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FROM THE EDITORS

Historians like to emphasize turning points, and this issue of *Tampa Bay History* marks several worth noting. First, this edition contains a cumulative five-year index of all ten numbers previously published, and we hope readers and future researchers will find it useful. Lest we become inundated with requests for specific back issues, we should point out that, thanks to the unanticipated demand for *TBH*, the only past numbers still available are: volume 1, number 1; volume 2, number 1; volume 4, number 2; volume 5, number 2.

The other milestone is more significant and should not pass unnoticed. After five years of giving generously of his time and talent, Steven F. Lawson is stepping aside as Managing Editor. We appreciate his enormous contribution to the success of *Tampa Bay History* and are pleased that he will continue to assist us as an Associate Editor.

The 1983 Tampa Bay History Essay Contest attracted a number of entries, and we are pleased to announce the winners. The first-place award and a prize of $100.00 go to Walter Howard for his article entitled, "'A Blot on Tampa's History': The 1934 Lynching of Robert Johnson," which records one of the last vigilante murders in this area. The prize-winning essay will appear in the next issue of *TBH*. The second-place award and $50.00 go to Darryl Paulson and Milly St. Julien, co-authors of an essay on "Desegregating Public Schools in Manatee and Pinellas Counties, 1954-1971." This article will be published in the Spring/Summer, 1985, issue. Given the success of the annual essay contest, we are renewing it with the next round of submissions due by September 1, 1984. We invite manuscripts, not previously published, on any aspect of history in the fifteen-county area.

This issue of *TBH* contains information on a variety of topics, including cigar-label art, right-wing extremism, early hospital care, railroad stations and smuggling. Although these various phenomena are examined in particular locales along the Gulf Coast, they should be of interest to all our readers because they form part of the "modern" experience. We hope you enjoy reliving them, and we welcome any comments you may have.
COMMUNICATIONS

Editors:

I was sorry to learn that Steve Lawson is giving up his duties as managing editor of *Tampa Bay History*. He has done a marvelous job in getting *TBH* started and in following through its first difficult years. He deserves a lot of credit. Before *Tampa Bay History* came into being, there was no voice for the history of Southwest Florida. Now, thanks to this interesting magazine, people who have lived, and in some cases, have made history, have been able to tell their intriguing stories.

Sincerely,

Marian B. Godown
Tallahassee

Editors:

I would bring your attention to the photograph on Page 74 in your Fall/Winter, 1983, issue showing what is reputed to be the Gasparilla Inn at Boca Grande. Apparently the Tampa Hillsborough Public Library has this photograph mislabeled. The photograph you reproduced actually depicts the *Boca Grande Hotel* which was built by Joseph Spadero in the 1930s. The Boca Grande Hotel building was demolished several years ago.

The Gasparilla Inn which was built by the Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railroad in 1911 was expanded in 1913. This fine Inn still stands and is open for business from December 15 into the early summer of each year.

I discussed the history of each of these hotels in my book *Boca Grande, A Series of Historical Essays*, (ISBN 0-9608996-0-X, $12.95) which was published in 1982. Your readership may be interested to know that my book contains many pictures of early Boca Grande life and includes photographs of both the Gasparilla Inn and the Boca Grande Hotel.

Sincerely,

Charles D. Gibson
Boca Grande
A fascinating aspect of historical research is the collection of information from a unique and overlooked source. The history of Tampa, Florida, is recorded in seemingly endless numbers of cigar labels produced as advertisements for the once thriving “clear Havana” industry. Thousands of unused labels stacked on warehouse shelves, stored in attics or filed in cases and forgotten in the basements of lithographic companies represent a wealth of encyclopedic information on personages, cultural scenes and historical events. These windows into the past reveal an era when a Spanish topic or title was a popular and profitable form of advertising for the Florida cigar industry. A Spanish theme associated with the clear Havana industry directly affected both cigar sales and production in the United States from 1870 to the Depression of the 1930s.

The American cigar industry and more refined advertisement printing techniques emerged simultaneously in the nineteenth century. Prior to 1870, America’s tobacco market was dominated by products made from tobacco grown in Virginia, Ohio, Connecticut and the Carolinas. Originally plug and snuff products had a significant segment of the tobacco market. Sales were enhanced through advertisements printed on a rather low quality paper, with usually one, perhaps two colors stamped from wood block prints. Promotional labels were placed directly on the product's package or were printed on posters which were placed in drug stores, saloons and country stores across the continent.

In the nineteenth century, a rival to snuff and plug sales appeared first in Connecticut. Tobacco farmers began to supplement their incomes by rolling cigars at home, giving rise to a popular cottage industry. Cigars sold so well that market demands necessitated a change in production techniques from the home to urban factories. Enterprising capitalists shifted production to New York and Philadelphia, hiring newly arrived immigrants who were anxious for employment. By 1870, cigars were so popular that they replaced snuff and plug tobacco sales and consumed most of the domestic leaf market. Cigar sales were further increased when factory owners adopted new advertising techniques. By the 1870s, lithographers switched from old printing techniques to chromolithography which produced brilliant, multi-colored cigar labels and posters to entice the eyes and win over the tastebuds of smokers. However, just as the future of cigars seemed assured, the future of American manufacturers was abruptly threatened as a consequence of civil war in Cuba.

The colonial struggle against Spain, known as the Cuban Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), introduced new competitors to American tobacco growers and cigar manufacturers. When the war began, thousands of Cubans lined the docks of Havana to flee forced conscription in the Spanish army. The emigres included cigarworkers and a few manufacturers who were sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. Most fled to nearby Key West or New York, bringing with them their cigarmaking talents.
Cuban cigars had always enjoyed an enviable reputation among connoisseur smokers throughout the world, but they posed no particular threat to the American cigar market since a high tariff on Cuban cigars (but not tobacco leaf) made them too expensive for the average smoker. The Cuban province of Pinar del Rio and a region known as Vuelta Abajo were famous for growing a light colored tobacco leaf, the superb smoking ingredient of the famous clear Havana cigars. After 1868, Cuban tobacco was shipped in large quantities to the United States, where it was hand rolled into cigars by skilled Cuban artisans, revolutionizing the smoking habits and tastes of America.

When the Cuban Civil War began, Florida was almost immediately transformed into the new center for clear Havana production. The state’s emerging industry underwent two distinct stages of development. The first occurred in Key West from 1868 to 1885. The second stage began in 1885 with the birth of Tampa’s Ybor City, which remained the clear Havana capital of the world until the Depression.

Key West, only ninety miles from Cuba, was the new home for thousands of Cubans after 1868. They literally transformed the sleepy island village into a bustling, bilingual city. Conditions were excellent in Key West for a cigar-based economic revolution. The island’s population had hundreds of skilled, but unemployed cigarmakers, and quantities of Cuban tobacco leaf were only hours away. The warm, humid climate, much the same as Cuba’s, was a prerequisite for good cigarmaking since it maintained a pliable tobacco leaf. The key to success was manufacturers to finance the new enterprise, and the war in Cuba gave businessmen an incentive to relocate. Don Vicente Martinez Ybor, a native-born Spaniard who operated a cigar factory in Cuba, had to flee the island for his life when Spanish agents discovered he was supporting revolutionaries. Ybor arrived in Key West and opened a cigar factory in 1869. He was not the first manufacturer to open a factory there, however. Joseph Seidenberg of New York City had started a factory in 1868, when only a few small cigar shops operated in Key West. Eduardo Hidalgo Gato, who had fled Cuba and accumulated capital in New York, moved to Key West in 1874. By then the rush was on, as Northern manufacturers opened branch factories, hiring almost 8,000 cigar workers. The respected trade publication, Tobacco Leaf, praised the new industry which produced genuine Havana cigars “equal in every respect to the finest imported from Havana,” but sold at much cheaper prices.

By 1885, Key West had grown into the thirteenth largest port in the United States as a consequence of the heavy trade with Cuba and Northern cities. This prosperity was not easily achieved, and it resulted in some extremely serious problems. Soon after immigrants arrived animosity arose between the conchs (natives of Key West) and the foreign-born cigarworkers. Immigrants, numbering in the thousands, included labor organizers who created increasingly serious disruptions in production. By 1885, labor-management conflicts exploded in a disastrous six-month strike. Ybor, disgusted with what he considered outrageous labor demands, decided to look for a new factory location. His New York manufacturing friend, Ignacio Haya, also upset with labor unrest, joined Ybor in a search for a new location to produce cigars, preferably in the South. The two industrialists finally purchased land two miles northeast of Tampa in 1885, initiating the formation of a planned industrial community known as Ybor City. The Tampa Board of Trade enthusiastically endorsed the new industry, guaranteeing a strike-free atmosphere with assurances that any labor agitators would be immediately deported. Then, Ybor and Haya
offered free ten-year leases on buildings to owners choosing to open a factory in their city. Factory owners responded immediately. By 1887, Tampa had annexed Ybor City for obvious tax advantages. The cigar city had an extremely large Cuban population from Havana, and others left Key West after a disastrous fire in 1886 which destroyed several factories. By 1900, Tampa led the world in the production of domestic clear Havanas. An impressive roster of Spanish, American and Cuban capitalists owned Tampa factories, in addition to their main offices in New York and leaf distribution warehouses or other factories in Havana.

While the Ybor City boom was underway, the printing industry was also undergoing an expansion of techniques and dramatic changes in advertisement processes. The unification of Germany in 1871 led to serious economic problems and political unrest. Numerous skilled lithographers immigrated to the United States for a more stable life, bringing their printing expertise with them. The chromolithographic printing process which had originated in Germany was transformed into a full-scale process for American advertisement art by the mid-1870s. German lithographers put their sophisticated talents to work by printing some of the finest advertisement art, some works comparable to, if not surpassing, professional art lithographic prints. Indeed, professional lithographers from Currier and Ives sometimes produced cigar label art which became anonymous contributions to the advertising world.

Since cigar labels both attracted new customers and maintained old ones, no expense was considered too great in order to advertise properly and promote sales. The chromolithographic application of several colors to labels opened new vistas in appealing advertisements. From six to as many as twenty-two colors were placed on one label. Embossment added an even more refined touch with a three dimensional effect. This involved placing the label on a mold of the desired design, then applying thirty to forty tons of pressure to the paper with huge presses. An even more exquisite touch was produced on finely detailed illustrations of coins, medals or titles by sprinkling silver, gold or bronze dust over carefully applied shellac on the areas where a metallic look was desired. The production of a cigar label was expensive, ranging from $2,000 to $6,000 for each new label.

Lithographic companies received specific descriptions of the labels they were to produce, and often sent artists to the factory owner to discuss the details. Numerous pre-1900 labels were printed in Germany or Cuba, but after the turn of the century, several firms based in New York, such as Consolidated Lithographic Company, American Lithographic Company and the popular firm of George Schlegel, Lithography, hired German lithographers and produced a majority of the labels used by Tampa’s clear Havana manufacturers. Factory owners often contracted production of several labels in order to lure the general smoking public to their brand. Poor sales resulted from either poor quality tobacco or unappealing labels. The trial and error process to find a popular label led to thousands of different designs and topics. Successful labels were used for decades. Sometimes manufacturers sold popular brands with a legal title similar to that of a real estate document; the more popular the label, the higher the price.
The domestic clear Havana industry used popular Spanish themes or topics in cigar label advertisement. Indeed, smokers came to associate any subject even vaguely Spanish in character with famous clear Havana cigars. Some companies used Spanish-sounding brand names even though their cigars were produced entirely from domestic tobacco.

Advertisers’ exploitation of the Spanish theme resulted in some unusual and amusing labels. For example, a Kalamazoo, Michigan, cigar company attempted to tap the profitable clear Havana trade by producing a label with the Spanish-sounding name, *La Zoos*. This became a leading brand for the company, even though the cigars were made from domestic tobacco.

