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Tampa Bay History 14/02

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FROM THE EDITORS

The reconstruction of the past by historians has traditionally focused on the lives of great men. Kings, presidents, and generals dominate the stage in traditional history. Indeed, political leaders have been used to personify entire periods from "the Age of Pericles" to "the Reagan Era." A significant challenge to this view of the past has come from social historians who write history "from the bottom up." Focusing on the lives of ordinary people, such as workers (men and women), families, and ethnic and racial minorities, social historians have drawn attention to the importance of class, race, and gender in shaping the past. One problem, of course, is finding sufficient evidence to document the experiences of people who left few written records. However, social historians have ingeniously tapped both traditional and non-traditional sources to recapture the actions, thoughts, and everyday life of common people.

In its thirteen years of publication, Tampa Bay History has sought to portray the diverse experiences of the great variety of people who have either visited or lived in this area. The list of subjects has ranged from Spanish explorers to recent retirees, from runaway slaves to the Krewe of Gasparilla, from cigar factory owners to migrant laborers, from working women to unemployed men. Since Tampa Bay History depends on the interests and creativity of authors who choose to submit articles, the wide distribution of subjects reflects the many new directions of historical research.

This issue features lives of local people in all their diversity - male and female, white and black, working class and middle class. The opening article by Jack Moore, "Jack Dempsey in Tampa," includes in its title probably the only name in this issue that most readers will recognize. Yet Moore considers more than the persona of the famous boxer. He uses a brief two-day visit by Dempsey to examine larger social questions, especially the relationship between sports and boosterism in the 1920s. In "Work Wanted - Female: Women and Work in Pinellas County in the 1950s," Ellen Babb looks at paid and unpaid work by black and white women. While placing these experiences in a national context, she reconstructs the lives and attitudes of local women largely through oral history interviews. H. Coupled with more traditional sources, oral histories can provide a wealth of information about the recent past. Stacy Braukman's interview of Ellen Green, a Tampa civil rights activist, opens up a world of accomplishments by black women that traditional histories of the civil rights movement have generally overlooked or underestimated. Finally, the photographic essay by Alicia Addeo reveals the way Fort De Soto looked during its heyday at the beginning of the century.

As always, this issue of Tampa Bay History is made possible by the subscribers and especially those listed on page 3, who have made special donations. Their generosity helps sustain this nonprofit journal, and we hope that more subscribers will consider making a similar commitment when they next renew their subscriptions.
On Wednesday afternoon February 4, 1926, heavyweight champion of the world William Harrison “Jack” Dempsey fought seven rounds of exhibition matches with four opponents in an outdoor ring specially constructed on the property of real estate developer B.L. Hamner in what is now the Forest Hills section of Tampa. None of the estimated crowd of 10,000 paid a cent to see the famous conqueror of Jess Willard, Georges Carpentier, Luis Angel Firpo (“The Wild Bull of the Pampas”), and Tommy Gibbons demonstrate some of the skills and spectacular personal appeal that had made him one of the era’s greatest sports heroes.

With the passage of time Dempsey would become an authentic legend, a sports immortal. Three other legendary sports’ heroes, Harold “Red” Grange, Jim Thorpe, and Babe Ruth also visited Tampa around the time of Dempsey’s appearance. Grange and the aging Thorpe opposed each other in an all-star football game played January 1, 1926. Ruth, who would become probably the nation’s all time greatest sports’ hero, was in the region just prior to spring training to play a little golf, to relax and stay fit, following a sub-standard (for Ruth only) 1925 season when beset by injuries, quarrels, and his own lack of discipline, he saw his batting average drop from .378 to .290 and his home run production decline to a seven-year low of twenty-five. In a nationally syndicated article, printed in both the *Tampa Morning Tribune* and the *St. Petersburg Times* on February 4, Ruth was grandiosely termed a “Modern Crusader,” seeking to recapture the “Grail” of “his reputation as the mightiest slugger in baseball.” Still, Jack Dempsey was locally the main attraction of the time.

