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## PICKING UP THE PIECES: Tampa 1848-1853

Volume 24 of *The Sunland Tribune* contains Chapter 6 of Canter Brown's book, *Tampa Before the Civil War* (Tampa Bay History Center, Reference Library Series No. 8, University of Tampa Press, 1999). The following article is Chapter 7. – ed.

Dr. Canter Brown, Jr.

The September 1848 hurricane constituted merely the first in a series of events that would jeopardize Tampa's continued existence. Of paramount importance, damage at Fort Brooke prompted the army to propose relocating the post elsewhere. Local leaders naturally battled for a continued military presence. Quickly, though, other disasters beset the community and diverted its leaders' efforts. Nature lashed out, hurling wind, water, and pestilence against the remote village's residents. By late 1853 Tampa's streets would lay empty. As the quiet settled on the land, however, fortune's wheel shifted once more. With the turn, almost unbelievably Tampa's prospects would begin to brighten.

The Fort Brooke controversy exploded twenty-three days following the hurricane. On October 18, 1848, the secretary of war ordered a board of officers to survey Charlotte Harbor "for the site of a new post within the limits assigned for the temporary residence of the Seminoles, in place of Fort Brooke, destroyed by the recent gale at Tampa Bay."<sup>1</sup> The news panicked Tampan's. They snatched at any ray of hope, such as the arrival in November of an apparently sympathetic commanding officer, Major W. W. Morris. "[He] regrets the order," recorded Juliet Axtell, "and says that he does not believe that they will find as pleasant a location."<sup>2</sup>

Optimistic thoughts deceived. On January 20, 1849, the officers' board endorsed the garrison's removal to Useppa Island. It further recommended creation of a military reserve on the Peace River. "The grant of a township immediately adjoining [Fort Brooke]," the officers wrote, "has already embarrassed the objects of the Government in keeping a Garrison here, & in the event of an Indian War—almost inevitable when the removal of the Seminoles shall be attempted—a reserve [away from Tampa] will be still more important for the efficiency of military operations." The report softened the blow by suggesting a continuing military presence at Fort Brooke. "So long as the Seminoles remain in Florida the Post & reservation at Fort Brooke should be retained as a Depot from which to supply posts or conduct operations north of the limits or between the Indians & white people."<sup>3</sup>

Fate then smiled upon the beleaguered Tampan's. At the time of the report, General George M. Brooke commanded the army's southern department. Concerned about his namesake fort's condition, he visited in late December. "It is supposed the Gen. came to see about the removal of the garrison," observed Juliet Axtell.<sup>4</sup> Brooke's tour reinforced his desire to protect the Tampa Bay post. He objected to the Useppa Island plan and urged an alternative. "It appears to me that the new fort should be somewhere on *Peas Creek*," he informed superiors. Brooke continued by recommending construction of "a good wagon road" between Fort Brooke and Peace River. He added a caveat. "Should there be objections to the line proposed," Brooke commented, "I am of the opinion that Fort Brooke is to be preferred to any island in Charlotte Harbor."



**Joseph Lancaster, Tampa's first mayor, moved his family in 1853 to this house on the north-west corner of Lafayette (Kennedy Blvd.) and Jefferson Streets.**

(Courtesy Florida State Archives, Florida Photographic Collection.)

Major General Edmund P. Gaines, another old Fort Brooke hand and now the army's commanding general, approved his old friend's request on February tenth.<sup>5</sup>

Brooke's intervention bought Tampan a little time, just as money began to circulate with the return of a regular army garrison in the Mexican War's aftermath. Tensions between the military and local citizens ran high, though, with many officers disdaining the town and its residents. "There is a small town—inhabited by the scum, well refuse of creation," typically noted Lieutenant Francis Collins. "[It] contains about fifty—or seventy-five inhabitants," he continued. "Among these, are three or four lawyers, as many preachers, three stores—half a dozen grog shops, and these live on each other." Collins concluded: "I do not believe there is a dollar per head among them. They hate the sight of an honest man."<sup>6</sup>

Town leaders faced a host of other problems, many of them arising out of frontier settlement patterns and local politics. Since 1846 Hillsborough County's board of

commissioners had run Tampa's affairs. Increasingly, the panel had reflected the wishes of farmers and cattlemen living well east of town. After the hurricane, the rural settlers expressed concerns about protection from Indians and demanded the placement of Fort Brooke's garrison at a point between their cattle herds and the Indian lands. This slap at Tampa's economic underpinnings found its echo in a lack of enthusiasm among commissioners for assisting in and supporting the post-hurricane cleanup.<sup>7</sup>

Given the circumstances, some Tampan decided to grasp control of municipal affairs. At a courthouse meeting on January 18, 1849, fourteen men chose to incorporate the "Village of Tampa." The community contained, they insisted, 185 individuals. One week later voters chose a board of trustees consisting of M. G. Sikes, Thomas P. Kennedy, Jesse Carter, Culbreath A. Ramsey, and William Ross. Interestingly, most of the men were newcomers. Jesse Carter stood most prominent among them. A state militia colonel, Democratic politician, stagecoach line operator, and mail contractor, he had served repeatedly in the legislature from Alachua and Columbia Counties. Sikes, of Savannah, practiced the craft of stonemasonry. Ramsey and Ross made their livings as carpenters. Construction work ongoing in town and at the fort had attracted the three artisans to the area. A few other families—that of John T. and Nancy C. Givens offers an example—also had arrived soon after the storm to take advantage of the building boom.<sup>8</sup>

