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FROM THE EDITORS

The United States was born in the countryside, but it came of age in its cities. Even in the colonial period, when less than five percent of the population lived in urban areas, cities like Boston, Philadelphia and Charleston were at the hub of economic, political and social life. During the nineteenth century, industrialization and urbanization went hand-in-hand, each stimulating the other, as improved technology made bigger cities possible and urban growth spurred technological innovations like elevators and trolleys. In 1900, forty percent of the population lived in cities, and by 1920, the majority of Americans resided there.

This issue of Tampa Bay History charts several urban developments of this century. In the opening article, "The Ku Klux Klan's 1926 Assault on the Democratic Party in Hillsborough County," Michael H. Mundt documents the Invisible Empire's movement into cities like Tampa, where it mounted a law-and-order crusade that had some distinctly anti-urban elements. Another side of the Roaring Twenties is featured in Hal Hubener's article, "The Cleveland Indians and Spring Training in Lakeland, 1923-1927," which demonstrates the early link between professional sports, tourism and business.

The next two articles focus on urban transportation. "Streetcars in Tampa and St. Petersburg" features a photographic essay by Robert Lehman, who illustrates the impact of trolleys in opening up suburban development and new forms of recreation, especially amusement parks. Thomas Reilly looks at another technological marvel in "The Birth of National Airlines: The St. Petersburg Years, 1934-1939," which shows how St. Petersburg and Tampa were first connected by air travel to the East Coast cities of Jacksonville and Miami.

The story of American cities has not always been one of progress, as Robert Kerstein demonstrates in his article, "From Annexation to Urban Renewal: Urban Development in Tampa during the 1950s and 1960s." By the second half of the twentieth century, many cities had become blighted by visible decay, and urban leaders sought ways of reversing this trend. Redevelopment took several forms, including slum clearance and public housing, but with mixed results as this study of Tampa suggests.

The editors of Tampa Bay History welcome new subscribers and thank longtime supporters who continue to renew their subscriptions. As a nonprofit publication, Tampa Bay History survives only through the voluntary efforts of its staff and the generosity of its subscribers. We hope you enjoy this issue and invite you to write us with your comments.
THE KU KLUX KLAN’S 1926 ASSAULT ON THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA

by Michael H. Mundt

Since its inception in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan has proven remarkably adept at attracting members by shaping its message to fit the times. During Reconstruction, the Klan was one of a number of anti-black organizations that appealed to southern whites. After disappearing from public view in the 1870s, the Invisible Empire reappeared in a new guise. Resurrected in 1915 by self-proclaimed Imperial Wizard William Joseph Simmons, the Klan grew slowly at first, but it found a favorable climate for its message of hatred in the years after World War I. At a time when Americans sought solutions for social and economic instability, the Klan advertised the catchy notion of “100 percent Americanism.” This ambiguous term lent itself to a variety of meanings, but Klansmen associated it with a defense of traditional American values, Protestantism and the so-called “Anglo-Saxon” race. Limiting its membership to native-born, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the Klan defended 100 percent Americanism by taking a stand against Catholics, Jews, immigrants and African Americans. During the 1920s, these various minorities were identified by Klansmen as the source of America’s problems, especially crime and the perceived decline in morality. This message, combined with Klan secrecy and ritual, attracted over three million members during the 1920s, making the Invisible Empire the largest fraternal organization in the country at the time. Originating in the South, the Klan spread to all regions, and although Klansmen engaged in violence, they reached their greatest strength through peaceful, legal methods, especially in politics, where they managed to elect governors and U.S. Senators, as well as numerous local officials, in states ranging from Alabama and Indiana to Colorado and Oregon. They did this not by establishing an independent Klan party but by seizing control of the local Democratic or Republican parties.

As a secret organization, the Ku Klux Klan left few records, but it thrived on public recognition. Historians have begun to reconstruct the activities of the Klan in the 1920s by undertaking community studies which draw on a variety of sources, especially newspapers. While often biased and incomplete, the press provides insight into the activities of Klansmen, their motivations, their beliefs and their impact on public issues. This study of Tampa Klansmen located no membership rosters or surviving participants. Nevertheless, extensive information has been culled from newspapers and national Klan publications, showing that the Invisible Empire had thousands of members and many more supporters in the Tampa area.

During the roaring twenties, Tampa experienced epidemic levels of crime against people, property and public morals. As Tampans confronted a high homicide rate, widespread larceny, narcotics, illicit liquor and gambling, their city earned a reputation as a fundamentally lawless community. When local officials failed to curb the perceived crime wave, the Klan found an opportunity to recruit members. The Ku Klux Klan arrived publicly in Tampa in 1923, when one of its most successful lecturers, the Reverend Caleb A. Ridley, paid a visit. Pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ridley had joined the Invisible Empire in the early 1920s, telling his parishioners, “I am a Klansman and proud of it.” On the night of January 25, 1923, Ridley spoke at the courthouse bandstand in downtown Tampa, asserting that the Klan was established to
A Klan publication, issued from national headquarters in Atlanta (“the Imperial Palace”), outlined the 1924 goals of the KKK, which were primarily political.

Photograph from Imperial Night-Hawk, January 2, 1924.

uphold, not violate the law. When only a small crowd gathered to hear Ridley, the Tampa Times quipped that most Tampans had chosen to “ignore the farrago of folly and nonsense which
excites the curiosity of the simple minded.” However, this assessment was premature.2

By August 1923, a local newspaper claimed that between 1,500 and 3,000 men had joined the hooded order in Hillsborough County. The accuracy of these estimates is dubious, but Tampa had enough Klansmen to form at least two klaverns (chapters) by late 1923. In addition, the Invisible Empire staged public initiation ceremonies, where several hundred new members were inducted into area klaverns, and in August 1923, Klansmen in full regalia staged a fifty-car motorcade through the streets of Tampa to mark the death of President Warren G. Harding. This well-publicized event caused quite a stir, leading one local paper to observe several weeks later: “That Klux parade is all over but the shouting.” Striking a more serious note, the Hillsborough County Solicitor declared: “I want it plainly understood that in the event of any overt acts upon the part of the Klan, these members will go to jail. . . . If the Ku Klux Klan wishes to start anything, it will find me right on the job.” This stance by the local press and public officials may explain the low profile taken by Tampa Klansmen over the next year and a half. However, it soon became clear that the Invisible Empire had not disappeared from Tampa, it had merely changed its methods.3

In 1926, Klansmen in Tampa and other areas of Hillsborough County extended their reach into local politics. Their vehicle was that year’s Democratic primary. As in much of the Solid South, primary elections were the seminal political contests due to the almost complete absence of Republican voters. Thus, whoever won the Democratic primary was usually assured victory in the general election. At stake in Hillsborough County’s 1926 primary were three seats in the Florida House of Representatives and one seat in the state Senate. Candidates also battled for two-thirds of the seats on Hillsborough County’s Democratic Executive Committee, which was composed of sixty-eight committeemen, each elected from one of the county’s precincts. The attempt of Klansmen to use this process to promote their vision of an orderly, moral community brought them into direct conflict with the county’s dominant political elite.

The primary campaign began quietly in early April. With candidates calmly debating the issues, the election initially drew little media attention, and the Klan issue remained unaddressed. This tranquility was shattered just six weeks into the campaign when, on the registration deadline, over twenty unexpected candidates qualified to run for the positions on the county executive committee in opposition to the previously registered candidates. The stewards of the committee’s status quo were appalled by this action because Hillsborough County tradition mandated that the first candidate to register for a precinct’s position on the committee be allowed to go into the primary unopposed by his fellow Democrats. Astute political observers immediately suggested that a secret society was responsible for the mass registrations, and the local Democratic elite quickly announced to the press that these last minute qualifications comprised “a move of the Ku Klux Klan to split open” the county’s Democratic party.4

The registration of these challenging committeemen exploded the serenity of the primary. The party elite linked the challenging committee candidates to four legislative candidates, implying a Klan affiliation in each case. The Ku Klux Klan became the primary’s paramount issue, splitting the county’s political arena into two factions, as Democrats who supported the established party order (the “anti-Klan” candidates) prepared to meet the challenge of the political newcomers associated with the Ku Klux Klan. This schism electrified the electorate, generating great press
coverage as the campaign deteriorated into “a conglomerate mass of abuse . . . religious exhortations” and “damnable lies,” according to opposing candidates. Amid the brawling, both factions of the Democratic party offered diverging definitions of the primary’s significance to the community.  

Reflecting the concerns of Hillsborough County Klansmen, the candidates associated with the secret order depicted the primary as a contest between the stewards of Protestant virtue and those who were too closely linked to the political establishment responsible for the current morally decrepit situation. Stricter law enforcement was the clarion call of the candidates identified with the Klan. They vowed to fight for more stringent prohibition, narcotics and anti-gambling laws, and they called for the “betterment of public morals.” State Senate candidate Charles Taylor repeatedly made an issue of his own moral standing, describing himself as a “good Methodist” and claiming to be “the crusader of the Bible,” while linking his opponent to the immoral and “lawless elements” of Tampa, especially bootleggers and gamblers. Taylor also trumpeted the endorsements he received from Florida’s Anti-Saloon League, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and Hillsborough County’s Protestant ministers. Similarly, legislative candidate John T. Lowe bluntly asserted that the primary was a contest between moral and immoral forces, while candidate J. Harvey Whitney defended the Ku Klux Klan as virtuous.
Meanwhile, state House candidate Leo Stalnaker claimed the anti-Klan candidates “represented the liquor and [gambling] interests.” A fervent Methodist, Stalnaker concluded each of his campaign speeches with a dramatic poetry reading, which asked God to provide morally upright men for community leadership. More specifically, Stalnaker advocated stricter prohibition and anti-gambling laws pursuant to “the betterment of public morals.”

Such exhortations echoed nationwide Klan propaganda. The Invisible Empire’s publication *Kourier* proclaimed: “It is our duty as Klansmen . . . to accept the leadership in the fight for prohibition, obedience to law . . . and for order and justice, as we have been Providentially given the leadership in the whole struggle for decent Americanism. It is no light task to which we have been called.” This rhetoric corresponds with that of the candidates associated with the Klan in Hillsborough County. Furthermore, just as these candidates lambasted their opponents’ immorality, the *Kourier* observed that “there will always be, vicious and corrupt politicians who will profess support of the law for the sake of winning an election, but will violate it and connive at violation whenever they dare.” This language is consistent with Klansmen’s perception of the 1926 primary in Hillsborough County. For example, Charles Taylor asserted, “You can’t get law enforcement from men who disobey the law and are not in sympathy with the law and who spend their time keeping men out of jail who ought to be there.” Taylor repeatedly reminded voters that anti-Klan Senate candidate Pat Whitaker had built a lucrative legal practice through his shrewd defense of violators of narcotics and prohibition laws. Further, as a state representative, Whitaker had consistently tried to weaken prohibition laws. Nevertheless, in the 1926 primary, he proudly proclaimed his support for anti-liquor laws.

Just as the candidates identified with the Ku Klux Klan sought to define the issues of the election, their opponents united to make the Klan the central issue in the primary. Anti-Klan candidates responded to the Klan challenge by ridiculing the secret order’s moral posturing. Anti-Klan legislative candidate Major Fielding L. D. Carr expressed his disgust for “men claiming to control all the civic and moral virtues of the community when their records did not justify their claims.” The anti-Klan candidates also lambasted their opponents’ compromising ties to secret organizations, while they claimed, in contrast, to represent “the most respectable Christian gentlemen . . . [and] the upstanding leaders of our community.” Perhaps most damaging, anti-Klan candidates decried the hooded order’s reputation for vigilante violence,
declaring that such acts were “a mockery of our courts, . . . detrimental to our form of
government” and distinctly un-American. In one of the more vivid exchanges, Senate candidate
Pat Whitaker condemned the “horrible practice” of flogging, and – at a well-attended political
rally in Tampa's Plant Park – dramatically produced a murderous-looking, three-foot-long leather
lash, which he claimed police had seized from would-be floggers. Holding the nail-studded lash,
he launched into a tirade against the Klan and its murderous methods, which prompted an
impassioned response from his opponent, Charles Taylor: “[I]t is not the law abiding citizen who
fears the [K]lan . . . . [I]t is the crook and those who defend crooks. . . . [I]t is only . . . wife
beaters and bootleggers . . . whom you hear refer to [the Klan] as anything but a law abiding
organization.” In rebuttal, Whitaker claimed that his opponent’s defense of the Klan was the first
time Taylor “has admitted . . . that he is an ignoramus and proud of it.” This flogging lash
became one of the most potent symbols of the campaign, and it was especially relevant in light of
three recent floggings attributed to local Klansmen. Above all, the antics of Pat Whitaker
dramatically reflected the elite Democrats’ emphasis on the Klan issue.8

Other anti-Klan candidates directed more eloquent assaults at the candidates associated with
the Klan. Instead of concentrating on the moral posturing of their opponents and the violence
attributed to the hooded order, they emphasized the divisiveness that the Klan’s intrusion brought
into the traditionally unified Democratic party. Two days before the primary election, at a rally
in rural Dover, the leader of the anti-Klan faction of the Democratic Executive Committee
clarified the issue facing Hillsborough's voters:

True democracy stands for the principles laid down by Jefferson and based on the constitution of
the United States. I believe in those democratic principles and want to support the real democrats.
The issue now is are we to have a democratic party in power or are we to have the ku klux in
power....[Y]ou can help to elect the true democrats.

Major Carr similarly praised the Democratic party as the keeper of the sacred rights of
Americans against the intrusion of tyranny. He warned the voters: “[Y]ou must make up your
minds . . . [to] select your representative from either the democratic party or the klan.” Thus, elite
Democrats clearly defined the primary to voters: elect the “true democrats” or face the tyrannical
rule of a secret society.9

Tampa’s press similarly defined the election. Allying themselves with the anti-Klan candidates,
Tampa newspapers attacked the candidates identified with the Klan for their ties to secret
societies, openly challenged their potential as legislators and assailed their disruptive effect on
the county’s Democratic party. The Tampa Times proclaimed that the “law-abiding, peace-loving
citizens” of the county, who believed in the sanctity of their rights as specified in the Declaration
of Independence, could vote only for the anti-Klan candidates. Thus, the press reasserted the
position of the Democratic establishment by emphasizing the noble principles of American
democracy and by associating Hillsborough County’s Democratic party with these ideals. Across
America, politicians confronted with a Klan challenge invoked similar rhetoric as they
 campaigned against the hooded order.10

Klan and anti-Klan Democrats in Hillsborough County differed not only in their divergent
visions for the community, but also in their social backgrounds. The four legislative candidates
identified with the Ku Klux Klan were of comparatively lower socio-economic status than their
opponents. Senate candidate Charles Taylor had achieved financial success as a farmer and rancher, but remained a prototypically uncouth backwoods politician, whose lack of education hampered his campaign. The three House candidates identified with the Klan were Leo Stalnaker, a twenty-eight-year-old Tampa lawyer; J. Harvey Whitney, the former chief of Tampa’s sanitary department; and John T. Lowe, a Plant City resident of unknown occupation.  

In contrast, the anti-Klan candidates had left an indelible imprint on their communities. By 1926, Senate candidate Pat Whitaker had established himself as one of Florida’s leading lawyers and politicians. Soon after his arrival in Tampa in 1916, he had tied himself to another rising star of local politics, future mayor Robert E. Lee Chancey, whose sister he married. Whitaker extended his political connections, becoming a powerful lawmaker and one of the state’s best known criminal defense attorneys. Like Whitaker, House candidate Major Fielding Carr was also clearly a member of the local elite. Manager of the influential Lykes family’s steamship business, he served as general manager of industrial development for the Tampa Real Estate Board and a director of the city’s Board of Trade. Legislative candidate J. Rex Farrior was the founder of a prestigious Tampa law firm with ties to the city’s Board of Trade. Candidate William Schneider, a Plant City entrepreneur and career politician, was the president of three corporations and the Bank of Plant City. These men clearly were part of the elite in their respective communities.

This socio-economic differentiation also held true for the candidates for the county’s Democratic Executive Committee. In Plant City, the six committee candidates associated with the Klan were relative unknowns who left little historical record. In sharp contrast, Plant City’s anti-Klan candidates were noted individuals. They included a former state legislator and speaker of the House, who also was incumbent chairman of the county’s Executive Committee; a former superintendent of Hillsborough County schools; and two successful planters. Overall, four of the six anti-Klan candidates were members of prominent Plant City families, while a fifth was a twenty-six-year resident and patriarch of a family which was growing in local political importance. In Tampa, the committee candidates identified with the Klan were from more diverse social strata. They included business owners, retail salesmen, a civil servant and an attorney. The anti-Klan candidates for Executive Committee were of somewhat higher status, holding positions as businessmen, civil servants and real estate entrepreneurs. The anti-Klan committee candidates also included a prominent criminal attorney, an accountant and a contractor.

Thus, as Hillsborough County’s citizens went to the polls, they faced two slates of candidates distinguished not only by attitudes toward the Ku Klux Klan, but also by socio-economic status. Although the Democratic party’s elite and Hillsborough County’s newspapers had lined up against the candidates identified with the Klan, they scored substantial victories. In Plant City, Klan-backed candidates won four of the town’s six committee seats. In Tampa, they captured eleven of the thirteen contested seats, defeating four of the five committee incumbents seeking reelection. Candidates identified with the Klan also did well in legislative contests. Although Charles Taylor lost the Senate race, Leo Stalnaker and John Lowe won their party’s nomination for House seats.
The proportion of the vote won by legislative candidates identified with the Klan varied greatly throughout Hillsborough County. In the rural areas and the two incorporated towns outside of Tampa, these candidates performed exceptionally well. In the town of Port Tampa, the legislative candidates associated with the Klan polled over 63 percent of the popular vote, with each candidate winning that precinct. In Plant City, these candidates garnered 55 percent of the vote and carried all but one precinct. In the eighteen rural precincts of Hillsborough County, these candidates won 60 percent of the vote. While garnering majorities in the county’s non-urban areas, the Klan candidates earned 42 percent of the vote in the thirty-eight precincts of urban and suburban Tampa.¹⁵

A *Tampa Times* cartoon (May 27, 1926) showed Pat Whitaker fanning anti-Klan flames.
Several factors account for the strength of the Klan candidates in rural Hillsborough County. The ethnic, religious and cultural homogeneity of the rural areas of the county contrasted sharply with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Tampa. Many of the native, white Protestants who dominated the rural parts of the county found nothing particularly offensive in Klan doctrine. More significantly, as many historians have noted, rural Americans harbored a strong bias against the values of urban America and the people who lived there. This bias became pointed in the 1920s, after decades of migration to urban areas and foreign immigration had altered America’s demographic portrait. In the context of southern Florida, Tampa symbolized the crime, vice and widespread immorality that many rural residents considered inherent in urban life. They saw a direct link between Tampa’s ills and its large number of non-Protestant, foreign-born Latin residents, a cause-effect relationship advanced by many rural Americans in the 1920s.

Additionally, the political and economic interests of rural Hillsborough and urban Tampa did not necessarily coincide. In the 1926 primary, many Port Tampa residents rejected the anti-Klan candidates because they advocated expanding Tampa’s port. In contrast, candidates associated with the Klan opposed such expansion as an unnecessary duplication of Port Tampa’s facilities. As Tampa grew dramatically in the 1920s, it came to overshadow Port Tampa and the rest of the county. The 1926 primary reveals the political manifestation of these tensions, as the majority of rural Hillsborough County voters chose the political newcomers identified with the Klan over those candidates clearly tied to Tampa’s political and economic establishment. Thus, a series of local factors – some of which reflected national trends – helps explain the strength of candidates associated with the Klan in rural areas.

