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FROM THE EDITORS

In the nineteenth century, Thomas Carlyle asserted that history "is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here." For generations this declaration raised little question among historians who focused on political developments and looked largely at the past from the top down. However, beginning in the 1960s, a new generation of historians suggested that the past appeared different if viewed from the bottom up. Examinations of history from the perspective of common people far removed from the heady world of high politics brought a flood of path-breaking studies of long-neglected people such as plantation slaves, wage-earning women, and working-class immigrants. The new social history also sparked a running debate about which actors - great men or ordinary people - deserved primary emphasis in the writing of history.

This issue of *Tampa Bay History* does not pretend to answer that question, but it does reflect the variety of approaches and perspectives now used by historians. In the article entitled "Spans of Time," David W. Adams examines the contributions of George S. Gandy, Ben T. Davis, and Courtney Campbell - men whose names are familiar to residents of the Tampa Bay area. Adams highlights the foresightedness and entrepreneurship of these men who spearheaded the development of the two spans that first linked Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. The article "Florida Fliers during World War II" shifts the focus to emphasize the contributions of two women who piloted planes during wartime. In telling the story of little-known women, authors Thomas Reilly and Lynn Homan emphasize individual accomplishments that have largely escaped the attention of historians.

Two other articles focus on local African Americans and provide both new information and new perspectives. In the article entitled "African Americans in Hillsborough County, Florida, during the Reconstruction Era," Kathleen S. Howe shows how different the period after the Civil War looks if examined from the point of view of former slaves living in a sparsely settled area. Her study also challenges readers to think about politics in new ways that make the daily lives of ordinary people central to struggles over power. In another article, "African Americans and Chinsegut Hill," Michael Lee Correia documents the lives of several black families in Hernando County and their relations with the famous owners of the Chinsegut property, Magaret Dreier and Raymond Robins. In focusing on blacks, these articles reveal significant ways in which African Americans influenced events.

Finally, this issue includes a look at the First Christian Church of Tampa, which is celebrating its centennial anniversary, and once again, the focus shifts to an institution whose leading members ranked high in Tampa society.

The editors hope you enjoy this issue, which marks the completion of twenty years of this publication.
The end of the Civil War ushered in the Reconstruction era which brought new realities to Southerners, both black and white. For blacks, emancipation marked the beginning of freedom; for whites, an end to uncontested control. Conservative whites who had previously dominated society would have to compete for power with white Unionists and those they had once enslaved. What emancipation ultimately meant for all was dramatic change. While much of this occurred in high profile battles at the state and federal levels, the process of change was also highly contested in local confrontations that pitted blacks against whites in communities across the South. African-American resistance to white attempts to limit the independence of freedpeople appeared in everyday struggles as blacks formed their own households, negotiated new labor relations, sought education, and wielded the vote. The outcome of these contests varied from community to community, and this study highlights developments in Florida’s Hillsborough County, a rural frontier locale where Reconstruction unfolded in ways that varied from those experienced in areas dominated by the plantation economy.

Most Reconstruction scholarship deals with “cotton belt” blacks rather than their counterparts residing in developing areas like Hillsborough County. These studies can mislead, implying that the process of Reconstruction followed the same course regardless of the setting. For example, in North Florida counties, large black populations accentuated white fears, bringing determined efforts to control freedpeople. Hillsborough County, by contrast, was sparsely populated and underdeveloped. The entire population in 1860 was only 2,981, with blacks contributing 566 of that number. So while African Americans made up about 44 percent of the state’s populace and several northern counties had large black majorities, Hillsborough County’s black population averaged from 18 to 20 percent of the total throughout the Reconstruction era from 1865 to 1877.

The smaller black population in Hillsborough County undoubtedly explains why the area experienced less overt violence toward blacks during Reconstruction. Thus, a study centered on Hillsborough County makes it easier to gain an unobstructed view of routine psychological and verbal battles that accompanied change, phenomena easily overlooked in the face of high-profile violence that took the lives of over 200 blacks elsewhere in Florida during the Reconstruction period. In Hillsborough County, confrontations between whites and blacks occurred, but most often in subtle daily interactions, which involved struggles over who should control the household, labor, political activities, educational matters, access to courts, and a host of other areas.

Understanding the dynamics of change during Reconstruction requires examining both the black and white communities, because first slavery and then emancipation inevitably tied the two together. In Hillsborough County most African Americans, first as slaves and later as
freedpeople, lived in or very close to the county seat of Tampa, and they were concentrated in an area called the Scrub. Bounded by Scott Street on the north, Cass on the south, Central Avenue on the west, and Nebraska on the east, the Scrub was described by a Tampa newspaper as an area that was “impenetrable and serves to remind one of a walled city.” During Reconstruction, black and white Southerners also had to deal with white Northerners who played a role in shaping the new society, especially as U. S. soldiers and officials of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the federal agency that was created in 1865 to assist ex-slaves in the transition to freedom. The views of both southern and northern whites can be found in surviving newspapers and government documents which they wrote, but few African Americans left written records. While this complicates analysis, we can learn much by examining official documents, the press, and the reactions of whites to what transpired. Given the general absence of records actually written by ex-slaves, we must infer their attitudes largely from their actions which often spoke loudly about their beliefs.

After emancipation, some of the fiercest battles between blacks and whites were over the household. The very act of forming families fundamentally challenged the prevailing view of elite whites that they were the rightful regulating agents in society. Slaves could not contract for themselves, control their families, or express themselves within the body politic. Emancipation changed this and offered freedpeople the right to form their own households and represent themselves in the public arena. Their attempts to exercise these rights were not uncontested, however, as many whites still assumed their control over blacks was necessary to assure social

In 1882, Tampa (as viewed here from the county courthouse) was still sparsely settled with a population of less than 1,000 people.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
order. Nevertheless, blacks forced changes, as evidenced by the way they ordered their domestic life.

After the war, Hillsborough County blacks gathered their kin around them, as did freedpeople throughout the South. For those ex-slaves separated from relatives, reuniting families proved a major challenge. The drive to unite with family was not a product of emancipation, however. Rather it was played out countless times even before the Civil War began. Such was the case in Hillsborough County when the local newspaper ran an advertisement in 1858 for a 26-year-old runaway slave named Pierce who was “probably heading for Columbus Georgia to join his wife.” After the Civil War, attempts to reunite families accelerated. Throughout the North and South, family members advertised for information about loved ones. In 1867, Ann Wells was still seeking information about her daughter, “Maria Adeline, formerly a slave of Dr. Lively, [who] was taken from Tampa during the war by some colored people and carried to Key West. When last heard from she was in Apalachicola, Florida.”

Black families maintained contemporary visions of males as heads-of-household, yet they did not mirror the patterns of the middle-class white community. Rather, they more closely approximated poor white households. The poor of both races were more distinctly committed to a communally based experience that valued cooperation over individualism. In an example of cooperation, African-American families sometimes took in orphaned children after the war and raised them as their own. In 1880 two black families in Hillsborough County listed orphans...
among household members. Other households included grandparents and young nieces and nephews who could contribute only marginally to the economic power of the family unit. In assisting those less fortunate, particularly the young and the old, blacks themselves helped keep ex-slaves away from white control. In this sense household formation represented an act of resistance to old social structures that tried to keep blacks dependent on white guardians.8

When blacks constituted their households based on kin and community ties, the implications went far beyond family. Households may seem the embodiment of the private sphere, but in reality it is where private and public spheres meet. Households, created by marriage, were the foundation of social organization, connecting the individual to the state by law. Independent households allowed black patriarchs to represent their dependents in the public realm and to make decisions about the character of employment for wives and children, thus limiting whites’ ability to make these decisions.

In Hillsborough County, most African Americans quickly formed households independent of white control. Within five years of emancipation, blacks headed seventy-one households which included nuclear and extended families, as well as single-person households.9 Not all blacks left white households right away, however. Forty-two adults and thirty children still resided with whites in 1870. By 1880, the number of black households grew to 178 of the county’s 1,182. Of these, ninety were male-headed nuclear families, a household pattern established soon after the war. Among the other eighty-eight non-nuclear black households, there were twenty-three extended families, thirteen husbands and wives, thirteen households with apparently unrelated members, twenty-seven single person households, and twelve households headed by women.10 The predominance of male-headed households indicates that blacks, like whites, generally adhered to prevailing patriarchal structures.

Since households formed the core of social organization, the act that formed them – marriage – provides insight into the struggle for control between blacks and whites. Despite the lack of legal recognition for slave marriages, both the white and slave communities had recognized the legitimacy of many such unions. Before emancipation, elders of the First Baptist Church of Tampa, which included both blacks and whites, expelled Franklin Branch’s slave George for “living improperly with a woman as his wife.” Since the law did not recognize this union as legal, it is clear that the legitimacy of the “marriage” lay within the social mores of the community. Church officials instructed him to provide evidence of his marriage, and after repeated requests went unanswered, the church withdrew its fellowship. Within weeks George provided proof “evidencing to the church that he is married” and the congregation welcomed him back. Whites held the decision-making power within the church, and so it was the very group which denied the legality of the marriage that demanded proof of its legitimacy.11

Once emancipation came, legal marriage became important to both social and political policy since it created households. Whites assumed formal marriages were necessary to create legal obligations, while blacks saw informal marriages as sufficient to claim rights attendant with that status. This struggle found its way into southern legislatures in the form of marriage statutes, but black resistance showed that actions, much less attitudes, could not always be legislated. Based on racial stereotypes and social myths, many whites believed blacks’ nature unsuited to the stable, monogamous relationships whites thought necessary, and middle-class whites clung to
This poster was marketed to former slaves seeking to establish their families as the foundation of freedom.

Illustration from *Reconstruction* by Eric Foner.
this view, despite evidence that many former slaves remained within the “families” formed during their bondage. A Freedmen’s Bureau official reflected northern views on the issue, observing “the principle of fidelity in the marriage relation is necessarily of slow growth among these people, who from force of circumstances and common custom, have so long been taught to disregard it.”

After emancipation, the Florida legislature mandated marriage by black couples. In 1866, the state passed a law requiring “all colored inhabitants of this State, claiming to be living together in the relation of husband and wife, and who have not been joined as such...within nine months...to appear before some person legally authorized to perform the marriage ceremony, and be regularly joined in the holy bonds of matrimony.” The marriage ceremony would legitimize the couple’s offspring retroactively. The state could penalize non-compliance through charges of adultery or fornication, a misdemeanor carrying a penalty of $1,000 and/or three months in jail.

The law notwithstanding, the incidence of blacks formalizing their family relationships appears to have been uneven, especially in Hillsborough County where few followed the law. It was not until Richard Runnels married Easter Clay on Christmas Day in 1869 that Hillsborough County registered its first legal black marriage. Between 1866 and 1872, only six black couples married within the county. It is unclear why Hillsborough County blacks declined to marry formally, but they did form family units. During the same general timeframe, census records document about fifty black “married” couples living within the county. This indicates that whites could control the legislative process but not black behavior. Compliance rates such as those in Hillsborough County concerned state officials, but apparently not local whites. The low prosecution rate in a community where so many black couples met the legal criteria for adultery suggests officials singled out only those not meeting legal responsibilities to support their families.

When white politicians realized the law was not creating a rush to the courthouse, Florida’s Governor David Walker recommended that the legislature extend the marriage deadline of October 1866. Lawmakers shared his concern, but found a different solution. In December 1866 the legislature automatically legalized unions between those who have “lived together as husband and wife and have before the world recognized each other as husband and wife as if the marriage had been solemnized by a proper officer legally authorized to do so.” This same law extended parental responsibility toward offspring by legitimizing children and making them heirs of their parents.

Just as whites tried to dictate household relations through marriage laws, they tried to shape economic relations through labor laws. Race-based legislation represented conservative white efforts to define the economic role of African Americans in postwar southern society. This was particularly onerous since Florida courts sometimes heavily fined convicted freemen and hired out their time. During the first years of Reconstruction, Florida’s Black Codes criminalized vagrancy in an effort to force blacks back to the plantations. Under the 1866 vagrancy law, “every able-bodied person who has no visible means of living and shall not be employed at some labor to support himself or herself, or shall be leading an idle immoral or profligate course of life, shall be deemed a vagrant, and may be arrested.” This law did not distinguish between white and black, ostensibly holding them to the same legal requirements and penalties. However,
enforcement was more strict for blacks, who were assumed by elite whites to be naturally “idle, immoral, or profligate.” The law reflected white elite fears about free black workers and, as historian Eric Foner argues, aimed at “resurrecting as nearly as possible the old order with regard to black labor.”

Many whites in Hillsborough County had doubts about blacks moving into a less controlled labor market. Praising federal and state efforts to control the mobility and labor of blacks, a local newspaper editor saw no contradiction in using these methods against free citizens. Instead, he opined that “the results of this year’s experiment confirm the forebodings of planters who distrust the reliability of black labor.” Another newspaper article expressed common white southern sentiments in dismissing the idea that blacks were whites’ equal in the workforce. The author argued against labor policies that threw “the whole black race into direct and aggressive competition with the laboring classes of the whites,” and he used a telling analogy to drive home his point.

The horse hired for a day may be fed or not fed, groomed or not groomed, when returned to the stable. The horse owned by us, and for which we have paid a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars, is an object both of pride and solicitude. His grooming, stabling, and feeding are cared for. If sick, he is doctored, and cured if possible – when at work it is the owner’s interest that he not be over tasked. The attainment of political equality by the Negro will revolutionize all this. It will be as if our horses were given the right of intruding into our parlors, or brought directly into competition with human labor, no longer aiding it but as rivals.

The analogy expressed a recurring theme – that blacks were not on the same level of humanity as whites. The “horse” had no business being in the parlor or placing himself “into competition with human labor.”

Under the labor law’s provisions, all contracts with blacks had to be in writing and, once signed, severe penalties faced blacks who broke them. Here, too, the law made distinctions between black and white parties to contracts. Failure of blacks to abide by the terms of a contract was a criminal offense punishable by incarceration or court-ordered forced labor. If the white party to the contract reneged, it was a civil matter and a jury of whites decided the amount of monetary damages due. Although southern whites and the Freedmen’s Bureau supported contracts as mutually advantageous to white employers and freedpeople, the advantage lay squarely with the landowner.

Despite the legal requirement, labor contracts were not universally used throughout Florida. By the Freedmen’s Bureau own accounting in 1867, there were few contracts and little in the way of coercion against black laborers in Hillsborough County. Noncontractual labor relations generally satisfied whites in Hillsborough County, because of the lack of plantations and prevalence of food crops, which generally did not require the intensity of labor needed on plantations. Since most of the food crops did not require year-round attention, landowners did not want to contract with laborers for an entire year, which would have necessitated providing rations even during slack times. Therefore, it benefited landowners to hire workers as needed on a wage basis. This arrangement also benefited black farm workers who could take advantage of the local labor shortage and change employers based on wages offered.
In 1870 Hillsborough County’s black men were still commonly employed in agriculture. While a few may have labored under contracts, most either rented land that was already under cultivation, worked as wage laborers, or took advantage of the Homestead program. Census figures show farm labor provided sixty percent of employment opportunities for black males. Despite the predominance of agricultural labor in the postwar period, whites were quick to suggest that freedpeople were inappropriately moving away from their “native element” – the fields. This probably reflects concern that increasing black independence would threaten whites’ own ability to find farm laborers.

Whites did correctly assess the fact that blacks were becoming more independent. By 1880 agrarian pursuits still dominated the male world of work, but census data also show an increase in the number of adult males who identified themselves as farmers rather than farm laborers. It is unknown, however, whether they were homesteaders or still working for whites under some form of tenancy or wage agreement. Even if they did not yet own their own land, they may have rented acreage where they could farm more independently. While the trend toward more independent working and living arrangements increased, some blacks continued to live with their employers, although the numbers gradually decreased. In 1870, 39 black adults and 22 black children lived with white families. A decade later, only 21 black adults and 11 black children still lived with their employers. 22

Labor was a highly gendered issue both in the way it was viewed and in how it was practiced. Laws governing vagrancy provide insight into the convergence of race and gender conceptions. Vagrancy laws required every able-bodied person to support himself or herself. Although seemingly paradoxical in a society where women’s place was considered to be in the home, this measure shows that gender roles contained a racial component. In practice only black women were required to work, subject to the sanctions for vagrancy. Despite the economic turmoil in the South after the war, no group suggested that white women should become wage earners. In contrast, however, neither law nor public policy accepted the role of black women as workers solely within their own homes. Race-based gender constructions were clear in the reactions of both northern and southern whites to black women's withdrawal from the outside labor force. Assistant Commissioner Sprague noted with concern that the freedmen are “adverse to their women and children going into the field as common laborers and desire them to attend to the housework, as they express it, like white folks.” 23 Whites attributed the new phenomenon of black women keeping house as a misplaced attempt to emulate white middle-class values or proof of blacks’ laziness. However, it was probably not coincidence that by staying home African-American women avoided the direct supervision by whites that was associated with slavery.

Nevertheless, the economic roles of black and white women differed significantly. In Hillsborough County, white women were overwhelmingly engaged in keeping house. In 1870, 98 percent of them listed no commercial work outside the home. In contrast to whites, only 50 percent of black women were keeping house in 1870. Keeping house undoubtedly included a variety of tasks that generated money and included helping their husbands in the fields whenever necessary. These activities often provided hidden income through the sale or barter of products such as produce, eggs, milk, or homemade goods. Even if not earning wages, freedwomen contributed significantly to the family economy through their own household endeavors and by
providing services and products that their families would otherwise have had to purchase. Since the economy in Hillsborough County at that time was highly dependent on barter, the food and goods produced by women were valuable for trade.24

Whites failed to understand that the social circumstances and legacy of slavery gave labor different meanings for African Americans. For black women, the meaning was deeply influenced by their desires to nurture their families and maintain their own households. They still assisted their husbands in the fields, but in ways that strengthened the family economic unit, instead of contributing directly to white employers’ profits. Their success in this is indicated by the fact that between 1870 and 1880 the percentage of black adult women keeping house or with no outside employment increased from 50 to 64 percent. When economic circumstances did dictate the need for freedwomen to earn wages, they created economic niches that added earnings without sacrificing care of their families or submitting themselves to the supervision of whites. A new occupation appearing in the 1880 census – laundress – illustrates this. Eleven female adults and one child reported this occupation, which allowed them to earn money while maintaining independence from white households by doing the work in their own homes.25

An 1865 cartoon by Winslow Homer depicted the question of free black labor from the point of view of a white southern planter who says to his former slave: “My boy, we’ve toiled and taken care of you long enough – now, you’ve got to work!”

Illustration from America’s Reconstruction by Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney.
In Hillsborough County’s rural setting, land provided the central avenue to economic independence. Access to land was enhanced by the 1866 Homestead Act, which opened government lands in Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida for settlement by small, independent farmers, both black and white. Homesteaders could later purchase the property for nominal fees. Opposition to black homesteading quickly developed among southern whites who did not want freedpeople to gain too much independence. As long as blacks could be kept under whites’ control economically, the latter could also influence other aspects of their lives. The Freedmen’s Bureau recognized this, and Bureau officials applauded the Homestead program which they felt would make freedpeople “self-reliant and better qualified to discharge the rights and duties of citizens,” a condition unlikely as long as freedpeople remained “in a great measure within the power of employers and landed proprietors.”

The full extent of homesteading in Hillsborough County is unknown, but an Army officer from Fort Brooke reported that it interested many freedpeople. There were obstacles, however, “since the government lands are worthless for any purpose whatever, most of them being barren sand hills with little or no vegetation upon them” or "sadly located in overflown and swampy lands." Despite these negative descriptions, by March 1868 the Bureau’s land agent serving Hillsborough, Hernando, and Sumter counties reported filing claims for eighty-six applicants, both black and white, testifying to a strong desire by the poor of both races to farm their own land. In practice, taking advantage of the Homestead Act proved difficult. Just filing a claim could be problematic. One Tampa official indicated he could get neither program information nor maps and would have to travel to Tallahassee to remedy the problem. He complained that the official in charge of helping blacks to apply for land “might as well have his headquarters in New York City, as at Tampa. He has no office or other place of business here that I know of where freedmen can obtain information.”

