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From the Editors

Tampa Bay History

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F ROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome to the twenty-third edition of *Tampa Bay History*. We are pleased to offer some of the finest and most recent scholarship on Tampa Bay area history. This year's issue contains what turned out to be an accidental theme: "Icons of Tampa Bay." Within these pages you will learn about two iconic hotels – one in Hillsborough County, the other in Pinellas, iconic sports figures and an iconic restaurant. All of these articles, like the topics they represent, add to the current history and culture of our region.

Brad Massey's "A History of the Floridan Hotel" leads off this year's journal. Massey is the winner of the 2009 Leland Hawes Essay Prize in Florida History for Best Graduate paper, an award given annually by the Tampa Bay History Center and the University of South Florida Libraries' Florida Studies Center. The main title of Massey's paper, "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of a Modern Florida Landmark", provides an excellent summation of the downtown Tampa hotel's eighty-three year history. Once the scene of grand parties and grander guests, the hotel eventually fell into a long era of disrepair. Literally saved from both the wrecking ball and demolition by neglect, the hotel is now undergoing extensive restoration by the current owner, who has spent the past several years resurrecting one of Tampa's oldest downtown structures.

Another iconic landmark, Clearwater's Belleview Biltmore hotel, is the subject of the next article. Deirdre Schuster takes a look at a specific period in the Belleview Biltmore's past – when it was home to hundreds of soldiers during World War II. Schuster examines the lives of the soldiers stationed at "The Queen of the Gulf", discovering that while they may have stayed at a luxurious resort, the soldiers were far from mere tourists. As one weary private pointed out: "We have the softest mattresses on our hotel beds but they have to be always ready for inspection, so we can't lie on them. We have a million dollar golf course, but all we do on it is the hardest kinds of exercises and obstacle running. We have lovely green velvet lawns, but we can't walk on them." Many soldiers would return after the war to take advantage of Florida's resort hotels, including the Belleview Biltmore.

This year's cover article focuses on the local influence of America's Pastime – Baseball. Mary Jo Melone and Art Keeble have written a fantastic and comprehensive book on baseball in West Tampa, from the Little League to the Major Leagues. The authors have allowed us to print a portion of their yet-to-be-published book, and we are delighted for the opportunity. Melone and Keeble note that baseball has deep roots in Tampa, dating back into the 1870s, and point out that Tampa has produced more Major League players than any other city in America. From Al Lopez to Lou Piniella, MacFarlane Park to Yankee Stadium, Tampa's place in baseball history is secure.

Included in this year's issue is a special feature for *Tampa Bay History* readers, an excerpt from the newly published book, *The Columbia Restaurant, Celebrating a Century of History, Culture, and Cuisine*. Written by *Tampa Bay History* assistant editor Andrew T. Huse, and published by the University Press of Florida, the new Columbia book provides an excellent and complete history of Florida's oldest restaurant. More than a cookbook (though many of the Columbia's famous recipes are included), the book gives readers a unique insight into the world of the "Gem of Spanish Restaurants", and the six generations of Hernandez and Gonzmart family members who have worked to maintain this iconic restaurant.

We close the journal with an examination of new works in Florida history in our Book Reviews and Books in Brief sections. Avid history buffs have a myriad selection of books to choose from this year, and our reviewers have done a great job evaluating the latest in Florida scholarship.

So sit back and enjoy the 2009 edition of *Tampa Bay History*. We are always looking for new topics to explore, so please contact us if you have an article that you would like to submit for publication.

RODNEY KITE-POWELL, EDITOR