However, candidates identified with the Klan also enjoyed successes in Tampa and its suburbs, although the electoral strength of these candidates varied tremendously within these urban precincts. Historians have noted that in Tampa’s neighborhoods, “residency depended upon ethnic background, religion, economic status and race.” Accordingly, the electoral strength of the candidates associated with the hooded order lay within distinct areas of the city. These candidates fared worst in the city’s immigrant enclaves and in Tampa’s affluent neighborhoods, while showing their greatest strength in the middle-class areas of the city and its suburbs.16

Tampa’s Latin residents most resolutely rejected the candidates identified with the Ku Klux Klan. They objected to the anti-immigrant attitude of the hooded order and the Klan’s advocacy of a Puritanical code of morals. They also despised the vigilante violence commonly attributed to the hooded order. In 1923, La Gaceta – a leading Spanish-language newspaper – held Klansmen accountable for the flogging of two Ybor City cafe operators, one of whom was a client of Pat Whitaker. Similarly, just before the 1926 primary, La Gaceta reiterated Senate candidate Pat Whitaker’s condemnation of masked vigilantes and informed its mostly Latin readership that Charles Taylor was supported by the “masked ones,” whose abuses Whitaker would correct through proper law enforcement. La Gaceta proclaimed that the “beloved people” of Ybor City would “not agree to a senator with a ‘mask,’” and the paper predicted that Tampa’s Latin citizens would vote strongly for “Pat.” For the editors of La Gaceta, the primary election was clearly a contest between “the ‘friends of the Latinos’ and those who wish to see them ‘hung by the neck.’” Although La Gaceta did not speak for all of Tampa’s Latins, it did reflect the concerns of these citizens, as illustrated by the election results; in Ybor City precincts, candidates associated with the Klan won, on average, less than 15 percent of the vote.17
A local newspaper headline drew attention to the Klan issue in the 1926 primary.

Like the city’s foreign-born citizens and their families, Tampa’s more affluent residents sided with elite politicians and voted against the candidates associated with the Klan. In the upper-middle-class and upper-class precincts of Hyde Park, Bayshore, Interbay and Ballast Point, the candidates identified with the hooded order won less than 30 percent of the popular vote. However, unlike the city’s Latin enclaves, the candidates associated with the Ku Klux Klan enjoyed sporadic electoral successes in Tampa’s more affluent areas, even if most residents of these precincts found the Klan’s potential distasteful at best and, at worst, a viable threat to the elite’s political power.

In contrast, in limited areas of the city, Tampans enthusiastically endorsed those candidates identified with the Klan. These candidates achieved their most spectacular victories in Gary and Jackson Heights, near Tampa’s eastern city limits – neighborhoods composed almost entirely of lower-middle-class and middle-class Anglo residents. There, Klan candidates won, on average, over 76 percent of the vote.¹⁸

Candidates associated with the Klan demonstrated their greatest strength in mostly middle-class areas of Tampa. This strength was centralized in northern Tampa Heights, Seminole Heights and Sulphur Springs, neighborhoods spreading northward from the city. In the five precincts of Seminole Heights candidates associated with the Klan collected nearly 60 percent of the popular vote. In Seminole Heights, only one Klan-supported candidate lost any precinct race, and that was by a mere three votes out of 197. Of Seminole Heights’ five committee positions, candidates associated with the Ku Klux Klan won four; one of the victors was Allen T. Stuart, who would lead the Klan faction on the county's new Executive Committee.¹⁹

If Tampa Latins feared the Klan’s reputation for violence and racism and Tampa’s affluent citizens resented the Klan’s political imposition, the motivations of Tampa’s middle-class voters are less clear. However, in the early 1920s, middle-class Tampans – acting through their religious and civic organizations – had expressed concern over the proliferation of crime and vice in the city. Residents of middle-class Seminole Heights vocally reflected this trend. In 1922, they publicly denounced the city police department and claimed it was influenced by Tampa’s powerful liquor interests. Later that year, area residents established the Seminole Civic Club to voice their concerns. The club declared that “the preservation of the moral tone of our residential community is a matter of primary importance to each and every resident of this section, and to this association.” The club criticized the efforts of law enforcers and specifically condemned the “considerable evil effect” of liquor-selling road houses, which served clientele “of known disrepute” and were an “offense to morals and decency.” This association evolved into the Seminole Heights Civic Club and came under the leadership of committee candidate Allen T. Stuart, who in 1926 condemned Pat Whitaker’s anti-Prohibition stance as a detriment to the community’s moral health. That same year, residents of the area formed a vigilance committee to protect their homes and possessions after a rash of robberies. They applied for pistol permits, armed themselves and vowed to rectify community conditions “with hot lead.” Such passion also pervaded the political arena, as Seminole Heights residents often voted in greater numbers than residents of any other Tampa precinct.²⁰
The activism of Seminole Heights residents reflected the concerns of many middle-class Tampans. Throughout the city, the proliferation of crime and vice was a paramount political issue, as voters held the established political elite accountable for deteriorating conditions. Incumbent politicians constantly found themselves vulnerable to challengers in volatile primary elections, and in 1924 protesting citizens had taken the radical step-in an almost exclusively Democratic county-of voting Republican in relatively large numbers.21

The lines drawn in the 1926 primary election represented a continuation of the unrest that characterized Tampa’s political scene in the 1920s. Indeed, other American cities experienced similar revolts by middle-class voters who expressed their lack of faith in traditional political elites. In his study of El Paso’s Klan of the 1920s, Shawn Lay noted that the middle-class was “disgruntled . . . and resented the dominance of a local establishment which they believed to be immoral and corrupt,” and El Paso Klansmen capitalized “on the electorate’s general discontent with the local political . . . establishment.”22 In the 1926 Hillsborough County primary, only one of the four legislative candidates identified with the Klan (Charles Taylor) had previously held elected office, and none of them had ties to the entrenched political elite. The same applied to the Klan committee candidates, who were also political newcomers. The candidates associated with the Klan represented an alternative to the established political order. In addition to being untethered to existing conditions, these candidates more closely reflected prevailing middle-class concerns with law and order.

The 1926 primary revealed a deep political rift within Hillsborough County’s Democratic party and indicated that a large portion of the area’s population did not view the Ku Klux Klan as a radical fringe movement. Clearly, a large number of citizens accepted the candidates associated with the Klan as viable alternatives to the established political order. The emphasis these candidates placed on law, order and morality attracted a growing number of Hillsborough County residents in the 1920s. While the candidates associated with the Klan may not have offered concrete solutions to the community’s problems and while they may not have proven to be effective political leaders once in office, they at least addressed issues significant to many citizens. In contrast, the political elite failed to address these concerns, choosing instead to make the Klan itself the issue, a decision which reaffirmed the dissociation of the elite leadership from the concerns of much of the electorate.

Despite the impassioned appeals of both Tampa’s press and the county’s political elite regarding the potential for tyranny manifest in a Ku Klux Klan victory, many voters saw no danger in electing candidates associated with the hooded order. The only tyranny they feared was the continuing oligarchy of the “true democrats.” In the 1926 primary, Hillsborough County Klansmen stressed their vision for an orderly, moral community. The broad appeal of this endeavor—and the rationality of using political instead of extralegal methods—brought area Klansmen support from a large number of citizens for the first time.
The Klan remained active in Tampa, as shown in this 1939 ceremony.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.


2 Jackson, Ku Klux Klan, 34; Tampa Times, January 26, 1923.


4 Tampa Times, May 19, 1926.

5 Tampa MorningTribune, June 8, 1926 (hereafter cited as the Tampa Tribune).

6 Tampa Times, April 26, May 17 (quote), May 27, May 31, May 27, June 3 (quote), 1926, June 8, 1926; Earnest L. Robinson, History of Hillsborough County, Florida (St. Augustine, Florida: The Record Company, 1928), 378; Tampa Tribune, May 27, June 8, 1926.

7 Kourier, June 1926, 8; Tampa Times, June 3, 1926.

8 Tampa Times, May 31, June 3, 1926, June 8 (quote), 1926; Tampa Tribune, June 8, 1926.

9 Tampa Times, June 7, 1926.


*Tampa Times*, June 9, 1926. These numbers are approximate as the returns from five small rural precincts were never recorded in the *Tampa Times* or *Tampa Tribune*.


La Gaceta, June 4, 7, 9, 1926; *Tampa Times*, May 31, 1926.

A random survey of 110 residents of these precincts taken from the 1926 Tampa City Directory reveals varied occupations: thirty-one tradesmen, sixteen professionals, fourteen business owners, ten laborers, six managers, three clerical workers, three retail and wholesale salesmen, two farmers, a police officer, a watchman and a justice of the peace.

*Tampa Times*, June 9, 1926.


*Tampa Tribune*, June 8, 1926; Mundt, "Fiery Crosses," 96-111.

THE CLEVELAND INDIANS AND SPRING TRAINING IN LAKELAND, FLORIDA, 1923-1927

By Hal Hubener

On July 10, 1922, the Lakeland Evening Telegram reported that the Cleveland Indians had chosen Lakeland as their spring training site for 1923. The selection was not official, however, until August 8, when T.J. Appleyard, manager of the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce, received a telegram from the Indians’ business manager, Walter McNichols, confirming the decision. Appleyard, along with Clare Henley, president of the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce, and J.E. Melton, secretary of the Lakeland Baseball Association, were the driving force behind the city’s attempt to acquire the major league team.¹

McNichols of the Indians had gone to Florida in July, after the team had decided not to return to Texas, where it had trained the two previous seasons. He had also considered both Miami and St. Petersburg as training sites. The Cleveland Plain Dealer noted that in deciding upon Lakeland, Indians’ management had selected a “town near several National League clubs' quarters.” Moreover, the city had a population of 12,000 and several thousand winter visitors “from whom the tribe [could] draw patrons,” along with a “pretty fair baseball park,” and a “first-class fireproof hotel.”² Additionally, the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce had prepared charts about weather, climate and rainfall, which indicated that the area was ideal for spring baseball.³

The excitement about major league baseball in Florida was not confined to Lakeland and the Indians. Seven teams were training in Florida, according to Al Lang, president of the Florida State League. He even suggested that in 1924 the American and National leagues should schedule a series of exhibition games and award a trophy to the best team.⁴

Acquiring the Indians proved to be an economic boon to Lakeland. The Hotel Thelma, which not only accommodated the players but also served as the headquarters of the organization, took in approximately $11,000 during the six-week training season in 1923. It was originally estimated that the team would spend some $30,000 while in town. The only cost to the city was $500 for showers “and other conveniences” at the ballpark.⁵

Baseball fans and visitors observed that Lakeland’s ball park, Adair Field, was the best in Florida. In fact, it was acknowledged as one of the best in the South, and the credit for its condition went to Indians’ groundskeeper Frank Van Dellen, who had spent the winter of 1922-23 working on the grounds.⁶ One sports writer reported that “no infielder should make an error because the grounders should never take a bad hop.”⁷

Lakeland was ready for the Indians. On February 28, 1923, seventy-five members of the Elks Club awaited the team at the railroad station. The Elks were there to welcome the players and carry their baggage to the Thelma Hotel. Unfortunately, the team failed to make connections at Jacksonville, and the train that did arrive carried only two players. They were George Dewey Metivier and Frank K. Cross.⁸ According to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, both players were bewildered to see seventy-five Elks all grabbing for their baggage as they stepped off the train.
That same day a few more players arrived and worked out at Adair Field, including pitcher Guy Morton from Alabama and catcher Al Spaulding. Joe Shaute, a “giant left hander” from Juanita College, was also seen in town but apparently had checked in at the wrong hotel.  

By March 1 several members of the team, including player/manager Tris “Spoke” Speaker, were working out at Adair Field. Comparing Lakeland favorably to Dallas, where the Indians had trained the previous year, one sports writer noted, “It’s funny how [Speaker] can wear a diamond ring around here in Lakeland – while over in Dallas last year he had to place his stone in the bank. Speaks pretty well of the law-abiding citizens of this community.” By March 1 several members of the team, including player/manager Tris “Spoke” Speaker, were working out at Adair Field. Comparing Lakeland favorably to Dallas, where the Indians had trained the previous year, one sports writer noted, “It’s funny how [Speaker] can wear a diamond ring around here in Lakeland – while over in Dallas last year he had to place his stone in the bank. Speaks pretty well of the law-abiding citizens of this community.”  

The players rapidly discovered the amenities of local life. When workouts were over, they took up tackle and went looking for fishing holes or headed for the golf course. Still others were the guests of sporting organizations. Tris Speaker, for example, accepted an invitation to take part in the weekly shoot of the Lakeland Trapshooters Club.

During the first week of training, speculation already focused on the starting lineup. Speaker reported on March 4 that he had not yet decided the batting order for the regular season, but sports writers believed that Charley Jamieson would lead off, followed by Bill “Wamby” Wambsganss and then Speaker. Wamby’s claim to fame was an unassisted triple play in the 1920 World Series between the Indians and the Dodgers. Concerning relief pitching, Speaker was hoping that Sherrod Smith, purchased from Brooklyn in the off season, would be the team’s ace. According to one scribe, Smith had the best pick-off move in the majors. The Indians were in good shape at the catcher position. Steve O’Neill, who batted .311 with the Indians, and Glenn...
Myatt, who led the American Association the previous season with an average of .370, were expected to share playing time at the position. They were backed up by Luke Sewell.12

With the exception of Jim Edwards and Phil Bedgood, the rest of the team arrived March 7. Attention that day turned to first base where Louis Guisto of California was competing against Frank Brower of Virginia.13 By the end of the exhibition season, however, the newspapers were referring to Brower as a utility outfielder, who was a “dangerous batter, fair gardener and pretty fast on the paths.”14 At third base, the club had Walter Lutzke, who was replacing veteran Larry Gardner, considered at that time to be one of the greatest third basemen in the history of the game. Sports writers were interested not only in Lutzke’s ability, but also his hands – reportedly the largest in baseball.

The lineup was rounding into shape by March 10. Jamieson was in left field and Speaker in center. Competing for right field were Homer Summa and Brower. The other positions were: first base, Guisto; catcher, O’Neill and Myatt; Lutzke, third base; Sewell, shortstop; and Wamby, second base. Larry Gardner and Riggs Stephenson were extra infielders. Joe Connolly was an outfield sub. Ken Hogan had a good shot at making the team as a pinch runner. Starting pitchers included Coveleskie, the knuckleballer George Uhle, Morton, and Smith.15 “A more willing and ambitious bunch of players never wore Cleveland uniforms,” one writer reported, “and already they are beginning to discuss among themselves their chances of finishing better than fourth.”16

Lakeland residents took every opportunity to mix with the star athletes. On Sunday, March 11, several dozen “prominent citizens” attended a fish-and-chicken fry for players, hosted by the
manager of the Hotel Thelma. A few players had other plans, however. Some went picking oranges, and Tris Speaker played golf in Sebring. Golf was the favorite pastime of several players, including Coveleskie, Uhle and Myatt.17

The next day Speaker announced a starting lineup and batting order for the first game. It was also announced that baseball’s commissioner, Kennesaw Mountain Landis, would be in Lakeland as a guest of honor at an Elks Club banquet. Before they opened the exhibition season against the Cincinnati Reds, the Indians had an intrasquad game on March 14. Speaker captained the second-team, called the “Yannigans,” and played center field. The five-inning game ended in a 2-2 tie, and one writer noted that some World Series games did not present as many thrilling plays. Speaker, the “gray eagle of the Texas plains,” caught his opponents flat footed in the first inning with a bunt single and made two fine catches in the outfield.18

On March 16, 1923, the Indians opened the exhibition season in Orlando and defeated the Cincinnati Reds by a 10-2 score. It was a close game until the ninth inning when the tribe scored six runs.19 On March 19 Adair Field was the site of the Indians’ first home game of the exhibition season. Unfortunately, the Indians were victims of poor base running and lost 2-1. The attendance at this game was nearly 2,000 – almost twice that for the first game in Orlando. Businesses and schools closed at 2:30, as the town made the day a half-holiday. Cincinnati hurler
Rube Benton, whose pitching career had coincidentally begun in Lakeland fourteen years earlier as a semi-pro player, made the following observation about his first stint in the area: “Wish I had $1,000 to invest down here then.... I would be worth a lot of money today.”

Almost daily games followed. On March 20 the Indians defeated St. Louis 6-5 in Bradenton. Cardinal second baseman and future Hall of Famer Rogers Hornsby played in the game, but in four at bats, Hornsby failed to hit the ball out of the infield. On the twenty-second, Guisto failed to touch first base after hitting a home run, and the Reds won 4-3 in Orlando. The Brooklyn Dodgers went to Lakeland on the twenty-third and lost 6-5. The next day, the Indians defeated the Reds 7 to 4. At that time Speaker was "about set" on his players.

On the twenty-sixth, Judge Kennesaw Landis, “the most talked of jurist in America.” was the distinguished guest at the game between the Indians and the Philadelphia Phillies. He also spoke at an American Legion luncheon that evening. The Indians won the game 7 to 2, as Jamieson hit a triple and a double and Lutzke starred at bat and in the field.

In the next game, on March 27, the Dodgers went down to defeat 9 to 6, as Guisto and Summa homered. Coveleskie kept the Dodgers off balance with his darting spitball. The game was played in Clearwater, and future Hall of Fame pitchers Dazzy Vance and Burleigh Grimes pitched for Brooklyn.

The following day, St. Louis played in Lakeland. Though the home team led after seven innings, the Cardinals prevailed 5-4. Rogers Hornsby, the highest paid player in baseball, had one hit in four at bats and hit into a double play. George Uhle became the first pitcher in the major leagues to go nine innings that spring. Max Rosenblum, whom the newspaper described as the “world’s greatest amateur athletic promoter,” arrived from Cleveland and attended the game.

Towards the end of the exhibition season it became clear that Speaker’s gamble to bring in new players was reaping benefits. Sensing that his veterans were “crashing” after the 1922 season, Speaker had released seven players who had been stars. According to sports writer Hugh Fullerton, the new team had all the earmarks of a first division club. In discussing Spoke’s “get tough” policy, Fullerton said the ball club of 1923 “realizes there is a Volstead Act, and cigarette smoking on the bench has been cut out.”

With the pre-season almost over, the Indians staged a fund-raiser for local teams. On April 4 they turned out for a game against the Lakeland Highlanders of the Florida State League. The contest benefited the athletic associations of Florida Southern College and Lakeland High School. The Highlanders made a “creditable showing” but lost 15-2.

The Indians left Lakeland the next day, full of optimism and with plans to return. According to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the whole city turned out to say farewell. Everyone from Indians’ President E.S. Barnard down to the trainer Lefty Weismann, as well as the press, was optimistic about the Indians’ season. A finish near the top was predicted by many. The ball club intimated it would return to Lakeland the next season, but the decision was contingent upon the city making improvements to the ball park. The Indians had been impressed with community support
for the team. The exhibition games had been well attended, in part because Henley’s Drug Store had sold both tickets and parking spaces, and the city had made the team feel welcome by inviting the players to community events.  

The optimism felt at the end of the exhibition season continued into the regular season as the Indians won the first six games of the 1923 campaign. Indeed, predictions of a good year proved to be accurate as the team finished in third place with an 82-71 record. What kept the team from an even better record was inconsistent pitching. As Speaker said the following spring, “No team ever won a pennant with only one first-class pitcher and that is all we had last year [with George Uhle getting 26 wins].”  

In the off season, Indians management made a major trade. Steve O’Neill, Joe Connolly, Bill Wambsganss and Dan Boone went to the Boston Red Sox in exchange for first baseman George Burns, catcher Allie Walters, and utility infielder Wilson (Chick) Fewster. Who “got the better of the deal” was one of the hot pre-season questions.  

The tribe arrived in Lakeland for the second year of spring training March 10, 1924. “For the first time in the history of Cleveland, its major league ball club tomorrow will be able to start its spring training with every member of the team in camp,” the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported. “Every man is signed; every man is here; every man is eager to get to work tomorrow.” The
article also noted that several of the players had brought their wives with them, and two men, Summa and Smith, had also brought their children.  

The March weather hardly fulfilled the players’ expectations of “sunny Florida.” On the train trip to Lakeland, the team was met at the state line by “the heaviest rainfall since Florida had boasted of a weather bureau.” Two days later, the temperature in Lakeland stood at a mere four degrees above freezing, and practice was confined to loosening up and fielding bunts. The cold weather did not stop Speaker from playing golf later in the day, nor did it impede players from fishing after practice. Later that evening Speaker went to the Elks’ Club with some materials and tools and constructed a minnow box for a fishing trip which he had arranged for the following Saturday. On March 13 the team had a fish dinner at the Elks Club with some of the fish provided by Coveleskie.  

