time to be married, the 11th day of April, 1880. Well, we lived away out in the wilderness, but he asked my parent’s consent and they told him yes. They both went out, and he came and sat by me and told me I was soon to be his wife. Well, I was not happy. I did not know what to do. I thought of Mr. Knight, I thought of Mr. Mizelle, and of the thrills I had with them, but it seemed it was my doom. I had been acquainted with Mr. Williams so long I just could not tell him no. Father and everybody liked him.

Mother, sister Sallie, and Mrs. Martin cooked my wedding dinner. They tried to tease me, but I was too sad. I wanted to be off in a room by myself. We married on Sunday. The night before we
married he brought his sister, Ellen, his niece, and one of my schoolmates to help me dress. I
loved Ellen; she was a sweet girl, but I could not be happy. I didn’t care what happened. I seemed to be miserable.

So Sunday, the 11th, came, a beautiful morning, but not a happy wedding day. I went to my room with the three girls, and my father came after a while to my window as I was dressing for the wedding, and called to me. I went to the window and stopped over, and he said, “Kattie, Mr. Mizelle has come early. He wants to talk to you before you come out to marry.” I said, “Father, I am dressing and I can’t come out.” But you can't think how I felt! You may think I was mean, but I was not; it was only my lot to marry Mr. Williams.

About ten o’clock everybody came. They had to come quite a distance in rowboats. At eleven o’clock we were ready to walk out to be married. One of my school teachers was a judge. So my father stood on one side of the judge, who was to perform the ceremony, and Mr. Mizelle on the other side. Mr. Mizelle never took his eyes off of me. After I was married all the people came to congratulate me. Mr. Mizelle asked if he could sit there and say a few words to me. My husband told him yes. Mr. Mizelle said, “Miss Kattie, do you believe in lottery?” I told him no. He said, “Well, I never did until today, but from now on I believe that the girl that is to marry is lotted for that man.”
So, I was not a bit happy, but I thought my happiness might come later on. We stayed at my father and mother’s that night. Then the next morning I began to think whether I could leave my father, mother and dear little brother, and I had a sweet little sister. She came the 15th of September, 1879, was just seven months old. My heart began to wish I was single again, but it was too late now.

So my husband took me over to Fort Ogden to stay at the saw mill. His mother, Ellen, Mamie, a younger sister of his, were there. His mother had been cooking for twelve mill hands for six years. Her girls were soon to be grown and she hated for them to be with the rough mill hands. So when one week was up, she asked me if I would stay there and do the cooking for mill hands and let her move back to their home. They had about four or five hundred head of cattle, over one hundred hogs, and a very fine orange grove to see after. So, I had never been with a rough crowd of men. I thought they were all nice; so I told her yes. She and father Williams moved away and left me, a young innocent bride there.

My husband was to run the mill, and I was to do the cooking and cleaning up. Well, I was a very sad bride, but I cooked and did the best I could for such a large crowd. One day my husband asked me if I liked it there, and I told him that I didn’t know that there were ever such rough people in the world, and that I was not a bit happy. So he said his mother could not stay there with the girls, so she had asked him to marry and bring his wife here to cook so she could get her daughters away. This made me grieve much, and I cried all day. My husband was ten years and five months older than I, but I made the best I could of my married life, for I thought for one to quit and get a divorce was very low. So I thought, “Well, I did it, and, with the help of God, I will stick until death separates us.” So I did.

I was married nine months. Well, on the 10th day of January, I had a dear little son. We named him (for the doctor who brought him into the world) Henry Rousch Williams. Then my father-in-law sold the old mill. I just hated it, for the mill-hands would come every day for dinner singing: “There is an old saw mill not far away, where they have cold beans three times a day.”

Well, I cooked what was put there for me, that was all I could do.

Well, father Williams moved my husband and me up to his home, so my husband could build them a two-story lumber house. They had always lived in a log house. So he commenced to plane, or dress, the lumber by hand and, of course, it took him over a year, as he was the only carpenter. Well, on May 13th, 1882, I had another son. We named him Thomas Alexander Williams. By the time Tom could walk, my husband bought a small piece of land, and built me a small nice house. Then I began to feel better, and some days I felt happy with my two nice sweet little sons.

