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A Street Car Ride in 1908 Through West Tampa

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By the end of the week of August 15, 1906, the Tampa Electric street cars were running from the farthest end of West Tampa to Twenty-Second Street in Ybor City.\(^1\)

West Tampa in its broadest sense was usually taken to mean not only the thriving municipality of that name on the west side of the Hillsborough River, but also a narrow strip of territory that lies within the corporate limits of the City of Tampa on the western margin of the Hillsborough River. This whole territory like the Fourth Ward (Ybor City) of the City of Tampa was devoted to the Cigar Industry.\(^2\)

Taking the West Tampa-Ybor City street car, where four cars were operated and each car was run on a schedule of 12 minutes, we cross the Hillsborough River at the Fortune Street Bridge, and see to the right of the street car line the large three story brick
factory of Julius Ellinger & Co. at the corner of Green and Garcia Avenue. It had opened on June 13, 1893, and was one of the cigar factories of the Havana-American Co., a producer of the choicest clear Havana cigars. This was the first brick factory in West Tampa and was later sold to the firm of J.W. Roberts in April 3, 1909.

On the left was the frame cigar factory of F. Garcia & Bro. at the corner of Arch Street and Garcia Avenue. This factory was erected for Barranco, Rico & Co., of Key West, in March 25, 1895, but on the death of Mr. Barranco some legal complications arose, preventing them from moving in or fulfilling their contract. F. Garcia & Bro. started work April 15, 1895. Around these factories were business houses, restaurants and tenement houses. Stretching out westward could be seen rows of houses similar in structure.

At the northern extremities of the street in front of the factories (Garcia Ave.), the Tampa and Sulphur Springs Traction Company were building the Ross Avenue Bridge across the Hillsborough River on which would be laid tracks for a direct street car line linking Ybor City and West Tampa. This company was using a different route and competing with Tampa Electric Co. Many cigar makers worked in West Tampa and lived in Ybor City and vice versa.

As the car sped westward you could see on the left the O'Halloran & Co. three story frame cigar factory located at the corner of LaSalle Street and Oregon Ave.

In reaching Nineteenth Ave. (Rome) we see a branch of the Atlantic Coast Line Railway Co. At the end of this line a one-story brick building stood, fronting 65 feet on Main St. and 95 feet on Rome, and owned by G.Ficarrota. He was engaged in the wholesale grocery business. Mr. Ficarrota a City Councilman, supplied the West Tampa Fire Department with feed for their horses.

WEST TAMPA WATERWORKS

Near this intersection could be seen a steel tower and tank for the water works which belonged to the City of West Tampa. The city had progressed and also built its own electric light plant in this area. On July 25, 1907 the City of West Tampa sold to the Tampa Electric Co., the City's lighting plant, including engines, dynamos, poles, wires, lamps and everything else pertaining to the lighting plant, for the sum of forty thousand dollars ($40,000), payable in cash.
Proceeding west we see at the southwest corner of Green Street and Fremont Ave., the El Arte frame cigar factory, which was the S. & F. Fleitas, one of the many factories to move to West Tampa in 1895. As we go along westward one could see the brick walls of the Berriman cigar factory (which later was sold to Morgan Cigar Co. in May 1910) and is located at the corner of LaSalle Street and Howard Avenue.

A splendid two story brick Municipal Building was erected around 1900 at the corner of Francis Ave. (Albany) and Main St. At this time (Sept. 1908) Peregrino Rey, of Cuesta-Rey & Co., was serving the unexpired term of Mayor Francisco Milian since his tragic death. Rey was elected Mayor the following term. The lower floor of the Municipal Building had been converted to house the City Fire Department.

By September 1908 there was excellent progress being made in the paving contracts. Main Street was paved eastward in the direction of Tampa, where it would meet the paving at Ellinger City. The completion of Main St. meant a second paved throughfare from Tampa to West Tampa, the first paving believed to be across Lafayette Street Bridge from Tampa, and then west to the center of West Tampa. The West Tampa authorities were eager to complete the paving project which would form a loop reaching the large cigar factories which had not been reached by paving at that time. This could also be of value in protection against fire, allowing the fire wagons (or trucks) to reach the fire sooner.

PASS THE ACADEMY
By November 1908 West Tampa boasted of having 15 miles of the finest brick paving to be found in the country.\textsuperscript{9}

Heading north on Francis Ave. (Albany) we pass the Academy of the Holy Names school, built and opened Sept. 4, 1896, at the corner of Spruce and Francis,\textsuperscript{10} the St. Joseph Church built May 3, 1903 at the corner of Walnut St. and Francis Ave.\textsuperscript{11} the Bustillo Bros. & Diaz cigar factory corner Francis Ave. and Pine St. Next we reach the one-story box factory that kept busy year around, located at the corner of Francis Ave. and Ponce de Leon St. (Beech).

Turning the corner the three story cigar factory of Cuesta-Rey & Co. could be seen at the corner of Howard Ave. and Ponce de Leon St. It was erected in 1895 for the Havana-Key West Cigar Co., the second brick factory to be built in West Tampa.

