The Pains of Anticipation, 1861-1862 "The State of Things - Tampa is Fearful"

Canter Brown Jr.

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Dr. Canter Brown, Jr.

Florida's secession from the Union in 1861's early hours unleashed passions at Tampa that the passage of time has tended to obscure but that resounded with a deafening clamor during the ensuing year and one half. Forces little understood and beyond local control seized upon existing tensions to turn neighbor against neighbor in a scene chillingly familiar to townspeople who had lived through the Regulator terror of three years past. Old grudges bore new fruit against the back drop of an external war that remained distant militarily but which loomed with frightening intensity as each day passed into the next. So many must have pondered a truly fatal question, how long before we begin killing ourselves this time?

Word that Florida had separated from the other states arrived locally on Sunday, January 13, 1861, courtesy of a stage coach driver who had hurried himself from Gainesville. The news set off rounds of noisy celebration. The town's brass band marched joyously through the streets, while other young men repeatedly discharged Fort Brooke's remaining few cannons. At the courthouse citizens gathered to gossip excitedly about what it all meant. That evening local pastors intoned a Methodist, Baptist, or Roman Catholic prayer, while placing their stamp of approval on the act of disunion.¹

The excitement persisted for days. On Monday, militia colonel William I. Turner stoked the martial fires by occupying Fort Brooke's grounds with a small force of followers. One historian of the action described the company as "undoubtedly ardent secessionists in civilian dress, armed (if at all) with the weapons used to fight Billy Bowlegs warriors." Still, the military had returned to Tampa, a condition with which local people were quite comfortable. On Thursday, they came together at the courthouse to vent their own enthusiasms and to hear the brass band's rousing airs once again as soon as the politicians had had their say. That night fireworks lit the sky to the delight of those assembled, doubtlessly expressing the common understanding that, just as was true of the fireworks, the secession excitement would not hurt anyone once the confusing dust of disunion had cleared.²

That is one important point to remember when casting back upon those heady days of secession. Most people did not believe there would be a war. Merchant John Darling, one of Hillsborough County's delegates to the secession convention, later summed up the early 1861 sentiments of many of the locality's white people. "In giving this vote [for secession, I] was not influenced by any hostility towards the Govt. of the U.S.," he declared, "but it was given under the conviction that it was a rightful and proper remedy to break down the policy of Negroe emancipation believed to be intended by the Republican Administration then about to come to office." Darling added, "Nor had [I] any idea that war would be the result until [President Abraham Lincoln's] proclamation of 15th April 1861." The Florida Peninsular
confirmed Darling’s memories. On February 2 it reported, "The tenor of news from Washington this week is quite pacific." Temporary editor Erasmus M. Thompson (editor Simon Turman was away at the secession convention) then quoted the Charleston Courier as concluding, "The question of separate State secession is at rest."³

In those days before President Lincoln called for Union volunteers in the wake of the surrender of United States troops at Fort Sumter in South Carolina’s Charleston Harbor, the whole idea of disunion could be seen as a lighter thing, an action without serious or, at least, lethal consequences. It allowed the politicians to bluster, while offering the young men a way to express loyalty to their state and region, an action which they would have defined as patriotism. Thus, when one-time Bowlegs War officer John T. Lesley announced the formation of The Tampa Guards in late January, local boys and young men flocked to its banner. Drills held at least weekly kept the guards (later called The Sunny South Guards) eager for the cause. On the other hand, they suffered at first from little threat of discomfort, dislocation, or danger. As one student of the company has noted, they avoided "orders [that] might have called them from the parties, parades, and parlors to the digging of earthworks." Eventually, though, frustration due to the lack of any real military responsibilities would lend itself to a desire for a greater show of commitment. And, that would cause problems for Tampa.⁴

Local loyalists likely were the first to bear the burden of ardent young Rebels with time on their hands. At first, a climate of tolerance for differing opinions graced the town. On January 26, for instance, the Peninsular boasted that "No ‘Reign of Terror’ has marked the overthrow of a great government; no Cromwell or Robespierre has been needed to kindle the flames of popular disaffection; no crowns have fallen; no blood has flowed." In such an atmosphere Unionists proclaimed their convictions. Among them stood lawyer Ossian B. Hart, merchant, James McKay, army veteran Robert Jackson and his wife Nancy Collar Jackson, undertaker John T. Givens, storekeeper Louis G. Covacevich, farmers Samuel and Jesse Knight, the brothers Vincent and Bartholomew C. Leonardy, and numerous others. "I always opposed those wicked heresies," Hart recollected, "and could not agree nor act with them, simply because they precipitated us into secession, rebellion, and war against our country, as too many others did."⁵
As the weeks passed, though, the young men of the Sunny South Guards could not restrain their passions and began efforts to intimidate their opponents, a circumstance common in Florida at the time. This increasingly became the case after the organization of the southern confederacy in February, Abraham Lincoln’s inauguration in March, and, in April, Fort Sumter’s surrender and the eruption of fighting at Pensacola. A Jacksonville man explained the general state of affairs. “The Union men... for two or three months [after secession] continued to utter their sentiments of opposition to the movement,” he recorded, "but gradually the reign of terror gained full swing and the time came when for a northern man to utter openly his love for the Union would be almost suicide." The man added, "Men who were born and reared in the south could speak against secession long after it was unsafe for northern men to do so." Details of the anti-Unionist campaign at Tampa are lacking, but O. B. Hart described the consequences. "By the events of war the protections of the National Government could not reach him," a newspaperman noted, "and common prudence compelled silence."  

