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Everybody has a history. This seemingly obvious statement has provoked endless debate among historians about the nature of their craft. What does "everybody" mean? Everybody important? Everybody who leaves written records? Some historians have had the audacity to suggest that "everybody" should mean everybody, including unknown women, fire fighters, and even children. In defense of this proposition, historians have begun documenting the experiences and attitudes of individuals and groups traditionally missing from the pages of history. Discovering new sources and reinterpreting existing documents, historians have met the challenge of bringing to light the lives of common people. This issue of Tampa Bay History highlights both subjects and techniques that have made local history one of the most innovative areas for new research into the past of ordinary people.

In the opening article, "A Diarist's Tale: Roby McFarlan's Tampa, 1887-1888," Heather C.R. McClanahan adopts a methodology popularized by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in her heralded book, A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812. Ulrich's study, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, brings to life the experiences of a New England midwife through an imaginative, yet subtle reading of her cryptic diary. In a similar fashion, Heather McClanahan shows how much can be gleaned from the Tampa diary of a little known woman.

Employing somewhat more traditional sources, such as newspapers and public records, Mark Wilkens recreates the struggles of Tampa fire fighters for improved working conditions, wages, and benefits during the period 1943-1979. His article, "'With Pride and Valor': The Tampa Fire Fighters Union, 1943-1979," uses this local example to tell part of a larger national story about the rise of public employee unions after World War II.

In the photographic essay, "Children at Play in Florida," the editors of Tampa Bay History present a selection of pictures from the Florida State Archives that focus on a group largely overlooked in history books. These photographs document the diversity of children’s experiences and their forms of play from the 1880s to the 1940s.

Finally, the article by Heath Nailos, entitled "Tarpon Springs and the Great Depression," looks at the efforts of ordinary people to cope with the economic crisis of the 1930s.

Once again, the acknowledgements on page 2 list the subscribers who have been especially generous in helping make this issue possible. The editors thank them and the many others who continue to support the publication of Tampa Bay History.
Editors:

In the photographic essay, "The Birth of Temple Terrace in the 1920s" which appeared in volume 14, number 1 (Spring/Summer 1992), there was a little misinformation about the old garage building (page 52). Here is the correction: The garage had been torn down when Florida College bought the property in 1944. The foundation remained until 1961, when Florida College removed it and built a concrete-block building to house Florida Academy. The former Academy building is now used as a classroom building.

I have been on the faculty of Florida College since its beginning in 1946

Sincerely Yours,
L. Griffin Copeland
Reference Librarian
Florida College

Several readers contacted the editors about the photograph below which appeared in "Jack Dempsey in Tampa: Sports and Boosterism in the 1920s," volume 14, number 2 (Fall/Winter 1992), page 25. Although the caption implied that the photograph showed "Jack Dempsey departing Tampa" in 1926, the airplane and station wagon clearly date from the period after World War II.
A DIARIST’S TALE: ROBY McFARLAN’S
TAMPA, 1887-1888
by Heather C.R. McClanahan

On July 3, 1884, Roby Hull McFarlan, her son, and her daughter-in-law stepped off Henry Plant’s new narrow-gauge train and into a sultry town that was just set to boom. As they left the train station, son Hamilton looked at his young wife and said, "Sarah, this is the place for me." She glanced over the landscape that a visitor just a few years earlier had described as "a sleepy, shabby southern town," and wondered what was going wrong inside her husband’s head. But the trio would make Tampa home for the rest of their lives.

The McFarlan family experiences must have been ordinary, but we know something about their lives from a diary Roby McFarlan kept with help from the others from January 1, 1887, to April 11, 1888. Age sixty-four at the diary’s midpoint, Roby left behind a glimpse of what Tampa was like for a middle-class family whose main wage earner was a carpenter who also played horn in a band. We learn about their friends: the families of a baker, a butcher, a builder, and other carpenters. We discover their daily activities, from raising chickens to sewing clothes to "murdering mice." And Roby faithfully reports the weather in almost every entry.

Of the six years she lived in Tampa, Roby could not have picked a better time to keep a diary. Controversy raged over temperance reform and the presence of Latin immigrants in the city and county. Incredible disasters, from a fire that destroyed two blocks of downtown Tampa to the city’s worst yellow fever epidemic, jump out from the diary pages. Roby McFarlan left a vision, of what the disputes and disasters meant to average people.

The diary is also revealing for what it does not tell: strikes by radical cigarmakers in Ybor City, results of city elections, and construction of the first bridge over the Hillsborough River, to name just a few. We hear nothing of Sadie’s pregnancy until the child is born, but clues are evident if one reads backwards from that event. Roby McFarlan’s diary is not introspective or spiritual. It records the events that affected her life, from the weather to the death of her old hen and the birth of her new granddaughter. She only wrote about those occurrences that directly touched her.

Because the diary is short, it would be difficult to explore in chronological order. Rather, this article looks at important themes in the life of the McFarlans, including health, politics, religion, crime, and daily life.

The diary opens on a cloudy Saturday, January 1, 1887. A cold front struck Tampa that afternoon. Hamilton had received an account book from Sarah - known in the diary as Sadie - for the coming year. That book became the diary. Sadie wrote the first entry in it, noting that she had penned a letter that day and that she and Roby went to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union reading room for a New Year’s party of ice cream and cake. She paid grocer Frederick Fenman $3.50 for flour. The house she sat in as she wrote was fairly new; the family had bought the land in I. S. Gidden’s new subdivision between Ybor City and Tampa the previous March. They had only lived there six months, and Hamilton still had work to complete.
The first page of Roby McFarlan’s diary, which is now in possession of her great-granddaughter, Roby Pixton Hendrick.
The People, The Diary

[July] 17 Sunday.... Hot weather has struck us butt end first, I mean goat fashion.⁵

Roby Hull was born July 3, 1823, in New York and married Daniel McFarlan there in 1859. Daniel died in 1882 and plays no role in the diary. Roby bore three children in her late thirties and early forties; a daughter died after three days, and two sons, Hamilton and Marquis, survived. Hamilton was the star of Roby’s story. She rarely wrote about "Markie," who had been in the Chatahoochee Insane Asylum for almost two years when the diary began. Hamilton’s wife, Sarah "Sadie" Layton, was born in 1864 and left her family in Wilmington, Delaware, a year after she was married to head to the Florida frontier.⁶

In a study of nineteenth-century, midwestern diaries, Marilyn Ferris Motz found that they served as "account books for all aspects of life." Such diaries were filled with descriptions of events like the weather, births, holidays, work accomplished, and visits with friends. National events were seldom recorded, and the writers rarely expressed their own opinions.⁷ Although she lived in a southern boom town, Roby’s diary fits Motz’s model.

The most prominent element in the diary is the daily weather report. It offers descriptions of the warm spells in winter when Roby decided not to wear her stockings, the heavy rainstorms, and the miserably hot and humid weather of south Florida summers long before air conditioning. Entries from the summer days are peppered with sayings, such as "hot as mustard," "hot as cotton," and "hot weather has struck butt end first, I mean goat fashion." Entries by Hamilton are often the most colorful. On February 11, he wrote that the wind was so strong that it would "blow bait in the fishes mouth’s [sic]."⁸

Writing in most of the entries is short, clipped sentences, but Roby did have a dry sense of humor that peaks through occasionally. For example, on July 12 she noted that Hamilton earned three dollars for playing with his band, and she went on to lament, "I wash, got nothing." Hamilton followed in his mother’s footsteps, joking one day when his wife and mother received four female friends that it was "a regular old hen picnic."⁹

While obviously literate - penmanship in the original diary is exquisite - the McFarlans were not much concerned with grammar or capitalization. Run-on sentences are common in the diary, punctuation is rarely used, and words such as "baked" or "knawed" are capitalized at random. Spelling, on the other hand, is generally good, although occasional lapses occur, such as "staid" for stayed. To retain as much flavor as possible, quotes from the diary will be divided into sentences, but the grammar and spelling will be left with the original authors.

Everyday Life

Feb. 16th. Sewing all day on Mrs. Glenn Dress. Ma went Down town. Sadie went to Mrs. Ordway this afternoon. Hamilton worked on Dennis house, cut his thumb just before quitting time. Hamilton paid Ordway $1.25 last Saturday Feb. 12th for Scientific America[n], Book. Cloudy all day, wind south east but warm. W. C. T. U. made an excursion down to the bay, cleared $100, Mrs. D. Bruce very sick.¹⁰
While longer than most entries in the diary, February 16, 1887, tells much about a typical day in the McFarlan household. It describes the work, the visiting with neighbors, and what Hamilton did that day. It also recounts a fund-raising drive by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, an organization in which the family was very involved, and notes the illness of a community member, in this case, a doctor's wife.

The daily work of Roby and Sadie was not atypical for town-dwelling women in the late nineteenth century. They washed clothes in rainwater and then ironed them, cleaned the house (including windows), gardened in small plots near their homes, shopped for groceries, and cooked over hearths and cast-iron stoves. They made clothes for themselves and Hamilton but also bought some of these items. The women also contributed to the family income. In addition to their household chores, they sewed dresses and other items of clothing for women in town. Roby created floor mats and rugs, which she sold in this era before wall-to-wall carpeting. They also raised chickens, which sold for fifty cents apiece, and occasionally peddled eggs to neighbors.11

Hamilton, meanwhile, was a jack-of-all-trades carpenter. He often worked for Melvin Woodbury Ordway, a prominent housing contractor whose craftsmanship the Tampa Tribune called "superior." He also helped build what was known as "Sparkman’s block," one of the first all-brick structures in Tampa, and occasionally worked in lumber mills. But the work was not steady, as the diary notes on February 15 when Hamilton "got through working on [street] cars and is ready now for anything to come to hand." In the off times, he worked on his own new house with such tasks as finishing the upstairs portion or putting in window frames. His pay was fairly good for the times. While skilled cigarmakers in Ybor City were making about $10 per week, the diary records that Hamilton took in $11.50 for the week of January 22 and $15 for the week of February 12. He made extra cash by playing trumpet in a band.12

After the weather, visiting represented the most common component in the daily lives of Roby and Sadie McFarlan. Until they left town on October 8 because of the yellow fever outbreak, they either visited or were visited almost every day - sometimes both and often more than once. The families they knew the best were other middle-class artisans who shared their values and interests. Mrs. Helen Ordway and her grown daughter, Elva Burton, play a more prominent role in the diary than the contractor that Hamilton worked for so often. Much was written about visiting with baker Anspaugh’s and butcher Frierson’s wives. The Glenn family also visited frequently with the McFarlans. In fact, much of Sadie’s sewing was for Mrs. Glenn.13

As a vital part of daily life, visiting took many forms. Sometimes the reasons were economic, such as those for sewing or selling chickens. At other times, the visitors took a meal or shared a watermelon in season. Most often, though, it was a simple call to say hello and to catch up on news. In this way Roby and her family knew about disasters or upcoming events in town long before the city’s two newspapers.

The McFarlans contended with daily difficulties in the tropical environment such as rats, mice, and roaches. Soon after the diary opens they "found a big rat in the house and Knewed Hamiltons wollen [sic] shirt." One day when Roby found no bugs after cleaning the bedsteads,
Hamilton and Sadie McFarlan with their daughters (from left to right) Roby, Mildred, and Elva, in 1897.

Photograph courtesy of Roby Pixton Hendrick.
the diary notes "that is good luck." They also had to go through the chores of "scalding" roaches after cleaning the kitchen and "murdering" a pair of mice that made a nest in the stove.14

Another significant item from the February 16 entry that gives us a glimpse of the McFarlans’ daily lives is their subscription to *Scientific American*, a magazine that dubbed itself then as the "weekly journal of practical information, art, science, mechanics, chemistry, and manufacturers." The McFarlans were interested in expanding their horizons beyond Tampa, and reading seemed to be one of their favorite past-times. In addition to the magazine, they subscribed, for a short while at least, to what the diary calls "The World Paper," probably the *New York World*. In mid-January, they received a book on the history of the United States from that newspaper.15

They also kept busy writing and receiving letters from relatives left behind in Delaware. Mail from Sadie’s family as well as other friends and relatives arrived weekly - sometimes more often. The weddings, illnesses, births, and deaths of loved ones far away were as duly recorded in the diary as those of local folks. The McFarlans did not seem at all homesick after three years in Tampa, perhaps because they were kept so close through the post offices. Sadie even received a piece of her sister’s wedding cake from Delaware by mail.16
Mail was not the only source of interaction. At 8 p.m. on April 20, 1887, the diary records that Sadie, loaded up with presents, boarded the train to Delaware for a visit. Though the *Tampa Tribune* society column incorrectly noted she was heading for Chicago with her good friend Mrs. Ordway, she arrived safely in Wilmington on the twenty-third. (Mrs. Ordway debarked in Chicago two days later.) In the three months she was gone, Sadie wrote no less than nineteen letters to Hamilton and Roby and received at least nine from them, according to the diary.17

Overall, the McFarlan household was a bustling place. Between their housekeeping, working to supplement the family income, writing letters, and visiting with friends, Roby and Sadie seemingly had little time for outside activities. Yet a variety other interests kept them active in public and private arenas.

**Politics**

[September] 30 Friday. A pretty day. Election day, great excitement, wet or dry is the watch word. Hamilton votes dry, but plays for the wet and gets $5.00 for his days work... 18

Tampa bristled with political issues in 1887. The growing city needed a new water system. The *Tampa Tribune* clamored for electric lights, while city officials voted to annex Ybor City and to write a new city charter. 19 A municipal election in July focused on many of these volatile questions, but they did not concern Roby. Even more explosive was a drive launched by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and other teetotaling groups to rid the county of alcohol.

Roby mentioned the July 12 election only in passing, noting that Hamilton earned three dollars playing with his band "on account of the town election." She was not impressed that George Sparkman, who occasionally employed her son to work on his brick building, won by fourteen votes over H.C. Ferris. She did not celebrate, as the *Tampa Tribune* did, that "every class" was represented on the new city council, including merchants, manufacturers, old citizens as well as new-comers, Knights of Labor, and "the colored population." Surprisingly, Roby, who generally recorded exciting events, did not even write about the big celebratory parade the evening after the election. The world of traditional, male-defined politics did not interest her.20

On the other hand, she played an active role in what is generally considered the woman’s sphere of moral reform. Hillsborough County’s referendum on prohibition in 1887 took up much of the three McFarlans’ time. The Florida Constitution adopted two years earlier allowed each county to decide whether to permit the sale of liquor. 21 Although the town newspapers did not start writing about the issue until the summer as the vote drew close, Roby and the others had already been active.

For example, on January 9, Roby skipped church in order to recruit for the cause and went to a "very good" temperance meeting. She joined both the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, which boasted sixty regular members by May, and a similar group, the Royal Templars of Temperance. Socials, suppers, and fundraising events - all in the name of prohibition - punctuate the diary’s pages.22
Three buildings that stood on the northwest corner of Franklin and Lafayette (today’s Kennedy Boulevard) in the 1880s. The large three-story building in the center held the Branch Opera House on the second floor. It served as Tampa’s primary place for social, political, and civil affairs.

Photograph from *Tampa Town, 1824-1886*, by Tony Pizzo.
The crusade picked up steam in July. The following month, the Board of County Commissioners received enough petitions to place the issue on the ballot for a September 30 vote. A number of speakers for both sides arrived in town, and the wets and drys held regular mass meetings. From July 18 to August 17, Hamilton attended three such gatherings, playing with his band at the last event. He went to three more in the week preceding the election, again playing for the last pre-election rally. The *Tampa Tribune* reported that the question of whether the county would go wet or dry was more common than "Ain't it hot," leading the editor to predict the fall election would be bitterly contested.\(^{23}\)

In fact, the campaign got downright nasty in at least a few cases. The *Tribune* recorded one fight over the question by September 15. A few weeks earlier, the newspaper ran a short piece at the request of the anti-prohibitionists "to state that the charge made that they carried a keg or barrel of whiskey to the Seffner picnic last week is false."\(^{24}\)

The battle raged on the pages of Tampa's newspapers. The *Tribune* published a letter by former Confederate President Jefferson Davis explaining why he was against the prohibition movement in Texas. In another front-page article, the paper touted the benefits of alcohol. And, significantly, it carried a letter from cigar magnate Vicente Martínez Ybor warning that if his immigrant workers were not allowed to drink the "light wines to which they have been accustomed to use in their meals from their childhood," there would be an "exodus to other shores." The *Tampa Journal*, which favored prohibition, responded that Martínez Ybor's warning was baseless as the law did not prohibit the use of alcohol in private, as long as it was imported from another location.\(^{25}\)

The printed debate between Martínez Ybor and the *Journal* revealed deep fissures within the community. Local historians contend that an important reason behind the prohibition movement in Tampa involved social control over the influx of immigrants to the cigar factories of Ybor City. Tampa's native, white community feared the social customs of the Latins and sought to regulate their behavior.\(^{26}\)

While that may be true in many cases, Roby and her family genuinely felt for the cause. She was quick to point out on April 16, 1887, that a man who ran over the Japanese plum tree in their yard was "whiskey bound." When deputy sheriff E.O. Kibbie was found dead in his bed on September 9, Roby displayed rare emotion, calling the man a "miserable drunkard." Historians have revised views of prohibition supporters over the last few decades, demonstrating that they hoped "to raise the shield against the social devastation" caused by excessive drinking rather than force rural, Victorian standards upon the majority of the populace. The McFarlans joined those families that viewed alcohol as a menace to all parts of society and crusaded to stamp out its influence.\(^{27}\)

Despite all the work Roby and Sadie devoted to the prohibition campaign, when the big election day came, all they could do was watch while the men cast their votes. They spent the day sewing, crocheting, and visiting with a friend while the town buzzed with excitement. Church bells pealed, children marched through downtown singing temperance songs, and bands hired by the "Antis" deafened the people who hung pro-prohibition banners and flags in the courthouse square. Hamilton voted dry but earned five dollars with his band playing for the wet rally.\(^{28}\)
The Tribune celebrated the outcome with one short sentence: "The county saved, 29," referring to the difference in votes between wet and dry. The loss must have been discouraging for Roby, but she did not editorialize in her diary entry on October 3: "We hear the County went wet, 33 majority. Tampa went wet." The final count actually showed a difference of 28 votes.29

Religion

Jan. 16.... We did not go to church this morning - But stayed at home and Murdered two mice that made a nest in our little stove.30

Roby McFarlan's participation in the prohibition movement and kindness to neighbors demonstrated her piety. Occasional references in the diary underscored her faith in the Christian God, such as this poignant entry from July 4, 1887:

This is the 4 of July and there is to be a great celebration at the reservation [Fort Brooke]. Hamilton goes but I am to [sic] low spirited to go anywhere, got a letter from Capt. Mosley
saying Markies mind is not one bit better, and I am grieved almost to Death. It seems as I must see him die, and may the good Father forgive me. 31

At the same time, the journal leaves a distinct impression that Roby was not an avid churchgoer. In fact, on the forty Sundays before the yellow fever outbreak, Roby did not record attending a single service. Hamilton, accompanied about half the time by Sadie, attended twenty-one services while no one went to church at least fourteen Sundays.