White opposition also interfered with the homestead program. Early on Tampa’s Florida Peninsular expressed derision by suggesting that officials call the homestead law “a Bill to Get Rid of the Laboring Class of the South, and make Cuffe a Self-Supporting Nuisance.” Many white farmers actively obstructed black homesteading through techniques that ranged from propaganda to outright fraud. One Bureau official reported “there is reason to believe freedmen have been intentionally misguided. Locating agents have found them settled on private land, through advice of neighboring white people ... [after] industriously cultivating the land, they were compelled to remove and lose their improvements.” In other cases, “after taking possession and most probably erecting his but and building his fences, a neighbor with gun in hand orders him to leave, that he is a trespasser.”

Some of the most visible confrontations between blacks and whites occurred in the public political arena, where African Americans sought to vote, hold public office, and join the state’s militia. As in other areas, changes that occurred in the public political arena were often the result of routine interactions in which African Americans refused to defer to whites. The framework for black political participation was imposed by the federal government during Reconstruction. Initially, southern states like Florida tried to gain readmission to the Union by simply outlawing slavery and ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment, while passing Black Codes that severely restricted the rights of freedpeople and excluded them from any political participation. This led
to Congressional Reconstruction legislation, passed in 1867, which gave African-American men the right to vote and used federal troops to protect the new rights of freedpeople.

In Tampa, the presence of the U.S. Army at Fort Brooke proved critical for African Americans seeking to exercise their freedom. According to one officer, “the people are outwardly loyal, and will be so as long as there are any troops stationed here. The feeling toward the Union ... is not very satisfactory.” Another Fort Brooke officer noted that “in Hillsborough and parts of the adjoining counties that are easy of access and with daily communication with this place, where any abuses or violations of law can be promptly attended ... the people are disposed to conduct themselves well.”\(^{32}\) As a result, military authorities did not often interfere with local affairs in Tampa, although an outburst of violence required the Army to intervene in January 1868, when “heads and noses were smashed.”\(^{33}\) Incidents like this appear rare in Hillsborough County, as federal troops in Tampa mediated disagreements and prevented widespread racial violence against blacks.

Despite the presence of soldiers and the extension of the franchise to black men, southern whites believed they could create a political world that kept blacks in their “rightful” place as second-class citizens. When African Americans demonstrated a desire to participate fully in politics, conservative whites explained this away by pointing to incitement by white Unionists and the Republican Party. In Tampa the *Florida Peninsular* asserted that “if colored men surrender their wills and freedom of political action... the shackles which they thus voluntarily assume will be found more degrading to their minds than the slavery which the law once imposed upon them.” Referring to the activities of white Unionists and the Republican Party, the *Peninsular* decried “the very industrious effort going on to drag our colored people into a party organization pledged to oppose the southern whites, as such, and chain them to the leadership of a set of men... whose attempts to foster antagonism and hatred between the two races we deem unwise, unnecessary, and of dangerous tendency.”\(^{34}\) In short, black votes were acceptable as long as they were cast for conservative Democrats who sought to restrict the independence of freepeople.

African Americans repeatedly demonstrated their eagerness to participate in the polity. During Congressional debates over the vote, a Florida Freedmen’s Bureau official told his superiors, “the political affairs of the country, particularly the discussions in Congress relating to Negro suffrage, are well known here which creates much interest and causes the freedmen to look forward to a revolution quite equaling the strife which brought about their freedom.”\(^{35}\) With the extension of the franchise to black men in 1867, political meetings became common among African Americans in Hillsborough County. These gatherings included speeches, marches, and barbeques, which served a variety of purposes, including breaking up the monotony of work while simultaneously showing the independence of African Americans.\(^{36}\) Even attending a meeting involved the risk of sanctions since some employers refused to hire the politically active. The threat of firing, if carried out, could place the ex-slave in danger of arrest for vagrancy, which might mean incarceration and the break-up of the family.

Throughout the period 1865-1880, Tampa’s Democratic newspaper echoed the displeasure of the conservative white community over local black political meetings, especially those held in the Scrub, where many of Tampa’s blacks lived. One particularly pointed attack concerning
night-time meetings charged that if there was nothing to hide, black and white participants would hold their meetings in public during the daytime. The newspaper showed no similar concern, however, when it had previously advertised a Ku Klux Klan meeting and informed members “you will meet as usual at 2 A.M.” to discuss “the social, political, and moral condition of this community.”37 Unable to prevent interracial Unionist gatherings, conservatives ridiculed these activities. One press account observed that meetings in the home of a white Unionist featured “an awful shuffling, singing, and dancing on the piazza of the residence of C. R. Mobley by his colored brethren, every night or so, which of course annoys his neighbors.”38 In addition to private homes, African-American churches in Tampa were also a favored gathering place for political meetings.

Blacks’ confidence in their political power grew over time, as evidenced by their increased willingness to take public stands against Democrats. Such was the case in 1867, when the “Union men” of Hillsborough County presented a petition, signed by both blacks and whites, to military authorities in Tampa. They expressed dissatisfaction with a proposed roster of county political officials and recommended an alternative roster that included three blacks. At least one of these men, Cyrus Charles, did receive an appointment to the County Commission in 1868. Freedmen petitioned their government on a variety of issues. They complained when officials taxed them for schools but did not use the money for this purpose. They also petitioned the

An 1868 illustration from Harper’s Weekly, entitled “Electioneering at the South,” shows that both men and women attended political rallies.

From Reconstruction by Eric Foner.

https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol20/iss2/1
The black community’s use of petitions to make its feelings known documents the growing confidence of African Americans and their belief that the government was responsible to them as citizens.

Petitioning state officials was also sometimes the only recourse when local courts denied equal justice. This was the case when the African-American community of Hillsborough County rallied to the aid of Henry Clay, a farm laborer and first sergeant in the Tampa militia, who was convicted of altering a cattle brand and sentenced to three months in prison. Citing the injustice of Clay’s conviction because he “was induced to commit the crime by a designing and unprincipled white man who has escaped punishment,” they requested a pardon from the governor. The forty-three black petitioners did not contest Clay’s guilt, but demanded for him equality under the law. Since his white accomplice had not been punished neither should Clay. The governor apparently agreed since he issued a pardon.

When it came to the most visible sign of traditional political behavior – the vote – blacks were enthusiastic from the beginning. Voter registration “awakened the freedmen to a sense of his personal strength and importance,” according to a Freedom Bureau official. While Democrats tried to persuade blacks to vote for them, Bureau reports show that local African Americans actively mobilized against the Democratic Party and for their own interests. White Unionists and blacks rallied principally around two groups – the Union League and the Lincoln Brotherhood, which both supported the Republican Party. The Union League, formed in the North in 1862, pledged complete support for the Union and the franchise for black men. Its platform centered around debt relief and issues of interest to both poor whites and blacks. The Lincoln Brotherhood also sought to rally black support for the Republican Party in Florida. According to historian Jerrell Shofner, the primary difference between the two groups was the more strident rhetoric associated with the Union League, which became the most influential political organization representing Republicans in Florida and throughout the South.

The Union League was particularly popular in Hillsborough County and likely represented Tampa’s first integrated political group. In 1867, a captain from Fort Brooke reported on a League meeting held in Tampa. According to him, “the Refugees and Union men are jubilant, they are industriously at work perfecting their organization as a political party. They have entire confidence in their ability to elect loyal Union men to office when the proper time comes.” The freedmen anxiously joined in political debate by listening to speeches and discussing courses of action. Union League members pledged to “elect true and reliable Union men and supporters of the government,” and this included African Americans.

A major political battle between Democrats and Unionists during military rule involved electing delegates for Florida’s 1868 Constitutional Convention. Controversy began with voter registration preceding delegate elections. Blacks and whites of all political leanings were extremely active, since they recognized this as a crucial crossroad in the state’s political future. By April 1868, a Fort Brooke officer reported that feelings of hatred toward Union men were at their highest levels in two years. The only whites permitted to register were males over the age of twenty-one who signed oaths of loyalty to the Union or had received Presidential pardons. This increased the influence of the black electorate while eliminating the most radical Democratic
elements. In the end, registration of blacks was successful with a statewide black-to-white ratio of three to one.\textsuperscript{45}

However, once again the pattern in Hillsborough County varied, highlighting demographic differences between Hillsborough and northern Florida counties. According to the local press, 211 whites registered in the county, compared with only 87 blacks, making the voter ratio about two to one in favor of whites.\textsuperscript{46} Nevertheless, Hillsborough County blacks constituted twenty-nine percent of the electorate, a proportion somewhat higher than their twenty percent representation in the population. Local whites charged that fraud had artificially inflated black political influence. At one point, a \textit{Florida Peninsular} article claimed there were eighty-three black voters registered but only seventy-three adult male blacks living in the county. There is no way of determining the validity of this charge, since voter registration records for the county no longer exist.\textsuperscript{47} In spite of the fact that white voters outnumbered blacks in Hillsborough County, conservatives realized the vote would not take place along the color line. There were many white Unionists in South Florida, and they joined with blacks to elect the Unionist candidate, C.R. Mobley, who won by a small margin.\textsuperscript{48}

Following adoption of the 1868 constitution, the legislature passed laws to monitor future elections. These provisions reflected the changing status of freedpeople. Each county selected three men as Inspectors of Elections. In Hillsborough County, officials selected two whites and one black. The African-American inspector was Joseph Sexton, a former Union soldier who had settled in Tampa and served as minister to the congregation of Mt. Sinai A.M.E. Zion Church. Reverend Sexton was politically active in the community, particularly in the area of education. The county continued to have a black Inspector of Elections until October 1872, when a white man replaced Reverend Sexton.\textsuperscript{49}

Local political meetings indicate that blacks maintained a broad political discourse long after the new constitution was in place. One such meeting was organized by the Reverends Gibbs and Pierce and held at the African Methodist church. Several other black community leaders were present, as was C. R. Mobley. Another meeting in August 1868 included thirty black men, eight black women, and five whites. In preparation for elections that year, there were at least three more Republican political rallies with black participation, one featuring a black speaker. Following the last rally in October, participants formed a procession consisting of sixty blacks and at least one white man, M. P. Lyons.\textsuperscript{50}

Tampa’s African-American community also organized parades to celebrate special holidays. On January 1st and July 4th of each year, blacks marched through the streets to celebrate the nation's and their own independence. The African-American brass band, whose fourteen members practiced at the local school house on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, probably accompanied these marchers. These demonstrations of individual, community, and national pride brought together members of the community as well as members of Tampa’s “Negro Militia,” formed in 1870. When parading, participants usually followed a course traversing the small town and ending at the county courthouse, where they listened to political speeches, enjoyed the fellowship of their neighbors, and celebrated their freedom.\textsuperscript{51}
A drawing, entitled “The First Vote,” shows the variety of African-American men who cast their first ballots – an aging craftsman, a member of the middle class, and a soldier.

From *America’s Reconstruction* by Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney.
The principal local office held by African Americans was county commissioner. Blacks served on the County Commission through at least the mid-1870s, but whites did not always accept their presence uncritically. Although commission records reveal no significant rifts, press reports suggested otherwise. Tampa’s Democratic newspaper often portrayed African-American officials as pawns of white Republicans. For example, when complaining about the commissioners reducing the number of precincts in the county, the paper said that black commissioners “should not be held responsible.” Instead, the editor pointed to local white Republicans as “the men who are responsible for this.”

While southern conservatives showed sensitivity to any political activity by African Americans, they were especially concerned by their participation in the militia. The conservative state leadership had revived Florida’s militia in its 1866 constitution but limited membership to “every able-bodied white male inhabitant of the State between the ages of eighteen and forty-five years.” Abuses by these groups throughout the South led the federal government to ban militias in 1867. Abuses by these groups throughout the South led the federal government to ban militias in 1867. They did not remain dormant for long, though. Once white radicals gained control in southern states, they petitioned Congress to allow them to form “loyal” militias. Perceiving this as another means of influencing events in the South, Congress allowed southern states to re-form militias. Florida’s militia law permitted membership by black and white men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five who declared their loyalty to the state. African Americans joined the militia in large numbers, but they never outnumbered white militiamen in Florida or any other state. Nevertheless, the organization was commonly referred to as the “Negro militia,” a term that spoke to the fears of whites about organized, armed black men in positions of power.

Tampa had at least three militia companies, one black and two white. Thomas McKnight, a laborer, headed the black company. Of the twelve officers in his company at least six were black, as were the eighty-five troops rounding out the muster. Even in Hillsborough County, however, blacks were not a majority in the militia, accounting for only 16 percent of the total according to state records. Despite a militia strength statewide that increased by 52 percent from 1869 to 1873, the size and racial make-up of the militia remained stable within Hillsborough County.

Conservative reaction to the Hillsborough County militia was swift and unambiguous. Tampa’s Democratic paper decried its formation “at a time when law and order is so much respected... [and] when the passions of the people are subsiding and the discontents and bickerings of the past give place to a sound and healthy public sentiment; and at a time too when constant work is indispensable to growing crops.” Over time, criticism in Tampa centered around militia participation in holiday celebrations. The local press described the militia’s 1871 New Year’s parade as “an interesting spectacle,” but claimed that in the aftermath there was “such fearful howlings, cursings groans, and yells... seldom heard from human throats.” Despite occasional problems, the relatively benign reaction toward the militia expressed by the local press probably reflects the fact that the governor never called the Hillsborough County units to active duty in maneuvers that pitted them directly against conservative white interests in the area. Officials did, however, use the militia to provide security at polling stations during elections. Other than this duty, the militia’s main activities centered around training.

It is difficult to assess the success of blacks in influencing the political discourse during Reconstruction. Certainly they had many victories, but they were unable to influence events to
the extent their numbers should have allowed. They never gained control over state politics nor
were they able to prevent the later erosion of their rights. This does not minimize the importance
of what they did achieve, however. They were able to elect Republican representatives to state
government, gain appointments to local offices, and force whites to take them into account when
making local policies. Perhaps the greatest political victories for blacks came in the area of
education.

African Americans saw education as yet another means to first gain and then extend their
autonomy. Education served as a way of improving blacks’ upward mobility, but perhaps most
important of all, it was a powerful symbol since education for slaves had been against the law.
As one official observed, the freedman “knows that it is now his business to climb, and he fully
comprehends that education is the ladder.” 58 African Americans fought hard to gain access to
education, often sacrificing the short-term economic benefit of more workers in the family to
long-term goals of increased knowledge. Where schools were unavailable, African Americans
often created their own, a task their black churches tackled with great enthusiasm. The story of
education in Florida and Hillsborough County illustrates this process.

Unlike other southern states which set up public school systems but barred blacks after the
Civil War, Florida specifically chartered a public school system for blacks. According to one
historian, conservative Floridians took this unique step in part to “create an effective and
obedient working class and control their votes.” 59 Toward this end, an 1866 law required the
Superintendent of Public Instruction to “establish schools for freedmen, when the number of
persons of color... will warrant.” 60 This initial effort brought black public schools to larger
population centers, but the people of smaller counties, such as Hillsborough, had to provide for
themselves.

White conservative Floridians got the first opportunity to use the school system for
socialization, implementation of military rule in 1867 shifted control to the Freedmen’s Bureau
and Unionists. Aware of the potential for developing “good Republicans” through the education
system, the Freedmen’s Bureau became actively involved in building schools and subsidizing
teachers' salaries. Its efforts provided the first public school for blacks in Hillsborough County
and eventually widened educational opportunities for whites as well. The Bureau had a genuine
desire to see blacks educated since schools “once finished and advantageously located will be the
central point for improvement.” Education was to be “the regenerator of the colored race, and if
they can be brought in contact with the whites in an intellectual effort prejudices will subside and
both races will be improved.” As one Bureau official observed, “it cannot be long before the
white citizens will discard their prejudices, and parents overcome all scruples to secure for their
children an education.” 61

Education in Florida got a boost when the 1868 state constitution provided for a public school
system for both blacks and whites. The state did not mandate segregated schools, although they
became the norm. By 1870, Governor Harrison Reed reported that there were more than 200
schools in the state. The Freedmen’s Bureau furnished eighty-seven of those. Statewide in 1870,
schools taught 25 percent of white children, compared to just under 15 percent of black children,
but during the next decade there were noticeable increases for both groups. By 1880, 41 percent
of white and 49 percent of black children attended school in the state. 62
During Reconstruction, Army officers at Fort Brooke frequently commented on the need for schools in the Tampa area and the black community’s desire for them. There was apparently a school for black children operating in Hillsborough County as early as 1866, although it was not a public school. In 1867, a Freedmen’s Bureau official noted the school had closed the previous summer, and the following year another official suggested that a Tampa school be located at Fort Brooke, because “the white people are somewhat opposed” to black schools. The reasons for white opposition were not explicitly noted, but it is likely Hillsborough County whites, like their North Florida counterparts, were concerned that they would have little influence in such schools. It was common in southern communities for conservative citizens to discourage white teachers from working in black schools by denying them lodging and making them social outcasts. After a visit to Tampa in late 1867, the Superintendent of Freedmen’s Schools for the State acknowledged the need for a black school, but it was over two more years before officials established a black public school in Tampa.

Meanwhile, blacks in Hillsborough offered their time and labor to raise money to purchase a school building and site. They asked only that the government pay the teacher’s salary. By December 1867, blacks in Hillsborough County had established “school societies” to organize their efforts. Before officials built a school, black students often met in church buildings, lodge halls, or wherever space was available and permission could be obtained. For the year 1867 the Hillsborough County Commission reported that a total of 687 whites and 92 blacks received some form of education. Since there were then no formal schools for African Americans in the county, these black students probably studied in Sabbath or night schools.

The program of the Freedmen’s Bureau to build public schools for blacks generally relied on freedpeople to first purchase land through their own contributions. Once clear title was secured, the Bureau provided construction materials. By the end of 1867, freedpeople in Hillsborough County had collected more than half the money necessary to purchase land for a school, but they were either unsuccessful in raising the remaining money or whites would not sell them land since they did not provide a suitable site until mid-1869. In June of that year the County Commission was finally able to inform the Freedmen’s Bureau that blacks now had clear title to land for a school. In August a Tampa newspaper announced that the Freedmen’s Bureau planned to get involved in establishing a school. At the end of 1869 the County Commission responded to a Freedmen’s Bureau inquiry requesting cost estimates for building materials for a school.

After citizens adopted the 1868 state constitution, Republican officials wanted to institutionalize the school system. To do this, they established county Boards of Public Instruction in 1869. The state appointed members, who were responsible for managing all educational properties and funds in the county. They also established new schools as required and assured that they operated at least three months each year. The formal school system got a slow start in Hillsborough since the first board members selected by the state in 1869 refused to accept these non-salaried positions. The school board in Hillsborough County finally held its first meeting in 1871. By that time a black public school was already operating in Tampa, opening after the first public school for whites.