**Trial for Treason**

The hardening of the times and of relations between Tampans already could be seen clearly by late March. By then the Confederate States flag floated on a staff above James McKay’s store. Not far away, at the establishment of New York-born W. G. Ferris the United States banner yet waved, except that its owner had turned it upside down. The pull toward greater conflict then accelerated with ensuing events. Not later than mid-April Colonel William I. Turner had conscripted "every available man" to build earthworks at Fort Brooke and was placing a set of five cannons along the waterfront. After the Peninsular cried "To Arms! To Arms!" on April 20, it took only a few days before many of Tampa’s older men desired to prove their allegiance to the new Confederate States by organizing a volunteer company of their own. Labeled The Silver Grays, the unit contained almost all the town’s leading secessionists and major slaveholders, as well as a few Unionists. William Cooley headed the company as its captain, with John Darling and John Jackson assisting as officers. Louis G. Covacevich and John T. Givens now stood in the ranks shoulder to shoulder with Alfonso DeLaunay, John P. Crichton, Jesse Carter, William B. Hooker, and Franklin Branch.  

Meanwhile, the secession convention and the legislature were attempting to rule the
State as it careened toward war. In doing so both bodies tackled several high-voltage issues that further stirred public excitement. Before the legislature adjourned in early March, it approved a military bill that called for raising troops and the organization of a more-effective militia system. The convention delegates thereafter carried on without the legislature and upon their own authority. Particularly, they moved to take control of all United States lands located in Florida. Tampans delighted in the action because it gifted them with a boon. Tucked away in the law’s details was a special provision that authorized the Hillsborough County commission to survey, subdivide, sell, and otherwise administer the Fort Brooke military reservation. Profits loomed rich for the taking thanks to secession.8

Lastly and with local repercussions not far distant, the convention defined and penalized treason. It specified, in part, that the crime was committed "If any person shall, by speech or writing, strive to stir up a rebellion in this State against the authority of the State or the Confederate States, or shall by word or deed endeavor to create sedition or be engaged in any seditious or rebellious meeting, assembled to incite resistance to the authority of this State or of the Confederate States, or shall endeavor to seduce any one in the military or naval services of this State or of the Confederate States to desert or betray a trust reposed in him or them." The Peninsular published the ordinance in full in its May 18 issue.9

Coincidentally, public anger had been building at, of all people, James McKay. Since November 1860 the captain and his partner Jacob Summerlin had been shipping one boatload of cattle after another to Havana, Cuba. The venture’s success had pleased area cattlemen enormously, but many of Tampa’s businessmen still chafed at McKay’s temerity in relocating the enterprise from their town to Charlotte Harbor. That act had deprived the merchants of a slice of a potentially lucrative pie, particularly since McKay was importing Cuban goods into Florida for direct sale to frontier families. Among the irate merchants stood John Darling, whose conflicts with the captain could be traced back at least one decade. In the circumstances, Darling took action by organizing a public meeting on May 4 to protest cattle shipments to Union-occupied Key West. The principal shipper, of course, was McKay. Now, tempers seethed at the man who, until recently, had been lionized as Tampa’s hero.10

McKay took several precautionary steps in light of the changed circumstances, but soon events took a turn for the worse. Especially, he protected his large cattle holdings from possible seizure under the treason law by...
transferring them to his partner Summerlin on May 31. Then, the captain’s position deteriorated with the coming of June. Emotions flowed early in the month when, at the Southern Baptist Convention’s request, the local Baptist church conducted a day of fasting and prayer for the Confederacy. Less than two weeks afterward the Confederacy’s own "day of humiliation and prayer on account of "national sins, etc.," as proclaimed by President Jefferson Davis, heightened sensitivities further. These acts combined with the strains of the recent past to send tempers flying. At the Baptist Church members summarily dropped longtime supporter Jesse Carter from their rolls for "unchristian conduct" in the wake of an argument with a fellow Baptist. Down at the masonic lodge, the spirit of fellowship fared no better. The same week, one-time county sheriff Edward T. Kendrick suffered expulsion as a result of accusing lawyer James Gettis of accepting a bribe from Darling’s late business partner. Darling joined with Gettis, William B. Hooker, and Henry L. Mitchell to eject Kendrick as a blasphemer and "habitual liar."11

