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THREE FLORIDA GOVERNORS FROM TAMPA

By ARSENIO M. SANCHEZ

Three Tampans have served as governor of Florida, Henry Laurens Mitchell (1893-97), Doyle Elam Carlton (1929-33), and Bob Martinez (1987-91). Of the three only one, Bob Martinez, was born in Tampa.

Henry Laurens Mitchell, sixteenth Governor of Florida and first elected from Tampa, was born on a farm in Jefferson County, Alabama on September 3, 1831 son of Thomas and Elizabeth (Sterns) Mitchell.

His parents came to Florida in 1846, homesteading in the Seffner area. There were nine children, seven sons and two daughters.

Mitchell received his early education from his mother and from an itinerant Methodist minister who occasionally served as his tutor.

Having completed his early education, Henry, by the time he was seventeen, was in Tampa reading law in the office of Judge James A. Gettis, a well-known local attorney.

Admitted to the bar at 18, Mitchell was well-liked, and by 1857, at the age of 26, he was elected State Attorney for the Sixth judicial Circuit. This position he held until the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, when he resigned and enlisted in the Confederate Army, serving as Lieutenant and Captain, in the Fourth Florida Infantry Regiment. At the close of the Vicksburg Campaign, he resigned to become a member of the Florida House of Representatives, from Hillsborough County, to which he had been elected in his absence.

Florida freeze of 1894-95
After returning from his duty as a soldier and beginning his career as a politician, Mitchell began courting Mary Eugenia Spencer, and they were married April 11, 1866. His wife’s brother, Thomas K. Spencer, published the *Florida Peninsular*, a weekly newspaper. He named Mitchell editor in September 1867.

By 1870 Mitchell had been named chairman of the county Democratic Committee, and he was elected to another term in the State Legislature in 1873. By then he had relinquished his editorial quill.

In 1877 when the Democrats succeeded in ousting the corrupt Republican "carpetbag" government from power, Gov. George Drew appointed Henry Mitchell judge of the Circuit Court for the Sixth Judicial Circuit and he served in this position until 1888.

While traveling his circuit which included Cedar Keys and all the way down to Key West, Mitchell had to break quarantine lines during the yellow fever epidemic of 1887.

In 1888 Mitchell was elected to serve as a justice on the State Supreme Court. But he and his wife seemed unhappy with the regimen in Tallahassee and he made it known he would welcome a return to a circuit court vacancy back in Tampa. Gov. Francis P. Fleming obliged with an appointment.

Why Supreme Court justice Mitchell was unhappy with his new position can only be surmised. The *Florida Times-Union* speculated that he did not like the political atmosphere in the State Capital.

In 1892 there was considerable dissension in the Democratic party, particularly on the matter of selecting a candidate for governor. The state convention was held in Tampa, and of the seven or eight candidates none seemed to have the qualifications to restore harmony. When the name of Judge Mitchell was proposed he was nominated. He was inaugurated January 3, 1893 and served a four-year term through January 5, 1897.

At the nominating convention in Tampa June 1, 1892 of Henry Mitchell for Governor, Sydney L. Carter of Alachua County made the nomination, and just as he did the electric lights, flickered and went out. This was a common occurrence in those days and did not cause a great surprise or alarm. One of Mitchell’s first official acts in 1893, was to appoint Hugh C. Macfarlane to the position of State Attorney for the Sixth Judicial Circuit. Macfarlane was in the process of developing West Tampa.

Mitchell’s term as governor was plagued by several natural disasters. The first was the...
big freeze of 1894-95. On Dec. 29, 1894, the temperature dropped to fourteen degrees damaging the fruit and leaves on the orange and lemon trees. An intervening warm spell brought new leaves and buds and then a second wave of frigid air swept the state, on February 7-10, 1895. In one night $50,000,000 worth of property disappeared. There was very little marketable crop left in 1895.

To recoup their losses, many farmers turned to truck farming, which became a major factor in Florida’s economy.

The cigar manufacturing industry that began in 1886 in Tampa was also contributing to Florida’s economy. In 1896 the cigar industry in Tampa produced 86,000,000 cigars.

Another disaster, a hurricane, ripped across the state at 135 miles an hour on September 28, 1896, destroying Cedar Key.

During his last year in office, Governor Mitchell was concerned about the problem of the revolution in Cuba against Spain. Repressive measures by Spanish forces caused an increase in the Cuban population of Florida, many of whom carried on activities to aid the insurgents.

These expeditions increased during 1896, aided by Floridians like Captain Napoleon Bonaparte Broward of the steamer "Three Friends."

At the end of his term as Governor, Mitchell placed his name on the ballot in Hillsborough County as a Candidate for Clerk of the Circuit Court. He signed his own Commission as Hillsborough County Clerk.

When his term as clerk ended in 1901 he was elected county treasurer, which office he held until his death October 14, 1903. He was buried in the Oaklawn Cemetery.
The Mitchells had no children.

Doyle Elam Carlton, twenty-fifth Governor of Florida and second elected from Tampa, was the youngest to hold this office (age 41). He was born in Wauchula, Florida July 6, 1887 son of Albert and Martha (McEwen) Carlton, who had eight sons and one daughter.4

His great-grandfather, Lieutenant Alderman Carlton, was killed by Indians when serving as an officer in the Seminole War. His grandfather, Daniel Carlton, also fought in the Indian Wars.

Carlton received his early education in the public schools of DeSoto County. He graduated from Stetson University and received an A.B. degree from the University of Chicago in 1910 and an L1.B. degree from Columbia University in 1912. He began his law practice in Tampa in 1912.