When they assumed office, the new magistrates could see the possibility of economic salvation for their town despite the possible garrison relocation. The countryside to the east continued to benefit from a small but steady immigration, and some business



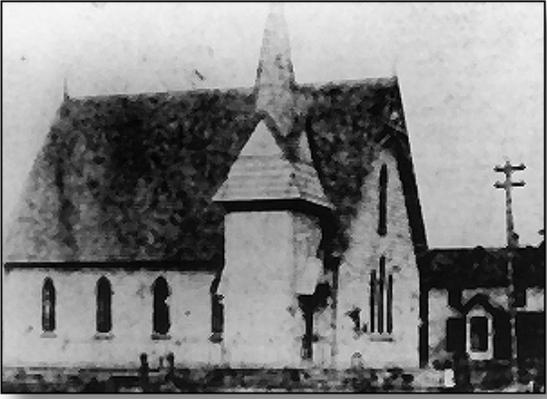
**The Hillsborough County Courthouse, built 1853-1855, facing Franklin Street, was a landmark structure testifying to Tampa's importance as the county seat.**

(Courtesy Florida State Archives, Florida Photographic Collection.)

could be derived by merchants from country needs. The old Charlotte Harbor Indian store had succumbed to the hurricane, and owners Thomas P. Kennedy and John Darling had received permission to reopen it on Peace River in today's Hardee County. Profits would flow to Tampa. More importantly, the Manatee River sugar plantations were just reaching a state of high development. Here, fortunes could be realized, with an extensive trade flowing through Tampa. The hurricane caused some damage, but calamity waited until after the town's incorporation to strike. Then, in February 1849 the plantations and sugar works of the Gamble family and of Josiah Gates burned. Damages ran into substantial amounts, the time required for rebuilding seemed uncertain, and Tampans suffered accordingly.<sup>9</sup>

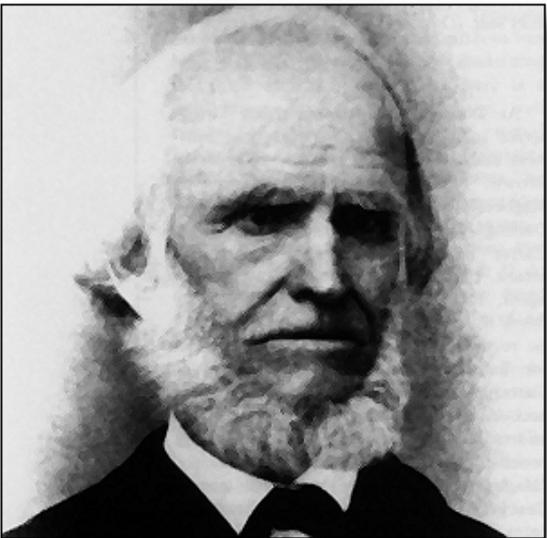
For months local fortunes ebbed, as uncertainty lay heavily upon the community. Then, on July 17 a tragedy created opportunity. A small band of outlaw Indians attacked the Kennedy and Darling store at Peace River, killing two men and burning the building. The incident offered the chance for a war. Such a conflict would prompt enhanced government spending and create numerous civilian jobs. It might also result in the expulsion—peaceful or not—of Florida's remaining Indians to the West. In turn, vast cattle ranges along the Peace and Kissimmee Rivers would be opened for exploitation, thus drawing a larger civilian population and lucrative trade.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, military officials appeared little desirous of war or even much excited about the isolated attack. A few weeks later General David E. Twiggs, who had been



**This delightful wooden structure was the first church in Tampa. The original First Methodist Church featured fanciful detailing, steeple and tall peaked roof. Under the leadership of Reverend L. G. Lesley, "the little white church" was built in 1851 on the corner of Lafayette (Kennedy Blvd.) and Morgan Streets. It was destroyed by fire in 1898.**

(Photograph courtesy of the Anthony R Pizzo Collection.)



**Surveyor John Jackson, an Irish immigrant, was awarded the first contract to survey the Town of Tampa. First surveyed in 1847 under the original incorporation of the town, it was again surveyed by Jackson in 1853. Jackson would later serve as mayor of the city in 1862.**

(Photograph courtesy of the Anthony P Pizzo Collection.)

placed in charge of the government forces, expressed his opinion of the affair. "It is astonishing to find how many persons, in & out of Florida, are whetting their appetites, expecting to share in the plunder of another Florida affair," he declared. "I will make every effort to disappoint them."<sup>11</sup>

At Tampa, the men of whom Twigg spoke included four old friends and business associates—State Senator Micajah C. Brown, State Representative James T. Magbee, Thomas P Kennedy, and John Darling—joined by militia colonel Jesse Carter. Within one week following the attack, Captain John C. Casey, the Indian agent, had discerned their thinking. "I think K. D. & B. are all anxious for a war," he recorded.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile Magbee headed for Tallahassee to demand troops, while Carter and Darling circulated inflammatory accounts of the Peace River incident. The efforts achieved their goal, and the army received orders to hasten to Tampa. "Magby raised a panic," admitted Captain Casey.<sup>13</sup> "Your paper is so full of lies," one calm Floridian informed an editor who published the Carter and Darling letters, "there is no room for a single fact in it."<sup>14</sup>