By 1871 Hillsborough County had a total of seven schools, six for whites and one for blacks. The Board of Instruction appointed Thomas McKnight and Isaac Howard, both African
Americans, as two of the three trustees for the school. In December of that year, Isaac Howard
remained as a trustee while freedman Peter Bryant replaced McKnight. In 1870 there were no
black teachers in the county, but that was not uncommon. By 1875 the total number of schools
grew to twenty six, although there was still only one public school for blacks.⁷⁰

In 1880, within the age group of four to twenty-one, forty-eight black children attended day
school, most with John Patton, who began teaching them in 1876. This represented about 14
percent of the populace in that age group, less than one-half the norm for blacks in the state.
Girls in the county made up 70 percent of the black school population, suggesting the continued
widespread need for the labor of male children. By 1880, children who attended school came
from families across the employment spectrum, indicating education was important to a wide
cross-section of the black community. Literacy increased dramatically for blacks during the
decade in all age groups, and many new readers were working adults who probably took
advantage of night and Sabbath schools to acquire highly prized literacy skills.⁷¹

In 1880, Hillsborough County had thirty-six schools for white children, but there was still only
one black public school.⁷² This discrepancy did not go unchallenged, however. Reverend Joseph
Sexton, minister of Tampa’s Mt. Sinai African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, organized
meetings in the African-American community to discuss new schools for blacks and whom to
hire as teachers. Although he invited members of the Board of Instruction to attend, there is no
evidence they did. School Board minutes mention neither of these community meetings, nor did
board members discuss black concerns. The African-American community, however, appeared
undeterred by lack of support from the school board, having already established a pattern of self-
help. By 1880 there were two black teachers, Harriet Henderson and Catherine Hamilton, listed
in the county’s census, but neither received salaries from the county. It is possible these women
taught in Sabbath schools or some other forum that did not fall under the public school system.
Freedmen Thomas McKnight, Peter Bryant, Henry Brumick, and Isaac Howard reportedly
formed a committee to pursue increased educational opportunities within the African-American
community. Supporting these efforts, freedwomen organized clubs to raise funds, and their work
eventually provided the money needed to build Tampa’s Harlem Academy which opened in
1889.⁷³

By the end of the Reconstruction period, politicians had institutionalized public education in
law and practice. The availability of public education for blacks existed, but the quality was
generally not the same as in white public schools. Blacks took advantage of those opportunities
that existed and continued to demand more, and better, education for themselves and their
children. For their part, whites still wondered aloud about the benefits and usefulness of
educating blacks. The previous decade, however, proved the ability and eagerness of African
Americans to learn. The State Superintendent of Public instruction himself acknowledged that
“the Negro, since the day of his citizenship, has shown large appreciation of the need, the uses,
and the blessings of education.”⁷⁴

During Reconstruction the challenge for Florida’s African Americans was to assert themselves
in an economic, social, and political system that marginalized them. This was especially difficult
given the concerted efforts whites made to dominate the postwar social order. These efforts were
evident in the state’s Black Codes, as well as less formal practices, which reflected the belief of
“Is this a republican form of government?” asked Thomas Nast in this 1876 cartoon which depicted the end of Reconstruction as a failure of democracy.

From *America’s Reconstruction* by Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney.
many southern whites that blacks were inferior and in need of continued supervision. Blacks, on the other hand, refused to accept constraints on their freedom, and they resisted the disadvantaged role conservative whites envisioned for them. The conflict this engendered, as this study has shown, was characterized by daily resistance and a steady stream of low-level confrontations that forced whites to accommodate to new realities of African-American freedom.

The experience of Hillsborough County illustrates that the Reconstruction period was more complicated than either its participants recognized or historians have fully reported. Despite some similarities, Hillsborough County did not follow the well-documented patterns found in areas dominated by the plantation economy. Above all, this study shows that Reconstruction was not a monolithic process—it unfolded differently depending on local conditions. While southern and northern whites clearly affected the outcome, the fact that changes beneficial to freedpeople occurred over white protests shows that blacks’ influence was effective. As a result of their actions, African Americans in Hillsborough County enjoyed the benefits of heading their own households, gained the right to benefit from their own labor, took advantage of educational opportunities, and participated in formal politics. Freedpeople’s political activity included frequent meetings, organized rallies, and exercise of the ballot. All of these activities show that blacks had the confidence and fortitude to take public stands, despite the risk of retaliation from employers, townspeople, or perhaps even night-riders.

In 1877 the Reconstruction era ended in Florida with the withdrawal of the last federal troops. Conservative whites regained political control and instituted policies to erode African Americans’ gains of the previous decade. The magnitude of this retrenchment serves as evidence of just how much freedpeople had gained. During Reconstruction their increased autonomy resulted from conflicts and ongoing battles; it did not occur simply because of emancipation. Rather, a clash of visions, values, and goals precipitated it. The story of blacks in Hillsborough County and their quest for personal autonomy can tell us a great deal about the larger struggles of African Americans to make freedom meaningful for themselves and their descendants.

1 U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census, 1860, Hillsborough County, Florida.
2 Ralph L. Peek, “Lawlessness, in Florida: 1868-1871,” Florida Historical Quarterly, 40 (October 1961), 164, 181. The worst areas of racial violence in Florida were counties in North Florida and West Florida. Jackson County alone recorded 153 deaths. There are no documented cases of Klan killings in Hillsborough County during the Reconstruction period.
3 Tampa City Directory, 1886; Florida Peninsular, February 15, 1868.
4 The Freedmen’s Bureau in Florida consisted of the Assistant Commissioner and four staff officers in Tallahassee and 13 Sub-Assistant Commissioners located throughout the state. Bureau officials also called on Army officers to provide local supervision on behalf of the Bureau.
6 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, Florida, 1880; Hillsborough County Commission, Minutes of the County Commission of Hillsborough County, Florida, April 15, 1867, March 3, 1868, Commission Book B, 46, 63, Hillsborough County Archives.

7 Nuclear families were those comprised of husbands, wives, and their children or stepchildren. Extended families represented a wide variation of related individuals including in-laws, aged parents, nieces, nephews, etc.

8 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880.


10 J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 14, 1867. Annual Report, Florida Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Letters Sent, Department of Florida, Volume 2, (hereafter referred to as LSDF).


12 Florida Genealogical Society, Marriage Records, Hillsborough County, Florida: 1866-1901, Book 3, Tampa Public Library.

13 1870 census data do not include the family relationships between household members. An analysis of the common surnames, adult ages, sexes, and the presence of children does allow an estimate of the number of adults living in a marriage relationship, however.


16 *Sunland Tribune* (Tampa), July 2, 1877; U.S. Census Bureau, *Eighth Census of the United States (1860), Agriculture* (Washington: GPO, 1864), 18-19; R. Comba to E. Woodruff, January 251867; R. Comba to C. Garrabee, December 31,1867, LRDF, Box 3. Hillsborough County’s African-American workers again seem to have benefitted from the county’s rural setting and differing work conditions. By July 1867, wages were higher than in other areas of the state.

17 W. Vance to T. Osborn, May 1, 1866, Florida Assistant Commissioner, RG 393, Part 1, U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Part 1, Department and District of Florida, 1865-1869, Letters Received, Box #3, National Archives, Washington D. C. Hereafter, referred to as LRDF.

18 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880.

19 *Florida Peninsular*, July 28, August 4, 1866.


21 *Florida Peninsular* (Tampa), April 24, 1858, December 7, 1867.
Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880. Adult females still made up the largest group of household servants, although their numbers, too, were shrinking. Children continued to work as servants, but now represented only about half of the servant workforce. Persons included in these numbers were those with occupations listed. Those residing with whites as a consequence of old age or coincident to their parent’s employment were not included.

J. Sprague to O.O. Howard, December 31, 1867, LSDF Volume 2.

Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870; Florida Peninsular, February 15, 1868.

The term middle-class did not mean the same thing in the North and South. In fact, the southern white middle-class, especially in rural areas like Hillsborough County was probably not too much better off than the poor. Because of this, middle-class in the rural South is more a social than economic category.

J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 1, 1867, Annual Report, LSDF.

Florida Peninsular, November 30, 1867; William Vance to A. Jackson, August 31, 1867, ULAR; J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, Monthly Report, February 7, 1868, LSDF.

Reports of W. Apthorpe to the Assistant Commissioner, September 1867-March 1868, in Assistant Commissioner, Land Agent Reports, RG 105, Box 7, National Archives, Washington D.C.; J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 14, 1867, Annual Report, LSDF, Volume 2; W. Vance to Assistant Adjutant General, October 5, 1866, LRDF, Box 4; W. Apthorpe to A. Jackson, March 31, 1868, Locating Agent Reports, RG 105, Box 7, National Archives. Statewide, by the fall of 1867 land agents had registered 2,012 homesteads.

R. Comba to C. Garrabee, October 31, 1867, LRDF;

Florida Peninsular, August 4, 1866.

W. Vance to A. Jackson, August 31, 1867, ULAR, Box 6; Florida Peninsular, October 13 1869, November 30, 1867; J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, June 5, 1867, October 14, 1867, Annual report, R. Comba to C. Garrabee, October 31, 186, LSDF, Volume 2.

Florida Peninsular, August 18, 1866; L. Smith to J. Lyman, November 1, 1867; R. Comba to C. Garrabee June 30, 1867, LRDF, Box 4.

Florida Peninsular, January 11, 1868; Monthly Inspection Reports, Department of Florida, RG 393, Part 1, LSDF, National Archives, Washington D. C. Fort Brooke troops would remain until August 1869 when the Army abandoned the garrison. During that period troop strength varied. In August 1867 there were 2 officers and 35 men. The number increased to high of 8 officers and 132 men in March 1869 and then decreased throughout the remainder of the period until only 3 officers and 77 men remained when the garrison closed.

Florida Peninsular, May 11, 1867; November 30, 1867.

J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, December 31, 1866, LSDF, Volume 2.

J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, December 10, 1867, Annual Report, LSDF.

Florida Peninsular, January 23, 1869, April 11, 1868.

Ibid., May 16, 1868 C.R. Mobley was white and his close political association with African Americans brought him much criticism in the local press.

Petition by Citizens of Hillsborough County, September 4,1867, contained in M. Lyons to R. Comba, September 4, 1867, LRDF; Roll of the Officers and Privates of the Company of Militia formed at Tampa, Florida August 27,
1870, Series 1140 Box 1, Florida State Archives. According to the August 29, 1868, *Florida Peninsular*, Mills Holloman, also black, was appointed as a County Commissioner.

40 Petition from the citizens of Hillsborough County to the Governor of Florida concerning Henry Clay, 1874, Office of the Governor, Correspondence of the Governors, 1857-1888, RG 101 Series 577, Box 4, Florida State Archives; Roll of the Officers and Privates of the Company of Militia formed at Tampa, Florida August 27, 1870, Series 1140 Box 1, Florida State Archives.

41 J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 14, 1867, LSDF; W. Vance to A. Jackson, June 30, 1867, ULAR.


43 R. Comba to E. Woodruff, May 31, 1867, LRDF.

45 J. Sprague to Howard, July 31, 1867; W. Comba to C. Garrabee, April 30, 1868, LRDF.

46 *Florida Peninsular*, October 26, 1867. There was confusion over actual ages and in all probability some blacks were registered who might have been younger than the legal age. The manuscript census from consecutive periods shows many cases where ages do not match those expected.

47 Ibid., September 3, 1867; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870. The local press reported both 83 and 87 black voters at different times. The true number of African-American voters remains unknown. The federal census in 1870 recorded 71 black males who were then over the age of 21, so it is possible conservatives were right. If they were, then this may have changed the election results since Republicans won by only a few votes.

48 Ibid., November 16, 30, 1867, April 4, October 3, 1868. The 17th District, which consisted of Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties, was allowed one delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

49 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870; Notes on the History of Mt. Sinai A.M.E. Zion Church, Tampa Florida; Hillsborough County Commission Minute Book B, 83,102; Sunland Tribune, December 23,1880; Records of the Hillsborough County Board of Public Instruction, 1880; Hillsborough County Commission Minute Book C, October 7, 1872, 40.

50 *Florida Peninsular*, August 22, October 3, 24, 31, November 28 1868.

51 Ibid., June 8, 1870.

52 Ibid., August 24, November 2, 1870 (quotation).


56 Roll of the Officers and Privates of the Company of Militia formed at Tampa, Florida August 27, 1870, Series 1140 Box 1, Florida State Archives; *Florida Senate Journal*, 1870, 88.

57 *Florida Peninsular*, January 4, 1871.
58 Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1876, in Florida Senate Journal, 1877.


60 “An Act Concerning Schools for Freedmen,” January 16 1866, Laws of Florida, Chapter 1,475 (Tallahassee, 1867).

61 J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, July 10, 1867, LSDF; O. O. Howard to J. Sprague, Monthly report, LRDF, July 10, 1867.

62 Address of Governor Harrison Reed to the State Senate, undated (1870); Florida Senate Journal, 1870, 14; Rosen, “Negro Education in Florida,” 226; Gile to Whittlesey, December 31, 1869, LSDF, Volume 4.

63 W. Apthorpe to A. Jackson, September 6, 1867, Assistant Commissioner, Locating Agent Reports, Box 7; R. Comba to C. Woodruff, March 1, 1867, Volume 2; G. Hollister to C. Foster, September 15, 1868, LRDF.

64 George R. Bentley, A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 182; Rosen, “Negro Education in Florida,” 113; R. Comba to Woodruff, December 31, 1867, LRDF.


66 R. Comba to E. Woodruff, December 31, 1867; Hillsborough County Commissioners to O.B. Hart, June 8, 1869 Florida Assistant Commissioner, LRDF.

67 Florida Peninsular, August 18, 28, 1869. Despite the lack of a black public school in Tampa, the Florida Peninsular reported one black school in the local area in April 1869. This school did not hold classes in a formal school house, however, since there was none available to blacks at that time, and it did not remain open long, perhaps because black citizens could not continue paying a teacher.

68 W. White to G. White, December 26, 1869, LRDF, Volume 3.


70 Minutes of the Hillsborough County Board of Instruction, August 28, 1871, Hillsborough County School System, Hillsborough County, Florida; Florida Peninsular, December 23, 1871; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870; Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1876, Florida Senate Journal, 1877, 111-116.

71 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1880; Minutes of the County Board of Public Instruction, March 22, 1872, September 2, 1876. Discrepancies between census data and School Board records could be caused by a variety of reasons including the fact the census relied on self-reporting while School Board records probably reflect a definition based on regular attendance; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1880.

72 Florida Peninsular, December 23, 1871, October 30, 1879; Hillsborough County Board of Public Instruction Minute Books, 1871-1877.

73 Sunland Tribune, September 28, 1878, December 23, 1880; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880; Hillsborough County Commission Book D, August 31, 1879; Tampa Tribune, October 29, 1950.

74 Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1876, in Florida Senate Journal, 1877.
The growth of the communities of the Tampa Bay area into a single metropolitan area depended on bridges. As late as 1920, the waters of Tampa Bay formed a natural barrier separating the city of Tampa from St. Petersburg and Clearwater in Pinellas County. In the absence of any bridges spanning the bay, it took from several hours to travel by boat, automobile, or train from the cities on the Gulf of Mexico to Tampa. The completion of the Gandy Bridge in 1924 and the Davis Causeway (today’s Courtney Campbell Causeway) in 1934 directly linked the three cities into what would eventually become the Tampa Bay metropolitan area, which today has a population of over two million people. These spans serve as umbilical cords for the Tampa Bay area, the main arteries for transporting people, goods and services between the bay area cities. The history of their construction shows that profit-minded visionaries, notably George S. Gandy and Ben T. Davis, spearheaded the projects, but bridging the bay depended on a variety of other people and forces that were critical to the development of the Tampa Bay area during the 1920s and 1930s.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, transportation between the Pinellas peninsula and the mainland of Hillsborough County was limited to difficult land routes. Despite the arrival of the railroad to the lower Pinellas peninsula in the late nineteenth century, journeys between Pinellas and Hillsborough remained arduous and time-consuming because no direct rail link existed until 1914. The arrival of the automobile cut the travel time, but it took approximately six hours for a model-T to make the trek around the bay on primitive Florida roads. A steamship cruise between the two cities across the bay took about two hours. In 1914, during the pioneering period of aviation, a short-lived airline made travel between St. Petersburg and Tampa a mere twenty-two minutes, but this novelty quickly went out of business.¹

An alternative link was developed by George S. Gandy. On his first visit to St. Petersburg in 1902, Gandy decided that a bridge linking St. Petersburg with Tampa could be built across Tampa Bay at the estuary’s narrowest point. Gandy was firmly committed to completing such an ambitious project once the population of the area had increased to a sufficient amount so he could make large profits from tolls. In 1915, “Dad” Gandy decided that his dream would become a reality, and the man from Philadelphia employed a large crew of surveyors to ascertain the narrowest and shallowest part of the bay. The surveys took two years to finish. Upon completion of the surveys in 1917, Gandy secured the rights-of-way from Pinellas and Hillsborough counties, the state, and the federal government. The volume of permits needed today to perform such a monumental task were not required in Gandy’s day; basically, all one had to possess were the finances and land rights. In the 1920s, ecological concerns were not even considered, except in very rare cases. With no need for environmental studies, Gandy’s project required only approval of the Florida legislature, which retained ownership of submerged land. In addition, Gandy had to acquire permits from the War Department, since the Army Corps of Engineers had
dominion over the navigable waters of the United States. The War Department also retained jurisdiction over bridges for the purpose of deploying troops in time of war or other emergencies.²

In the beginning of 1918, the Gandy Bridge Company finally advanced to the construction phase of the project. However, as a result of the United States’ entry into World War I the previous year, the volume of construction materials needed for such an enormous project was impossible to procure. The War Emergency Board informed Gandy and his partner H. Walter Fuller that they had to postpone the bridge project until the end of the war. “Dad” Gandy was an extremely determined individual, and though the postwar recession further delayed his dream, he did not give up hope. His determination and stubbornness were illustrated in a statement he made at a hearing conducted by the War Department Board of Engineers. Someone accused Gandy of writing all the signatures of support, declaring the endorsements had the old man’s distinctive mark. Gandy arrogantly slammed his fist on the table and reportedly proclaimed: “You bet they do! And I’m that one man! And if the bridge is ever built, by myself or anyone else, it will be by a fellow who gets behind it like I have and never quits!”³

Like his father, young George Gandy had adopted an ethic of hard work. Born in Tuckahoe, New Jersey, in 1851, Gandy received only a grammar school education. At age sixteen, he set out for Philadelphia, where he obtained work as an office boy at the saw works of Henry Disston.
& Sons, earning four dollars a week. He remained at Disston & Sons for eleven years. In 1882, Gandy became involved in the transportation business, which was instrumental to his financial success. While working in transportation construction and operations, he achieved several prominent positions, such as secretary and treasurer of the Frankford and Southwark Railroad, vice-president of the Frankford and Southwark, president of the Omnibus Company, and president of the Fairmont Park Transportation Company. Gandy organized the construction of many trolley lines and electric railways, and was recognized in his field as an expert on traction problems. Eventually, he became vice-president of the Philadelphia Electric Traction Company. The tireless Gandy also served as president of the St. Petersburg and Gulf Railway, and this position brought him to west-central Florida in 1902. The climate and potential for growth in the Tampa Bay region sparked the interest of Gandy, and he thought it an ideal place for retirement. While his energy prevented his retreat to rest and leisure, “Dad” undertook several ambitious construction projects in St. Petersburg, including the Plaza Theater and office complex.

In 1922, Gandy bought out his partner H. Walter Fuller and persisted with the project to build a bridge across Tampa Bay. Despite his determination, Gandy refused to put one penny of his money into the project, so he faced difficulties in financing the bridge, which continued to encounter doubts about its profitability. However, prospects brightened during the summer of 1922, when another Philadelphia businessman, Eugene M. Elliott, became aware of the project after meeting Walter Jones, a part-time resident of St. Petersburg and an unofficial representative of the city’s chamber of commerce. The subject of the bridge came up, and according to Elliott, Jones declared:

It has been a hobby of old man Gandy’s for ten or fifteen years, but he hasn’t been able to get anywhere with it, and I don’t think he can. You know the people of St. Petersburg and Tampa think old man Gandy is rather fanatical on the subject of Gandy Bridge. He has tried to finance it in both St. Petersburg and Tampa and has not been able to get anywhere. The people down there don’t believe in it, don’t believe it is a feasible possibility. They think it is too big an engineering feat.