The Tampa Toedtman Cigar Company enticed clear Havana smokers with a romantic, turn-of-the-century label portraying a Spanish guitarist, Flamenco dancer and the title *El Cubanos*. The improper use of the singular “el,” instead of the grammatically correct plural “los,” was of little concern to the manufacturer, as long as smokers associated good taste, though not good Spanish grammar, with their cigar. Another Toedtman label, entitled *Tampa Rica*, illustrated the Tampa-Cuba connection in a spectacular colored print portraying Havana’s El Moro light house, a ship and cigar factory, all surrounding a Spanish maiden. She held a shield with the symbols of Castile and Aragon in her right hand, assuring the smoker that this Spanish connection assured an excellent smoke.

Advertisement gimmicks also appealed to elitism and snobbery, favorite ways to lure smokers to buy a particular brand. Imported Havana cigars were, of course, associated with a luxury since fine quality cigars were too expensive for the average smoker until they were produced in the United States. In the early 1900s the label for Fernandez and Company’s brand *Do-U-No* portrayed that, regardless of an individual’s class, a good quality cigar was affordable. Cigars, as levelers of society, were seen with an impoverished, poorly dressed paperboy (whose newspaper
assured smokers his was a genuine clear Havana). He was sharing a smoke with an individual of obvious wealth; their bond of commonality, what else, but a Tampa-made clear Havana?

Manufacturers took pride in the craftsmanship of hand-rolled cigars made in Tampa by Cubans. Northern factory owners increasingly relied on molds or machines for mass produced cigars, but Tampa’s cigars were works of art. The personal touch of a Cuban cigarmaker was, therefore, a natural subject matter for an appealing label, such as the one that featured the smiling face of a Happy Cuban. Another Tampa label showed a cock smoking a cigar, in apparent reference to cockfighting which was popularly associated with Cubans. The Fernandez Hermanos label also assured buyers, in Spanish, that the cigar was made from guaranteed Havana leaf.

Local events and personalities often provided subjects for Tampa cigar labels. The J. M. Martinez factory first opened in 1897, and the company’s success soon resulted in the construction of a larger factory. The 1904 grand opening was commemorated by placing the new factory on a cigar label. Martinez had another label printed which immortalized Norma, “his
intelligent-looking and interesting grand-daughter.”

The symbols of Castile and Aragon appeared discreetly in the corners of the Martinez labels to emphasize their Spanish connection.

Beautiful young women were prominently featured on labels. The Tampa Royal label, first owned by the José Silva Company and later sold to the Pedro Castro Company, showed a well-dressed Spanish senorita, who reflected both aristocracy and beauty. A touch of discreet pornographic art caught the eyes of smokers choosing the A. A. Amo label, La Eva. Below her bare breasts was a treasure chest from which imps were fleeing into the horizon. This was an early form of subliminal advertisement, suggesting something evil, but at the same time erotic in the cigar.

The most popular cigar brands were frequently plagued with piracy. Copyright laws were difficult to enforce in the early years of industry. Tobacco Leaf and United States Tobacco
Journal, leading trade journals, attempted to curb the unethical copyright violations by listing the new brands of manufacturers and condemning firms which pirated brand names or topics. Stricter codes were enforced when *The Trademark: The Cyclopedia of Law and Procedure* was published by the American Law Book Company in the late 1890s. This weekly publication listed brands approved by the copyright office and those brands refused registrations. The publication also attempted to control international piracy of label topics, but was somewhat less successful in this endeavor. Clear Havana brands were most popular in Europe, and therefore, the most susceptible to thievery. The famous *Flor de Sanchez y Haya* label, first printed in 1878, portrayed a popular New York actress, Fannie Davenport. It remained the firm’s leading clear Havana brand after the company moved from New York to Tampa. In early 1920 there suddenly appeared a questionable label on the European cigar market. It had pirated a popular American cigar label name, *La Belle Creole*, and used the same Fannie portrait popularized by Sanchez Y Haya. This undoubtedly cut into the foreign sales of both American firms, but little could be done to the thieving European company other than sending letters of protest and appeals to cease and desist use of the bogus brand.\(^{25}\)

The theme of labels, as with other fads, inevitably changed with the times. Although the Spanish theme long dominated cigar advertisements, other subjects arose reflecting new political or social trends. During World War I, the Tampa Cuba Company changed its traditionally Spanish labels to the patriotic label, *Little Sammies*, which portrayed Uncle Sam and a representation of liberty.

Following World War I, cigar advertisements appealed to the tastes of the Roaring Twenties. The necessity of finding different, more appealing topics was influenced by the inroad of
cigarettes into the cigar market. In addition, machine-made cigars such as those of the American, not Spanish, owned Hav-A-Tampa Company were marketed by new techniques with simpler, more direct advertising to reach customers. The contemporary theme was evidenced in the Radio Queen label, a snappy art-deco design, portraying a modern woman and her magnificent new radio. While it retained the words “Havana Cigars,” other contemporary labels completely dropped any reference to a Spanish theme or use of Cuban tobacco.

With the advent of the Depression, the artistic talents of both cigarmakers and lithographers suddenly became too expensive to compete profitably with cigarettes or machine-made cigars. Tampa was still known as a cigar city, but its output was made mostly by machines, not by hand. Moreover, label titles, such as Think, Call Again, Tampa Elite, and The City of Tampa, were increasingly printed by a less expensive photolithographic process. In March, 1933, at the depth of the Depression, Fortune magazine noted the demise of the hand-rolled cigar industry and its elaborate use of romantic and noble Spanish topics. “A maker no longer wants the loveliest bosom in Old Castile,” Fortune observed. “He wants a snappy emblem and a name no hick can forget. And it’s a different business.”

It was, as the article stated, “a different business.” Above all, it displaced hand craftsmen. Tampa cigarmakers either found employment in other Tampa businesses or moved to the North, where some were hired by cigar companies using machines, if employment was available. By the mid-1930s, Tampa could no longer claim the title as the clear Havana capital of the world. However, a record of the city's achievement remains in the cigar label art which illustrates the significance of Spanish culture in Tampa, the State of Florida, and the entire cigar industry of the United States.

EDITORS’ NOTE: The author wishes to express his gratitude to Mr. Thomas Vance for the use of his labels which are portrayed in this article. Mr. Vance has one of the world’s largest collections of cigar label art. He specifically requests that none of the labels pictured in this article be photographed without his written permission.
The term “Clear Havanas” refers to cigars produced specifically from Cuban tobacco, also referred to as genuine Havanas. Although the tobacco was grown in the western part of the island, the name “Havanna” was associated with all Cuban cigars since it was in the city that the first Cuban cigar factories emerged. “Domestic clear Havanas” refers to those cigars equal to those made in Cuba, the location of their production (the United States) being the only difference.

Renate V. Shaw, “19th Century Tobacco Label Art,” The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress, 2 (1971): 76-102. In this article, Ms. Shaw explains the advancement of printing tobacco advertisements with numerous illustrations. She mentions that the chromolithographic printing process began its demise in the 1890s and while this may have been true for plug tobacco advertisements, it was not true with regard to cigar label art, which retained the chromolithographic process until after World War I.


The United States Tobacco Journal, March 14, 1871.

Manley Banister, Lithographic Prints from Stone and Plate (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 22-41. The process of chromolithography is quite time-consuming for colored prints. For every color used, an artist draws the designated design in wax or grease pen on a limestone surface. Then acid is brushed over the surface, eating away a very thin layer of the stone, except in the sketched area. The stone is cleansed, the etched area coated with a material which repels ink, and thus, when ink is applied to the stone, it adheres only to the now elevated sketched area. For every color used in a print, this process is repeated on a separate stone. The paper is applied to each stone until the final multi-colored effect is attained. Both the precision required in placing the paper on the stones and in the sketching process explains why this is considered a very detailed and complicated printing technique.

Florida Union, September 11, 1869.

Little written information exists on the Key West cigar industry. Jefferson Browne in Key West, The Old and the New, Chapter 20, discusses its formation briefly. A more detailed history of the formative years of the industry from 1869 to 1885 may be found in Don Vicente Martinez Ybor, The Man and His Empire: Development of the Clear Havana Industry in Havana and the United States, a Doctoral dissertation by L. Glenn Westfall, University of Florida, 1977, Chapter 3, hereafter cited as Ybor, the Man and His Empire.

Westfall, Ybor, the Man and His Empire.

The Key West Daily Equator-Democrat, Trade Edition, March 1889, p. 9. Seidenberg produced a brand, “La Rosa Espanola” (sometimes misspelled in older publications as “La Rosa Espainola”), his popular brand in Key West, and in his factory later opened in Tampa.

The United States Tobacco Journal, September 1889, p. 15. When Gato opened his first factory in New York, he called his brand “Gato-71,” a popular brand name he brought to Key West. Other popular Gato brands were “La Cressida,” “The Key Wester,” and “La Flor de Eduardo Hidalgo Gato.”


Tobacco Leaf, April 12, 1879.

Ibid., January 7, 1885.

Westfall, Ybor, The Man and His Empire, pp. 38-46.

Steward Campbell and W. Porter McLendon, The Cigar Industry of Tampa, Florida (Gainesville, 1939), p. 44.
Figures for the Tampa cigar industry include factories from both Ybor City and West Tampa. West Tampa was formed in 1894, but not incorporated into Tampa proper until 1924. Often sources will list Ybor City as a separate entity from Tampa, yet it was incorporated in 1887.

Oral interview with George Schlegel III of Stamford, Connecticut, June 28, 1980. Mr. Schlegel is a third generation printer whose family began their business in 1841. They were one of the most popular printers of Tampa’s cigar labels.

Wall Street Journal, September 1978. See also David Richard Quinter’s *Nico: A Selection of Original Painter Designs for Cigar Box Labels*, 1895-1920, Collection of the Art Gallery of Windsor, Ontario, 1982. The Nico publication is an extremely informative source, discussing a collection of the original art paintings used by the lithographer before making the lithographic stones. It is a very well written source, explaining the process and themes of cigar label art in detail.

Schlegel interview.

Very few of these label titles remain. One owned by the Corral factory in Tampa lists the various owners of a label entitled *Julia Marlow*, one of the firm’s most popular brands.

*Tobacco Leaf*, March 3, 1904. New labels for manufacturers were frequently illustrated and discussed on the front page of the *Tobacco Leaf*.

Oral interview with Thomas Vance of Tampa, Florida, April 12, 1982. Mr. Vance, the great-grandson of Ignacio Haya, explained that their “Flor de Sanchez Y Haya” brand was extremely popular in Europe. Since the firm was Number 1 in Tampa, it often faced piracy of its brand by competitors at home and abroad.

Earl Brown, Jr., *A History of the Name Hav-A-Tampa* (1980). This informative booklet lists chronologically the major events of the company and its list of brands. This corporation succeeded where the older Tampa companies failed by adapting to new printing techniques, using new machines to produce cigars, and hiring primarily Anglo, not Cuban or Spanish laborers. Tampa’s problems, as pointed out in Campbell and McLendon’s *Cigar Industry of Tampa, Florida*, were all problems of Latin, not American-operated factories.

The simple and direct four-color separation in photolithographic prints were much less expensive and did not have to rely on skilled artisans for label advertisements. The process of photolithography is amply explained in David J. MacDonald and George Hart’s book, *Survey of Lithography: Basic Texts for Apprentices in Lithography* (New York: The Lithographic Technical Foundation, Inc., 1945).

“Atlas and the Nudes,” *Fortune Magazine*, March, 1933, pp. 66-71. This special issue of *Fortune* included an insert of original lithographic prints of labels popular in the early 1930s.
On Monday night, March 7, 1966, two hundred Sarasota residents attended a special meeting of the Sarasota County Council of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) at the Sarasota Junior High School. They came to hear a report on whether or not there was a communist conspiracy in Sarasota to subvert the schools. An ad hoc committee had been investigating allegations all winter, and presentation of its long-awaited study attracted not only interested spectators but also the press, including NBC-TV News.

The ad hoc committee reported its investigation had turned up no evidence of “left wing influence whatsoever.” What it had discovered, it claimed, was “a very dangerous radical right element,” which was intimidating administrators, teachers and students. The committee concluded that the only conspiracy to subvert the local schools came from extremists on the political right, not the left.