March 17 was opening day of the pre-season, and Spoke’s boys crushed the Cincinnati Reds 16-1 at Adair Field. The next day a game with Indianapolis was scheduled at Plant City, but it was rained out. The tribe defeated the Reds again on March 19, trimming the Ohio club 8-7 in Orlando. Cincinnati led 65 in the eighth inning when Frank “Turkey” Brower hit the longest home run in Tinker Field history to provide the winning margin. On March 20 the team drove to St. Petersburg only to see their game against the Boston Braves rained out.
On the twenty-second, the team fell to the Brooklyn Dodgers by a score of 12-7 in a game played in Clearwater. Sports writers blamed the team’s poor performance on a lack of practice. Two days later, Speaker scheduled an intrasquad game in which the second-team Yannigan pitchers were given the opportunity to “show their stuff” and they won 4-2. That evening the team went to the Elks Club and saw a film made the previous year by the Cleveland Plain Dealer Motion Picture Magazine.

On March 25 the Philadelphia Phillies went down to defeat 6-4. Coveleskie displayed his “old form,” and Speaker hit an inside-the-park home run. The game also featured a home run by Phillie Cliff Lee. One staff writer stated that it was the longest Adair Field home run he had ever seen by a right hander hitting to right field.

At that time the Plain Dealer predicted that before the week was over, E.S. Barnard would sign to bring the team back to Lakeland for two or three years. The signing was in expectation that a bond issue would pass in June. The citizens of Lakeland did take that step which authorized the sum of $87,000 “for the purpose of purchasing and improvement of park to be known as ‘The Athletic Field.’” The large sum of money was required to cover the cost of a concrete grandstand and re-orienting the field so that the sun would no longer be in the faces of the spectators. According to the Plain Dealer, Bernard assured Lakeland’s city manager and T.J. Appleyard of the Chamber of Commerce that the team “would make their permanent camp here if the desired improvements were made.”

On March 28 the Indians played their last pre-season game in Lakeland. George Uhle, called “the premier hurler of the American League” by one staff writer, pitched seven innings and gave up only one run in a 4-3 victory over the Columbus team of the American Association. There remained only a workout on the twenty-ninth and an intrasquad game and a team golf match on the thirty-first. In the golf game Glen Myatt turned a score of 84 to take honors. Twenty-one players participated.

The team left town the following day. A large crowd of Lakelanders turned out at the railroad station to bid them goodbye. McNichols, the team’s business manager, issued a glowing review of the Indians’ second year in Lakeland:

I don’t think we made any mistake in agreeing to come back. This is a town that is showing an unusually healthy growth, not a tourist boom town, but one which is not likely to experience a set-back. We are going to be mighty glad some day we picked it for a training camp.

Upon leaving Lakeland, Speaker summed up the pre-season with praise for the players. He remarked that he had never seen a team hit so hard in the spring. And according to a Plain Dealer staff writer, the team was one of the strongest that had represented Cleveland in recent years. In addition, the World Champion Yankees said that they had to defeat the Indians in order to win the pennant again. Unfortunately, the Indians’ performance did not meet expectations. The team finished the 1924 season in sixth place with a 67-86 won-lost record.
Prior to the start of the 1925 season the consensus was that for Cleveland to become a contender again, both the pitching and fielding had to show major improvement. Run production was not one of the concerns, inasmuch as the team had finished the 1924 season second in the league in hitting. In addition to looking at a number of rookie pitchers, including Lakeland pitcher Watt Luther, the Indians also made some trades. One deal brought submariner Byron Speece to the team from Washington.40

Meanwhile, former Cleveland players were making Lakeland their permanent home. Outfielder Tom Gully, who had been sold in the off-season to Little Rock, had relocated to Lakeland, where he and Lakeland shortstop Whitey Kowalski were selling real estate for the H.A. Stahl Company. Indian pitcher Phil Bedgood, on the voluntary retired list, had also moved to Lakeland and was an automobile salesman.41

Chick Fewster was the first player to arrive in Lakeland for the 1925 spring training season. Accompanied by his wife, he arrived the afternoon of February 21 and told the press that he was “down here a week ahead to get in some golf and then start real hard work with the pitchers March 1.”42
Although weak pitching and fielding were the reasons generally accepted for the team’s poor finish the previous season, E.S. Barnard indicated that there were other problems, none of which had to do with athletic performance. The Plain Dealer reported on March 4 that the team president believed the club performed poorly because some players failed to observe training rules. In a letter mailed to each player, Barnard enclosed a circular detailing two rules adopted by the club’s stockholders. One rule prohibited the consumption of alcoholic beverages from the beginning of the training season until the conclusion of the regular season. The other established a midnight curfew. Apparently Barnard was not alone in his assessment of the team’s failure. Speaker himself alluded to “disturbing elements” on the 1924 club.

Preparation for exhibition games followed a familiar routine in 1925. March 2nd was picture day as the men donned their uniforms and posed for the cameras. Later, the manager and players headed for the golf course. Light workouts were held on March 4 and 5. No intrasquad games were planned until after the exhibition season began on the thirteenth. On March 8 the bulk of the veterans arrived, including three who had recovered from injuries. Jim Edwards and Riggs Stephenson had overcome knee problems, and George Uhle had rehabilitated his throwing arm. They were met at the railroad station by a number of townspeople. One player whose appearance “created something of a sensation” was Garland Buckeye. According to the Plain Dealer, he made Babe Ruth “look like a midget.” Thirty-seven men were competing for positions. The only veterans missing were Harvey Hendrick, purchased from the Yankees, and Homer Summa, who was due the following day. On the twelfth, the Yannigans defeated the regulars 4-2 in a three-inning intrasquad game.

The first spring training game was on Friday the thirteenth, and the team lost 9-8 to Indianapolis, a minor league team, in a game played in Plant City. The score was tied after nine innings and the tribe lost in the tenth. Poor throwing contributed to the horror show. Pitching honors went to Watson Clark, a Mississippi College and Cleveland sandlot player who gave Indianapolis only one run in three innings.

Indianapolis traveled to Lakeland four days later and again won, but that game also featured the dedication of the new stadium. Judge Landis attended, as did several other baseball officials, including the president of the National Association. J. Hardin Peterson, Lakeland city attorney and later a Congressman, led the dedication ceremony, along with Walter McNichols of the Indians. The festivities included the gift of a baby alligator to each player by Chamber of Commerce president D. Hodson Lewis. The Lakeland Evening Ledger bragged that the new field was the state’s best ball park. Confirmation came from Billy Evans, named the “world’s greatest umpire,” who was visiting Lakeland and called the park “the prettiest baseball plant I have seen in the whole south.” That evening the Junior Chamber of Commerce held a banquet at the Thelma Hotel for the players, sports writers, club officials, Judge Landis and others. One hundred twenty-five people attended. As one of the speakers at the dinner, Landis pointed out that the presence of so many baseball teams in Florida in March meant all the newspapers in the country were screaming “Florida” every day to 100,000,000 people for the entire month. “Every time he reads something about Lakeland,” Landis said, “the Northerner thinks it is the best place in the world at this season of the year.”
After playing several minor league teams, the Indians finally took on a major league club, the Cincinnati Reds, and defeated them 6-3 on March 20. Several days later the Plain Dealer noted that with the trade of Coveleskie the team did not have a spit ball pitcher for the first time since 1915. Playing the Reds in Orlando on March 26, the tribe won 2-0. Shaute and Smith combined for the shutout. According to the Plain Dealer, the team, which usually traveled to away games in automobiles, made the trip to Orlando in one of H.A. Stahl’s huge Cleveland Heights buses, “which made the 64 miles in about two hours.” Two days later, the Indians lost to the Boston Braves in St. Petersburg. It was the first time in the pre-season that George Uhle pitched. The Indians stranded sixteen runners, giving some cause for concern about the effectiveness of the pre-season hitting.

The Indians held their last practice on March 31 and that night headed for New Orleans, where they remained until two weeks prior to opening day. Team president Barnard was optimistic about the chances for a good year. But that optimism was not shared by everyone. American League statistician Irwin M. Howe said that several things had to fall into place for the tribe to be a contender. The catchers had to improve, Uhle had to regain his 1923 form, Lutzke had to hit better and the new pitchers had to produce. The pessimists were correct. With a record of 70 wins and 84 losses, the team again finished the regular season in sixth place.

With Lakelanders looking forward to spring training in 1926, the Ledger reported on February 26 that “the first detachment” of players was scheduled to depart Cleveland that day. Boarding the train were George Uhle, Pat McNulty, Homer Summa and Rube Lutzke. Luke Sewell was already in Lakeland, inasmuch as he had become a winter resident. Twenty-two players stepped off the train on the last day of February, and they took the field the next day.

The Ledger carried an interesting story about two young New York sandlot players who wanted Manager Speaker to give them a shot at making the team. The two young men claimed to have walked from New York to Lakeland. Speaker promised to help them catch on with the Lakeland team in the Florida State League.

At that time local baseball fans were engaged in the task of raising money to ensure that the city would be represented in the Florida State League for the 1926 season. Clare Henley, owner of Henley’s Drug Store, was the impetus behind the fund-raising effort for the Lakeland Highlanders.

Five home games were scheduled for Cleveland’s 1926 exhibition season in Lakeland. In the opener on March 10, Cincinnati went down to defeat, 12-3. Commissioner Landis threw out the first pitch. For that game, Walter McNichols had reserved a section of the stands for the Ohio Society of Lakeland, which included both Cleveland and Cincinnati residents who rooted for their respective teams. The game also featured Lakeland’s municipal band, under the direction of John Francis Fingerhut. In the return match, played in Orlando two days later, the Reds prevailed by a 2-1 score.

On March 18, John McGraw brought his three-time National League pennant winners to Adair Field. The game was the feature attraction of spring training and the first appearance of the New York Giants in Lakeland. The Indians won 9-3, and Speaker had three of the team’s twelve hits.
The game also featured the appearance of future Hall-of-Famer Mel Ott, just seventeen years old at the time. “No player has a more brilliant future than this kid,” McGraw correctly predicted. March 24 featured the final home game of the pre-season. The crowd went home disappointed, however, as the Boston Braves won 2-1. Cleveland managed only four hits.

After the final game, several Lakeland citizens hosted a farewell banquet at the Thelma Hotel. The entertainment featured roasts of Commissioner Landis and Tris Speaker with someone imitating Speaker by carrying golf clubs under one arm and a fishing rod under the other. On a more serious note, toastmaster and sportswriter Henry P. Edwards described Speaker as “one of the greatest outfielders of all times.” Later that evening the team departed Lakeland by train. After exhibition games in Waycross, Atlanta and New Orleans, the ball club returned to Cleveland to begin the regular season.

With a record of 88 wins and 66 losses, the Indians finished the 1926 season second to the Yankees. But in the off-season, charges were made against Tris Speaker and Ty Cobb, claiming that they had bet on a “thrown” game between their two teams in September 1919. Both men resigned as managers of their respective clubs, but they were ultimately exonerated by Commissioner Landis. Speaker then signed with the Washington Senators for the 1927 season.

Jack McCallister was named the Indians’ new manager. He had been with the club for several years, serving as coach, scout and assistant manager. In addition to the change in manager, the team had new accommodations in Lakeland. The Terrace Hotel was selected for the 1927 exhibition season. It was also announced in early February that the Indians would play fewer exhibition games than any other major league club, in keeping with management's belief that routine practices were more beneficial to the team than actual games.

Most of the team arrived in Lakeland on March 1, 1927. They were greeted at the railroad station by “Fingerhut’s [town] band, a crowd of fans and damp drizzle.” The players had their first workout the next day. The practice attracted few fans due to the “extreme cold, wind and dampness.” The following day featured the photographers and moving picture crews. George Burns, who had hit a record sixty-four doubles the previous season and won the American League Most Valuable Player Award, demonstrated the art of sliding for the cameramen. March 6 featured an intrasquad game, with the Yannigans defeating the regulars 4 to 1. On the eighth, the team lost to Cincinnati in Orlando 5-1, but defeated their Ohio rivals 6-5 the next day at Adair Field.

In their free time, the players were involved in a number of activities. The Cleveland Plain Dealer showed Garland Buckeye fishing in Lake Morton, Homer Summa lawn bowling, Martin “Chick” Autry tossing horse shoes and Joe Shaute singing along with Fingerhut’s band in the town bandstand. Photographs also captured several players playing pinochle in their hotel room and two others listening to a phonograph. Aside from the exhibition games, golf was the principal local attraction for people in town for spring training. On March 27 a number of ball players, officials and journalists tried out the links as guests of H.A. Stahl. Baseball moguls included the president of the Washington Senators and Indians’ officials Barnard and McNichols. Cleveland sports writers teed up with George Dailey of the New York World and Richard Vidmar of the New York Times, and a few ball players also participated.
The tribe departed March 28 amidst speculation that they might not return. Barnard said that although attendance was down in 1927, finances were not the only consideration, and management was “satisfied with Lakeland as our spring training headquarters.” However, he added somewhat cryptically that if the team did not return, “It [would] not be our fault.” Although the city commissioners were quoted as saying they believed the Indians would return, at least one commissioner mentioned that Lakeland “must retrench in many ways.” The Lakeland Evening Ledger acknowledged that there were “certain expenses incidental to the team” that the city had paid through the Chamber of Commerce. Apparently D. Hodson Lewis, Chamber president, did not want to continue paying those expenses. When the Indians left Lakeland at the end of the 1927 training season, there was no “formal proposal” from the city.

As it turned out, the 1927 season was the last for the Indians in Lakeland. There were several reasons why the team did not return. One had to do with the sale of the ball club. Citizens of Cleveland opened their Plain Dealer on November 16, 1927, and read of the purchase of the club by “Fifth City businessmen.” Two weeks later the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce received a telegram from Walter McNichols announcing that the new owners had decided to select a new spring training site. If change was desired, New Orleans was a natural choice. Each spring, after leaving Lakeland, the team had gone to New Orleans for a few more exhibition games. Moreover, the team had trained in New Orleans in 1920, the last year the Indians won the American League pennant. That fact did not escape the attention of the new general manager, who in announcing the team’s return to New Orleans for 1928 said that “the Crescent City may be lucky for the tribe.” A second reason for the team’s departure was financial. The state of Florida had seen its early 1920’s boom turn to bust by 1927. Indications of Lakeland’s financial problems showed in the sparse attendance at Adair Field for exhibition games in 1927. “Lakeland is not supporting the team in the exhibition games,” said McNichols flatly in March 1927. For the Baltimore game on March 17, the paid attendance at Adair Field was only 110. “Avon Park turned out 1,100 the other day,” explained McNichols, “and in other places not half the size of Lakeland the crowds are three or four times the size of ours.” Even the local fans had noticed the poor attendance, and “the more far-seeing [were] perturbed about it,” according to a Lakeland newspaper.

Very little was required of a central Florida town to attract a team. Major league clubs trained in Leesburg, Orlando, Tampa, St. Petersburg and Plant City, and exhibition games had been played in other Polk County cities, including Winter Haven, Lake Alfred and Auburndale, all within “spittin’ distance” of each other. The fact is that the region itself was the major draw. To acquire a team, a town needed only a good ball park, sufficient hotel accommodations and a steady stream of paying fans. Unfortunately for Lakeland, it could not put the fans in the stands that final season.

Questionable financial practices on the part of the city manager and other city employees of Lakeland may also have influenced Indians’ management in its decision. During the spring of 1927, at the request of the Lakeland City Commission, the City Advisory Board investigated charges that were brought against the city manager, Anton Schneider. The board concluded that the charges were not sustained, but it acknowledged “considerable testimony ... alleging certain irregularities” and recommended “a thorough and further investigation.” On April 6, Schneider submitted his resignation.
The local baseball scene probably gave the Indians concern as well. The Lakeland Highlanders, the Florida State League’s oldest team in point of continuous membership, ceased to exist on March 21, 1927. Since neither the city nor the Chamber of Commerce wanted to invest money in the organization, Clare Henley offered the club for free to anyone who was willing to keep it in Lakeland. No one accepted the offer. Both Bradenton and Ft. Myers also forfeited their clubs at that time, and West Palm Beach, which had applied for admission, withdrew its application after lack of financial support. These developments were undoubtedly a result of difficult economic times in the Sunshine State.72

Given that the Indians and their fans spent tens of thousands of dollars in Lakeland each exhibition season, city fathers and businessmen undoubtedly realized their mistake in letting the ball club leave. It did not take them long to get back into the spring training business. On December 21, 1927, D. Hodson Lewis advised the City Commission that the Chamber of Commerce had made arrangements for the International League’s Reading, Pennsylvania, team to train in Lakeland the next year. There were also efforts to land the Pittsburgh Pirates. City Commission meeting minutes for 1929 record the fact that both the city manager and the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Pittsburgh Pirates in hopes of acquiring that team for the 1930 exhibition season. Lakeland’s efforts were finally rewarded with the arrival of the Detroit Tigers in 1934. Except for a couple of seasons during World War II, the Tigers have maintained their spring training relationship with Lakeland – the longest affiliation in the major leagues.73 In 1966 the city built anew ball park – Joker Marchant Stadium – for the Tigers. Adair Field, renamed Henley Field in 1942, is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and its notable history includes the five pre-seasons that it hosted the Cleveland Indians for spring training.
1 Lakeland Evening Telegram, July 10, August 9, 1922. It should be noted that the Indians were not the first professional baseball team to hold spring training in Lakeland. That distinction went to the Louisville Colonels of the American Association, who trained there in March 1915.

2 Cleveland Plain Dealer, July 31, August 9 (quote), 1922.

3 Lakeland Evening Telegram, July 10, 1922.

4 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 8, 1923.

5 Lakeland Evening Telegram, July 10, 1922.

6 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 8, 1923; Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 10, 1923.

7 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 8, 1923.

8 Although the newspapers spelled the name Metevier, it is spelled Metivier in The Baseball Encyclopedia: The Complete and Official Record of Major League Baseball (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

9 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 1, 1923.

10 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 8, 1923.

11 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 3-4, 1923.

12 Ibid., March 3, 5, 1923; Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 1, 7, 1923.

13 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 8, 1923.

14 Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 1, 1923.

15 Ibid., March 11, 1923.

16 Ibid., March 9, 1923.

17 Ibid., March 12, 1923; Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 4, 1923.

18 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 13-14, 1923.

19 Ibid., March 16, 1923.

20 Ibid., March 20, 1923.

21 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 22, 1923; Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 23, 25, April 14, 1923.

22 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 27, 1923.

23 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 28, 1923.

24 Ibid., March 29, 1923; Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 28-29, 1923.

25 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 30, 1923.

26 Lakeland Star-Telegram, April 5, 1923.
27 Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 1-2, 6, 15, 1923.

28 Adair Field was renamed Henley Field in 1942.

29 Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 24, 1923, March 2, 1924.

30 Ibid., March 3, 5, 9, 16, 1924.

31 Ibid., March 10, 1924.

32 Ibid., March 12, 14, 1924.

33 Ibid., March 20-21, 1924.

34 Ibid., March 23-24, 1924.

35 Ibid., March 26, 1924.

36 Minutes of the Lakeland City Commission, June 11, 1924, Book 4, 184; Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 1, 1924.

37 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 29, April 1, 1924.

38 Ibid., April 2, 1924.

39 Ibid., March 30, April 4, 1924; Baseball Encyclopedia, 292.

40 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 1-3, 1925.

41 H.A. Stahl was a Cleveland businessman who developed Lakeland's Cleveland Heights subdivision in the mid-1920s. Ibid., February 22, 1925.

42 Ibid., February 22, 1925.

43 Ibid., March 4, 1925; Lakeland Evening Ledger, March 23, 1925.

44 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 3, 6, 1925.

45 Ibid., March 9, 1925; Lakeland Evening Telegram, March 9, 1925.

46 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 13-14, 1925.

47 Lakeland Evening Ledger, March 18-19, 1925.

48 Ibid., March 18, 1925.

49 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 21-22, 1925.

