1997

James Gettis: Tampa Pioneer Lawyer

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A 32-year old lawyer arrived in Tampa in 1848. Born in Pennsylvania, May 4, 1816, James Gettis "never spoke of his family, for personal reasons known only to himself, even when directly questioned about them." He had practiced law in his home state but friends believed that "disagreement with his family, over the issues that led to the War Between the States," prompted his removal to Florida.

The first recorded session of circuit court in Hillsborough County occurred in April 1846, although an earlier term was held in the fall of 1845, though no records remain. Georgia-born James T Magbee, Tampa's first practicing attorney, was admitted to the bar in April 1846 and not until October 24, 1848 was another Tampan admitted to practice. On that date, James Gettis was examined by attorneys Magbee and Thomas E King and found qualified to practice law in the courts of Florida. The court minutes show that Circuit Judge Joseph B. Lancaster granted his approval to the admission of Gettis.

On August 10, 1850, James Gettis was initiated an Entered Apprentice in Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, Free and Accepted Masons and was raised a Master Mason on September 17, 1850. For the remainder of his life, Gettis remained a loyal and active Freemason.

Though northern-born, James Gettis soon earned his bona fides as a Southerner. He owned no slaves but strongly supported the institution. Throughout 1850, and afterwards, the issue of expansion of slavery into the western territories was of paramount importance to Southerners. In April of that year, community leaders in Tampa met to express support for the rights of the slave states under the constitution and their "Just right and fair equality in the acquisition and distribution of the public domain,.." James Gettis was one of six delegates chosen to represent Hillsborough at the upcoming Ocala convention which met and sent delegates to the Southern Convention in June.
Gettis began to prosper in his law practice, reporting income of $500 in 1851, $800 in 1853, $500 in 1854 and $800 in 1855. He built a law office on the west side of Franklin Street, between Whiting and Washington in 1855. The small wooden building was located in the middle of the block and cost $1200. In 1852, Gettis was elected by the state General Assembly as Solicitor or prosecuting attorney for the Southern Judicial Circuit but apparently never served. During the early days of statehood, the Florida Supreme Court held session at various towns across the state. In March 1852, the High Court met for the first time at Tampa. In a letter dated March 10, 1852, to the Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, a correspondent wrote from Tampa:

The Supreme Court of our state closed its first term here on the 6th, the docket contained four cases, one of which was dismissed, one confirmed and two reversed. The judges composing the Supreme Court are eminently qualified for their high judicial duties -- they are doubtless commensurate to the highest anticipation of the people.

The following order was observed at table, viz:

Chief Justice Anderson at the right of the President (James Gettis, Esq.), Associate Justices Semmes at the right of the secretary (J. Carter) and Thompson at the right of John Conrad, chairman of the committee of arrangements. After doing ample justice to fine Turkeys, Ducks, Ham, Pies, etc., the cloth was removed and then came the 'sparkling vintage' and cake in profusion. The President having given the order to 'charge glasses' the popping and cracking of the cork ... ensued... On the call of the President the following regular toasts were announced viz:

The United States -- The observance of domestic tranquility and friendly foreign intercourse is the surest guarantee to national distinction and greatness.
The Constitution - The production of inspired minds. May it be perpetuated through all times.


Florida -- An infant in the family of states. May she soon arrive at maturity by the development of her innumerable resources.

The Supreme Court of Florida - the final arbiter of the rights of her citizens. Filled with judges eminently qualified for their high stations, and enjoying the confidence of her people, its future usefulness will prove commensurate with the expectation of the state.

The sentiment being drunk, Chief Justice Anderson arose and responded in a style evidently happy, and with that dignity, ease and eloquence peculiar to himself. He resumed his seat amidst applause. Associate Justices Thompson and Semmes each proposed sentiments suited to the occasion, prefaced with appropriate and eloquent remarks, which were received and responded to by Col. J. T. Magbee and the president...

The gentlemen present all proposed sentiments which were drunk with responses and cheers. Chief Justice Anderson proposed, as a closing sentiment, 'The hospitality of Tampa,' which being drunk, after a brief response, the company retired, well pleased with the social entertainments of the evening. About 8 P.M. the judges were waited upon to the wharf, and after a cordial farewell, they embarked upon a small vessel for St. Marks.

On this occasion the champagne produced no 'real pain' - its charm could only produce a commendable dyne of merriment, and all separated as straight as a bee line, and highly gratified at the social intercourse of the day.