In retrospect Dempsey’s visit was a minor event in the champion’s life, but his public performance presents an illuminating episode in his career and southern Florida’s history, pulling together and spotlighting cultural strands that reveal much about the sources of Dempsey’s growing popularity and the extent to which he increasingly appeared to manage his own affairs rather than being a product of manipulative forces controlling his actions. In the narrative of Dempsey’s sojourn, even so trivial a subject as the legitimacy of his recently repaired nose would assume an importance in the eyes of his followers (and detractors), much like the bones of a saint might be squabbled over by true believers and scoffers. In terms of Florida history, his brief visit to the state provides interesting insights into the region’s promotional techniques, real estate business, and attempts to revive and stimulate the state’s once burgeoning movie industry. On the national level, much of the publicity attending Dempsey’s greatly ballyhooed stay in Florida (culminating in the Tampa exhibition bouts) underscores the racism infesting American sports during perhaps its first boom decade, and offers a classic example of the connection between play and business during sports’ Golden Age, demonstrating how sports heroes, increasingly thrust into the marketplace in America, could be used to help sell commodities like property or concepts such as community spirit. Mainly, however, Jack Dempsey’s visit to Tampa provides fascinating insights into the life of a great sports hero who wanted to forge his own image, and it reveals the promotional efforts of a city that also sought to be great.
Jack Dempsey and B. L. Hamner posing at the champ’s exhibition bout in Tampa on February 4, 1926.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
At the time of his exhibition fights in Tampa, Dempsey had not, of course, assumed the cultural and even mythic stature he would later attain. His ultimate apotheosis would require a magical mix lacking then at least three key ingredients – his two losing battles with Gene Tunney, and time. In the second Tunney fight (September 22, 1927) he would display his tragic flaw, a curious but at the same time emotionally understandable inability to control the raw power his fans worshipped. Dempsey was representative of a new breed of American hero, an entertainment hero, not a statesman or military leader, as nineteenth-century American heroes had so often been. As a hero of consumption and not of production, he (like Ruth, with his home runs and Grange with his long touchdowns) provided simple solutions to difficult problems of victory in an increasingly complex society. Dempsey would eventually fall because, sadly, individual power was not enough, and because he could not adapt to Tunney’s cool, rational, scientific style. To hit his opponents until they dropped and then to hit them again as soon as or even before they stood erect had enabled Dempsey to triumph before, but the crude, old fashioned technique would thwart him against Tunney during the “long count” that spelled defeat but, much later, a higher glory for the “Manassa Mauler.”

In February 1926 Dempsey was possibly better liked by more fans than he had been when regularly fighting as a champion, although he had not fought an officially sanctioned title or non-title match since battering Firpo to the canvas in two frantic rounds on September 14, 1923, knocking the Argentinean down nine times and being punched and pushed from the ring himself once in a wild fight. But he was still far from the revered figure he would become, and he had to work hard to be liked. Two issues worked against his popularity. Dempsey was thought by many to have shirked his military obligations in World War I, and what may have been worse to some sports fans, he had failed since becoming champion to fight Harry Wills, perhaps his leading challenger – and not so coincidentally an African-American nicknamed the “Black Panther.”

Dempsey had not fought in the military during the war. Foolishly, his handlers had released a photograph of him in overalls holding a power tool, that appeared in newspapers across the country, suggesting he was laboring in a shipyard for the war effort. Actually, he was performing the meritorious job of recruiting defense workers. Dempsey’s shiny patent leather and suede shoes peeked out from under his trousers appearing to belie the photograph’s legitimacy, and scandal simmered. In 1920 Dempsey was tried on charges of conspiracy to avoid the draft, but his lawyers convinced the court of his innocence. Dempsey’s defense was that as sole support of his first wife, Maxine, his mother and father and some members of his family, he had been draft exempt; that he had contributed significantly to the war effort; and that he was trying to enlist in the Navy when the war ended. To many American boxing fans, his fight against Georges Carpentier, July 2, 1921, pitted a slacker against a French war hero. Dempsey’s court victory was for some jingoists no more effective in shining his image than his four-round knockout against the smaller, more fragile looking Carpentier would be, and the issue would linger to wound Dempsey for decades, until not long after Pearl Harbor when in his late forties, he joined the Coast Guard.