Hamilton remained active in organized religion throughout his life, joining Tampa’s First Methodist Church back in the days when it was known as the Little White Church. He later served for ten years as chairman of that body’s board of stewards. When Sadie died in 1950, she was remembered as one of the church’s oldest members. 32

Isben S. Gidden & Co., one of Tampa’s leading grocery stores in 1880s, was located on the northwest corner of Washington and Marion streets.

Photograph from Tampa Town, 1824-1886, by Tony Pizzo.
Southern religion in the late nineteenth century experienced a series of schisms as Methodist and Baptist church leadership accepted the white, middleclass aspirations of the New South. ”Plain folks” defected from such churches. However, Roby must be considered a member of the middle class based on her friends and associates in Tampa. What, then, might explain her lack of Sunday worship?

In a series of lectures written shortly after Roby’s death, Edward Caird pointed to a ”large and increasing class” conscious that their spiritual life was based on the Bible but who felt alienated from dogmatic beliefs. Perhaps Roby, a widow whose younger son was locked away in an ”insane asylum,” felt some of this estrangement. Or, perhaps she was a hard-working, older woman who found the only time she could rest was Sunday mornings while her family was away at church. Whatever the case, the church itself obviously did not play a role in her life. Nevertheless, religion remained an important subject, because she regularly noted when she did not attend.

**Health**

*Mar 16 Wednesday. South wind very dry and dusty. Ma sell a pad for $2 and buy a pr. of spectacles $1.00 and dinner... Hamilton came home in pain with his side apply hot cloths and at 10 o’clock is asleep, Sadie tired out tonight. I (mad clean the stove pipe and all, awful foul.)*

References to family and community health pervade Roby’s diary. For the most part, she wrote about births, deaths, and illnesses in the same tone as house cleaning and visiting. But the numerous citations on aches and pains, medicines and doctors showed that she considered health a paramount concern.

For instance, Hamilton had what was probably a hernia that flared up six times while the diary was kept. The chronic ailment complicated the carpenter’s life because his job included heavy lifting. He missed work at least twelve days and spent some painful, restless nights. The application of hot cloths usually soothed the pain.

One fascinating health-related component of Roby’s life is that she acted as a distributor for Dr. Flagg’s Stomach and Liver Pads. The flannel pads that served as chest protectors were part of the patent medicine craze of the nineteenth century. The *Tampa Tribune* regularly carried advertisements for such wonders as Henry’s Carbolic-Salve, the ”most powerful healing ointment ever discovered,” and other nostrums. Patients in those days wanted mild and pleasant solutions to their medical problems promised by patent medicines as an alternative to the more ”rugged regimens” proposed by doctors. Roby ordered the pads by mail from Dr. Flagg for about fifty cents apiece, plus shipping. She then sold them to various townspeople for two dollars each. Business was fairly brisk, with five dollars worth of pads selling out in about six months, including time the family was out of town during the yellow fever epidemic.

Roby also helped out her neighbors by taking care of them and their homes during illnesses. On March 26, 1887, she reported to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Hiram Bruce. The doctor recovered quickly but asked Roby to stay on until his wife was better. She finally returned home April 6. In mid-May, she spent the better part of two weeks at the house of mason and contractor William
Crawford, nursing his wife and overseeing her domestic duties. The diary does not state whether Roby was paid for her services, which, noting the way it records other payments to the household, probably means she was not.\textsuperscript{39}

Until the yellow fever scourge, death and illness were regular occurrences in life, and were treated as such in the diary. One entry began with daily visits and mentioned that Rob Glenn had gone to Bartow to work. Then it noted "a dutch baker cuts his throat and kills himself last night, call on Mrs. Kinsman found her sick, came home and washed, rained a nice shower this afternoon." The gruesome death of the "dutch" baker, actually a German, was described fully in the \textit{Tampa Tribune}. His throat cut from ear to ear, he was found lying in a pool of blood. Authorities later decided the incident was murder rather than suicide, but Roby never mentioned it again. For her, the death became part of another day.\textsuperscript{40}

In the same way, birth was an ingredient in everyday life. The diary never mentions Sadie's pregnancy. Yet on October 17, it tells us, "Sadie gave birth to a fine daughter about 3 oclock, now at 7 oclock P.M., all are comfortable." Elva Hazen McFarlan, who later owned Roby's diary, was named after the family's dear friend, Elva Ordway Burton. Looking back nine months through the diary, subtle clues to the pregnancy begin to emerge, such as Sadie going to bed with headaches, feeling tired, and crocheting "little socks" in late September. But the family did not feel compelled to write about her condition.\textsuperscript{41}

The average life span in the 1880s was less than fifty years. The birth rate for women age fifteen to forty-four was 155 per 1,000 in 1880 and still 137 per 1,000 in 1890, making births a fairly common event in a town with almost 7,000 residents. Doctors were becoming more professionalized than they had been, but much of the public still embraced the soothings of patent medicines. Without germ-killing medicines such as penicillin or even surgery for a hernia, health issues governed much of life.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Crime}

\textit{Jan 21st. Been warm and pleasant all day - ironed this morning, Sadie made herself a skirt . ... On the night of the 19th a negro at Cuba town Shot and killed his wife then killed himself. on the 20th. The[ly] don't know whether it was the knights [of Labor] or not shot and killed one man and wounded four more. Wednesday night a man stabbed another in the bowels and he will die from the effects, all at cubes town. Tonight will be the Social of the R. T. of Temperance.}\textsuperscript{43}

In January 1887 Tampa experienced something approaching a crime wave in the eyes of the McFarlans. The lawbreakers ranged from a drunkard who rode through the McFarlans’ yard and broke off a Japanese plum tree to a man caught rolled up in a mattress after stealing chickens.\textsuperscript{44} Roby's information on such incidents is not always correct, nor does she always tell the full story. The January 21 entry is a good example.

Roby can be excused for any misinterpretations on the first item in the entry about a man killing his wife. The story itself is difficult to unravel. According to the \textit{Tampa Tribune}, Cuban cigarmaker Enrique Roca had just returned to town from Key West where he had picked up a letter to seventeen-year-old Priscilla Roberts from her mother. He reportedly delivered the epistle
to Priscilla at the home of Mrs. Harrison, where she boarded. The story of what happened while
the pair sat on Mrs. Harrison's front porch is confusing. Mrs. Harrison said she heard a gunshot,
rang to the porch, saw Roberts lying dead and saw Roca shoot himself. But the Spanish physician
who attended the scene said Roca had suffered two shots, one to the eye and one to the temple,
either of which could have been fatal. He hoped to do an autopsy, but the newspaper did not
report the results if he did. At first Mrs. Harrison said the couple was married. Then she said they
were not married but had lived together five years. Whatever the case, all agreed that Roca was
"a shiftless, lazy fellow who rarely did a day's work."

The stabbing mentioned in the January 21 entry was not life threatening but, rather, a light flesh
wound on the victim's right side. Whether it demonstrates ethnic tensions, the need for
prohibition, or both is unclear. The injury occurred during a fight, according to the newspaper,
between a drunk Frenchman and an Italian in the tobacco stripping room at a cigar factory. The
Frenchman, John Gignac, suffered the cut, but his assailant was released from police custody
when no witnesses came forward.

The final crime-related item in the January 21 diary entry had occurred the day before as a result
of the first major strike in Ybor City. Spanish members of the Knights of Labor union walked out
of the Martinez Ybor factory, demanding a Cuban foreman be dismissed for firing a Spanish
worker. The shooting took place during a meeting of strikers above the Mascotte saloon. The
Tribune reported that few men in town went to work the next day. Instead, they gathered on the
streets to discuss the situation, and they expected more trouble. Two men were charged with
firing into the union meeting, but, with the exception of the shooting itself, none of that
information was included in the diary.

The writings about crime in Roby's life are revealing in many ways. No matter how heinous or
amusing, such as when Mrs. Dorsey's groceries were stolen on March 10, 1888, the acts are
described in the same matter-of-fact way as the weather or visits and are included simply as
additional daily information. While Roby and the others were interested in events, they did not
feel a need to describe why such actions had occurred, or what the results were. The diary's
multiple references to "Cuba town" show a need to point out the location of the crime, as
opposed to the McFarlans' neighborhood or other "respectable areas" of town. Interestingly, a
publicized argument between two young white women at the same time as the other January 21
crimes was not mentioned in the diary. Their fight, apparently over a man, resulted in one of the
young ladies stabbing the other in the hand with a pen knife and being arraigned for the crime.
Pointed references to race and location, as well as those left out, expose attitudes that Roby and
her family shared with many of her neighbors and, indeed, the white population in the nation as a
whole.

Race

[June] 28 Tuesday. A nice morning. I work on mats & start for Friersons, get caught in a rain,
stop at a darkies house untill shower is over. ...

Late nineteenth-century relations in Tampa between whites and blacks and between
Anglo-Americans and the Latin immigrants have been described as turbulent and violent. Tampa
was, of course, a southern town. The African-American community reached 1,632, or thirty percent of the population, just two years after the diary ends. The city’s neighborhoods were rigidly divided along class, ethnic, and racial lines, with most blacks living northeast of town in an area known as "The Scrub." Subjected to violence and discrimination, they lived at the lowest end of the economic and social scales.51

Ybor City set Tampa off from other southern towns in this period. The dominant Anglo, Protestant community opposed immigrants because of their foreign and "un-America" backgrounds, a form of prejudice known as nativism. While Tampa's Anglo residents appreciated Ybor City’s economic impact, they distrusted the Latin cigarmakers’ Catholicism and radicalism. The Tampa Tribune noted in the late 1880s that Cubans and Spaniards are "not bad when no evil influences are working amongst them." In 1887, Tampa formed a "Committee of Fifteen" to rid the town of Cuban radicals after a strike. The diary does not mention the group, and Hamilton was not a participant, although the family did know many committee members.52

Roby and her family were no different than many of their white neighbors when it came to race relations - patronizing and racist by today's standards, but typical for the times. The diary calls African-Americans everything from "coloured" and "darkies" to just plain "nig." Roby noted one day that Mr. Hinsman, whose wife frequently bought chickens from her, sold his house to "a coloured man." The mere fact that she mentioned the buyer's race indicated her surprise at the
transaction. Her references are not belligerent, but, like most of the diary, are matter-of-fact. She was quick to point out when wrong-doers are not white, but was willing to allow blacks to perform menial tasks like chopping wood or providing her shelter from a storm.\(^{53}\)

**Disasters**

Mar 17 ... A young cyclone passed over Tampa crossed the Hillsborough River took Mrs. Hartman's house down killed Mr. Rossbuck baby by falling lumber, then struck Mr. Tinney's house, leveled that, killed his baby, injured Mrs. Tinney some, knocked many houses from their pins, uprooted many trees, done a great deal of damage, rained some.\(^{54}\)

Aug 4 Thursday. The first thing I heard this morn was a big fire on Franklin St, two blocks burnt, except two houses. All the liquor saloons burnt except one....\(^{55}\)

[October] 5 Wednesday Beautiful day, sun shine hot. we wash, get done, then a report of yellow fever in town. Mr. McKinzie sick, He died this eve, people scared.\(^{56}\)

One of Tampa's worst years in history for disasters had to be 1887. A tornado killed two babies and uprooted buildings and trees, the first street car fatality occurred, a lumber mill burned down, another fire destroyed two blocks downtown, and the city's worst yellow fever epidemic raged into the next year. With the exception of the tornado, Roby's diary records these tremendous events with characteristically scant details.

The March 17 entry on the "young cyclone" exemplifies Roby's most graphic writing, but the *Tampa Tribune* amplified the story. The storm blew in from the west around 5:30 a.m. Tin roofs rolled up like paper while trees and housetops "lay upon the ground in a chaotic mass of timbers." Mr. Ferman's new grocery store twisted off its foundation. The Tinney baby died when the family's home at the corner of Cass and Tampa streets collapsed. The newspaper proclaimed that the storm was the worst in years and that damaged amounted to thousands of dollars.\(^{57}\)

Another tragedy occurred less than a month later when a thirteen-year-old Cuban boy fell off a street "rail road" and was run over by it. Gonzalo Perez de Guzman apparently was playing around while the vehicles stopped, standing with one foot on a car and the other foot on the car behind it. When the street cars started again started, he fell. The conductor quickly halted, but not before the youngster was "horribly mutilated" with a dislocated right foot, fractured jaw, and nearly severed left arm. "No blame what ever is attached to the rail road company," the *Tribune* reassured its readers. The diary simply noted, "Cuban boy killed on the street rail road last night near Ybor City, a resident of that city."\(^{58}\)

The next month, a large mill with 25,000 feet of lumber burned. Authorities suspected an arsonist, and nothing was saved. But the lumber mill fire served as a harbinger.\(^{59}\)

At 2 a.m. on Thursday, August 4, a fire began in either Thomas's barber shop or Cole's restaurant on Franklin Street. It rapidly engulfed the one- and two-story wooden buildings that housed retail shops, fruit stalls, grocers, and saloons. In two and a half hours, two blocks burned, and only three buildings - the *Tampa Tribune* office and the homes of the Glenns and McKinzies -
survived. Roby went to town that morning and called on her good friend Mrs. Glenn. She reported that "they took everything out of the house thinking it would burn but it escaped." The Tampa Journal attributed that, and the fact that the fire did not spread even further, to super-human efforts by the city firemen. The Tribune calculated individual losses that added up to $55,930. But the Journal later celebrated the fire because it opened up "two of the finest business blocks in the city" for "substantial and valuable improvement." Both newspapers were confident the great citizens of Tampa could rebuild, bigger and better, in no time. They certainly did not anticipate that in two months Tampa would become a virtual ghost town.

When yellow fever struck Key West in May 1887, city officials took a number of precautions, quarantining everything except tobacco and mail from Havana and Key West. Still, Tampa's elite had grown complacent because the town had been relatively free of yellow fever since 1871. They believed that their continuing economic prosperity was a sign of God's favor. Officials were confident by August that the outbreak in Key West had passed them by. But confidence cannot control germs.
Roby reported the first yellow fever rumor on September 21, the day before barbershop manager and alleged fruit smuggler Charlie Turk died of the disease. Turk’s Cuban doctor declared death by yellow fever but later said he was mistaken. Roby ended her September 22 entry, "Report no yellow fever." Rumors persisted, and on the twenty-sixth, she wrote about another man dying of the fever in Ybor City.62

The diary is loaded with yellow fever reports after Wednesday, October 5, the day painter A.B. McKinzie died and Dr. John Wall began spreading the word to get out of town. On Thursday, Hamilton came home from work at noon because Mr. Ray, an architect and builder he was working for, had closed his shop. The McFarlans’ neighbors and some of their friends were already leaving town. P.E. Sprinkle died and "a great many sick with the fever," Roby wrote. The next day Roby saw Dr. Wall, who "told me the fever was yellow fever, and advised all the people to get out of town."63

George A. Bell, the former city marshal and later a policeman, invited the McFarlans to join him and his wife at their country home eight miles north of Tampa near the present day intersection of Nebraska Avenue and Skipper Road.
They started out at 8 a.m. Saturday. With two very pregnant women Sadie was nine months along and Mrs. Bell was not far behind - the trip took four hours and was described by Roby as "hurly burly." But the house was comfortable, and Roby even went so far as to write that she was enjoying herself.  