One of the Company.  

The two most important local issues of interest to Hillsborough County during the decade of the 1850s were the railroad and the removal of the Indians. At a meeting at the Courthouse in Tampa on December 15, 1851, community leaders John Darting, Jesse Carter, M. C. Brown, James Gettis, Thomas P. Kennedy, S. B. Todd and others addressed both matters. A cross-state railroad with its southern terminus at "Ballast Point" on Tampa Bay was endorsed and a resolution was adopted calling for removal of the Seminoles from the State of Florida.  

In 1853, the Florida Railroad, promoted by David Levy Yulee was chartered. It was to run from the Fernandina area to "some point, bay, arm or tributary of the Gulf of Mexico in South Florida." Tampa citizens held a railroad convention in 1853 with James Gettis prominently involved.  

Hillsborough Democrats met at Alafia, August 1, 1854, and nominated Gen. Jesse Carter, boarding house proprietor and mail contractor, and "intimate personal and political friend" of David L. Yulee.  

Carter assured the voters that the Florida Railroad was indeed going to be built to Tampa but not everyone believed him. County Commissioner Christopher Q. Crawford, an "anti-Yulee Democrat," was brought
forward in opposition. Carter complained that he was canvassing against a "corrupt faction" claiming to be 'democrats' in coalition with a portion of the Whig party, aided by a rotten contemptible press." He identified his opponents as the "[Tampa] Herald, Magbee, Gettis, Darling and several other kindred spirits." A "Know Nothing Society" was organized and actively opposed Carter upon the grounds of his friendship with the foreign-born Yulee. Nevertheless, Carter won by an impressive margin and went on to the Assembly session in 1854. With Carter's "vote and influence" Yulee was returned to the Senate. The legislature approved the Internal Improvement Act which included support for a rail line "from Amelia Island, on the Atlantic, to the waters of Tampa Bay in South Florida, with an extension to Cedar Key." On June 9, 1856, James Gettis, along with 11 other Tampa Bay area residents, wrote to the president and directors of the Florida Railroad Company. They asked for a "candid statement" of the company's intentions regarding construction of the railroad south of the "point of divergence" to Cedar Key; in other words, the main line to Tampa. If the company was not interested in pursuing the line to Tampa, then the question of a separate railroad company was raised. Replying, for the railroad, George W. Call, secretary, responded that it did not wish to be relieved of its responsibility to build the "main line" south and intended to do so once the line to Cedar Key was completed, by July 1857.

Hillsborough County Democrats held their convention August 25, 1856 at Tampa. James Gettis and Francis M. Durrance were placed in nomination for State Assemblyman. Durrance withdrew and Gettis was nominated by unanimous vote. In his letter of acceptance, Gettis wrote:

... In relation to our Indian War [the Third Seminole War had broken out in Dec. 1855] I shall be in favor of, and urge more ample frontier protection to those of our citizens, who have been, for over six months, broken up, and compelled to move from their homes to protect themselves from a savage foe, and also for the immediate payment of the Volunteers, and those who have, by the force of circumstances, been compelled to leave their homes, and protect themselves, families, and neighborhood against the miscreant foe now occupying the Peninsular of
our State. Upon all questions of State policy, I shall hold myself in readiness to obey the instructions of my constituents, and in the absence of such instructions, I will pursue such course as may present itself to my mind, for the interest of the people of Hillsborough County, and for the interest of the State at large.20

In the October election, Gettis defeated Joseph B. Lane by a vote of 302 to 143.21

In April 1856, Henry Laurens Mitchell, who had read law in Gettis’ office, was admitted to the bar and the two of them formed the partnership of Gettis and Mitchell. Another law student of Gettis’ was John Alexander Henderson. John’s father, Andrew, had died in 1852, leaving four sons. The mother remarried to a man whom the boys did not like, so Gettis took the three younger sons, John, James Fletcher and Wesley P, and raised them. As Gettis was a lifelong bachelor, the Hendersons were as close to family as he ever had during his years in Florida.22

Gettis remained active in local politics and in 1858 was nominated for a second term in the State House. At the Democratic county convention at Alafia on August 28, Gettis and Simon Turman, Jr., were placed in nomination. Gettis received 15 votes to 10 for Turman who then withdrew and Gettis was declared unanimously nominated. Turman, in his local paper, the Florida Peninsular, lauded "Col. Gettis" as the leader "of the van of Democracy against the K[now]. N[othing]. hosts" in the well contested battles of ’56"23 In October, Gettis defeated Silas McClelland by a vote of 190 to 10.24