Jones asked Elliott what he thought. After asking questions about the width of the bay, the depth of the water, and the population of the area, Elliott replied that the project was not only feasible but would be profitable. Elliott then discussed the project with Congressman Fred S. Purnell of Indiana, a good friend and business associate, who had inside government information about the federal permits required for the Tampa Bay span. Purnell urged Elliott to meet with Gandy, and the Congressman agreed to be the contact man in Washington and provide any information the entrepreneurs would require. When Elliott and Gandy first met, they talked almost continuously for nine days, and Elliott became convinced he could finance Gandy’s plan. According to Elliott, he did not need to earn money because he was already financially secure, but he became captivated with Gandy’s bridge because the seeming impossibility of it challenged the self-acclaimed financier. From that point on, Elliott became a key player in making the Gandy Bridge a reality.

According to historian Raymond Arsenault, Elliott was not what he professed to be during his interviews with the press at the time. Arsenault asserts that Elliott, as a real estate promoter, was completely unrestrained in his sales approach. As Arsenault remarked, “As clever as he was unprincipled, the slick-talking Elliott took the town by storm – and boom-era ethics to a new
By September 1922, after 110 days of Elliott’s hard selling, Gandy was astonished that the salesman and his unscrupulous associates had raised $2 million from the sale of stocks. In their pitches, Elliott and his legion had falsely claimed that Elliott was a well-to-do tycoon who had already financed most of Gandy’s venture. Despite these questionable claims, construction began in earnest on September 26, 1922, when dredging started for the causeways that would approach the bridge from both sides of the bay.

With equipment coming from as far away as St. Paul, Minnesota, and expertise from men who had worked on the Panama Canal, the construction project itself was like nothing that Floridians had ever witnessed. Dredging began on the Pinellas side and was carried out during the entire project by three dredges. For a year and a half, dredging was constant, and it eventually removed roughly 2.5 million cubic yards of sand from the bottom of Old Tampa Bay. The piling and packing of this sand transformed a 400-foot-wide strip of bay into a causeway ten feet above the mean low-water level. The causeway from the Tampa side is three-quarters of a mile long, and the one from the St. Petersburg side is approximately two and a half miles long. According to one estimate, causeway construction is about five times less expensive than bridge construction.

Near the end of 1922, a temporary town was organized on the eastern side of the bay as a base of operations for the project. Dubbed “Ganbridge,” the base camp had dormitories and showers for the workers, a warehouse, offices, a machine shop, a blacksmith’s shop, and a wood shop. In addition, Ganbridge had a concrete plant, a water plant, a sewage system, and telephone lines.
Existing roads were repaired and upgraded and temporary roads were established to provide a route for materials between Tampa and the bridge site. To accommodate delivery of materials by boat from the Gulf the Mexico, a pier 1,100 feet in length was built.¹⁰

In July 1923, pile driving commenced for the bridge span that covered two-and-a-half miles. Some piles were driven as much as forty-five feet through the sand into the bedrock. The sixteen-inch-square, reinforced-concrete piles were manufactured at the Ganbridge plant, and they ranged in length from twenty to sixty feet. By utilizing water jets and steam hammers, the pile drivers drove in four piles at a time. This was convenient since the piles were placed in groups of four, which were five feet apart across the width of the bridge. Each group of piles or “bents” was spaced twenty-four feet from an adjacent bent. The pile driving concluded within a year.¹¹

The facts and figures associated with the bridge are remarkable. At Ganbridge, the materials arrived by truck, barge, and more than 1,600 railroad cars. A total work crew of 1,500 men labored for two years on the highway over the bay, using 170,000 bags of cement, 30,000 tons of gravel, and 15,000 tons of sand. In addition, they used 1,500,000 boardfeet of timber, 1,250,000 bricks, 7,000 tons of rock, 75,000 feet of electrical cable, and 50,000 feet of water pipe. Heavy equipment required 40,000 gallons of gasoline, 30,000 gallons of fuel oil, 2,500 tons of coal, and 9,000 gallons of lubricant.¹²
The bridge formally opened to the public on November 20, 1924, and four days later Tampa and St. Petersburg held a massive celebration. According to the official program for the festivities, the Gandy Bridge had become “the longest over-water highway in the world . . . attracting attention throughout the nation.” Taking inflation into consideration, the tolls were quite expensive by today’s standards. The official program publicized the following tolls: “Motorcycles - 25 cents; bicycles - 10 cents; double team - 75 cents; single team - 50 cents; saddle horse - 25 cents; in addition there is a charge of 10 cents per passenger; loose driven cattle or horses 20 cents a head.” The rate for an automobile with no passengers, which interestingly was not in the program, was the same as a double team, with an additional ten cents per passenger. Judging from the 30,000 people and 7,500 cars that steadily crossed the bridge on the Sunday after the grand opening, these rates did not hinder the success of Gandy’s enterprise. On November 24, 1924, Governor Cary A. Hardee untied a rope of flowers across the width of the bridge, symbolically uniting the cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg. The bridge attracted worldwide attention and many dignitaries, including the governors of seventeen states and politicians from as far away as Alaska and Maine, attended the festivities. Thirty-thousand spectators jammed the bridge, and awards and praise were given to Gandy by everyone, including many who years before had ridiculed “Dad” for his crackpot idea. Area merchants had Gandy Bridge sales, and songs were written, including “Gandy Bridge,” by Flora Overly. That day, thanks largely to the foresight of “Dad” Gandy the twin cities were united into a community, and the Tampa Bay “area” was born. However, the ever humble Gandy insisted on sharing the credit. In a well received speech, he concluded:

The Tampa entrance to the Gandy Bridge on opening day in 1924.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
People give me too much credit. Two thousand men were employed in the construction of the bridge. During the cold weather of last winter those men worked in the chilly water stripped to the skin, for eight hours a day. A doctor was engaged and kept at the bridge continually. He treated an average of 10 injuries a day – smashed fingers, sprained wrists and the thousand other casualties that follow in the train of a big construction job. Thank the Lord it's finished!14

In addition to cutting the driving distance between St. Petersburg and Tampa from forty-three to nineteen miles, the Gandy Bridge had a lasting impact on the Tampa Bay area. Even before the span opened, the huge construction project attracted migrant labor. Many of the hundreds of men who traveled to the Tampa-St. Petersburg area to work on the Gandy Bridge remained after the project was completed. Some came from the Cayman Islands, a British-owned island group in the Caribbean, located between Cuba and Honduras. These men from the Caymans included James Nathaniel Tibbets, a carpenter, and his cousin Clarence Tibbets, a rigger. In addition to the Tibbets, the Ryan family also contributed the labor of carpenters Isaac C. and James S. Ryan. The workers from the Caymans labored from March until December and went home for Christmas aboard two sailing ships. According to James Nathaniel Tibbets’ son, Linton, the bridge work in the colder climate of Tampa Bay was difficult for the Caymanians, who came to the region because of poor economic conditions in the islands. James Nathaniel Tibbets, a shipbuilder in the Caymans, and the approximately dozen or so other Caymanians who worked on the span, were part of a long-standing Cayman connection with Tampa Bay that still exists today. The Tibbets family eventually established roots in St. Petersburg, and today, two sons of James Nathaniel Tibbets live in St. Petersburg.15

The Gandy Bridge significantly contributed to the land boom of the 1920s, especially in St. Petersburg. In 1922, upon his first visit to St. Petersburg, Eugene Elliott observed: “The Streets were deserted, the day was hot, the movement of the people was slow, automobiles in evidence were few. The city had a lackadaisical appearance.” The 1920 census showed that St. Petersburg had 14,237 residents. During the following decade, the city’s population increased by 184 percent to a total of 40,425 people in 1930. Although the Gandy Bridge was not the sole cause of this growth, it did spark increased construction in the northern sections of St. Petersburg, where real estate prices soared. Fourth Street North, built as the link between downtown St. Petersburg and the Gandy Bridge, became a new commercial corridor. The city increased in area from just over eleven square miles in 1921 to over fifty-three square miles in 1926, and the residential areas of Allendale, Snell Isle, Coffee Pot Bayou, and many others were developed during this era. The city relied heavily on the labor of African Americans in the boom era, and the black population of St. Petersburg increased from 2,444 to 7,416 during the 1920s. Labor recruiters traveled throughout the southeastern United States in an effort to attract black workers to the bay area.16

Although dredge and fill operations had occurred prior to the building of the Gandy Bridge, they were small compared to the landfill projects that drastically altered the shoreline of the bay in St. Petersburg during the 1920s. Most notable were the Snell Isle and Shore Acres projects. From the time of the first cutting of mangroves with machetes that began the Gandy Bridge project until the end of the 1920s, five miles of St. Petersburg’s bayshore were completely changed. Workers destroyed natural vegetation and replaced the pristine shore with a concrete seawall. Synthetic peninsulas allowed many more people to have a house on the water.17
Workers who constructed the Gandy Bridge included many blacks, some of whom were migrants from the Cayman Islands.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

The route of the Gandy Bridge has been the site of three additional bridge projects since construction of “Dad” Gandy’s original venture. In 1956, the 1924 bridge became the eastbound span when a second bridge was added for westbound traffic. The original bridge was demolished in 1975 when the third project produced a new eastbound span. In the 1990s, another Gandy renovation significantly improved the crossing. The only tangible part of the old bridge remaining is a tower that was part of the toll plaza, and in an effort to save it, the structure was recently moved to the St. Petersburg campus of the University of South Florida.18

After the opening of the Gandy Bridge in 1924, the next span built across Tampa Bay was the Davis Causeway, known today as the Courtney Campbell Causeway. The construction process began in 1927, and it owed its success to one man – Captain Ben T. Davis. Like George Gandy, Ben Davis also dreamed of linking Pinellas and Hillsborough counties by a long causeway and bridge. Davis envisioned joining Tampa and Clearwater, located in Pinellas County to the north and west of St. Petersburg, by spanning Old Tampa Bay at the estuary’s northernmost portion. This would connect Rocky Point on the Hillsborough side to the eastern end of Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard in Clearwater, a citrus center and resort community that possessed a pristine Gulf beach, but had a population of only 7,607 in 1930, whereas Tampa had grown to over 100,000 people. The Great Depression, like World War I in Gandy’s struggle, caused Davis’s project to cease operations temporarily; however, like the Yankee Gandy, the Southerner Davis was an
extremely determined individual. His fortitude, in combination with Depression-era economic programs, finally ensured the project’s completion. The story of how Davis’s span subsequently became named the Courtney Campbell Causeway also deserves re-telling.\textsuperscript{19}

Ben T. Davis had gained experience from dredging and construction operations in Texas and Mexico, and he led a colorful life prior to coming to Florida. Jefferson Davis and George T. Davis, the Confederate Attorney General, were among Captain Davis’s famous ancestors. In Kentucky, the state of Captain Ben Davis’s birth, the Ben Davis apple was grafted by the famous dredger’s grandfather. Before reaching adulthood, young Ben and his family migrated to Texas, where he participated in several cattle drives along the Chisholm Trail, and traveled as far away as Oregon. Davis attended the University of New Mexico and received that university’s first degree in engineering. After graduation, Davis went to Mexico in the 1890s, and as a member of a government engineering team, he worked on the construction of one of that country’s first railways. He helped develop an exclusive subdivision in Mexico City, and at the port of Tampico, Davis constructed all the wharves. In addition, Davis built a viaduct, a steel bridge, and various types of buildings south of the border. According to George Davis, the engineer’s grandson, Ben Davis had acquired an elaborate list of friends over the years, including Charles Lindbergh and Walter Chrysler, and the bridge builder had made the acquaintance of such men as Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller. While in Mexico during the Revolution of 1911, the six-gun-toting Davis also made friends with Pancho Villa.\textsuperscript{20}
Davis spent thirty-five years in Mexico (where he earned the honorary title of Captain) before moving to Florida in 1925. In the Tampa Bay region, Davis managed the Standard Dredging Company, which built the Mandalay portion of Clearwater Beach. He also worked on Tampa’s Twenty-Second Street Causeway. His main claim to fame, the causeway that would bear his name, was not originally his idea. The movement for a Clearwater-to-Tampa span had been discussed as early as 1924 when the Gandy Bridge opened, but concerted efforts actually began in 1927. After organizers in Tampa agreed on a plan to construct the upper bay span, the proposition was turned over to the Tampa Board of Trade, the Clearwater Chamber of Commerce, and similar entities in other south Florida cities, which added their endorsement. The original plan called for a free causeway with the state picking up the tab at a cost of $2.5 million. When state financing did not pan out, local officials looked to private individuals for funding, thus creating a venture for a toll bridge.

Captain Davis became sold on the causeway idea and, like Gandy, believed a toll bridge would prove profitable. In 1927, the War Department granted a permit for construction, and the chambers of commerce of Tampa and Clearwater obtained a franchise from the legislature, which lawmakers assigned to Davis. According to the late Ralph Richards, a Clearwater attorney, “All you had to do in those days to get a franchise was apply for it – it was automatic.” (Richards failed to mention that “it was automatic” only for people in positions of power.) After two years of delay due to further engineering studies, financial “wheeling and dealing,” and the bust of the Florida land boom, the first shovel broke ground to begin construction of the causeway in 1929.

That same year, with Davis's United Dredging Company on the job, dredging began on the Hillsborough side of the bay, but the Great Depression put a quick end to this period of construction. Approximately two-and-a-half miles of causeway had been built from the Tampa shore when funds ran out, mostly money that Captain Davis had earned in Mexico. For over two years, Davis again worked to raise capital. During the Hoover administration, a new possibility opened up with the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). Assistance from the RFC allowed local authorities to complete the span, but getting the government loan was not as easy as getting the original state franchise and War Department permit. While the federal loan was pending, chamber of commerce officials from bay area cities wrote a number of letters supporting the project. Mayors and other politicians also rallied in support. Davis even spent a number of weeks in Washington arguing his cause. Despite these frantic efforts, the RFC demanded certain requirements before it would even consider the application. RFC officials required that the original cost of the span be reduced by shortening the length of the bridge and increasing the amount of dredged causeway, which would later show to have significantly altered the ecology of the northern section of the bay. The government also made Captain Davis buy an insurance policy on the bridge-causeway. With these alterations in the project, a loan of $600,000 was granted in November 1932.

Construction did not resume until the following year because of technical difficulties and weather conditions. Among other problems, a storm caused the loss of a barge carrying a dredge, further delaying construction. Finally, in June 1933, construction of Davis’s toll bridge resumed with three dredges working twenty-four hours a day. Nearly a year later, the Davis Causeway was completed at a cost of $1.5 million, 60 percent of which came from Davis and his friends.
With its nine-mile causeway and 3,510-foot bridge, the span became the longest such structure over open water in the nation.  

The fact that the bridge planning and implementation process took place after the collapse of the Florida land boom and the beginning of the Great Depression makes the Davis Causeway even more significant to twentieth-century American history. The Davis Causeway exemplifies the importance of Depression-era economic programs such as the RFC in developing infrastructure in the Sunshine State, as well as the rest of the nation. As attorney Ralph Richards pointed out, the RFC officials “made [Davis] take out insurance on his bridge, and he was lucky they did. It was just a skinny, little two-lane bridge. The causeway wasn’t much, either. Well, a hurricane came along and blew the thing away. Davis collected the federally inspired insurance money and rebuilt his bridge.”  

According to his grandson George, Ben T. Davis and his causeway had an even greater meaning to the common people of the Tampa Bay region during tough economic times. “The reason so many people for so long have wanted to see Granddaddy’s name restored to the causeway is that, during the Depression, he gave jobs to thousands of people, which meant the difference between eating and starving to death.”  

The gratitude of the people of the Tampa Bay region was fully expressed one week in June 1934. As the grand opening of the bridge approached, advertisements and messages filled the pages of the Clearwater Sun, praising the efforts of Captain Davis. In a typical advertisement,
one general contractor from Dunedin proclaimed his pride in having worked on the project, and he congratulated “Capt. Ben Davis and his ever-working Organization for their continued effort and determination to complete this magnificent causeway.” Addressing its message directly to Davis, a St. Petersburg company called the causeway an “everlasting monument to your never ceasing efforts and determination. It is the realization of a dream and we extend our hand of congratulation to a man who refused to be licked.” 28

The original Davis Causeway viewed from the Clearwater side of the bay.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
The formal ceremonies to open the Davis Causeway began at two in the afternoon on June 28, 1934, at the Tampa end of the span. The whole event and the persons involved in the festivities hint at the influence of politics and the Great Depression. Unlike the ceremonies opening the Gandy Bridge, this occasion – in the midst of the depression – attracted dignitaries only from the West Coast of Florida, possibly indicating the difficulty of obtaining funds for travel. The motorcade of notables departed the Hillsborough shore for the west end of the bridge, where the bulk of the “pomp and circumstance” took place. With thousands of people congregated on the western terminus of the causeway, Corita Davis, daughter of Captain Davis, opened a gate fabricated from flowers to allow the mayors of Tampa and Clearwater to pass and meet at the Pinellas toll gate. Former Governor Doyle Carlton, the man who headed the Sunshine State from 1929 to 1933, gave the dedication address, praising the fortitude of Davis and the progression of Florida’s highway system, “a system that is already the pride of our people, the envy of our neighbors, the joy of the traveling public.” Carlton went on to compare Davis with Gandy, and Florida railroad builders Henry Plant, and Henry Flagler. Other speeches were given by the mayors of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater, as well as by various chamber of commerce officials, who, earlier in the day, had a meeting in Tampa to devise better plans for cooperation among bay area communities. Captain Davis spoke only briefly, saying: “I’ve never faced a mike before. I’d rather get out and build another bridge than make a speech.”

In its tribute to the occasion, the *St. Petersburg Times* neatly summarized the benefits of the causeway, which cut almost ten miles off the land route between Tampa and Clearwater:

To Clearwater the completion of the causeway meant bringing its fine beach resorts nine miles closer to Tampa citizens seeking week-end and holiday pleasure.

To Tampa it meant the opening of a new avenue of trade and better opportunity for its citizens to indulge in beach sports they cannot find in the Cigar City area.

To St. Petersburg and other west coast cities it meant another attraction for their tourists and a strong physical tie linking them together in a common community spirit.

Motorists from the entire bay area enjoyed free tolls during opening day, but this convenience of cross-bay travel was short lived. The schedule of tolls announced in local papers took an accountant and engineer to comprehend, but the cost was considerable for depression-era Americans.

Automobile and driver, 25 cents, plus five cents per passenger. Motorbus and driver, 30 cents, plus 5 cents per passenger. Motor truck and driver (any number of axles, but with wheelbase not exceeding 18 feet), 30 cents; plus five cents per 1000 pounds or fraction thereof, in excess of 6000 pounds gross weight; plus five cents per passenger. Trailer and one passenger (if total wheelbase of vehicle and trailer exceeds 18 feet), 30 cents; plus 5 cents per 1000 pounds or fraction thereof, in excess of 6000 pounds gross weight; plus 5 cents per passenger. Motorcycle and driver, 10 cents; plus 5 cents per passenger. Bicycle and rider, 5 cents; plus 5 cents per passenger. Double team and driver, 25 cents; plus 5 cents per passenger. Single team and driver, 25 cents; plus five cents per passenger. Horse and rider, 10 cents; plus 5 cents per passenger. Loose driven cattle, horses, 10 cents per head.