Bewildered and frustrated by the public relations campaign and political manipulations, many military men hardened in their attitudes toward Tampa and its residents, with potentially drastic consequences. "What the Indian panic will lead to, it is impossible to say," remarked one young officer. "There does not seem to be any call for all this stir of the military."<sup>15</sup> General Twigg, in particular, found little use for the town and its inhabitants and soon determined to rid himself of the place. He chose to favor a "new Paradise," the more genteel environment at the Manatee River. "He says he intends to move all the garrison from Tampa to his point," an aide recorded at

Manatee on October 12, "and make it the grand depot for his future operations." The aide added, "I left at Tampa what I never hope or expect to find again in this world."<sup>16</sup>

Mostly, the army commander's initiative met with failure. "When Gen. Twiggs was ordered here seven years ago he took a prejudice against Tampa and tried to make the Manatee (lower down the bay) the depot," explained a Fort Brooke officer in 1856. "He ordered roads to be cut, bridges to be built, store houses to be constructed and after it was all done he had to return to Tampa," the man continued. "He then tried to remove every thing to Ft. Myers, but after he got down there he found the Indians had come north and it was necessary to follow them."<sup>17</sup>

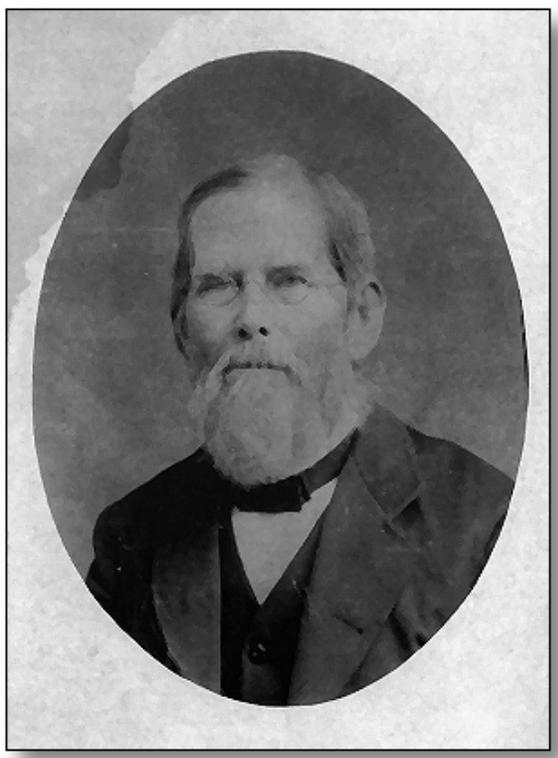
#### THE DIVIDENDS OF NEAR WAR

David E. Twiggs may have failed to close Fort Brooke in 1849 and 1850, but he succeeded at keeping the peace. With help from Indian Agent Casey and the Seminole chief Billy Bowlegs, the general averted armed hostilities in return for a promise by Bowlegs to withdraw his people away from the upper Peace River and toward Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. To secure the peace, Twiggs established a line of posts to keep white settlers away from the Indians. The most important link came at the main Peace River crossing point. Near the ruins of the old Upper Creek town of Talakchopco, he founded Fort Meade, named after Lieutenant George Cordon Meade. To service the posts the general ordered construction of a road sufficient to allow passage of heavy military wagons from Fort Brooke to Fort Meade to Fort Pierce on the Atlantic Ocean. In doing so, Twiggs inadvertently gifted Tampans with access to markets and interior settlers.<sup>18</sup>



**Major General David E. Twiggs, commander of U. S. Army troops in Florida in 1851.**

Other efforts funded by the army also paid off for Tampans, just as Kennedy, Darling, Brown, Magbee, and Carter had hoped. With jobs and money in plentiful supply, old and new residents hovered to take advantage. In late 1849, for example, John Jackson erected a store and opened a mercantile business at the northwest corner of Washington and Tampa Streets. C. L. Friebele pursued his general store on the northwest corner of Washington and Franklin, while Antonio Castillo prospered with his oyster house. That year, Tampans saw numerous men, many with families, traveling down sandy trails toward a new home. Among them, Robert F. Nunez arrived to clerk and keep books for Kennedy and Darling; Jose Vigil introduced candy making; and Domenico Ghira added to the port's small collection of seafarers. From Hernando County came James McKay's



**Perry G. Wall**

(Courtesy of J. Edgar Wall, III)

friends Mitchell and Elizabeth McCarty. The McCartys constructed their own store building on Washington Street between Morgan and Marion.<sup>19</sup>

The good times and growing population brought with them new community institutions, endowing a slightly more civilized quality to Tampa life. On March 12, 1850, twelve men met in a room above James McKay's store to found a masonic lodge, what would become Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, F&AM. They were Joseph Moore, John M. Palmer, Martin Cunningham, Michael L. Shannahan, Sherod B. McGuire, Thomas James Cook, Jesse Carter, Daniel P. Myers, John H. Myers, Dr. John W. Roberts, Benjamin F. Drew, and James T. Magbee. A lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows followed on April 21 at the behest of James McKay, Micajah C. Brown,