The charge that he had avoided fighting Wills was in 1926 far more frequently a subject of newspaper accounts, and more difficult for Dempsey to counter, since Dempsey had in fact just one day after defeating Jess Willard for the title July 4, 1919, announced he would under no circumstances pay attention to a “Negro challenger.” In fact, before he became champion,
Harry Wills (circa 1926) was denied a heavyweight title fight against Jack Dempsey.

Dempsey had fought blacks. The color line was drawn less firmly in prizefighting during the 1920s than in other sports, most notably baseball, but it seemed to grow more distinct as the weights of the fighters and the sizes of the purses they might earn increased. Heavyweights were the kings of sport, and the line was drawn most clearly in their division. In modern times only Jack Johnson had been a black heavyweight champion (1908-1915) and his carefree, outgoing, sometimes arrogant manner, his affairs with white women, but most of all his very blackness coupled with his dominance in the ring incensed many white fans. Any black fighting as a heavyweight had the double burden of his own blackness in a racist society, and the powerful, mocking image of Jack Johnson in white spectator’s minds to overcome. While many whites would doubtless have appreciated seeing Dempsey fight Wills, many others, including leery promoters and politicians subject to organized white pressure, were strongly opposed to the match. At times Dempsey appeared inclined to disavow his stated prescription against interracial fights, but a bout with Wills always seemed to become enmeshed in political wrangling outside his control.

Even with the slowly fading shadow of his non-participation in war to deal with and despite his three-year absence from a real fight and his seeming avoidance of a scrap with Wills, Dempsey was a national hero in 1926. “In France and England, Dempsey was received as a symbol of America,” according to biographer Randy Roberts. He was a “cultural hero”. In 1924, “without climbing into the ring, he earned more than any other professional athlete during that year.” Among athletes Babe Ruth would have been his only rival, and Ruth’s greatest season, when he hit his 60 home runs in 1927, still lay ahead of him. In short, Dempsey early in 1926 when he visited Florida was at a popularity peak. He was a dominating sports hero, and a charismatic figure in the public consciousness as well; even among Americans who never closely followed his fights, he was a celebrity.

Tampa Bay newspapers greatly publicized Dempsey. A detail such as “Jack’s Cafe Makes Money: Old Fighters Wash Dishes” in a small restaurant he owned briefly in Los Angeles was deemed worth printing in the Tampa Morning Tribune. His nose was a feature of minor controversy. Once flat, it had been straightened in 1924, Dempsey always claimed, simply so he could breathe more easily. Some fight fans and reporters suspected, however, that the operation was cosmetic or worse, aesthetic, to beautify his handsome but clearly battered mug. After all, he was now married to the Hollywood actress Estelle Taylor, and he had made several films during
his ring absence after the Firpo fight. A 1925 news story reported: “Dempsey Insists His Nose Is Real. Will Let Any One Twist It To Prove It Is Not Wax, He Says In Mexico.” His nose, doubtless far more famous than Cyrano de Bergerac’s among 1920s fight fans, would achieve a life of its own in sports columns and ring lore. In January 1926 the *Tampa Tribune* reported that Pie “Traynor To Get New Nose Like Dempsey’s,” in an item about the Pittsburgh Pirates’ third baseman, ultimately a member of baseball’s Hall of Fame.