As these scenes and circumstances unfolded, attention shifted back to McKay. Word trickled from Key West to Tampa’s Confederates that the captain had been cooperating with old friends of his who now commanded United States forces at the island city. He had brought them supplies, helped them to deport secessionists to the mainland, and leased them his steamer. For the young men who made up the "Sunny South Guards" this was all too much. They prepared to act.12

McKay discovered his change of fortune when he landed in a fishing smack at his wharf on June 26. "Within half an hour after our arrival at Tampa," he related, "an armed posse of men went down & took possession of the smack, stating that she belonged to Unionists, and must be seized; they being reckless, ignorant people." The guards’ action in seizing private property proved too much for many of Tampa’s merchant leaders, even for John Darling. He - along with McKay, C. L. Friebele, L. G. Covacevich, Edward A. Clarke, and Franklin Branch - sought to interpose the authority of their friend Colonel William I. Turner over that of guards captain John T. Lesley. The businessmen long had associated closely with Governor Madison Starke Perry, and he acceded to their wishes, giving McKay an order for return of his vessel.13

The Sunny South Guards refused to bow. The gubernatorial appeal took some time, during which the local unit was mustered into the regular service of the Confederate States as Company K, Fourth Florida Infantry. This removed them from state jurisdiction. Two days later, on July 3, 1861, a United States gunboat, the R. R. Cuyler, took up station in Tampa Bay, initiating the Union blockade of the port. Within twenty-four hours, after the guardsmen celebrated the Fourth of July "in a manner clearly indicating their appreciation of the Liberty bequeathed to them by the Revolutionary Sires," they prepared to act once again. "The night previous to which the Smack was to be turned over to me," McKay explained, "the persons who held her in charge set fire to her, and burned her up."14

The crisis was building to a crescendo. When McKay headed north to discuss affairs with the governor, word circulated that he was "a general agent of the Government and a traitor and should be hung." Many of the rumors derived from a Peninsular letter penned by the captain’s old nemesis State Senator James T. Magbee, who was more than ready to avenge
McKay’s role in the senator’s 1858 removal from federal office. Then, word arrived of the South’s victory (or so it was seen) at the First Battle of Bull Run. Amid the swirl of excitement, Magbee found his opportunity to strike. State Attorney Henry L. Mitchell had resigned to enter Confederate service with the Sunny South Guards. The senator volunteered to act in Mitchell’s stead and filed petty treason charges against McKay. When the accused returned to town, Magbee ordered him arrested.15

Strange turns of events were about to become the rule. The trial convened on August 10 at the county courthouse. Three justices of the peace weighed evidence presented by Magbee, who sought a sentence of death by hanging. Rebuttal came from McKay’s lead attorney O. B. Hart, who was assisted by secessionist James Gettis. Brigadier General Joseph M. Taylor of the Florida Militia, an old associate of the defendant who temporarily had relieved Colonel Turner of Fort Brooke’s command in late July, “sat himself on the trial.” Cattlemen threatened to break up the "long and acrimonious" proceedings before the justices agreed to set McKay free on $10,000 bond pending a new trial during the circuit court’s October term. Taylor then arranged for the captain to pass the R. R. Cuyler’s blockade in a schooner bound for Key West. There, McKay retrieved his steamer, the Salvor, and headed for Havana. He picked up a cargo that may have included supplies for the Fort Brooke garrison (guns and ammunition reportedly were found aboard). Unfortunately, while steaming through the keys toward Tampa on October 14, a United States warship intercepted the Salvor. Finding contraband on board, the warship’s commanding officer seized the vessel and held its captain as a prisoner of war. James McKay would not see Tampa for seven months.16

Troubled Times

As the tumult of the McKay trial subsided, the military presence at Fort Brooke came before long to resemble an occupying force more than the band of patriotic neighbors that had taken up the abandoned post in January 1861. Colonel Turner resigned his militia position to accept a captaincy in the Confederate States army. This act placed Captain John T. Lesley in charge by August 21. His tenure proved short-lived. With Confederate army orders in hand, Major Wylde Lyde Latham Bowen of Lake City took up the reins of authority in early September, bringing with him two companies of the Fourth Florida Infantry and an intention to wring order out of chaos. Bowen quickly stationed Lesley and the remaining Sunny South Guards away from Tampa at Shaw’s Point near the Manatee River’s mouth. As the major sought to
institute regular drill and discipline among the post’s remaining garrison, Lesley battled for redress, refusing to recognize Bowen’s authority. That status quo held for the time being.17