The next several weeks were spent pleasantly, with Hamilton and Mr. Bell fishing and hunting alligators, deer, squirrels, and rabbits while the women performed minimal chores around the house. The temporary refugees visited others in the vicinity such as Mr. Diaz, Mr. Grables, and their nearest neighbor, James Metcalf "A pleasant day and all is well. Mr. Metcalf call, a social chat with him," Roby wrote on October 9. But while the refugees could escape the plague in the country, they were not immune from bad news. Mr. Bell went to town on October 15 and reported that six people had died the day before. He also brought a letter from Sadie’s mother, who panicked when she read about the epidemic in the Wilmington, Delaware, newspaper. The day Elva was born, Roby wrote "yellow fever raging," and reported eight more deaths.*

The Bells and McFarlans did not celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas in 1887; the former "because we could not get anything to cook for a big dinner," and the latter because Roby and the others "got discouraged with this business." While the house was bursting with new life - Mrs. Bell gave birth to a daughter on November 30 - news of death surrounded them. The saddest came in early December when word reached the McFarlans that Melvin Ordway had died of yellow fever. His family had moved east of Ybor City to escape the disease, but it was to no avail. Son Austin Ordway and others in the family apparently came down with the fever, too, but Mr. Ordway was the only one to die.*

By January, the epidemic appeared to be running itself out, and people began returning to town. The W.C.T.U. started meeting again, and officials planned to reopen schools. However, with their new baby, the McFarlans were not taking any chances. Hamilton gave up his hunting and fishing to start building a house for Judge Williams in Tampa that month. He still returned to the Bell's place each night, bringing mail and news. Sadie ventured into town on January 21 to stay for a week and visit the Ordways, but it was not until March 12 that the family loaded up and headed back to Tampa for good. The last diary entry to report a yellow fever case was on January 13, when Mrs. Eddins, the wife of a builder, contracted it.*

Following the epidemic, Dr. Wall estimated about 1,300 people had suffered from the disease and about 110 people died. City fathers would long argue over the merits of urging people out of town and the economic havoc wrought on the city by the four-month plague. But for ordinary citizens like the McFarlans, health and welfare manifested greater concern. Since Hamilton did not have work anyway, the family chose to survive in the country on game and fish, and tried to carry on life as normally as possible.*

**Conclusion**

* Apr 11 Wednesday. Warm day. Sadie & I wash, Dr. Bruce called for a chat, was glad to see him, Mrs. Durst baby pretty sick, Mrs. Ordway sold her cow & calf to Robles.*
And so the diary ends on April 11, 1888. The next - and last page - of the original maroon and orange volume lists the Hull family tree. Roby Hull McFarlan survived two more years: she died September 27, 1890, and was buried in Oaklawn Cemetery.

Hamilton built a new home for his growing family in 1895 at 1211 Nebraska Avenue. The Bells, their roommates during the yellow fever scare, lived behind the McFarlans, and the families remained life-long friends. Hamilton and Sadie had two other daughters - Roby, born in August 1890, and Mildred, born in 1896. Hamilton stayed in the carpentry business, managing lumber companies and doing other such work. He was also affiliated with Williams and McFarlan Insurance Company at the time of his death in 1925. Sadie lived on another twenty-five years in the same home, raising two of her grandchildren and treating the others to sugar toast when they rode their bicycles down from Seminole Heights. The last name of McFarlan died with Hamilton, but one of his grandsons is named Henry McFarlan Williams and goes by the nickname "Mac." Roby's great-grandchildren, Keeblers, Pixtons, and Williamses, live throughout Florida.70

They have little knowledge of the impact their great-grandmother and grandparents left on the history of Tampa. Some might say the myriad of references to weather and death show just how much the McFarlans' lives were controlled by outside forces. But such an analysis excludes the choices in which they participated. Roby, Hamilton, and Sadie chose to move to Tampa as it was beginning to boom, giving Hamilton fairly steady work and allowing him to keep the family in good financial circumstances. They chose to participate in the temperance movement and to socialize extensively with their neighbors. Had they decided to stay in town during the yellow fever epidemic, perhaps the diary would have ended that much sooner.

The diary is full of much more than descriptions of a terrible epidemic, heinous crimes, and prosaic household chores. It is Roby McFarlan's life. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich wrote about the diary of a New England midwife from 1785 to 1812, it was in its very dailiness that the power of the document lay.71 Ulrich showed how such an apparently mundane diary can be turned into a marvelous work of history. This more modest exploration of Roby McFarlan's world seeks to show how she lived and what her experiences tell us about life in Tampa in the 1880s.

The McFarlans' lives in the late 1880s were not much different from hundreds of other white, middle-class Tampa residents, such as the Glenns, the Anspaughs, the Friersons, and the Dursts that they wrote about. But the McFarlans left behind a small part of their story, a story that shows they were active pioneers, who "watched Tampa grow from a small village to one of the leading cities of the South," and they contributed to that growth.72

Epilogue

Like so many documents from the past, Roby McFarlan's diary answers many questions while leaving numerous mysteries. First and foremost, why did she stop keeping the diary on April 11, 1888? Her great-grandchildren do not know, and unless more evidence is uncovered elsewhere, we may never know. What might we have discovered had Sadie decided to buy Hamilton another account book and the diary had continued?
Why was Roby married so late in life compared to other women at the time? Why was Markie in a mental institution and when was he released? We know from the family Bible that he died in Florida in 1918, but where or how remains a mystery.

What brought the McFarlans to Tampa in the first place - a growing construction industry, a sense of adventure, or some other, unknown factor? Roby’s great-granddaughter, Roby Pixton Hendrick, remembers hearing a story of her grandfather’s desire to settle "at the end of the [railroad] line," and Tampa was certainly that in 1884, but what details can be added to the story?73 Just who were the Glens and why did they leave so little mark on Tampa history after having such a big impact in the lives of the McFarlans?

Roby’s diary is a rich source for those who seek a glimpse into the late 1880s in Tampa or Florida or the United States. Life in a boom town, social struggles, epidemic diseases, and other issues are explained from the point of view of an average, yet somehow remarkable, family. The diary can be approached from many different angles and can give many different answers to the question of what life was like for Roby McFarlan. This article serves only to scratch the surface of the treasures she, Hamilton, and Sadie left behind.

NOTES

1 The last name of Roby and her family has been spelled numerous ways, including McFarlan in the Works Project Administration version of her diary, McFarlane in Oaklawn Cemetery records, MacFarlan in Hamilton’s obituary, and McFarlain in the 1900 U.S. Census. McFarlan is the correct spelling.


3 The diary used for this paper was typed by the Works Progress Administration in 1940 from the original found in the Florida State Library, and is now in possession of the Special Collections Department of the University of South Florida Library and hereafter referred to as RHM diary. A second copy, typed in 1959 by Mrs. John Humphreys, is in possession of the Hillsborough County Historical Commission. The only differences in content between the two is a postscript on the last page of the historical commission version that states, "This diary written by Roby Hull McFarlan, assisted by Hamilton and Sarah McFarlan." References that differ from the original diary are noted.

4 Hillsborough County Deed Book U, 335. The house stood at Governor Street between Kay and Scott streets. The property is now owned by the Dioceses of St. Petersburg; RHM diary, 1.

5 RHM diary, 30.

6 Oaklawn Cemetery records, 8, supplement (Hillsborough County Historical Commission); McFarlan family Bible, in possession of Roby Pixton Hendrick; RHM diary, 8; 1900 United States Census, University of South Florida Library, microfilm.


8 RHM diary, 19, 30, 9-10.

9 Ibid., 29, 10.
10 Ibid., 11.

11 For examples, see ibid., 12, 15, 16, 20, 25, 5, 18, 3.

12 Tampa Tribune, July 1, 1887, 3; RHM diary, 11, 17, 3, 4, 5, 10. Payrates for cigar workers estimated by Gary R. Mormino. For more information see Mormino and Pozzetta, Immigrant World, 69; Interview with Roby Pixton Hendrick, greatgranddaughter of Roby Hull McFarlan, February 6, 1993, notes in possession of author.

13 Most names and occupations were found in the Webb Tampa Directory, (New York and Jacksonville, 1886). See also Oaklawn Cemetery records.

14 RHM diary, 1, 15, 25, 4.

15 Ibid., 11, 2-3; Scientific American, February 12, 1887.

16 RHM diary, 64.

17 Ibid., 20-31; Tampa Tribune, April 22, 1887, p. 3.

18 RHM diary, 41.

19 James W. Covington and Debbie Lee Wavering, "Mayors of Tampa: A Brief Administrative History" (unpublished manuscript, University of South Florida Library Special Collections, no date), 30-35.

20 RHM diary, 29; Tampa Tribune, July 15, 1887, 2-3.


22 RHM diary, 2, 5; Tampa Journal, May 5, 1887, 4.

23 Tampa Tribune, Aug. 11, 1887, 2; RHM diary, 30-35, 40-41; Tampa Tribune, July 28, 1887, 3.

24 Tampa Tribune, September 15, 1887, 3 and August 25, 1887, 3.

25 "Jeff Davis on Prohibition," Tampa Tribune, August 4, 1887, 2; "Alcohol from Two Standpoints," Tampa Tribune, August 25, 1887, 1; Tampa Tribune, September 15, 1887, 2; "The Great Issue," Tampa Journal, September 15, 1887, 4.

26 Mormino and Pozzetta, Immigrant World, 240.

27 RHM diary, 19, 38; Norman H. Clark, Deliver Us From Evil, an Interpretation of American Prohibition (New York, 1976), 139.

28 RHM diary, 41; "A Great Battle," Tampa Journal, October 5, 1887, 1.

29 RHM Diary, 42; Tampa Tribune, October 6, 1887, 2.

30 RHM diary, 4.

31 Ibid., 28.

32 "Pioneer of City to be Given Burial," Tampa Daily Times, June 11, 1925, 8B; "Mrs McFarlan Taken by Death," Tampa Morning Tribune, April 11, 1950, 2.


35 RHM diary, 15.

36 See Motz, "Folk Expression." In her analysis of nineteenth-century rural diaries, Motz explains entries juxtaposing death and illness with "meals prepared, crops planted, and parties attended" are common, "an integral part of life and of the community experience"; see also Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York, 1990), Chapters 5 and 7.

37 RHM diary, 3, 6, 14, 15, 24, 26; For hernia symptoms, see Stanley Loeb, ed., *Professional Guide to Diseases* (Springhouse, Pennsylvania, 1992), 667-669.


39 RHM diary, 16, 17, 22-24.

40 Ibid., 23; "Was it Suicide or Murder?" *Tampa Tribune*, May 27, 1887, 3.

41 RHM diary, 44-45, 18, 39, 41.


43 RHM diary, 5. The reference to the Knights of Labor is contained in the original diary on that date. The WPA version notes that the reference is unreadable.

44 Ibid., 19, 26.


46 "A Cutting Affray at Ybor," ibid.


48 RHM diary, 66.


50 RHM diary, 27.


53 RHM diary, 7, 6.

54 Ibid., 15.

55 Ibid., 32.

56 Ibid., 42.

58 RHM diary, 18; "Fatal Accident," *Tampa Tribune*, April 15, 1887, 3.

59 *Tampa Tribune*, May 13, 1887, 3.

60 "Tampa Scorched," *Tampa Journal*, August 4, 1887, 1; "A Big Fire," *Tampa Tribune*, August 4, 1887, 3; RHM diary, 32.


62 Ibid., 53; RHM diary, 40.

63 RHM diary, 42; Barker, "Seasons of Pestilence," 54.

64 RHM diary, 42-43. House site is based on location of nearest neighbor, John Metcalf, whose farm was cited in Mormino and Anthony F. Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City* (Tulsa, 1983) 86.

65 RHM diary, 43-45.

66 Ibid., 58-59, 65.

67 Ibid., 66.

68 Barker, "Seasons of Pestilence," 77-78.

69 RHM diary, 70

70 1900 U.S. Census; McFarlan Family Bible; "Pioneer of City to be Given Burial"; "Mrs. M'Farlan Taken by Death"; interview with Angus Williams, Jr., great-grandson of Roby McFarlan, November 19, 1992, interview notes in possession of author; interview with Roby Pixton Henrick.


72 Ibid.; "Mrs. M'Farlan Taken by Death."

73 Interview with Roby Pixton Henrick.
"WITH PRIDE AND VALOR": THE TAMPA FIRE FIGHTERS UNION, 1943-1979
by Mark Wilkens

Since the early 1960s unions have been remarkably successful in organizing public sector employees and in helping them gain the right to engage in collective bargaining. The dramatic transformation of labor relations between federal, state, and local governments and their employees was not a smooth one, however, as the experience of the Tampa Fire Fighters Union (TFFU) demonstrates. Fire fighters, due in part to the unique nature of their occupation, had been among the most active and militant public servants since the early twentieth century. Similarly, the TFFU, organized in 1943, was a pioneer in the struggle in Tampa to extend the rights of public employees to collective bargaining.

Like most other public workers, fire fighters occupy a unique niche in American society. On the one hand, municipalities restrict their rights as workers since their duties are considered crucial to permitting cities to function in a safe and orderly manner. On the other hand, the democratic character of the legislative councils to which the workers are responsible provides them with the opportunity to influence their employers’ decision-making processes. Beginning in the 1960s the Tampa Fire Fighters Union, in its drive to improve fire fighters’ wages and working conditions, developed into a potent political force in the city. The success of the TFFU proved troubling to many Tampans, however, and during the course of the 1970s the fire fighters and their opponents engaged in a bitter struggle to define the terms under which the TFFU would exist in the municipal arena. The fire fighters ended the decade with their power and influence somewhat diminished, but, as was true of public employees throughout the nation, the legitimacy and nature of their political activities remained a controversial point that went unresolved.

Organized fire fighting in Tampa originated on June 2, 1884, when sixteen local citizens formed a volunteer hook and ladder company whose sole equipment consisted of twenty buckets, two ladders, and a few axes. It was not until 1889 that the city decided to hire a professional fire fighter, Andrew J. Harris, to lead the department and improve training. Following a series of disastrous fires in 1894, a number of citizens pushed the city to take additional action, and on May 10, 1895, the city council authorized the creation of a professional fire department of paid employees.1

The early fire fighters labored in an environment that demanded long hours and low pay. The "continuous duty system" employed by the city in the early twentieth century required fire fighters to work shifts that lasted ten to twelve days at a time. Throughout the next several decades hours gradually improved, but as late as 1959 Tampa’s fire fighters were still working a seventy-two-hour work week.2

In addition to working long hours, fire fighters in Tampa also faced economic uncertainty in the early twentieth century. The career of Captain William Taylor, a decorated veteran who retired in 1963, illustrates the hardships endured by fire fighters in this era. Taylor joined the department in 1918 as a chauffeur, and within ten years he was drawing a monthly salary of $188.50, the top pay for his rank. In 1932 he was promoted to captain, but the Great Depression crippled the city’s
finances and the department forced Taylor to take a pay cut and demoted him to the rank of lieutenant. It was not until 1943 that Taylor finally worked his way back to the rank of captain, which at that time provided him with a monthly salary of $193. Thus, during the previous fifteen years with the Tampa Fire Department his salary had increased by the sum of four dollars and fifty cents a month.3

Such conditions prompted the fire fighters to organize in 1943 as Local 754 of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). For the next twenty-five years the TFFU struggled to expand the rights of fire fighters and to improve working conditions within the Tampa Fire Department despite the antagonism of national, state, and local governments. However, this was not the first example of activism on the part of the Tampa fire fighters. Forty years earlier, in January 1903, city firemen had launched the nation’s first department-wide strike of fire fighters. The city fired the striking fire fighters and was able to hire replacements, thereby defeating this early attempt at unionization. Infuriated by the fire fighters’ militancy, Tampa’s city council also passed an ordinance forbidding city employees from joining unions or participating in political parties or elections.4 It took another forty years before the Tampa fire fighters were able to organize a union under the auspices of the IAFF.
By the standards of most public employee unions the IAFF was a venerable organization. The origins of the IAFF lay in the development of independent unions of fire fighters that were directly associated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL chartered the first chapter in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1903, and by 1918 there were eighty-two locals that claimed the allegiance of one quarter of the nation’s forty thousand professional fire fighters. That same year the AFL established the IAFF as a separate international union.5

Although forming a union provided the Tampa fire fighters with a valuable organizational advantage in dealing with their employers, the concerted opposition of the federal and state government and the courts limited the union’s effectiveness. The United States government had dealt with organizations of its own employees as far back as the 1830s, and in 1906 the AFL had helped postal employees form the first national union of government employees, the National Federation of Post Office Clerks. The official policy of the federal government, however, was to discourage public employee unions. The National Labor Relations Acts (NLRA) of 1935 and 1947, which did so much to revolutionize labor relations and institutionalize collective bargaining in the private sector, explicitly excluded federal, state, county, and municipal employees from their provisions. The legislature and courts in Florida closely mirrored the
federal position on public employee unionism. It was not until 1959 that the state legislature passed legislation providing state and local workers with the right to join unions. Even this victory was limited, however, since the courts interpreted state law in such a manner that it prohibited municipalities from engaging in collective bargaining with their employees.6

Despite the state-imposed statutory limitations, the Tampa Fire Fighters Union was not helpless in its efforts to effect substantive change in the workplace. Before winning the right to engage in collective bargaining in 1967, the traditional method by which the fire fighters sought to improve working conditions was to lobby elected officials and to work through the municipal civil service system. Fire fighters first sought to extend the protections of the civil service system to the department, which in Tampa began in 1904, and then worked to apply pressure through the local civil service board for better wage and benefit packages and for more effective grievance procedures. They also applied pressure directly on the mayor and the city council, either by presenting their case in public or by volunteering their time to favored candidates. Nevertheless, in the quarter century from the founding of the union in 1943 to the first collective bargaining agreement between the city and the union, the TFFU’s ability to effect changes on behalf of its members was limited.7
The 1960s proved to be a critical turning point in the history of the Tampa Fire Fighters Union. Like other public employees in the country, they became far more assertive in their relationship with their employers. In the case of the Tampa fire fighters, three developments were particularly crucial in strengthening the power of the union. First, starting in 1959, the city dramatically expanded the size of the fire department. Second, in 1965 the TFFU organized a political action committee to back sympathetic candidates, thereby further politicizing the union and placing it more squarely in the public eye. Most importantly, in 1967 the Florida Legislature passed the Fire Fighters Collective Bargaining Act, which provided the TFFU with the right to engage in collective bargaining. Consequently, by the end of the decade the nature of the relationship between the union and the city had changed dramatically.