This led to howls of outrage by some in the audience. The findings were called “politically motivated” and one man charged they were “an insult to the intelligence of the people here.” Others like Betty Davis, president of the Alta Vista PTA, came to the support of the committee, declaring, “Yes sir, the namby-pamby, tea-drinking, utterly boring, drag-your-husband-to-the-meeting PTA has been the only organization in town with the guts to stand up and investigate something that concerns the whole town. . . . And I must say that for once I’m proud to be in the PTA!”

The behavior of the PTA and its adversaries was predictable. The political far right and educators in Sarasota had been at each other’s throats for six years. Their long-term conflict had gained national attention. The press could depend upon another in a long series of public bloodlettings, which explained why NBC-TV covered the event.

Conflict in Sarasota County had emerged between educators and ultraconservatives following the local 1960 elections when the Republican Party staged a political revolution at the polls. Sarasota went from being a one-party Democratic county to a one-party Republican county. The GOP swept all county offices, including the Board of Commissioners and the School Board.

The ascendant GOP included an ideological mix that ranged from moderate to the far right. Some of the extremists argued that non-teaching jobs in the schools should be considered political spoils, and they sought the opportunity to reward party loyalists with sinecures.

Philip Hiss, the Republican chairman of the School Board, resisted the demand, arguing that the schools should be off-limits to both political parties. The victorious party began to divide. The right-wing rallied to the anti-Hiss cause. The conflict quickly ceased being one over policy and became one of ideology. Elements of the fundamentalist-Christian, anti-communist right, ac-
cused Hiss of being anti-Christian. Emphasizing that Hiss and several school administrators were Unitarian, the fundamentalist right alleged the existence of a “Unitarian conspiracy” to subvert the county schools.⁵

The political right also sought to tie Hiss to the radical left. His association with New College was cited since the Sarasota college was considered avant-garde and Hiss was a founder. His relationship with Alger Hiss was widely discussed. Alger Hiss had been accused of being a Communist-spy by Whittaker Chambers and Richard Nixon in the 1940s, and the Hisses were cousins. The radical right was soon accusing all those who came to Philip Hiss’s defense as being part of a general subversive conspiracy.⁶

The radical right had emerged as a force in Sarasota County and in the local GOP during 1960. This political shift reflected demographic changes of a radical nature within the community. The county’s population had nearly tripled in the decade between 1950 and 1960. Most of that increase was from the North. In 1950, Democrats had out-registered Republicans five-to-one. By 1960 the two parties were near parity. The GOP, however, staked out a clearly more conservative position in the elections and attracted many conservatives in the Democratic Party to its candidates. Thus, the local 1960 election spelled victory for conservative ideology.⁷

Despite its growing influence within the party, the far right clearly did not dominate the GOP. Moderates like Hiss could still challenge the right and get away with it. Partly as a result of frustration within the party, the radical right turned to political organizing outside the GOP. By 1961, a local chapter of the John Birch Society had been organized by Sarasota physician Dr. William Campbell Douglass. The chapter was financed by Lewis Van Wezel, Sarasota millionaire and partner in the S.L. Van Wezel Diamond Cutting Corporation. The local chapter had about twenty-five members.⁸

In 1961, a Sarasota chapter of the Florida Project Alert was formed with an initial membership of about a hundred. Part of a state-wide organization, Project Alert mixed fundamentalist Christianity with militant anti-communism. Another early ally was the Americanism Committee of Bay Post 30, of which Van Wezel was chairman. The Americanism Committee became a clearing house and coordinating committee for right-wing efforts throughout the community. The committee established a reading room on Main Street in Sarasota. It purchased right-wing literature in large quantities which it distributed to other organizations at cost. It also supported other groups financially.⁹

In 1962, the Americanism Committee donated $186 to Dr. Douglass to help him establish a national right-wing information network called Let Freedom Ring. Dr. Douglass distributed weekly far-right messages to subscribers throughout the country who were expected to set up telephone dial-a-message services in their local communities and use the Douglass commentaries.¹⁰

The Americanism Committee, like the John Birch Society, was financially supported by Van Wezel. The Lewis and Eugenia Van Wezel Foundation donated $2,090 to the committee in 1963. The Sarasota chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars also supported right-wing causes at
various times. All of these organizations allied themselves on the right against the Sarasota schools between 1960 and 1966.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1961, representatives of Project Alert met with Sarasota Superintendent of Schools Dr. Russell F. Wiley. They came to protest the use of the textbook, \textit{The Meaning of Communism}, in the high school course, “Americanism versus Communism.” The group claimed the book was “soft” on communism. The representatives from Project Alert recommended use of approved reading lists distributed by the Church League of America and the Florida Coalition of Patriotic Societies. They also gave Dr. Wiley samples of film clips and movies they recommended for classroom use. The superintendent said he declined, “because some of the material was misleading and inaccurate.” He reported that on the day following the meeting, one of the representatives from Project Alert “wrote school board members saying they ought to hire a Christian as the school superintendent.” Dr. Wiley was also Unitarian.\textsuperscript{12}

“The problem over books in 1961 became vicious and vitriolic,” according to Herbert Field, who was vice-chairman of the School Board at that time. The right quickly identified Dr. Wiley as a partisan of Hiss and claimed he was a participant in the Unitarian conspiracy. Attacks were soon directed at other administrators and teachers, as well. Partly because of this, Hiss resigned as chairman of the School Board in 1962. Hiss “believed that his resignation would relieve tensions and remove the schools from the political arena.” Field replaced Hiss as chairman.\textsuperscript{13}

The political right, however, was not satisfied with the Hiss resignation. Turning its attention to Superintendent Wiley, the right “went after Wiley’s scalp in 1962 through 1964.”\textsuperscript{14} Ultra-conservatives directed their fury at Dr. Wiley and others in the schools at School Board meetings. According to Chairman Field, extremists “were convinced that some of our teachers were heavily involved in the Communist Party and brought up charges in School Board meetings, insinuating that many were also homosexuals. Project Alert developed a “hit list of teachers they thought shouldn’t be there.”\textsuperscript{15} The Veterans of Foreign Wars joined in criticism of textbooks. These groups “made a hell of a lot of noise and created a lot of problems,” recalls a local journalist.\textsuperscript{16}

Tensions increased within the schools themselves. On one occasion, “one character went into the boys’ room and locked himself in a stall so he could eavesdrop and try to collect evidence. He had his wife go into the girls’ room and do the same. They were out to get Dr. Wiley.” A student editor of the high school newspaper who criticized various activities of the right in the schools found himself strongly criticized by ultra-conservatives.\textsuperscript{17}

The right issued a wide range of complaints against Dr. Wiley. He was accused of being an “innovator,” the “person more responsible than anyone else” for recent changes in the school system. The system was expanding, relaxing student behavior codes and modernizing the curriculum. Moreover, Dr. Wiley had complied with federal orders to desegregate the local schools, and in the process ignored local demands that he resist federal mandates. He was one of the new breed of professional administrators, not one of the old, familiar political appointees. He surrounded himself with a professional bureaucracy, less responsive to local control. The right also criticized his private life. Dr. Wiley played the jazz trumpet, and the right insisted that was in itself “leftist.”\textsuperscript{18}
Dr. Wiley and the School Board which supported him found themselves caught between opposing forces. On the one side, there was a local community growing increasingly conservative and militant. On the other, there were state demands for expansion and modernization and federal demands to integrate.

The schools in Sarasota had become so politicized precisely because they confronted such a wide range of controversial issues in the 1960s. Schools were being integrated. Administrators were becoming professionalized. Teaching methods were changing. Youngsters all over the country were rebelling against norms in behavior and dress. Even Sarasota heard threats of a student strike in the early 1960s at the high school over the issue of student funds.  

Many Northerners had come south in part out of political considerations. They had come to a romantic place called “Dixie.” They imagined Florida to be a place without strong government or professional bureaucracies, but in the schools of Sarasota County, they encountered both. They found professional administrators willing to serve as agents of federal and state authorities in the cause of social engineering. The schools were the one public institution in the community seemingly unresponsive to local political pressure and beyond local control. The right-wing community of Sarasota, like American Catholics of the nineteenth century and the Creationists of the 1970s, argued that a hostile government was using the schools to mold children and turn them against the ways of their parents.

The right used a number of devices to gain influence in the school system. Ultra-conservative students were organized within the schools. Dr. Wiley regularly cooperated with the Americanism Committee, allowing that group to sponsor essay contests in the schools on patriotic themes. The right frequently utilized such access to spread right-wing literature. On one occasion a number of three-by-five cards appeared in the high school bearing an expanded “Pledge of Allegiance.” The mock pledge read:

I pledge allegiance to the flag (not the President) of the United States of America (not the U.N.) and to the Republic (not democracy) for which it stands, one nation, under God (not the World Bank), with Liberty and Justice for all (not just for traitors).

This created a strong reaction among parents and students of a moderate or liberal political persuasion. According to one observer, many parents reported they “were horrified at this open insult to our flag and country.”

On another occasion moderates alleged an effort by the right “to learn the religious affiliation of every child in the Sarasota schools, for reasons unknown.” Moderates also claimed that the right had attacked one school principal by circulating in his school copies of a divorce complaint against him.
In 1964 Harry W. Frazee, a Sarasota insurance man and member of the John Birch Society, won the Republican nomination to the School Board in a campaign directed at Dr. Wiley. Herbert Field, who had carried on the policies of Hiss as chairman of the School Board, found himself under personal attack in his bid for re-election. The campaign against Field turned anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism in the city was condemned publicly in May by the Sarasota County League. Field was Jewish.\textsuperscript{22}

Frazee won his bid for election, and Field won re-election. The right wing of the GOP was considered to hold two of the five seats on the School Board. Its vice-chairman, Ronald Brinton, was frequently sympathetic to the right. Frazee’s election placed the right within one vote of controlling the Board.

The hostilities generated during that 1964 campaign convinced Dr. Wiley to resign. Like Hiss before him, the superintendent believed he had become the issue, and by resigning he would remove the schools from attack. He announced unofficially late in 1964 that he would be leaving at the end of the school year.

Dr. Wiley’s departure had unanticipated results. Instead of calming tensions, it only increased them. Teachers, administrators and some parents felt that the right was winning its battle. It had toppled Hiss as chairman and Dr. Wiley as superintendent. As for those on the right, “Dr. Wiley’s departure only made them feel their wild oats.”\textsuperscript{23} The right, flushed with victory, concentrated its attention on what it considered, the next most menacing target, the Sarasota County Council of the Parents Teachers Association.
By 1965, ultra-conservatives had attacked a wide range of groups and institutions in the community. They had been critical of unions, the Sarasota Chapter of the Florida Civil Liberties Union, the Young Democratic Clubs of Florida, New College and the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, in addition to the School Board and PTA. The PTA supported expansion, modernization and integration, everything the far-right opposed. The PTA had also supported Hiss, Field and Dr. Wiley.

The assault by the right on the Sarasota alignment followed a national pattern. As early as September, 1960, Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, had told members that the way to take over schools was to take over the PTA. He urged members to “join your local PTA at the beginning of the school year, get your conservative friends to do likewise, and go to work to take it over.”

The John Birch Society was headquartered in California. By 1961, teachers in that state were complaining of right-wing interference in the schools. The California Teachers Association condemned the activity, citing coercion over textbook selection and the slandering of teachers. In 1964 the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Congress of PTAs joined in a warning to affiliates. Their report noted that the PTA had been challenged by the political right in thirty-five states. “Extreme opposition” to the PTA had appeared in sixteen states. Florida was one of those states. The report denounced the right as “irresponsible extremists” and an “emotionally unstable” political faction. It urged member chapters “to go on the offensive.”

Trouble had existed in Florida outside Sarasota. On November 22, 1963, the *Lakeland Ledger* editorialized that Lakeland’s own local PTA was threatened:

In case anybody is inclined to laugh off the threat against the PTA, let it be known that the John Birchers did succeed in capturing the PTA in Eustis, only 75 miles northeast of Lakeland, and in some other places too. At Eustis, the PTA was destroyed, disbanded, and an entirely different organization substituted for it. Not surprisingly, the new one has far right political messages ready for any who venture forth to its meetings.
In September, 1964, the R. B. Hunt School PTA in St. Augustine was reportedly “stampeded into voting to withdraw from the State and National PTA, not in a democratic, well-studied move ... but by a minority group which took advantage of a poorly attended meeting . . . to push through the withdrawal.”