At the 1858-59 House session Gettis shepherded through the act creating the Florida Peninsular Railroad. By 1858 it had become apparent that Yulee’s Florida Railroad was no closer to coming to Tampa than it had been several years earlier. Construction on the "branch" line to Cedar Key was still underway and local citizens began organizing the Florida Peninsula Railroad in the summer of 1858. After the charter was approved in early 1859, the stockholders met at Brooksville in June for their first meeting. James Gettis was the fourth largest shareholder with 317 shares and was also elected to the Board of Directors along with George W. Means, Madison Starke Perry, William B. Hooker and seven others.25

Writing from Tampa, May 12, 1858, Gettis announced his resignation from the General Assembly. He cited his "delicate health and the inclemency of the weather during the winter session at Tallahassee..."26 But Gettis was prevailed upon to reconsider and by the following month he was active in railroad
matters. In August he addressed the students at Mrs. Porter’s Female Academy upon the completion of their examinations.27

The General Assembly met in adjourned session in Tallahassee on November 28, 1859. With John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry and the publication of Hinton Helper’s Impending Crisis, the South was feeling more and more defensive. There was great concern and fear that a Republican might be elected president in 1860. James Gettis was one of five chosen to sit on a Joint Select Committee to address the matter. A scathing report was issued condemning the "treasonable designs" of the Republican party:

In view of these momentous truths, and the present threatening aspect existing between the North and the South, your Committee cannot repress deep anxiety and serious apprehensions for the safety of the Union. Nevertheless, we recognize but one course which is left to the South. We therefore recommend the passage of the following resolutions:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Florida in General Assembly convened, That, in view of our national affairs, the time for argument has passed, the time for action arrived, and that Florida, as one of the Southern States, abides the destiny of her sisters, extends her warmest assurance and co-operation in any course their united wisdom may devise.

Resolved, That in the event of the election of a President by a Northern party, opposed to slavery as it exists in the Southern States, it will be the duty of the Southern States to prevent his inauguration or to take some measures in common to protect themselves, and, as one of the Southern States, Florida hereby pledges herself to do her duty.

Resolved, That, to give effect to this assured cooperation, the Governor be and he is hereby authorized, upon the call of any of our sister slave-holding States, and particularly of those bordering on the free States, to take any and all steps necessary for the maintenance of their rights, and to convene the legislature in extraordinary session should the necessity occur.

Resolved, That the Governor be requested to forward a copy of this report and these resolutions to our Senators and Representative in Congress, as also to the Governors of the several States of the United States.28

The resolutions were unanimously adopted.29

Gettis and Mitchell continued to prosper through 1860. Frequently, Gettis appeared on behalf of clients before the Florida Supreme Court when it held its annual sessions in Tampa. One circuit court case turned out to be quite disruptive. Gettis represented Edward Tattnall Kendrick in a chancery suit against Thomas P Kennedy and Micajah C. Brown. The case dragged on for several years, from 1855 to 1860 when Kendrick finally received a judgment for $3380. By that time, Kennedy and Brown were dead. During the time the case was pending a dispute arose between Gettis and Kendrick with the latter accusing Gettis of taking a bribe from Kennedy. Both Gettis and Kendrick were Masons and charges were brought in the lodge against Kendrick.
for slander against Gettis. Kendrick was declared not guilty in a Masonic trial but Gettis had the last word. In 1861 Kendrick was charged for being a blasphemer and a "habitual liar." He didn't show up in lodge to answer the charges and was unanimously expelled for contempt on June 15, 1861. Gettis, along with Henry L. Mitchell, William B. Hooker and John Darling, were among the ten witnesses against Kendrick.30

The Florida Peninsular gushed in its praise of Gettis in January 1860:

…that untiring, indefatigable "fugleman" - Representative of the County and people of Hillsborough - - Notary Public -- Solicitor in Chancery -- Attorney at Law -- Alderman of the City of Tampa, and Prince of good fellow -- James Gettis, Aid de Camp to His Excellency Madison S. Perry; and therefore entitled to the rank of "Col."31

And if Gettis had wished to travel to Key West, he could ride on Capt. James McKay's steamer the James Gettis.32

Storm clouds were gathering on the national horizon in the fall of 1860. With Republican Abraham Lincoln's election in November, secession fever spread throughout the South. Hillsborough Countians gathered in a mass meeting at the Alafia on November 24, 1860. Those present at the meeting took the position that Lincoln's election "determines the fact the powers of the government have passed into the hands of a section only of this Union, and of a section implicitly hostile to our interests and institutions." The General Assembly was urged to "promptly call a convention to sever our connection with the present government".33 Signing the petition were 76 men and 26 women.