The 1960s and 1970s marked a period of historic change for public sector unionism. At the national level, the key development was President John F. Kennedy’s Executive Order 10988. Under its provisions, the government reaffirmed the right of federal workers to organize unions and granted them the right to engage in collective bargaining, albeit with significant restrictions. A similar transformation occurred at the state level. In 1955, only one state in the nation provided statutory authority for collective bargaining, and that was at the discretion of the employer. Beginning in 1962 with Wisconsin, an increasing number of states passed laws that required government employers to engage in collective bargaining with their workers. The result was an explosion in the size of the rolls of public employee unions. Whereas in 1960 only one million government employees belonged to unions, by 1976 that number had tripled. This increase accounted for eighty percent of all new workers who joined unions during this period.

The explosion in the growth of public employee unions in the 1960s was prompted in large part by the changing attitudes of many Americans, including the workers themselves, towards unions in the public sector. As local, state, and federal governments expanded in size, public employees often faced an environment that was increasingly bureaucratic, impersonal, and unresponsive to their needs. To many workers, organizing a union seemed to be the only way to get the state to respond to their concerns. The postwar victories of organized labor in the private sector also meant that by the 1960s many of the prized advantages of government employment, such as job security, were no longer unique to public employees. Furthermore, in an era that was increasingly conscious of rights, many people outside of the public sector believed that the inferior legal status of public workers was unjust and should be remedied. Consequently, Americans became more likely to support government employees’ demands for the right to collective bargaining.

Like many public employee unions in the country, the Tampa Fire Fighters Union became a much stronger and more effective organization during the course of the 1960s and early 1970s. One of the most important changes was the dramatic expansion of the size of the fire department. The Tampa Fire Department, which began with twenty-two men in 1895, had expanded into a uniformed force of 157 personnel by the early 1950s. Throughout the rest of the 1950s and the 1960s the city continued to build additional stations, but the major development occurred in 1959 when Mayor Julian Lane agreed to institute a three-platoon system in place of the existing two-platoon system, thereby reducing the average work week from 72 to 56 hours. By 1963 the fire department had 599 employees, 590 of them uniformed personnel, making it the second largest department in the city.
One of the worst fires in Tampa’s recent history swept the Maas Brothers department store at the corner of Franklin and Twiggs streets on June 28, 1951. The fire, which raged for five hours and destroyed the store, was fought by over 100 fire fighters, ten of whom were injured.

Photograph from The Tampa Fire Fighter.
Another important development occurred in October of 1965 when several hundred fire fighters descended on a church in Tampa's Ybor City to organize the Fire Fighters Service League, a political action committee. The changeover to the three-platoon system and the expansion in the size of the fire department under the Lane administration had helped to alleviate many of the fire fighters' concerns over safety and working conditions. Nevertheless, there continued to be a number of issues that disturbed the men of the department and undermined their morale.

Veteran fire fighters in Tampa often recalled that the fire department used to consist of "wooden trucks and steel men; now we have steel trucks and wooden men." While improvements in equipment and stricter building codes eased the difficulties that fire fighters faced, the dangers confronting the men of the Tampa Fire Department actually increased during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1950s alone, five firemen died in the line of duty. One fire in 1955, at a fertilizer and chemical plant, required over 200 fire fighters and resulted in twenty-two injuries.

As Tampa's skyline rose, so did the difficulties facing the men who struggled to battle fires in the new towers of concrete, glass, and steel that rose up in the city's business district. Even more dangerous to fire fighters was the growing use of plastics, synthetics, and chemicals in construction materials - and furnishings. Forced to work in environments that contained deadly fumes, fire fighters had to depend upon an air filtrate system that was little better than gas masks from World War I. The explosion of violence in the 1960s in the nation's inner cities also had a significant impact on safety conditions for fire fighters. Several fire fighters were killed and hundreds more injured in what one national magazine referred to as "the undeclared war on the nation's firemen." Nationally, these dangers were reflected in the fire safety statistics: between 1964 and 1970 fire fighter deaths in the line of duty increased every year, from less than 40 to nearly 120 per year by the end of the decade. In 1970 there were 115 deaths per 100,000 fire fighters, making it the deadliest profession in the nation.

In addition to concerns over safety conditions, fire fighters in Tampa in the 1960s also worked to eliminate the role of partisan politics in hiring and promotion practices. The period between the 1930s and 1950s was the heyday of the political machine in Tampa, and while the police department was the most notorious for its corruption, politics also crept into the administration of the fire department. Throughout the 1950s the mayor's office received numerous letters from local citizens worried about the politicization of the department and from employees fearful of losing their jobs. Critics of the department frequently focused their attention on the fire chief, who was the only appointed official in the department and the officer with the responsibility for making decisions on promotions.

The issue of politicization came to a head during the second term of Mayor Nick Nuccio. Under Nuccio, who held office from 1956 to 1959, and again from 1963 to 1967, the city built more bridges, parks, fire stations, and roads than under any other previous administration. Nuccio was also famous for being a very partisan mayor, and during his tenure in office critics frequently charged that he gave out too many favors to his political allies. Many fire fighters began complaining about the over-politicization of the fire department under Nuccio's appointee, Fire Chief Ken Ayers, and argued that the city was apathetic about the concerns of fire fighters. In 1966 a group of fire fighters' wives even picketed city hall to protest the intimidation that their
husbands faced from city officials because they voiced their demands for better pay and job security.26

The discontent in the department helped lead to the creation of the Fire Fighters Service League, and in October 1966 it was under the auspices of the League that the fire fighters lodged a formal complaint with the city council.27 After an investigation by the city council, Nuccio demoted Fire Chief Ken Ayers, but the unrest in the department had made its mark with the birth of the Fire Fighters Service League. Ironically, the politicization of the department’s administration in turn helped to lead to the politicization of the fire fighters and of their union.

Following the creation of the League, the fire fighters became far more explicit and open about their willingness to provide assistance to candidates sympathetic to the TFFU’s concerns. The stated objectives of the League were "to engage in community activities which will advance the interest of the members of this association... [and] to provide financial and moral assistance to other organizations or bodies having purposes... [similar] to those of this association."28 Mayor Nuccio and Fire Chief Ayers originally supported the creation of the League, but relations quickly soured when it started pressing the city council for higher wages and for an investigation of the department.29 Troubled by the aggressive behavior of the fire fighters, the city council’s final report, issued on November 30,1966, charged the League with engaging in "political activities and threats,... [creating] dissension... [and] the suborning or inciting of insubordination and disrespect for authority."30 As a consequence of its findings the council urged Tampa's legislative delegation to press for a state law that would have restricted city workers from participating in "any political party or in any political campaign, except to exercise his right as a citizen. . .to vote."31 Area legislators rejected the admonitions of the city council, however, and the council quickly had to become reconciled to the fact that the fire fighters' union would play an increasingly prominent and influential role in municipal politics.

During the quarter-century following the formation of the League, the fire fighters union established itself, in the words of one newspaper, as being a "pragmatic and effective practitioner of politics."32 Most of the aid the fire fighters provided to favored candidates came in the form of donated time.33 Fire fighters would construct signs, canvass voters, and provide other volunteer services. Candidates frequently sought the endorsement of the union, and even those who did not have the support of the TFFU noted that without it they had to work harder to make contact with local citizens.34 The union also provided significant financial assistance, and in the case of city council races their aid was particularly important: one newspaper account in 1978 noted that thirteen of the past fifteen candidates the TFFU supported had won their elections.35

The 1960s was a watershed that marked the growing political power of the TFFU, but to the fire fighters of Tampa the most significant event in that era occurred in 1967 when the Florida legislature passed the Fire Fighters Collective Bargaining Act. The passage of the law illustrated that the Florida Professional Fire Fighters (FPF), the state counterpart of the International Association of Fire Fighters, was surprisingly successful in its lobbying efforts in the Florida legislature. Until the late 1960s the organization was small. The state convention in 1953 included representatives from only six locals, and the meeting was held in a single room at an old hotel in Tallahassee.36 Despite its small size, though, the FPF maintained a permanent presence in the capital and, as one Tampa paper pointed out, by the 1960s it was recognized as "the most
politically active amongst public employee [groups].” Its efforts finally bore fruit in 1967 when the state legislature passed the Fire Fighters Collective Bargaining Act, thereby making fire fighters the first public employees in Florida to gain the right to collective bargaining. The crowning achievement occurred seven years later when the rest of the public employees in the state acquired the right to engage in collective bargaining when the state legislature passed the Public Employee Relations Act (PERA). Aided by the legislation from Tallahassee, public employee unions quickly expanded throughout the state, and by the end of the 1970s a majority of Florida’s public employees had availed themselves of the right to collective bargaining.38

The Tampa Fire Fighters Union quickly benefited from the flurry of activity by the state legislature. Although the first contract between the city and the TFFU in 1969 was a brief document, only a single page, within three years it had expanded to twenty-seven pages and covered a host of issues other than wages and benefits.39 For example, the city granted the members of the executive board of the union paid leave to attend to official business without

The officers of the Tampa Fire Fighters Union in 1970 with President Sam Sinardi in the front row center and Vice President Frank Urso in the front row right.

Photograph from the Tampa Fire Fighter.
placing any restrictions on the amount of time. The contract also required binding arbitration of any grievances arising out of the interpretation of the agreement. In addition, the agreement called for monthly meetings between union officials and the fire chief, and mandated that the city appoint a public information officer to "develop community awareness of the needs of fire safety [and of] the services and accomplishments of the Department." In the years immediately following the start of collective bargaining, the fire fighters had a remarkable degree of influence in matters that extended beyond the major concerns of most unions such as wages, benefits, and pensions. Some of the more exceptional provisions included articles requiring the city to maintain minimum manpower levels on vehicles and to meet certain requirements for equipment. If manpower requirements were not met, the station captain then had the authority to put a truck out of service rather than operate it while short of personnel.

In the first few years following the advent of collective bargaining the TFFU was also successful in achieving wage increases for its members. Furthermore, it was able to enshrine certain provisions in the contract that made for a safer work place and ensured that the union could operate without hindrance. The success of the fire fighters in winning these gains derived in part from the cooperative attitude of Mayor Dick Greco. Unlike most other municipalities in Florida, Tampa had no city manager, and as the chief executive and administrator the mayor was the single most powerful politician in the city. During his tenure in office Greco, who was mayor from October 1967 to March 1974, pushed wage and benefit increases for municipal employees through the city council and made a point of maintaining cordial relations with the city's workers. Not only did the TFFU and the city avoid major contract disputes while Greco was mayor, but the fire fighters also did not have the occasion to raise a single work-related grievance.

Greco resigned in March 1974, and during the mayoral election that October the TFFU threw its support behind city council member Joe Kotvas in his contest with insurance executive William Poe. The union committed to Kotvas at an early point, attacking Poe in a newspaper ad for what they termed were his "family and company ties [to those] that have continuously fought labor." Poe triumphed in a race decided by 368 votes, however, and during his five years in office relations between the city and the fire fighters were frequently strained and combative. Contract negotiations, which had proceeded smoothly under Greco, became an annual conflict in which the fire fighters fought against the attempts of the city to rein in their wages and assert greater control over the operations of the department and of the union.

The first clash between the TFFU and the mayor's office occurred in December 1974 when the fire fighters broke off contract talks with the city. In the preceding contract negotiations the city offered a 4.7 percent raise, but it also insisted on a number of benefit cuts that would have reduced the earnings of some employees. The city also sought to reassert greater control over the activities and prerogatives of the union in the workplace, including a proposal that fire fighters above the rank of lieutenant be removed from the bargaining unit. Union president Sam Sinardi, himself a captain, charged that this was a blatant "union-breaking tactic." Poe claimed that he was merely bringing benefits and working conditions for the fire fighters in line with those of other city employees, but to many fire fighters it appeared he was attempting to roll back the previous gains of the union and punish them for their political activities.
After the union rejected the contract offer, the dispute went before an arbitrator as part of a process known as a Special Master Hearing. Under the terms of the Public Employees Relations Act, both the city and the union were required to appear before an arbitrator in the case of an impasse in contract negotiations. The arbitrator's decision was nonbinding, however, so if either side continued to reject a settlement the dispute had to be brought before the legislative body, which in the case of the TFFU was the city council. Although the arbitration process was extensive and elaborate, the final decision still remained in the political arena, a factor that the administration and the TFFU both realized.

In February 1975 the two sides participated in a Special Master Hearing, but the city and the fire fighters reached an agreement before the arbitrator's final ruling. The union accepted the elimination of eleven administrative personnel from the terms of the contract, agreed to a limit of 700 hours a year paid leave for union business, and allowed the city to replace, by attrition, the department's mechanics, electricians, and supply workers with civilian employees. Although the TFFU managed to earn more generous wage concessions than the city had originally offered, the contract signalled the beginning of a gradual erosion of the union's strength and of the rights that it had won in previous contracts.

The accord between Poe and the TFFU lasted only as long as the recently concluded contract, and within two years the city and the union were engaged in another fierce dispute. In December 1976 the union rejected, by a vote of 422 to 88, a proposed contract that eliminated manning provisions and offered a smaller than desired pay raise. The results of the subsequent Special Master proceeding were a considerable success for the union. Not only did arbitrator Jules Pagano award the fire fighters an immediate 7.3 percent wage increase, but he also ruled that the city should maintain the manning clause. The TFFU was content with the ruling, but Poe objected and refused to abide by the arbitrator's decision, thereby forcing the issue before the city council.

On May 3, 1977, after what one newspaper characterized as "two hours of rambling, emotional debate" during which city council members hurled insults at each other, the council voted five to two to award the fire fighters an 8.9 percent raise over two years. The ruling left Poe both disappointed and frustrated, and the reactions of Poe and his supporters demonstrated that the significance of the debate transcended the immediate contractual issues. Council member Jan Platt protested that the council was "rewarding unionism," and would encourage other city workers to organize. Poe himself later remarked that the council was not interested in the facts; "they were [simply] interested in giving a raise to the fire fighters."

In May 1979 the Poe administration and the TFFU concluded their final contract with each other and, like the previous two, it was hotly contested. In its initial contract offer the city did not propose a pay raise, a condition which the union rejected, thereby leading to another Special Master Hearing. During the hearing the TFFU and the city clashed over whether or not the fire fighters deserved a wage increase and over the ability of the city to fund any such increase. The underlying argument of the city, though, was simply that the mayor's office and the city council, as duly-elected representatives of the people, had passed a budget that established different fiscal priorities than those of the fire fighters. Despite the city's protestations, the arbitrator awarded the fire fighters a pay raise that ranged from 1.3 to 9.4 percent, depending on
each individual’s length of service. Poe again rejected the Special Master ruling, thereby returning the conflict to the city council chambers, where, as the *Tampa Times* noted, "the fire fighters [had] found such close friends in the past."\(^{51}\)

When the city council met on May 30, 1979, to resolve the dispute, it was before hundreds of supporters of the TFFU, many of whom were bused in at union expense. Following a strident debate before a partisan audience, the city council voted four to three to approve a 6.9 percent pay raise. Once again, the union had won over the opposition of Mayor Poe. The events helped to prompt a bitter editorial in the *Tampa Times*, which spoke of the "Firemen's Four" on the city council who "continue to sing the same old tune under the baton of Sam Sinardi and his fire fighters union."\(^{52}\) Although the editorial, which spoke of the "overpaid and underworked" fire fighters, did not perfectly mirror public sentiment, it did demonstrate the degree to which the repeated clashes between the TFFU and the city angered some local citizens. To many residents of Tampa the politicization of public employees and their apparent influence in municipal government was a disturbing and threatening trend.

Like public employees throughout the nation, the Tampa fire fighters found that their success in influencing the political process proved to be a double-edged sword as it helped to draw out anti-union opponents. If the 1960s marked the birth of public employee unions as a major force in society, then the 1970s was undoubtedly its troubled adolescence. The growth in size and assertiveness of public sector unions in the late 1960s prompted concern, and in some cases even fear, amongst a growing number of Americans. In Florida, public fears about the growing militancy of government workers rose dramatically after 1968, when a statewide teachers' strike was only the most notable of six public employee walkouts that resulted in 354,000 lost mandays.\(^{53}\) Two years later Florida's Governor Claude Kirk painted a frightening vision of a future where the power of public employee unions was unbridled: "a strike by public employees brings to mind the vision of heaps of unsanitary garbage... menacing the health of the people.... Of prisons without guards.... Streets without policemen. Fires with no one to fight them. Complete chaos and an open invitation to anarchy. Clearly, public service is ... above and beyond the ability to collectively bargain ... which can only encourage illegal strikes."\(^{54}\) Eight years later, in Memphis, Tennessee, Kirk's predictions appeared to come to life when fire fighters and police officers staged a simultaneous walk out. For the eleven days that the strike persisted National Guardsmen enforced a dusk to dawn curfew with loaded rifles while hundreds of fires swept through the city, causing millions of dollars in damage. The following January the *Tampa Tribune* published a feature article on the strike, previewing it with the chilling commentary, "Memphis - could it happen here?"\(^{55}\)

Nationally, the frustrations and fears about public employee unions took a number of different forms. Academic studies warned that "excessive power" by public employees could distort the bargaining process or that they could "overwhelm the needs of others" within the municipal community.\(^{56}\) Conservative critics urged states to prohibit collective bargaining in order to "preserve government sovereignty and individual freedom in the public sector."\(^{57}\) One article, in the popular monthly *Reader's Digest*, queried in its title "Can Public Employee Unions Be Controlled?" and warned that "our country faces the very real prospect of public-employee unions literally dictating what government workers earn and, therefore, the taxes citizens must pay."\(^{58}\) The rise of public employee unions and the consequent transformation in the power
relationship between the state and its employees was, to many Americans, a radical development that had to be vigorously opposed.