The Sarasota PTA went on the counter-offensive, utilizing an article in the September, 1965, issue of Look magazine as a weapon. The article spoke of a “vicious battle” being waged against the PTA nationally by “superpatriots.” Moderates used Look as an authority to back up their charges that the far right was malicious and dangerous. The article was discussed on radio talk shows and in local newspapers.

The PTA counter-offensive produced a strong reaction. Guy Paschal responded in a free-lance column in the Sarasota Herald Tribune, under the headline “Would You Rather Have Your PTA Run by John Birchers or Reds?” Paschal described the local conflict as one between two groups of extremists. He wrote, “Of the two I would vastly prefer control by [the John Birchers].” Paschal insisted that “infiltration of most of our important institutions is an accomplished fact.” He claimed America’s “self-pronounced enemy” was committing “communist subversion” locally. He concluded that “until communism decides to behave itself, I would prefer the influence of chauvinists in our schools than that of communists and anti-patriotic American socialists.”

Paschal was not a member of any right-wing organization. He asserts today that he had a well-known reputation as “a devil’s advocate,” who “baited persons on both sides of an issue.” Paschal says he used such tactics to “stimulate interest” in subjects in his newspaper column and on his radio talk show on WSPB, called “Guy Paschal’s Talk Show.”

Let Freedom Ring responded angrily to the PTA. In early September, Dr. Douglass distributed a message which declared, “The nation’s schools are open again and the left-wing extremists are publicly gnashing their teeth about an alleged take over of the PTA by the John Birch Society and other patriotic groups.” He charged, “the PTA is basically a political lobby for left-wing educators,” who were seeking to transform schools “in the Russian manner.” At the end of the message he instructed callers to send for additional information to “PTA Dictatorship, Box 1775, Sarasota.” He followed this with another, accusing the PTA of being a “pro-communist propaganda mill designed to brainwash American children.”

In this climate the PTA appeared to step back from its offensive. It agreed to investigate itself. In fact it created an Extremism Committee in October, 1965, to investigate extremism of any type in the schools. The national council had also urged local chapters in 1964 to gather information on the right-wing and to make that information public. The ad hoc investigating committee included Elizabeth McCall (chairperson), Jean Glendinning, Mrs. Frank Ladd, John Strong, Dale Aschilman, Margaret Woodsmall, Dr. Preston Knapp, Jr., Ted Sperling and Rabbi Herbert Weis. The committee met nine times during the winter of 1965-1966.

The ad hoc committee made its report on March 7, 1966, before local residents and the national press. McCall spoke for the committee, asserting, “I personally investigated each of the charges made against the PTA on behalf of the committee, and I have found no instance of left-wing
influences whatsoever.” She said her committee met with school administrators and teachers and investigated each complaint. She added that she resented “for myself and the more than 3,400 members in Sarasota being called a communist.”

The committee went on to list a litany of charges against the right. Russell C. Jordon, a former state legislator, speaking on behalf of the committee, attacked Let Freedom Ring as the primary antagonist of the PTA and “the principal source of Sarasota’s new notoriety as a hate center.”

Robert G. Petree of Orlando, a Civil Liberties Union attorney and officer in the Young Democratic Clubs of Florida, described activities of ultra-conservatives around the state. The committee also quoted from reports put out by the national PTA and NEA.

Jordon’s words were picked up the following morning by the local press. The Sarasota Herald Tribune ran the headline: “Sarasota Said City of Hate in Eyes of Many Floridians.”

The substance of the PTA report was all but forgotten. The issue quickly became whether or not the PTA had described Sarasota as a city of hate in front of network television.

Paschal responded to the meeting with a column in the Tribune. He called the ad hoc committee members “mongers of gossip” and a “hand full of hypertensives.” He wrote, “There was a big to-do this week. The PTAs or some kind of association of them, got into the act. They invited an outsider to come in and address a public meeting in one of the public schools on the theme that Sarasota’s anti-communist extremists are making Sarasota a city of hate.” Paschal closed with an ominous warning: “It is reasonable to assume the USSR is making an effort here. So we should be alert and report to the FBI in the Old Post Office Building any evidence of this effort being directed at the people or institutions in our area.”

Dr. Douglass responded through Let Freedom Ring, calling Petree “an admitted spokesman of the communist-accommodating Civil Liberties Union.”

The PTA received criticism from other quarters. Within two days Frazee had filed a complaint with the Sarasota County Commission. Frazee reminded the commissioners of the network cameras and of the film footage which had not yet been used. County Commissioner Leslie Miller responded, stating he had been at the meeting and had become incensed when he heard Sarasota described as the “hate capitol of the United States.”

On March 22, County Commissioner William Montgomery submitted a resolution on the PTA meeting. It stated “the Commission deplores the recent expressions and inferences . . . labelling this community as one intolerant of the rights of individuals and organizations.” The resolution urged a letter to NBC protesting any planned use of the Sarasota footage. It passed the Commission unanimously over protests by representatives of the PTA.

In April, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers Associations entered the Sarasota conflict directly. Jennelle Moorhead, national president, wrote the Sarasota County Board of Commissioners, asserting that Sarasota deserved the reputation it was earning because of “the vicious and unfounded attacks made on the PTA.” The controversy continued to smolder through the spring. On June 12, 1966, NBC-News used its film in a special entitled, “Politics: The Outer Fringe.” Following the program the Board of Commissioners expressed its official disapproval.
It would be unfair to develop the impression that the Sarasota press and business community were interested only in the image of the city and not with the city’s problems. The conflict between the right-wing and the schools was by 1966 an old story. The fact that the city had been caught airing its dirty linen in front of network television was novel and newsworthy.

By June, summer vacation had begun. Following the NBC program the conflict between the right-wing and the schools disappeared from newspapers and radio talk shows. With the opening of schools in the fall, it failed to reappear. A conflict which had raged for six years faded from public consciousness.

Several different explanations have been recently offered for the demise of the conflict. Waldo Proffitt, who was managing editor of the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, in the 1960s, speculates that the far right “ended up suffering from its own success.” It had expended great energy toppling first Hiss and then Dr. Wiley, only to find them replaced by moderates. Proffitt describes the schools as a political “tar-baby” for the right. The more it struggled to change the schools, the more they remained the same.42

Paschal, former free-lance columnist, describes the decline of the right differently. The Republican Party had waged a revolution in Sarasota in 1960. The far right had served as the Jacobins of that revolution, exerting influence far out of proportion to their actual numbers. “At the most there were only about twenty-five really dedicated extremists who raised most of the commotion,” Paschal notes. This Jacobin element had won political victories, but it had failed to produce change.43

Elizabeth McCall, former chairperson of the Sarasota PTA, gives much of the credit to the PTA and the groups in the community which supported it. “We were the first group that stood up to them,” she comments. “Nobody else in town would, but we did, and they left us and the schools alone after that.” She also believes that the experiences of 1965 and 1966 “frightened” most Sarasotans and led them to reappraise the far right.44

All of these views are probably correct. In addition, by late 1966 the war in Vietnam had become a national issue, blocking out most others. In the early 1960s the far right had played the role of political outsider, strongly critical of government at all levels. By the latter part of the decade right-wing organizations had come out strongly in favor of the war effort. Groups which had castigated Johnson in 1964 were supporting him in 1966. Locally, the energies and attention of ultra-conservatives were directed out of Sarasota toward Washington and Vietnam.

The turmoil in Sarasota between 1960 and 1966 was unique only for its shrillness. Communities around the country experienced attacks by the political right on their schools and eventually on their PTAs. The turmoil was greater in Sarasota for several reasons. A large number of political organizations developed on the right in the county, and these groups were able to cooperate on key objectives. The revolution of 1960 had also been as much a victory for conservative ideology as for the Republican Party. Conservatives in Sarasota County were often transplanted northerners with romantic ideas about government, or the lack of it, in the South. For four years the School Board placed itself as a shield between the schools and local political
factions. In 1964 that shield was broken when the far right was able to force a resignation within
the school system. Dr. Wiley’s departure frightened moderates and liberals in the community and
causede them finally to unite. In 1966 for the first time a mass of local residents, and not merely a
small elected board, arrayed itself against the far right, and the Jacobin wave began to recede.

1 Elizabeth McCall, “Report on the PTA and Extremism,” March 7, 1966, Sarasota County Historical Archives,
Sarasota, Florida. Special gratitude is expressed to the Sarasota County Historical Archives for assistance and
cooperation (hereafter designated as SCHA).

2 Sarasota Journal, March 8, 1966. Some newspaper citations are taken from scrapbooks, containing no page
numbers for the articles mentioned.


4 Interview with Herbert Field, Longboat Key, Florida, July 29, 1981.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.; Interview with Waldo Proffitt, Editorial Director, Sarasota Herald Tribune, Sarasota, June 26, 1981;
Interview with Guy Paschal, Bradenton, Florida, July 26, 1981.

7 Reports of the Secretary of State of Florida, 1950-1960. 1950 figures show Democratic registration at 9,955 and
Republican at 2,026, April 3, 1960 figures were 12,941 and 11,933 respectively. October 8, 1960 figures were
16,315 and 16,230. During this six month period from April through October, voter registration increased in
Sarasota County by thirty percent, indicating the intensity of local partisan campaigns.

8 Sarasota Herald Tribune, March 16, 1964, p. 2; Paschal interview.

9 St. Petersburg Times, August 11, 1964.


12 Ibid.

13 Field interview.

14 Paschal interview.

15 Field interview; Interviews with Elizabeth McCall, Sarasota, Florida, March 6, 1981 and April 24, 1981.

16 Paschal interview.

17 Field interview; McCall interview, April 1981.

18 Proffitt interview.

19 Field interview.

20 Russell C. Jordon, “Is Sarasota Becoming One of the Hate Capitals of America?” March 7, 1966, SCHA.

21 Ibid.; McCall interview, April 1981.


23 Paschal interview.

California Teachers’ Association, “The Pattern of Attack on Public Education in California,” March 27, 1961, SCHA.

W. R. Fulton, “Coping with the Extremists and Critics of the PTA,” July 2, 1964, SCHA. Fulton, a professor of education at the University of Oklahoma, delivered this address to the National Education Association convention in Seattle on that date.

Lakeland Ledger, November 22, 1963.

McCall, “PTA and Extremism.”


Paschal interview.


“Notes of the Committee on Extremism,” October 7, 1965 through March 7, 1966, SCHA.

McCall, “PTA and Extremism.”

Jordon, “Is Sarasota Becoming ... ?”

McCall interview, April 1981.


Ibid., March 12, 1966.

“Let Freedom Ring,” April 4, 1966, SCHA.

Tampa Tribune, March 9, 1966.


Jennelle Moorhead to the Sarasota County Board of Commissioners, April 4, 1966, SCHA.

Proffitt interview.

Paschal interview.

McCall interview, May 1981.
What did a courthouse, a hospital and a wrecking crew have in common in the annals of Fort Myers’ history? That was, to be sure, an unlikely threesome, and their equally strange common denominator was lumber. Toss in a bit of determination (some would call it stubbornness) and a dash of intrigue, and you have a most interesting pot brewing. This article is about the early years of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Hospital, but first we must look into the pot to see how these strange ingredients came together to produce the desired result - a hospital.

Concerned citizens of Fort Myers had known for years that the town needed a hospital. The population had exploded. The census of 1910 counted 2,463 men, women and children, while Lee County overall totaled 6,294. The “town” had become a city in 1911 by designation of the state legislature. No longer were the few doctors, midwives, practical nurses, and people with a knowledge of herbal medicine adequate to serve the medical needs of the area. Moreover, distances were long, and tranportation was difficult for the doctors in those days of “house calls.” Lee County stretched from the settlements along the upper reaches of the Caloosahatchee River down to the villages dotting the beaches and islands as far south as Chokoloskee. Roads, if they existed at all, were no more than sandy trails making travel by horseback or horse and buggy uncertain. Travel by boat was at the whim of the wind in the sails. What might have been a simple emergency in Naples could be a catastrophe by the time a message reached the doctor in Fort Myers, and it could become a fatality if he were “out” on a call thirty miles upriver at LaBelle. Hence, the need for a hospital became more and more urgent.