Just as Major Bowen and Captain Lesley began to lock horns at Fort Brooke, Key West’s Union authorities acted to introduce another factor into the Tampa equation. On September 6 Major William 11. French had ordered all residents of Key West to take an oath of allegiance or else be removed from the island. He also directed the families of local men who had joined Confederate forces to leave. The act, according to a report dated September 8, "caused a vast amount of commotion among the secessionists here, and they are about to commence their flight Northward or towards secessia." The correspondent added: "A large number leave with their families and household goods and gods next week. All go to the first rebel port, Tampa - a poor and unimportant town in the bay - already filled to repletion with half starved rebels from Key West, and unable to support any considerable increase to her population."18

The Key West refugees arrived at a difficult time, although Major Bowen sensed a bright lining to the cloud. Rains had pelted Tampa through September, complicating attempts to supply the 250-man garrison (including the Sunny South Guards). With little food available and fevers sending many of his men to sick quarters, Bowen recognized the need to put the newcomers to work. He directed the construction of an artillery battery on a small, marshy island three-quarters of a mile out in Hillsborough Bay. "Both Soldiers and Citizens have done considerable work on the Battery &[,] to continue the work[,] there will be [a need] to secure the aid of the Citizens," he recorded on November 24.19

Fortunately, newly installed governor John Milton helped to regularize the refugees’ labor contribution requirements in late November. In implementing the legislature’s military act, the governor called into Confederate service the Florida Volunteer Coast Guard. It was to be made up, in good part, of one-time Key West residents. He placed one company in the charge of ship captain Henry Mulrennan, reportedly "the first man [at Key West] to hoist the rebel flag and salute it with seven guns." Mulrennan, in turn, sent a detachment to

John A. Henderson in his Civil War uniform.
Tampa under Lieutenant Walter C. Maloney. They called themselves *The Key West Avengers*.\(^{20}\)

If Major Bowen believed that he would be around to supervise the *Key West Avengers*, events proved him incorrect to the detriment of Tampa's civilian population. In early December 1561 he and the *Sunny South Guards* received orders, just as the *Avengers* were taking up their posts at Tampa, to report immediately to Fernandina. Essentially, this left the *Avengers*, who tended to be rough-hewn seamen or else hard-bitten frontier characters, to set the tone for community affairs. As Methodist minister R. L. Wiggins noted in January 1562, "I sincerely hoped that many of them would seek and obtain religion; but alas!"\(^{21}\)

The problems with the *Avengers* did not evidence themselves clearly until the new year had gotten fairly under way. Although rumors of attacks constantly aroused the fears of Tampans, they remained safe for the time being from assault. Nearby areas fared less fortunately. On January 16 United States military personnel raided Cedar Key and destroyed the Gulf terminus of Senator David L. Yulee's Florida Rail Road. Ten days later elements of the Tampa Bay blockading force captured Captain Archibald McNeill's sloop *Mary Nevis*. Tampa had depended upon the vessel to haul mail and supplies to and from the small settlement at Manatee (now Bradenton). In early February the raiders returned to the Gulf coast, attacking Manatee directly and also occupying for a time Abel Miranda's settlement at Big Bayou on Point Pinellas. The incursions naturally added to Tampa's refugee population.\(^{22}\)

All of these events took place as news of greater Confederate disasters rained on Tampa. Among other things, General Ulysses S. Grant took control of the Tennessee River by capturing Forts Henry and Donelson on February 6 and 16. On the eighth federal troops scored another victory at the Battle of Roanoke Island, leaving Pamlico Sound and much of the North Carolina coast under Union authority. Even before Donelson fell, Confederate General Braxton Bragg had called for Florida's abandonment so that Confederate assets could be concentrated elsewhere. Meanwhile, a United States fleet was assembling at Key West aimed at an advance upon the South's largest and richest city, New Orleans. The war for southern independence had turned sour.\(^{23}\)