William G. Ferris, Magbee, and Lawrence Ryan. Joining them were Christopher Q. Crawford, Claudius L. Graves, John Darling, and Darwin A. Branch.<sup>20</sup>

The fraternal lodges may have enjoyed more enthusiastic support in the community in 1850 than did organized religion. The Methodist society had been meeting since 1846. Its struggle to survive had turned the corner when the circuit riding minister Leroy G. Lesley took up the leadership reins shortly after the 1848 hurricane. The congregation met in private homes or else at the courthouse, since it lacked a proper church building. In fact, the closest church stood on the north side of the Alafia River, constructed in 1850 by Benjamin F. Moody. Father Edmund Aubril, CPM, celebrated Tampa's first known Roman Catholic mass later the same year. The ritual occurred at the John Jackson family home, likely with Collar family members and their relations also in attendance.<sup>21</sup>

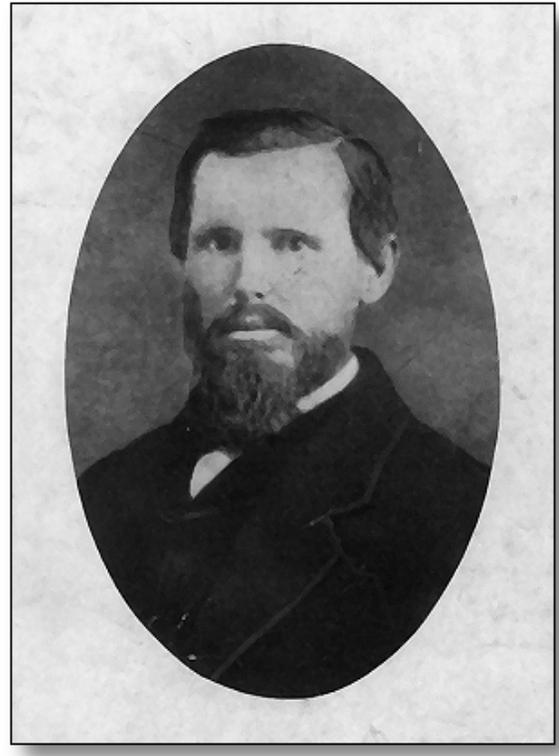
The local governments, buoyed by the renewed prosperity, also acted to enhance Tampa life. The county commission ordered courthouse repairs and caused the erection of a jail nearby. The panel directed that the compound be planted with "China Tree" seeds "in regular rows." The officials saw to the needs of the departed, as well. On April 1 they dedicated a tract of land north of Harrison Street and east of Morgan as a public cemetery. In subsequent years Tampans would bestow upon the cemetery the name Oaklawn. Continued access to the Hillsborough River's west bank had been guaranteed a few months earlier when Benjamin Hagler received permission to conduct the ferry established years before by Thomas Piper, now deceased. About the same time, the county allowed W. P. Wilson to reopen his courthouse school, while admonishing the teacher to find private

quarters by April 1850. The municipal government complemented the county improvements by opening a municipal market at Lafayette Street where it touched the river. Finally, a new town survey by John Jackson reached completion. When accepted on February 4, the "new map of the Town of Tampa" permitted renewed land sales and clearer understanding of property lines.<sup>22</sup>

Private initiative resulted in what may have been the most significant innovation at Tampa in 1850. Immediately following the hurricane two years earlier, James

McKay had purchased a schooner, which he named the *Sarah Matilda* after his wife. He then commenced a shipping business between Tampa, Mobile, and New Orleans. His ship docked at the military wharf located at the Hillsborough River's mouth. "This was the only vessel that was being used commercially for this port," recalled James McKay, Jr. In 1850, the captain bought another ship, the *Emma*, to link Tampa with Fort Myers. To service his small fleet, he constructed a private wharf at the foot of Washington Street. Pens located between the two wharfs held cattle destined for shipment to Key West. The town no longer depended upon Fort Brooke for access to water-borne commerce.<sup>23</sup>

The needs and wants of interior settlers absorbed the goods brought into the port of Tampa by James McKay's schooners. With the withdrawal of the Indians deeper into the southern peninsula, pioneers began to press the frontier eastward into present-day Polk County where unspoiled cattle ranges abounded. Behind them, new arrivals took up homesteads and farms. As the number of residents grew, the character of those nearest to Tampa also changed. The earlier pioneers, many of them Armed Occupation Act



**William Washington "Billy" Wall**

(Courtesy of J. Edgar Wall, III)

claimants, had tended to be poor. That was not true of the latecomers. "The Occupationists are beginning now to give way to a better class and I hear almost every day of some one of them selling out," explained John Darling.<sup>24</sup>

A growing rural population meant bigger volume for Tampa merchants, although the total trade remained small in the early 1850s. The slow recovery of the Manatee sugar output after the 1849 fires rated as a major factor in the equation. This, when coupled with the growing interior population, helped to divert the attention of Tampans away from the Manatee River and toward the east and that region's frontier products. "Cattle are the principal article of export with a limited market, some sugar, a very little sea island cotton, less tobacco,

and a few Hides, make up the list," John Darling observed, "still business steadily increases showing healthy progress of the country, and although we have no money now, we live on hope and look for better times ahead."<sup>25</sup>