The national debate over the growth of the political power of public employee unions also occurred in Tampa, where the critics of public sector unionism found the TFFU an obvious target. By the early 1970s editorialists of local papers were already warning that precedents set by the fire fighters could turn elections into "a competition to see which candidate could promise to do most for the public [employees] with the biggest slush fund and largest army of poll workers." 59 As the decade progressed the press began referring to the "firemen's five" on the city council, who were the fire fighters' "hand-picked candidates." 60 Even the local television stations joined the chorus with editorials charging that the TFFU was on a "treasure hunt," and warning that offering arbitration to the fire fighters would be "disastrous for democratic self-government." 61

The fire fighters were well aware of the local media's hostility towards the TFFU's political activism, and the union worked diligently to promote its own position. One TFFU newsletter in 1979 noted that "if past history can be used as any indicator, expect the citizens of Tampa to be force fed whatever swill Mayor Poe and the local dailies consider appropriate. Countering the
Union leaders were very conscious of the need to communicate their own views to elected officials and the local populace, and they devoted considerable energy to this end. The TFFU was also willing to challenge the press directly, as evidenced in 1979 by a libel and defamation lawsuit the union filed against the editor of the *Tampa Times* after one particularly scathing editorial.

Despite accusations in the local media, the Tampa Fire Fighters Union's ability to influence local political campaigns was not solely based upon its ability to reward sympathetic candidates with campaign contributions. The fire fighters were also adept at marshalling public support for their positions. The city council meetings that decided the contract disputes frequently attracted hundreds of fire fighters, their families, and their supporters. The department also worked to make sure that the community was aware of their services, and that the local populace continued to have a positive image of the fire fighters. The Public Information Officer and other personnel, for example, went out into the communities to help train teachers in CPR or participate in radio programs to educate the public to fire dangers. The fire fighters also participated in charity functions, such as collecting for muscular dystrophy. In an era in which the public was growing increasingly disenchanted with the service of government employees, the fire fighters worked hard to maintain their image as one of the few groups that still enjoyed public favor.
Another reason why the TFFU was so often successful defending its position before the city council was that it usually took great care and effort to present a strong case when it had to go to arbitration. In most cases the city lost its argument in the Special Master Hearings because its negotiators could not convince the arbitrator that their claims were credible. Consequently, when the debate finally reached the city council, the burden of proof was upon the administration to establish why a supposedly impartial arbitrator could make what the mayor’s office claimed was an improper ruling.

The ultimate source of the strength of the TFFU, however, lay in the nature of the profession. Fire fighters were not simply employees of a municipal department; they were also members of a tightly knit community born out of a need for close cooperation. Much of this closeness derived from the safety risks inherent in the job. Fire fighters frequently faced situations fraught with enormous danger, and in order to prevail they had to work quickly and effectively as a team.

Another factor contributing to the close social relations among fire fighters was the need to remain on duty for extended periods. To fire fighters, the fire station house was not simply a workplace; it was a shared living space, what one veteran referred to as a "home away from home." Depending on the era when he or she served, the typical fire fighter spent anywhere from one-third to one-half of their working life in the close quarters of a fire station. Although official responsibilities took up much of a fire fighter’s shift, he or she also had the time to engage in a number of practices that are normally thought of as being "domestic," such as cooking, eating, cleaning, sleeping, reading, and watching television or listening to the radio. Given that fire fighters often worked at the same station or even with the same crew for years at a time, the department believed good working relations were at a premium. If personality conflicts arose and could not be handled at the station house, then the department would transfer employees to resolve the conflict.

The other characteristic of fire fighting that helped to contribute to the sense of community was the absence of sharply drawn lines of authority. The labor-management dichotomy so central to most other workplaces was far less distinct. All the men of the Tampa fire department, from the greenest recruit to the fire chief, had started as trainees and had experienced service as combat fire fighters. Furthermore, since turnover was low and transfers almost unheard of, most of the officers had served with each other and with the men in their department for many years. The nature of the living arrangements for fire fighters also tended to weaken the divisions between officers and men. Most employees, even district fire chiefs, lived, worked, and slept together according to the platoon-shift system. In an environment where it was possible to see a station captain cleaning dishes, traditional social barriers between labor and management were largely irrelevant. Finally, the common danger faced by all fire fighters on call at the station house, officers and men alike, served as a powerful force to draw them together.

Although it helped to provide a vital source of strength for fire fighters, the closely knit community that existed within fire departments often served as a barrier against the inclusion of outsiders into the workforce. This was true of Tampa as well, with its diverse population of native whites, African-Americans, and the descendents of Italian, Spanish, and Cuban immigrants. Throughout its history the Tampa fire department has been dominated by white men. Nevertheless, the ethnic and gender composition of the work force has changed dramati-
cally since its founding in 1895. Until the 1940s fire fighting in Tampa was the near exclusive
domain of native whites. A few Latins, the sons of Italian, Spanish, and Cuban immigrants
from Ybor City and West Tampa, managed to enter the department in the 1940s and early 1950s,
but their welcome was an ambivalent one. One Latin fire fighter recalled that native whites
harassed their ethnic counterparts on occasion, and that the epithet "Cuban nigger" was common
in the station house. By the mid-1950s, however, attitudes within the city towards Latins were
changing, most dramatically with the victory of Nick Nuccio in the mayor's race of 1956. The
election of Nuccio, the son of Sicilian immigrants, marked the growing power and assertiveness
of the Latin community within Tampa, and this change was reflected in the ethnic composition
of the fire department. By the late 1950s the sight of a Latin fire fighter was common, and with
this development came a decline in ethnic tensions within the department. In the 1960s Latins
played a key role in the leadership of the union, and by the 1970s Hispanic fire fighters occupied
a disproportionately large percentage of the higher ranks within the Tampa fire department.

Despite the success Latins had in integrating into the workforce, African-Americans and women
continued to face obstacles that limited their opportunities to join the fire department. In the
1960s the city integrated the fire department, but the effort was largely ineffective as many of the
first black fire fighters left within a few year, owing to racial harassment and the low pay. By
1975 the department employed fewer than ten African-Americans as fire fighters, and conditions
did not begin to improve until the following year when the threat of a lawsuit by the federal
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission forced the city into instituting a more aggressive
affirmative action program. In the case of women, the city did not hire its first two female fire
fighters until 1981. The fire department, having overcome Latin-Anglo differences in the
community of fire fighters, proved to be much slower in working to integrate blacks and women
into the workplace.

The unique, closely-knit character of the fire fighting community helped to propel it to the
forefront of the public employee union movement throughout the United States: The TFFU was
the first municipal union in Tampa; the FPF, along with the teachers, was the driving force
behind the success of collective bargaining legislation in Florida; and the IAFF was the oldest
international union in the country for state and local workers. Part of this success can be traced to
the astonishingly high rates of participation in unions by fire fighters, both in Tampa, where
membership was usually over 98 percent and in Florida and the United States as a whole. An
additional source of strength lay in the fact that fire fighter unions throughout the nation
traditionally included officers as well as men in their ranks. This was true of Tampa as well,
where even the fire chief would frequently rejoin the union once he was replaced. Consequently,
oficers in positions of management usually preferred to work within unionized departments,
since in most cases the boundaries of the union were nearly identical to those of the community
of fire fighters. Fire fighting, with its unique system of organization, was well suited to
creating a strong union that could operate effectively in the political arena.

Although the past successes of the Tampa Fire Fighters Union were not based entirely on
political activism, politics played a crucial part in the bargaining process. Since the Special
Master Process was nonbinding, it proved of limited value to the fire fighters. On average, less
than 10 percent of the Special Master rulings in the state were accepted by the respective
governing body. Consequently, union officials have frequently characterized collective
bargaining in Florida as "collective begging."\textsuperscript{82} While "begging" might not be an entirely accurate description of the situation, it comes close enough to explain why public unions have become so politicized. In the case of the Tampa Fire Fighters Union, it would have lost its disputes with the city if not for the fact that the union was successful in garnering the support of a majority of city council members in the contract disputes of the 1970s. In order to prevail in the face of an administration hostile to unions the fire fighters were, by the very nature of the system within which they operated, pushed to participate in the local political process as fire fighters and as public employees. Politics is, and was, a fragile foundation, however, and the events of the early 1980s demonstrated that in a changing environment the "Firemen's Four" on the city council could just as easily become the "Firemen's Three." By 1981 newspapers were already referring to the TFFU as the "once powerful" fire fighters union.\textsuperscript{83} It is for this reason that binding arbitration has long been a primary goal of the IAFF and of the Tampa fire fighter's union. Binding arbitration would prevent the uncertainty that accompanies a system of negotiation and conflict resolution sensitive to the vagaries of municipal politics.\textsuperscript{84} Sam Sinardi, the former president of the TFFU, later noted that in the case of public workers, "if you don't have politics in your community, you have nothing. You have to elect your friends and defeat your enemies" in order to succeed.\textsuperscript{85} As long as the state allows employees to organize unions, but does not provide for binding arbitration of their disputes, his statement is likely to remain true.

NOTES

\begin{enumerate}
\item City of Tampa Ordinance #307, approved February 20, 1903, box 9-2-A-15, Tampa Archives.
\item David Ziskind, \textit{One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 53, and Richardson, 4-5, 7-8.
\item Gray, \textit{Tampa Firefighter} 3; interview with Charles Hall, former V.P. of the IAFF (1968-79), at Florida International University, Miami, November 4, 1991 (notes of interview in possession of author); interview with Sam Sinardi, Tampa City fire fighter (1957-1981) and former president of the TFFU, and Frank Urso, Tampa City fire
\end{enumerate}
fighter (1952-1979) and former vice-president of the TFFU, in Tampa, November 23, 1991 (notes of interview in possession of author).


10 Ibid., 9.


13 Ibid., 169-170.

14 Gray, Tampa Firefighter, 80.

15 Tampa Fire Department Annual Report: 1963, and 1964. The 1963 annual report is located in the Nick Nuccio papers (2nd term), box 12-3-F-11, of the Tampa Archives, and the 1964 report is located at the Hillsborough Library.

16 Interview with Sinardi and Urso.

17 Interview with Aubrey Grant, Tampa City fire fighter (1959-1992) and deputy fire chief, in Tampa on February 21, 1992 (tape of interview in possession of the author).

18 Gray, Tampa Firefighter, 85, 130.


20 Interview with Grant. Throughout the early 1970s one of the provisions that constantly appeared in the contracts between the city and the TFFU was a demand that the department provide a greater number of self-contained breathing apparatuses. These were much safer than the older filter masks. See contracts between the City of Tampa and Local 754 of the IAFF, AFLCIO for 1970 (4145B),1971 (4145C), and 1972 (4145D), box 9-3-E-11, Tampa Archives.


22 During the 1960s, a total of 790 fire fighters were killed in the line of duty. Fatality statistics for other professions from 1970 were as follows: 100 for mining/quarrying, 73 for police, and 18 for all industries. "Annual Death and Injury Survey of the Professional Fire Fighter in the United States and Canada," International Fire Fighter 54:11 (November 1971), 4-9.


24 Assorted correspondence in the papers of Mayor Julian Lane, box 15, file 114, Tampa Archives.

25 Tampa Times, August 5, 1975, 1-A.

*Tampa Tribune*, October 11, 1966, 1-A, and October 12, 1966, 10-A.

Membership in the league was limited to active duty fire fighters. "Articles of Association of Firefighters Service League of Tampa," Articles 11 and 111, Nick Nuccio Papers (2nd term), box 12-3-F-1, Tampa Archives.

Letter from Nick Nuccio to the Tampa City Council, December 28, 1966, ibid.

"Report of the City Council Upon the Investigation by the City Council of the Fire Department," November 30, 1966, 3, ibid.

Ibid., 9. The city council was arguing for what was known as a "little Hatch Act." The original Hatch Act, passed by Congress in 1939, prevented federal employees from taking part in any political campaigns. Although the initial purpose of the act was to protect public employees from being forced to contribute to or work on the political campaigns of their employer's, it later became a tool to restrict the power of public employee unions. Many states and municipalities later passed their own version of the bill, which were dubbed "little Hatch Acts." The U.S. Supreme Court consistently upheld the constitutionality of the Hatch Act. "Regulation of Partisan Political Activities of Public Employees - The Hatch Act," in Harry T. Edwards, et al, eds., *Labor Relations in the Public Sector: Cases and Materials*, 3rd ed. (Charlottesville: Michie Company, 1985), 858-80.

*Tampa Times*, September 1, 1978, 1-A, 6-A.

Interview in Tampa on March 25, 1992 with Sam Sinardi, Tampa City fire fighter (1957-1981) and former TFFU president (tape of interview in possession of author). See also interviews with Sinardi and Urso, Grant, and Etelvino Fernandez, Tampa City fire fighter (1951-1972), in Tampa on March 28, 1992 (tape of interview in possession of author).

Newspaper clippings (date and page unknown), and October 5, 1978 (probably *Tampa Times* or *Tampa Tribune*), clippings from the papers of Sam Sinardi.

*Tampa Times*, September 11, 1978, 1-A, 6-A. In one city council election during the Greco administration the four candidates supported by the TFFU received the following financial assistance from the union and from individual fire fighters: Lee Duncan - $500 (out of $1335 collected), Vince Meloy - $1000 (out of $3950), R. L. Cheney - $500 (out of $3340), and Joe Kotvas - over $5000 (out of $12,000). *Tampa Tribune*, date and page unknown, clipping from the papers of Sam Sinardi.

Interview with Sinardi and Urso. The FPF was chartered in 1944. Interview with Sinardi.

*Tampa Tribune*, May 11, 1969, 1-C.


Contract for 1969 (agreement 4145) and for 1972 (agreement 4145D), Box 9-3-E-11, Tampa Archives.

Contract for 1972 (agreement 4145D), Articles IV and XXIII, ibid.

Ibid., Articles XV and XVI; interview with Sinardi and Urso.

A number of studies have suggested that the attitude of management towards unions in the public and private sector plays a critical, if not the most important, role in reducing labor-management conflict. Oddly enough, the attitude of union leadership towards management may not matter as much. See James Martin, et al, "Successful..."

43 Interview with Sinardi and Urso.

44 Tampa Tribune, September 2, 1974, 7-C.

45 Tampa Tribune, December 11, 1974, 1-B. December 4, 1974, 1-B; Tampa Times, December 4, 1974, 1-F. The fire fighters had the only union in the city at the time, and they enjoyed some of the most generous benefits of any city employees. Tampa Tribune, December 11, 1974, 1-B.

46 Ibid., March 1, 1975.

47 Ibid., March 8, 1977, 1-B, March 12, 1977, 1-B. The manning provision was controversial not only because the city felt it limited their flexibility on personnel issues, but also because of its symbolic value. As city council member Jan Platt argued, the level of service "should be in the hands of the people’s elected representatives, not the union." Tampa Tribune, March 27, 1977, 2-B, December 3, 1976, 1-B.

48 Ibid., May 4, 1977, 1-B.

49 Tampa Times, January 19, 1979, 1-E; Brief of the Union in Special Master Proceedings Between the IAFF, Local 754, and the City of Tampa, 28, in the records of Charles Hall at FIU.

50 Brief of the City in the Special Master Proceedings Between the IAFF, Local 754 and the City of Tampa, 7-10, in the records of Charles Hall at FIU.

51 Tampa Times, March 27, 1979, 1-A, March 29, 1979, 6-A.

52 Ibid., May 30, 1979, 4-A.


55 Tampa Tribune, January 6, 1979, 1-A, 8-A, and January 7, 1979, 8-A.

56 The former is from Paul F. Gerlart, Political Activity by Public Employee Organizations at the Local Level: Threat or Promise?, No. 44 of the Public Employee Relations Library (Chicago: International Personnel Management Association, 1974), 70. The latter is from Harry H. Wellington and Ralph K. Winter, Jr., The Unions and the Cities, Studies of Unionism in Government series (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1971), vii.


59 Tampa Tribune, September 30, 1971, 20-A.

60 Interviews with Grant and with Sinardi; Tampa Times, August 31, 1978, 8-A; Tampa Tribune, May 5, 1977, 20-A.

61 Editorials of WTVT, Channel 13, on May 22, 1977, and April 11, 1977, from the papers of Sam Sinardi.
62 Flash Point, a publication of the Tampa Fire Fighters Union, 1979, day and month unknown, 2. From the papers of Sam Sinardi.

63 Ibid., 4-5, and “Resolution of Support from the Hillsborough County Democratic Executive Committee,” February 28, 1979, from the papers of Sam Sinardi, and Tampa Times, June 27, 1979,1-A, and June 28, 1979,1-D.

64 Local Union No. 754 of the IAFF, AFL-CIO, and Sam Sinardi v The Tribune company, d / b / a The Tampa Times, and James M. Talley, Case No. 79-8215 of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit of the State of Florida (Hillsborough County). The case, prompted by a May 30, 1979, editorial of the Tampa Times, was eventually dropped.

65 Before one hearing of the city council the union organized so many supporters that they had to move it to Curtis Hixson Hall, the local convention center. One tactic the TFFU used was to go to local retirement communities that were particularly dependent on Fire Rescue Teams and convince residents to attend the city council meetings. Interviews with Sinardi and Urso and with Sinardi.