A garbled notice of Dempsey’s visit to Tampa appeared in the *Tampa Morning Tribune* on January 28, 1926, announcing that “Mr. and Mrs. Dempsey Will Come To Tampa For Visit Saturday.” Dempsey, accompanied by his wife, had been making public appearances in Miami, where he had trained but not fought any exhibitions, under the sponsorship of real estate entrepreneur J.S. Blain. Supposedly he had wired reservations to the Tampa Terrace Hotel, bringing “to an affirmative end rumors that have been prevalent during the last two weeks that the two would visit” Tampa, where “the champion will engage in no ring appearances.” The article was misleading. On January 28 the Dempseys shipped from Miami to Havana, to shop and possibly to arrange for exhibitions in Cuba that never took place.

A more accurate report of the Dempseys’ visit to Tampa appeared in the *Tribune* on January 30, the day the champion was supposedly to arrive. Under a banner headline proclaiming “DEMPSEY TO APPEAR IN BOUT HERE WEDNESDAY” and adjacent to a smiling picture of Jack himself, an article revealed that Dempsey would fight six exhibition rounds against various sparring partners who would arrive from Miami. The B. L. Hamner company was promoting the appearance of the “Utah Mauler,” and no admission would be charged – that point was made quite clear.

Hamner seemed confident the exhibition would take place. His organization distributed 25,000 tickets and constructed a ring “with as many seats being arranged as time will permit.... ‘Those who can’t find seats probably won’t mind standing up, when the attraction is the world’s heavyweight boxing champion,’” Harry Hester, Hamner’s liaison and supposedly Dempsey’s friend, stated. Arrangements were proceeding “to accommodate the largest crowd which ever attended a sports event in Tampa.” No one could mistake that “FANS WILL BE GUESTS OF HAMNER AT RING EXHIBITION BY CHAMP,” that the fight was free, or that to see the bout fans had only to drive “North from Tampa out Nebraska Avenue to Waters Avenue, then west approximately three quarters of a mile to the properties. Another route is the Armenia Avenue way, turning east on Waters Avenue. These routes will be thoroughly placarded . . . with directions to [the] scene of the bout.” In actuality, at the time this meant a fair drive to a sparsely settled near-wilderness.

The event would benefit everyone - the local newspapers who could offer their excited readers ample information about the hero Dempsey; the Hamner sales team who would reap rich publicity for their development and increased visibility as community builders; Dempsey who could demonstrate his brute power as a fighter, advertise his professional career (even as Hamner he could “drum up trade”), and enhance his image as a solid citizen; the spectators who would be seeing a famous athlete close up; and the city of Tampa, which would gain greater repute as a growing city of leisure activities and community expansion.
Hamner consistently represented Dempsey’s exhibition as a gift to the people of the city, an attempt to raise Tampa’s image of growth and achievement throughout the region, state, and country. This was a familiar attitude expressed by local land promoters, but perhaps none was more adept at the practice than B.L. Hamner, who was doubtless in large part profit oriented, but whose underlying sincerity also seems apparent. He was a gifted salesman who made and lost and remade again several fortunes from selling or developing land during his almost half-a-century of work in the region, but who also consistently expressed a vision of Tampa as an important city. He was not alone in this vision among Tampa realtors, but his advertisements show him to have been more imaginatively grand and insistent in his vision than all but a few competitors.

In his first newspaper advertisement for the exhibition matches Hamner proudly proclaimed that “In presenting Jack Dempsey, world’s heavyweight boxing champion, in a free boxing exhibition at Tampa’s North Side Country Club on Wednesday afternoon, B.L. Hamner and his associates in the B.L. Hamner Organization are going forward in accordance with their desire to build a greater and finer city.” Hamner’s next advertisement combined his social zeal, his dreams for a greater Tampa, with claims promoting the advantages of the development he owned – in that order – to produce an almost inspirational explanation of his motives for arranging the proposed free bout. “In arranging for the appearance of the boxing champion, B.L. Hamner and his associates had a three-fold purpose – first, to gratify the public interest in Dempsey – second, to further Tampa’s fame as a resort and an amusement center – and third to acquaint folks with the beauties and advantages of Tampa’s North Side Country Club Area,” where the exhibition would take place.