Among the signers were: H. L. Mitchell, John Darling, H. A. Crane, J. T Lesley, J. A. Henderson, Wm. B. Hooker, Simon Turman, James Gettis and Wm. I. Turner. Among the women were Matilda McKay, wife of James McKay and Mrs. Catherine S. Hart, the wife of Tampa's most prominent Unionist, Ossian B. Hart. Federal officeholders H. V Snell, Madison Post, Alfonso DeLaunay, and Jesse Carter also pledged their support. Another such meeting was held at Tampa with about 400 present.34

A state convention was called for January 3, 1860 and James Gettis was elected delegate from the 20th Senatorial District which included Hillsborough, Manatee, Hernando and Levy counties. Gettis was one of eight members of the Select Committee on Ordinances which submitted a report on January 9, justifying secession and calling for immediate withdrawal from the Union. Amendments offered by moderates to make the ordinance of secession subject to voter approval, postpone the matter until January 18, or have it not take affect until Georgia and Alabama also seceded were defeated. A strong and sizeable minority of the delegates opposed taking immediate action. James Gettis and Hillsborough County delegate Simon Turman, Jr., however, consistently voted with the majority for immediate secession. The following day, January 10, the remaining opposition all but evaporated and the delegates voted Florida out of the Union, 62-7.35

In March 1862, Gettis organized a troop of soldiers, primarily from Hillsborough County, which became Company B, 7th Florida Infantry. Serving as second lieutenant was his law student John A. Henderson.36 By late June the company had marched off to war but Gettis' departure was delayed. On June 30 - July 1, Tampa was bombarded by a Federal gunboat. Capt. John
W. Pearson, the Confederate commander at Ft. Brooke reported:

I am proud to say that my men behaved handsomely on the occasion, though some of them had never before fired a cannon. I had them drilled in ten minutes so they were as old veterans, and I would here mention the name of Captain Gettis in the highest terms. He took command of one of the batteries manned by a green squad of my men who had never fired a cannon before, his own company having left a few days previous for Tennessee. Captain Gettis acted with that cool firmness which characterizes the man in all his various spheres at the bar and legislative councils; and I would also mark here that the citizens behaved handsomely, showing loyalty to the backbone.37

Capt. Gettis’ career in the field was brief. He resigned his commission April 17, 1863 due to ill health. Much of the time he had been "hospitalized or on furlough because of incipient phthisis and chronic diarrhea."38 Back home in Tampa, in March 1863, shortly before his discharge, he helped Capt. John Darling organize the Tampa City Guards and was offered a commission as first lieutenant, despite his poor health.39

When Union troops occupied Tampa in May 6-7, 1864, Gettis was residing at the Florida House Hotel, operated by Reason Duke, on Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Blvd.). The cash property of several prominent citizens was confiscated and Gettis was briefly detained though shortly afterwards paroled. According to one account, "Colonel John Darling and Captain James Gettis were left with nothing but what they had on."40

The war ended in 1865 and Tampa was described as "a hard looking place."41 Union troops moved in on May 27. Under President Andrew Johnson’s Reconstruction plan, a constitutional convention was held at Tallahassee in October 1865 and James Gettis was elected Hillsborough County delegate, defeating Unionist Tampa lawyer Ossian B. Hart. At the convention, the Ordinance of Secession was annulled and slavery was declared to be "destroyed" in Florida. Gettis was in the majority which supported additional language stating that slavery "had been destroyed by the Government of the United States."42 Even more conservative verbiage which would have declared that slavery's "re-establishment [was] prohibited by the President of the same,"43 was defeated by a 30-7 vote. An unrepentant secessionist, Gettis voted with the minority. The new constitution limited suffrage, political office and jury duty to white males. Elections were held in November and Gettis was chosen Judge of the Southern Judicial Circuit.44

Col. George E Thompson, Inspector for the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned lands, took a tour of central and south Florida in December 1865 and January 1866. On New Year's Day, 1866, he was in Tampa aboard Capt. James McKay's steamer the Governor Marvin.