67 Tampa Times, March 27, 1979,1-A.

68 Interview with Grant.

69 Interviews with Sinardi, Grant, Hall, Sinardi Urso, and with Fernandez.

70 In 1961-2, for example, the turnover rate in the fire department was 2.4 percent. The rate for the police was 13.8 percent, for sanitation, 18.9 percent, and for parks and recreation, 11.0 percent. The rate for the city as a whole was 13.7 percent. Results in the 1970s were much the same. Tampa Civil Service Board Annual Report for 1963 and 1976, in Hillsborough Library. Part of the explanation for this tendency was that pension credits could not be transferred between fire departments or among the different municipal services. This was a national phenomenon in fire fighting. Interview with Sinardi; America Burning, 37.

71 Interviews with Sinardi, Grant, Hall, Sinardi Urso, and with Fernandez.

72 Interview with Fernandez.

73 Ibid.

74 Mormino and Pozzetta, Immigrant World, 302-04.

75 For example, in the late 1960s the president (Sam Sinardi), vice-president (Frank Urso), and the president of the Fire Fighters Service League (Arthur Llerandi), were all of Latin descent. In 1975 the proportion of Hispanic workers in the main fire fighter job classifications (Deputy Fire Chief, District Fire Chief, Fire Captain, Driver-Engineer, and Fire Fighter) was 11.5 percent (out of 593 total). In the case of Deputy Fire Chief (16.7 percent), District Fire Chief (15.8 percent), Fire Captain (13.8 percent), and Driver-Engineer (18.4 percent), they were overrepresented. Only 5.5 percent of the 274 employees with the lowest rank, fire fighter, were Hispanic. No statistics were kept for Italian-American employees. "EEOC Detail, June 30,1975," from the records of the Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EE00) of the City of Tampa.

76 Interview with Fernandez.

77 In 1975, of 274 men holding the rank of fire fighter, only six were African-American, and of the 185 men who were driver-engineers, only one was black. Higher ranks were the exclusive domain of whites. By 1982 one black had reached the rank of captain, four the rank of driver-engineer, and twenty-seven were fire fighters. "EEOC Detail, June 30, 1975," and "Work Force Analysis, May 13, 1982," from the records of the Tampa EE00. See also "Conciliation Agreement" between the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the City of Tampa, May 20, 1976, Hillsborough Library.
No precise figure is available for the TFFU, but the interviewees consistently provided this approximate figure. Statistics for Florida for 1974 indicated that 63 percent of fire fighters were organized, followed by 54.9 percent of teachers, and 30.7 percent of all state and local workers. In the United States as a whole fire fighters had the highest participation rates until the mid-1970s, when they were overtaken by teachers. In October of 1972 76.5 percent of fire fighters were organized, followed by 73.7 percent of teachers, and 53.5 percent of all state and local employees. Labor-Management Relations in State and Local Governments: 1974, Series GSS No. 75 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 20, 28.

One national survey found that 80 percent of officers expressed a preference for unionization. It also found that unionization had little influence upon the job performance of officers, or upon their ability to separate their identity as a supervisor from their identity as a worker. Hoyt N. Wheeler and Thomas A. Kochan, “Unions and Public Sector Supervisors: The Case of Fire Fighters,” Monthly Labor Review 100:12 (December 1977), 44-48.

Ibid., April 23, 1981, 1-A.

Ibid., November 11, 1976, 2-D.

Interview with Sinardi and Urso.
CHILDREN AT PLAY IN FLORIDA:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Children may well be one of the last frontiers for historians. While pathbreaking studies of slavery, immigration, and women have appeared, children are still largely absent from the historical record. Historians, as one scholar has put it, "are typically guilty of child neglect."¹ Numerically, and quite naturally, children have been a significant part of the population. In 1850, 42 percent of Americans were under the age of fifteen. A century later they composed 27 percent of the total. In 1900, the number of children under fifteen was more than double the foreign-born population of the U.S.

Historians and anthropologists argue that the very concepts of childhood and adolescence are invented traditions. Indeed, it is rare to find children depicted as children before the Renaissance. Children over the age of seven were represented as small adults, wearing adult clothes. When children appear in history books, they are often represented as passive objects, being reared, educated, and even exploited by adults. They are seldom depicted as active participants who had any measure of influence.

By the twentieth century, children’s greatest influence perhaps centered around their roles as consumers of mass-produced goods, especially toys. Although children continued to play with homemade toys and still turned objects into playthings, they increasingly looked to the marketplace and department stores to satisfy new desires. Of course, adults - including manufacturers, retailers, and parents - also had some say over supply and demand, but children themselves often decided which store-bought toys would become popular and which ones would remain on the shelves.

Like their parents, children, of course, represented a diverse collection of groups. As a result, differences of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and even region shaped lives and decisions, including those about consumption. In addition, items like clothes and toys were also used by parents to reinforce adult perceptions of gender and class. In the most obvious example, parents bought dolls for girls and guns for boys. Nevertheless, children themselves decided what to play with, and only they knew the fantasies constructed around play. The difficulty for historians is trying to reconstruct the worlds of children.

As with many groups generally missing from the pages of history, children have left few records to document their past. However, historians have begun the process of reconstructing the lives of children by using traditional, as well as unusual, sources. In addition to records from schools, churches, and various government agencies, scholars have explored indirect evidence, such as memoirs and material culture, that evoke childhood experiences long after the fact.

Photographs are also a rich and voluminous source for documenting the history of children. As any parent knows, children are the most common subject in family photos. Susan Sontag observes, "Not to take pictures of one’s children, particularly when they are small, is a sign of parental indifference."² Many photographs, taken by both parents and professionals, have found their way into archives, where historians have ready access to them. "Through photographs," one
historian has noted, "we can look into the eyes of children who never kept a diary or wrote a letter. We can see them at play, at work, at home, at their mother's breast, at their father's knee; we can see what kind of clothes they wore; we can see to some extent what they and their world looked like. By seeing in this way we can gain an understanding of children and their lives that would otherwise be closed to us."³

Thanks to the efforts of Joan Morris of the Photographic Collection of the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, the editors of *Tampa Bay History* offer the following photographic essay, organized around the theme of children at play. The pictures cover the period from the 1880s to the 1950s. Like other records of the past, these photographs do not speak for themselves. They can be "read" to reveal some meaning, but answers to many questions remain elusive. Nevertheless, combined with information from other sources, these pictures can tell us something about children’s play.

These frozen images provide a powerful and sometimes haunting look into the past. Even if we cannot fully comprehend the moment captured on film, we can gain some understanding of children and their material culture, especially their toys. However, the captions are meant to be suggestive rather than definitive. The editors invite readers to write and share their own thoughts and reminiscences about children at play.
Children in the Tampa Bay area have always had diverse ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds, and their experiences have varied accordingly. Posing next to the Tampa Bay Hotel early in this century is D.J. Jenkins’ Orphans Band, composed of African-American children. Orphans represented an enormous social problem in the nineteenth and early twentieth century due to the early death of parents, especially mothers.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.

The Tampa Bay area attracted large numbers of immigrants and their children from Cuba and southern European countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece. Many parents tried to preserve some ethnic identity in their children, even those born in this country. "Dress-up" provided one means of combining play and education in ethnic customs. These Cuban-American children gathered at Tampa’s Cuban Club for some patriotic occasion in 1912.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Masaryktown in Hernando County was settled by immigrants from Czechoslovakia, who named their new town after a Czech patriot. These two unidentified girls were dressed in traditional costumes for a 1958 festival in Masaryktown.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.

Americanization was long considered a primary function of public schools, even in areas which had few immigrants. These kindergarten children in Bartow (Polk County) wore star-spangled costumes for a national holiday in 1932.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
During World War I these two Bartow children played at being a nurse and a wounded soldier.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Clark Knight’s clothes and musical taste stamped him as a member of an elite Tampa family in the 1880s.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
For adults, play could serve as a means of initiating children into the rituals of society. Tea parties offered a traditional nineteenth-century form of play, allowing children a chance to act like adults. This photograph from the 1880s shows Helen Wilson and Olive Smith, both of Bartow.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.

Tea parties often included boys, who also had to be socialized. This 1931 photograph shows three Tampa children: Blanche Joan and Mary Pat Weedon and their cousin, Frederick Renfro Weedon, Jr.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
At the turn of the century, the favorite toy of girls was dolls. In an 1899 survey of children, girls under twelve mentioned dolls more often than any other toy or form of play. However, by the 1920s, surveys showed that play (tag, bicycling, hide and seek) was more important to girls than dolls. This photograph shows Jessie Ruth Stokes of Arcadia (De Soto County) with her dolls in 1902.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
This portrait from the 1890s reinforces the perception that girls and boys had different playthings. Tampa’s Floss Knight holds a doll while her brother Jules cradles a “real” pet.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.

Boys also played with stuffed animals not "dolls." However, this 1925 photograph of Sarasota’s Frederick Keith suggests a certain distance between the boy and his "Petey Rabbit."

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Prior to the twentieth century, handmade toys were common. This undated photograph shows Tampa’s Leslie Washington Weedon, posing at sixteen months of age, with what appears to be a handcrafted cart.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Despite the increasing popularity of store-bought toys, unique homemade playthings could still be found. This goat-drawn wagon carried Lakeland children, Mary Nancy Sammon and Paul Jones, in 1931.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.

Among middle-class Americans in the late nineteenth century, gift giving for holidays and special occasions became a form of conspicuous consumption that encouraged parents to shower toys on children. This 1915 photograph of Ted Mack of Bartow shows a child with several toys, including a toy horse he was clearly too small to mount by himself.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Edson Keith posed with his son Frederick at a Sarasota beach in 1925. The impressive toys appear more important to the proud father than to the boy whose attention is focused elsewhere.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.

In this picture, Timmy Keith of Sarasota seems more bewildered than amused by his mechanical dog.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Bicycles first appeared in the late nineteenth century, but they required skill and the outdoors. This undoubtedly made them more popular with children than with protective parents. This unidentified Sarasota boy posed indoors with a tricycle in the 1880s.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Both girls and boys engaged in cycling, and it is not clear in this picture from the 1890s whether the tricycle belonged to Rossie or Ted Evans of Fort Myers.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
A Tampa boy on tricycle (c. 1915).

Photograph courtesy Florida State Archives.
Abbie Laura Lyle of Bartow had her bike decorated for some kind of festive occasion in 1906.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
These Fort Myers boys, hanging out at the corner of Main and Hendry streets in the 1910s, reflect the kind of freedom and independence that bicycles could give children.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
This turn-of-the-century photograph of two Tampa brothers, Frederick Renfro and Harry Lee Weedon, shows the type of physical—even violent play often encouraged among boys. In this case, an adult would have had to assist by lacing up the gloves for the mock boxing match.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Unlike many parents, children considered games more significant than toys in their play, because many games, like tag and hide and seek, do not require any special objects. Although baseball requires some equipment, it was the singular most popular form of play among boys in several surveys between 1900 and 1925. This baseball team posed around 1900 with their principal at a school in Alva (Lee County).

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
One of the most candid photographs in this collection shows two of the happiest looking children. These two Seminole boys appear to be truly enjoying the outdoors in the 1930s, even though they have no playthings except the stone one boy is proudly displaying for the photographer.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
NOTES


3 Ibid., 168.
TARPON SPRINGS AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

by Heath Nailos

During the years of the Great Depression, the ethnic and economic mixture of Tarpon Springs gave it a character that set it apart from other Florida cities. During the darkest hours of the depression, the town found itself saved by the sponge, a simple organism that proved to be the life-blood of the city. Ironically, the people of Tarpon Springs entered the decade of the 1930s in a paradoxical situation, as they simultaneously faced the Great Depression and enjoyed the "golden age" of the sponge industry.

Understanding the history of local economies and ethnic groups provides insight into Tarpon Springs during the Great Depression. When pioneer A.W. Ormond built a log cabin on Spring Bayou in 1876, the area was deserted. All that remained of the native Tocobaga Indians who had inhabited the land for thousands of years were their midden and burial mounds. Legend has it that Ormond’s daughter, Mary, was so amazed by the giant tarpon that swam in the bayou, that she named the town after them. The surrounding land was covered with pine and oak trees which ran to the water’s edge. Wild game and alligators abounded, and many species of fish swam in the bayou.

In 1880 Governor W.D. Bloxom sold four million acres of land to Hamilton Disston at a price of twenty-five cents per acre. This deal included the embryonic settlement of Tarpon Springs, and Disston’s title to the land superseded existing homesteads. One of his first actions was to force the people who had settled on this land to buy it back from him at a rate of one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre. In 1882 Disston formed the Lake Butler (now Lake Tarpon) Villa Company with 9,000 acres of what is today Pinellas County. Settlers laid out the new town in 1882, and Anson Safford, an ex-governor of Arizona, arrived to run the company. A hotel was constructed in 1883, and a railway depot was built for a new line that ran from Ehren (twenty miles to the north) to St. Petersburg. The first promotional brochure, "An Interesting History of Florida and the Famous Tarpon Springs," was published in 1884 in New York in an effort to lure prospective land buyers. Local mail service began in 1886 with the construction of a new post office. Until this time the nearest post office was in Clearwater, and anyone who went down the trail brought the mail back for the whole town.

The year 1887 galvanized the fledgling community. On February 12, thirty-three of forty-four registered voters elected to incorporate Tarpon Springs as a city in Hillsborough County, which then included all of today’s Pinellas County. The city built a dock at the foot of the main street. A steamboat, the Mary Disston, ran between the new dock and the small settlement of Anclote, where all goods and passengers from Cedar Key landed for transport to Tarpon Springs. President Grover Cleveland ordered the construction of a $35,000 lighthouse on Anclote Key to help mark the harbor entrance.

Tarpon Springs gained notoriety with the arrival of the Duke of Sutherland, who was a cousin of Queen Victoria. His wife, Duchess Anne, was lady-in-waiting to the queen and loved court life. Theirs was not a marriage made in heaven, as the Duke preferred hunting, yachting, and fishing.
He took up with a widow, Lady Caroline Blair, and they bought forty acres on Lake Butler and built a cypress shingle house. When the Duchess died in England in 1889, Lady Blair and the Duke were married.  

The decade of the nineties was known for the construction of the "Golden Crescent," a half-circle of Victorian homes built along Spring Bayou by wealthy northerners. The "Golden Crescent" featured homes with boathouses to provide shelter for yachts. These residents helped make Tarpon Springs a popular winter resort. Between 1890 and 1895, the city’s population increased by 42 percent, to 561 residents, making Tarpon Springs the largest city on the Pinellas peninsula. 

In 1890, John K. Cheyney established the Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company. The sponge industry began to move from its historical base in Key West to Tarpon Springs because of the nine thousand square miles of rich and untouched sponge beds off Florida’s western Gulf Coast. By 1900 thirty-five sponge boats operated out of Tarpon Springs. The common way to obtain sponges used long poles with hooks in shallow water, a process called the hook method. A Greek named John Cocoris persuaded Cheyney to finance an experiment in gathering sponges by diving for them instead of using the hook method. The future of Tarpon Springs changed
A sponge diver from Tarpon Springs boarding a boat with his catch in 1936.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
overnight when the experiment succeeded. Cheyney asked Cocoris to bring over sponge divers from Greece, and in 1905, some 500 divers made the long trip. These experienced divers came from the islands of Aigina, Khalke, Kalymnos, and Syme. They brought with them their diving suits, dive boat plans, and customs - their language, dress, dance, and love of the sea.

The pioneer Greek immigrants had a hard life. They slept on their boats, in shacks, or in the "Old Diver's House," which opened in 1907 to house bachelor divers. The sponge beds proved to be very fertile, and many of the Greeks sent back for their families as soon as they had established themselves. All was not peaceful, however, as hostilities broke out between the "hookers" and the "divers." The hookers, mostly "Conchs" from Key West and Cedar Key, felt threatened by the efficiency of the Greek divers. They spread rumors that the Greek divers trampled small sponges walking across the ocean floor in their heavy shoes. A bitter and violent rivalry developed. The wealthy families of the "Golden Crescent" watched in amazement and disbelief as their winter resort evolved into a teeming Greek village. The citizens of the city of Tarpon Springs were a collection of wealthy northerners, native frontier "crackers," African-Americans, and newly arrived Greeks.

The arrival of the Greeks can be dramatically illustrated by the U.S. Census, as the population rose from 740 in 1905 to 2,212 in 1910. The number actually decreased to 1,938 in 1915, a fact explained by the exodus of some of the wealthy northerners and a few homesick Greeks. After that the population grew rather slowly. The 1925 census reported 2,635 citizens, an increase of 21 percent in fifteen years. Tarpon Springs’ place as a county leader in Pinellas County was supplanted by Clearwater and a rapidly growing St. Petersburg. A great discrepancy exists between the 1925 Florida census and the police department census of 1926, which claimed 4,459 residents, not counting the hundreds of part-time northern residents. The police department listed 826 foreign-born (Greek) citizens, with half of that number naturalized.

Tarpon Springs prospered in the teens and early twenties as it became the world’s leading sponge producer. The city appeared immune to the problems faced by most of postwar America. Anglo-Americans, African-Americans, and Greeks worked together without serious incident. The local economy prospered because of the sponge fleet’s catch, valued at $707,202 in 1919. The concurrent Florida land boom also contributed to the area’s growth. A savage hurricane smashed Tarpon Springs and the Tampa Bay area in 1921 with winds of one hundred miles per hour, which severely damaged the sponge fleet. Subsequently, the sponge catch fell to $531,300 in 1922. Any rise or fall in sponge sales had an immediate ripple effect throughout the city because so many of Tarpon’s residents worked in the industry.