Hamner, like many Tampans in the growing city, was not a Tampa native. Born in Kansas City, Missouri, on August 3, 1882, he practiced law there for several years after receiving his L.L.B. He came to Tampa around 1911 or 1912, and soon became known as a highly successful real estate entrepreneur, as did his brothers Harry and William, who had moved to the area with him. According to a “Builders of Tampa” article in the *Tampa Tribune*, he was “always active and enterprising.” He had “headed some of the principal real estate and development enterprises in this city and vicinity,” including the “noteworthy suburb” of Temple Terrace, and, the article stated, originally owned what would become known as Davis Islands, one of the most distinctive residential enclaves in the city, a regionally famous development that would come to feature Mediterranean revival buildings situated on land much of which was dredged up from surrounding Tampa Bay. “It is no secret that it was Burks Hamner who first visioned the possibilities of the islands in the bay as a scene of epochal development and it is stated that he imparted to D.P. Davis the outlines of the idea which has resulted in the wonderful Davis Islands of today.” According to his nephew, Joseph Burks Hamner Miller, B.L. Hamner sold the islands to Davis when he realized the development would take more time and effort than he wished to expend. Viewed as more than a successful businessman, Hamner was also hailed in the *Tribune’s “Builders of Tampa” as the type of urban leader, though no politician, who was “Always . . . active in community and civic work.” A “booster for Tampa,” he “urg[ed] upon citizens greater attention to those things which make a real City.” Like many salesmen, he possessed an easy, charming way with colleagues, customers and friends, whether men or women, but according to his nephew he did not like partners and felt more comfortable with just himself in charge of his projects: he was not a team player.
Hamner maintained throughout his long career a grand vision of sales linked with community growth. Not content with fielding stray clients attracted to his enterprises, he attempted various devices – like the Dempsey promotion – to lure larger numbers of potential clients to contemplate his dream suburbs. Some of the spectators who attended the Dempsey exhibition were brought to Tampa in buses Hamner chartered for prospects in cities such as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, not expressly so they could see the fight, but so they might be enticed to buy property in his Forest Hills development, one of whose slogans created by Hamner was “Sooner or later all the people will take to the hills!”

Hamner’s advertisements consistently stressed his grand dreams for the region and combined commercial appeal with a merchant’s concept of visionary and intellectual discourse to attract customers. “Have Faith in Tampa – work morning, noon and night” one of his *Tribune* advertisements proclaimed in 1926 with the stated purpose being “to realize our vision – a million people in nineteen thirty six.”\(^{19}\) He labeled select samples of his homiletic newspaper copy an “Editorial.” One was subtitled “Knowledge,” another “Opportunity.” “Truth” announced that “Five hundred and fifty-one years before the coming of Christ, Confucius said ‘the absolute truth is indestructible....’ Why, therefore, should we be disturbed at silly tales in the North about Florida?”\(^{20}\) And so just as Christ and Confucius seemed somehow to be enlisted in his sales force, Jack Dempsey soon would be. “Red” Grange and his manager Charles C. C. (“Cash & Carry”) Pyle had already been recruited. Newspapers announced that each had submitted a $1,000 down payment on “more than $15,000.00 worth of property in Tampa’s North Side Country Club area,” not long after Grange had played a professional game with his recently-joined Chicago Bears team on New Years Day, against a squad that included Jim Thorpe.\(^{21}\)

When Dempsey arrived in Tampa, the city was experiencing one of its sporadic boom periods. The same 1926 issue of the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, explicating how Confucius’s wisdom might advocate investment in local real estate, announced in a regular news item (not an advertisement) “AMPLE ASSURANCE FOR CONTINUED PROSPERITY” in the region. As proof of this claim the article stated that “as a seaport Tampa ranks seventh in importance among the country’s many great ports.” The newspaper’s headline for the day was even more enthusiastic: “TAMPA TURNS TO NEW CONQUESTS. GOLDEN YEAR ENDS WITH CITY HOLDING GREATEST LAURELS,” one of which was the Tribune’s own ranking of “Twelfth Among Newspapers Of Nation In Advertising Volume.”\(^{22}\)