50 Ibid., March 27, 29, 30, 1925.

51 Ibid., March 30, April 1, 1925; Baseball Encyclopedia, 296.

52 In the 1925 season Sewell struck out only four times in 608 at-bats. Gainesville Sun, June 28, 1995.

53 Lakeland Star-Telegram, March 2, 1926; Lakeland Evening Ledger, March 2, 5, 1926.
54 *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 4, 1926.

55 *Lakeland Sunday Ledger*, March 7, 1926.

56 *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 9, 11, 13, 1926; *Lakeland Star-Telegram*, March 10, 1926.

57 *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 13, 19 (quote), 1926.

58 Ibid., March 25, 1926.

59 *Lakeland Star-Telegram*, March 31 (quote), 1926; *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 31, 1926.

60 *Baseball Encyclopedia*, 299; *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, January 27, February 1, 1927.


62 *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 2, 3, 1927; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 6, 1927.

63 *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 10, 1927.

64 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 9, 13, 1927.


66 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 28, 1927.


68 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 16, 1927; *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, December 2, 1927.

69 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 6, 1927.

70 *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, March 19, 1927.

71 Minutes of the Lakeland City Commission, March 3, 1927, Book 5, 158; *Lakeland Evening Ledger*, April 6, 1927.


73 Minutes of the Lakeland City Commission, December 21, 1927, Book 5, 263, and March 20, 1929, Book 6, 23. Since 1934, the Tigers have trained continually in Lakeland, with the exception of the 1943-45 seasons when they remained in the North as a “war measure.”
In the late nineteenth century, American cities grew upward and outward. While skyscrapers reached new heights, improved transportation took urban populations farther and farther from the center of downtown. No single development contributed more to the movement outward than the electric streetcar or trolley. Population expansion followed streetcar lines, creating the first suburbs and making it easier for people to live many miles from the place where they worked. Until the advent of electric streetcars, cities extended at most three to four miles from their center core, because transportation depended largely on the speed and distance a horse could cover. Under these conditions, most people lived within walking distance of their job. When electric-powered trolleys on rails replaced horse-drawn railcars, access to outlying areas became faster and cheaper, and middle-class people who could afford the cost of a streetcar ride and the price of new housing moved to the suburbs and commuted to work. Although more of a luxury for lower-income urban dwellers, streetcars still provided a Sunday escape to the country, where amusement parks sprang up to entertain the masses.¹

Tampa’s first street railway system pre-dated the trolley. Beginning in 1885, the Tampa Street Railway Company ran a wood-burning engine with several cars over a narrow-gauge track from downtown, along Franklin Street, to the adjacent town of Ybor City. The passenger coaches were merely scaled down versions of regular railroad cars, and they meandered through thinly settled land to the newly developed cigar manufacturing center, named after its founder Vicente Martínez Ybor. Despite its modest beginning, the Tampa Street Railway Company marked a turning point in the city’s development, making possible dramatic geographical expansion.

Within a few years, Tampa’s streetcar line became electrified, as did urban rail systems around the country. The transformation was the result of a technological breakthrough engineered by Frank Sprague, who worked in Richmond, Virginia, where he successfully developed a four-wheeled device that was pulled along an overhead wire and transmitted electricity to streetcars. Called a “troller” by Sprague, the invention soon became known as a “trolley,” the common name for electric streetcars. The new power source brought private electric companies into the transportation business, and in 1892, the Tampa Street Railway Company merged with the Florida Electric Company to form the Tampa Street Railway and Power Company.

Tampa’s original trolley company quickly encountered competition. In April 1892, the Tampa Suburban Company was formed by a group of local entrepreneurs, including Peter O. Knight, who realized the growing commercial potential of the city as a result of the opening of the luxurious Tampa Bay Hotel across the Hillsborough River in west Tampa. In an effort to forestall competition, the Tampa Street Railway and Power Company secured an injunction to prevent operation of the Suburban lines. With an appeal pending, backers of the Suburban Company organized a new corporation, selling stock to local citizens. The Consumers Electric Light and Street Railway Company soon became the dominant trolley system in Tampa by winning a rate war against its rival, which it bought out on June 18, 1894. After some financial disputes and trouble with stockholders, Consumers went into receivership, and in 1899, it
became what is today Tampa Electric Company (TECO). At its inception, the company operated just over twenty-one miles of trolley tracks with main lines to Ybor City, West Tampa and Ballast Point, a waterfront park on the interbay peninsula.²

The development of streetcars in St. Petersburg followed a somewhat different pattern. Arriving over a decade later, the first electric railway system in St. Petersburg was the creation of F. A. Davis, a transplanted Philadelphia businessman, who organized the St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Company in 1901. The firm’s first line opened for passengers on New Year’s Day of 1905, and it ran from downtown, along Central Avenue, to the junction of Ninth Street and Eleventh Avenue South. By April 1905, lines were extended to Veterans City (now Gulfport). Four years later, H. Walter Fuller took over the St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Company and expanded it greatly. By 1917, the system grew to twenty-three miles of track, including a line to Boca Ciega Bay known as “the Jungle Line.” Increased track mileage allowed Fuller to sell property in what used to be untapped and nearly unreachable areas. Despite these additions, the streetcar system went bankrupt in 1919. However, during the boom of the early 1920s, St. Petersburg voters approved a $250,000 bond issue, enabling the city to run the lines. The municipal purchase was presided over by Mayor Al Lang and was followed by another bond of $100,000.³

Trolleys were more than just home-to-work transportation. The attractive service of streetcars also increased traffic in the form of pleasure travel which was promoted by streetcar owners and other businessmen. Resorts and parks operated by street railway companies, known as “electric parks,” popped up in almost every major city in the country. These parks were almost always located in an area which required a streetcar trip, and even the ride itself could be enjoyable. The Tampa Electric Company developed both DeSoto Park and Ballast Point into popular centers of amusement and recreation. DeSoto Park was used for family picnics and even employee outings. Ballast Point, however, became the jewel of Tampa Bay. Offering bathing, boating and fishing, the resort suited those who liked outdoor activities. Ballast Point also featured an ornate pagoda-like pavilion where couples could dance and enjoy Sunday concerts. Sulphur Springs, north of downtown Tampa, also developed as a popular recreation area with its large swimming pool and alligator farm. Tampa Electric advertised this destination as having “all the attractions of a first class resort” and a Tampa Tribune advertisement urged potential customers to “Try It, A Nickel Does It.”⁴

The St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Company offered its own kind of “electric park.” The Electric Pier, built by F.A. Davis, extended 3,000 feet into Tampa Bay and was illuminated by hundreds of incandescent lights. Special streetcars rode out onto the pier and shuttled large numbers of passengers who would watch the boats and ships in the bay. The Electric Pier was torn down in 1914, but a more elaborate structure replaced it a decade later. The Million Dollar Pier, named after a million dollar construction bond issued by the city of St. Petersburg, was 1,400 feet long and made of concrete. Officially opening on Thanksgiving Day 1926, it featured a swimming area (Spa Beach), solarium and bathhouse. A casino was built on the 12,000 square foot pier head, where visitors could enjoy dancing and gambling. The casino had a central atrium where streetcars were loaded and unloaded.⁵
The simple act of riding a streetcar could be extremely gratifying. This was true in both Tampa and St. Petersburg, but especially so in the latter. Not as developed as its sister city, the area surrounding St. Petersburg offered long stretches of wild, jungle-like countryside, dominated by orange groves. On the trip to Veterans City, passengers could stick their hands out of the car windows and pick oranges as they passed. Fishermen would string their catches across the front of the car from Veterans City to St. Petersburg so that people along the way could see how the fishing had been. The Jungle Line to Boca Ciega Bay traversed dense undergrowth of brush, trees and plants. The St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Company pushed this extension as an attraction, describing it as a bit of the real tropics.6

By the 1930s, streetcar riding was in decline. Gasoline-powered automobiles and buses were quicker and more convenient, taking away much of the streetcar business. However, a reversal of the trend occurred during World War II, when gas and rubber rationing limited automobile and bus travel, and streetcars once again became a popular mode of transportation. The Tampa Electric Company boasted that its system saved 213,000 gallons of gas and a year’s wear on 2,500 rubber tires. In St. Petersburg, winter tourism was mostly cut off by the war, but thousands of troops from the U.S. Army Air Corps, which used the city as a training site, created a demand for streetcar service. The municipal system employed 108 operators, including fourteen women, during the peak of service in 1942.

The end of World War II also brought the end of trolley service in Tampa and St. Petersburg. Residents had long complained that streetcars were noisy and hampered the flow of auto and bus traffic. Bus systems were also promoted as cheaper and more practical for public transportation. The Tampa Electric Company was the first local operator to discontinue streetcar service. The company had been operating its system at a loss since the 1930s due to its five-cent fare which was never changed. Peter O. Knight had continued to run the cars during the war partly due to his sense of public duty, but in August 1946, the last Tampa Electric streetcar made its final run. When the system was shut down, the company had 168 cars in operation. St. Petersburg soon followed Tampa’s lead. In October 1947, the city council voted to phase out its streetcars, although some officials, including Mayor Bruce Blackburn, fought against the proposal. By January 1948, most of the cars had been taken out of service, and on May 7, 1949, the last streetcar in the Tampa Bay area made its final run with windows draped in black crepe and a sign reading “Not Dead Just Retired.”7

While the demise of the streetcar marked the triumph of the automobile, trolleys were an integral part of urban and suburban development in the Tampa Bay area. The following photographic essay shows a number of streetcar scenes from both Tampa and St. Petersburg, as well as some of the more popular destinations for passengers. These photos represent only a small portion of the wealth of photographs and material that document the era of the streetcar.
The first street railway system in Tampa was started in 1885. The wood-burning engine that pulled coaches from Franklin Street to Ybor City was replaced by electric-powered cars during the early 1890s.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
The original trolley line from downtown Tampa to Ybor City carved a path through land which was thinly settled and covered with scrub palmetto, and the jungle-like atmosphere was promoted as an added attraction for streetcar riders.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Downtown Tampa was serviced by both Consumers Electric Light & Street Railway Company and Tampa Street Railway in 1892. Passengers could ride the streetcar to Branch’s Opera House (right foreground).

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
Passengers could enjoy a gentle breeze while still being shielded from the sun on the double-decker street car in 1892. The car, operated by Tampa Suburban, ran from Ybor City to Sulphur Springs, a recreation area where residents could relax and cool off.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.

This postcard view of Tampa’s Franklin Street shows how close streetcars ran to one another. It also shows that at the beginning of the century trolleys still shared the streets with the old horse and buggy.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
Tampa Electric Company’s Ballast Point streetcar on its way to the popular recreation spot in 1910. Open-sided cars were retired by 1923.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.

The ornate Ballast Point Pavilion was a favorite destination for streetcar riders in 1911. Tampa Electric enticed customers to Ballast Point by advertising a “fine restaurant, bathing, boating, fishing and Sunday concerts” with “special attention given to picnics.”

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
The palm garden was a special feature of Ballast Point, where visitors could relax in the shade and enjoy a “tropical” stroll along the path.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.

St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Company car #26 cruised down Central Avenue at a time when horses still plied the city. The trolley company was then owned by H. Walter Fuller.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.
St. Petersburg’s “Electric Pier” does not look like much by today’s standards, but in 1909 it was a popular tourist attraction. Visitors could ride special trolley cars out the 3,000-foot pier which was illuminated by hundreds of incandescent lights.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.

The Casino at Veterans City (now Gulfport) was a popular destination for St. Petersburg trolley riders. Originally called Disston City, it was renamed Veterans City to draw Civil War veterans to settle in the area. The St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway Co. extended their lines to this area in April 1905.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.
The St. Petersburg trolley waits while another enters a switch on the Gulfport Line. The Gulfport trolley was a favorite of winter visitors during the land boom of 1912-1913 because it offered a scenic ride through an unsettled area, filled with palmetto and orange groves.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.

A passenger car and express car on the dock at Gulfport in 1913. Business was good during the 1911-1914 boom and passenger service ran hourly to Seventh Avenue North and Ninth Street.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.
The St. Petersburg corner of Central Avenue and Fifth Street was bustling with activity when this photograph was taken in about 1920. Horse carriages, trolleys and automobiles reflected the past, present and future of urban transportation.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.

In April 1927, TECO supported a local campaign to promote automobile safety. The white “safety” car boasted Tampa Electric’s accident record as being the “best in ten years.”

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
The interior of Tampa Electric Company streetcars typically had “walkover” (reversible) seats with rattan backs and plenty of advertising to help pay costs.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.

During World War II this Tampa Electric streetcar featured ads by Maas Brothers and Southern Brewing Company, as well as the U.S. Marine Corps Women’s Reserve.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
With no air-conditioning, Tampa residents could take the streetcar to the Sulphur Springs swimming pool to cool off. The pool also offered a toboggan and high dive.

A lonely trolley rattles over the Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Boulevard) bridge around 1923. This car is an example of the new Birney cars which were extremely lightweight and could be worked at a low cost with a one-man crew. The Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa) is seen in the background.
Tampa’s Franklin Street was a busy place in October 1925, shortly before the thoroughfare was changed from angular to parallel parking.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.

Two streetcars converging at the intersection of Franklin and Zack Streets in 1937. The vertical sign “Tampa” advertised the Tampa Theatre.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.
Tampa shipyard employees posed for this photograph by pretending to jam into a West Tampa-bound streetcar in the early 1940s, shortly before trolleys were replaced by gasoline-power buses. The puppy would have been allowed to ride for free.

Photograph courtesy of TECO Archives.

2 Goldfield and Brownell, *Urban America*, 205-06. The history of Tampa streetcars is documented in the Tampa Electric Company Archives, Tampa.


6 Ibid., 88; James Buckley, *Street Railways of St. Petersburg, Florida* (Forty Fort, Pa.: Harold E. Cox, 1983), 7, 11.

THE BIRTH OF NATIONAL AIRLINES:
THE ST. PETERSBURG YEARS, 1934-1939
by Thomas Reilly

Florida has been a breeding ground for commercial aviation ever since Colonel John H. Sherburne proposed the use of balloons during the Second Seminole War in 1840. The redoubtable Lincoln Beachey was the first man to fly a heavier-than-air aircraft in Florida when he made a five-minute flight at Orlando’s Orange County Fair in February 1910. Four years later the world’s first scheduled, passenger airline was inaugurated when on January 1, 1914, Antony Habersack Jannus piloted a two-passenger Benoist flying boat twenty-three miles across Tampa Bay from St. Petersburg to Tampa. The St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line lasted only three months, but it carried over 1,200 passengers and logged 8,000 air miles.¹

Twenty years later, another airline went into service in St. Petersburg. On October 15, 1934, National Airlines System began operating from St. Petersburg’s Albert Whitted Air Field. The company’s first route covered a distance of 142 miles from St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach with stops at Tampa, Lakeland and Orlando. Three days after National’s first flight, the company’s founder – George T. (Ted) Baker of Chicago – was asked why he had decided on St. Petersburg as his headquarters. Baker said, “I didn’t establish headquarters here simply by chance, but I did come here after months of careful map study had convinced me that St. Petersburg was one of the best transcontinental airports in the entire United States.”² That statement was a fine example of early public relations, but it was not reality. Baker had settled in St. Petersburg because he had successfully bid on three air mail routes, one of which was Air Mail Route number 31 from St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach. The two others were from Cleveland, Ohio, to Nashville, Tennessee, and the Chicago-Twin Cities-Pembina route. St. Petersburg’s Albert Whitted Field was little more than a cow pasture with a runway composed of sod and ground-up clam shells. When it rained, the field became a sea of mud.³

Despite these modest beginnings, Baker immediately sought to extend the St. Petersburg-to-Daytona Beach route by adding Jacksonville. This was initially disapproved by the superintendent of the air mail division of the U. S. Post Office, who ruled that extension of the line would “practically parallel” a line already in existence. At Daytona Beach, the mail carried by National Airlines had to be transferred to north- and south-bound flights operated by Eastern Air Lines. Never dissuaded by governmental pronouncements that would limit his company’s growth, Baker announced on October 18, 1934, that regular service would begin between St. Petersburg and Jacksonville within three weeks.⁴ Just prior to his inaugural flight on October 15, Baker had already promised that “as quickly as we prove our ability to maintain our schedule, I plan to apply for additional routes which will expand our service. And, as our contracts are extended, we will purchase larger aircraft from funds already on hand.”⁵ Baker was a visionary and saw a need for airline shuttle service long before the well known Eastern or Delta shuttles. In November, Baker talked about hourly service between St. Petersburg and Tampa, planning to use Tampa’s Davis Island Field which was under construction and just about completed. The proposed ten-minute shuttle service across Tampa Bay never came about, but it provides an example of Baker’s far-sightedness.
Eastern Air Lines was indirectly responsible for National’s entrance into Jacksonville. After a utility company had strung either telephone or electric wires at the end of the Daytona Beach Municipal Airport and failed to inform Eastern Air Lines, an Eastern Air Lines DC-2 aircraft ran into the newly installed wires at night and crashed. The airport was temporarily shut down while repairs took place. Eastern immediately contacted the United States Post Office Department and requested a suspension of service at Daytona Beach, which was granted. The disruption of service at Daytona Beach was a potential financial disaster for National, as well as the expeditious handling of mail from St. Petersburg and Tampa. Baker realized this and protested, stating that National should at least receive temporary authority to carry mail and passengers to Jacksonville to connect with Eastern’s north and south service. Baker argued that by not allowing National to fly the mail from Daytona Beach to Jacksonville, St. Petersburg and Tampa would suffer a major economic hardship. Eddie Rickenbacker, the owner of Eastern, protested in vain, and National was awarded temporary operating authority into Jacksonville. At first, National had no office at the Jacksonville Municipal Airport. The company's part-time employee was George McColeman, nicknamed “Sweetpea.” McColeman wore dirty, white coveralls emblazoned with the legend “Jacksonville Municipal Airport” in red letters on the back. He met the aircraft, refueled it and did minor maintenance. He also sold tickets, collected fares and handed the money over to the pilots. During the negotiations with the Post Office and the besting of Rickenbacker by Baker, the relationship between the two airline executives worsened. It is
claimed that Rickenbacker stated that Baker and the people at National were nothing but pirates. Instead of taking Rickenbacker’s epithet as an insult, Baker wore it as a compliment. Days later, National’s aircraft were sporting a new logo – “The Buccaneer Route.”

The Post Office Department finally approved National’s temporary award of St. Petersburg-to-Jacksonville service. Beginning November 19, 1934, flights departed each afternoon from St. Petersburg at 3 p.m. with stops at Tampa, Lakeland, Orlando and Daytona Beach. After the 6 p.m. arrival in Jacksonville, the mail was transferred to an Eastern Air Lines’ flight destined for Newark, New Jersey, where it arrived at 3:40 a.m. the next day. The return flight from Jacksonville departed at 5 a.m. and arrived in St. Petersburg at 8:15 a.m. The speed of the new air mail service between New York and St. Petersburg was quickly realized when an unofficial record of less than ten hours was set. John Green of New York mailed a letter late on Tuesday, November 20. The letter left Newark Airport on an Eastern Air Lines flight at 10:40 that evening and arrived in Jacksonville at 4:17 the next morning. The mail was transferred to National’s flight at 5 o’clock and arrived in St. Petersburg at 8:15 a.m. With the new route came government inspection of National’s equipment by a transport inspector from the U.S. Department of Commerce, who spent a week at Albert Whitted Field, ensuring that National’s equipment was airworthy.

By the end of December, Baker had petitioned the Department of Commerce for authorization to begin a schedule of two planes a day between St. Petersburg and Jacksonville. He argued that the expansion of service was necessary because of the increased demand. Each trip was now averaging one hundred pounds of mail compared to an average of only thirty to forty pounds during the start-up period. Baker had proposed a night flight out of St. Petersburg, but the idea had not met with acceptance because the Department of Commerce considered Albert Whitted Field unfit for night flying. The airport lacked adequate lighting, its runways were too short and a large blimp hangar on the field was considered a hazard. Nevertheless, Baker pressed forward in hopes that the government would reconsider. Anticipating a change of thought, National Airlines tested a ten-passenger trimotor Stinson airplane between Jacksonville and St. Petersburg. In an uncharacteristic display of goodwill, Eastern Air Lines loaned National one of its Stinsons on February 15, 1935, for the round-trip test flight from Jacksonville to St. Petersburg.