On board the Steamer we found Judge Gettis of Tampa, the Judge of the Circuit Court. Elected thereto by the people for his ability and rebellious proclivities he is a thin cadaverous looking man and if Phrenology has any foundation in reason, is more cunning than profound. He is an instance of what great change the Southern climate and the institutions of the South have wrought in Northern men from time
immemorial. He insists that a man necessarily becomes enervated in the Southern country in the course of two or three years residence and soon becomes assimilated to those around him in manner and habits. I could not help thinking while he was talking in that strain, that he intended it as a justification of himself quite as much as it really was a libel upon nature. He sings the old song 'The Nigger won’t’ but excuses the white man by libeling nature.45

In April 1866, Judge Gettis convened a circuit court in Hillsborough County for the first time in three and one-half years.46 Union men who had suffered during the war complained that they were unable to find attorneys to represent them in the local courts. James A. Jones, John W Platt and James W Jackson wrote to Freedmen’s Bureau agent, C. R. Mobley, in September 1866:

According to the instruction we received from Captain James D. Green and yourself civil agents for Loyal Citizens of Manatee and Hillsborough Counties we went to Tampa a short time since for the purpose of entering suits against our rebel neighbors for our rights in the civil courts of this state. Captain Green recommended Judge Allen for our attorney and you recommended Honorable John A. Henderson some of us having applied to Judge Allen we soon decided that he was a poor chance as he wanted an unreasonable fee and it strictly in advance [and] we know Judge Allen to have been a leading Rebel [and] we are apprised of the fact that he is an open enemy of the Union party consequently we would have nothing to do with him, we then went to the Honorable John A. Henderson believing at the same time that he would do us justice, be he also refused to aid us in obtaining our rights, he said that if he was to prosecute cases for the Union party that he would consider that he had sold himself away from his party now sir according to instructions received from Captain Green and yourself to whom we look for our rights we have applied to the lawyers to aid us there are no lawyers in the county who are able to compete with Allen and Henderson in short the lawyers are all implicated in the taking of our property it is impossible for us to get our rights in the courts of this state...47

Military reconstruction began in the spring of 1867 with passage of the First and Second Reconstruction Acts by Congress. Florida became part of a military district and began the task of establishing a government satisfactory to Congress. Elections were scheduled for November 1867, and persons who had held Federal or state office before the war and later engaged in rebellion were among those not allowed to participate. Voters were to elect delegates to a constitutional convention and to decide "whether a convention should be held at all."48

In the meantime, Judge James Gettis’ circuit court remained a source of controversy. On August 30, 1867, Unionist agitator Matthew P. Lyons presented a petition of “qualified registered voters” to Major Richard Comba, commander of U. S. forces at Tampa. The petition sought the removal from office of Judge Gettis. Asserting that there was no need for any more sessions of circuit court until after the framing of the new
constitution, the petitioners went on to condemn Gettis as

a man of strong prejudices especially when a political opponent is a party to a suit - such is the feeling of the Union people that no union man thinks of getting justice in his courts. The consequence is that no union man ever thinks of bringing a suit in his court when he thinks the claim will be contested, under the circumstances if there was a necessity for a circuit court to be held here we cannot be content with Mr. Gettis as Judge from our knowledge of him we will feel that his court is to be used as an engine of oppression upon union men. His hatred towards ex-rebels who are now acting in good faith with the Republican party is as great as it is against those who took-up arms for the Union....

He is disqualified as a voter and therefore cannot hold office under the Reconstruction acts of Congress.\(^49\)

Major Comba sent the petition on to District Headquarters and added "from my personal knowledge of Mr. Gettis and his court I do not hesitate to state my opinion that union men would not obtain equal justice in the Circuit Court of this district."\(^50\) However, Comba believed it inadvisable to "suspend the Circuit Court for an indefinite period."\(^51\)

At a Fourth of July ceremony at the courthouse in 1867, Judge Gettis delivered an address on the same platform as a freedman and two Radical Republicans. But he must have been saddened at the sorry spectacle of voter fraud in the November election for the state constitutional convention. Carpetbager W L. Apthorp oversaw and allowed ballot box stuffing and other fraud, thus marring the democratic process.\(^53\)