He married Nell Ray August 30, 1912. They had three children: Martha, wife of David E. Ward, a lawyer; Mary, wife of Dr. W.J. Ott of Tallahassee, and Doyle Jr. who nearly made the governor's mansion himself in a hot run-off with Gov. Farris Bryant in 1960.

Doyle Carlton chose the field of politics and was elected to the State Senate representing the District of Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties in 1917 to 1919. He was city attorney of Tampa from 1925 to 1927.

He served as governor of Florida from Jan. 8, 1929 to 1933, during one of the most critical peace time periods of Florida's history, as a result of four major disasters:
the Mediterranean fruit fly pest, collapse of the state’s real-estate boom, a violent hurricane killing 1,836 persons, and the national depression. While Carlton was governor his administration legislated state support of county roads and bridge bonds with gasoline tax revenue and legalization of Pari-Mutuel wagering on horse and dog racing.

After serving as governor, he returned to Tampa in 1933, to practice law.

Announcement of his candidacy for the U.S. Senate in the summer of 1936 brought a series of commendatory newspaper endorsements. The papers agreed that, with his wide name-recognition, he should have little trouble winning the race.

Carlton’s only opponent, Charles O. Andrews of Orlando, was a Spanish-American veteran who had been a schoolteacher, lawyer, state representative and supreme court commissioner.

Four Florida newspapers urged Andrews to withdraw, to save the cost of the primary and to make it a sweep for Carlton. Andrews felt that he had announced his candidacy first, and he wasn’t about to bow out.

Carlton wrongly assumed the race would be an easy one and made no plans to campaign. But Andrews cultivated a well-organized group making its first major impact upon the American political scene the -- elderly.

What jolted the Carlton camp in late July was word that the Florida Townsend club had come out strongly for Andrews.

A light statewide vote gave Andrews a winning margin of about 5,000. His major strength came from Townsendites and north Floridians who favored a cross-state ship canal.

Carlton was defeated in 1936 for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate. He did not run for elective office again, concentrating instead on his law practice, church and civic interests.

Carlton was special attorney for the State in the 1947 settlement which brought state ownership of the Ringling Museum and home at Sarasota. Former Gov. Doyle E. Carlton was appointed on December 23, 1957 by President Eisenhower to fill a vacancy on the six-man Civil Rights Commission. Carlton said he had no idea how President Eisenhower happened to appoint him to the group which was created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, he a Democrat and a southerner. He also served 13 consecutive years as president of Tampa’s Pan American Commission.

Carlton remained active until several months before his death. He died Oct. 25, 1972 at age 85, Florida’s oldest living former Governor.

Bob Martinez was Florida’s 40th Governor, its first chief executive of Spanish descent and its first Roman Catholic Governor. He was the third Florida Governor from Tampa.

Martinez born in West Tampa on December 25, 1934, the son of Tampans Serafin and Ida Martinez. Christened in the Roman Catholic Church as Robert Martinez, he was called “Bobby” at the insistence of his grandmother, Isabel Carreno, who took care of him as a child while his parents worked.

He received his formal education in the Tampa Public Schools. At Jefferson High School, Martinez lettered in baseball and
basketball and was co-captain of the basketball team in his senior year.

Martinez married his high school sweetheart, Mary Jane Marino in December 1954 when he was a sophomore at the University of Tampa. A degree in education from the University of Tampa enabled him to work as a high school teacher in his hometown, Tampa. Postgraduate studies at the University of Illinois earned him a master’s degree in labor and industrial relations in 1964.

While in the school system Martinez was executive director of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association.

In 1975, after 16 years of work in education and labor relations, Martinez bought the well known restaurant, the Cafe Sevilla. He spent the next four years as a restaurateur.

He became active in the Democratic Party politics in 1979. The Mayor's office at the time was up for grabs. Martinez ran against four other candidates and was elected Mayor of Tampa without a runoff.

His conservative views on government put him at odds with Democratic policies and he switched to the Republican Party in 1983, the year he was re-elected Mayor with 81 percent of the vote. He resigned his post in 1986, to run for governor of Florida against Steve Pajcic, whom he edged by 54 percent of the votes. He was Florida's second Republican Governor in 110 years.8

The former Tampa mayor was sworn in as governor of Florida on Tuesday, January 6, 1987, at age 52.

The Martinezes have two children, Sharon M. Keen and Robert Alan. Sharon presented them with identical twins, grand-daughters, Lydia Marie and Emily Ida Keen.

While in conversation with Governor Martinez the talk would drift to the then-approved amendment to the California State constitution declaring English the official language of the state. Martinez’s answer was "I have always assumed that English is the language in which all business is transacted. No constitutional amendment or legislation is needed to confirm that fact."

Martinez was defeated at his second attempt at the Florida Governorship by Lawton Chiles in the 1990 election.

In March 1991, Martinez was appointed to head the National Drug Control Policy office by President Bush, a position he holds at the present time.

The U.S. Justice Department cleared former Gov. Bob Martinez of any violations of federal election laws relating to his donation to the Florida Republican Party of almost $62,000 in 1990.9

A long time Martinez supporter, Brian Ballard said, "If the former governor chooses to leave Washington, he will go by choice and not because he's forced to."10

ENDNOTES


3 Church, The Life of Henry Laurens Mitchell.

4 Tampa Tribune, October 25, 1972

5 Tampa Tribune, July 12, 1986

6 Tampa Tribune, December 24, 1957

7 The Tampa Tribune, December, 20,1987
The Author gratefully acknowledges the assistance Of Leland Hawes in proofreading this article.