Tarpon Springs experienced a period of great growth during the 1920s. The Tarpon Inn, a $125,000, one hundred-room hotel, opened with great fanfare. The city contained two lumber mills which employed a large number of men and shipped lumber to various points on the coast. These saw mills kept busy supplying the growth of the local building industry. According to a brochure printed by the secretary of the Board of Trade, Tarpon Springs supported "several machine shops and marine ways, automobile garages, laundries, two bottling houses, and other industries." This brochure stated, "two strong banks administer to the financial needs of the community, the business of both having doubled during the past year." A quarter of a million dollars in new commercial structures and residences marked the growth of Tarpon Springs, while
Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange in 1921.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
a score of new businesses expanded the city commercially. In 1926, the two banks in Tarpon Springs showed a 37 percent increase in net holdings over 1925. At that time the nearest hospital was in Clearwater. Also that year, the $250,000 Sunset Hills Country Club opened complete with a golf course. Like the other municipalities of Pinellas County, Tarpon Springs accumulated a huge debt to finance this growth. By 1931, the city owed $2,436,500 in bonds. Tarpon Springs never enjoyed the boom St. Petersburg had, but the city experienced steady and substantial growth.

The citizens’ experiences during the Great Depression could best be described as a period of extreme peaks and valleys. Old Greeks described the 1930s as "good ole days" after blight destroyed the sponge beds in 1947. Whatever the oldtimers might have said, though, times were tough.

Residents felt the effects of the depression almost immediately. In 1930, the First National Bank of Commerce nearly dissolved. A midnight meeting of 75 percent of its major depositors saved the faltering institution. The morning after was labeled as "confidence day," celebrated with posters all over town and a band playing on Spring Bayou. The bank stayed open until March 4, 1933, when it closed under presidential orders. It reopened as the First National Bank of Tarpon Springs on January 27, 1934. The bank was capitalized at $50,000 with a $5,000 surplus and guaranteed deposits of up to $2,500. This was a far cry from the bank’s situation in 1926 when both banks (the Bank of Commerce and the First National Bank, which later merged) had posted assets of over $2,000,000.

Shortage of income created a tax collection problem. In 1932 the city offered a tax discount to stimulate collection. This plan was dropped after one year because of increased revenue. In December 1932 the city almost had to do without a Christmas tree because the American Legion, the usual sponsor, could not raise the money. Guests of the Arcade Hotel contributed twenty-five dollars, and the community’s children enjoyed their tree. In 1932 the city foreclosed on its airport which had been the site of its annual air show. In the same year, the city saved nearly $5,000 by closing the public golf course for six months and by closing the sanitary department. After the sanitary department closed, the city had to pass an ordinance preventing the dumping of trash on the streets. When Lake Butler, the source of the city’s water supply, became salty due to extreme high tides in March 1932, the city lacked sufficient funds to make a $125 deposit with Florida Power to turn on the old pumping station in town. The well at the Tarpon Springs Golf Club provided a solution when it was turned into the city water main. The Sunset Hills Golf and Country Club closed its doors in 1934. It was sold at a sheriff’s auction for $4,000, a fraction of its cost. The site of the country club served as a year-round baseball training school for a while; now the site serves as the home of Anclote Manor, a world renown psychiatric hospital.

In 1932 the Halki and Claymnos societies opened relief kitchens to feed the needy and the unemployed. The Halki Society, whose members traced their origin to the Greek island of Halki, served two meals a day to all who asked. The kitchens were funded by the sponge industry with each boat captain donating a bunch of sponges. Officials of the two organizations maintained a close watch on the conditions of needy families so help could be given without delay. Their actions meant other charity groups, such as the Red Cross, could focus on other areas of the community. Even though these two kitchens eventually closed, the Greek community of Tarpon Springs
Springs managed to weather the depression by lending each other a helping hand when times were tough. The government also assisted the needy with distribution of hundreds of sacks of free flour. Even with these aid programs, there was never enough relief to go around. Residents often had to depend on their fishing skills to secure their next meal.

The city faced another problem with the arrival of waves of unemployed northerners. According to the Florida Census of 1935, Tarpon Springs was populated by 3,414 year-round residents, including 648 Greek immigrants. The number of unemployed residents increased from 137 in 1933 to 250 in 1936. An example of the sad plight faced by the chronic unemployed was the suicide of William McFather. An unemployed father of thirteen, McFather chose to commit suicide with his own knife rather than deal with failure.

By 1933, the New Deal began to influence life in Tarpon Springs. The unemployed worked at projects sponsored by the federal government. By 1935, the Works Projects Administration (WPA) had enlisted 184 of the city's unemployed. The workers helped to beautify the city; their various projects included Coburn and Rotary Parks. They repaired the streets and painted public buildings. When the WPA worked on projects such as Coburn Park, local businesses received assistance since contracts were let for materials, such as cement, lumber, crushed stone, and other items that were used in construction.

President Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration (NRA) of 1933 also provided much needed help. "Every person must do his share. We are going through a great war, a war of life and death," Perry J. Wilson stated as he addressed a mass meeting at the city park during which the NRA was explained. He received an ovation as he explained the project in every detail. The NRA raised the salary of workers covered from $1.50 to $2.40 a day. Local workers labored from one to three days a week to support some 400 dependents. The citizens and employers of Tarpon Springs supported the NRA until it was declared unconstitutional in 1935.

The city showed their support for the Roosevelt by holding a "New Deal Dance" at the municipal pier (Sunset Beach). Throughout the depression, the citizens of Tarpon Springs supported the New Deal programs by voting overwhelmingly for Roosevelt.

J.N. Craig, mayor of Tarpon Springs during the entire decade of the 1930s, faced financial problems almost immediately after taking office. The most serious problem involved delinquent taxes and a $2,500,000 lawsuit by the holders of municipal bonds. This suit was not settled until 1938, with the city paying off at a rate of seventy-five cents on the dollar. In 1933, the Sponge Exchange agreed to pay off its three years of delinquent occupational licenses with city bonds. A spokesman said that this was the only way they could pay off their back taxes and keep their occupational license. The city commission did many things in an effort to save money: taxes were slashed, salaries were cut, and the street lights were turned off. The hospital was leased to E.H. Beckett for five years at one dollar a year, because it had run so far into the red. Schools, including the Negro Union Academy, faced hard times. Teachers were often paid in scrip, redeemable at select local merchants, and it was never certain at the beginning of each year how long the term would last.

Just as today, politics in Tarpon Springs during the depression was never dull. A 1936 mayoral election almost led to bloodshed. The contest was fought between Mayor J.N. Craig, who
represented the Anglo-American community, and George M. Emmanuel of the Greek community. Emmanuel sought to become the city’s first Greek mayor. According to the 1935 census, Tarpon Springs’ Greek population comprised 1,273 out of the city’s 3,520 citizens. In 1935, Tarpon Springs reported that 881 people paid their poll taxes, along with the 325 citizens who were exempt because they were over fifty-six years of age. Thus, a total of about 1,200 citizens were eligible to vote. The number of Greeks who were registered to vote was relatively low. In the official account, Craig led with 649 votes to Emmanuel’s 443. Emmanuel immediately announced that he would seek the arrest of all five members of the local election board. Emmanuel cried foul because the city hall was closed while the votes were being counted, instead of being open to the public as in previous years. Emmanuel also questioned the tally of 179 absentee ballots. Reputedly, these ballots were cast mostly by members of the sponge fleet. Emmanuel, the sponge exchange president, and his supporters were shocked when the count of absentee ballots was released, and Craig received 170 out of the 179 total. Emmanuel’s supporters said affidavits would be sought for the absentee voters to see how they had voted. Later that night, Emmanuel claimed that he had received a letter which warned him to stay out of politics and was signed with a bloody dagger. The subsequent election probe ran into a snag when subpoenas were issued to spongers who were not scheduled to return for many weeks. In the end, Craig won the election; however, the wounds incurred would not heal for years to come.

Aside from occasional bolita trafficking, crime was not a serious problem in Tarpon Springs during the Great Depression. The region’s meandering coastline invited smuggling, and more than one bootlegger landed his cargo in Tarpon Springs. This problem ended when the sale of liquor became legal on November 6, 1934. Most of the crime was of a trivial nature, such as a woman wanted for the theft of her own car. The teeming throngs attending the annual Epiphany celebration attracted would-be criminals, causing the sheriff to issue a warning to watch for pick-pockets. Tourism, though at a low level, was still a viable industry during the depression years. The ex-president and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge visited in 1931 and were taken by boat to the Anclote lighthouse. Other notable guests included Paramount film director Paul Lannin and Tammany Hall Chief James Dooling. Luxury yachts put into harbor occasionally, and the city boasted four hotels, including the fashionable Villa Plumose. The Chamber of Commerce was so hard pressed for advertising money that they put bumper-stickers on north-bound cars.

It was sponges, however, not the New Deal programs which saved the economy of Tarpon Springs in the thirties. "Sponges and gold." insisted George Emmanuel to the Rotary Club in 1931, "are the only two commodities whose price has not fallen in the last two years." Historian Gertrude K. Stoughton observed, "For the Greek speaking part of Tarpon Springs, sponge was gold." The sponge trade provided for Tarpon Springs families in the midst of a horrible depression. Sponge diving was the life-line of the Greek community. It was estimated that one diver provided jobs for fifteen other men.

Sponges have been a commodity of trade since antiquity. By the 1930s sponges were chiefly used for cleaning automobiles and by the paint industry. Until the invention of the artificial sponge in the 1940s, there was no comparable substitute and demand constantly exceeded supply. According to The Journal of Geography, New York received the majority of the Tarpon
Springs catch. In 1931, New York alone received almost one-half of the domestic production. Other important markets included Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. Tarpon Springs was a convenient center for the industry because of its favorable transportation facilities, both by water and by railway.

In 1934, the Civil Works Administration completed its study of the sponge industry. According to the report, national sponge sales in 1933 netted $597,458, of which $420,481 was from Tarpon Springs. The industry employed approximately 629 men; 515 worked on boats and 114 in packing houses. Fifty diving boats based in Tarpon Springs and thirty hooking boats based in Key West, comprised Florida's sponge fleet. The industry annually spent $95,000 for food, $90,000 for fuel, $15,000 for diving suits, $6,000 for miscellaneous items, and $25,000 for interest on financing and debt. Even though the sponge industry employed mainly Greeks, its success in the thirties was shared by many who were not directly involved in it. The entire town prospered.

Another assessment of the sponge fishing fleet in the early thirties estimated the value of a diving boat and equipment at $6,000. The fleet's fifty-four boats amounted to an assessment of $324,000. The average replacement value of a hooker boat was $1,200; there were twenty-five of...
these for a total of $30,000. The value of the Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange was $30,000. Waterfront docks and improvements were worth $20,000. Machine shops, marine ways, and shipyards totaled $75,000. Sponge preparation and packing houses were worth $50,000, and boat supply houses and special stocks on hand equaled $30,000. The total investment according to this estimate was $559,000.62

Sponge sales continued to rise during the depression. While most industries in the country suffered a severe downturn, the sponge industry continued to grow. The federal government even did its part to keep the sponge industry thriving. For example, in 1938, the federal post office purchased 5,000 sponges to "pump-prime" the industry. A spokesman commented, "We have to keep the windows clean in 2,745 post offices across the country." He also noted, "With this last order, we have shot our load as far as this commodity is concerned. We won't be able to buy any more on this year's budget."63 In 1933 Congress appropriated funds to dredge the Anclote River.64 This deepened the shallow river, enabling the sponge boats to travel the Anclote River freely, not just at high tide.65

Sales in the years 1917-1938 fluctuated according to consumer demand and supply, but they reached new highs in the 1930s (see Table 1).
Table 1

Sponge Sales in Tarpon Springs, 1917-38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Value in Dollars</th>
<th>Quantity in Pounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>$870,135</td>
<td>487,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>592,778</td>
<td>355,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>707,282</td>
<td>456,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>672,209</td>
<td>412,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>531,300</td>
<td>404,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>678,153</td>
<td>556,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>734,378</td>
<td>519,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>717,213</td>
<td>508,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>715,197</td>
<td>494,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>660,645</td>
<td>423,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>886,213</td>
<td>474,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>729,918</td>
<td>451,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>706,645</td>
<td>413,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>802,937</td>
<td>475,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>606,789</td>
<td>386,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>422,157</td>
<td>430,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>420,481</td>
<td>373,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>687,813</td>
<td>499,635</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>600,367</td>
<td>388,888</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>1,035,429</td>
<td>628,226</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>1,097,301</td>
<td>561,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>952,258</td>
<td>530,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>1,035,554</td>
<td>423,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>847,210</td>
<td>232,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,364,870</td>
<td>201,126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sponge prices declined through the first years of the depression, but by the auction of July 1933, prices began to rise again. This brought cheering and celebration from the boat owners and crews at the Sponge Exchange. Prices were 20 percent higher than in June, and continued to climb. This extra money immediately circulated through the community. The million dollar year of 1936 had an immediate impact upon the Greek community. In January 1937, community leaders announced plans to erect a new $100,000 Greek Orthodox Church. The plans for the church were drawn up in Greece; it was to be modeled along ancient Byzantine lines. The Greek Orthodox Church traditionally received a portion of sponge sales. By 1938, the Sponge Exchange was inadequate, and plans were readied to enlarge its capacity from sixty to one hundred cells and to erect a new two-story office building.

The New Deal imposed new regulations on the sponge industry. The National Recovery Administration attempted to work out standard codes of hours and wages for the producers and packers, but the many sided sponge industry proved a difficult industry to order. The supply firms, boat owners, and crews formed the Sponge Producers Association in 1932, in part to

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oppose government regulation. In 1934, Tarpon Springs became the location of the first national convention of the Sponge and Chamois Institute. The delegates worked out a code to cover all divisions of the sponge industry in the United States. The agreement prohibited packers from buying sponges in any place other than Tarpon Springs, Keaton Beach (near Perry), or at Key West. However, the federal government thought that the sponge industry had gone too far in collaborating on a pact of mutual aid. In January 1937, the government charged Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange, Inc., along with twelve other distributors of sponges, with conspiracy and restraint of trade by member packers and distributors. After a long struggle, the case was finally dropped.

One of the major problems faced by the sponge industry was the persistent shortage of divers, which limited the number of boats which could operate. The efforts to bring in more Greek divers were thwarted by the federal government's Immigration Restriction Acts of 1921 and 1924, which discriminated against newer immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe. Consequently, some boats worked within the state's nine-mile limit because it was possible to get more bottom time at the shallower depths. This led to many arrests and a rekindling of the diver-hooker feud. The hookers expressed anger because the sponge beds inside the nine-mile limit were reserved for them, and diving was prohibited within that boundary. Authorities
impounded sponger boats and arrested crews. Also, the city of Sarasota tried to lure the sponge
fleet away. Nick Nicholas led this movement, describing Sarasota as the "land of milk an honey." He had no takers, however, and the movement failed.74

In November 1932, tragedy struck the Greek community. Three Greek sponge fisherman died when the jail that housed them in Cedar Key burned. Stathis Johannou, Theodore Samarkos, and George Georgiou had been jailed on charges of drunkenness and disorderly conduct. They were being held under orders of Justice of the Peace T. W. Brewer. State Attorney J. C. Atkins confessed he "could find no other reason for their incarceration, except that Brewer was drunk and admitted to being under the influence of intoxicating liquor." Atkins also said that there was evidence that gasoline had been spread around the wooden jail. The Greek community expressed outrage. Brewer and Special Constable Thomas Booth were later convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for stabbing and bludgeoning the men to death and then setting fire to the jail.75

Sponge diving made for a very dangerous living. Prolonged time underwater could and usually did lead to a case of the bends. The "bends," or decompression sickness, is caused by small pockets of nitrogen which form in the blood and arteries while diving. The bends can be prevented by surfacing slowly and allowing the nitrogen to escape the body, a process called decompression. However, the early Greek sponge divers knew little about this hazard or how to prevent it. Each year several unfortunate divers lost their lives to the bends. The number of incapacitated divers in need of charity further aggravated the community's efforts at dealing with the depression. George Poumpouris was one of the lucky ones; the only injury from twenty years of diving was the loss of most of his hearing. He claimed that sharks never posed a problem for the divers. The main problem was the air hose getting tangled or cut by an escort boat. He knew of only one instance of a man getting attacked by a shark, and the man fought the shark off without serious injury.76

Still, no matter how careful the Greek spongers were, fatalities did occur. On December 2, 1932, Antonio Fataakeis, a hooker, died of a stroke on his boat. He had come from the island of Halki twenty-three years earlier, and like many of the sponge fishermen, his wife and two sons were still in Greece.77 In November 1933, the diving boat Xios and its five crew men failed to return home. The mystery was not solved until February 1935, when the wreck was found twelve miles off Cedar Key by Captain Gahielle Peterson of the sponge diving boat, The Gabriel.78 He found the fire-scarred remains of the boat as well as two battered dive helmets and some bones. Captain Peterson believed that fire aboard the Xios had cut off the air supply to the divers below. Those aboard the boat either perished in the flames or jumped overboard and drowned. The families had all but given up hope when the Xios failed to return home for Christmas and the Greek ceremony of Epiphany on January 6.79