These rates reflected the fact that the Davises owned and operated the span as a private toll road. The second floor of the tollhouse at the western end of the causeway served as home for the Davis family after the bridge opened. A journalist once asked Ben Davis if the cars kept him awake at night, and the Captain said that not hearing the vehicles would be more detrimental to
his slumber. A friend of the Davises joked that Ben “wanted to be near the money.” Ben Davis’s grandson George remembers the playroom his “granddaddy” built next to the toll gate on the ground level, having a chicken wire front so the small children could play without the risk of their wandering off and getting hit by a car. The tollhouse had public restrooms where the Davises kept their pet snake, which on occasion would cause quite a fright for Tampa-bound motorists. All of Captain Ben Davis’s four grown children were involved in the construction and operation of the Davis Causeway.32

The Davis Causeway had no sooner opened than a movement began to remove the tolls from Tampa Bay’s two spans. A law passed by the 1935 session of the Florida legislature gave authority to the State Road Department to “purchase, lease or otherwise acquire toll bridges of the type of Gandy Bridge and Davis Causeway.” In a 1938 letter to the Tampa Daily Times the Davises expressed a disposition to “cooperate with the state if it desires to acquire our enterprise. We are at present satisfied with our investment and have no desire to sell it, but if the state wants it we are prepared to negotiate a sale or lease on fair and reasonable terms.” Despite this public stance, Davis hoped to hang onto his beloved causeway, according to George Davis who recalls that his grandfather “used to hitch a ride with motorists and talk for the whole 9 – mile trip about how badly he wanted to keep the bridge.” At the time of the Davises’ announcement of a willingness to work with the state in 1938, a struggle was ensuing to lift the Gandy Bridge’s “high tolls,” but Gandy was not as cooperative as Davis.33
An advertisement for the Davis Causeway.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
During World War II, because of the federal government’s war powers and the political clout of Senator Claude Pepper, both the Gandy Bridge and the Davis Causeway were turned into public thoroughfares. First, in 1944 the federal government used its war powers to seize control of both spans and eliminate tolls. This allowed military personnel to commute easily between housing and recreational facilities in Pinellas County and MacDill Field in Hillsborough County. As a final step in its transformation into a toll-free public road, the Gandy Bridge was purchased by the government for a price of $2,382,642, which was determined by a jury. With the Davis Causeway no longer producing revenue, its owner sold the span for $1,085,000, the cost of which was split by the state and federal governments. The transfer of the two spans occurred in the midst of the heated 1944 election campaign, when Senator Pepper used his influence in Washington to secure public acquisition of these life lines, thus ensuring his reelection. Ben T. Davis – adventurer, engineer, and bridge builder – retired to a ranch in Harlingen, Texas, where he died in 1946.34

After World War II, Courtney Campbell, a Clearwater citizen and a member of the State Road Board, obtained funding to improve the Davis Causeway. Born in 1895, this lawyer, politician, fruit grower, and businessman served on the State Road Board from 1945 to 1949 as an appointee of Governor Millard Caldwell. Campbell had come to Florida during the 1920s land boom and has the distinction of creating Florida’s system of roadside parks. After the economic lift world War II gave the Sunshine State, Caldwell’s administration marketed the benefits of Florida to tourists, retirees, and businesses in the North. Campbell played a leading role in the administration’s plan because Caldwell’s project included provisions for the modernization of state roads in preparation for increased tourist and business activity.35

After the war, the state made a number of improvements on the Davis Causeway from 1945 to 1947, and as a member of the State Road Board, Courtney Campbell was very influential in implementing these changes. At a cost of one million dollars, the State Road Department bulkheaded the south shore of the causeway and elevated the level of the road several feet. As part of the improvements, Campbell also pushed a proposal to decorate the causeway, which became known as the Courtney Campbell beautification project. The beautification project decorated the barren white span with oleanders, Australian pines, red hibiscus, cabbage palms, and other plants and trees. Seventy picnic shelters with barbecue pits were constructed, each seating between twelve and fifty persons. Areas for access to the bay, including boat launching, were also added. These improvements of Ben Davis’s causeway are the roots of controversy and one of the longest family legal feuds in the state’s history.36

On January 9, 1948, the improved Davis Causeway was renamed the Courtney Campbell Parkway. Over the years, road maps of the Tampa Bay region, have often shown the bridge as the Courtney Campbell Causeway, but it is officially a parkway. According to a Clearwater Sun article from 1948, the ceremony changing the name gave no recognition to Ben Davis, who had been dead for nearly two years. However, since then, the controversy over the renaming of the causeway has reemerged time and time again. The effort to change the name of the span back to Davis Causeway has been led by Ben Davis’s grandson, George T. Davis, and supported by a host of backers, primarily from Tampa. After Courtney Campbell died in 1971, two state legislators from Tampa filed a 1973 legislative resolution that sought to name the span after Davis, but the lawmakers failed to act on the proposal. Since then, George Davis has offered a
compromise which involved naming the parks along the causeway as Courtney Campbell Park and renaming the bridge Davis Causeway. In this way, each man would receive the proper recognition for his efforts. However, with no official response, the span remains the Courtney Campbell Parkway, and the controversy continues. The only evidence of Davis’s contribution is the Ben T. Davis Beach, which is operated on the eastern end of the causeway by the city of Tampa.37

The automobile, facilitated by road and bridge building, changed the face of the Sunshine State during the 1920s and 1930s. As historian George B. Tindall pointed out, Florida in the 1920s, was “an American Riviera [that] sprang from the mangrove swamps and sand dunes” through a combination of road construction, “Coolidge prosperity,” and the prolific production of automobiles. During the boom years, Americans had surplus money and “tin lizzies,” and Florida sites became more accessible because of roads such as the famous “Dixie Highway” and bridges such as the one built by George Gandy. Then the Great Depression sparked federal programs that made possible the completion of the span started by Ben T. Davis in the 1920s.38 The entrepreneurial spirit of Gandy and Davis forever changed the landscape of the Tampa Bay area and provided crucial links that helped tie St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Clearwater into a single metropolitan area.

2 Lee M. Feder, *Florida Master Site File for Gandy Bridge* (Tallahassee: Florida Department of State, Division of Archives, History and Records Management, 1970); Telephone interview with Dr. Heywood Mathews, Professor of Oceanography at St. Petersburg Junior College, May 13, 1996.

3 Rhyder McClure, “Monument Near Gandy Bridge is Link to Area’s Past,” *St. Petersburg Times*, August 12, 1979, 1, 3; Feder, *Master Site File for Gandy Bridge*; E. Murphy Foley, “’Dad’ Gandy’s Folly?” *Sunset Gazette*, June 1, 1995, 6 (quote).

4 *St. Petersburg Times*, November 20, 1924.

5 McClure, “Monument Near Gandy Bridge”; Foley, “’Dad’ Gandy’s Folly?”

6 *St. Petersburg Times*, November 16, 1924.


8 Ibid.; McClure, “Monument Near Gandy Bridge”; *St. Petersburg Times*, November 16, 1924.

9 *St. Petersburg Times*, November 20, 1924; Interview with Heywood Matthews.

10 *St. Petersburg Times*, November, 20, 1924.

11 Ibid.

12 Gandy Bridge, Official Program for the Formal Opening, November 20, 1924, St. Petersburg Museum of History.

13 Ibid.


21 *Clearwater Sun*, June 26, 1934.

22 Ibid.


26 Johnson, “Bridges of Tampa Bay,” 55; McClure, “Men Who Bridged the Bay.”

27 George Davis quoted in Quinn, “Ben T.’s Grandson.”

28 *Clearwater Sun*, June 26, 1934.

29 *St. Petersburg Independent*, June 28, 1934; *St. Petersburg Times*, June 29, 1934; *Clearwater Sun*, June 28, 1934.

30 *St. Petersburg Times*, June 29, 1934.

31 *Clearwater Sun*, June 26, 1934.


33 Dunn, “Will Its Original Name be Restored?” 36; Bower, “How to Get Justice.”


36 *Clearwater Sun*, January 5, 1948; Bower, “How to Get Justice.”


AFRICAN AMERICANS AND CHINSEGUT HILL: RACE RELATIONS IN HERNANDO COUNTY, FLORIDA, DURING THE JIM CROW ERA

by Michael Lee Correia

Chinsegut Hill lies nestled on a high Florida ridge, seven miles north of Brooksville in Hernando County. Long a kind of oasis and a monument to the twentieth-century dreams of Raymond and Margaret Dreier Robins, Chinsegut – as Raymond Robins called it – dates its recorded history to antebellum slave society. Indeed, until 1938, it retained a direct link to slavery in the person of Elizabeth Carr Washington, who was brought to Chinsegut as a young slave just before the outbreak of the Civil War. She made the transition from slavery to freedom at Chinsegut, where she worked for a succession of owners, including the famous Robins family, and she achieved local prominence as a midwife, delivering more black and white babies than any Hernando County physician at the time. The story of her family, in contrast to the well documented lives of the Robinses, reveals a little known side of local history.

The first white settler on Chinsegut Hill was Colonel Byrd Pearson, a South Carolina lawyer and planter, who took possession of the area, under the terms of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. In 1849, Pearson built a manor house on Chinsegut Hill, the foundation shell of which still stands. Actual construction was originally by a New England ship’s carpenter, who framed the building with hand-hewn, twelve-inch cypress timbers that were hauled from the Gulf Coast by oxen and mortarized with wooden pegs.¹

A few years later Chinsegut was purchased by Colonel Francis H. Ederington, who brought with him slaves from his former home in the Abbeyville district of Fairfield, South Carolina. One of these was Elizabeth Carr, who had been born into slavery in 1848. In addition to her African ancestry, she claimed Irish and Native-American heritage.² Her original owner, C. Q. Nevitt of South Carolina, sold young Elizabeth to his brother-in-law, Francis Ederington, who brought her to Hernando County when she was twelve or thirteen years old, according to a descendant of the Ederington family. In the late 1800s, the estate came into the possession of Precious Anne Ederington, who later married Dr. T. R. Snow.³

In 1905, the property known as “Snow Hill” was sold to Raymond Robins. Raised by relatives after his father deserted the family, Robins had spent his teenage years on a grove near Snow Hill in the 1880s, when he apparently dreamed of buying the property. After several years seeking gold in Alaska’s Klondike and pursuing social work in Chicago, he purchased Snow Hill and renamed it “Chinsegut,” which in Alaskan Innuit dialect meant “the spirit of things lost and regained,” according to Robins. At the time he claimed that he bought Chinsegut with funds from a small fortune he had made in Alaska, but a recent biography shows that the money came from a $5,000 loan from his sister. He used this to purchase sixty acres on the crest of Chinsegut Hill and 120 surrounding acres.⁴

While in Alaska, Raymond Robins had found not gold but God. After undergoing a religious experience, he became a Congregational minister and turned his attention to social causes, joining the growing movement for progressive reform at the turn of the century. Based in
Chicago, he followed the social gospel into settlement house work. In 1905, on a speaking tour in New York City, he met another reformer, Margaret Dreier, who was active in various reform causes, along with her sister Mary. The Dreier sisters were the children of middle-class German immigrants who had settled in New York City. Margaret first worked as a volunteer in New York hospitals and asylums where she advised gentle, compassionate treatment of patients. Later she dedicated herself to improving the living and working conditions of women and children through labor unions, and by 1905, when she met Raymond Robins, she had become associated with the Women’s Trade Union League, which she later headed, making it an effective voice for “helping women help themselves.” Within months of their first meeting, Margaret Dreier and Raymond Robins married. They spent their honeymoon at Chinsegut, which Raymond had recently purchased, but they settled in Chicago.  

From 1905 to 1924, the Robinses pursued their interests in reform and social justice. While Margaret directed the National Women’s Trade Union League, Raymond tried his hand in politics. In 1914, he ran unsuccessfully for a Senate seat in Illinois on the national Progressive Party ticket of Theodore Roosevelt. In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Robins to a Red Cross mission to Russia that was designed to relieve the starvation caused by the Russian Revolution. While there, Robins met Lenin and Trotsky, and upon his return to the United States, he campaigned unsuccessfully for better relations with the Soviet Union. As a result of his dedicated work with the Red Cross, Robins received the title Colonel. The causes championed by Raymond and Margaret Dreier Robins led to unjust criticism by opponents who labeled them
Raymond Robins and Margaret Dreier Robins seated together, soon after their marriage in 1905. Standing behind the couple are Margaret’s sisters Katherine (top) and Mary (beside Margaret).

Photograph from Reform and Revolution by Neil V. Salzman.
as socialists or anarchists. Nevertheless, Chinsegut developed a special cultural and political milieu, owing to the Robinses’ proclivity for liberal causes and their civic sense of service to their country, county, and community.

Chinsegut always held a special attraction for Raymond Robins. Thought by Robins to be the “highest hill in Florida” (it was in fact the second highest point on Florida’s peninsula), “this hill...drew him when he felt alone,” his sister-in-law Mary E. Dreier noted in her biography of Margaret Dreier Robins. “He used to ride there to look out upon the vast forest as far as the eye could see, and beyond to the distant horizon where one’s soul could stretch toward the infinite.” However, the estate had fallen on hard times by the time Robins purchased it. “The great freeze of 1895 had killed the orange trees which once clothed the hill, and the house was forsaken,” Mary Dreier wrote. “To Raymond’s amazement, he found the house still lying on its side, held by a chain to a huge water oak.” Robins immediately had necessary repairs made. After Margaret saw the property for the first time on their honeymoon, she too developed the same love for the area. During a 1908 visit, Margaret wrote her sister: “It is wonderful out here and I dream visions in the silence of the pines.”

The Robinses’ politics and their attempt to create an Arcadia on Chinsegut Hill strongly influenced their relations with the African Americans who worked there, especially Elizabeth Carr Washington and her family. Little is known of Elizabeth’s early life dating back to slavery, but she worked at Chinsegut until she died at the age of ninety in 1938. She married George Washington, a former slave who also assisted with chores at Chinsegut, and the couple had nine children. At Chinsegut, Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) Washington did a variety of jobs, including the cooking. “She could cook out of this world,” noted a black woman who knew Lizzie as a girl in the 1920s. Mrs. Washington also did laundry at Chinsegut. “She would carry huge baskets of it on her head and she would open the gate for me,” recalled Lisa von Borowsky who began working there as the Robinses secretary in the 1920s and soon became “the little daughter of Chinsegut” for the childless couple. Elizabeth Washington also had a wry sense of humor, which may explain why she would sometimes charge people twenty-five cents to enter the gate at the bottom of Chinsegut Hill.

By the 1920s, Elizabeth Washington was well known in Hernando County as a result of her work as a midwife, and she won the respect and admiration of both the black and white communities because of her selfless devotion to both black and white families, reflected in the fact that she delivered more babies than any physician in the county during the 1920s and 1930s. Lisa von Borowsky remembers driving Mrs. Washington to deliver babies. “She helped both black and white families who couldn’t afford doctors or hospital bills,” notes Ms. von Borowsky who cannot remember that Mrs. Washington ever got paid for her midwife services.

Elizabeth Washington’s character traits and demeanor left a lasting impression on people. As Margaret Dreier Robins once noted, “She walked as if she were the Queen of Sheba!” She could be, by turns, eccentric (she was often seen smoking a pipe), outspoken, and assertive in her dealings with both blacks and whites. “I would drive her to town,” Lisa von Borowsky recalled. “Negro men were sitting by the side of the store, [and] she’d call them over to the car. ‘You go in and get me some backie [tobacco],’ she’d tell them, in the commanding way she had.” She also gave orders to her grandchildren, telling them, in one incident, to enter a local store when they
hesitated. This assertiveness served her and her grandchildren well, especially during the Jim Crow days in the first half of the twentieth century. A granddaughter remembers that “if she didn’t like you, she’d tell you.” As a result, she often got her way. For example, after Mrs. Washington purchased a car from a Brooksville mechanic, she told the man point blank and without equivocation, “If you don’t fix my car, I’m goin to take it somewhere else!” She would not have her dream of a car – and the freedom it symbolized – destroyed.  Even her inability to drive did not deter her; she had her daughter and granddaughter drive for her.  

The other African American who figured prominently in the history of Chinsegut was Fielder Harris, a former slave who eventually became Elizabeth Washington’s son-in-law. Harris was born in South Carolina in the mid-1850s and moved to Florida at an unknown later date. Harris and Raymond Robins developed a long and unusually close relationship, especially considering the dictates of the Jim Crow South. The two met in the 1880s, when Raymond was a thirteen-year-old living with his relatives on a grove near Brooksville and Harris was a hired hand. The boy who had been shifted among various relatives as a youngster found in Fielder Harris a source of strength and knowledge that opened up a new world. Fielder mentored the young man in the ways of nature and farming, and a lifetime friendship evolved. According to Robins’s biographer, “it is safe to say that the single individual that left the most profound impression on him was Fielder Harris.” Robins himself reflected on the relationship shortly before Harris died in 1924.

Uncle Fielder had the unbound confidence of my foster mother and he was during those impressionable years my closest associate. Unable to either read or write, his mind was filled with the immemorial wisdom of the field and farm, forest and stream. A wise fisherman and a mighty hunter, he knew the signs and ways of fish, fowl and beast.

He fished by the moon’s phases; planted crops and trees and killed hogs and hunted deer and bear by the same high wisdom. He believed unalteringly in the efficacy of the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit captured at midnight in a cemetery in the dark of the moon. He carried one for years and may do so still. He was the best axman, oarsman, runner, wrestler and jumper in the county. He was a master of horsemanship; broke the wildest of mules, tamed range cattle and was altogether my ideal for those seven years.

As in the way with arrogant youth I would now and again expatiate upon my splendid and prosperous future – I was a poor relation on a sandhill farm – and promised him among other glories that after I had made a fortune and built a home I would surely take him to New York.

Fielder Harris reciprocated this strong feeling of attachment. In a 1912 letter he wrote to Robins:

Dear Boy, I want to say this to you. The day you and I were sitting in the sitting room I taken [sic] a close observation of you, whither you knew it or not, and such eyes I ve never beheld in a man before, pure, clear and bright. If you[r] heart (which I certainly believe it is) is as pure as your eyes depict, you are heaven bound.

After purchasing Chinsegut, Robins wanted Fielder Harris to become caretaker, but first he had to locate his old friend. According to his sister-in-law, Robins “wrote to every post office in Florida to see whether he could find Fielder and, suddenly, one sunny morning he heard steps coming up the walk leading to the house in Brooksville, leaped to his feet and said to Margaret,
Fielder Harris (with his son Raymond) in 1914.

Photograph from *Reform and Revolution* by Neil V. Salzman.
‘That is Fielder,’ and there stood Fielder! He became the most important figure on the place.”

Harris served as foreman at Chinsegut, which was unusual in the Jim Crow South because it meant he supervised not only blacks but also whites who worked there. His ties to Chinsegut were reinforced by his marriage to one of Elizabeth Washington’s daughters, Pet. In a tribute to the Robinses, the Harrises named a daughter Margaret and a son Raymond, and the Robinses served as the children’s godparents. During their long absences from Chinsegut, the Robinses gave Fielder Harris enormous latitude, “virtually allowing Fielder to exercise Raymond’s power of attorney in matters related to the estate,” according to Robins’s biographer. Harris proved himself indispensable in many ways, including on one occasion rescuing Robins after a fall. Raymond “was building a dam over our spring-run,” Margaret wrote in a 1914 letter; “the earth was very slippery and in reaching forward he slipped and fell. Dr. Coogler, our Brooksville physician, says that Fielder, our old Negro, saved the day by pulling the leg into place at once.”

The following year, Robins fulfilled his youthful promise to take Fielder to New York. They traveled together by rail to Washington, D. C., and New York, where they stayed with Margaret’s brother on Long Island. There they visited Theodore Roosevelt who gave Fielder a horseshoe which he nailed to the great Altar Oak at Chinsegut. “It’s still there today!” notes Lisa von Borowsky.

Fielder Harris’s death in 1924 hit everyone hard at Chinsegut. “You can imagine how tremendously topsy-turvy the world seems with Fielder stricken,” Margaret Robins wrote her sister in May. “As I wired you yesterday, he went out fishing Saturday and was taken ill in the boat. But somehow with his indomitable will he climbed the hill and milked the cow. He seemed to grow worse and so about midnight, Pet [Harris] sent for Doctor Coogler.” Having suffered a stroke, Fielder Harris died six months later. The Robinses organized a memorial service at the Lake Lindsay Cemetery, where Harris and his son Raymond were buried. Margaret Robins described the ceremony in a letter.