To celebrate their annual production the Cuesta-Rey & Co. cigar factory had a banquet at the end of each year, it was referred to as "The Truly Spanish House," and was held at the Atlanta Restaurant in West Tampa.\textsuperscript{13}

In November of 1908 the City Council of West Tampa changed the name Beech to

CELESTINO VEGA & CO. FACTORY
Built 1907, 3302 N. Armenia Ave
Ponce de Leon in honor of the discoverer of Florida.12

MORE CIGAR FACTORIES

Making the loop we reach Armina Ave. (Armenia) and the Drew Subdivision in Northwest section of West Tampa. John Drew contracted the firm of Levick and Mobley to construct the factories of Andres Diaz and Calixto Lopez. The factory of Andres Diaz, a four story brick building was constructed on the corner of Havana Ave. and Alvaro St. (Kathleen) and completed May 15, 1908 and opened May 27, 1908. The Calixto Lopez took a little more negotiation and was completed on Sept. 1, 1908 at the corner of Gomez Ave. and Abdela St.

The previous year (1907), the factories of Garcia & Vega costing $20,000 and Celestino Vega $24,000 were built on Armenia Ave. They were constructed of brick three stories high with a cellar.

Continuing the loop south on Armenia Ave. we pass the factories of L. Sanchez & Co., J.M. Martinez, arriving at the A. Santaella & Co., corner of Chestnut St. and Armenia Ave.

The cigar factory of A. Santaella & Co., like many of the factories in the Tampa area, shipped large quantities of high grade cigars to San Francisco and the West Coast. In March of 1906 a carload of Optimo cigars were shipped by A. Santaella & Co. to Seattle, Washington, and from there to Nome, Alaska to be used by the gold miners.14

QUAKE BLOW TO TAMPA

The San Francisco earthquake of April 18, 1906 was a great blow to the cigar industry in the Tampa area. All the well-established Tampa factories had salesmen regularly employed in that city.

At the western end of Chestnut street, were it meets Roosevelt Ave. (MacDill) we find the West Tampa Municipal Park (Macfarlane Park) in the process of being developed. The Park is located five to ten minutes walk from the center of West Tampa, and easily reached by street car line, either Tampa Electric Co. or the Tampa and Sulphur Springs Traction Company.

The new park covered about 40 acres, and is in an ideal location. It is planted in handsome trees and decorative shrubs and flowers. In the Park plans were made in December 1, 1908 for the construction of a pavilion. When completed would accommodate a large number of people, and would be octagonal in shape.15 A baseball diamond, bandstand, tennis court and other attractions would be added to the Park.

In July 1908 bonds were sold in West Tampa amounting to $190,000. It was expected that $20,000 would be spent in making improvements to the Park. A large force of men worked for months grading, leveling, removing trees, planting others, and trying to finish the Park before it was opened to the Public.16 The plans of the City Park were prepared by the City Engineer. By unanimous vote of the City Council in July 9, 1908, the Park was named, "Macfarlane Park."

MAIN BUSINESS SECTION

Continuing the loop that takes us to the main intersection of the city, Howard Ave. and Main St., we find a row of business
establishments, some branch houses of local firms from Tampa and Ybor City.

The rapid growth and increasing business interests of West Tampa had indicated for some time that a bank was needed to meet the financial interests of this prosperous city.

The production of the city had increased yearly, from the year of its incorporation in 1895 to 1905, in which time 1,205,165,000 cigars were made in West Tampa and Ybor City. This would be nearly one and a quarter billion. At 5 cents each, this vast number of cigars would amount to $60,258,250.00. But the average price of the Tampa cigar was more than 5 cents.

In January 1905 there were 19 large cigar factories, several blocks of business buildings and hundreds of homes built in West Tampa.17

The Bank of West Tampa had been organized in December 28, 1905, with a paid up capital of $25,000. The bank was an outgrowth of the Drew-Henderson-Harris private banking institution, which only in part supplied the demand. This new bank made it the sixth establishment to be opened in the Tampa, Ybor City and West Tampa area.

J.W. Drew commissioned architect Fred James to draw the plans for the new West Tampa building. This was erected on the southeast corner of Main street and Howard avenue, where it stands today.

The Bank of West Tampa opened for business Monday, February 19, 1906. The blooming city of West Tampa by 1908, was considered the most prosperous in the state.

"West Tampa is one of the most peaceful and law abiding cities of its size to be found anywhere," said Justice J.J. Boyett, "especially when you take into consideration that so many nationalities are represented here." During the seven years that he was City Clerk, Boyett watched West Tampa grow to a population of eight thousand by December 1908.

This ends our street car ride tour through a city that has achieved a phenomenal growth and prosperity.

**FOOTNOTES**

1 Tampa Morning Tribune, August 15, 1906.
2 Tampa Morning Tribune, March 8, 1904.
3 The Tobacco Leaf, June 21, 1893.
4 The Tobacco Leaf, April 3, 1895.
5 Tampa Morning Tribune, October 8, 1908.
6 Tampa Morning Tribune, February 14, 1904.
7 Tampa Morning Tribune, October 9, 1908.
8 Tampa Morning Tribune, September 4, 1908.
9 Tampa Morning Tribune, November 1, 1908.
10 Holy Names Academy School files, Bayshore Blvd.
11 Jesuit High School files, Himes St.
12 Tampa Morning Tribune, January 7, 1913.
13 Tampa Morning Tribune, November 20, 1908.
14 Tampa Morning Tribune, March 15, 1906.
15 Tampa Morning Tribune, January 5, 1909.
16 Tampa Morning Tribune, July 4, 1908.
17 Tampa Morning Tribune, January 26, 1905.