Sponge boat captains welcomed new technologies, such as the service provided by state radio station WRUF at the University of Florida in 1932. Daily weather reports broadcast in Greek aided the sponge divers working in the Gulf of Mexico.80 Sudden storms threatened the sponge boats, which remained at sea for many weeks at a time. The sponge boat, however, was capable of navigating storms and distances. In 1933 the sponge boat St. Nicholas traveled to Chicago via the Mississippi River and was exhibited in the 1933 World's Fair next to the Florida orange grove exhibit.81
A sponge boat captain pictured in 1941.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
The Greek community awaited anxiously for the outcome of an invention by Simon Lake. It was a crawling submarine capable of prowling along the gulf bottom in depths beyond which the divers could work. The inventor began work on a twenty-two-foot submarine which would roll along the ocean floor on wheels and would be used to retrieve sponges in depths of 250 to 300 feet. In the end, the experiment failed.82

In his autobiography, the Rev. John Pappas revealed the problems of sponge production. According to him, even with the success of the sponge fleet, all was not well. He explained how the fleet was owned by individual captains who operated on shares. To recruit crew members, the captain gave them a share before they set sail on a three-month expedition. Often the crew spent the money on drinking or gambling and then refused to sail with the captain. Also another captain might come along and promise more money than the first, leaving the first captain short of crew. This caused delays and a loss of time and money. Bankers sometimes charged captains exorbitant rates of interest, anywhere from 35 to 40 percent a year. Pappas also stated that the businessmen and even the banks took advantage of the Greeks, who, according to the 1930 census, were 85 percent illiterate and often could not read or write even their own language. Since they bought their supplies on credit, they ended up paying almost double for everything. Since they could not add, they were left at the mercy of unscrupulous men who charged them whatever they wanted. "They tried to gyp the captains and crews," recalled ex-sponge diver George Georgeiou, who fifty years later remained bitter toward the businessmen who had preyed off the sponge industry.83

After a trip, the owners figured out expenses and paid the crew via a share system. From the proceeds, crew expenses such as food, fuel, and operating expenses were deducted. The remainder was split between the crew and the vessel owner. The profit margin for the crew was small. Rev. Pappas estimated that in the first six months of 1933, the average man working on a sponge boat earned forty-three cents per day. Since some of the men received higher shares than the others, the majority made only around thirty cents per day for the support of their families.84

Given the vicissitudes of the industry, spongers sought temporary work elsewhere. The citrus industry served as an important employer in Tarpon Springs. The Tugwell and Wiseman cannery opened in 1929. Processing over 1,000 cases of orange and grapefruit juice a day during its six-month season, the plant employed between 100 and 200 people. The citizens of Tarpon Springs received a shock when the cannery closed in 1937, but the plant reopened a year later much to the relief of the city.85

Since the town’s earliest days, Tarpon Springs had African-American residents. Most of the men worked in the lumber mills; others worked in orange groves, maintained homes, or cut wood. The women worked as cooks, maids, and midwives. African Americans also worked in the sponge industry. They were hooking sponges before the arrival of the Greeks, and after their arrival they worked side by side for a number of years. Some even learned how to speak Greek and became divers. The Greeks were racially tolerant at first, but gradually the African Americans were squeezed out of the industry. The black community erected its own Christmas tree which attracted many residents in a Christmas Eve tradition.86 Every January 1 they celebrated Emancipation Day with a parade that ran through the main business district to the Union Academy, an African-American school, where a barbecue was held.87
The African-American community of Tarpon Springs fared much worse than the Anglo-American and Greek communities during the Great Depression. They did not share in the wealth of the bumper sponge crops of the thirties. The Greeks were very tightly-knit in their work, and few outsiders were employed by them. Very little of the sponge profits, which helped the town hold its head above water trickled down to the African-American community. According to the 1935 census, there were 637 African Americans in Tarpon Springs; of these, an impressive number of 250 were registered to vote. The African-American community received very little help from the city. In 1933, at the height of the depression, the board of governors of the Chamber of Commerce asked the city commissioners to condemn and secure the removal of "a series of dilapidated, unsightly and unsanitary shacks" occupied by African-American families. The African-American community did receive help from the community in 1939, when the Jolly Juvenile Ministers put on a performance of "The Chocolate Wedding" to raise funds for the Union Academy.

A vivid illustration of the difference between the African-American and the Anglo-Greek communities remains today in the Cycadia cemetery. The Anglo-Greek section is immaculate, with well-maintained lawns and elaborate tombstones. Some of the Greek graves actually serve as little shrines, with eternal flames. The African-American cemetery lies in an unmarked field across the street. The cemetery is weed-choked and desolate. The cemetery itself suggests the poverty experienced by the African-American community. Many of the graves are marked by two-foot tall, thin pillars of stone. Few have names engraved on them. The oldest readable tombstone dates to 1910, although it is probable that there are illegible ones that are even older. The tombstone of the Rev. W.G. Andrews, who died in 1929, was of a much higher quality. This shows the high regard which the African-American community placed on religion. The African-American cemetery of Tarpon Springs is a sobering testament to the plight of this community during the depression.

Women played an important, if unsung, part in Tarpon Springs history. From the earliest days they were civic minded. Women raised money for such things as the first school building, the first street lamps, churches, general welfare and temperance. The women were especially active during the depression years. In the Greek community, it was the women who ran the free kitchens of the Halki and Callymanin societies. Mrs. Boyer became the first county social worker in the area, but she found that she was able to help only the worst cases until state funds became available in 1935. In 1937, Janet M. Black took a new step for women when she ran for the office of commissioner. Even though she was unsuccessful, she was the first woman of Tarpon Springs to run for public office.

By 1939, most residents felt confident of the future. J.N. Craig confirmed this optimism when he said, "I honestly think that this year will be better than the last and one of our best so far." With sponge sales increasing yearly, times did indeed look good for the city. Yet as late as 1941, the Great Depression had not disappeared. The fifty-three students of the Tarpon High School graduating class of 1941 faced uncertainty. Sponge diving, fishing, or work picking or packing in the citrus industry remained customary career options. College was a luxury few enjoyed.

For Tarpon Springs, times were not destined to get better. Just as the economy began to pick up a terrible blight struck the sponge beds, and the industry was all but destroyed. The Great
Depression and the "golden age" of sponge diving came to an end, and the city on the bayou would never be the same again.

NOTE: THE ENDNOTES 54 – 56 HAVE SEVERAL DIFFERENT ENDNOTES IN THE BOOK

NOTES


4 Maxwell, "Tarpon Springs."

5 Ibid.

6 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 8.

7 Maxwell, "Tarpon Springs."


9 Maxwell, "Tarpon Springs."

10 Dill, "The Glow that was Rome."

11 St. Petersburg Times, January 3, 1937.

12 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 23.


14 Jennie Harris "Sponge Fisherman of Tarpon Springs," National Geographic (January 1947), 119-123.

15 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 44.

16 Harris, "Sponge Fisherman," 120.

17 Walter Corbit, "Tarpon Springs House was Tough" Tampa Tribune (n.d., clipping).

18 Tampa Tribune, July 3, 1926.

19 St. Petersburg Times, January 2, 1938.

20 Ibid.

21 "Tarpon Springs" (Promotional Brochure), 1926.

22 Ibid.
23 *Tampa Tribune*, June 8, 1926.

24 Ibid., July 17, 1926.

25 Ibid., December 17, 1926.

26 *St. Petersburg Times*, January 17, 1931.


28 *St. Petersburg Times*, January 30, 1934.

29 *Tampa Tribune*, January 27, 1934.

30 Ibid., June 8, 1926.

31 Ibid., November 28, 1933.

32 *St. Petersburg Times*, December 22, 1932.

33 Ibid., August 8, 1933.

34 Ibid., September 24, 1932.


36 Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs*, 76.

37 *St. Petersburg Times*, July 17, 1932.

38 Ibid., July 15, 1932.

39 *Sixth Census of the State of Florida, 1935*, Table 5, 25.

40 *St. Petersburg Times*, January 4, 1935.

41 Ibid., August 6, 1933.

42 Ibid., January 11, 1933.

43 Ibid., August 3, 1933.

44 Ibid., August 6, 1933.


46 *St. Petersburg Times*, August 6, 1933.

47 Ibid., November 9, 1932, November 11, 1936.


49 *St. Petersburg Times*, December 28, 1933.

50 Stoughton, *Tarpon Springs*, 73.
St. Petersburg Times, November 5, 1932.

Ibid., January 20, 1936.

Ibid., January 21, 1936.

Ibid., January 23, 1936.  
St. Petersburg Times, January 23, 1936.

Tampa Tribune, January 24, 1936.
Tampa Tribune, January 24, 1936.

St. Petersburg Times, January 3, 1939.

Ibid., 77.

Ibid., 77.  
St. Petersburg Times, January 2, 1938.


Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 78.


St. Petersburg Times, January 3, 1939.

St. Petersburg Times, January 14, 1938.

Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 78.

St. Petersburg Times, January 14, 1938.

Ibid., July 31, 1933.

Ibid., January 1, 1936.

Ibid., January 25, 1937.

Ibid., January 3, 1937.
74 Ibid., August 8, 1933:

75 Ibid., November 29 to December 20, 1932.

76 Corbit, "Tarpon Springs."

77 St. Petersburg Times, December 2, 1932.

78 Tampa Tribune, February 16, 1935.

79 Ibid., March 12, 1934.

80 St. Petersburg Times, July 14, 1932.

81 Ibid., April 30, 1933.

82 Ibid., November 9, 1932.

83 Pappas, Experiences of the Founder, 97.


85 Pappas, Experiences of the Founder, 99.

86 Mary Alice Perry, Various unpublished letters, 1905-1907.

87 St. Petersburg Times, January 1, 1937.

88 Ibid., January 10, 1937.

89 Stoughton, Tarpon Springs, 74.

90 Ibid., 75.

91 St. Petersburg Times, January 17, 1937.

92 Ibid., January 1, 1939.
"RATTLESNAKE CANNERY"

by Federal Writers’ Project

Editors’ Note: The Work Projects Administration (WPA) was created in 1935 as part of the New Deal effort to provide work relief to the unemployed. WPA tried to put people to work on meaningful jobs where they could use their expertise. This meant government-run projects in fields ranging from construction to the arts. Even unemployed historians and folklorists found jobs under the Federal Writers’ Project, which funded research for a series of guides for each of the forty-eight states.

As in other states, the Writers’ Project in Florida sent researchers into the field to study the cultural, economic, and social lives of ordinary people. So much material was accumulated that much of it never appeared in the resulting state guide, Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State (New York). However, typed summaries of the original findings are available in archives, and they can provide important documentation for historians.

The following document is a colorful description of what one researcher found during a 1936 visit to a "rattlesnake cannery" near Arcadia, Florida. A copy of the original typescript is located in the Special Collections Department of the University of South Florida Library.

The rattlesnake has ever been classified among man’s deadliest foes. Now it has been converted into an item of his economic life, a delectable addition to his diet, and is also contributing its bit toward science. Instead of being hunted only to be despised and destroyed, it is now sought by trained hunters and handled as a valuable cargo to be brought alive to the rattlesnake cannery.

This canning of rattlesnake is an [sic] unique enterprise, though yet in its infancy. The only cannery known at present (1936) is that of the Florida Products Corporation, located at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George K. End, eight miles east of Arcadia, Fla.

Several years ago Mr. End, emulating the hero who first ate an oyster, cooked the white glistening flesh of a rattlesnake and found it not only edible but delicious. He packed some of this novel product in cans and in order to sense the public reaction to it, served rattlesnake to a group of Legionnaires [sic] at a Florida convention. The Legionaires went for it in a big way. Newspaper columnists followed up this event and presently Mr. End found himself swamped with orders from all over the country for the canned rattlesnake. The Florida Products Corporation, now in its fourth year, was the result.

The hunters use six foot bamboo poles in catching the snakes, and this process is an art in itself, as some of the rattlers weigh fifteen pounds or more, and must be carefully handled to be brought in alive and uninjured. They are then placed in a specially prepared pen until slaughter day.

The territory in the immediate vicinity of the cannery has been so thoroughly hunted that few snakes [sic] are left. But plenty of virgin rattlesnake territory remains in the "big prairie" of DeSoto County and adjacent lands. The demand is fast outgrowing the supply, and means must
be found to facilitate matters in supplying the demand. Hence the industry bids fair to be a prosperous one.

On slaughter days the rattlers are decapitated, the carcasses hung up to bleed thoroughly, and then dressed and skinned. The preparation for canning follows the most scientific methods so as to result in a beautifully blended and seasoned product. When prepared in approved style, the delicacy resembles chicken a-la-king in looks and taste, but with a flavor all its own.

In addition to the canned product, part of the catch, consisting of choice bits of meat, are hickory smoked and marketed in small flakes as "Snakesnacks" put up in celophane [sic] packages. These taste very much like smoked herring, and are good served with beer, wine, cocktails, or other beverages.

The venom is extracted from the snakes while they are still alive, and is bottled and sent to laboratories where it is used by scientists in the compounding of anti-venom. The fangs are also bottled and sent to universities and colleges to be used by professors in their class room exhibits.

The skins are carefully stretched and cured, and are converted into de luxe leather articles, coats, hats, purses, belts, sandals and novelties. The backbones are dissected and carefully cleaned and polished. Then with a few agile strokes of a pen dipped in indelible ink, grotesque faces are made on the various sides of each little vertebrae, making interesting novelties. These are supposed to be good luck charms, and can be worn on necklaces, bracelets, or watch fobs. The fats are converted into pharmeceuticals [sic].

Thus with very little waste, every part of the diamond-back rattlesnake is utilized for some good purpose. In a few short years it has become the epicurean's delight, the essence of style to the modish woman, an asset to sciences, and the last word in the successful wooing of Lady Luck. It has been introduced as such to the four corners of the globe, and has found its way into the highways and byways.

Visitors to the cannery at the home of Mr. and Mrs. End, are offered samples of rattlesnake, and those who partake are supplied with membership cards in the "Ancient and Epicurean Order of Reptile Revelers" with the privileges of being "hailed, coiled, and rattled at all times."
ERRATA

The following notes were inadvertently omitted from Stacy Braukman's article, "Women and Civil Rights Movement in Tampa: An Interview with Ellen H. Green," which appeared in the last issue of Tampa Bay History, 14 (Fall/Winter), pages 62-69.

NOTES


3. Port Tampa's Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1889.

4. The Pallbearers Grand Union is a Florida burial society, whose Tampa lodge dates from the 1930s.

5. Central Life Insurance Company was founded in Tampa in April 1922 by a group of black businessmen interested in community development efforts to overcome adverse conditions created by segregation.

6. Clarence Fort, a twenty-one-year-old barber, was president of the NAACP Youth Council in 1960 and led sit-in demonstrations that sparked integration of lunch counters at stores in downtown Tampa. The dispute was mediated by Tamp's Biracial Committee, a recently formed group, that had several black members, including Reverend A. Leon Lowry, who was president of the Florida NAACP and a Tampa resident. Lowry went on to become the first black to attain public office in Tampa in 1977 when he was elected to the school board.

7. St. Paul A.M.E. Church, the second oldest black church in Tampa, was founded in 1870. The current structure, located at the corner of Harrison and Marion Streets, was completed in 1915.

8. Bob Saunders, a Tampa native, and Francisco Rodriguez, an Afro-Cuban attorney, were both active in the civil rights struggle in Tampa, where both served as head of the NAACP.

9. Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Dayton Normal and Industrial School for Girls in 1904, and in 1923 it was joined with the Cookman Institute of Jacksonville to become Bethune
Cookman College, located in Daytona Beach, Florida. In the 1930s she worked as an administrator in Roosevelt’s New Deal.

10. The Spring is a private center in Tampa that offers a variety of social services for women.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Some Alligator Stories

"My family refugeed at Seffner at the old Stafford Plantation-during the yellow fever epidemic in 1876. I was eight years old at the time, and despite the lapse of more than seventy years the experience is recalled as a thrilling adventure of my childhood. The trip to the plantation was made in a covered wagon drawn by four oxen two yoke and as the road all the way was deep sand it required a full day. The crossing at Six Mile creek-at the site of the present bridge was the outstanding event of the trip. The approaches to the crossing were graded down to the edge of the water, and the water in the creek at the deepest part was only hub deep. The widow Stafford and her lovely daughter and two sons gave us hearty welcome, despite the possibility that we might be carriers of the terrible plague. Luckily, no infected mosquito had contacted any of our family, so none of the refugees or our courageous hosts were stricken.

"A daily adventure during the period that we remained at the Stafford place was the trip to the big prairie east of the fine old seedling orange grove to drive in the herd of milk cows. This prairie now drained, and much of it under cultivation was then almost entirely under water from a few inches to several feet deep, and there were numerous alligator holes. Alligators of all sizes from monsters ten and twelve feet long to the recently hatched babies were in sight always. ‘Buddy’ (Columbus), the youngest of the Stafford sons, apparently had little fear of even the largest of the reptiles. He always carried a big oak club, and I saw him many times slip up on a big gator sleeping in the sun and crack it on the head with that club of course always keeping out of range of the deadly tail.

"Coming in from Bartow, where we had been to attend a Democratic campaign rally, with Congressman S. M. Sparkman one afternoon, he asked me to stop the automobile on the highway which borders the north end of the prairie. ‘Right here,’ he said, ‘I killed the biggest alligator I ever saw. It was crossing the road evidently making for that lake north of Charlie Spencer's place. It was over fourteen feet in length. I didn’t have a weapon of any kind in the car, so I lifted a heavy oak rail from a fence and stunned the big fellow with the first blow but it took a lot of clubbing to kill him. I wore out several fence rails but I didn’t stop hammering on his head until I was sure he was dead.’"