We all drove over after dinner and with the other white men and women present were twenty whites and one hundred and fifty Negroes. It was a beautiful day and Lisa [von Borowsky] and Raymond had covered the grave with cedar and pine boughs and Lisa made two beautiful wreaths, one for Fielder’s grave and one for little Raymond’s grave...Raymond made a beautiful address. I wept like a little child! When Raymond finished he paused for a moment and then said: “And now, Margaret, Fielder’s youngest daughter, will unveil the monument which we are here dedicating to a man brave and true and fine – my friend Fielder Harris.” Margaret stood like a great Egyptian statue and at Raymond’s word she unveiled the monument. With one accord the Negroes started singing, “Nearer my God to Thee.” It was very touching and beautiful.

Religion was clearly one of the ties that bound blacks and whites together at Chinsegut. Raymond Robins was Congregational minister, and Margaret was the granddaughter of a Protestant minister. They shared their strong Christian faith with the family of Elizabeth Washington and with Fielder Harris, who was himself a preacher at a local church supported financially by Raymond Robins. On special occasions, whites and blacks joined in religious celebrations at Chinsegut. For example, in 1933 Margaret wrote her sister about “our little service on Sunday. I told Pet [Harris], Margaret [Harris] and Aunt Lizzie [Elizabeth Washington] and of course...Lisa [von Borowsky] that it was the anniversary of Mother’s birthday. So we read the 103rd Psalm and then after singing some Negro spirituals, Lisa sang ‘Lobe den Herren.’”

https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol20/iss2/1
Elizabeth Washington died in 1938. “I was getting my mail,” her granddaughter Margaret Harris recalls. “A man working at Chinsegut told me the bad news. Lizzie was walking, perfectly healthy looking. She passed at the dinner table. Must’ve been a heart attack. She was ninety years old and had spent [almost] ninety years at Chinsegut!” Born into slavery, Mrs. Washington had experienced the trials and tribulations that confronted many African Americans – the evils of slavery, the benefits of emancipation, the fears provoked by lynchings, and the discrimination of Jim Crow laws. Yet, despite the many obstacles, she kept her faith in God and in her people, and she prevailed. As a midwife, she made a singular contribution to Hernando County, and as a mother and grandmother, she nurtured a strong family that has also prevailed. Her granddaughter, Margaret Harris, studied nursing at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and worked as a counselor for African-American youth in Hernando County. A great granddaughter, Lenore Washington, attends St. Leo College. In addition to the profound influence of Elizabeth Washington and Fielder Harris, this African-American family also undoubtedly benefited from living and working at Chinsegut in the midst of the Arcadia, whatever its limitations, that Raymond and Margaret Dreier Robins tried to build.

Despite their efforts to improve the lives of African Americans employed at Chinsegut, the Robinses faced insurmountable obstacles in confronting issues of race in Hernando County. As Mary Dreier emphasized in her biography of her sister, “The Negro’s position in the South seemed one of the injustices which could not be remedied by Northerners and Margaret chafed under that limitation, for she had been accustomed to ride over obstacles ever since she was a little girl.” Margaret Harris later related an incident from the 1930s that showed both how Jim Crow victimized African Americans and how some fought back. “Here in Brooksville they got me for walking down the street,” Harris recalled. “A white man said, ‘I don’t see why the hell you don’t walk on the other side of the street.’” The man then prodded her in the back with something. “We actually fought it out...till a man across the street said, ‘you let her alone!’” After a sheriff’s deputy was called, Margaret left, but her tormentor followed her until she finally eluded him.

Unable to change segregation in Hernando County, Margaret Robins worked to improve services for local blacks. In 1930, she helped organize the first Institute on Negro Education that was held in Hernando County. “We are hoping,” she wrote, “that the Rosenwald gift of three thousand dollars toward a school [for black children] to cost six thousand [dollars] can be accepted, and that the Negroes and the county will build it.” During the Depression, when a typhoid epidemic hit, Margaret Robins personally paid “the larger end of the salary” for Hernando County to hire two public health nurses. As a result, she wrote her sister, “all the children in the schools are being given anti-typhoid serum.” She also insisted that hundreds of pounds of flour and grains go to impoverished African Americans in the county. Reflecting on Raymond Robins’s racial attitudes, Fielder Harris’s daughter Margaret declared that “he would allow a black person at his front door, before he would allow a white person there.” However, Margaret Robins recognized that she and her husband could not change the community’s racial hierarchy. “All the years that she had been at Chinsegut,” according to her sister, “she was troubled that she could not effectively help in bringing about a more tolerant attitude toward the Negroes. She realized very early that being a Northerner she could do nothing to help directly except by and through her personal relation to Negroes.”
Nevertheless, the personal relations of the Robinses certainly made a difference in the lives of African Americans like Elizabeth Washington, Fielder Harris, and their descendants. And, it should be remembered, Fielder Harris was the most significant influence on young Raymond Robins, demonstrating the complex interactions that could exist between individual blacks and whites during the days of Jim Crow. Put simply, Fielder Harris may be considered as responsible for the development of Chinsegut as Raymond Robins, for it was Harris who taught Robins much of what he came to love about Chinsegut Hill.

The gravestone of Elizabeth Carr Washington stands in Brooksville’s Lake Lindsey Cemetery.
Margaret Dreier Robins and Raymond Robins in the garden at Chinsegut.

2 Population Census, Hernando County, Florida, 1880; author’s interview with Margaret Harris, July 14, 1993. Mrs. Harris, a resident of Brookville, is the granddaughter of Elizabeth Carr Washington.

3 Alfred A. McKethan, *Hernando County, Our Story*, ed. by Patricia Rogers (self-published: Alfred A. McKethan, 1989), 25-26. Alfred A. McKethan is the son of Mary Alice Hale and William M. McKethan. Mary Alice Hale was the daughter of John Hale and Dorothy Ederington, the daughter of Francis Ederington, Sr., who originally transported Elizabeth Carr from South Carolina to Chinsegut Hill.


8 Death certificate of Elizabeth Carr Washington, Lake Lindsay Cemetery Records, Brookville; Harris interview.


11 Dreier, *Margaret Dreier Robins*, 212; Von Borowsky telephone interview; Harris interview.

12 Washington interview.


15 Ibid., 21.


21 Ibid., 233; Salzman, *Raymond Robins*, 389 (note 23).
22 Harris interview.

23 Drier, *Margaret Drier Robins*, 220.

24 Harris interview.

As World War II dawned, few women in the United States had more flying experience than two Florida pilots, Ruth Clifford and Dorothy Ebersbach. When war became a reality, both women took steps to serve their country; they first became members of the Civil Air Patrol and then served as Women Airforce Service Pilots. Their pioneer efforts reveal a little known aspect of aviation history during World War II.

Dorothy Ebersbach learned to fly in Tampa. Born in 1914, she attended Ohio State University and graduated with a degree in English. Her first taste of flying came at the Chicago World Fair, when she and her father took a ride in a hydroplane. Subsequently, Ebersbach’s father, a Tampa road contractor, worked on the construction of the runways at MacDill Army Air Field. Returning home after college, Dorothy Ebersbach gave in to her interest in aviation and enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training Program offered by the University of Tampa in 1939. Her flight instructor was Lewis Lee. Following completion of the training program, Ebersbach got her own airplane, a three-passenger Piper Cruiser, which her father purchased. She took her new
avocation seriously, successfully passing her commercial license and logging over 300 flight hours at Tampa’s Drew Field and Peter O. Knight Airport. When war struck, she sold her airplane since gas rationing curtailed civilian flying.¹

Ruth Clifford, born in 1917, was fortunate to have parents who believed women were capable of anything a man could do. She and her two sisters were encouraged to make their way in life and look for positive results. Clifford was equally fortunate to grow up in Lakeland, a hotbed of aviation, where frequent air shows featured local fliers Clem Whittenbeck and Charles F. Abel. Whittenbeck was self-proclaimed as “America’s Champion Inverted Flier.” Abel called himself “America’s Champion Stunt Glider Pilot.” Ruth Clifford was raised on the family strawberry farm in Lakeland, where she and her two sisters helped to pick berries in the fields. Graduating from high school in 1935, she went into typical female employment as a secretary with the Lakeland Ledger, but wanted something different. In 1939, the Haldeman Flying Service operated by Walter Haldeman offered a prize for the best aerial photograph of Lakeland. Long interested in photography, Clifford entered the contest, hiring a plane and pilot to take her up to achieve the aerial shots. She did not win the contest, but her lifelong love of flying was born. While Ebersbach was taking lessons from Lewis Lee in Tampa, Clifford began taking flying lessons in May 1939, at Lakeland’s Haldeman-Elder Field. Her instructor was Walter Haldeman, brother of George Haldeman who had unsuccessfully attempted to cross the Atlantic Ocean in 1927 with Ruth Elder. On January 21, 1940, flying out of the Lakeland Municipal Airport, Ruth Clifford made her first solo flight in a Taylorcraft. While involved with the practical aspects of learning to fly, Clifford also kept busy in ground school learning the theory of flight. In a course taught by Rupert Keene and John Roberts at the Lakeland Municipal Airport, twenty-three potential fliers learned about navigation and the fundamentals of flight. Clifford easily passed the course with the highest grade.²

Long before America entered World War II, Florida fliers had begun preparing for the seemingly inevitable conflict. One of the earliest precursors of the Civil Air Patrol was Florida’s First Defense Force, with units throughout the state. The Polk County Air Defense Unit consisted of twenty-two men and women.³ Among those nearly two-dozen Florida fliers were the Clifford sisters, Ruth and Mary, of Lakeland. The purpose of the Polk County Air Defense Unit was “to coordinate all private and nonscheduled flying activities in Florida with the state and national defense program, to guard against sabotage, espionage or other subversive activities and to prohibit violations of any air corps, CAA or national defense regulations.”⁴ Service in the unit
was strictly voluntary; no salaries were paid. Members were required to have a private pilot’s and a radio operator’s license.

In 1942, both Dorothy Ebersbach and Ruth Clifford joined the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). Clifford obviously felt very strongly about her role and that of women generally in World War II. On December 11, 1942, she wrote, “If, in my small way, I could contribute some little bit to the final success of the United Nations in this war I would not have lived in vain. If I could train even one of those few to whom ‘so many owe so much’ I would feel that I had a personal representative in the field of battle, and, God helping me, I will.” Only a month earlier, on November 5, 1942, Clifford had received her first official appointment as a Civil Air Patrol officer, holding the rank of second lieutenant and serving as adjutant in Lakeland’s Squadron 413-2 which was based at Bartow. Ebersbach became a member of a Civil Air Patrol squadron based at Tampa’s Peter 0. Knight Airport. “In England women help to ferry bombers to combat zones,” she had stated even before joining the CAP. “We could well copy that idea. I hope the Civil Air Patrol becomes more active because I believe it offers a field in which women could be quite useful.”

Like other CAP groups, Lakeland’s Squadron 413-2 set about preparing for whatever missions might arise. A but was constructed at the airport and outfitted with emergency resources. Benches with folding desktops were built for ground school classes, with meteorology and navigation routinely taught. Each Sunday, flights were formed. Emergency landing fields and navigational landmarks were located. Clifford’s contributions were recognized by her squadron commander who wrote that he was “deeply grateful to Ruth Clifford, Squadron Adjutant, for being so complete in her weekly reports. Thank you ever so much!”

Members of the Lakeland and Tampa CAP squadrons frequently trained together. Certainly one of the most exciting meetings was a mock aerial bombing raid by CAP fliers against the city of Tampa on September 27, 1942. The attacking force was composed of pilots from Tampa, Lakeland, Sarasota, and Ft. Myers. Only after the raid ended did the pilots learn how dangerous their mission had been. “Some of the pilots who flew close to the shipyards may never know how near they came to having a few .50-caliber anti-aircraft machine gun slugs earmarked for them,” the press reported. “Someone forgot to tell the gun crews that there was to be a practice air raid. When the sirens went off, they ran to their stations and unlimbered their guns. Fortunately, someone told them what was going on.” This raid ended two days of aerial attacks against Tampa. The previous day, Ruth Clifford, Dr. H. S. McClamma, and Claude Pinkston had wrought havoc over Tampa, as each pilot dropped sixty flour-filled bombs. Few Florida cities escaped practice attacks by the Civil Air Patrol. Later that same month, thirteen private planes flown by CAP pilots from Tampa, Lakeland, and St. Petersburg attacked Ft. Myers. Ruth Clifford flew a Luscombe and dropped “bombs” containing several thousand leaflets that explained the need for volunteer Civil Air Patrol pilots.

Proposals to utilize women in the United States Army Air Forces met stiff resistance. In the summer of 1941, Jacqueline Cochran of Pensacola served as a civilian consultant to the staff of the Commanding Officer of the Ferry Command, and she investigated the possibility of using women pilots. Cochran studied the flying and medical records of all licensed women pilots in the files of the Civil Aeronautics Administration. Several months later, she recommended the use of women pilots in the Army Air Forces, but her suggestions were rejected because “there were
more than sufficient male pilots to handle available planes, and no provision was made in the recommendations for organization and supervision of the women pilots.\textsuperscript{11} At the time, the idea of women joining the military was opposed by many men, including one who in 1941 declared in the \textit{Congressional Record}: “Take the women into the Armed Service, who then will do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself?...Think of the humiliation! What has become of the manhood of America!”\textsuperscript{12}

This attitude was undermined by the efforts of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Just as she had assisted the cause of black fliers in becoming part of the Army Air Corps, she used her influence to help women fliers. On September 1, 1942, she wrote in her newspaper column:

\begin{quote}
We know that in England, where the need is great, women are ferrying planes and freeing innumerable men for combat service. It seems to me that in the Civil Air Patrol and in our own Ferry Command, women, if they can pass the tests imposed upon our men, should have an equal opportunity for noncombat service. This is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with all our ability and every weapon possible. Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

The United States War Department and the generals of the Army Air Forces eventually realized the need for women pilots. When the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) organization was activated in the fall of 1942, more than 25,000 women applied for the few available slots in the program. The original requirements included age limits of twenty-one to thirty-five, high school education or equivalent, minimum height of sixty inches, 200 hours of flying time, medical examination by an Army flight surgeon, American citizenship, and a personal interview with an authorized recruiting officer. Eventually the required flight hours were reduced to 100, then 75, and finally 35.\textsuperscript{14}

The first class of WASP fliers reported for duty at Howard Hughes Airport in Houston, Texas. A civilian contractor, Aviation Enterprises, was hired to provide training for Cochran’s “girls.” The women fliers were not members of the military, but were instead rated as Civil Service employees. Trainees were paid $150 per month; with regulation overtime, they received $172.50. Following their assignment to operational duties, the fliers were paid approximately $290 per month. However, they received few benefits; there was no government life insurance, military funerals, burial expense, or G.I. benefits. Nevertheless, their training was a carbon copy of that received by male Air Corps flight cadets. They were instructed in military courtesy and customs, Articles of War, safeguarding of military information, drill and ceremonies, Army orientation, organization, military correspondence, chemical warfare, and personal affairs. The ground school phase of flight training included mathematics, physics, maps and charts, navigation, principles of flight, engines and propellers, weather, Morse code, instrument flying, communications, and first aid training. Practical flying ranged from primary through advanced. In the beginning of the program, the women received twenty-three weeks of training which included 115 hours of flying and 180 hours of ground school. By the program’s end, the women received thirty weeks of training, including 210 hours of flight instruction and 393 hours of ground school. The first WASP group began training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, in February 1943. Of the 25,000 applicants, only 1,834 were accepted as trainees. Of that number, only 1,074 graduated.\textsuperscript{15}
Dorothy Ebersbach of Tampa and Ruth Clifford of Lakeland were two who made it through the rigorous training to wear the gold WASP insignia on their uniform lapels. Even before the WASP program, Ebersbach had sent letters to both the Navy and the Army Air Corps in late 1942. When the WASP program became a reality, she applied, and in January 1943, she learned that she had been accepted for the February class, but she could not leave until the following month. On March 23, 1943, Ebersbach became a member of the fifth class of WASP trainees to go through the program. Arrival at Avenger Field, Texas, was like entering a different world from Florida. The flat dry wasteland seemed to go on forever, broken only by mesquite brush. Trainees were transported between auxiliary fields in cattle wagons. Sweetwater, the largest nearby town, contained only 10,000 residents. From the front gate of Avenger Field, the first building to be seen was the administration building. Atop the building stood Fifinella, the symbolic mascot of the WASP. A large cartoon character designed by Walt Disney, Fifinella was a female gremlin whose job was to thwart the male gremlins who allegedly caused airplane malfunctions.¹⁶

The exacting training was tough, and nearly thirty-one percent of the trainees were eliminated for flying deficiencies. The rate was high, but no higher than for their male counterparts.¹⁷ The women who made it through the program were ready for anything. Ebersbach recorded some of her experiences in several tiny blue spiral notebooks. In September 1943, she wrote: “Jumping – on right side of Am. [American] planes except P-38 jump from inside of spin. Seat pack – jump
head first. Chest pack – keep head back. Pull shroud lines in direction you wish to go. Face downwind. Land with legs bent up and feet apart.”

Training was also dangerous. Two of her classmates, Margaret J. Seip and Helen Jo Severson, were killed in a training accident at Avenger Field. Ebersbach graduated from the school at Sweetwater on September 11, 1943.

Described as Tampa’s only WASP, Ebersbach was based first at Love Field in Dallas, Texas, and then at Marana Field, Arizona, where she served most of her tour of duty. Assigned as a utility pilot in the engineering department, Ebersbach took airplanes up for a test flight whenever maintenance work was performed. It was dangerous and frequently monotonous work, especially when putting an airplane through slow timing (flying at the minimum power setting). Minor mishaps were routine; as a type of quality control, the mechanic who had worked on the airplane frequently flew along on the test flight. While testing an AT-6 fresh out of maintenance at Marana Field, Ebersbach recalled, “Somebody had left the oil cap off. As soon as we got going good, the oil began to go all over the windshield, all over the plane. We headed back for the field but it was hard to see. He [the mechanic] opened the canopy. It made the wind worse and I kept yelling at him to close the canopy. He finally did and we got back in okay and we were covered with oil.”

After her work at Marana Field, Ebersbach had several other assignments. She spent the month of May 1944 in Orlando undergoing officer’s training. Shortly afterward, she was transferred to Yuma, Arizona, to serve as a copilot on a TB-26 bomber that had been stripped of most of its armor. Her job was to tow targets so that artillery and pursuit aircraft could practice their gunnery. In November she received instrument training in Sweetwater, before returning to Yuma.

By the time Ruth Clifford became a WASP in March 1944, she had what few of her classmates had – flying experience and almost 450 flight hours in her logbook. She also held a commercial pilot’s license with an instructor rating. Upon arrival at Avenger Field, Clifford and her fellow cadets were issued oversized men’s size 44 fatigues, affectionately called “Zoot Suits.” Like Ebersbach before her, Clifford learned to fly the Army way in a double-winged open-cockpit Stearman P-17 in primary training. The more advanced closed-cockpit North American AT-6, complete with flaps and retractable landing gear, was used for transition and cross-country training. Along with the other women cadets in her class, Clifford was required to wear a turban while working around machinery to ensure that her hair did not get caught. Because the order had come from the commanding officer, Major Robert Urban, the white hand-towels became known as “Urban’s turbans.”

Ruth Clifford became a graduate of the sixteenth class of women pilots at Avenger Field on October 9, 1944. The going had been tough; elimination from the program was very high. Of 108 women in her class, only 49 graduated. On October 17, 1944, Clifford received a telegram, ordering her to Cochran Field in Macon, Georgia, where she served with seven other women in the flight test section. “After a plane was worked on in maintenance, I’d take it up to see if it was working properly,” she explained. Thus, in a role similar to that of Ebersbach, Clifford’s job was to test fly the airplanes after maintenance. “It was routine,” she declared. “I don’t think it was any more dangerous than any other flying.”
As the war wound down, the War Department decided to put an end to a program that it had never wanted. Many of the women were caught by surprise when on October 3, 1944, the order for deactivation of the WASP, effective December 20, 1944, was issued. In his press release, General Henry H. Arnold tried to justify replacing the women fliers with male pilots.