To understand how National Airlines System became an air mail carrier, it is necessary to look back at what had happened to American aviation in 1934. In February, President Franklin Roosevelt canceled all existing civilian air mail contracts. Roosevelt and Postmaster James A. Farley believed such drastic action was imperative because of charges that Walter Folger Brown, the previous postmaster, had engaged in collusion with large airlines, a few of which had allegedly gained unfair advantages. There were also charges of government overpayments to air mail contractors. At the time President Roosevelt revoked all air mail contracts, there were 27,062 air mail miles in the system. On February 19, 1934, the United States Army Air Corps began flying the mail over a reduced system of only 11,106 route miles. Military pilots shortly proved that they were not up to the task. Within one week, five air corps pilots had died in crashes, and six others were injured. By the time the United States government went back to the civilian system of contract air mail, twelve air corps pilots had died, and there were sixty-six forced landings. On March 30, the Post Office Department solicited bids on new air mail contracts, and the unsuccessful experiment by the Army Air Corps was replaced by a new
contract air mail system by May 31, 1934. Thirty-two new routes were granted, and the one awarded to National Airlines System was the shortest in mileage, but not in importance, at least not for the citizens of the west coast of Florida. When the civilian air mail routes had been suspended by Roosevelt in February, a route out of St. Petersburg had not been replaced by military fliers. Inauguration of the route by Baker once again provided air mail service to St. Petersburg and Tampa after an eight-month interruption. On October 9, St. Petersburg’s postmaster announced the resumption of air mail service. With the flights scheduled to depart St. Petersburg at 7:08 a.m., air mail letters had to be at the post office no later than 6:45 a.m. Mail leaving St. Petersburg at 7:08 a.m. arrived the same day in Charleston at 1:04 p.m., in Washington at 6:24 p.m. and in New York at 8:30 p.m. By contrast, the Atlantic Coast Line’s railroad connection between St. Petersburg and New York took twenty-eight hours.7

Ted Baker’s flying background in Chicago was unusual, but it served him well in Florida. During the early 1930s, while Prohibition was still the law of the land, his National Air Taxi System had done a thriving business in Chicago, transporting thirsty customers to Canada, where alcohol was legal, available and inexpensive. The repeal of the Volstead Act led to a sharp decline in Baker’s fortune, and he looked elsewhere for new opportunities for his small fleet of three aircraft, which included two second-hand Ryan monoplanes each capable of carrying four or five passengers. The Ryan aircraft, powered by a 450-horsepower Wasp engine, was similar to the Spirit of St. Louis used by Charles Lindbergh in his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean. Baker also owned a Butler Blackhawk biplane, but it was unsuitable for passenger service and was sold before he moved his operation to St. Petersburg.8

Following receipt of the United States government’s contract air mail route, National Airlines had a great deal to accomplish before it could commence service from St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach. Charlie Banks and Horton Hale ferried one of the tiny Ryan monoplanes south from Chicago, and Ted Baker and Russell Mossman flew the other Ryan airplane to St. Petersburg. While making a refueling stop at Ocala, Banks and Hale picked up a young woman hitchhiker. When they arrived in St. Petersburg, they circled Albert Whitted Field but did not land. They saw the coast guard installation adjacent to the field and believed it to be a military field, so they proceeded to the old Grand Central Terminal at Weedon Island and landed. Then they were informed that the field they had overflown was, in fact, Albert Whitted. Mossman had only recently been hired by Baker, not only because of his flying skills, but also because he was owner of an inventory of spare parts. Once the aircraft were in St. Petersburg, Baker’s small crew went to work, overhauling engines and getting ready for business. Fuselages were repainted, and the company formerly known as National Air Taxi System became National Airlines System. The fuselages were painted dark blue, and the wings were a vivid red. Baker set up his corporate headquarters in the St. Petersburg Times Building. At Albert Whitted Field, National had a shop and a small office. National’s original employee roster encompassed three pilots, two stenographers and an expert mechanic.9

On the morning of October 15, 1934, airplane number seven was rolled out of the hangar. It was about to begin the 142-mile trip from St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach. Pete Hubert, a jack-of-all-trades, filled the Ryan with 105 gallons of gas and seven gallons of oil.10 Hubert, Baker and the others shared the ground chores equally. All did everything and anything necessary to get the flight off. One man served several functions – “mechanic, cleaner, ramp
agent, cargo agent, baggage man, gas and oil man, weather observer and any other jobs.”

Safety precautions were minimal. The single engine was checked; the propeller was turned through by hand. The pilot received his weather report, and then checked the runway for cows. It was comparable to an aerial Pony Express. Since the United States mail was being carried, pilots were required to carry firearms. Air traffic control amounted to little more than visually checking the skies for other airplanes. Radio equipment was rudimentary and useless for anything but short distances, so the low-frequency transmitter and receiver could only be used within a sixty-mile range of the St. Petersburg headquarters. Moreover, radio transmissions were full of static, especially in the summer. A month after National initiated service, Baker had the Postal Telegraph Company install Teletype machines at each city served to keep in touch with weather reports along the entire route of the system. Later, they used the Teletype to track passenger reservations. Russell Mossman piloted the first trip to Daytona Beach. Ted Baker, Horton Hale and G.Q. Caldwell, a federal air line inspector for the Department of Commerce, accompanied Mossman on the round-trip. Mossman remained in St. Petersburg for less than two weeks, and then he sold his inventory of spare parts to Baker and left town.

In spite of the early hour, nearly 200 people turned out in Tampa to witness the arrival and departure of National’s first flight. Celebrants included Tampa’s mayor, postmaster and Congressman. The opening of the new air mail route also represented improved service for the southwest communities of Sarasota, Manatee and Bradenton because an automobile carried their
mail north to Tampa for connection with National’s service. As much as people welcomed the new service, many residents complained about the flights being too early in the morning.

Following the inaugural round-trip flight, Baker reported that his airline had made all of the stops on time and that it had connected with Eastern Air Lines at Daytona Beach without any problems. The first day's total cargo was 140 pounds of mail. Ninety pounds had been carried from St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach, and fifty pounds was onloaded for the return trip from Daytona Beach to St. Petersburg.  

National Airlines System operated initially without carrying any passengers. According to one story, on the sixth day of the service, which was a Saturday, a young woman showed up at the hangar, needing to travel to Daytona Beach. Baker wrote a ticket and handed it to his first passenger. She took the ticket and gave Baker a hundred dollar bill, but he did not have change for the fare of $10.60. The flight was delayed, and a newly hired employee, Dave Amos, was ordered into St. Petersburg to break the hundred dollar bill. However, banks were closed, and none of the city’s merchants had change. Baker had his employee fly with the passenger to Daytona Beach with orders not to return until he got the bill changed and collected the fare. Amos returned Monday, with the fare. This story may be nothing more than fiction, because there are claims that National did not even inaugurate its first passenger service to Daytona Beach until December 1934, and this definitely seems to be the case. The Tampa Morning Tribune reported at the time of National’s first flight that passengers would not be carried during the first thirty days of operation in accordance with government regulations. (It had earlier been reported that passenger service would not commence until November 1.) Baker originally did little advertising other than by word of mouth. The first print advertisement appeared in local St. Petersburg newspapers on February 27, 1935, and it was nothing more than a one-by-two-inch insert on page three stating, “Passengers-Mail-Express, National Air Line System, Municipal Airport – Phone 42-775.” After six months of operation, National had carried only 193 passengers.

Baker and his small crew struggled to keep the airline flying. Frequently, they had to pool their meager personal resources to buy fuel for the next flight. Baker barnstormed over the city of St. Petersburg to earn extra money. Dave Amos of St. Petersburg recalled, “To earn money in those days when passengers were few and far between, we’d barnstorm on Sundays. We’d set one of the Ryans aside and get rolls of tickets from a theater supply house, and we’d sell tickets for a couple of dollars apiece to take people up. We’d just circle around the city and the bay and get ’em back as quick as possible so we could sell more tickets. We did all right until Clarence Chamberlain came along and tore out the inside of his plane so he could carry a whole bunch at once, and he took people up for 75 cents.”

Mail was the fledgling airline’s lifeblood. An air-mail, special-delivery stamp was a guarantee from the United States government that any letter carrying such a stamp was to be rushed through on the fastest schedule possible in the mail routings of the nation. National Airlines quickly proved that it was more than capable of fulfilling the government’s guarantee. On Friday, October 19, 1934, Mrs. Allan Burke of St. Petersburg received a letter at one p.m. that had been mailed from New York City at noon the previous day.
Only six months after the airline's inauguration, Baker’s original declaration that St. Petersburg offered “one of the best transcontinental airports in the entire United States” had given way to threats to abandon the city. In a letter to Carleton F. Sharpe, city manager of St. Petersburg, Baker wrote: “The department of commerce is insisting that my company be given adequate hangar space for the proper maintenance of our equipment. The department also insists that runways be lengthened and floodlights must be installed for night flying. If the city does not comply with the requests, my company will be compelled to move to Tampa.” In the same letter, Baker also alluded to the possibility of a move to Jacksonville. Baker’s concerns were legitimate. The runways were too short, unpaved and narrow. The large blimp hangar also presented a very real navigational concern, but the biggest problem was the lack of airport lighting which precluded National from night flying. This probably explained why one-third to one-half of all air mail letters directed into and out of St. Petersburg were being transported by train instead of air.

One year following the inauguration of National’s first flight at St. Petersburg, Baker found himself at odds with the United States Postmaster, the Department of Commerce and the city of St. Petersburg. In September 1935, five months after Baker had received an increase in mail rates, Postmaster General Farley ordered an investigation of the rates on Baker’s line, complaining that they were too high. Then the Department of Commerce threatened to take air mail service away from St. Petersburg because Baker had been ordered to begin night flights but could not comply because Albert Whitted Field was unlighted and too small. Although the city of St. Petersburg agreed that the airport needed lighting and runway expansion, it wanted federal money to do the work. Before Baker departed for a trip to Washington to meet with commerce officials, he blasted the city’s leaders. “Personally I am through talking, but if the city is more interested in putting dresses on statuary and in closing the beer parlors at 9 o’clock than in keeping the air line here – well that’s a question for its own decision,” declared Baker. The owner of National Airlines managed to fend off both government agencies, but his love affair with the city of St. Petersburg was fast coming to an end.

In its first full year, National Airlines System carried only 500 passengers and earned less than $5,000 in revenues. Financially, the airline struggled. At the end of 1934, the company’s assets were only $16,000, with less than $900 in cash. The original air mail contract guaranteed the equivalent of 300 pounds of mail at seventeen cents per pound, for a government subsidy of $51 a day. Money was so tight that National had trouble paying its bills. During the early days of the operation, when Gulf Oil Corporation delivered fifty gallons of oil to the hangar at St. Petersburg, it informed Baker that National was on a C.O.D. basis. Baker always blamed Eddie Rickenbacker of Eastern Air Lines for Gulf Oil’s actions, but in reality, the decision was probably due to the fact that National had little money and was very slow in paying its bills.

Operationally, the going was not much smoother. Horton Hale landed one of the Ryans on the back of a cow near Orlando. The next day, Ed Kershaw, in the other Ryan, lost part of a propeller blade near Daytona Beach and was forced to make an emergency landing on St. Augustine Beach. Three days’ subsidy was lost while the aircraft was repaired. Charlie Banks and Dave Amos traveled by car from St. Petersburg to St. Augustine to find that what they thought would be a quick and easy repair turned out to be a major overhaul. A motor mount was twisted and the engine had shaken loose. In addition, fabric on the trailing edge of the wing
needed repair. To Dave Amos went the job of sleeping on St. Augustine Beach with the disabled Ryan. Banks travelled to Daytona Beach, where the company’s only spare engine was located. The Ryan was towed from the beach to the highway, and the nearest gas station was used as an impromptu repair station. Once the new motor was hung on the Ryan, the aircraft was still not considered airworthy because National had a rule that a new engine needed to run for ten hours on the ground and then operated for two additional hours in the air before it could carry passengers. Shortly after the plane resumed service, Kershaw took off from St. Petersburg with two male passengers who got into a fist fight. Kershaw landed in a field near Orlando and pushed the men out of the monoplane. On the ground, the fight continued, and one of the men shoved the other into the aircraft, driving him through the fabric-covered fuselage. Flights again had to be temporarily cancelled.18

Horton Hale, National’s chief pilot, made front-page headlines when he reported sighting, a sea monster in the Atlantic Ocean. Flying along the coast at an altitude of 500 feet about fifteen miles south of St. Augustine, Hale sighted the monster, which he described as “black and as large as an ordinary elephant.” Hale decreased altitude and circled for a better view. He claimed that the animal was frightened by the aircraft’s engine and swam 500 feet off shore, never to be sighted again.19

Erwin J. Kershaw, who had worked for Ted Baker’s Chicago-based National Air Taxi System, complained about the weather in Florida. Recalling the early days in Florida, Kershaw later declared: “There was a spirit of adventure then. One engine, no navigational aids, grass runways. And weather – weather you couldn’t fly over; weather you couldn’t fly around because the distance was too great. So, you either flew real low under it, or barged through it and prayed. But usually you just waited. We took a lot of delays in those days.”20

By the second year of operation, Baker and his employees found themselves with more demand for service than they had capacity. The increased demand was a blessing, but brought problems. The two Ryan monoplanes no longer provided enough capacity. In addition, National’s limited success also threatened to breed competition. Baker was worried about possible competition by St. Petersburg-based Gulf Airlines, which existed only on paper, but it was owned by Jerome A. Waterman, an executive with the Maas Brothers department store. Waterman had also sought the run from St. Petersburg to Daytona Beach, bidding twenty cents a mile to Baker’s seventeen cents. Another possible competitor was Eastern Air Lines, which had previously operated the route.

Because of the increased demand and the threat of competition, Baker realized that he needed to replace the two Ryan aircraft. Even in the fledgling days of the airline industry, advanced technology was at hand to solve the problem. In this case, the remedy took the form of two eight-passenger Stinson SM-6000 trimotor airplanes that became part of the fleet in 1935. National lacked its own financial resources, so Baker was forced to borrow money from Harry Parker, owner of the Flash-Tric Sign Company in Chicago. Baker used these funds to buy two second-hand Stinsons. The first was purchased from Licon Airways headquartered in New York, and Baker went there in late March and personally flew the aircraft to St. Petersburg. The flight took ten hours, with refueling stops at Washington, Richmond, Raleigh, Charleston and Jacksonville. On the flight Baker was accompanied by his wife’s sister and Albert E. Theis,
owner of Licon Airways. Within a week, Horton Hale and E.J. Kershaw were examined by a Department of Commerce inspector and found fit to fly the Stinson. The other Stinson came from Western Airlines.21

With the arrival of the Stinsons, National also hired its first flight attendant, Charlotte Georgia. She had worked behind the cosmetics counter at the Woolworth store in St. Petersburg’s Snell Building at the corner of 4th Street and Central Avenue. The first uniform she wore at National Airlines was made at home by her and her mother. The eight-passenger trimotor Stinsons were fragile machines and their center of gravity was sensitive. Georgia recalled, “When I walked from one end of the plane to the other, the pilot had to adjust the stabilizer. We didn’t serve any food, didn’t have restrooms. I used to tell passengers where we were, pass out cigarettes, gum, magazines.” Aircraft were not pressurized, which wrought havoc on passengers’ ears, so one of the most important duties of the flight attendant was passing around a small, black leather box full of Chiclets to aid in relieving ear pressure during flight. At the time, a typical advertisement for an airline “hostess” read, “Registered nurses, age 21 to 26, height 5 feet 2 inches to 5 feet 5 inches, weight 100 to 125 pounds.” For passing out chewing gum and enduring ear aches, a flight attendant earned from $100 to $125 a month, plus four dollars a day as an expense allowance.22
National Airlines quickly established an enviable record of reliability. In April 1935, the company held the distinction of being the only domestic airline to complete 100 percent of its scheduled flights. Unlike the other thirty-one air-mail routes in the country, it was seldom necessary to cancel or delay flights on National’s Florida route, except during the hurricane season. On September 5 and 6, 1935, National was forced to shut its operation down because of a major hurricane, which produced Florida’s lowest barometric reading to date when it fell to 26.98 inches. For those two days, the mail went to Jacksonville by train.\footnote{23}

The first Stinson departed for Jacksonville on April 8, 1935, with Horton Hale and Erwin Kershaw sharing the controls. The six passengers included Ted Baker and Department of Commerce inspectors G.Q. Caldwell and Jerome Annis. The daily flights originated in Jacksonville at 6:30 a.m. and arrived in St. Petersburg at 9 a.m. The return flight departed St. Petersburg at 4:45 p.m. and arrived in Jacksonville at 7:15 p.m. Intermediate stops were at Tampa, Lakeland, Orlando and Daytona Beach. The one-way fare from St. Petersburg to Jacksonville was $16.68 and a round trip cost $30.30. Seven-day, round-trip excursion fares were available for a daily rate of $20.02.\footnote{24}

In 1936, Ted Baker gave a report on the status of his airline. It read more like a travelogue then an operational report.

While our route is one of the shortest in the country, being 262 miles long, it is over some interesting terrain. Leaving Jacksonville, we fly down the beach of the Atlantic Ocean to Daytona Beach. From Daytona Beach we fly overland to Orlando, crossing numerous swamps, forests, and lakes. From Lakeland to Orlando, the air traveler is impressed with the number and symmetry of the citrus groves below. From Lakeland to Tampa we fly over some of the largest phosphate mines, as well as over Plant City, which is known as the Strawberry City. Tampa is, as you know, the Cigar City of the country, as well as an important seaport. At this city they are building a beautiful new airport which is nearly completed on Davis Island within a mile and a half of the post office. From Tampa we fly over beautiful Tampa Bay, the rendezvous of pirates in earlier days, to St. Petersburg, with its downtown airport. Our passenger and express business in 1936 has increased from three to four hundred percent over 1935. Our mail poundage has more than doubled, and we look for additional big increases during the coming winter season, at which time we contemplate operating new all metal multi-engine planes.\footnote{25}

Baker never hesitated to exaggerate. In 1936, National carried 1,613 passengers compared to 887 in 1935, for an 82 percent increase. His 1936 mail was 10,658 pounds, compared to 7,075 pounds in 1935, for a 50 percent increase. National was still very small, when compared to Eastern Air Lines' 1935 totals of 87,389 passengers and 727,960 pounds of mail.\footnote{26}

However, National continued to grow. In 1937, after several attempts, National Airlines System merged with Jerome Waterman’s Gulf Airlines. On July 8, 1937, the company was incorporated under the laws of the state of Florida as Gulf National Airlines. Ted Baker soon dropped Gulf from the name, and the company became known as National Airlines. The merger had little impact on Baker, other than to eliminate a possible competitor and add Waterman to National’s board of directors. The \textit{St. Petersburg Times} reported that the new name was National Airlines Florida System.\footnote{27}

In January 1937, routes were extended from St. Petersburg and Tampa to Miami with stops at Sarasota and Fort Myers. On January 5, round-trip service was inaugurated between St.
Petersburg and Miami. At first, the service operated only on Tuesday and Friday, but on February 1, it became daily. Ten-passenger Stinsons were used on the flights, which departed St. Petersburg at 10 a.m. and arrived in Miami at 11:59 a.m. National’s flights connected with Pan American’s service leaving for Havana, Cuba, at 1 p.m. Return flights left Miami at 3 p.m. and arrived in St. Petersburg at 4:59 p.m. The inaugural service did not get off to a smooth start. With St. Petersburg’s mayor and postmaster on hand and the ceremonies concluded, the Stinson taxied out toward the end of the runway. The pilot ran the engines up and checked all three engines for magneto drops. Everything was perfect, but as the pilot pulled onto the runway, the tire on the right landing gear blew. The aircraft tilted onto its right side, and passengers were forced to deplane. Sitting on the end of the runway, the aircraft was jacked up, and the damaged tire and wheel removed. The tire seemed frozen to the wheel, and workers were forced to saw through the tire to remove it. Two hours later, the inaugural St. Petersburg-to-Miami flight was on its way. The one-way air fare from St. Petersburg to Tampa was $1.50, to Daytona Beach $9.90 and to Miami $14.70. By October 15, 1937, only three years after the airline’s inauguration, Baker claimed that the combined annual mileage of all the company's flights had reached more than one million miles.  