Through January the *Avengers* had responded to events with restraint. Chasing around the bay area kept many of them busy much of the time. Then, threats of attack upon Tampa prompted them, despite poor winter weather, to construct artillery positions at the mouth of Spanishtown Creek in today's Hyde Park section. "All hands at work on the batteries today," recorded one member of the company on January 22. "Had to knock off several times in consequence of rain but finished the one that was began yesterday and nearly finished another." He added, "Rained very heavy all night with a plenty of thunder and lightning." Fearful Tampans, grateful for whatever protection they could receive in increasingly difficult circumstances, embraced the coast guardsmen despite their less-than-sophisticated demeanor. "I received an invitation from some ladies in Tampa to call over and spend the evening," noted Robert Watson on February first. "I accepted the invitation and went over after supper." Of the occasion, Watson commented, "Was introduced to several of the fair sex and passed a very pleasant evening."\(^{24}\)
February’s disasters altered conditions markedly, and not for the better. Food supplies had dwindled, miserable weather had fostered illness and bad tempers, and threats of wartime violence had erected a pall of fear over the community and garrison. By March 1 refugees were informing authorities at Key West that "the Confederates [at Tampa have] grown desperate since the loss of Fort Donelson, proclaiming death to all Union men who dare express their sentiments." Further, the refugees reported that "the Confederate soldiers plunder the gardens in the neighborhood of Tampa as fast as any edibles are produced." As these events unfolded, the local people discovered that they no longer possessed the authority to protect themselves. On February 22, Fort Brooke’s commander declared martial law in the town and suspended civilian government. For some Tampans, the hunters had just become the hunted. 

An important change in the Fort Brooke military command had taken place prior to the declaration of martial law, but it took some time for the development to make itself truly felt. It occurred on February 10 when Major Robert Brenham Thomas took command upon the orders of General James H. Trapier, then heading Confederate forces in Florida. Thomas was a well-regarded Tampan. A West Point graduate of the Class of 1852, he had served until resigning his commission in 1856, when he went into business with his father-in-law W. G. Ferris. Sadly, his wife and daughter soon died. In 1858 Thomas remarried, this time to Sallie McKay, daughter of Captain James McKay. He taught at the Kentucky Military Institute for one year before returning to Tampa to run the Florida House Hotel. He had helped to organize what became the Sunny South Guards in January 1861, but yearned for service closer to the front. "When the rebellion was raised, I, like others, deemed it my duty to go with the state," he explained. "I entered State Service, was transferred from that to what was called Confederate States Army and was commissioned First Lieut." Thomas distinguished himself in Virginia and Kentucky, but by the late winter of 1862 he suffered from serious illness. The Tampa assignment was intended to allow him to recuperate.

The situation faced by Thomas upon his arrival at Fort Brooke would have taxed an officer in perfect health, more so a man who needed rest and family care. His forces consisted principally of Co. E, Fourth Florida Infantry (Lafayette Rangers) and the Key West Avengers. Both units presented problems. "The military conditions which greeted Thomas at Fort Brooke were appalling," observed one historian. Thomas sought to enforce discipline as best he could, but his efforts availed little. This stayed the case even after Thomas swore the Avengers
into Confederate, as opposed to state, service in March as Co. K, Seventh Florida Infantry.27

The unmilitary demeanor of the Rangers may have exceeded that of the Avengers, although the condition differed only by degree. One Avenger expressed shock in a diary entry about the condition of the Rangers’ barracks in mid-May. "Went over and had a look at the quarters and of all the dirty houses that I ever saw they beat all," he wrote, "hog pens are cleaner." Reports continued to flow into Key West about depredations visited upon local residents by the soldiers and guardsmen, and northern newspaper correspondents were all too happy to share the tidings with their readers. In early April, it was said that "the rebels [are] growing more and more desperate, refusing rations to their prisoners who were unwilling to enlist in the rebel cause, and threaten[ing] them with violence." Deserters confirmed several weeks later "reports of want and desperation previously received from that quarter."28

One shining moment of heroism was allowed to Major Thomas. On April 14 a United States schooner, the Beauregard, drew to within one and one-half miles of the fort. Under a flag of truce, Lieutenant William B. Eaton demanded Fort Brooke’s surrender, threatening "to bombard the town" after twenty-four hours if appropriate action were not taken and suggesting that noncombatants depart. Thomas forthrightly responded, "I cannot accept the proposition to surrender, though for the sake of humanity, I accept your terms in regard to the removal of the women and children." For once his troops backed their commander. "Our men gave three cheers at the prospect of having a fight," recorded Robert Watson, "which made the men in the Yankee boat look down in the mouth as they expected to see us all look frightened and ready to surrender." Most civilians did depart, but the threat proved an empty one. Maria Louisa Daegenhardt remembered that her father took the family to a farm nine miles from town. "We took all we could carry with us not knowing what we would find when we came back," she related. "We staid 5 days but when we came back the gun boat was gone & they had not thrown a shell."29