Well, then on January 29, 1884, there came another fine little son to me. We named him Thaddeus Munroe Williams. He was a fine little son. I guess I had begun to have my hands full; doing the sewing, with my fingers, cooking, washing, cleaning house, and seeing after my little sons. Well, on the 24th of October, 1885, I had another son. We called him LaRue Massey Williams, I now had four fine sons, I was proud of them, but it kept me busy doing all of my work and seeing after them.
The country had begun to get a little better. The train was soon to come through as the railroad was being built, and I was so proud as I had to stay by myself every day and there was but such few people, and not any near me. I thought where the depot would be, there would be a little town, and we could get along so much better than to have to go so far for our provisions and other things we needed. So, the depot was put in one mile and a half from us. They called that place Arcadia. They divided Manatee County and called our part Desoto County. So Arcadia began to be a little town, and the court house was moved from Pine Level to Arcadia, where it is now.

I never got around much as I had so many little children. We had a nice home, horse buggy, hogs, a few head of cattle, and were putting out a nice orange grove. I was very proud of our little home, and did all I could to help my husband to keep the place going. Well, I was confined with twins in August, 1888. They were born on the 25th day, and then I had my hands full. They were very small and only weighed three and one-half pounds each. The son we named, Eddie and the girl Ellen, after her aunt Ellen. I had to nurse them night and day after my mother left me. I didn’t know how to manage six little ones without help. So my health began to run down. I was getting miserable again.
On August 15th, 1887, I had another little girl.* We named her Arrie Frances. I just cried all the time for all my children had the whooping cough, and I knew my little twins could never get over that. They had it three or four weeks anyway. So when Arrie was five days old, little Eddie died. It most killed me because I was so weak and run-down anyway. He was buried on my birthday, August 21st.

Father was very sick. He was twenty-four miles from us. He sent a horse and wagon after mother to go to him as he lived away out in the wilderness. So mother did not say a word to me until she had packed her clothes and little Ellen’s. Then she took my darling baby in her arms, came to me and said: “Kattie your father is very sick and has sent for me to go to him at once.” She was crying. She said: “My dear child, I hate to leave you like this, in bed where you can’t turn over. Your baby was buried yesterday, and I have little Ellen’s clothes packed with mine. I don’t see any other way to help you only to take this baby and take care of her. She is very sick.” It most broke my heart to see my baby and mother go, for I knew she would die if she stayed, and me with another baby only six days old. So mother and baby kissed me good-bye.

Arcadia had built up so that there are some days as many as three doctors there to hold consultation. Well, it took four weeks for us to get around a little. It was in October before I was able to go out, as we had to go in an ox-cart. My husband fixed me a bed and I lay down for the trip. You see, it was the only way I could be taken there as we were so far from the railroad, and when I got there little Ellen was still sick. I just was heart-broken.

*The dates are noted here as they appear in the manuscript. It is likely that Arrie Frances was born in August 1889.
BOOK REVIEWS

The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education. Edited by Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985. Index. $25.00 cloth.

Reviewing an anthology is always difficult. But the task is especially cumbersome when the text results from an academic conference. Despite prominent authors represented, excellent work included, and editors’ valiant efforts to connect diverse essays, conference proceedings often lack coherence and organization. They patch together individual efforts to create an illusion of unity. The reader must view the book through an imposed framework. This collection of essays presented during a two day "Symposium on the South" is no exception. The editors and contributors are foremost in the field of Southern history. Yet paradoxically the thirteen essays presented here are not ordered historically. Instead the editors fit the essays into three overlapping, converging subject areas: women, family, and education. Most of the essays pertain to two or more of these areas, contributing further to the reader’s confusion. As a result of this loose organization, the text jerks the reader back and forth between settings, time periods, and subjects toward no general conclusion. The introduction to the volume does not resolve the reader’s quandary as to its goals or purpose.

Still, each essay read individually is good. Many of them illustrate the political implications of personal experience and restore the individual to history. The stated goal of this book is "to provoke questions for all students of southern society, especially those who want to learn more about ordinary lives" (p. xv).