The year 1937 was difficult for National, at least from the standpoint of carrying passengers. Demand continued strong, but the company’s passenger revenues fell because of a price-cutting war precipitated by several of Florida’s unsubsidized airlines. During this period, Florida
Airlines served the Jacksonville, Tampa and Sarasota markets with Ford AT Tri-Motor aircraft, affectionately called the “Tin Goose.” Air mail carriers were regulated, but any airline was free to carry passengers and charge whatever the local market would bear.

In order to meet the increased demand and to service the company’s newly expanded route system, National purchased a ten-passenger Lockheed Electra 10 A aircraft. The low-wing, twin-engine aircraft was capable of a maximum speed of 185 miles an hour. The Lockheed Electra shared the distinction of being the airline’s first all-metal airplane and the first it had ever purchased that was not second-hand. The Electra service was inaugurated in September 1937 with Florida’s Seminole Indians participating in the ceremonies. This was also the first aircraft in National’s fleet to require a copilot. National eventually purchased a total of four Lockheed L-10 Electras. Two were ordered directly from Lockheed, and two used airplanes were purchased from other airlines. With the new aircraft came a need for further professionalism. Baker became uniform conscious, so street clothes would no longer do for his crews. National’s employees began wearing dark blue serge suits, blue shirts and neckties. Hats also became part of the National Airlines System uniform.

In early 1938 the United States Congress approved the Civil Aeronautics Act, which was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on June 23. The law provided a number of protections that were important not only to National Airlines, but also for every other air carrier. Most importantly, “Grandfather Rights” provided permanent route certification for airlines already in existence. As part of the act, the Civil Aeronautics Authority (later the Civil Aeronautics Board) was established. In the future, any airline wishing to operate a route, whether passenger or mail, needed route certification from the new agency. Shortly after adoption of the law, Baker petitioned the Civil Aeronautics Authority for authorization to provide service from Daytona Beach and Jacksonville on a permanent basis, but approval was not immediately forthcoming.

In 1938, National underwent a further route expansion and entered the interstate market by receiving air mail route number 39 between Jacksonville and New Orleans. The new 531-mile service was inaugurated on November 1. The first flight carried mail, company officials and employees. The service held great significance for the cities served on the route because it was the first time in history that mail was flown directly between Jacksonville and New Orleans. The company did not receive government authorization to carry passengers over the route until December 21. The trip was definitely not nonstop. The flight departed Jacksonville at 3:15 p.m. and arrived in New Orleans at 6:35 a.m. the next day, but it linked northeast Florida to the west with stops at Valdosta, Georgia; Tallahassee, Marianna, Panama City and Pensacola, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; and Gulfport, Mississippi. Thus, the company served five states. As welcome as the Jacksonville-to-New Orleans service was, it presented problems for Baker. The Post Office later revoked National’s temporary route authority between Daytona Beach and Jacksonville, so National was then forced to operate two unconnected routes. Route 31 served Daytona Beach to Miami (via Orlando, Lakeland, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota and Ft. Myers). The company’s route 39 provided service between Jacksonville and New Orleans. In January 1939, Baker met with the Civil Aeronautics Authority to request authority to expand the Daytona Beach-Miami route into Jacksonville. The action would have combined Baker’s two individual air mail routes. Government approval was slow in coming, and Baker did not receive...
authority to do so until March 1940. This was the first route case ever heard by the newly formed Civil Aeronautics Authority.²⁹

In the fall of 1939, National Airlines abandoned its St. Petersburg office on the second floor of the St. Petersburg Times Building. A small, rundown house on the Jacksonville Municipal Airport became Ted Baker’s headquarters. From an operations standpoint the move made sense. Jacksonville was the airline’s hub with flights going south and west. Baker also believed, and rightly so, that St. Petersburg and its officials had not taken much interest in air mail, passenger travel, or his airline. In the five years since the company’s birth, the cities of Tampa, Jacksonville and Miami had actively pursued Baker. St. Petersburg’s leaders never saw fit to do so.³⁰

In its subsequent years, National Airlines scored many firsts. On February 14, 1946, using a Douglas DC-4, National inaugurated the first non-stop service between New York and Miami. Equipped with an up-to-date, four-engine fleet, National turned its attention to marketing in 1950. The company became the first airline to introduce low coach fares between the Northeast and Florida and was the first to provide Florida package vacations, which were instrumental in changing Florida’s economy. These programs started a trend which extended the state’s traditionally short winter season and helped turn Florida into a year-round vacation destination. In 1958, National became the first airline to offer pure jet service in the United States, when it inaugurated Boeing-707 service between Miami and New York. The 707’s had cruising speeds approximately twice that of the most advanced propeller airplanes and made the New York-to-Miami trip in only 142 minutes with 111 passengers.³¹

Lewis B. Maytag, Jr., head of the Maytag washing machine empire and the onetime president of Frontier Airlines, purchased a controlling interest in National Airlines in April 1962. He became chief executive officer. George Baker remained as chairman of the board, but soon resigned that post. Maytag then became chairman of the board. Baker did not live to enjoy the profits of the sale of National Airlines. While vacationing in Europe in 1963, he died of a heart attack.

The small palmetto-hopping airline that was founded in St. Petersburg in 1934 continued its growth until 1980 when it merged with Pan American World Airways. The merger was intended to provide a domestic feed to Pan American’s international network. It was hoped that the combination of National’s domestic routes and Pan American’s global system would bring greater benefits than either airline could provide alone. On January 7, 1980, Pan American’s president told a roomful of reporters that, “This is a merger of equals, each with unique skills and strengths. We welcome National people as equals.”³²

Born in the depths of the Great Depression in St. Petersburg, National Airlines climbed steadily throughout its forty-six year history. From its start as an air mail contractor in Florida, National grew to an international air network of 29,000 route miles serving forty-one cities in twelve states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Great Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland.³³ In National’s first year of operation, less than five hundred passengers were carried. In its final year of service, nearly seven million passengers flew on National’s airplanes. Baker’s small airline had been put together with assets valued at less than $20,000. The company’s balance sheet at the end of 1979 showed assets of approximately $500
A 1946 ad for National’s New York-to-Havana service, which included a stop in Tampa.
million. In 1934, Ted Baker and his six employees struggled to keep two small airplanes flying. When National Airlines merged with Pan American, National’s fleet of fifty-six aircraft was supported by nearly 8,000 employees, few of whom probably had any idea that the giant international carrier had begun as an air mail company in St. Petersburg.


2 St. Petersburg Times, October 19, 1934.


4 St. Petersburg Times, October 12, 19, 1934.

5 St. Petersburg Independent, October 20, 1975.

6 St. Petersburg Times, November 22, 1934.


9 Ibid.

10 National Airlines System Flight Clearance Form, October 15, 1934, in possession of author.


12 St. Petersburg Times, October 16, 1934.

13 St. Petersburg Times, October 11, 1970; National Airlines System Timetable and Fare Sheet, April 28, 1935; Brad Williams, The Anatomy of an Airline (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970); 29; St. Petersburg Times, February 27, 1936, October 15, 1937; Tampa Morning Tribune, October 10, 16, 1934.

14 National Now, 35 (September 1978), 14.

15 St. Petersburg Times, October 19, 1934.

16 George T. Baker to Carleton F. Sharpe, April 28, 1935, in possession of author.


18 Williams, Anatomy of an Airline, 51.

19 St. Petersburg Times, November 23, 1934.


21 Williams, Anatomy of an Airline, 31.

23 Ibid., September 7, 1935.

24 National Airlines System Timetable and Fare Sheet, April 28, 1935, in possession of author.

25 Cearley, National Airline of the Stars, 8.

26 Aviation, 35 (April 1936), 68; ibid., 36, (April 1937), 77.

27 St. Petersburg Times, July 4, 1936.


29 St. Petersburg Times, November 2, 1938; National Airlines Miami-Daytona Beach Timetable, Effective August 1, 1939, and National Airlines Jacksonville-New Orleans Timetable, Effective February 1, 1939, in possession of author.

30 Williams, Anatomy of an Airline, 57.


32 Pan Am Clipper, 6 (January-February 1980), 1.

FROM ANNEXATION TO URBAN RENEWAL: URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN TAMPA DURING THE 1950s AND 1960s
by Robert Kerstein

Modern Tampa dates from World War II, which jump-started the city’s ailing economy. The temporary boost provided by the significant presence of federal personnel and dollars sparked other changes. In 1945 the citizens of Tampa passed referenda which created a modified governmental structure for the city of just over 100,000 residents and also two new governing institutions with specialized concerns – the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority and the Hillsborough County Port Authority. These changes were designed to enable the community to pursue growth initiatives in the postwar economy. However, vestiges of old Tampa remained. In 1950 the Kefauver Committee hearings held in Tampa publicized what most residents already knew – the new governing structures coexisted with remnants of the crime and corruption that had plagued the community for decades. This corruption contributed to the continuation of the image of Tampa as a “hell hole,” an image which threatened to operate against stimulating growth of the city.¹

Soon, a somewhat reconstituted business community engaged in efforts with political office holders to reinvigorate growth initiatives. The earliest of these initiatives began in the late 1940s and ultimately led to the 1953 annexation which added dramatically to the geographical size of the city and doubled its population. Later efforts included the purchase of land owned by the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL) railroad on the east side of the Hillsborough River and the creation of three urban renewal projects in and near downtown Tampa, as well as other initiatives in the downtown area that were characterized as redeveloping land use to strengthen Tampa’s role as the business hub of the west central region of Florida and as a destination for tourists.²

By the end of the war, it appeared clear that Tampa’s economic base was no longer going to rely primarily on cigar manufacturing. A more diverse economic base was sought by the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of 100, the business recruiting arm of the Chamber that was formed in 1954, under the leadership of Scott Christopher who had become the Chamber’s chief executive in 1951. Business services and tourism were seen as crucial to Tampa’s economic development, and renewal in the downtown area and Ybor City fit well with this strategy. Some of the projects brought unequivocal gains, such as the purchase of the ACL land which replaced railroad loading and other business activity along the river. The urban renewal projects, however, resulted in significant displacement of lower and moderate income citizens, primarily African Americans and Latins, and had more limited positive results. Those who were displaced by urban renewal generally had no influential representatives to voice their interests, and they had to pay the cost of programs that were ostensibly to enhance community well-being in “the long run.”

Enlarging the city’s boundaries became the first step in postwar development. The Chamber of Commerce voted to support annexation to expand the city limits of Tampa as early as 1944, but charter reform to change the structure of Tampa’s government became a higher priority. Annexation moved near the top of the Chamber’s agenda by 1947. It also won the support of the
Junior Chamber of Commerce, an active organization of younger professionals and business people who took the lead in reform efforts in Tampa, and annexation was endorsed by the two major newspapers, the *Tampa Daily Times* and the *Tampa Morning Tribune*. An examination of newspaper articles and minutes of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce preceding an unsuccessful annexation referendum on August 5, 1947, provides a good indication of the rationale for expanding the city limits.  

Advocates of annexation contended that the city limits of Tampa had to expand in order to accommodate prospective growth. For example, the *Tampa Daily Times* emphasized that Jacksonville and Miami each had three times the twenty-four square miles of Tampa. In addition, Miami and Jacksonville each had a larger population than Tampa, and St. Petersburg and Orlando could surpass Tampa’s population if no annexation occurred. On the other hand, the secretary-manager of the Chamber asserted that Tampa would become the forty-seventh or forty-eighth largest city in the nation, rather than its current eighty-fourth rank, if the proposed annexation were accomplished. A related argument was that industries were more likely to locate in the area after annexation, providing employment opportunities for citizens. Joseph R. Mickler, a publicist for the Chamber, noted that because cities such as Miami and Jacksonville were growing more rapidly than Tampa, many industries chose to establish branch plants in Tampa while their major factories went to faster-growing cities.  

The proponents of annexation also contended that suburbanites would benefit, in spite of what many suburban residents argued. As one advocate put it, “[W]e suburban residents cannot separate our lives or futures from the future of Tampa... If Tampa prospers, then we will prosper in our jobs and in our business. If Tampa stagnates from a slow process of strangulation, then we will suffer as individuals in a like manner.” In addition to economic considerations, it was argued that suburbanites incorporated into Tampa would benefit politically. According to W.J. Barritt, Jr., the chair of the Civic Affairs Committee of the Chamber and also head of the Greater Tampa Annexation Committee that was formed to coalesce support for the effort, suburbanites had an interest in Tampa’s growth and prosperity, but were unable to vote or have a voice in government. After annexation, political participation would be expanded.  

Most suburban residents, however, rejected these arguments. Although about 28,500 residents of Tampa were eligible to vote in the annexation referendum compared to only 10,000 from the unincorporated area, the state legislative delegation insisted that the measure had to be approved separately by voters in both the city and unincorporated county. The combined vote was 8,443 in support of annexation and 6,476 against it, with city residents voting four to one in favor of it. Suburbanites, however, turned it down by a margin of about three to one. A majority of voters in only one suburban precinct supported annexation.  

Explanations for the 1947 defeat varied. Many pointed to corruption in a variety of places. Prior to the vote, an activist in the Junior Chamber of Commerce contended that financial backing for the anti-annexation efforts in one area included jook joint operators, garbage collectors and others who wanted to incorporate as a separate city so that they could control it. Even Barritt, in supporting annexation, admitted that Tampa was similar to some Snowbelt cities in that economic dry rot and political corruption drove people to the suburbs. If shared by many suburban voters, this motive would have likely encouraged a desire to remain separate from the
city’s jurisdiction. Further, the *Tampa Daily Times* pointed to the fact that many suburban voters probably turned against annexation because they perceived favoritism in the way that the proposed boundaries were drawn. The exclusive residential areas where many of Tampa’s elite resided, including those surrounding the Tampa Yacht Club and the Palma Ceia Golf Club, were to remain outside the city limits. In addition, major businesses in the eastern and northwestern suburban areas were also excluded due to “legislative favoritism.”

Soon after the defeat, the Chamber, local newspapers, and other groups immediately began plans for another annexation effort. Although legislation passed the 1949 legislature allowing an area contiguous to the city to be annexed after submission of a petition with more than fifty one percent of the eligible voters, it was clear that piecemeal annexation would not meet the objective of a significantly larger Tampa. Annexation supporters emphasized that the legislature would have to authorize a process that would not permit suburbanites to have an independent vote on their incorporation into Tampa. The pro-annexation forces, however, had no immediate success with Hillsborough County’s legislative delegation. As a result, an annexation referendum was defeated by suburbanites in an election in November 1951.
The proponents of annexation continued to publicize the merits of expanding Tampa. For example, the Tribune ran a series of articles in late 1952 which included several references to the desirability of annexation. It noted some opposition from suburbanites, because Tampa had tolerated “an arrogant, politically-minded underworld obnoxious to good citizens on the outside.” However, the Tribune stressed that the existing structure allowed Tampa’s residents to be exploited, by helping to finance improvements in the county. Citizens residing in the city were paying tax dollars to support the expenditures of an “outdated political ward system” for services in the county, such as paving streets, building sidewalks and “hauling dirt for the lawns of voters.” This inequitable burden was, in turn, a barrier to attracting new business and industry to the community, according to the Tribune.9

A significant turn of events occurred after the legislative elections in November 1952. Representative Tom Johnson, who won reelection, and Sam Gibbons, a Tampa attorney, who was elected to the Florida House for the first time, both had run on pro-annexation platforms. Johnson and Gibbons, as well as Senator John Branch, emphasized at a meeting with the Board of Governors of the Chamber of Commerce that they would prepare an annexation bill for the next session of the state legislature that would not require a citizen referendum. Gibbons took the lead, and the Chamber agreed to finance an attorney to help prepare the statute. Tampa’s Mayor, Curtis Hixon, remained relatively neutral in this effort, but he did provide Gibbons with some legal and engineering assistance in formulating the legislation and establishing the boundaries.10 The 1953 annexation bill passed the state legislature and resulted in a significant increase in Tampa’s land area and population, which more than doubled from 124,645 in 1950 to 274,970 in 1960.

After this major success, Tampa’s growth interests focused on the area in and near the city’s downtown. Local political leaders, the Chamber and planning consultants all shared a consensus that the downtown would have to prosper for Tampa to develop as a center of West Florida’s growing business community and for Tampa to take advantage of the increase in Florida’s tourism. In setting forth this image, activists knew they would have to overcome the inertia and self-interest that had contributed to making annexation difficult to secure, barriers which were recognized by many in the community. For example, one analysis noted that there was little progress in the downtown area, where “buildings were owned by one set of old families and leased by another set. Nobody seemed to get together on anything.”11 Another observer noted that “we’d talk to people in industry and business about moving down here, and we’d have good plots of land lined up for them to see, but then the land owners would catch wind of it and jack their prices up out of sight.... So many people were afraid of ‘New York interests’ coming in here.” Similarly, William MacInnes, who moved to Tampa in 1954 to replace Frank Gannon as president of Tampa Electric Company (TECO), was not initially impressed with the level of initiative in the business community. He noted that “Tampa had about as much charisma as the U.S. Postal Service where everyone works strictly from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., does the job and goes home.”12

During the 1950s and 1960s, the leading advocates of downtown development included Scott Christopher, major business figures active in the Chamber of Commerce, professional planning consultants and Tampa’s mayors – Nick Nuccio (1956-59 and 1963-67), Julian Lane (1959-63) and Dick Greco (1967-74). All saw growth as important for changing the image of Tampa and
providing jobs for an expanding population. In addition, economic development would presumably provide more tax revenue for city government and profit opportunities for land owners, developers, builders and other private interests.
Mayors Nuccio and Lane differed in style during their respective administrations, but both agreed on the desirability for growth and development. For example, during Nuccio’s first primary and runoff election for mayor in 1956, he focused on the need for a library and auditorium downtown and on the importance of more industries locating in Tampa. During the runoff, he accused his opponent; J. L. Young, who was serving as interim mayor after the death of Curtis Hixon, of attempting to obstruct the growth of Tampa when he sought to incorporate Sulphur Springs as a separate municipality to prevent the city from annexing it. During Lane’s successful 1959 race, when he defeated Nuccio in a runoff election, he pledged to work closely with the Committee of 100 to attract new industries to Tampa. He also promised “to exert every reasonable effort to revitalize the downtown business area of the city, which bears such a heavy burden of taxation.”

During Lane’s unsuccessful reelection effort in 1963, he primarily ran on a platform to “keep Tampa growing,” and he claimed to have kept his 1959 campaign pledge to “get the city moving at a much faster pace and to really make downtown revitalization a reality and not just so much talk.”

Dick Greco also stressed the desirability of growth and development during his 1967 campaign against Nuccio and several other candidates, although he noted the need for better planning for the growth.

An example of a planning document that pointed to the need for growth in general and in the downtown in particular was the 1956-1957 comprehensive plan for Tampa formulated by Jacksonville planner George W. Simons, Jr. Pointing to the lack of development in the Central Business District (CBD) during the first half of the 1950s, Simons emphasized its importance to the tax base of the city because its land was generally assessed at a higher value than in other areas of the city. Although the assessed value of non-exempt property in the CBD had increased nearly 85 percent from 1945-50, it stayed roughly the same five years later. In addition, the assessments in the CBD had increased during the last half of the 1940s, but its share of total assessment in the city decreased from 37 to 30 percent during the same period, as the overall value of property in the city increased substantially.