County Commission minutes for November 25, 1867 show the following:

At the suggestion of the Honorable James Gettis, Judge of the Southern Judicial Circuit of Florida, the Board ordered the stairs leading from the hall of the Courtroom to the belfry of the Court House be removed to prevent idle boys and loafers from going up, to the damage of the plastering and also prevent the windows of the belfry be left open, and the rain beating in to the further damage of said plaster. Lewis Bell, Jr. agreed to take the stairs down.\(^54\)

Gettis' health, which had always been uncertain, now continued to decline rapidly. He made out a brief will on December 14, 1867, leaving everything to 24-year old James Fletcher Henderson, junior partner with his brother John in the firm of Henderson and Henderson. In his will, witnessed by John Darling, he said that he did not expect to live much longer due to "the nature of my disease." James Gettis died that same day at midnight, December 14.\(^55\)

The following day members of the Hillsborough Masonic Lodge met for the funeral. They marched to the Methodist Church where Baptist minister, Mason and
lawyer Sam C. Craft led them in prayer. The "Masonic funeral dirge was sung" and the procession continued to Oaklawn Cemetery where Gettis was buried with full Masonic honors.56

The Tribute of Respect, issued by the Masonic lodge said Gettis' whole life "Illustrated the Golden Rule."

By nature he was endowed with a reflective mind and a discriminative judgment; but his physical structure was comparatively feeble - hence, his natural mental powers were continually improved by study and reflection, which embraced the whole range of science and philosophy as well as the more common concerns of every day life....

His frank and genial disposition toward his fellow men, made access to him easy for every individual; and there are very few persons in the Southern Judicial Circuit of Florida, either in or out of this order, who have not, at one time or another, had the benefit of his judicious and friendly counsels, and this, frequently, directly against his own interest as a Lawyer.57

The Gainesville States editorialized:

But he is gone - another sorrow has fallen upon a people already tottering beneath the heavy burdens of accumulated misfortune, another strong and manly spirit that might have aided to guide the vessel of State through the perils of the storm, is lost and it must flounder on amid the billows and tempest, without the aid of one stout heart to which it never turned in vain for solace and assistance.58

Finally, his former law partner, Henry L. Mitchell, now editor of the Tampa Florida Peninsular, wrote:

From the period of Judge Gettis’ first coming among us he identified himself with the interests of the state, and its prosperity was the great aim of his life. Called repeatedly to fill important political positions, he acquitted himself with honor in every sphere. He believed in the constitutionality of secession, and held the high doctrine of state sovereignty, hence was foremost in the memorable convention of 1861. Fortwith he supported his actions by repairing to the front to defend the principle he cherished. When the end came he accepted the result to abide by it faithfully, and heartily applied himself to restore the government of our fathers, as it was. [emphasis added]

In private, his charities were liberal, his conduct regular, and his example a path wherein we should proudly follow. A great light has been extinguished, but its radiance still exists. We have his memory and his deeds to incite us to emulate his life and his death.59

James Gettis remains an enigmatic figure. Was he gay? His background was mysterious, he never married, he surrounded himself with young men and one of his close associates was John Darling, another life-long bachelor. Northern-born, he went out of his way to become a real Southerner, a true secessionist. He supported slavery yet owned no slaves. His health was feeble, but he courageously manned a cannon and organized troops for war. He was unforgiving towards Unionists and thus
earned their hatred. But to former secessionists and Confederates, he was a hero. The epitaph on his tombstone in Oaklawn Cemetery reads:

Here lies James Gettis, born May 4, 1816, died December 14, 1867. An exemplary Mason, a learned lawyer, an incorruptible judge, an honored man, self-made, to idleness a rebuke. Reader, know thyself and improve the lesson taught thee by the dead.60

ENDNOTES

1 James Gettis Tombstone, Oaklawn Cemetery, Tampa, FL; Hillsborough County Circuit Court Minute Book 1, 1846-1854, 70.

2 Theodore Lesley, "Judge James Gettis," Tampa Tribune, Sept. 7, 1952. Lesley's article, published in D. B. McKay's Pioneer Florida page, gives Gettis' birthday at May 1, 1816. However, when quoting the tombstone, he gives the birthdate as May 4, 1806. Obviously, the 1806 is a typographical error.