When the Beauregard pulled away from Tampa, the time in town of the Rangers and the Avengers was growing short. Fernandina, Jacksonville, and St. Augustine had been occupied by the Union in March. That month, the state abolished all of its militia organizations and the Confederacy decided essentially to abandon coastal defense in Florida. On April 7 General Grant, however narrowly, bested the Confederates at Shiloh. By month’s end New Orleans had surrendered. About the same time, Pensacola came under the United States flag. Orders arrived at Tampa in May for the departure of the Lafayette Rangers, an act accomplished on the twentieth. The Avengers moved from Spanishtown Creek into the Rangers abandoned quarters, but only temporarily. They simply awaited the arrival of replacements before themselves departed on June 27. With individual exceptions, they would not be missed.30

Civilian Decline

Through the months as Fort Brooke’s garrison changed and circumstances altered its relationship to the community, Tampans endeavored to adjust their lives to swings of fortune and, eventually, to survive increasingly trying times. Interestingly, they had begun the period by attempting to do away with their municipal government. Amid the hoopla of secession in January
1861, unnamed "TAXPAYERS" proposed a "PUBLIC MEETING!" in order "to devise means for relieving this place from the encumbrance of a Corporation." Their call argued: "The one which now exists is beneficial to none, save a few Officers; it is a source of needless expenses to the people, and, as troubles are likely to come upon us soon and the State may be levying additional taxes, it will be well to retrench superficially."31

It turned out that Dr. Franklin Branch and Peninsular publisher William J. Spencer lay behind the scheme to abolish local government. When the citizens met, though, Henry L. Mitchell on behalf of the town council convinced the men to support continuation of the corporation but agreed to a suspension of tax collections for the ensuing year. The gathering then nominated a "no taxation" ticket. Headed by Hamlin V. Snell as mayoral candidate, it carried Spencer as its choice for town marshal. Tampa's larger merchants, with John Darling's leadership, attempted to forestall the attempt to curtail town services. They failed. On February 2 the "no taxation" ticket prevailed, although it appears that the results pleased few. When the town's second newspaper - Alfonso DeLaunay's staunchly pro-secessionist Sunny South - carried on February 19 a report of the mayor's inaugural ball, it noted, "There was but slim attendance, considering the general invitation to the citizens of Tampa - and visitors."32

By the time of the February election, some Tampans already were voting on the town's future with their feet. As early as December 1860, Leroy G. Lesley had advertised that he was selling out preparatory to a move to Hernando County. With the passage of time, numerous others followed. Candy maker Jose Vigil departed for New Orleans in early 1861, for example, while Lesley made good on his earlier declaration. By the next year the trickle had mounted to a slow stream, especially after Fort Donelson's fall in February. William B. Hooker removed his family to a Hernando County plantation. Christopher L. Friebele closed his Tampa store and reopened at Brooksville. John Jackson carried his loved ones "some 10 or 15 miles from town." Others trod similar paths.33

Some Tampans likely followed another stream, that of area Unionists seeking United States military protection. By mid-summer 1861 Union troops had landed on Egmont Key in Tampa Bay's mouth, and thereafter the tiny island and the ships that called there served as a beacon for refugees. The island's status became official in the winter of 1862. "I mentioned in one of my late letters that Capt. Eaton of the barque Ethan Allen was about to take possession of a light house in the neighborhood of Tampa Bay, and make it a refuge for the Union men of Florida, who come off to seek protection on board his ship," reported a correspondent of the Boston Daily Journal on March 7. He added, "I learn that his plan is working successfully, and that he has a colony of several families within range of his guns." The refugee camp remained on the island through the war, a thorn in the side of local Confederates.34

Perhaps even more Tampans would have departed the vicinity in 1861 and early 1862 had it not been for the opportunity to share in the potential prize of Fort Brooke. Secession meant that the United States government no longer controlled its large military reservation at Tampa. As seen, the Florida secession convention acted in April 1861 to assume authority over it. The delegates, in doing so, handed control to the Hillsborough County board of
commissioners. Three months later the commissioners advertised for proposals to survey the property. W. T. Coons won the bid. The Confederate military’s presence slowed down his work, though. Coons managed to deliver a preliminary map in February 1862 (he named the principle new east-west avenue as "Jeff Davis Street"), but the surveyor proved unable to deliver a completed plat satisfactory to the board. Meanwhile, the county lawmakers champed at the bit to obtain desperately needed funds from land sales, while Tampa speculators’ expectations of profit soared high. Conditions thereafter slipped so low that in May 1862 the commission suspended the survey attempt and removed all documents connected with it, together with the rest of the county’s records, to Cork, a rural community four or five miles west of today’s Plant City.35