On January 2, 1912, a group of concerned citizens from civic organizations, churches and businesses met to discuss the problem and seek a solution. These community leaders took the first step and appointed a working committee. In support of this group, the city council of Fort Myers gave $300 for the hospital project. Since the need was great and civic leaders had endorsed the idea, one might suppose that the project proceeded full steam ahead to a rapid fulfillment. Sad to say, it was not so.

For many reasons, some obvious and some obscure, the 1912 proposal floundered. The city had other things on its mind. It had growing pains and was concerned with what it considered more urgent problems. Some citizens clung to the belief that a hospital was only a place to go to die, so they saw no need for one. Strange to say, even some of the doctors were lukewarm to the idea of a hospital, or too busy to offer their support. Whether the committee tried and failed or, in the time-honored way of committees, merely sat and spun it wheels, is not clear, but no more action on the hospital project was seen until October 26, 1914. Action on that memorable night produced astounding results, but before we proceed to that point we must look again into our pot. With the addition of a dash of intrigue, we find the brew coming to a full boil.
While the young city of Fort Myers faced the need for a hospital, the County of Lee grappled with the idea of a new courthouse. Fort Myers was the county seat of the young and growing Lee County, only recently separated from Monroe County. A lean budget had forced the new county to build a modest frame courthouse rather than the grandiose building which some of the civic leaders wanted. For almost twenty years the county conducted its business in the little wood building while the area continued to grow and develop. The dreamers, led by William Towles, a cattleman who was a colorful character in Fort Myers’ history, continued to hold onto their vision, waiting until the time was ripe to try again. When the prosperous pre-World War I years arrived, they judged the time had come for them to make their move. And move they did. They put their plans before the county commissioners who hired an architect, and on July 5, 1914, a contract for $74,900 was awarded to F.P. Heifner, an Atlanta contractor, for the construction of their long-awaited stately courthouse.4

However, this did not end the struggle over the proposed courthouse. Conservative businessmen, under the leadership of Harvie Heitman, held to the belief that there was no need for such an extravagant building since the existing one was in good condition. Never mind that the robust young county had outgrown this twenty-year-old building and that the county officials were woefully cramped for space. This conservative faction felt very strongly that the proposed step should not be taken. Therefore, in true pioneer spirit, they went into action and got an injunction from the district court in Arcadia which brought work to a screeching halt.

The halt of construction sparked another round of maneuvering and the scenario was played out again with the same results – a contract awarded, an injunction obtained, and work stopped.

Perseverance was another pioneer trait. For a third time the dreamers put their plans for a courthouse before the commissioners. Another contract was let on October 23, 1914, but with one major change – the price had gone up $25,000 in the three months since the battle had begun. It now stood at $100,000. Three days later the promoters heard, by whatever grapevine existed in that day, that the opposition would be on the afternoon train for Arcadia to get yet another injunction. This one would be based on the simple fact that there was no need for a new building (the first two court orders having been pegged to technicalities).

The county commissioners had had enough. They held a meeting with the contractor behind closed doors and made their plans. The instructions to the contractor were simple and to the point: tear down the old courthouse. If after that night of October 26, 1914, there were no county courthouse, then certainly there could be no question about the need for a new one.

When the Atlantic Coast Line train with its passenger cars and freight cars puffed out of the station on Monroe Street at 4:30 P.M., “the opposition” was aboard. The train rolled past the little frame courthouse, rounded the curve at Anderson Avenue, and was on its way to Arcadia and points north. The delegation settled back to enjoy the ride. They had been through this routine twice before, so they felt no concern about the outcome. The injunction would be granted. Perhaps this time “the spendthrifts” would see the futility of their efforts, and this would be the end of the tug-of-war.
The train blew its whistle to signal the drawbridge as it crossed the Caloosahatchee River. As the last sound died away, the contractor for the new courthouse and his workers appeared almost as if by magic on the grounds of the old building. They began systematically and carefully to tear it down. Not surprisingly, a crowd of onlookers gathered, and soon those in sympathy with the “courthouse gang” pitched in to help. When it became too dark to see, they built bonfires fueled by scrap lumber which could not be salvaged. The work continued into the night and on into the next morning with only occasional times out for the men to rest. Before noon, the job was finished; Lee County did indeed need a new courthouse.

When the delegation returned from Arcadia in the afternoon, they saw not the familiar old courthouse, but piles of neatly stacked lumber and smoldering bonfires on the otherwise empty lot. The dreamers had won. Construction got underway, and the next year, 1915, the magnificent courthouse became a reality.

Now, as promised, we come to the hospital. The wrecking crew that tore down the old courthouse had carefully stacked up piles of good used lumber which was soon transformed into a hospital. The county had all this used lumber cluttering up its courthouse construction site, and the city had a somewhat dormant but still intact hospital committee to which it had given $300 two years previously. There seemed to be an obvious way to resolve the county’s problem and at the same time help the city’s committee. The county, in a move beneficial to both parties, gave the lumber to the hospital committee.

This donation put new life, enthusiasm, and hope into the drive for the hospital. An anonymous donor gave land for the building on the south side of town on the corner of what is now Grand Avenue and Victoria Street (the present day site of the Greyhound Bus Terminal). Other donations came from many sources, both businesses and individuals, but they came slowly.

Finally, after two more years (four years from the time the committee came into being) the hospital was completed. Its proud supporters held the dedication ceremonies on October 3, 1916, and the Lee County Hospital opened its doors for business. Through the efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the name was changed to the Robert E. Lee Memorial Hospital. Every day usage shortened this to Lee Memorial Hospital, and eventually this became its official name.

In the beginning the hospital was small. A square, two-story building with screened porches along the front on both floors, it had four rooms for patients and an operating room, but it had no delivery room, so babies were delivered in the mothers’ rooms. With no elevator, patients were carried by hand from the second-floor operating room downstairs to their rooms on the first floor.

Through the untiring efforts of the board of directors and with the help of the loyal and hard-working supporters, improvements came to the hospital. During the first two years, two wings were added, making a total of sixteen rooms which could accommodate twenty-two patients. A third-floor operating room was added. A portico improved the front entrance in looks and convenience.
The story of how the hospital came into being makes an interesting tale, but it does not give any idea of the working conditions in such a small, primitive hospital almost seventy years ago. However, the reminiscences of two nurses who worked there in the early years provide insights into what conditions were like in the hospital during the 1920s. Over forty years later LaVeta Allen, R.N., the superintendent of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Hospital in 1922, and Theo Ellis McAfee, R.N., the hospital’s first operating room nurse, who also started her career in 1922, recalled those early years in interviews.

LaVeta Allen graduated from the Mercy Hospital School of Nursing in Fort Scott, Kansas, in 1920. After working for a year in Fort Scott, she came to LaBelle, thirty-nine miles east of Fort Myers, to visit her parents who had been homesteading in the area for ten years. She first came to Fort Myers on a sightseeing tour. (At that time a daily bus ran between Fort Myers and LaBelle.) One of the sights she visited was the local hospital, where Irene Gayles, the hospital superintendent, gladly showed her around, since visiting nurses were few and far between.

While on vacation, LaVeta also had time to do some private duty nursing which led to a job at Lee Memorial Hospital. She was on a case in a home “out in the woods” in the LaBelle area when the doctor decided that the patient should be put in the hospital. LaVeta brought her patient to Lee Memorial and while on duty in the hospital, she was asked by Superintendent Gayles if she would be interested in the job of hospital superintendent. Mrs. Gayles had been there only a short time, but she did not like the position and wished to leave. LaVeta was interested and sent a letter of application to the hospital board. Some of the board members were reluctant to hire her because she was a Catholic. They were in a difficult position, however, because Mrs. Gayles was leaving, and they could not operate the hospital without a registered nurse. So they hired her. Or, as LaVeta expressed it, “The Board had a difficult time in reaching a decision, but finally they selected me since I was the only applicant.”
LaVeta neglected to inquire about the duties of the superintendent but if she had, she probably would have torn up her application and gone back to Kansas. Her duties? You name it and she did it, if not regularly, at least on an emergency basis. A run-down of various areas gives some idea of her responsibilities and the operation of the hospital.

The dietary department: The kitchen was staffed with two Negro cooks. LaVeta planned the meals. She ordered supplies from C.W. Bartleson’s Wholesale Grocery Company, or she personally made purchases at one of the town’s retail grocery stores when she could not wait for delivery day. The nurses, including LaVeta, served the patients’ trays.

The housekeeping department: Two black women were responsible for the cleaning. However, when emergencies arose and it was necessary in the interest of sanitation, LaVeta or the other nurses would be found swinging a mop or wielding a scrub brush. Not long after LaVeta started work, she upgraded the housekeeping department by hiring Cleve Cavitt, a young black man, as a combination janitor and orderly.

The bookkeeping department: LaVeta and the board of directors were the bookkeeping department. The board paid the major expenses (“what might be called capital outlay”) and the nurses’ salaries. LaVeta had charge of the routine expenses. The board gave her money in three funds: groceries; medicines and supplies; and staff pay (domestic help). She kept a record of all expenditures, and at the end of each month, she gave the board a financial report.
The heating system: “Now there was something to make a modern hospital administrator turn pale!” The patients’ rooms on the south wing were heated with fireplaces; those on the north wing were heated with potbellied stoves. All of these (plus the kitchen stove) burned wood. Who carried wood to the rooms and kept the fire burning? The nurses. Who chopped the wood? Primarily, that was Cleve’s job except when he was too busy with his orderly duties, then the nurses pitched in. “We did what needed to be done,” was the way LaVeta summed up her work.

LaVeta’s starting salary for this jack-of-all-trades position was $125 a month. The second year, she received a raise which put her salary up to a whopping $135.

The medical staff of the hospital consisted of five Fort Myers doctors and two visiting surgeons. The doctors were: Dr. M. F. Johnson, Dr. Elliot Parnell, Dr. W. B. Winkler, Dr. A. P. Hunter, and Dr. Ernest A. Brecht. The surgeons were: Dr. David McSwain who commuted from Arcadia, and Dr. Guy A. Longbrake who had come to Florida for his health.

The nursing staff consisted of LaVeta and eight (sometimes fewer) attendants who, in today’s terminology, would be classified as practical nurses or nurses’ aides. LaVeta was the only registered nurse on the staff, which meant that she worked a twelve-hour shift and was on call the other twelve hours. The private duty nursing “register” consisted of two R.N.’s: Mrs. Gayles, the former superintendent, and Blanche Bryan.

Toward the end of her second year, an emergency situation arose which caused a serious conflict between LaVeta’s obligation to the nursing profession and her obligation to hospital policy. Dr. Johnson had a black obstetrical patient who was in convulsions and needed an immediate Caesarean operation. The operation would have to be done in the patient's home because the hospital was not allowed to treat black patients – “not even to give emergency treatment if one were brought to the door.” LaVeta knew that the difficulties of performing a Caesarean in the home were insurmountable, especially with the patient already in critical condition. Remembering the reluctance on the part of the board in hiring her and a continuing wish on the part of some members to remove her, she said to Dr. Johnson, “Bring her to the hospital and we will do the operation here. If they are looking for a reason for firing me, I might as well give them a good one.” The operation was performed; she was fired.

LaVeta continued her nursing career in Fort Myers as a private duty nurse in homes and in the hospital until she retired in 1956 at the age of sixty-five due to poor health. She died in 1971.

Theo Ellis also came to Lee Memorial in 1922.10 On April 14, 1922, LaVeta Allen and A.C. Carlton, a member of the hospital board of directors, waited on the platform as the train backed slowly along the siding as it neared the station on Monroe Street. When the passengers stepped from the train, LaVeta approached a tall young woman and said, “I am LaVeta Allen.” The new arrival answered, “I am Theo Ellis.” And so the hospital superintendent met her new registered nurse who was to serve as the operating room nurse.