Most congruent with this purpose are the essays about education. Since few professional historians have written about Southern higher education, we have little information about the effect of schooling upon personal lives and the relationship between education and its cultural context. Here we learn about how the conservative socialization provided by female academies could be negated by the subversive sisterhood these schools encouraged. Similarly in men’s colleges there were influences which tended to subvert family control. Thomas G. Dyers’ enlightening historiographical essay about higher education in the South points to numerous untapped areas for scholarly research. There is a need for balanced and objective (rather than celebratory) institutional histories. There have been few historical studies of the effects of Reconstruction, the new South, or desegregation upon education! And there have been no studies of the role of athletics in Southern universities. Are these areas which individuals are afraid to research? Such gaps in scholarship leave many questions unanswered.

Only two essays are specifically about the Southern family, and both are perceptive. Orville Vernon Burton reveals that the Civil War and Reconstruction had a "differential impact" upon young Southern men. The black community remained stable, and black men adjusted well to historical changes; but the white community experienced an economic decline, and white men experienced a crisis of confidence. In a sensitive essay entitled "Folks Like Us: The Southern Poor White Family, 1865-1935," J. Wayne Flynt utilizes oral histories and other personal testimony to dispel stereotypes, foster understanding, and emphasize the diversity of poor white lives.
Most of the essays about women address narrower topics stressing women’s historical agency in areas heretofore unrecognized. These are very isolated case studies which together provide only a sketchy outline of some of the factors affecting Southern women between the eighteenth century and the Progressive Era. For example, Carol M. Bleser studies autobiographical sources and private correspondence to discover that Elizabeth Frances McCall Perry was the principal adviser to her less controversial, less ambitious, and less outspoken husband, South Carolina legislator Benjamin Perry. In his autobiography, Perry suppressed all evidence of his wife’s non-traditional role in their marriage. But Bleser’s analysis of the couple’s correspondence - 540 previously unavailable letters - provides a glimpse of Elizabeth Perry’s exceptionally strong voice in her husband’s political career.

More provocative and all-encompassing is Catherine Clinton’s "Caught in the Web of the Big House: Women and Slavery," which exposes the antebellum legacy of persistent patterns of sexual oppression that covertly united Southern women while racism overtly locked them in competitive conflict. As historical evidence in two other recent books - Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila Skemp’s Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South (University Press of Mississippi, 1983) and Minrose C. Gwin’s literary study Black and White Women of the Old South (University of Tennessee Press, 1985) - also document, this is a legacy which contemporary Southern women need to combat.

While the lives of ordinary Southerners have been diverse and multifaceted, they have also been altered by cultural and historical changes. Their living record is history in its most basic sense. From the study of everyday lives in times past we can look beneath the surface of political history to discover facts and details which were more relevant to a majority of Southern lives. Historical studies like these prevent both the social scientist’s tendency to over-generalize and the outsider’s tendency to stereotype.

Ruth A. Banes


Our Story of Gulfport, Florida is a compilation of the history of the city of Gulfport by the Gulfport Historical Society. The contributors to this local history volume number over fifty, and it is therefore not practical to list all of them. An acknowledgement should be made, however, of the Editorial Committee who brought all of the pieces together and furnished the glue to make this endeavor both informative and readable. The Editorial Committee consisted of Mary Atkinson, Agnes Conron, Willard B. Simonds, Genevieve Smith, and Frances Purday, chairperson.

As is usual, the early history of the city proved to be the most interesting. The early settlers who came to this tip of land on Boca Ceiga Bay were much like other settlers on the Pinellas peninsula. They lived off the land and the abundance provided by the warm waters surrounding them. Fish and game were plentiful, and it was easy to grow crops in a favorable climate. During those early years, the city went through several name changes. It started out as Disston City, so named by real estate tycoon Hamilton Disston, who had purchased four million acres from the state. The post office used the name Bonafacio until 1890, because there was already another
Disston City north of Tampa. The settlement north of Tampa disappeared in that year thus resolving the confusion. In 1905, the name of the city was changed to Veterans City in hopes of attracting Civil War veterans. This idea proved futile, and in 1910 the city of Gulfport was incorporated. The first part of the book, concerning this early settlement, is arranged chronologically using descendants of the early settlers to recount the city’s origins.