Tampa businessmen labored with other handicaps in 1850. A principal one arose out of the difficulty of obtaining clear title to lands close to the town. The United States government in 1848 had reduced the Fort Brooke reservation to the post quarters and their enclosures, in good part the area lying south of Whiting Street. The authorities also donated 160 acres of land above Whiting Street for the town of Tampa. The remainder of the former sixteen-mile-square reserve could not be sold, however. The law required that it first be surveyed.<sup>26</sup>

Local and national events postponed action. "In 1849 a Petition from the inhabitants received a favorable hearing at the General Land Office and an order was issued to the Surveyor General of Florida to cause the relinquished Reservation to be surveyed," recounted one Tampan in 1851, "but about that time the Indians broke out, and the order was recalled." Then, the nation lurched into crisis over the question of slavery in territories gained from the Mexican War. "In 1850 another Petition was forwarded for the same object; but ... the government were too much engaged with the subject of slavery to attend to it," the resident added. Yet another appeal issued forth in 1851, but several years would pass before the government acted.<sup>27</sup>

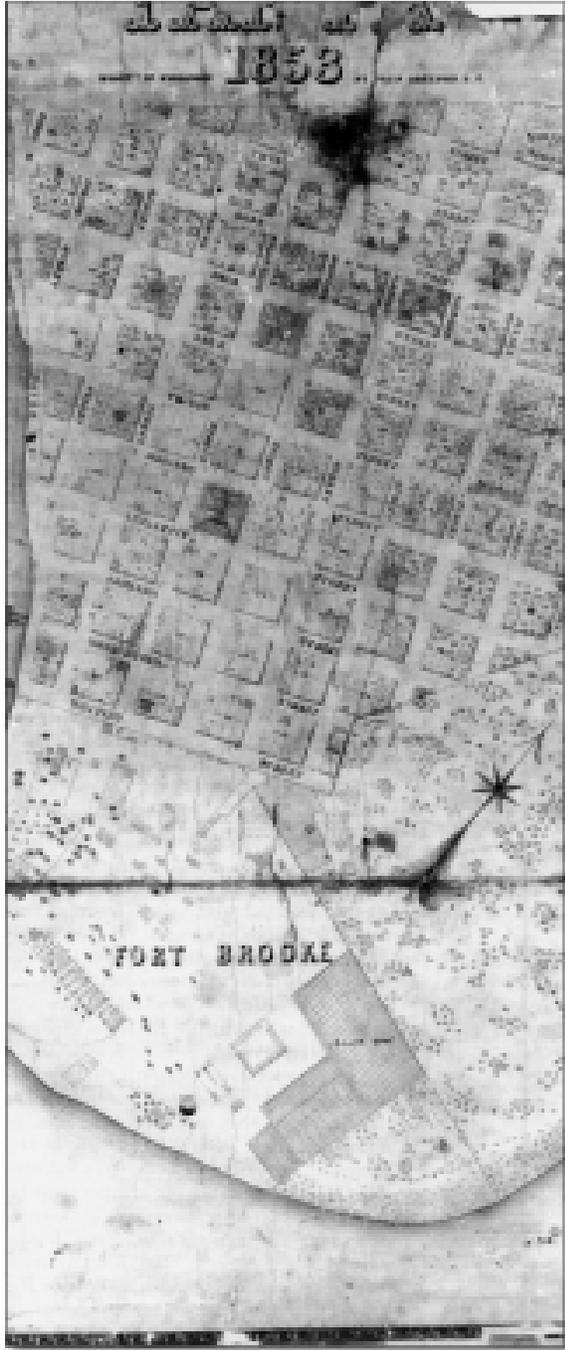
### SEASONS OF TROUBLE

Tampa's brief honeymoon with prosperity ended suddenly by the fall of 1850. The Indian crisis had subsided, and the troops quickly went on their way to other assign-

ments. Those who remained in southwest Florida grouped at Fort Meade and Fort Myers. By November Tampa's post stood almost empty. "There are few officers left here," Indian Agent John C. Casey informed a friend. "Occasionally, I visit Caloosa Hatchee and they are now building a House for me there (at Fort Myers)," the captain continued, "when I shall move down and take up my residence."<sup>28</sup> By early the following year only a caretaker stood watch.<sup>29</sup>

Thereafter, small detachments served at Fort Brooke from time to time, until army needs required a slightly enhanced force in 1853. No one remained in the military's hierarchy to protect the facility once General George M. Brooke died on March 9, 1851. Colonel John H. Winder, commanding Florida troops from Fort Myers in January 1852, ordered Fort Brooke abandoned in favor of a new position on the Peace River. Tampans pleaded with Winder's superior David E. Twiggs, who reluctantly countermanded the directive. A few months later, General Thomas Childs assumed command at Fort Brooke and renewed Winder's authority to build at Peace River. Tampans feared the military's stay in their town had about ended.<sup>30</sup>