The WASP became part of the Air Forces because we had to explore the nation’s total manpower resources and in order to release male pilots for other duties. Their very successful record of accomplishment has proved that in any future total effort the nation can count on thousands of its young women to fly any of its aircraft. You have freed male pilots for other work, but now the war situation has changed and the time has come when your volunteered services are no longer needed. The situation is that, if you continue in service, you will be replacing instead of releasing our young men. I know that the WASP wouldn’t want that. So, I have directed that the WASP program be inactivated and all WASP be released on 20 December 1944. I want you to know that I appreciate your war service and that the AAF will miss you. I also know that you will join us in being thankful that our combat losses have proved to be much lower than anticipated, even though it means inactivation of the WASP.  

The WASP pilots had performed magnificently during their nearly two years of service. In all, they logged more than 60 million miles as they performed aircraft ferrying service, target towing, aircraft administrative test flying, and instructing. The cost had been high; thirty-eight of Ebersbach and Clifford’s fellow WASP died while in the service of their country. Since the WASP were not considered to be members of the military, they were denied even the traditional benefits of a military funeral or an American flag for the coffin. With a stroke of the pen, the
military flying careers of almost a thousand women were effectively ended. Dorothy Ebersbach resigned from the Women Airforce Service Pilots and was discharged at Yuma Army Air Field on December 5, 1944, and she returned to Tampa. Ruth Clifford waited until the deactivation became official and then returned to Lakeland. Despite having served their country in time of war, both women were forced to pay the cost of their transportation home.\textsuperscript{28}

The lives of the two women diverged after the war. Having sold her airplane before entering the WASP, Ebersbach flew infrequently. In contrast, Clifford began the second phase of her flying career, finding a job teaching flying at Johnson Aero Services at Gilbert Field near Winter Haven. With nearly 900 hours of flying experience, Clifford was one of four flight instructors and the only woman instructor employed by the company. In a dual control airplane she flew almost every day. Within a year after the war, she relocated to the Tampa Bay area and began teaching for U.S. Flying Services at Albert Whitted Airport in St. Petersburg. There she met and eventually married Pete Hubert, owner of his own flying service and one of the original founders of National Airlines.\textsuperscript{29}

After the war, Ruth Clifford became a familiar face at local Tampa Bay air shows. In May 1946, she was one of only two women pilots who participated in a show at Drew Field sponsored by the local chapter of the National Aeronautic Association. Ruth Clifford, by then married to
Pete Hubert, flew her Stearman P-17, looping and rolling above more than 7,000 spectators, who turned out to see the U.S. Air Forces Tactical Air Command’s B-25s, A-26s, P47s, and P-51 Mustangs. Six months later, the Ruth Hubert Event was one of a dozen attractions at the Tampa Air Maneuvers, held at Peter O. Knight Airport and sponsored by the Tampa Aero Club.  

In 1947, Ruth Clifford Hubert served as the chair of the Florida chapter of the Ninety-Nines, a national women’s flying organization. Formed in 1929 by licensed women pilots who gathered at Curtiss Field on New York’s Long Island, the group had ninety-nine charter members. To qualify for membership, a woman needed a private pilot’s certificate and her application needed to be approved by the membership committee. The Clifford sisters, Ruth and Mary, had been inducted into the Ninety-Nines on November 2, 1941, at a Florida chapter meeting held in Ft. Lauderdale. Ebersbach had been a member for just as long. The leaders of the Ninety-Nines had pushed hard for inclusion of women pilots in the Army Air Forces during World War II.

As head of the Florida chapter of the Ninety-Nines in 1947, Ruth Clifford Hubert was in part responsible for staging the First All-Woman’s [sic] Air Meet. Held at Tampa’s Peter O. Knight Airport for two days in March 1947, the event was organized by women pilots who had been banned from competing in the Miami All-American Maneuvers in January 1947. Promoters heralded the Tampa event as the world’s first all woman air meet. According to one of the headliners of the show, “It would be quite an achievement if this were the first All-woman Air Show in the U. S. or even in North America, but the first one in the world will truly be a memorable event, and should make a name for Tampa in aviation.” Ruth Clifford Hubert had a very successful weekend of flying. She took third place in the aerobatic competition, Military Pilots Trophy Race, and the Free-For-All Race. The First All-Woman’s Air Meet also attracted Dorothy Ebersbach, who served as a demonstration pilot flying a Navion. Later that year, Ebersbach finally ended her flying career. She went back to school, became a nurse, and spent over twenty years as a public health nurse in Tampa. To continue flying, Ruth Clifford Hubert rejoined the Civil Air Patrol, rising to become a lieutenant colonel and logging over 2,500 hours of flight time. She still flies her own Cessna 172.

It took more than thirty years, but the women who served as WASPs finally received recognition. The G.I. Improvement Act of 1977 authorized the Secretary of Defense to determine if certain types of civilian service during World War II could be classified as active duty. On March 8, 1979, it was announced that the service of the Women Airforce Service Pilots qualified as active military service. In May 1984, forty years after their service ended, Ruth Clifford Hubert, Dorothy Ebersbach, and the other WASPs were awarded the World War II Victory Medal and the American Campaign Medal.

Dorothy Ebersbach and Ruth Clifford should be credited for their accomplishments in general aviation, as well as their wartime service. These Florida fliers were legitimate pioneers in aviation, and they accomplished much in the face of adversity.


2 Lakeland Ledger, February 18, 1940; Lakeland Sunday Ledger and Star-Telegram, May 9, 1941.
3 *Lakeland Ledger*, October 31, 1942.

4 Ibid., October 19, 1941.

5 Ruth Clifford Scrapbook, in possession of Ruth Clifford Hubert, St. Petersburg, Florida.


7 *Tampa Tribune*, 1941, clipping in Dorothy E. Ebersbach Scrapbook, in possession of Dorothy E. Ebersbach, Tampa, Florida.

8 Jean K. Fyfe, *The Pelican* (Civil Air Patrol, Intelligence Officer Group 413).

9 Jean K. Fyfe, *The Pelican* (Civil Air Patrol, Communications Officer 3rd Group), November 5, 1942.


11 Jacqueline Cochran, Director of Women Pilots, to Commanding General, Army Air Forces, in folder 1, Women Airforce Service Pilots, National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C.


15 Ibid.

16 Personal interview with Ruth Clifford Hubert, June 4, 1997; personal interview with Dorothy E. Ebersbach, June 18, 1997.


18 Ebersbach notebooks, September 1943, in possession of Dorothy E. Ebersbach.

19 Department of Defense Form DD 214 (Report of Transfer or Discharge) for Dorothy E. Ebersbach, ibid.

20 *Tampa Sunday Times*, May 21, 1944. Florence Maloof of Tampa later went into the WASP program but resigned after only a couple of months.

21 Interview with Ebersbach.

22 Department of Defense Form DD 214 for Ebersbach.

23 Ruth Clifford’s sister, Mary, joined the Women’s Auxiliary Ferry Service in February 1943. After training in Texas, she was assigned as a ferry pilot at New Castle Army Air Forces Base, Wilmington, Delaware. Another sister, Margaret, served as a WAVE and was stationed at a naval air base at Lambert Field, St. Louis. Interview with Hubert; *Tampa Times*, August 12, 1943.

24 Interview with Hubert; interview with Ebersbach.

25 Interview with Hubert.


Department of Defense Form 214 for Ebersbach; Department of Defense Form 214 for Ruth Clifford, in possession of Ruth Clifford Hubert.


The Ninety-Nines All-Woman Air Show Program, March 15 & 16, 1947, 3, copy in possession of Ruth Clifford Hubert; Lakeland Ledger, November 3, 1941.


Personal flight log books in possession of Ruth Clifford Hubert; interview with Hubert.

Department of Defense Form DD 214 for Clifford; Department of Defense Form DD 214 for Ebersbach.
Established in April 1900, First Christian Church (FCC) of Tampa stands at the threshold of its centennial year with a rich history of achievement. The fledgling Church of fourteen charter members has grown and flourished along with the community in which it resides. Situated at 350 Hyde Park Avenue since 1927, First Christian Church is a landmark of English Gothic architecture, overlooking the Davis Islands Bridge near Bayshore Boulevard. The red brick structure and its peripheral property extend for a half-block on Hyde Park Avenue and a full block along DeLeon Street. It is an impressive edifice, with stained glass windows, steeple bells, a large education annex, and a library of over 9,000 volumes. Its story, however, began humbly.

Turn-of-the-century Tampa was reputedly a rough-and-tumble town marked by the legendary rowdiness of the soldiers stationed there during the Spanish-American War. Despite this, a religious spirit quietly prevailed, as did the decorum of Victorian mores, particularly with regard to the roles of women who were expected to confine their activities to the private sphere of the home. However, voluntary service to the community increasingly provided an outlet for middle-class and elite women. So it was that Lena Shackleford, the wife of Judge Thomas M. Shackleford, became the catalyst for the establishment of Tampa’s First Christian Church. After making a bold and impassioned plea at the State Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Jacksonville, Lena Shackleford provided the impetus for the Church’s organization in Tampa by procuring its first minister, Dr. D. S. Colyer. On April 2, 1900, upon Mrs. Shackleford’s return to Tampa with Brother Colyer, the following fourteen members convened for the first time as First Christian Church: Judge and Mrs. Thomas M. Shackleford, Mr. and Mrs. L.M. German, Mr. and Mrs. J.E. Oglesby, Mrs. J.O. Weatherwax, Mrs. W. A. Morrison, Mrs. P.P. Culbreath, Mrs. Viola Driver, Mrs. G. F. Monroe, Mrs. W.F. Lucas, Mrs. Nellie T. Boyd, and Miss Nora Harmon. Church services were initially held in a room above Tibbett’s Corner Store at Franklin Street and Lafayette (now Kennedy) Boulevard, while the congregation focused its efforts on a building program.¹

During its early years, the Church moved often in an ongoing effort to provide adequate quarters for its growing membership. In July 1901, a little over a year after its founding; First Christian Church dedicated its first small tabernacle at the corner of Florida Avenue and Scott Street. Within a few years, a new and larger sanctuary was constructed at the northwest corner of Henderson and Florida avenues. However, by 1912, with Tampa’s population passing 40,000, First Christian Church was outgrowing its premises. Soon property was purchased for a larger, more centrally located worship site at Marion and Twiggs streets, and in March 1913, a new church building was dedicated at this location. FCC remained there until the mid-1920s, when the property was sold and the present site developed.²

Today’s church on Hyde Park Avenue opened its doors in January 1927 at a cost of approximately $250,000. Described on postcards as the largest and most modernly equipped...
Christian Church in the South, the Church housed a $10,000 state-of-the-art Midmer-Losh organ, paid for by the Ladies Aid Society. More than an impressive and inspiring structure, however, it was a welcomed new home for a congregation whose membership surpassed 800 in the 1920s.  

During the formative years of the Church, despite limited avenues for personal income, the women of First Christian Church contributed substantially both to the mission of the Church and to its financial stability. With women comprising eleven of the fourteen founding members, both a Ladies Aid Society and a Christian Women’s Board of Missions were established in 1900 at the time of the founding of the Church. Early fund-raising projects initiated by the women ranged from customary bazaars, at which homemade items from sweets to sunbonnets were sold, to creative Kitchen Kabinet Koncerts, where young women of the Church performed musical concerts, using instruments improvised from kitchen tools. Other events to raise money included boat excursions along the Manatee River and Tampa Bay. The profits from such ventures provided a solid foundation for the Church’s early building programs and charitable endeavors.

Through the years, the women of Tampa’s First Christian Church have continued their support of countless benevolent activities with thousands of hours of volunteer service. Especially prolific and far-reaching have been the local, national, and international charitable efforts of the Christian Women’s Fellowship (CWF). Organized in 1951, CWF continued the work of its
predecessor, the Women’s Council, which was a 1929 consolidation of various earlier women’s societies within the Church. The following list of beneficiaries, randomly chosen from FCC annals, exemplifies the diverse interests of this organization during the course of one CWF year (1953): Tampa Child Evangelism Fellowship, United Church Women of Tampa, Florida Chain of Missionary Assemblies, Drew Park School for Retarded Children, Salvation Army, Drew Field Tuberculosis Hospital, Old People’s Home, Florida Avenue Children’s Home, West Tampa Boy’s Club, and Girl Scout Troop 55, which the Church sponsored.4

Foremost in service among early FCC women was the Church’s founding member, Lena Shackleford. Still respectfully referred to as Mrs. Shackleford by those who remember her, she undertook numerous Church and community roles, including treasurer of the Ladies Aid Society, vice-president and circle leader of the Women’s Council, member of the FCC diaconate, board member of the YWCA, and founder of the Tampa Women’s Club. Her multifaceted work also earned her the State Federation of Women’s Clubs gold medal in 1961 (at the age of 99!) for the most substantial contribution to the service of women in Florida in fifty years.5

Numerous other women have also distinguished themselves in serving the Church. One, Pauline Love Johnson, is a former public school teacher who has been an FCC member since 1923. Mrs. Johnson’s innumerable service-oriented positions have included state representative...
and local president of the Chain of Missionary Assemblies, board member of Church Women United, two-term Church CWF president, diaconate member, local president and state board member of the PTA, and FCC Biblical instructor for nearly fifty years. Also noteworthy, and still active as a CWF and diaconate member, is eighty-one-year-old Margaret Walstrom, who served for thirty-three years as summer camp director at the Christian Church Conference Center in Silver Springs and for sixty-seven years as a Sunday school teacher at FCC. Through the years, Mrs. Walstrom also held positions as president of the Church CWF and president of the Hillsborough County Pre-school Association, and she actively served as a Red Cross and Recreation Department volunteer. Yet another exemplary woman is Louise Coleman, FCC elder emeritus, whose diverse Church and community leadership roles included president of the Tampa CWU, three-term Church CWF president, chairperson of the Church elders, director of the YWCA, and two-term president of the Tampa Bay Chapter of the American Business Women’s Association. In honor of her longtime community service, Mrs. Coleman was also named 1982 Distinguished Member of the President’s Roundtable of Organizations of Greater Tampa, an organization representing twenty-seven major, non-profit organizations. Another example of long service is Mary Napoli, a former Hillsborough County principal and teacher (for forty-three years), who became the first female chairperson of the FCC board and currently serves as Church CWF vice-president. She has won recognition as Lay Woman of the Year and as a volunteer for American Cancer Society’s Reach to Recovery.⁶

Members of the First Christian Church in front of their tabernacle at the corner of Marion and Twiggs streets.

Photograph courtesy of FCC.
Among the numerous CWF members who have contributed countless hours through the years were a number of women who called themselves the Sew and Sews. This talented, and seemingly tireless, group gathered each week for twenty-four years to sew for the needy, donating nearly 7,400 handmade outfits to charitable organizations such as the Clothes Closet, a community clothing distribution center organized by the interdenominational Church Women Unite. They also created innumerable miscellaneous items, from knitted preemie caps for hospital newborns to crocheted lap robes for nursing and rehabilitative center residents. Others, like Pauline Johnson, Ruby Bozzell, and Jenice Orr, have served for years with other CWU members as Clothes Closet volunteers, gathering, sorting, and distributing thousands of clothes and other necessities to the city’s poor. Still others donated their time visiting and assisting the homebound, the number of which has been recorded in the annals of the CWF, with one year’s visits totaling 9,650.7

During the early years of the Church, as in society, the leadership roles of women were generally limited to ladies organizations, but the First Christian Church has since been in the vanguard of social change with respect to gender equality. In the 1980s, Emm Williams became the Church’s first woman elder, although prior to that time women had served as members of the diaconate and, since the earliest days, as religious teachers. Today, FCC women serve in all aspects of congregational life, not only as teachers, deacons, and elders, but also as board members/chairpersons and ministers (with two of the three staff ministers being female).
Through the years, men have also contributed to both the mission of the Church and the development of the community through myriad charitable and civic-oriented pursuits. Early on, men held the positions of leadership both in the ministry and on the Church board. Later, with the organization of the Christian Men’s Fellowship (CMF), the organizational counterpart of the CWF, they further utilized their leadership and service skills by supporting Christian and community outreach ventures. During the middle decades of the century, under the leadership of the late John Grady, former FCC and state chairman of the CMF, as well as chairman of the Church board, the CMF spearheaded the establishment of the Christian Church Conference Center and campgrounds in Silver Springs, Florida. More recently, the CMF reorganized as the Disciples Men and redirected its efforts towards interdenominational and interracial activities. The Disciples Men, united with other church-affiliated men’s organizations, volunteered at such diverse projects as fundraisers for public television (WEDU) and building programs for Habitat for Humanity. They also initiated an ecumenical liaison, known as the Christian Service Brotherhood, with the men of Beulah Baptist Church and Zion Lutheran Church. Finally, one of the FCC men’s most enduring endeavors has been the organization and sponsorship of Boy Scout Troop 4, which was chartered in 1916 and remains active today as the oldest Boy Scout troop in the Southeast.  

Among the men active in the early life and growth of First Christian Church were a number of influential Tampans. First and foremost was Judge Thomas M. Shackleford, who as a charter member provided valued service and support during the earliest and most critical years of the Church. Teacher, deacon, and elder, Judge Shackleford also served his community with distinction as City Attorney of Tampa from 1900 to 1902 and as Florida Supreme Court Justice from 1902 to 1917. Another FCC member whose ideals and benevolence extended well beyond church walls was William G. Brorein, the founder/president of the Peninsular Telephone Company (now GTE). In addition to holding the positions of elder, teacher, benefactor, and multi-term chairman of the First Christian Church Board, he served the community as president of the Tampa Board of Trade (now the Chamber of Commerce), president of the Family Service Association, president of the Gasparilla Carnival, founding member and long-term president of the South Florida Fair, president of the Rotary Club, and board president of the YMCA.  

During the critical days of the Depression, Dr. Elwood C. Nance assumed the pastorship of the Church, diverting its foreclosure and reestablishing its solvency. In his seven-year tenure at FCC from 1930 to 1937, as throughout his lifetime, Dr. Nance was renowned as a Church and community leader. He served as president of the Florida League for Intercultural Education, board member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, chaplain of the Lion’s Club, president of the Hillsborough County League for Better Schools, president of the Family Service Association, president of the Gasparilla Carnival, founding member and long-term president of the South Florida Fair, president of the Rotary Club, and board president of the YMCA.  

Since the 1930s, the men and women of First Christian Church have continued to pursue their mission of service to both the Church and the community-at-large. In the 1940s, they opened their doors and hearts to members of the military based at Drew Field and MacDill. During the 1950s, First Christian Church initiated the popular Hillsboro Drive-in Church that allowed people to attend worship services in their cars. The following decades brought the community’s first religious classes for exceptional children and, more recently, active support for such
community resources as the Divine Providence Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, and the Emergency Food Pantry, as well as continuing traditions like the fifty-year-old program of holiday food baskets for the hungry.

From fourteen charter members in 1900 to a membership of over 1,700 by mid-century, Tampa’s First Christian Church remains numerically one of the largest Christian Churches in Florida. Moreover, it has propagated its spirit through the active sponsorship of several Tampa-area churches: Northside (now Central) Christian Church (1928), Peninsular Christian Church (1953), Hillsborough Christian Church (1955), University Christian Church (1957), Brandon Christian Church (1966), and Primera Iglesia Cristiana de Tampa (1992). In its first hundred years of existence, First Christian Church of Tampa has established itself as a religious institution committed to the spiritual life of its members and the welfare of the larger community.