All three climbed aboard Carlton's Model-T Ford. A porter cranked the engine (no self-starters on the old Tin Lizzies) and they were off – until the motor died two blocks from the station. Carlton could not turn the crank because of a recent hernia operation; LaVeta was too exhausted;
so that left Theo. After several futile spins of the crank, the observant LaVeta said to Carlton, “Perhaps if you turn the ignition on, Theo will be able to accomplish a little more.” With one more turn of the crank, they were on their way. “And that,” remembered Theo, “was my introduction to Fort Myers.”

Theo was recently graduated from Gordon Keller Hospital in Tampa, and this was her first job. She was so eager to start working, she had forgotten to ask about her salary or fringe benefits. When she did ask, LaVeta told her that her beginning salary would be $85 a month. “There was no withholding then, so I got the whole $85.” Fringe benefits included room and board and uniforms laundered.

Theo started work immediately. She had arrived in town at 12:30 P.M. Dr. Longbrake had surgery scheduled for 2 P.M. When LaVeta, weary from long hours and little sleep, asked Theo if she would assist with the operation, she responded, “I’ll try.” She later observed, “I guess it must have gone alright because the patient lived.” That night she assisted with an emergency appendectomy. The new nurse felt that she had been quickly and thoroughly initiated. When asked if he thought they should keep Theo on the staff, Dr. Longbrake’s reply was a heartful, “I certainly do. She is fine, just fine.”

Theo had a room in the nurses’ home which was a small building near the south wing of the hospital. It was close enough to be within calling distance when she was needed for emergency surgery. LaVeta had a room in the central section of the hospital in order to be available to give injections at night or for any of the other numerous situations that required the attention of an R.N.

One of Theo’s unusual duties was window washing. The new third floor operating room had windows on all four sides. (By contrast, today’s operating room suites have NO windows.) Once a week Theo washed those windows inside and out. Washing the inside was easy, but in order to wash the outside, she sat on the window sill and pulled the top sash down to her lap. And this was three stories up! Her only comment: “Those windows were always clear and clean.”

Another duty more in line with operating room procedures was sterilization of instruments and supplies. Normally a routine task, this was anything but simple given the primitive equipment available. Indeed, it was a monumental, never-ending headache. Everything that could be boiled was boiled – instruments, rubber goods, syringes – on the stove in the kitchen, an intrusion which displeased the cooks who thought the kitchen was their private domain. If they needed the whole stove while Theo’s pot was on, they simply moved it off the fire. When she came down to retrieve her instruments, she would have to start the process over again. After they had boiled the proper time, she loaded the pot onto the dumbwaiter, went upstairs (two flights and no elevator yet!) and pulled them up. “Somebody had to hold the rope while I unloaded it, or the dumbwaiter went crashing back down to the kitchen.”

The supplies, such as sponges, dressings, linens which could not be boiled, had to be sterilized with steam. The steam chamber which Theo had to work with was just large enough to hold one pack, one pack being all the sponges, drapes, gowns, and towels needed for one operation. This steam chamber worked on the principle of a pressure canner: put the pack in, exhaust the air, let
the chamber fill with steam, let the temperature rise to 250 degrees, and maintain this temperature for one hour. Then the steam had to be exhausted and the pack left in the chamber to cool and dry. A maddening, time-consuming chore which allowed for no shortcuts. Besides the packs which were kept ready for scheduled surgery and emergencies, small bundles of sponges and miscellaneous items were needed and had to go through the same long process. Obviously, Theo had to operate the little steam chamber almost constantly to keep the supply of sterile goods ahead of the demand. (Later, when city gas became available, the hospital purchased an autoclave which was larger and more efficient, and sterilization became less than a twenty-four-hour-a-day job.)

As we noted in LaVeta’s work schedule, in the early days of the hospital, duties were not spelled out as specifically as they are today. If a job needed to be done, someone did it. Theo was the operating room nurse, but when there was a lull in her department, she helped with routine chores in other parts of the hospital. Preparing medicines for the night attendants to dispense had to be done by a registered nurse. Theo took over that job except when she was busy with emergency surgery, thus relieving LaVeta’s workload.

Another unusual aspect of Theo’s operating room work was that much of the routine surgery was done at night. This schedule was for the convenience of Dr. David McSwain of Arcadia, the chief surgeon for a number of years. In order not to interfere with his Arcadia practice, he travelled to Fort Myers on the 11 P.M. train and performed his operations in the middle of the night. In the morning, he caught the 7 A.M. train and returned to Arcadia.

There was no delivery room in the hospital at that time, so the patient’s room became the delivery room. Theo remembered that on September 4, 1923, during the height of a hurricane, a baby was delivered in the end room on the north wing. Theo cradled the baby in her arm, covered herself and the baby with a heavy rubber sheet, and made her way along the porch to reach the nursery which was in the central section of the building. The wind howled, and water swirled ankle deep on the porch floor. She had to steady herself with a hand on the wall to keep from falling down. She made it safely to the nursery and kept the baby dry, “but water was running in sheets off my uniform.”

Theo recalled another unusual experience when a Seminole Indian woman came to the hospital for surgery. Her husband sat outside the operating room door with war paint on his face and body while the operation was performed. It seemed that his squaw had better live or else. “Luckily she lived, so we didn’t have to find out what the ‘or else’ was.”

Theo continued her work as operating room nurse supervisor as the hospital expanded. Gradually the medical facility lost its pioneer flavor. When the new Lee Memorial Hospital was built on Cleveland Avenue in 1943, she worked in the updated and modernized operating rooms and later in the obstetrical wing until her retirement in 1967. Her nursing career spanned forty-seven years, all of them spent working in the Lee Memorial Hospitals. Shortly after her retirement, Theo married Kenneth McAfee and moved to north Florida. At the time of this writing, she is widowed and living with her family in Jacksonville.
Fort Myers and Lee County were proud of the original Lee Memorial Hospital. Though primitive by today’s standards, it was modern in its day. It served the medical needs of the area for twenty-seven years until population growth demanded new and larger facilities.¹¹


³ Grismer, The Story of Fort Myers, p. 201.

⁴ Florence Fritz, Unknown Florida (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1963), p. 120.

⁵ Ibid.


⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Interview with LaVeta Allen, R.N., circa 1965.

¹⁰ Interview with Theo Ellis McAfee, R.N., circa 1965.

¹¹ Betty Wight, R.N., “History of Lee Memorial Hospital,” in Lee Memorial Hospital Life, April 1975, p. 4.
THE RAILROAD DEPOT: A PHOTO ESSAY

by R. Randolph Stevens

From 1830 through the 1950s railroads were the tie, the sinew, that bound our country together. Pioneers first traveled by using the lakes and streams. Eventually, roads were cut, canals dug, and finally track was laid to connect the seaboard towns and cities with the interior of the country. This transportation revolution had little effect on Florida until after the Civil War when two Yankee railroad builders, Henry Bradley Plant and Henry Morrison Flagler changed the landscape of central and south Florida. Their investments and foresight brought ribbons of track down the west and east coasts over the next few years, sparking an economic boom. In 1883, Plant’s South Florida Railroad came into Tampa, and the west coast began to grow in earnest. Before long twin rails extended down to Venice, Boca Grande, Naples and Everglades City.

The visible, ever-present evidence of the railroads, those important industrial giants of America’s wealth and mechanical genius, was the railroad station. In virtually every Florida community, from the largest city to the smallest flagstop, the station was a hub of activity and a source of local pride. Both freight and passengers were handled with equal precision, care and thoughtfulness. These depots became the community social center, the place where people stopped to set their watches at the foot of the grand station clock called a “Regulator.” They also gathered to catch up on the latest local gossip and listened to the telegraph chatter with state and national news. In short, for many adults and children alike, the station was their window on the world. Like Alice’s mirror in the child’s story, you could occasionally step through the “Looking Glass” and catch a train to far off places with strange sounding names. In the days of the Florida Crackers, the depot was the only source of current worldly communication for inland communities. In seaports, the station was an important link in the chain of commerce between sea and land.

The arrival of the train was the highlight of the day or week. Strangers and friends would come and depart. Mail was tossed onto the platform for distribution to the townsfolk. Newspapers and supplies for the general store or mercantile marts cluttered the freight and baggage areas. During horse and buggy days, wagons and stagecoaches might be crowded around at train time to carry passengers and goods to the surrounding area. Later, after the coming of the horseless carriage, trucks and taxis waited impatiently to be loaded or unloaded.

Railroad employees were an essential element in all of this activity, selling tickets for honeymoon trips, summer camp for the kids, family vacations or business trips. They made sure the steamer trunk got on board, the cast iron stove was stoked, telegrams were sent and all the dozens of tasks were completed even though they seemed to occur at the same time.

Over the years, communities changed, but the railroad stations seemed to remain the same. After World War II travelers got used to lunch in New York and dinner in Chicago. When trains could not measure up to our love of speed and the convenience of air travel, we abandoned them.
The station was no longer needed for passengers, and even our freight deserted trains for trucks using the new federally-built highways or planes landing at huge tax-financed airports. Many of our stations were torn down or rotted away in the last thirty years. Fortunately, we have belatedly realized our railroad depots have new uses, and many are being renovated and preserved for another generation to love as we loved those pictured on the accompanying pages. Some stations still slumber, waiting on a community to devote the time, effort and money necessary to recreate a social center like that which existed in a bygone era. Perhaps a motel, restaurant, office center, library, museum, or even a drive-in bank will again enliven those once active walls and cause the adjacent town to swell with pride at the “new” town center down by the old station.

This 1922 photograph shows passengers in front of Tampa Union Station. It was built in 1921 by the Tampa Union Company headed by Peter O. Knight, to serve the Seaboard Air Line (SAL) and the Atlantic Coast Line (ACL). Its plan is unique. Some of its sheds, the Railway Express and Pullman offices are gone by today.

Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
The ACL station in Clearwater was built on the route of the old Orange Belt Railroad. It and the trackage were removed with the ACL/SAL merger in 1968.

This and subsequent photographs courtesy of the author.

Bradenton’s ACL station is a standard brick and stucco design. It is still in use as a railroad office.
The station at Punta Gorda in Charlotte County was built by the Atlantic Coast Line. Constructed of brick and stucco, it is similar to others found in Florida cities of similar size, such as Bradenton.

Unlike the standardized designs frequently used by the railroad companies, ACL’s Fort Myers station is one-of-a-kind. Unfortunately, it had seen better days by the time of this 1969 photograph.
The SAL built the station at Arcadia on the line begun in 1906 as the Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railway Company, which connected Plant City timber and phosphate with deep water at Port Boca Grande. The station’s plan and stucco construction is similar to that of others in Dade City and Polk City, dating to the boom era.

The station at Polk City was a standard Seaboard Air Line stucco design. It was gone by the 1960s.
Dade City’s station was built by the SAL and is another “Boomtime” stucco design. It stood across from the Edwina Hotel and was razed in 1970.

The SAL St. Petersburg station south of Central Avenue was built in the 1960s. Its stark exterior contrasts vividly with the ornate designs of earlier eras. It was abandoned by 1968 after the SAL/ACL merger, but found a new use as a lumber company office.
This miniature stucco structure is the Bay Pines station. It was built by the SAL specifically to serve the Veterans’ Hospital at Bay Pines.

Barrel-tile roof over the waiting area distinguishes Venice’s unique SAL station. It was abandoned by Amtrak when passenger service was discontinued south of Tampa. The stationmaster offered my wife and myself bed and breakfast at his home when we arrived by train with our bicycles to tour the local beaches.
Lake Placid in Highlands County aimed at becoming a winter home for the rich, so it obviously could not be satisfied with a standard-design building. It was serviced by the Atlantic Coast Line and has just begun its new use as a museum.

The Sarasota SAL station was so centrally located that the tracks ran unprotected down the center of a major street. It was abandoned and razed with the creation of the Seaboard Coast Line in 1968.
The Auburndale station is another standard brick design used by the ACL. The station was painted in their trademark – color purple with white trim. The building was demolished in 1968.