A study completed by Hammer and Company Associates in 1961 also emphasized the importance of the downtown area. This report concluded that no component of the economy of Hillsborough County was more important than Tampa’s CBD, which was critical for generating payrolls, profits and taxes. Moreover, it was “the administrative and decision-making center of the Hillsborough economy and the place where potentially the central-work of the entire Florida
West Coast region will be carried on.**15 However, according to the report, downtown Tampa had to improve significantly or it would decline and continue the process of losing new investments to outlying locations in the city and county. Among the projects proposed by this study were the purchase by the city of the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL) property in the downtown area and the inauguration of urban renewal projects in and near the center of the city.

The Chamber of Commerce also began to focus on public efforts in downtown Tampa. A poll of the Chamber’s membership regarding their major concerns for 1961-62 indicated that the third most important goal, after broadening the ad valorem tax base and formulating plans for the reuse of MacDill Air Force Base, was to promote development of the Central Business District. In addition, a priorities committee of the Chamber issued a report in 1962 ranking the construction of a convention center on the waterfront as the number one priority. This project became possible because of the city’s purchase of land along the Hillsborough River from the ACL.**16

The Atlantic Coast Line had owned the land on the east side of the Hillsborough River, opposite the University of Tampa, since early in the century. The site contained various offices, warehouses and tracks related to railroad operations, as well as a variety of other wholesale and industrial facilities. In addition to these businesses, numerous rats made the property their home. The Chamber of Commerce actually began to focus on the city buying this land during the Hixon administration. In June 1955, Ed Rood, an attorney who served as chair of the urban development committee of the Chamber, reported his committee’s resolution that the city purchase the ACL area between Lafayette Street (later Kennedy Boulevard) on the south, Cass Street on the north and Ashley Street on the east for public buildings, including a new city auditorium and parks. He further urged that the city condemn the land, an act that would require a change in state law, and purchase it if the ACL continued to refuse to sell it.**17

A year later, George Simons reported to the Chamber of Commerce that the acquisition of the ACL property should be the number one goal for Tampa, because the Central Business District was stagnating. This opinion was shared by businessman Howard Hilton and by Jerome Waterman, the president of Maas Brothers, a long-established department store. Along with others, they emphasized that clearing the land would provide a location for a convention hall auditorium, more parking and improved access to streets in the CBD.**18

The Chamber remained consistent in urging the city to procure the ACL land, an effort which the railroad had resisted. The ACL’s interests were supported by Hillsborough County state representative Tom Johnson and by W. Howard Frankland, a banker and Chamber activist, who served as an ACL board member. In April 1957, the Board of Governors of the Chamber called on Tampa officials to pursue either the purchase or the condemnation of the ACL property. The Chamber emphasized that this property was the key to redevelopment of the CBD, especially since the proposed interstate highway system through downtown was to have an exit near the property, making the site central to the continuation of Tampa as the hub of the west coast of Florida.

After W. Thomas Rice became the president of the ACL in mid-1957, he announced that he would discuss the possibility of selling the land to the city. The Chamber’s executive officer,
Scott Christopher, emphasized that this possibility “immediately pushed other Chamber projects into a secondary position.” Mayor Nuccio also welcomed the chance to acquire the land, and he formed a special task force including TECO president William MacInnes, W. Howard Frankland, J.C. Council - the president and publisher of the *Tampa Tribune* – and several other businessmen. Finally, early in 1959, members of the committee reached an agreement with the ACL for the purchase of 4.4 acres of its riverfront land for $2.5 million, with the railroad agreeing to move its facilities to a new location. Nuccio emphasized that the city lacked enough money to purchase all seventeen acres of the ACL property, but that the 4.4 acres were important, because they could serve as a site for a city auditorium.

Although Julian Lane claimed during his mayoral campaign against Nuccio in 1959 that the city had paid too much for the land, Lane’s policy for the area was similar to that supported by the Chamber and Nuccio, as well as by Simons and other planning consultants. The Chamber formed an auditorium committee to push efforts for a convention hall on the ACL site, and Frankland, representing the committee, met with Mayor Lane in November 1959. Lane asked the Chamber committee to continue its efforts and requested that its members work with the city comptroller, the chairman of the City Council and architect Norman Nix to formulate plans for the auditorium. Later, Lane formed another committee and purchased the additional thirteen
acres of ACL land in 1961. Several public projects were subsequently completed on the ACL land, including an auditorium-convention center named after Curtis Hixon (1965), the main facility of the Tampa Public Library (1967) and the Tampa Museum of Art (1976).

The Chamber, politicians, planners and a variety of business interests saw the ACL land purchase as just one step in downtown revitalization efforts. In June 1959, R.D. Saunders, the president of Sealtest Dairies and the chair of the Chamber’s metropolitan planning committee, reported that the Chamber’s membership poll for 1959 had given highest priority to a new city auditorium and convention center, a general program for downtown development and the promotion of slum clearance projects. Other business groups also focused on downtown revitalization. In March 1959, the Merchants Association asked the Chamber to take the lead in organizing a Downtown Development and Improvement Council, which would also include representatives of the Uptown Merchants Association – a group of businessmen who owned property on upper-Franklin Street in the northern section of the Central Business District. Members of this group had years earlier been involved in a campaign to clear a “skid row” area along the river that they contended had depressed their property values and the viability of their businesses. Their campaign included bumper stickers with the slogan “river front slums must go.” In fact, their campaign led Mayor Nuccio to choose part of this area, known as the “hole,” as the location for the construction of the new police station. In 1959 the Chamber agreed to form a downtown development committee with representatives from the Chamber, the Merchants Association and the Uptown Merchants Association. In addition, the Chamber organized its own Committee on the Central Business District, headed by TECO president William MacInnes.

By the late 1950s, many cities across the country had initiated urban renewal projects under the provisions of the 1949 federal Housing Act and later amendments to this law. The legislation provided subsidies to local projects involving clearance, rehabilitation and redevelopment of areas that were declared blighted by municipalities. None, however, had been initiated in Florida because of a decision by the Florida Supreme Court in 1952, ruling that Daytona Beach could not participate in the federal urban renewal. The Court held that a government could not use its authority of eminent domain to force the sale of private property and then sell it to another private enterprise that might realize a profit from redeveloping the land. Due to the 1952 case, the state legislature declined to approve general legislation authorizing Florida cities to participate in the federal program, but it did pass local bills allowing Tampa and Tallahassee to begin urban renewal programs. Tampa’s authority to initiate a project was challenged in the
courts, but the Florida Supreme Court ruled against the challenge in a 1959 case, thus paving the way for Tampa to begin the Maryland Avenue project, the first of its urban renewal projects.\textsuperscript{24}

Mayor Nick Nuccio made his initial appointments to the board of the newly created Urban Renewal Agency (URA) in May 1958. This agency retained the legal authority to implement urban renewal projects in Tampa until its dissolution in 1972. During the second half of 1958 it selected the first project site in conjunction with Milo M. Smith, a city planner under contract to the agency, and after consultation with Nuccio and representatives of the Chamber. A.R. Ragsdale, a suburban developer who headed the URA, spoke to the Chamber’s Board of Governors in May 1959 and praised its metropolitan planning committee for supporting the project.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, one of Nuccio’s initial appointees to the URA was H.L. “Dusty” Crowder, the president of the Greater Tampa Chamber in 1958-59 and one of the Chamber activists on urban development projects. Also Joe W. Dalton, another URA board member, was elected to the Board of Governors of the Chamber in 1960.\textsuperscript{26}

The Maryland Avenue area was located just beyond downtown Tampa. The site included a sixty-one acre tract in a lower-income African-American area which housed about 376 families, living in 140 dwelling units between Seventh Avenue in Ybor City and Nebraska Avenue.\textsuperscript{27} Milo Smith emphasized that the urban renewal project would eliminate a slum area which provided

An aerial view of Tampa in 1961, looking southeast, with the Cass Street bridge and the former ACL site on the lower right.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
the city only about $1,000 per acre in taxes in 1959. Further, he suggested that the project related to the wider concerns of improving the downtown area and Ybor City, emphasizing that the project would eliminate a slum district which divided the “two main business areas of downtown Tampa and Ybor City.”  

All the homes were to be razed and replaced primarily by alternative housing provided by the private sector, rather than by the Tampa Housing Authority, the public housing agency. However, demolition proceeded without a new developer being designated, so those who were displaced had to find housing elsewhere. A report released by Hammer and Company Associates in June 1959, under a contract by the URA, suggested that relocation posed no major problems. 

More significant than construction of public housing or private housing in terms of number of units added, is the increment of the Negro housing supply forthcoming from movement into formerly white areas. As mentioned previously, mixed neighborhood have been traditionally the pattern in certain areas of Tampa-particularly in the Ybor City area where Negro families from Cuba and other Caribbean counties were among the first in-migrants along with the sizable numbers of families of Latin origins. 

Families have lived and worked side by side since the early days of Tampa’s history and as a result the expansion of the Negro population into areas formerly inhabited by families of Latin descent takes place with virtually no friction or resistance. To this extent, the entire Ybor City housing supply can be considered potentially available for Negro occupancy limited only by the rate with which Latin American families are ready and willing to up-grade their housing accommodations and move out to new and better facilities to the suburbs. At the present time, residents of Ybor City and adjacent sections of Jackson-Belmont Heights are leaving the area at a rate of 450 families per year and in most cases the quarters which they formerly occupied are quickly given over to Negro occupancies. 

This analysis is noteworthy for several reasons. First, the vast majority of Tampa’s neighborhoods were segregated, not integrated, as a 1953 study had made clear. Second, the 1959 report ignored the red-lining and block-busting that were occurring at that time in the Ybor City area, institutional practices that belied the claim of a smooth transition based on cordial relationships between the races. In fact, a 1958 report of the metropolitan planning committee of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce had pointed out that it was difficult for African Americans in Tampa to obtain loans from mortgage and insurance companies. Third, the report sublimely accepted the movement of families to the suburbs, ignoring implications for neighborhood stability in the central city. Finally, it overlooked the already initiated planning for additional urban renewal projects that would displace hundreds of families and increase the need for lower-income housing. In fact, the 1958 metropolitan planning committee report had found that even before urban renewal displacement, public housing units were filled. Moreover, little private housing existed to match the quality or price of public housing. 

At a public hearing on the Maryland Avenue project held at the City Council in May 1962, Mayor Lane noted that relocating families into decent housing was one of the major problems the URA faced. Although some public housing units probably did open up to those displaced from Maryland Avenue, it soon became clear that these people were having a difficult time finding replacement housing. In February 1963, Tom Fox, the executive director of the URA, noted the difficulties that the relocation staff encountered in finding private rentals for those displaced from Maryland Avenue. And he voiced concern that if this continued, the federal government might hold up approval of the Riverfront application, the area designated for the
second urban renewal effort. As it turned out, the federal authorities approved the funds for the Riverfront project in March, in spite of the fact that Fox’s latest report indicated that only 21 of 106 families looking for relocation had actually been housed, with eight of them moving to substandard housing, a record that Fox attributed to the lack of available rental units.\(^{32}\)

Only after significant displacement already had occurred did efforts commence to find a developer for replacement housing in the Maryland Avenue area. In October 1963, Fox received a letter from Perry Harvey, the African-American president of International Longshoremen’s Association local No. 1402, expressing interest in developing low-cost housing in the project area. However, the URA did not begin receiving bids for the Maryland Avenue site until late in 1965, and in February 1966, the URA voted to accept the joint proposal for low-income housing in the project area from Perry Harvey’s union and the Lily White Security Benefit Association, a group headed by C. Blythe Andrews, the African-American publisher of the Florida Sentinel Bulletin. The Benefit Association and Longshoremen’s Union formed Tampa Park Apartments, Inc., which developed about 370 subsidized rental units.\(^{33}\) Well before this time, however, the URA, the mayors and the business community were focusing on two other urban renewal projects that were more directly related to plans to ensure Tampa’s place as a business hub for western Florida and to transform Ybor City into a tourist destination.
Modesty did not characterize the claims made for the Riverfront urban renewal project located north of the ACL site in the Central Business District on the west side of the river, just north of the University of Tampa. In February 1960, after the Tampa City Council had adopted a resolution authorizing the URA to submit an application to federal authorities for the Riverfront project, URA chair Ragsdale declared that the project “would have more impact on the development of the City of Tampa than any other single event in the last hundred years.” And after the site had been cleared, a URA brochure claimed that it was “some of the most desirable development land in the south.” This project was viewed as necessary to revitalize downtown Tampa, in conjunction with redevelopment of the ACL land and completion of the interstate expressway interchange that would serve to feed business people and consumers into the downtown area.\(^3^4\)

The Tampa City Council approved the urban renewal plan for the Riverfront project in January 1963. The area included about 160 acres, and almost all of it was proposed for clearance. Of the 737 buildings in the area, 599 were residential, and 78 percent of these were designated as substandard. A survey of the area in 1961 recorded that 10 white and 670 black families lived in the project area, with 97 of the families being owner-occupants. There were also 150 single African Americans in separate households, 176 businesses and six institutions.\(^3^5\) The URA also estimated that several hundred black families in Tampa would be displaced by expressway construction during 1962 and 1963 and that almost 400 black families would be displaced by code enforcement, but local officials expressed confidence that new and existing private and public housing would be adequate for those displaced. A project report noted that “new housing is to be provided in the project area available to minority groups at prices and rents within the means of a substantial number of families in the locality,” specifying that about 500 subsidized dwelling units would be built after the land was cleared. Although realizing that this housing would not be ready for people displaced by the Riverfront project, the report stressed that the housing would be needed for future urban renewal projects. However, in September 1963, a study by the Planning Commission suggested that fewer than 200 units, not 500, were likely to be built in the Riverfront area.\(^3^6\)

The Urban Renewal Authority assured federal officials that it was cooperating with the African-American community regarding both the Riverfront and the Maryland Avenue projects. A Bi-Racial Urban Renewal Advisory Committee, which had been inactive, was replaced by a mayoral appointed committee known as the “Bi-Racial Advisory Committee, Riverfront Project.”\(^3^7\) This committee included three whites and three African Americans, and it was designed to serve as the primary means of consultation with local African-American leadership. The three African Americans on the committee were Perry Harvey; James Hammond, an electrical contractor who was involved in desegregation efforts in the city; and Moses White, a restaurant owner who was prominent in the African-American community. Both Harvey and Hammond were also on the Board of Trustees of the Progress Village, a housing development in Hillsborough County that was viewed as a possible source of housing for African Americans who were displaced by urban renewal. According to the URA, the Bi-Racial Committee expressed no opposition to the Riverfront project, and the mayor intended to merge this committee into a citywide Citizens Advisory Committee for Community Improvements.
The emphasis in the report on the acceptance of the project by African Americans was overstated. For example, in 1961 representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had contested what they saw as the exclusion of African Americans from decision-making positions regarding urban renewal. At a meeting attended by URA officials and the chair of Mayor Lane’s Bi-Racial Committee, the NAACP’s field secretary for Florida, Robert Saunders, emphasized that African Americans wanted more influence over a program which was scheduled to relocate a large number of families in both the Riverfront and Maryland Avenue projects. He pointed out that “the practice here has been to plan for rather than with local minority groups,” and he stated the importance of “realizing that the program of urban renewal benefits the entire community, when administered fairly.” No African Americans were included initially on the URA board, although at least one was later appointed to it, and the Chamber of Commerce committee with some influence over urban renewal policy included no African Americans or citizens living in the Riverfront residential area. The Chamber formed a West Riverfront Committee that issued a report in May 1962 on appropriate reuse of the land north of the University of Tampa that was part of the urban renewal area. The committee expressed concern that the existing plan for the area north of the University of Tampa was to build low-cost housing there. The committee called this a serious mistake, claiming that it would be detrimental to the development of the Central Business District, and it recommended that the land should be sold to the University of Tampa. The committee listed a variety of interested parties whom it had consulted, but none represented the Bi Racial Advisory Committee or any citizens’ group in the area.

Ultimately, the University of Tampa did purchase a twenty-five acre tract of the urban renewal land in November 1967. At a price of $553,392, the large tract was bounded by Phillips Field on the south, North Boulevard on the west, the interstate highway on the north and the Hillsborough River on the east. The university said it would build dormitories, fraternity houses and athletic facilities on the site, but it later sold the land without completing any development on it.

Some subsidized housing was eventually built in the Riverfront project area, well after the residents had been displaced. Presbyterian Village, including about 140 apartments, opened for occupancy the early 1970s, and the LaMonte-Shimberg Corporation developed Oakhurst Square apartments during the same period. Additional low-income housing was constructed outside of the project area at the insistence of the federal government, which refused final approval of the Riverfront project until the URA made commitments for additional public housing and subsidized units. The Tampa Housing Authority completed 250 units in March 1966 and a 150-unit high rise in September 1966. Another small subsidized housing unit was constructed by the Paul Smith Construction Company.

However, city officials and the business community focused more on the east side of the river. This downtown land north of the ACL site was supposed to spur the further economic growth of Tampa. A brochure advertising the land for sale and development boasted that it was just two blocks from Franklin Street, the “heart of Tampa’s business-shopping district,” and adjacent to the new convention center and city-owned parking facility. The brochure also emphasized that the downtown area included several new buildings, notably the Exchange National Bank completed in 1965. In addition, the public library was scheduled to open in 1967.
By the beginning of 1965, before the land went on sale, A.R. Ragsdale of the URA noted that he had been contacted by groups interested in a variety of projects, including a luxury hotel, a high-rise apartment building and a commercial office complex and retail center. However, at this point there was a growing perception by public officials and Chamber activists that downtown was not progressing as rapidly as they had hoped. For example, at an October 1965 meeting of the Chamber’s executive committee, William MacInnes declared that he had received many calls during recent weeks about the apparent slowdown in the development efforts in the CBD. He added that a number of retailers had indicated that they planned to relocate out of the downtown.\footnote{42}

Unable to get the city to create a nonprofit organization to foster downtown development, MacInnes joined with other Tampa business leaders in forming the River Park City Center Corporation in 1967. This group purchased about sixteen acres of land in the Riverfront area north of the library, planning to spend about $25 million to develop the area as part of “the rebirth of the downtown business district.” Mayor Dick Greco, who had defeated Nuccio in the 1967 election, called the proposal a significant effort to continue downtown growth. The future land use was left open, but two years later Mayor Greco announced that the MacInnes group had finalized an agreement for a 350-unit, fourteen-story Holiday Inn to be erected just north of an office building that River Park was also developing. Chamber executive Scott Christopher lauded the development, boasting that it would place Tampa in competition with Jacksonville and Miami to attract major conventions.\footnote{43} At the same time that city leaders were focusing on the downtown, they also had turned their attention to Ybor City as another site which could be redeveloped to help transform Tampa’s image and economic base.

Even before the URA was created, business leaders, Mayor Nuccio and planners had viewed the old Latin district as an area in decline and in need of revitalization. By 1960 Ybor City was a far different place than it had been before World War II. Many sons and daughters of cigar workers had moved out of the area of generally smaller houses to live elsewhere in Tampa and its growing suburbs. Large numbers migrated to West Tampa, the other historic cigar manufacturing area of Tampa, which had a larger supply of homes and land for new construction. During the 1950s, West Tampa’s population increased from about 5,000 to 11,000, and its expansion continued in the early 1960s. As Latins departed from Ybor City, its African-American population increased. Clearly, Ybor City was undergoing rapid change, but
until it was officially approved as an urban renewal area in 1965, it was not clear what role public programs would play in influencing its future.44

Planning for Ybor City’s redevelopment evolved slowly. As early as 1951, one of George Simons’ planning reports emphasized that much of Ybor’s housing was substandard and that wholesale and industrial uses were becoming more common. Simons suggested that to turn around the decay, efforts should be initiated to develop the area as a “Latin American trade and cultural center, with special efforts to preserve historically significant structures.” Simons also noted approvingly that Mayor Curtis Hixon had appointed a citizens’ committee in 1951 to study the prospects of Ybor City’s revitalization at the request of the Pan American Commission of Tampa.45 Other groups involved in studying the possibilities for Ybor City were the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce and the Ybor City Rotary Club.