6 U. S. Original Census Schedules, 8th Census, 1860, Hillsborough County, Florida (Population and Slave Schedules); Hillsborough County Tax Book 1849, 1850, 1853, 1854, 1855, 1860, 1863, microcopy at Fla. State Library, Tallahassee. In 1860 Gettis was listed as agent for free black Mills Holloman and in 1863 was listed as his guardian.

7 Jacksonville Florida Republican, May 9, 1850.

8 Ibid.

9 Hillsborough Court Tax Book, 1851, 1853, 1854, 1855; Lesley, "Judge James Gettis," Tampa Tribune, March 26, 1950; Florida House Journal (1852), 31, 388; Hillsborough County Circuit Court Minute Book 1, 1846-1854, 323, 351.

10 Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, March 10, 1852.

11 Jacksonville Florida Republican, Jan. 2, 1852.

12 Laws of Florida (1852-53), 31-38; Jacksonville Florida Republican, May 5, 1853.

13 Karl H. Grismer, Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida (St. Petersburg, 1950), 116-120; Tampa Tribune, June 3, 1951; Florida Peninsular; Jan. 8, 1859.

14 Tampa Florida Peninsular; Jan. 8, 1859; Historical Records Survey, State and County Officers Commissioned by the Governor of Florida 1845-68 (Jacksonville, 1941), 142.


16 Ibid., Oct. 6, 1854.

17 Ibid.; Tampa Florida Peninsular; Jan. 8, 1859.

18 Laws of Florida (1854), 9-19.

19 Fernandina East Floridian, Sept. 15, 1859.

20 Tampa Florida Peninsular, Aug. 30, 1856.

21 Territorial and Statehood Election Returns, RG 150, Ser. 21, Box 18, Folder 21, Florida State Archives.


23 Tampa Florida Peninsular; Sept. 4, 1858.

24 Election Returns, Box 11, Folder 23, FSA.
Florida House Journal (1858), 98, 105, 136-140, 154; Tampa Florida Peninsular; June 19, 1858, July 2, 16, 1859.

Tampa Florida Peninsular, May 21, 1859.

Ibid., July 30, Aug. 13, 1859.


Ibid., 207-208.

McKay v. Friebele, 8 Fla. 21; McKay v. Bellow, 8 Fla. 131; Parker, et al v. Hendry, 8 Fla. 53; Hooker v. Johnson, 8 Fla. 453; Hillsborough County Circuit Court Minute Book 2, 1854-1866, 119, 178, 385, 500; Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, E & A.M. Minute Book 1857-1864, 102, 122, 169-171.

Tampa Florida Peninsular, Jan. 14, 1860.

Ibid., March 24, 1860.

Ibid., Dec. 1, 1860.

Ibid.

Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention of the People of Florida Begun and Held at the Capitol in the City of Tallahassee, on Thursday, January 3, A. D. 1861 (Tallahassee, 1861), 3, 6, 25-32.


Hartman and Coles, Biographical Roaster, II, 694.

Ibid.


Journal of Proceedings, 103.


Ibid., 21.

Ibid., 22; Jerrell H. Shofner, Nor Is It Over Yet:- Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877 (Gainesville, 1974), 163464.

Petition of Hillsborough County Voters to Major Richard Comba, August 30, 1867, RG 393, Part 1, Dept. and Dist. of Fla., 1865-1869, Letters Received, Book 5, National Archives.

Major Richard Comba to District Headquarters, September 6, 1867, in Ibid., above.

Ibid.


Tampa Florida Peninsular; July 6, 1867, July 4, 1868; Notes of John T Lesley, transcribed by Theodore Lesley, in collection of author.

Hillsborough County Commission Minute Book 1863-1871, Nov. 25, 1867.

Hillsborough County Old Wills Book, 77.

Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, E & A.M. Minute Book 1867-1873, 2629. Lodge minutes reveal that Gettis was also a member of Tampa Chapter No. 17, Royal Arch Masons and Lamienus Encampment No. 13, (Knights Templar?).

Tampa Florida Peninsular, Jan. 4, 1868.
60 Gettis is buried in what is today known as the Henderson Family Plot. Nearby are James Fletcher and William B. Henderson. His tombstone is very weathered and the date of birth -- 4 -- is almost illegible and looks like a 1. A veteran’s marker was installed in 1997 and gives his birthdate as May 1, 1816. Mrs. Patricia (Henderson) Levy has James Gettis’ original Bible which has the notation that it was purchased in 1849 for 75¢.