Given their history, Tampans not surprisingly renewed their campaign for Indian removal, hoping to recapture military expenditures while opening new lands for settlement. They achieved a victory in January 1851 when the Florida legislature called for action and authorized a regiment of mounted volunteers to accomplish the task. Thereafter followed two years of pressure from Florida upon the federal government, convoluted negotiations, and sordid incidents of violence against Indians. On one such occasion in mid-1851, three captives held in the Tampa jail were found



**Surveyor John Jackson completed this survey of the Town of Tampa in 1853.**

(Courtesy of the Tampa Bay History Center.)

hanged to death. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis lost his patience with the whole matter by December 1853. He reinstated

Captain Casey's Indian agent authority and more-humane approach but warned that he was ready to use force.<sup>31</sup>

As the Indian-related turmoil simmered and seethed after 1850, Tampans strove to make the best of their situation. James McKay once again led in initiative. In cooperation with the New York firm of Blanchard and Fitch, he attempted to revive the lumbering business originally envisioned by the Hackley family in 1824. Over the years other men had sought to exploit area forests on a limited basis, but they usually ran afoul of agents protecting government-owned resources, especially live oak groves whose timbers were needed by the wooden navy. The Blanchard firm, for example, had been prosecuted in 1843. Six to seven years later, though, the government's need for timber at Fort Brooke and on the Manatee River prompted agents to look the other way as the entrepreneurs stripped public lands on the upper Hillsborough River.<sup>32</sup>

Once commenced, the lumbering operations grew at a modest pace. A small saw mill set up by Blanchard and Fitch cut cedar logs into boards, which James McKay transported in his ships. The firm then milled the cedar into pencils. In June 1851 McKay expanded the operation by erecting a larger steam saw mill on the Hillsborough River's banks north of town at what residents one century later would call Waterworks Park. He perceived a local need for construction lumber. Previously, most area inhabitants had settled for log cabins or else imported lumber from Mobile. Now, those who could afford to pay could enjoy plank-board homes. By-products also found a local use. "Sawdust from this mill was placed on the municipal streets to assist teams in hauling," recalled James McKay, Jr.<sup>33</sup>

Sad to say from the standpoint of Tampa's economy, the timber industry quickly reached arbitrary limits. The state was gaining ownership of large tracts of federal land with a great deal more to come. It naturally wanted to husband its resources, preserving property values and potentials. To facilitate these goals, the legislature created a board of internal improvements. In May 1851, Governor Thomas Brown designated John Darling as south Florida's board member. Darling thereupon became the state's eyes and ears in the region. As he informed the governor, "In regard to Depredations on the state lands, I shall consider it my duty to notice all that comes to my knowledge."<sup>34</sup> The agent first targeted Blanchard and Fitch, doubtlessly causing hard feelings with McKay and forcing the timbermen to exercise a high degree of caution when it came to cutting trees. Still, by 1851 lumbering had emerged as a viable business at Tampa and would remain its principal industry for the next three decades.<sup>35</sup>

A second industry also had shown modest promise. Tampa's warm climate and beautiful vistas had begun to attract a few winter visitors anxious about health problems, especially ones associated with the throat and lungs. Clement Claiborne Clay, scion of a prominent Alabama family, stayed over in March 1851 for that reason. At first he thought poorly of the place. "It is badly improved & scattered over a white sandy plain & would be intolerably hot if it was not almost constantly farmed by the balmy & soft Gulf breeze," he recorded. Clay overcame his reservations and remained for several weeks, living at a boarding house operated by Jesse Carter. There he discovered others similarly situated. "There are some twenty invalids, besides many who are making this their homes on account of their diseased lungs," he

informed his father. The sojourn resulted happily for Clay. Within days he would write: "My throat is certainly getting well, for my cough has almost ceased.—I weigh 139 lbs., without my coat & am hearty as a plowman." And so, Tampa's winter tourism industry had come into being.<sup>36</sup>

With the military cutbacks, however, Tampa's economy faltered despite a growing interior population, lumbering, and winter tourists. Through 1851 and into 1852, it eased slowly into the doldrums. "Tampa is a poor village, without any object of interest save the Indian mounds & old barracks," Clay insisted.<sup>37</sup> The Methodist minister Richard M. Tydings concurred, remembering sand as the principal characteristic of the "small village." He recalled, "There were no sidewalks then, and the sand was so deep that we young men would invite the girls to go wading, as anything like graceful walking was impossible."<sup>38</sup> The economic situation deteriorated further in 1852 when Thomas P. Kennedy opened a store at Fort Alafia, twenty-five miles east and a little south of town. Interior settlers now could trade and receive mail closer to their homes, minimizing the need for travel into Tampa.<sup>39</sup>

With conditions so depressed it is little wonder that religion received greater attention during the period. On April 8, 1851, the county deeded to Leroy O. Lesley, Franklin Branch, William B. Hooker, Alderman Carlton, and C. A. Ramsey as trustees a lot on the northeast corner of Lafayette (now Kennedy) and Morgan Streets for use by the Methodist church. John H. Whidden had bequeathed \$00 in 1848 for the structure, and the funds recently had become available for use. The Reverend Tydings solicited an additional \$00 and launched construction. The congregation's nineteen white members celebrated its dedication in 1852 or, possibly, early 1853. "Plain and sturdy of

line, it was no picture of ecclesiastical grandure," described historian Theodore Lesley. "Hand-hewn logs were its sill and frame works," he continued. "Characteristic of the time the clap-board siding ran the long way, up and down, giving the building from the outside a taller appearance than it actually had." Lesley added: "The windows were square and paneled in glass."<sup>40</sup>