Palmetto’s ACL station is of a non-standard brick style.
The main lines of both the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard Air Line crossed in Plant City. The depot, built in 1908 to serve both companies, was recently placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Trilby was an important junction on the oldest route from Tampa to St. Petersburg. Trains took twelve and a half hours en route before the construction of the Gandy Bridge. Ringling Brothers used to stop their trains at Trilby to water their animals in the nearby lake. The ACL station was built in 1902, partially destroyed by fire in 1925, and rebuilt in 1927. By the 1980s it had been relocated at the Florida Pioneer Museum in Dade City.
Bowling Green’s building shows the standard design serving the ACL’s smaller communities and used brick and wood.

Waverly in Polk County exhibits yet another standardized ACL design, this time of wood.
The ACL’s Brooksville station is a standard wooden design with an extra wide platform for farm implements.

The ACL depot at Immokalee in rural Collier County has a utilitarian wooden construction and contrasts with the more glamorous West Coast stations.
Palmdale’s station was built by the ACL using their standard wood plan for smaller flag stops. The line opened just after World War I to connect the Sebring/Haines City line with Moore Haven, where steamboat connections across Lake Okeechobee carried passengers for West Palm Beach.

Dover, a small stop on the ACL to Tampa, was one of several standard wood designs, this one with the freight end enclosed for security. It had been razed by the 1980s.
Wimauma shows a standard wood design and was built by the SAL.

Highlands City’s structure (ACL) was built of wood. Doodlebug #2900 of the combined SCL passes with a single coach for Naples. This rare combination engine/freight car had itself been retired and scrapped by the time Amtrak took over the passenger service.
Croom’s ACL station was small but had character. It overlooked a large rail yard in a once busy phosphate and pulpwood area. It was levelled by 1980.

The depot at East Tampa, built by the ACL, typifies the smallest of the standard wood designs which was used to serve a single industry or a small town.
Elfers, between Tarpon Springs and New Port Richey, had a depot built by the SAL. The line began in 1909 as the old Tampa and Gulf, known locally as the “tug and grunt.” The building was a standard small wood design. It has been used as a lumber company office.

Valrico in Hillsborough County has a non-standard, indeed curious design. This SAL structure had been removed by 1980.
By 1958, there was no station at Felda in Hendry County, only a sign to designate the side track. Station Number VC 948 was built by the ACL, and its tracks could hold nineteen cars.
SMUGGLING AT TARPON SPRINGS: A PROTEST

Editors’ Note: Smuggling is undoubtedly as old as the practice of taxing imports, and the illicit liquor trade along the Gulf Coast certainly predates Prohibition, as the following 1901 protest makes clear. Written by a Tarpon Springs businessman, it also contains some interesting information about life in that town at the turn of the century. The other fact worth noting is that this document was found in the National Archives where a wealth of original source material on local history is housed. The exact location of this document is Record Group 36, Treasury Department, “Custom House Nominations – Tampa,” Box 79. It should also be pointed out that the file contains an official response from an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Department who answered that the federal government could not afford to appoint a customs officer for Tarpon Springs to police traffic at the mouth of the Anclote River. Perhaps most remarkable is the fact that the reply from the Washington official is dated August 27, 1901, a mere eight days after the following complaint was written.
Office of W. W. K. Decker  
Dealer in  
Rock Island Sheep’s Wool and Anclote Grass and Yellow Sponges.

Tarpon Springs, Florida

8/19/1901

M. C. Macfarlane  
Collector of Customs  
Tampa, Florida

Dear Sir:

I feel it urgently incumbent upon me to again call the attention of the Department to the illegal traffic in dutiable merchandise which is being constantly carried on at and near the mouth of the Anclote River. Lately this has assumed alarming proportions, large quantities of liquors distilled in Cuba, and brought to these waters by fishing smacks, the home Port of which is Havana, are being conveyed from these vessels to land in almost open violation of Customs laws, and sold ashore in violation of United States and States law, by the quart, gallon, demijohn and I presume barrel to suit the inclination of the purchaser. This in itself we who are engaged in business here might endure if the Government authorities are disposed to permit its continuance, but to such the consequences of this traffic are something direful to contemplate with equanimity.

The demoralization and debauchery that arises from this state of affairs plunges our business into confusion, engenders animosities that result in loss of life and property and excites and intimidates the law abiding and law defending element of the community.

Speaking now only for myself, I am constrained to say that my direct losses from having supplies which are furnished my vessels for the legitimate pursuit of the business, traded for rum by dishonest members of the crews; the jeopardy to my large interests as a sponge buyer from men made irresponsible or vindictive by drink and considerations of personal safety leads me to think seriously of abandoning a business the volume of which amounts to nearly $100,000 a year.

It may be proper here to supply some data relating to the Sponge industry and market at this place:

There are at present about 150 vessels engaged in fishing along this coast, about forty of which are outfitted here, the balance outfitted at Key West, and about 1200 fishermen, commonly called spongers, are employed in operating these vessels. This fleet all rendezvous within from one to three miles from the Anclote River, while on their trip and there cleanse the sponges caught, and prepare them for the market.

There are usually five buyers representing as many business firms and nearly all of the catches made by the Key West vessels from these waters are sold here as well as the entire product of the
vessels owned or operated at this place. For past two or three years the value of the product which has been disposed of here has averaged $250,000 annually. There are from thirty to forty men employed in the various sponge packing establishments and disbursements for wages aggregate $20,000 per year. The above statements, I can readily substantiate, from accurate records and by other parties interested in this business and it is the opinion of all that an industry of this magnitude is deserving of adequate protection from the hands of the Administration.

You will no doubt note account of the murder committed at Anclote last night when reported to the newspapers. This was attributable solely to causes complained of at beginning of this letter, the last of several that have been perpetrated through same causes.

Yours very truly,

(signed)
W. W. K. Decker
BOOK REVIEWS


This book is in three closely related parts of roughly the same length, narrative, photographs, and histories of sponsoring individuals and institutions. It is part of the American Portrait series which includes studies of Miami and Pensacola in Florida. It is an effort in words and pictures to present the spirit and identity of modern Tampa, a city with roots deep in the past. It is, of course, not a detailed history of the city, but the glimpses readers get may well motivate them to learn more about it. A bibliography provides a guide to further reading.

The story of Tampa lends itself admirably to this kaleidoscopic presentation. It is made up of legends and legendary characters galore, of dramatic episodes and rising and falling hopes and
achievements. An international flavor adds to this many-faceted image. It is important always to remember that Florida lies on the northern rim of a Hispanic world that reaches across the southern United States to the Pacific Ocean and down through Mexico and Central and South America. Like other cities on that rim, Tampa is a gateway to both the Hispanic and the Anglo-American worlds.

Only recently have we come to realize that the Florida Indians were more numerous and much more highly civilized than was commonly supposed. This is nowhere more evident than on the Gulf Coast of Florida. Perhaps the total disappearance of those Indians long before the state’s belated modern development accounts for that oversight.

The early part of the story is told in imaginative and sweeping statements, often quite perceptive. This inevitably leads to some oversimplification and distortion, and may invite some nitpicking. Juan Ponce de Leon deserves more than the Fountain of Youth as his motivation for exploring Florida. Hernando de Soto was the first of the explorers to be primarily a gold seeker. It is to the credit of the authors that they do not claim to know where he actually landed in Florida. Tampa Bay was a most likely place. Hopefully, it will remain Florida’s greatest mystery.

The Gasparilla festival best typifies the legendary aspect of Tampa’s story, and the writers give it its proper place in history. One character was very real indeed, John Gomez, himself a legendary figure, who is credited with telling the story. He was a well known figure on the southwest coast a century ago.

Tampa, like Miami, waited for the railroad, aptly termed “the Messiah,” to come into its own. Until the rails opened the way into the hinterland, the city's magnificent harbor had only a local and limited use. Then within a century, a modern metropolis developed. Tampa overcame a late start, and quickly transcended but never forgot its Indian, Spanish, Italian, and Cuban heritage or its romantic frontier flavor.

The final section of the book provides accounts of some of Tampa’s business and cultural institutions and biographies of some of its leaders, recording information available nowhere else.

Charlton W. Tebeau


Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada y Barnuevo was the second of seven Spanish governors ruling East Florida from St. Augustine between the close of the American Revolution in 1784 and American occupation in 1821. He succeeded the brilliant Vicente Manuel de Céspedes y Velasco in 1790, and apparently left office in 1795. These were critical years in world history in general and on the Spanish-American frontier in particular. The French Revolution affected Spanish defenses throughout America; it was Quesada’s task to handle Florida defenses. He did so with disgruntled troops who grumbled at their lengthy pay arrears and with little support from his
direct superior, Captain-general Luis de las Casas in Havana. In addition, Quesada had to contend with the increasingly bellicose attitude of American frontiersmen greedy to occupy the fertile lands below the St. Mary’s River, the international threats posed by William Augustus Bowles and his dream of creating an Indian empire in Florida, and, perhaps most critical of all, the changing economic “rules of the game” forced upon Spain as a result of the international situation.

Dr. Miller chose this topic for her doctoral dissertation at Florida State University (1974) under the direction of Professor J. Leitch Wright, world renowned authority on Anglo-Spanish rivalry in Florida. Since the dissertation is available from University microfilms, the *raison d’etre* for this barely-modified version is unclear. Moreover, the subject is not adequately covered. Who was this governor, where was he born, when did he die, when did he turn over the office to his successor? These are just a few of the unanswered questions.

Rather than complain about what the author has *not* done, let us see how she has handled what she has done. Her study is hardly a step above a graduate seminar paper and pales by contrast with such recent studies of Florida as Amy Bushnell’s brilliant examination of Spain’s financial organization in Florida between 1565 and 1702 (*The King’s Coffer*, Florida, 1981) or the study of Quesada’s predecessor, Céspedes by Helen H. Tanner (Miami, 1963). Because Miller does not really understand Spanish administration, she assumes for Quesada extraordinary powers which he had neither in theory nor practice. In the search for free trade, for example, she assumes the settlers had some God-given right to do what they wanted, notwithstanding the monopoly over the Indian trade exercised by the firm of Panton, Leslie and Company. She spends useless time describing a situation of free trade that was only a suggestion, never a realization (pp. 66-70). In her study of educational opportunities, she cites the regulation for admitting “American Nobles” to the College of Granada without any follow-up concerning how many youngsters from Florida actually attended, who they were, how they got to Spain, whether they returned, or any concrete facts concerning the actual working of the college. (See pp. 44-45).

Perhaps the failure of this book may be attributed to the sources used. Principally, they are the East Florida Papers, consulted in microfilm form at FSU. Had the author taken the time and effort to use the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida, she could have answered many questions about Quesada’s family background, his almost-chronic belly-aching, and his inability as an administrator to get along with his superiors or subordinates. While the author has used selected documents from the Archivo General de Indias, she has not really explored in depth the documentation concerning Quesada’s Florida career.

If the book is so bad, how did it get published? How could so many typographical errors appear in a supposedly scholarly work? How could bibliographical references be so wrong (I can’t recall who Frederick Jason Turner was, p. 173; I can find no copy of Bolton’s *Spanish Borderlands* published at Norman by the University of Georgia press in 1964, *ibid.*). If the typist lacked the *ñ* of Spanish, why didn’t an editor insert it by hand? The explanation is simple. The University Press of America has nothing to do with any university press. The quality of its books depends totally on the author; all errors are reproduced in print from the typed manuscript, which is sent “camera-ready.” The binding of the paperback is so bad my review book fell apart before
I wrote this. The tragedy is that the uninformed public, seeking books on Spanish Florida, are tempted to buy this press’s offerings, the quality of which, at least in Florida history, is very low.

As for Quesada, perhaps he does not need another study at all. From the information given by Miller, he was not an effective example of Spanish administration on the Florida Borderlands.

*Jack D. L. Holmes*


The 1930s was a watershed period in federal Indian policies. John Collier, a well known social reformer, was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs with a mandate to draft a New Deal for Indian people. For the first time in over a century, the federal government made a sincere effort to exercise its fiduciary responsibility over Indian resources within a framework designed to enable self-determination and the preservation of tribal cultures. Such reforms were urgently needed throughout Indian country, and especially by the Seminoles in south Florida who had been dislocated and pressed into desperate poverty by the land boom and everglades drainage projects of the preceding decades.