(Note: Superscript for endnote 36 omitted from text)36

The disappointment of the speculators could not possibly have matched the heartbreak by then suffered in many Tampa households. It began with some mothers’ tears as their sons prepared to go to war. Later news of casualties stirred even more widespread grief. Nancy Jackson believed that her "sorest trial" during the war came with "the enlistment of two of their sons in the Confederate army." She related her experience to an interviewer:

When my John enlisted with the Confederates I though I could not have it so. His father was sick then and I knew they were to be sworn in that day [April 25, 1862]. I slipped out just from my own impulse, with my sunbonnet on my head, and went over, or started to go over to where Captain Robert Thomas had the boys in camp. John was under age, only a schoolboy, and I was his mother and was going to forbid their taking him away. When I got near enough I saw them all in line with their hands raised to be sworn in. I knew I was too late. I nearly fainted. I stopped where I was under a tree, and finally got back home. Father saw something was the matter with me as there were tears in my eyes, and he said, "Mama - that is what he always called me - what is the matter?" I managed to tell him. He tried to comfort me, telling me he did not believe Thomas would have paid any attention to me if I had got there before they were sworn in.37

While many of Tampa’s women stood loyally and enthusiastically behind the Confederate cause and the service of their men in support of it, complications necessarily arose that divided families and loved ones. A number of couples married in order to enjoy intimacy and the strength of commitment before the young husband departed to an uncertain future. Not unusually they did so without parental consent or, at least, the consent of both parents. Maria Louisa Daegenhardt recalled such a situation and the loneliness of a bride who could not acknowledge her marriage publicly. Her story stemmed from the June 1862 nuptials of her sister to blacksmith John Henry Krause, a private in Company B, Seventh Florida Infantry, and from the young couple’s concerns about father John Daegenhardt, a "true Christian" who "did not believe in slavery." As Maria remembered:

They wanted their marriage to be very secret as he was to leave right away to join his company in Charleston. Sister Mary gave me .50 cents to keep quiet about it, but I just had to tell my Teacher [Louisa B. Porter]. I knew she loved
sister Mary. She sent her a large bunch of Roses & sister wondered how she knew, but I never told of it and afterward bought a prettie brown Pitcher for my 50 cents & thought I made a big bargan. I kept it so long.38

John Henry Krause’s departure from Tampa for service in the Confederate States army highlighted yet another drain on the town’s population during 1861 and 1862. Some young men - such as Robert B. Thomas, James McKay, Jr., Peninsular publisher William J. Spencer, its editor Simon Turman, Jr., Drew Givens, and T. W. Givens - could not wait to serve the cause. They left Tampa in 1861 searching for a unit in which to enlist. As time passed, local companies such as the Sunny South Guards entered Confederate service and were called northward. A second spurt of enlistments came in February and March 1862, after the Confederate Congress passed a conscription act covering white males eighteen to thirty-five years of age. Rather than await the draft, dozens of the area’s remaining eligible men signed up with what became Company B, Seventh Florida Infantry. Krause served in its ranks. Captain James Gettis, and Lieutenants William B. Henderson, John A. Henderson, and Robert F. Nunez led its men.39

The departures, from whatever cause, left Tampa a place populated mostly by white women, children, and older men, plus a declining number of slaves (some left when owners moved away) and whatever troops made up the garrison. This particularly was so after Company B, Seventh Florida Infantry, filed from town in the summer of 1862. For the civilians, conditions deteriorated with the local economy’s collapse and pressures on available food and supplies brought about by the influx of Key West refugees. Already in the spring of 1861, times had turned hard. "Business is quite dull," reported William Ferris on May 3, "we are scarcely doing anything in the line of selling goods." Less than one year later, rumors reaching Key West insisted, "The state of things - Tampa is fearful." The account continued: "They are literally starving. They have no coffee, no tea, no flour, no cloth of any kind, except their common homespun, for which they pay $1.25 per yard. They all say they cannot hold out much longer if the blockade is not broken by England."40

If ever a situation cried out for leadership, this one was it. By late spring 1862 Tampans yearned for better days and for a guide to take them there. As events proceeded, the assistance of the United States government permitted them to turn once again to the man upon whom they repeatedly had relied in the past for answers to difficult problems. A hint that such a possibility existed came in late spring. Key West Avenger Robert Watson, then stationed near Clear Water Harbor, noted the moment in his diary. "A horseman came from Clearwater with the information that Lt. Maloney had arrived at that place," he recorded on May 16, "and that Mr. Jas. McKay & sons had arrived at Tampa."41

ENDNOTES

Dr. Canter Brown, Jr. is a native of Fort Meade, Florida. He received his B.A., J.D. and Ph.D. degrees from Florida State University. His 1991 book, Florida’s Peace River Frontier, received the Rembert W. Patrick award from the Florida Historical Society. Currently living in Tallahassee, Brown is completing a history of the Florida Supreme Court. He is the author of a number of articles and books such as Florida’s Black Public Officials, 1867-1924, African-Americans on the Tampa Bay Frontier, Ossian Bingley Hart: Florida’s Loyalist Reconstruction Governor, Tampa before the Civil War, published in 1999, and, most recently, Tampa in Civil War and Reconstruction. A frequent lecturer on Tampa and Florida history, Dr. Brown was the
Historian-in-Residence at the Tampa Bay History Center and the 1998 recipient of the Tampa Historical Society’s D. B. McKay Award.