Other community institutions also sought permanent homes. The county's clerk of court Martin Cunningham arranged in late 1852 for the gift of a lot for a Baptist church. It lay on the southwest corner of Tampa and Twiggs Streets. Cunningham's effort met with frustration at the time, since not enough Baptists yet lived in the town. The fraternal orders enjoyed greater success. The Masons and the Odd Fellows joined together to construct a two-story frame building on the northeast corner of Franklin and Whiting Streets. It cost the breathtaking sum of \$2,000. The lodges met on the upper floor while the local school held classes below.<sup>41</sup>

Readers should not envy the comfort or support Tampans drew from the church or the fraternal lodges, for hard times were about to turn tragic and the local people would need all the comfort and support that they could get. The first blow came in September 1852. "Tampa Bay and the surrounding country was visited by a terrible gale on the 11th instant, which carried away all the wharves at Tampa," one report declared, "and caused considerable damage to the sugar crops and orange groves in the adjacent settlements."<sup>42</sup> The winds hammered so fiercely and the waters rose so high that they drove a schooner 200 feet eastward from the river into the woods. Ever ready to capitalize on opportunity, James McKay purchased the vessel from W. G.

Ferris, dug a canal from the river, and floated the ship back to deep water.<sup>43</sup>

The storm struck a terrible blow to an already weakened Tampa. Within one month residents gathered at the courthouse to admit defeat. On October 10 they agreed to dissolve their town government. Its possessions consisted of three small record books, one market house, some dog chains, three candlesticks, one sand box, and a small table. The county accepted the property as it took over control of village affairs. It assumed, as well, the town's debt of \$42.50.<sup>44</sup>

One year following the hurricane, a second tragedy befell the community with calamitous results. A government steamer arriving from New Orleans deposited mosquitoes infected with yellow fever at Fort Brooke. Tragically, General Thomas Chills hesitated to inform Tampans that soldiers had fallen ill until "the Doctor can pronounce upon their cases as to whether they will worsen."<sup>45</sup> On behalf of his fellow citizens, on September 21, 1853, Jesse Carter attempted to discover the truth. "It is reported in town that yellow fever has appeared in the Garrison—that there has been one, or more, deaths & several cases now in the Hospital," he informed Chills. "You will confer a favor by informing me whether there be any foundation for such reports."<sup>46</sup> Late in the day, the general's adjutant finally acknowledged the fact. "The General directs me to state that yellow fever is amongst the troops," he responded to Carter.<sup>47</sup>

There followed months of suffering and death, compounded by ignorance of the disease's origins. The McKay family emerged as a scapegoat to some because they spread their mill's sawdust on the town's streets. "When the yellow fever appeared in town

many of the citizens claimed it was from decayed sawdust," recalled James McKay, Jr., "and the practice was stopped."<sup>48</sup> Fears leapt out of control when General Chills died in October, followed by two of his three fellow officers. "The yellow fever is bad at Tampa," William R. Hackley of Key West noted in his diary on October 26, "and the place is deserted for the pine woods."<sup>49</sup>

In November, authorities relocated the headquarters of United States forces in Florida with its military band to Fort Meade. Only in December would the terror begin to ease.<sup>50</sup>

The death toll ran extremely high for the village and tiny garrison, and it would have soared higher had not some local residents displayed tremendous courage. Perhaps fifty persons caught the fever all told, with twenty-three soldiers and civilians succumbing. "Of the citizens, nine resided in the town, and two in the country, from two to three miles out," explained the military physician. "Nearly all who died with this

disease were comparatively strangers," he continued, "but two of those who died where thoroughly acclimated."<sup>51</sup> John Darling, who headed the town's board of health, stood out as a hero. So, too, did Methodist ministers George W. Pratt and Joseph J. Sealey. Both survived, although Pratt lost his little daughter. When he passed away over thirty years afterward, memories of Sealey's dedication survived him. "We shall never forget the yellow fever scourge of 1853, in Tampa," observed one editor, "when this man of God never ceased, day nor night, to visit and nurse the sick."<sup>52</sup>

Fortunately, in January 1854 Tampans could look out of the abyss and see a ray of hope. Unlike the desperate times they had confronted in the past, they now enjoyed concrete prospects for growth and prosperity. A wave of momentum already had begun to rock their community by 1853 that eventually would prove to be the catalyst for its dynamic growth. A great question would remain. Would that growth happen now or would it happen later?

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Orders of the secretary of war, October 18, 1848, Letters Received, Office of the Adjutant General, M-567, roll 410, NA.

<sup>2</sup> Axtell family letters, 125.

<sup>3</sup> W. W. Morris, R. D. A. Wade, and John C. Casey to the adjutant general, January 20, 1849, M-567, roll 410.

<sup>4</sup> Axtell family letters, 127.

<sup>5</sup> Endorsements of George M. Brooke and Edmund P. Gaines, February 8 and 10, 1849, to Morris, Wade, and Casey to the adjutant general, January 20, 1849.