It perhaps comes as no surprise that the hoped-for results of Collier’s program failed substantially to materialize. Although the reasons for this failure are complex, part of the problem stemmed from the frequent lack of reciprocal support between the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington and the field personnel charged with implementation. James L. Glenn’s account of his tenure as agent to the Seminoles between 1931 and 1936 represents an interesting case study of the gap between reforms enacted at the federal level and the intervening political and economic realities that militated against successful outcomes at the community level. This work also represents a useful commentary on the political economy of south Florida during the era and offers particularly valuable information about the Seminoles. As the editor points out, Glenn’s description of the Indians’ relationship with the larger world around them indicates a much greater interdependence than is conveyed in the conventional image of everglades isolation.

This document, which is presented in the form of a long letter to Glenn’s niece in Tampa, was written some ten years after he was involuntarily terminated from the Indian Service. Much of what he says has the sound of a long simmering self-vindication and an effort to document accomplishments that his superiors in Washington failed to appreciate.

Prior to his appointment, Glenn had been a minister of a church in Everglades City. This account, however, reflects more concern with the Seminoles’ material deprivation and the daily injustices they were forced to bear than with the condition of their immortal souls. In many ways, the author seems like the ideal sort of civil servant to have acted as a foot soldier in Collier’s crusade. Glenn was evidently hardworking, intelligent, and humane – refusing to join his predecessor in the conclusion that the Seminoles’ plight was hopeless. He was completely in sympathy with policies of land restoration and economic development. It was under his direction
that the Brighton Reservation and the beginnings of a tribal cattle industry were established. He did not, however, agree with the notion of self-determination, nor with programs designed to preserve traditional culture. It is not clear whether his objections to these aspects of the program reflected an assimilationist philosophy or a belief that Seminole self-government was simply impractical given their objective conditions. He expresses a genuine appreciation for their traditional beliefs and values, but a loathing for the tourist camps which he felt exploited the more exotic aspects of their culture.

Glenn apparently was perceived as a maverick by the Indian Service personnel and, as a hold-over from the Hoover administration, was vulnerable to partisan opposition. At any rate, caught between an uncooperative bureaucracy and relentless pressure from local political and economic forces, he was impeded and eventually stalled in his efforts to lead the Seminoles out of the wilderness. Although there is no indication of it here, it may also have been that the Seminoles were unwilling to be led in the direction that he wanted them to go.

This is a very valuable document from several standpoints. It provides an unusually candid and well-written analysis of a critical transition period in the organization of the Seminole tribe of Florida, and it supplies important background information for anyone wishing to understand the controversy over their current economic development activities in Hollywood and Tampa. The work has been very ably edited by Harry A. Kersey, Jr., whose introduction and extensive footnotes provide much-needed clarification of some of the vagaries in the text.

My major criticisms concern the quality of photo reproductions and the oddsized sideways design of the book. Glenn included 60 photographs in his original letter, and each is the subject of a specific reference in the text. Although these are quite interesting, even aesthetic, the print quality is terrible. Given their unique role in the book, they deserved more creative darkroom attention than they evidently received. Similarly, more thought should have been given to selecting the shape of the book, because this only fits on a shelf when the spine is tilted upward. These are perhaps trivial objections, and certainly should not deter anyone from reading or buying the book. But, these features seem to reflect an unresolved ambivalence about whether this should be a scholarly book or a coffee table item. It far more suitably belongs in the former category.

Susan Greenbaum


Billy Bowlegs made a surprise attack upon First Lieutenant George L. Hartsuff’s detachment at five a.m., December 20, 1855. This was the official opening of the Third Seminole War, or the Billy Bowlegs War. Yet Professor Covington believes that the third war was only a continuation of the Second Seminole War fought two decades earlier; that Colonel William J. Worth’s General Order, issued on August 14, 1842, signified only the temporary termination of military action against the Seminoles of Florida; and that during the period between Worth’s order and
Billy Bowleg’s attack there had been no diminution in the desire or the plans of white Floridians to drive the red Floridians from the peninsula.

Of the three Seminole wars in Florida, the best known is the second and the least known is the third. There have been a smattering of newspaper accounts and historical articles in local publications about the third war, but all of these treated only a specific segment of the whole. Until recently no one had produced a study of the Third Seminole War in its entirety. Then a few years ago Virginia B. Peter’s The Florida Wars included the third. Now Professor Covington provides an in depth study of this little known Indian-white conflict.

Covington’s thesis, expressed in his subtitle: *The Final Stand of the Seminoles Against the Whites*, is presented through an uncomplicated narrative. He describes the desire of Floridians to rid the peninsula of Indians, the efforts of various Indian agents to bribe, cajole, and threaten the remaining Seminoles, and the State and Federal governments’ harassment by survey and military reconnaissance into the heartland of the Seminole reserve in the Everglades. Finally, he focuses on the war itself, with its countless scouting expeditions and infrequent skirmishes. It would be so easy for a historian to become bogged down relating one minor event after another for no other purpose than to inform the reader on every bit of research performed by the author. Covington avoids this pitfall and keeps his narrative moving.

The author discusses three phases of the Billy Bowlegs War. First the Indians were actively raiding well beyond their assigned reserve, while the whites were disorganized and defensive. Then two regular officers, General William S. Harney and Colonel Gustavus Loomis, reorganized the military structure. Harney initiated the use of boats, and Loomis increased the militia participation. In the final days of the conflict, the militia brought the war to the Seminoles in the Everglades and the Big Cypress Swamp. The third war’s ending seems a déja vu of the earlier war.

Professor Covington focuses so intently upon local history that he overlooks the significance of these Florida events upon national developments, especially American military history. While he believes that this war was a continuation of the Second Seminole War, he does not devote any analysis to the army’s strategy during the earlier conflict. Therefore, his discussion of military stratagems during Billy Bowlegs War is developed in a vacuum.
A map of Florida appears on the front and back covers. Geographic and political details are provided only for south Florida, and even here the information is inadequate. Of the thirty-seven forts listed in the text only eight appear on the maps. Two of the seventeen rivers are identified. The Seminole reserve, set aside in 1842 for the Florida Indians, is not delineated, a crucial omission. Only the more informed reader could follow this narrative without outside geographic aid.

Despite these limitations, Covington’s book fills a void in Florida history. Not only will those interested in Florida history want to become acquainted with it, but also those devoted to American military history, for this study adds its might to the national military development.

George E. Buker


Not only has George Buker masterfully captured the color, scope, and evolution of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from 1821 to 1975, but also has provided the historical and geographical framework so necessary for a study of this kind. The book, well-organized into fifteen chapters, reflects thoughtful research, articulate expression, and attractive graphics. An excellent bibliography, appropriate index and footnotes, as well as two appendices more than compensate for the few misspellings in this interestingly presented work.

The early history of the Corps is inextricable with that of Florida, linking numerous personalities, both familiar and obscure. James Gadsden, more noted for his Mexican activities and famed Gadsden Purchase, is recognized as a significant contributor to early Florida history and Corps development. On occasion, the author infuses such realism into his characterizations that the reader senses a loss when the figure fades from the Corps story. An excellent example is the analysis of Dr. Abel Baldwin's lengthy, aggressive, but futile, struggle to gain acceptance for his plan to enhance the port status of Jacksonville by solving the problem of shifting stream channels at the mouth of the St. Johns River.

The theme of change and expanding responsibility for the Corps is ever present. Seldom deviating from his primary objective, the author successfully traces two centuries of growth from the first official designation of an engineer in 1775 to the 1975 status of the Jacksonville District of the Corps. Early emphasis on mapping and surveying yielded to concern for coastal fortifications in the mid-nineteenth century. Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, today a remote national park, serves as a reminder of the scope, frustration, and failure of that period. Later private developers helped stimulate Corps activity in regard to harbor and community development. The twentieth century was a boom period, as Corps activities affected the lives of almost all Floridians. Navigational projects such as the Intracoastal Waterways, the incomplete and controversial Cross-Florida Barge Canal, the Okeechobee Waterway and the beltline canal vied for funds and approval along with projects concerning flood control, drainage, beach erosion, water management, wetland conservation, and a host of related environmental problems.
The author vividly portrays the pressures of World War II as the Corps engaged in intense military construction, primarily air bases and training facilities. The military experience blossomed later into major construction work at Cape Canaveral and nearby Patrick Air Force Base. With both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands within its jurisdiction, the Jacksonville District acquired additional responsibility for collecting data and conducting engineering studies for feasibility of an inter-oceanic canal across Central America. Consequently, focus has been expanded to several foreign political states.

The book is an excellent history and summary of Corps activities. The author shows the transition from military to civil concerns as the nature and range of involvement expanded. Simultaneously, the reader is afforded insight into Corps organization and regional responsibility. Engineers and historians should find this book rewarding and of special interest.
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Thronateeska Heritage Foundation has recently published the first issue of the *Journal of Southwest Georgia History*, an annual journal covering the history of an area neglected in most traditional history books. It will also contain book reviews on Georgia and Southern history.

For more information, write to Lee Formwalt at the Department of History & Political Science, Albany State College, Albany, Georgia 31705.

Over seventy pieces of carnival glass are on display at the Fort Myers Historical Museum. The Ethel Cooper collection provided the impetus needed for the City to establish this local museum.

The museum is located at 2300 Peck Street, in the former ACL Railroad depot. For more information, contact Patti Bartlett at 332-5955.

The Palm Harbor Area Genealogical Society invites you to its meetings at 7:30 on the third Monday of each month at the Palm Harbor Day Care Center. Contact either Shirley Kaufhold at 784-8791 or Roger Blohm at 784-2444 for further information.

The Polk County Historical Association is another very active local organization, with their quarterly magazines, newsletters and meetings. It meets every fourth Wednesday of the month, and further details can be obtained by writing to the President, Glenn Hooker, at 31 N. 6th Street, Haines City, FL 33844.

Florida’s Secretary of State, George Firestone, announced in January that the State Library of Florida is transferring its genealogy collection to the custody of the Florida State Archives.

Firestone said that "this will result in one of the finest and most complete genealogical resources in the State of Florida."

The State Archives is located in the R. A. Gray Building in Tallahassee and is open to researchers Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Correspondence concerning subscriptions, contributions, books for, review, and all other editorial matters should be sent to the Managing Editor, *Tampa Bay History*, Department of History, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620. (Telephone: 813-974-2807). ISSN: 0272-1406.

Manuscripts from potential contributors should be typed and double-spaced with footnotes, also double-spaced, placed at the end and prepared in conformity with the style used by the journal. Manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope with enough postage.

The subscription rate is $10 for one year and $18 for two years. Single issues and back files are available. Printed semi-annually, in the spring/summer and fall/winter.

*Tampa Bay History* disclaims responsibility for statements made by contributors.

*Tampa Bay History* is indexed in *Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life.*
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COVER: The Orange Belt, the first railroad to reach St. Petersburg, was built between 1885 and 1889, and this photograph dates from the early 1890s. (Photograph from Stokes Collection, courtesy of USF Special Collections.)
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"STREET-CORNER LOAFERS"

At the request of some of Tampa’s most prominent merchants, the Tribune vehemently kicks about the large number of street-corner guys, who congregate on the streets during the busy part of the day.

A merchant said last night that ladies would not pass these crowds of hoodlums, and that they were injuring the trade by always standing in front of their places of business, using profane language and expectorating upon the sidewalk.

This is a nuisance that the police should take hold of ....

*Tampa Morning Tribune*, Dec. 13, 1900.
EARLY FEMINISTS?

Mrs. Scoville has taken legal steps to get divorced from her husband on the grounds of bad temper and cruel treatment.

From the *Sunland Tribune*, August 10, 1883.

The woman who works in some honorable way to maintain herself, loses none of the dignity and refinement of true womanhood, and is just as much, even more, an ornament to her sex than the women whose days are passed in luxurious indolence and indulgence.

From the *Tampa Guardian*, June 7, 1879, p. 3. (Editors’ Note: the *Guardian’s* assistant editor was a woman, Mrs. Julia Magbee. While she was the editor’s wife, articles such as this imply that her title was not merely for show.)