2 White, History of First Church, 79-80.

3 W. D. Hearne, “Whole Church is Back of Whole Program,” The Tampa Christian (Tampa, Florida: First Christian Church, 1934), 7; Hariette Baker, The Women’s Work, ibid.,

4 First Christian Church postcard courtesy of the University of Tampa Archives; E.L. Robinson, History of Hillsborough County, Florida (St. Augustine, Florida: The Record Company, 1928), 149.

5 Annual Minutes of the CWF, compiled in The Christian Women's Fellowship and Former Women’s Organizations from 1900-1953, ed. by Neva A. Shriner, 51.


7 Personal Interview with Pauline Love Johnson, May 12,1998; Personal Interview with Margaret Walstrom, May 4, 1998; Personal Interview with Louise Coleman, May 7, 1998; Personal Interview with Mary Napoli, May 5, 1998; Miscellaneous papers, First Christian Church (FCC) Library Files; Tampa Tribune, October 24, 1977; July 3, 1982; Sandra Jakeway, CWF Laywoman of the Year (Speech delivered to First Christian Church CWF, May 9, 1998).

8 Emm Williams, History of the Sew and Sews, January 1997, FCC Library Files; Annual Minutes of the CWF, The Christian Fellowship and Former Women’s Organizations from 1900-1953, ed. by Neva A. Shriner, 47.


11 Personal Interviews with Roslin Springer, Roger Harvey, and Mary Napoli, May 3 and 6, 1998; Miscellaneous Papers, FCC Library Files.

BOOK REVIEWS


Private letters and journals have long captured the attention of Civil War historians. The dozens of Confederate women’s diaries and family letters published in the last decade provide evidence of the continued value of such personal collections to Civil War studies, but they also reflect a rapidly developing interest in southern family relations during that conflict. These publications have greatly expanded our understanding of the diversity of personal experiences during the war. The Bryant-Stephens letters are a valuable addition to this growing collection, providing a significant contribution not only to Civil War history, or even Florida history, but to the larger social history of the South.

A rich collection of family letters and journals, Rose Cottage Chronicles will hopefully remedy the absence of Florida planter families from larger regional studies of the late antebellum South. The Bryant-Stephens families may have been unique in their particular experiences, but their letters are often remarkably similar to those of families from Louisiana to Virginia. It is a poignant drama of a people caught up in events they can neither control nor entirely understand. The book contains letters from several family members, but it is the correspondence between Octavia (Tivie) Bryant Stephens and her husband, Winston Stephens, upon which the book focuses. Married shortly before the war and separated for much of it, the couple used their correspondence, with remarkable candor, to reveal their romantic love and occasional marital conflict.

The introduction provides useful information on Bryant-Stephens family history and plantation life in antebellum Florida. The footnotes are excellent sources of information on military personnel and engagements mentioned in the letters. Unfortunately, the book lacks any feminine context. Many of the letters are written by or to Tivie and her mother, Rebecca, yet there is no information provided on planter women or marriage. This could make it difficult for readers to understand how the Bryant-Stephens women may fit within what is known about southern women in the late antebellum. Considering the amount of information currently available on women in the Civil War, this is troubling. Tivie’s letters reflect a remarkable, strong-willed woman, willing to submit to her husband’s authority, but not afraid to criticize him. This is noteworthy because of her young age and the twelve-year age difference between herself and Winston. Yet the editors introduce her as aloof with a negative self-image. With no yardstick of historical information with which one can measure Tivie, this analysis seems strangely out of place.

The Bryant-Stephens family letters are about much more than women on the homefront or marital affection and conflict. The letters describe how parents and children related, how mundane matters of plantation operation were transmitted between husbands and wives during
long separations, how men and women coped with death and fear and divided political loyalties. It is a compelling dialogue on family and gender relations during the Civil War. More importantly, *Rose Cottage Chronicles* brings this significant collection to a wider audience.

Sheila B. Cohen


The youth who trains, or runs a race,
Must bear privations with unruffled face
Be called to labour when he thinks to dine,
And, harder still, leave wenching, and his wine.

These lines from Byron’s “Hints from Horace” symbolize the work ethic instilled in the pupil Frederick Delius, who later became a musical master. Delius learned these lines from his teacher, Thomas F. Ward, a Brooklyn-educated music instructor. Delius subsequently recalled that Ward’s tutelage during several months in Florida provided “the only lessons from which I ever derived any benefit.” Years later a music student, Don Gillespie of the University of Georgia, stumbled upon a recording of Delius’s most famous work, “Appalachia: Variations on an Old Slave Song,” which evoked images of South Georgia and North Florida. Gillespie’s professor urged his student to explore Ward’s fundamental influence on Delius’s early musical experiences. Thus began an insatiable curiosity which shaped the writing of this book, and the result is a kind of first-person narration of the author’s search for Ward.

Gillespie traces Ward’s steps from his childhood in a Catholic orphanage in Brooklyn, New York, to his early interest in music and his training as a organist and choirmaster. In 1883 Ward contracted tuberculosis, and his doctors recommended that he relocate to Florida. Leaving Brooklyn for Jacksonville, Ward took a job as an organist at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. Within weeks Professor Ward was supplementing his income by offering piano lessons, through which he met Frederick Delius. Private lessons at Delius’s orange grove on the St. Johns River followed and, according to Gillespie, provided the young aspiring musician a spiritual revelation in idyllic physical surroundings. And it was there that Delius made steady musical progress under the guidance of a strong intellect and sympathetic comrade.

In 1887 Ward moved to St. Augustine, where he found the town’s Catholic heritage much to his liking. However, after a fire destroyed the cathedral, he moved on, first to Palatka, and then finally to St. Leo College, which offered him a teaching position in 1894. Located in West Central Florida, thirty-five miles north of Tampa, the four-year-old college combined a military regimen with a three-year curriculum of commercial and liberal arts courses. While at St. Leo, Ward made the decision to prepare for the priesthood. But during his training, he reached a spiritual crisis, sparked by serious doubts about his own fitness for the priesthood. He also harbored nagging questions regarding the circumstances of his birth. Gillespie is convinced that Ward knew, or at least suspected, that he was the illegitimate son of a priest, and thus needed a
special dispensation to become a priest. And even if this was granted, Ward would have had to live a life of special penance. With this secret, combined with his aching feeling that his temperament was not suited to the priesthood, Ward faced a psychological and spiritual dilemma. His behavior became erratic, and a mental breakdown seemed imminent. Soon Ward was forced to admit that he had no vocation in the religious life. He was discharged from the college and released from his vows. Proceeding to Tampa and then to New Orleans, Ward continued a downward spiral, finally ending in a Catholic graveyard in Houston, Texas.

An interesting piece of historical detective work, this book will be of interest mainly to Frederick Delius enthusiasts and those curious about the early history of St. Leo College.

James M. Denham


This is the last book of a trilogy by Ferdie Pacheco which seeks to recapture the flavor of life in Tampa’s immigrant community. Like Ybor City Chronicles, and The Columbia Restaurant Spanish Cookbook (co-authored with Adela Hernandez Gonzmart), Pacheco’s Art of Ybor City blends history, autobiography and Ybor City lore in a collection of stories that convey the “sense of daily life” in Tampa’s Latin colony in the 1930s and 1940s, when the author was growing up there. In the previous books, Pacheco’s drawings complemented the stories, but here, the colorful images that constitute the hallmark of his people’s art take center-stage. The first portrait pays homage to one of the masters who most influenced Pacheco’s artistic development – Mexican muralist Diego Rivera.

After a brief history of the immigrant community and a brief autobiography of the author/artist, Pacheco introduces the reader to his memories of Ybor City by telling the stories behind the thirty-three paintings that make up the book. Some of the most evocative images depict the working environment that defined this multiethnic community where Cubans, Italians, and Spaniards lived and worked side by side. In the redbrick cigar factories that dotted the Ybor City landscape, hundreds of cigar workers produced the Clear Havana cigars that made Tampa famous. Seated at their tables, the cigar makers would hand roll the cigars, sipping the Cuban coffee served by the cafetero and listening to the commanding voice of the lector, who read to them daily as they worked. Other paintings provide a glimpse of the immigrant community’s social life – family picnics, trolley trips to the beaches in summer, dances at the clubhouses of the mutual aid societies, and heated debates at the local cafes about the topic of the day.

Community leaders are also represented in Pacheco’s paintings, ranging from the much-revered Victoriano Manteiga, founder of the newspaper La Gaceta, to the fondly remembered county commissioner (and later Mayor) Nick Nuccio. And there are less prominent, but perhaps more colorful, community characters like the piruli man who sold the cone-shaped candy to Ybor City children or the ever-present vendor of bolita numbers (the illegal lottery game). Pacheco also recreates some of the political events that affected the community in the tumultuous decade of the 1930s, notably the crooked municipal elections of 1935 and the
passionate demonstrations in support of the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War. The latter he experienced closely, since his grandfather served as consul of the Spanish Republic in Tampa during most of the war. Relations between the different ethnic groups, the impact of World War II, and memories of life in a segregated South are also present in the book.

Pacheco’s family scenes, particularly his Nochebuena (Christmas Eve), illustrate the strength of Old World tradition even as they hint at its erosion and transformation as the immigrant community assimilated into American society. This process of Americanization usually manifested itself in the lives of the second generation. The food stands at the State Fair, Pacheco remembers, offered Latin children a taste of American cuisine – the hamburgers, hot dogs and Coca-Cola that were taboo in most Ybor City homes. As teenagers, they enjoyed the freedom of the car to meet with peers in favorite hangouts. Young Latins could attend dances in groups; without having to worry about chaperones. And although many of them still enjoyed the Sunday matinees at the Centro Espanol, they danced to the tunes of Glenn Miller, more than to those of Spanish pasodobles.

This is a nostalgic book, filled with Pacheco's memories of the “good of days.” Although, as he acknowledges, this is just one piece of the history of Ybor City, he has managed to capture in a few images an important part of the history of this immigrant community. Readers will find this book not only artistically delightful, but also instructive and entertaining. I hope it will encourage others to share their memories of Ybor City and contribute to the preservation of its rich history.

Ana Varela-Lago

Florida’s Heritage of Diversity: Essays in Honor of Samuel Proctor is a festschrift appropriate to its honoree. Samuel Proctor, now Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Florida, served as editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly for thirty-one years. He was a pioneer in the field of Florida oral history, an avid preservationist, and a lifelong teacher. The essays in Florida’s Heritage of Diversity cover many of Proctor’s areas of specialization, including Florida’s Native American history and the history of Jews in Florida. The authors, most of whom are Florida-educated, are themselves a testament to Proctor’s mission to expand and enhance history programs both at the university and community levels.

Of particular interest to readers in the Tampa area may be Mark Greenberg’s “Tampa Mayor Herman Glogowski: Jewish Leadership in Gilded Age Florida.” This essay looks at Glogowski’s service during Tampa’s explosive late nineteenth-century growth, an era that saw the introduction of telephone service, streetlights, and Henry Plant’s rail service. This is the same railroad

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In April 1987, Paul Harvey’s radio show listeners were treated to an unexpectedly dated bit of news. After 450 years, archaeologists had finally pinned down the site of one of Florida’s earliest European settlements, Hernando de Soto’s winter encampment in Apalachee territory. Soon the spot, in the center of Tallahassee, was swarming with a combination of excited archaeologists and curious tourists, in addition to the beleaguered contractors who had been just days from laying in a driveway on the land. A great race ensued, as the discoverers cobbled together enough funding and enough artifacts to stop plans for development.

De Soto’s remnants range from the typical (majolica shards and chain mail links) to the macabre (the remains of a man burned at the stake), mirroring the experience of the expedition. Likewise, the historic record is divided in its presentation of de Soto, with some seeing him as a cavalier, while others insist that his careless brutality should be at the center of his image. Ewen and Hann helpfully include the documentary record of the encounter, drawing the reader into the discussion, just as their clear presentation of the excavation draws the reader happily into the dirt of the site.

* * * * *


This beautifully researched work traces the development of Florida’s Supreme Court, beginning with the territory’s legal struggles during Andrew Jackson’s gubernatorial administration and following them through the Progressive era. Manley divides the text into five historical periods, presenting for each the landmark decisions and political machinations that shaped the court. Discussions of the issues are interspersed with frequent biographical sketches,
which are equally, if not more, illuminating. Manley’s explorations of the judiciary’s personalities are reminders of the complexity and occasional caprice of legal and state history.

A welcome addition to the growing body of legal history writings, this book is also widely readable; the court is viewed in the broader context of Florida’s social, economic, and demographic growth. Its writers are from the fields of business administration, history, and criminal justice, and their array of perspectives offers a good model of cross-disciplinary collaboration. The result is a book which ought to interest readers of history, politics, and law. Indeed, as the book points out, the Florida Historical Society was founded by George Raney, a politician who became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Florida.

* * * * *


Odet Philippe, the first European settler of Pinellas County, has been described as everything from a nobleman student of Napoleon Bonaparte to “a French quack.” He is reputed to have been a pirate, or at least a pirate fence, as well as an illegal slave trader; he was in any case no stranger to litigation. On the other hand, he is credited with introducing the grapefruit to Florida, as well as producing Tampa’s first cigars. Though he disowned his oldest daughter upon her marriage, he was careful to provide for his adopted daughter in a trust. Indeed, it is hard to imagine Philippe as a forefather of the sleepy town of Safety Harbor.

This biography, some of which appeared originally in Tampa Bay History, is well-researched by Allison DeFoor, a descendent of Philippe, who has pieced together a broad range of sources in tracing his subject’s background, travels, and work. These paint a picture of an indefatigable entrepreneur. Philippe variously operated a billiard hall, an oyster shop, and a cigar factory. Philippe’s life, however, does not easily give up its secrets, and many of the facts simply lead to other questions. Perhaps it is fitting that so vibrant a figure should resist being laid to rest; this is a work in progress, but it presents the best portrait of Odet Philippe yet available.
In *Florida’s Black Public Officials, 1867-1924*, Canter Brown offers a statewide study of blacks in public offices from Reconstruction through the first quarter of the twentieth century. The first section of the book is a history of black political and civic participation, tracing the route by which Floridian blacks came into power in the post-Civil War period, the political struggles they faced, and their eventual disenfranchisement. Obstacles came from both outside the black community, as in the case of Presidential policies, as well as from within, as divisiveness diminished support from AME churches. Nevertheless, Brown’s research shows that blacks served in public positions to an extent historians have widely underestimated, suggesting the strength of black resistance to disenfranchisement after Reconstruction.

Perhaps as a counter to that underestimation, the second and third sections of Brown’s book are devoted to biographical and geographic directories. Though Brown admits in his introduction that the scope of his research limited his study (he does not include, for example, blacks who served on school boards, as postmasters, or as militia officers), his listing is nevertheless an archive in itself. The biographical directory includes dates, positions, and terms of service, and, where possible, either public records or personal quotes. John Hurston, we read, was mayor of Eatonville, and “beloved by his church,” in addition to being the father of Zora Neale Hurston. Benjamin W. Thompson, lawyer and farmer, of the Florida House of Representatives, suffered an attack which left him unable to drag himself home; the *Monticello Advertiser* reported “We do not think that politics was at the bottom of this dastardly affair.” The third section organizes these men, numbering over 600, by county and office. This book should be of help to those wishing to flesh out the contours of Florida history during the Jim Crow era; its research offers new angles from which to view Southern politics as well as black civic history.

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This biography looks at Governor Ossian Bingley Hart, whose death in 1874 took him from office after just fourteen months. This brevity, coupled with Hart’s often unpopular political stances, has often erased him from historians’ thoughts; author Canter Brown observes that Hart’s opponents found “a need for him to be forgotten.” In resurrecting Hart, Brown hopes to shed light on Reconstruction-era Florida.

Hart’s terms in office were characterized by the contradictions that led to and followed the Civil War. Though the ante-bellum owner of over fifty slaves, Hart fully expected the war to free them, and he was a staunch if naive proponent of voting rights for blacks. As a politician, he served in a state government scrambling to balance irreconcilable interests – northern investors, increasingly influential black voters, and southern whites in both the Democratic and Republican parties. This biography suggests that Hart’s turmoil was an apt statement about Florida politics.
Fittingly, the site of Ossian Bingley Hart’s Tampa house is now the home of the Hillsborough County Courthouse.

* * * * *


“Can you imagine a neglected corner in the Garden of Eden,” Julia Moseley wrote to her friend Eliza Slade, “where you could look up fifty feet and see air plants growing on the branches of great oaks and hundreds of ferns nodding to you up there in the sunlight and the grey moss like a mist?” Moseley’s query resonates now as it must have a hundred years ago; these are the kind of letters that will make you yearn for a world as new as Florida was to her in 1882. With skirts hemmed up to her knees for gardening and hiking, Moseley set about carving a place in her newfound paradise – arranging flowers (like a breeze grown into a blossom of gold), hunting out wild plums, fashioning wallpaper out of saw palmetto and a handbag out of a killed rattlesnake.

Luckily, she was also a prodigious letter-writer, with an eye to posterity. _Come to My Sunland_ is her own collection, the letters she copied into a leather journal for her children and grandchildren to read. As such, we can read it in two ways. The letters provide an invaluable glimpse into Moseley’s world and perceptions, a harsh and gorgeous landscape harboring a curious admixture of entrepreneurial settlers, cadaverous crackers, ex-slaves, and the Utopian Mrs. Averill, who thinks everything belongs to the world. What Moseley offers less consciously is herself as a woman. “I loathe nine-tenths of the things that go to make up the daily round of a woman’s life,” she confided to Eliza. Nevertheless, she knew the value of her observations, which she carefully preserved and handed down to the next generation; the record of that gesture should be as valuable to us as what she wrote.

* * * * *


Tony Jannus won a place in aviation and local history by piloting the world’s first scheduled air flight in a 1914 trip between St. Petersburg and Tampa. However, his pioneering contributions to
aviation went far beyond this single feat. In this first complete account of his life, Thomas Reilly records the many contributions of Jannus and his relationships with better known aviation pioneers, such as Glenn Curtiss and Thomas Benoist. Drawing on extensive research, Reilly documents Jannus’s life as a barnstormer, test pilot, and romantic figure in the early days of aviation, beginning with test flights in 1910 and ending with his premature death in Russia while delivering bombers to the Romanov government. This engaging account will appeal to specialists in aviation history and general readers interested in a magnetic character, whose brief life intersected the history of the Tampa Bay area.

* * * * *


This celebration of the Tribune’s centennial anniversary is more than just a look at the workings of a newspaper; it provides a survey of the history of Tampa. Orrick and Crumpacker trace not only the Tribune’s reportage, but also Tampa’s politics, including early Cuban resistance movements, and the ongoing struggles for civil rights and women’s equality. Vignettes and headlines range from charming (Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’ correspondence about how fishing has spoiled her for work) to ghastly (“MOB SEARCHES FOR FIEND” in Rosewood), reflecting the turbulent times in which the Tribune found its feet.

Above all, though, this is a compelling book to flip through. Sometimes the material seems strikingly current, as when the Tribune took a stance against politicians’ “rabid radio talk” against one another during elections. Other entries point to the difficulty of assessing the history of a newspaper. The front page on August 7, 1945, features one of George White’s cartoons, depicting a blackened bomb victim being laughingly welcomed into Heaven, while a nearby sidebar is headlined “Atomic Bomb Could Wipe Out World.” A newspaper record is a great window into the past, and Tampa readers should be particularly interested in this one.

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This guidebook offers twenty-seven different drives through many of Florida’s relatively undiscovered sites. Authored by Jan Godown, a Tallahassee resident and freelance writer, the book includes not only descriptions about points of interest but also historical insights that give a good sense of the state’s rich history. In addition, Scenic Driving Florida provides up-to-date travel information for trip planning.
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COVER: Members of the First Christian Church of Tampa in front of the building that served as their tabernacle from 1913 to 1925. See page 75.
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