<sup>6</sup> Entry of March 1, 1849, Francis Collins journal, 1849-1850, Collins Papers.

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<sup>7</sup> Otto, "Hillsborough County (1850)," 192; Jacksonville *News*, September 2, 1848; R. D. A. Wade to R. Jones, September 26, M-567, roll 398.

<sup>8</sup> Hillsborough County Commission Minutes, Book A, 22; Gordon, *Biographical Census of Hillsborough County, Florida, 1850*, 500, 523; Dodd, "Florida in 1845," 14; *Tampa Guardian*, April 10, 1880; Harrison, *Genealogical Records*, 80-81; Grismer, *Tampa*, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 68-70, 78-79; Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, February 20, 1849; Matthews, *Edge of Wilderness*, 151-58.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 80-83.

<sup>11</sup> David E. Twiggs to G. W. Crawford, September 8, 1849, Misc. Manuscripts Collection, LC.

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<sup>12</sup> Entry of July 24, Diary—1849, John C. Casey Diaries.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 84-85; Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, August 11, 1849; VanLandingham, "James T. Magbee," 7; entry of August 11, Diary—1849, Casey Diaries.

<sup>14</sup> Jacksonville *News*, August 4, 1849.

<sup>15</sup> Entry of August 17, 1849, Francis Collins journal.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, entry of October 12, 1849.

<sup>17</sup> George W. Hazzard to John D. Howland, December 21, 1856, Hazzard Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 88-90; Brown, *Fort Meade*, 1-7.

<sup>19</sup> *TST*, May 4, 1952, January 11, 1953; Pizzo, *Tampa Town*, 22; Harrison, *Genealogical Records*, 94-95, 134, 151; Denham, "Some Prefer the Seminoles," 50.

<sup>20</sup> *Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, F & A.M.*, 3; *TDT*, June 4, 1955; "Partial listing of Oddfellow Lodge Members," notes in collection of Julius J. Gordon.

<sup>21</sup> Stone, "Rev. Capt. Leroy, G. Lesley," 25; Canton, Moore, and Capitano, *History of First Methodist Church, Tampa*, 11-15; *TST*, May 2, 1948; Hawes, "Church marks 150th year"; McNally, *Catholic Parish Life*, 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> Hillsborough County Commission Minutes, Book A, 26-29, 46; Baxley, Gordon, and Rodriguez, *Oaklawn Cemetery*; *TST*, June 24, 1951, November 30, 1958.

<sup>23</sup> McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, II, 25; McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days, 78-79.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 91-93; John Darling to Thomas Brown, July 28, 1851, "Swamp and Overflow" file box, Division of State Lands, Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *TST*, October 30, 1949.

<sup>27</sup> Darling to Brown, June 8, 1851, "Swamp and Overflow" file box.

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<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 89-90; John C. Casey to J. K. Casey, November 27, 1850, Casey Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Senate Executive Document No. 1, 32d Congress, 1st session., 191.

<sup>30</sup> Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, April 1, 1851; Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 94-95; Blakey, "Military Duty," 165-66.

<sup>31</sup> Covington, Billy Bowlegs War, 19-27; Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 93-94.

<sup>32</sup> Wood, *Live Oaking, Southern Timber for Tall Ships*; *TP*, XXVI, 731; Darling to Brown, June 8, 1851.

<sup>33</sup> McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days," 79; *TST*, March 26, 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Knetsch, "John Darling," 14-15; *TST*, February 3, 1957; Darling to Brown, May 11, 1851.

<sup>35</sup> Darling to Brown, May 11, 1851; Brown, *Jewish Pioneers of the Tampa Bay Frontier*.

<sup>36</sup> Norwood, "Letters," 268-69.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>38</sup> Tydings, "Reminiscences," 79.

<sup>39</sup> *FP*, October 17, 1858; Senate Misc. Doe. No. 6, 32d Congress, 2d session.; Bruton, *Plant City*, 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Canton, Moore, and Capitano, *History of First Methodist Church*, 15-17; *TS*, October 4, 1954; Tydings, "Reminiscences," 79.

<sup>41</sup> *Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, F. & A.M.*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, October 12, 1852; Jacksonville *Florida News*, October 30, 1852.

<sup>43</sup> *TST*, March 26, 1950.

<sup>44</sup> Hillsborough County Commission Minutes, Book A, 46.

<sup>45</sup> *Savannah Georgian*, January 15, 1854; Thomas Chills to Laura Lancaster, September 21, 1853, Vincent Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Jesse Carter to T. S. Chills, September 21, 1853, Letters Sent, Registers of Letters Received, and

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Letters Received by Headquarters, Troops in Florida, and Headquarters, Department of Florida, 1850-1858, M-1084, roll 3, NA.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., A. J. Cook to Jesse Carter, September 21, 1853, roll 1.

<sup>48</sup> McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days," 79.

<sup>49</sup> *Savannah Daily Morning News*, October 17, 19, 1853; Entry of October 26, 1853, Hackley Diary.

<sup>50</sup> John Munroe to Adjutant General, November 27, 1853, M-1084, roll 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Savannah Georgian*, January 15, 1854.

<sup>52</sup> *Savannah Daily Georgian*, December 11, 1853; Carlton, Moore, and Capitano, *History of First Methodist Church*, 17; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*