In November 1956, shortly after taking office, Mayor Nuccio announced that he was considering applying for slum clearance funds to raze some of the residential property in Ybor City. However, he noted that he was unable to do so because Florida’s cities could not yet participate in the federal program. Meanwhile, Nuccio announced that he was responding to an appeal from Ybor City businessmen to conduct a study to formulate plans to demolish property in part of Ybor City, while commercial property would be remodeled to preserve a “Spanish atmosphere.” Support for this idea came not only from Ybor City businessmen but also from Simons and from the Tampa Tribune, whose editor and publisher were by no means political supporters of Nuccio.46

Even though the URA initially focused on the Maryland Avenue and Riverfront projects, Mayor Lane continued Nuccio’s support for revitalization in Ybor City. In September 1960 the Tampa City Council approved the appraisal of Ybor City land for a possible redevelopment project that was being planned even in the absence of federal financial assistance. Less than two months later, the Board of Governors of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce called for the city to go ahead with plans to develop a Latin Plaza in Ybor, and the Tampa Tribune contended that a recreated Ybor City would not only become a tourist attraction, but also serve as a location for Central and South American programs that could be designed to improve cooperation among countries in the hemisphere. Further, the Tribune in 1962 explicitly related these efforts to those.
underway in the downtown area, suggesting that Ybor could become a major retail shopping center that would benefit from the office growth and convention business in the CBD.\textsuperscript{47}

In July 1962, Mayor Lane met with supporters of urban renewal in the former Latin district. These advocates included Dr. Henry Fernandez, the president of both the Ybor City Redevelopment Commission and the Barrio Latino Commission, a group that the Florida legislature authorized in 1959 to evaluate plans for proposed construction and demolition in the area; the president of the Ybor Chamber of Commerce; the director of the Pan American Commission and members of the City Council. Lane assured this group that he would endorse their request that Ybor City be the third urban renewal project in Tampa. By September, the mayor had written a letter to the URA asking it to initiate a study of Ybor City. Mayor Nuccio took up the cause after he returned to office. In February 1964, he wrote to the URA urging the completion of a survey and designation of Ybor City as a third urban renewal area. The URA complied with this recommendation, and by November 1964, the federal government had approved the application for a proposed Ybor City urban renewal project.\textsuperscript{48}

Officials soon made explicit that the effort would involve the razing of a significant number of homes. When a revised urban renewal plan was submitted to the City Council by the URA in April 1965, Ragsdale told the Council that his agency had originally hoped to rehabilitate many of the homes, but a survey had led to the conclusion that at least ninety percent were beyond repair. He also noted that the proposal expanded the boundaries in the original plan and that many new townhouses and apartments would replace dilapidated housing. In total, the area encompassed 158 acres with 901 buildings. The plan called for the demolition of 708 buildings, with most of the land then being sold for private development. The other 193 structures were expected to be rehabilitated, according to standards established by the Barrio Latino Commission. Most of the commercial buildings were to remain. In the place of the demolished structures, the proposal anticipated the construction of apartments, motels, sidewalk cafes and a needle tower from which one could view Tampa’s waterfront.\textsuperscript{49}

Dr. Henry Fernandez told the members of the City Council that future residents of Tampa would call them “men of vision.” He predicted that a revitalized Latin Quarter would draw to Tampa three million more tourists, equivalent to $150 million in new industry. Both Mayor Nuccio and Ragsdale agreed that a redeveloped Ybor City would benefit “every citizen in Tampa and Hillsborough County.” And Ragsdale emphasized that Ybor City would become a tourist center “second to none” in the nation.\textsuperscript{50}

The federal government approved the project by the end of June 1965. This brought the city a grant of $6.5 million as the federal share of the over $9 million dollar project. The URA estimated that the first buildings would be demolished by the spring of 1966 and that the projects would be completed in about five years.\textsuperscript{51}

Many Ybor City businessmen reacted positively to the announcement of the federal grant. Cesar Gonzmart, the owner of the historic Columbia Restaurant, promised to complete a $150,000 renovation and expansion of his restaurant. He also noted that the grant would lead to the further restoration of at least thirty buildings, at a cost of about $500,000, in the primary business section of Ybor City. Furthermore, he anticipated that a six-story, $3.5 million hotel
would be constructed across the street from his restaurant. There was also speculation that an
insurance company would build a Latin American center that was envisioned by former
Governor Doyle E. Carlton, who served as the president of the Pan American Commission. The
Tampa Times enthusiastically praised the project. It asserted that “by 1970 – about the time man
lands on the moon – Ybor City will have shed its shabby cocoon and emerged as the beautiful
butterfly that it should be.” The paper also claimed that a “revitalized Ybor City will do far more
than increase the importance of a single neighborhood – it will add spark and zest to the life and
reputation of all Tampa in the Greater Tampa area.”

As it turned out, the Times was more adept at predicting the first flight to the moon than it was
at forecasting the revitalization of Ybor City. While demolition proceeded, redevelopment
lagged. The major effort to initiate a large-scale development in Ybor involved a group of
businessmen, including Cesar Gonzmart, Henry Fernandez and Jim Walter, a close associate of
Mayor Greco and head of one of Tampa’s major corporations. Gonzmart presented a plan to the
URA in March 1967 for a “walled city” involving several blocks in Ybor City that would include
stores catering primarily to tourists. He noted that his group was trying to interest the Spanish
government in its development, and also hoped to persuade authorities to allow Portuguese
(“bloodless”) bull fighting in the area. The legislature did agree to legalize the bullfighting, but
unfortunately, an exhibition held in another city resulted in the bull going out of control and
having to be shot by state police, leading to another ban on bullfighting. The proposed
development also never came to fruition.

Other efforts met a similar fate. In a meeting with business and civic leaders in June 1967,
Ragsdale emphasized that the URA would attempt to initiate development south of Interstate 4,
the northern boundary of the urban renewal area. However, some time after this meeting, the
assistant director of the URA realized that there they were “going to have some difficulty
attracting developers and purchasers back into Ybor City.” Due to this lack of private
development in the renewal area, officials began to negotiate by mid-1968 with Hillsborough
Community College (HCC) to purchase urban renewal land for another campus for the college.
In the early 1970s, fifty-one acres of urban renewal land was sold to HCC, making it the largest
land holder in the urban renewal area. In addition, other public facilities were located there,
including the County Sheriff’s Office Operations Center.

Despite limited redevelopment in Ybor City, dislocation of residents continued. Many people
had been already displaced by Interstate 4, even before the area was approved for an urban
renewal project. Then “urban removal,” as it was derisively called, forced more relocation for
citizens and businesses in the neighborhood. As early as April 1966, civic leaders associated with
a Latin group, the United Civic Organization, met with the URA board to emphasize the
problems that elderly Latins were experiencing and to ask about the possibility of providing
housing in the area for low-income families who wished to remain there. Citizens also reported
to the URA about the problem of insurance companies canceling or not renewing fire protection
policies in the project area. Further, small business owners complained that with the loss of
residents in the area, their businesses were failing. Ultimately, several Latin professional and
business people organized Haciendas de Ybor, Inc., cosponsored by the Ybor City Chamber of
Commerce, St. Paul United Methodist Church and Tampa Methodist Settlements. It developed a
ninety-nine unit subsidized apartment complex during 1967-70. This was virtually the only replacement housing provided in the Ybor City renewal area.56

Tampa in 1970 looked far different than in 1945, and public authority and expenditures played a crucial role in these changes. The city’s boundaries were greatly expanded by the 1953 act of the legislature, and consequently, Tampa’s population grew dramatically. The land on the ACL site on the east side of the Hillsborough River changed to uses that were clearly more public-serving than what had existed earlier due to the government’s purchase of the land and its development of a convention center and other ventures. The completion of Interstate 4 and Interstate 275, although not the major focus of this article, also played an important role both in razing structures and in enhancing mobility of the population. Ironically, given the planning reports that spoke of the interstate system as potentially contributing to the stimulation of downtown, it clearly had the opposite effect of opening up more possibilities for suburban residential development, which later contributed to commercial development outside the downtown area. Similarly, Tampa’s urban renewal projects led to significant displacement of largely lower- and moderate-income African Americans and Latins, as well as their businesses and established institutions.

The public sector did not make decisions independently of influential actors and institutions in the private sector. Much of the changing picture of Tampa during the 1960s reflected the influence of the local elite. Some leading citizens certainly advocated policies that reflected their ideas of the public interest, but decisions were made outside of widespread public debate. This process had clear losers, most significantly those who were deprived of their homes and businesses and who often faced difficulties in relocating. Moreover, the objectives of enhancing the vitality of downtown businesses and of reconstituting Tampa as a tourist center are still largely goals, not accomplishments, decades later.

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2 Several other projects were also initiated outside of the downtown during the 1950s and 1960s, including the University of South Florida and the industrial park in the same vicinity. This article only focuses on the near downtown projects that were associated with urban renewal in the late 1950s and 1960s. For a more general overview of Tampa’s politics and policies during this period, as well as later decades, see Mormino, “From Hell Hole to Good Life”.; Robert Kerstein, “Growth Politics in Tampa and Hillsborough County: Strains in the Privatistic Regimes,” Journal of Urban Affairs, 13 (1991), 55-75; and Robert Kerstein, “Suburban Growth in Hillsborough County: Growth Management and Political Regimes,” Social Science Quarterly (September 1993), 74, 614-30.

3 Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, June 13, 1947, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records, Tampa, Florida. The name of the Chamber of Commerce was changed to the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce in July 1946. See W. Scott Christopher, Tampa’s People With A Purpose (Tampa: Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, 1993), 129.

5 Ibid., July 26, August 13, 1947.

6 Ibid., August 4, 6, 1947.

7 *Tampa Daily Times*, August 2, 6, 1947; Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, June 13, 1947, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records.

8 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 20, 1952; August 20, 1947, February 23, 1952; Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, October 5, 1951, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records.

9 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 27, 29, 1952.

10 *Tampa Daily Times*, October 18, 1952; Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, November 14, 1952, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records; Personal interview with Sam Gibbons, December 15, 1988.


12 Ibid., January 5, 1975.


16 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, October 20, 1961, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records; Christopher, *Tampa’s People*, 202.

17 Minutes of Board of Governors, June 24, 1955, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records.

18 Ibid., July 13, 1956.

19 Christopher, *Tampa’s People*, 178.

20 Also on the task force were Joseph Cornelius, G.R. Griffin and H.L. “Dusty” Crowder. Griffin was president of Exchange National Bank, and MacInnes was on its board of directors. Griffin was also on the board of General Telephone Company of Florida. Frankland was the chair of First National Bank. Crowder, who was in the insurance business, was president of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce in 1958-59, and MacInnes was the president for 1957-58.


22 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, November 20, 1959, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records; *Tampa Tribune*, July 5, 1961. Bonds were sold to purchase the land, backed by revenue from the utility tax. See Leland Hawes, “Ex-mayor Recalls Stress, Crises,” *Tampa Tribune*, April 5, 1992.

23 Minutes of Board of Governors, June 12, 1959, and minutes of Executive Committee, March 6, 1959, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records; *Tampa Tribune* July 6, 1961; Christopher, *Tampa’s People*, 202-03.
This ruling was probably a major reason why the “Scrub” lower-income housing area in Tampa was cleared and replaced by public housing rather than commercial, industrial, or other housing in the early 1950s.

Ragsdale owned the A.R. Ragsdale Construction Company in Brandon, an unincorporated eastern suburb of Tampa.

Christopher, Tampa’s People, 193.

A survey completed by URA in October 1962 reported that there were 303 families, 70 single-person households and 132 unattached single persons, as well as 60 businesses, in the project area. Minutes of URA meeting, October 29, 1962, City of Tampa Archives.

Tampa Tribune, May 1, 1959.


Maryland Avenue public hearing held at the City Council chambers, May 17, 1962, URA Minutes Book, City of Tampa Archives. The first executive director of URA, Arnold Hicks, announced his resignation in January 1962, effective no later than April 1, and was succeeded by Tom Fox, his assistant since 1960. Minutes of URA board meeting, August 8, 1960, January 29, 1962.


Minutes of URA meetings, October 14, 1963, February 8, 1966; Ybor City preliminary redevelopment plan, prepared by Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission, adopted by City Council April 17, 1980, Ord. No. 74.14A.

Minutes of URA meeting, April 1, 1960. The ACL land was initially viewed as part of the urban renewal site, but was later separated from it. Interstate 4 was completed in 1963 and I-275 was finished in 1968. It was estimated that about 2,544 homes were razed for Interstate 4 and about 700 homes were removed to clear the way for I-275. See Dave Nicholson, “Interstate roads helped, but were no magic carpet ride,” Tampa Tribune, September 25, 1994.

Tampa Urban Renewal, Application for Temporary Loan and Capital Grant, Part II Local Project Approval Data, Riverfront Area Project No. Fla. R-2, URA binder no. 10; Tampa Urban Renewal, Application for Temporary Loan and Capital Grant, Part I Final Project Report, Riverfront Area Project No. Fla. R-2, URA, binder no. 9, Par-8, and Relocation Report, located in library of Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission. Among the institutions demolished was Clara Frye Hospital, the segregated black hospital in Tampa.


39 Minutes of Board of Governors, May 11, 1962, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records.


42 *Tampa Times*, January 2, 1965; Minutes of Executive Committee, October 1, 1965, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Records.


46 *Tampa Tribune*, November 28, 1956.


48 Ibid., July 31 1962; minutes of URA board meetings, September 10, 1962, February 17, November 2, 1964.

49 *Tampa Tribune*, June 2, 1965.

50 *Tampa Times*, June 1, 1965; June 2, 1965.

51 Ibid., June 29, 1965.

52 *Tampa Tribune*, June 30, 1965.


54 Minutes of URA board meeting, March 15, 1968; Mormino, “From Hell Hole to the Good Life,” 158-60.

55 *Tampa Times*, June 28, 1967; *Tampa Tribune*, May 13, 1979 (quote); minutes of URA board meeting, July 16, 1968; Ybor City preliminary redevelopment plan, prepared by Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission, adopted by Tampa City Council, April 17, 1980, Ord. No. 74-14A.

56 Minutes of URA board meetings, April 19, September 27, 1966, August 20, 1968; Ybor City preliminary redevelopment plan, prepared by Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission, adopted by Tampa City Council, April 17, 1980, Ord. No. 7414A.
BOOK REVIEWS


Anyone familiar with the historiography of the Florida Seminoles knows that the first scholar to explore the African-American involvement with this tribe in any meaningful way was the late Kenneth W. Porter. When Professor Porter began his career in the 1930s, few scholars were interested in black history, much less the important role of African Americans as a part of the Seminole experience. The Seminole experience itself - except for the work of John Swanton and Mark Boyd - had also been largely ignored by scholars. This situation changed, however, when Professor Porter's path-breaking research appeared in the Journal of Negro History, the Journal of Southern History and the Florida Historical Quarterly during the 1940s and 1950s. Porter's pioneering work laid the groundwork for J. Leitch Wright, David Littlefield and a host of other scholars. A whole new view of the Seminole experience began to take shape. Those familiar with Professor Porter's style will find the same fast-paced prose in this, his last work, unfinished at the time of his death in 1981, but completed by two editors, Alcione M. Amos and Thomas P. Senter. Three years ago the editors discovered the unfinished 700 page manuscript in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black History in New York City.

The Black Seminoles is divided into five parts: "War and Peace, Florida, 1812-1842," "The Lean Years, Indian Territory, 1842-1850," "The Sanctuary, Mexico, 1850-1870," "The Seminole Negro Indian Scouts, Texas, 1870-1914," and finally, "Father of His People, Mexico, 1876-1882." The latter is a tribute to John Horse, whose multi-faceted life provides the main thread through which Porter weaves his history. Porter's work begins with the birth of John Horse on the Alachua Prairie as the Patriot War (1812-1813) begins - a conflict which saw Georgia frontiersmen make an aborted attempt to take over Spanish East Florida. The Creek Civil War, Andrew Jackson's defeat of the Red Sticks at Horseshoe Bend, the destruction of the "Negro Fort" at Prospect Bluff, and finally, Jackson's 1818 raid into Florida - all told from the black perspective - set the stage for the story of the Black Seminoles in Florida. Early that year one of those who escaped with his people across the Suwannee River into East Florida was a little boy named John Horse.

By the middle 1820s John Horse lived in the Tampa Bay area and was a frequent visitor to Fort Brooke. The teenage lad, now dubbed "Gopher John" by the fort's commander, lived in relative peace until the Second Seminole War in 1836. That year John Horse was approximately twenty-five years old. Cowya or John Cavallo, as John Horse was sometimes known, took an active part in the Second Seminole War. Blacks participated in this conflict as warriors, interpreters and scouts. Soon runaways from neighboring areas also joined the conflict. Thomas Jesup and other commanders understood the stakes of the war for the Black Seminoles. For the blacks, losing the war meant not only losing
their land, but their freedom. Thus, Jesup stated not long after his arrival in Florida, "The warriors have fought as long as they had life, and such seems to me to be the determination of those who influence their councils - I mean the leading negroes" (71). Jesup stated the obvious when he uttered, "This . . . is a negro war, not an Indian war" (66). Soon Jesup and other commanders began using the double inducements of cash and promises of freedom in exchange for the assistance of blacks, who had it within their power to bring the war to a close.

"Abraham," a Black Seminole.

Though John Horse took an active part in the war, his movements are difficult to document. Easier to trace are black leaders John Caesar and Abraham, who were far more identifiable at this stage of the conflict. By the second year of the war John Horse began to take more of a leadership role. Jesup and other officers found John Horse a disruptive force among Seminole leaders leaning toward capitulation. After convincing several Seminoles to violate their agreement to emigrate, John Horse became a marked man. In 1837 he, Osceola and Wild Cat were seized under a flag of truce and jailed in St. Augustine. Making a dramatic escape from the old Spanish fort, Wild Cat, John Horse and several others resumed the fighting on the lower Kissimmee River. Near the end of the year Zachary Taylor - who would later take overall command of American forces in Florida - marched southeast from Tampa Bay to the northern shore of Lake Okeechobee, where a battle was fought on Christmas Day 1837. The encounter forced John Horse, Alligator, Wild Cat and their followers to flee. Finally, by the summer of 1838, John Horse and many of his followers decided to surrender.

Though leaving Florida temporarily, John Horse subsequently returned to Florida to assist in convincing other hostiles to emigrate. As a well-paid scout and interpreter, John remained in Florida until leaving for good in 1842 for the Arkansas territory where life was very difficult. Some of the Seminoles harbored hard feelings against John and his black compatriots, whom they were convinced had betrayed them. Soon, despite promises to the contrary, it appeared as though the blacks were to be re-enslaved. Wild Cat's Seminoles were in little better circumstances, and both men led delegations to Mexico, where they eked out a living farming until they re-entered Texas as scouts in the service of the United States. Their task was to patrol the border against hostile Indians raiding from Mexico. Porter ends his narrative with John Horse’s death in Mexico City, while still attempting to secure a permanent settlement for his people.

The editors do an adequate job of bringing the work up to date, although they ignore many important recent works on the subject - much of it published after 1981. Nevertheless, this work will be of interest to both scholars and general readers interested in the Seminole experience.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JAMES M. DENHAM, Associate Professor of History at Florida Southern College, wrote the recently published book, "A Rogue’s Paradise": Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1861 (University of Alabama Press).

HAL HUBENER, Special Collections Librarian at the Lakeland Public Library, has published articles in the Polk County Historical Quarterly and the Florida Genealogist.

ROBERT KERSTEIN, Professor of Political Science at the University of Tampa, has previously published articles on Tampa politics in the Journal of Urban Affairs and in Social Science Quarterly.

ROBERT LEHMAN earned a B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and is currently completing a master’s degree in history at the University of South Florida.

MICHAEL H. MUNDT earned a master’s degree in history at the University of South Florida and recently published an article in the Tampa Historical Society’s Sunland Tribune.

THOMAS REILLY, a licensed pilot and the chief executive officer of an aviation and transportation consulting firm, has written a biography of Tony Jannus, entitled Jannus: An American Flier, that will be published by the University Press of Florida.
COVER: Passengers disembarking from a streetcar at Port Tampa in 1910. Segregation kept whites in one waiting area (front cover) and blacks in another (back cover). See "Streetcars in Tampa and St. Petersburg," page 37. Photograph courtesy of Tampa Electric Company Archives.
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