The remainder of the history deals with the development of the city topographically. There are sections dealing with such topics as churches, schools, service organizations, government services, businesses, and early buildings. In each case, individuals associated with particular institutions or organizations provided the information to members of the Editorial Committee. The contributors were well chosen, and in most instances were old timers who were familiar with the complete history of those institutions, organizations, and businesses which had flourished at one time or another during the development of the city.

This local history is a most comprehensive effort. Equal consideration was given to all organizations and events, whether it was the founding of the fire department or the growth of a Russian Orthodox Church in the community. Gulfport is unusual in Pinellas County in that it started out as a small, self-sufficient community and has remained so over those decades which saw unparalleled growth in other parts of the county. It is perhaps for this reason that one gets the feeling that no stones were left unturned by the Editorial Committee. All the resources were and are still there.

Kendrick Ford
ANNOUNCEMENTS

The American Association for State and Local History announced today the publication of two new books for historians who study, write, and display the history of the community in which they live: *Local Schools: Exploring Their History* by Ronald E. Butchart (Paper, 124 pages, 39 photos, index, $11.95), and *On Doing Local History* by Carol Kammen (Paper, 180 pages, index, $13.50). Copies may be ordered from AASLH, 172 Second Avenue North, Suite 102, Nashville, TN 37201.

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Do you have any photographs of the early Dunbar or Safety Hill area? The Ft. Myers Historical Museum would like to borrow photos of people and places relating to local Black history. The photos will be copied, and the copies used for murals to decorate the new City Hall Annex in Dunbar. Original photos will be returned to the owners. Bring your photos to the Historical Museum on the corner of Jackson and Peck Streets, or call the museum at 332-5955. The museum is open Tuesday-Sunday.

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The Ft. Myers Historical Museum has begun restoration on the Esperanza, a private railroad car built in the late 1920s. The car was given to the people of Ft. Myers as part of the City Centennial last January, when the car was moved to the Museum grounds. Early stages of the restoration have been supported by numerous individuals and organizations, including the Scale Rails Railroad Club of Southwest Florida. The Museum Railroad Committee, headed by Lloyd Hendry, would like to invite you to share in the exciting process of restoring the Esperanza to its original glory.

To pledge your contribution to the restoration of Ft. Myers’ only private railroad car - to your private railroad car - please call Diane McGee at the Historical Museum. Mrs. McGee may be reached at the Museum, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Tuesday-Friday. The phone number of the Museum is 332-5955.

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*Afro-Cubans in Ybor City: A Centennial History* by Susan D. Greenbaum may be purchased for $4.00 per copy from the Marti-Maceo Club, 1226 7th Avenue, Tampa, Florida 33605.
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COVER: The girls’ basketball team of Middleton Senior High School gathers for a team portrait, January 4, 1948. It is interesting to note that the uniforms are very similar in style to present day uniforms except for the bloomer style shorts. Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.
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UNMANLY SPIRIT

"Extravagant women have ruined many a man, but we are sick of the disposition to always lay a man’s mishaps at the door of the female sex. It began right in Eden where Adam gave the first proof of a nature already distorted by sin when he laid the blame of his fall on Eve. That unmanly spirit is too often still displayed by his sex." Taken from a WCTU Column, St. Petersburg Times, August 31, 1901.
HOSPITAL ANNEX NEARLY COMPLETE

"The hospital annex at the County Farm is rapidly nearing completion. Everything is now ready for the plasterers and after they have finished their work the finishing touches can be made. Two additions have been made, one at the east end of the dormitory for the negroes.

"Dr. J. D. MacRae, county physician, is very enthusiastic over the new hospital additions. He explained the floor plans of each, stating that there would be a ward for male patients and a ward for females of both races on the lower floor." Tampa Morning Tribune, December 5, 1911.
MANY CRIPPLES

"It is remarkable how many cripples there are on the streets the past few days. It is a never failing sign of cold weather when these 'boxcar tourists' put in an appearance, and they will haunt our thoroughfares until the return of warm weather." *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 25, 1900.