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Tampa Florida Peninsular</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSA</td>
<td>Florida State Archives, Tallahassee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORA</td>
<td>War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Officials Records of the Union and Confederate Armies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORN</td>
<td>Officials Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion</td>
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<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>Record Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Tampa Sunland Tribune</td>
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<tr>
<td>TMT</td>
<td>Tampa Morning Tribune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TST</td>
<td>Tampa Sunday Tribune</td>
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The editor of *The Sunland Tribune* and the Tampa Historical Society are grateful to the University of Tampa Press, Tampa Bay History Center, and the author for permission to reproduce a portion of *Tampa in Civil War and Reconstruction*. This handsomely designed and illustrated book is No. 10 in the Tampa Bay History Center’s Reference Library Series published in 2000 by University of Tampa Press. The book focuses on Tampa’s unique cast of wartime and post-war characters and the events which occurred in the Tampa Bay area during the tumultuous years 1860 to 1877.


2 Ibid.; *FP*, January 19, 1861.

3 John Darling to Andrew Johnson, August 19, 1865, Case Files of Applications From Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons, 18651867 ("Amnesty Papers"), Office of the Adjutant General, M-1003, roll 15, NA; *FP*, February 2, 1861.


8 *FP*, March 23, May 11, 1861.

9 Ibid., May 18, 1861.


13 James McKay to William H. Seward, February 11, 1862, Correspondence Regarding Prisoners of War, 1861-62, box 7, General Records of the Department of State, Civil War Papers, RG 59, entry 491, NA; John Darling [to the governor], June 27, 1861, Incoming Correspondence of Governor Madison Starke Perry, RG 101, Series 577, FBA.
14 *New Orleans Bee*, July 10, 1861; *FP*, July 6, 1861; McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862.


16 Brown, "Tampa’s James McKay," 418-19; Petition of Citizens of Clear Water Harbor, August 15, 1861, Incoming Correspondence of Governor Madison Starke Perry, RG 101, series 577, box 1, FBA.

17 Waters, "Tampa’s Forgotten Defenders," 5-6.

18 *New York Herald*, September 15, 1861.

19 W. L. L. Bowen to Edward Hopkins, November 24, 1861, in W. L. L. Bowen Confederate Military Records, Fourth Florida Infantry, RG 109, NA.


24 Prouty, "War Comes to Tampa Bay," 41-47.


26 *TMT*, January 26, 1901; R. B. Thomas to Andrew Johnson, August 27, 1865, Case Files of Applications from Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons, 1865-1867 ("Amnesty Papers"), M-1003, roll 15, NA.

27 Waters, "Tampa’s Forgotten Defenders," 7; Prouty, "War Comes to Tampa Bay," 52-59.

28 Prouty, "War Comes to Tampa Bay," 59; *Boston Daily Journal*, April 18, 30, 1862.

29 Frank Falero, Jr., "Naval Engagements in Tampa Bay, 1862," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46 (October 1967) 135-37; Prouty, "When War Came to Tampa Bay," 54; Maria Louisa Daegenhardt, reminiscences (Historical Association of Southern Florida: Miami) 3-4.


31 *FP*, January 26, 1861.

32 Ibid., February 2, 1861; Welch, *Tampa’s Elected Officials*, 10; *Tampa Sunny South*, February 19, 1861, quoted in *Tampa Tribune*, October 29, 1891.


37 Farr, *Sketch*, 16.

38 Maria Louisa Daegenhardt, reminiscences (Historical Association of Southern Florida, Miami) 2-3; *TST*, May 4, 1952.

39 Hartman and Coles, *Biographical Rosters*, II, 694-704, IV, 1376-77; McKay, "Tampa of the Olden
Days," 84; TST, December 6, 1959; Coulter, 
Confederate States of America, 314.

40 Kyle S. VanLandingham, ““Tampa is the Place of 
Places”: The William G. Ferris Family Collection,” 
Sunland Tribune 22 (November 1996) 97; New York 
Herald, March 24, 1862.

41 Prouty, "War Comes to Tampa Bay," 58.