In the month prior to Dempsey’s visit, local realty sales hit $24,000,000, and a record number of building projects had been started. Not far from Tampa, satellite community developments were burgeoning: Homosassa, “a tailor-made city now under construction”; Zolfo Springs, “an established town”; the aristocratic sounding “Nobelton . . . on the high, tree-shadowed banks of the Withlacoochee River”; and Dunedin Isles, a “complete Development” with “Every Convenience and Advantage,” where “$780 and no more pays in full for house and lot” on a “High-Dry Full Sized 50 X 100 ft.” parcel of land.\(^{23}\)

A growing community with big ideas about itself awaited Dempsey, and the city’s sporting fraternity greedily received any bits of publicity about the champion. Though his biographer, Randy Roberts, asserts that “by 1926, it was painfully obvious to everyone connected with the
pseudopromotion that the [Wills] fight would never be held,” the Tampa Morning Tribune for January was liberally seeded with conjectures about Dempsey, his future, and his next opponent: “Dempsey Writes He Wants To Meet Wills and Gene; Ready to Talk Business”; “Two Million Is Bid For Dempsey Battle Against Harry Wills”; “Dempsey Promises Los Angeles Wills Battle If Fitzsimmons [promotion] Fails”; “Tunney To Meet Dempsey In September Is Belief Of Promoters And Fans.”

Dempsey’s future opponent seemed to change almost daily. More significant to Tampans was that he was going to fight in Tampa!

Advance news of his schedule contained much misinformation, but fancy and fact blended smoothly into instant publicity, which was partly what both Hamner and Dempsey sought, for both had products to sell. Dempsey was marketing himself, his legitimacy as a champion, and his substantiality as a person. Hamner was selling property, a stake in the community, and like many good developers he also sought to sell himself and his legitimacy as a progressive citizen. Both had an eye on the future. Dempsey wished to meet big-time opponents for large purses, but he also wanted to appear in or produce more films and so needed to be respected not simply as a “pug.” Hamner had many other projects in mind, and visions of greatness for Tampa that would also enhance his projects. Each man could make use of the other in pursuing his dreams.
On Tuesday, February 2, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* announced that Dempsey expected “to remain in this city until Saturday,” that he would “be feted on several occasions” and that he would be “guest of honor” at several entertainments now being arranged by Harvey Hester. The *Tribune* said Dempsey had written Harvey Hester that “Having never appeared in a Florida ring [he was ignoring or forgetting previous exhibitions in Pensacola and Jacksonville] . . . I naturally, will be anxious to be at my best. Although it will only be an exhibition, I expect to travel at a fast rate.” How the fans must have thrilled at that: Dempsey, at a fast rate in Tampa! The *Tribune* added erroneously that he had never “appeared in a bout in the south.”

He had in fact battled at least three times below the Mason-Dixon line, at Memphis, on February 25, 1918; Dan “Porky” Flynn in one round on July 6, 1918 at Atlanta; and Dutch Seifert also in one round (exhibition) on February 10, 1925, also at Atlanta: three fights, three rounds, a fair display of Dempsey’s power.

Across Tampa Bay, Tampa’s rivalrous sister city during boom and bust years, St. Petersburg received notice of his local appearance at first in a somewhat snide and then reserved fashion. The *St. Petersburg Times* reprinted under a picture of Dempsey, the regionally syndicated “Sports Done Brown” column, which warned that Jack’s three years of official idleness could produce the same malaise that Brown claimed defeated heavyweight champions John L. Sullivan, Jim Jeffries, and Jess Willard. Dempsey, a Times reporter added quietly, was “scheduled to box three rounds at a Tampa realtor’s subdivision on Wednesday afternoon and will probably attract quite a few local fans.”

In Tampa, the colorful, charming booster and salesman B.L. Hamner was fully exploiting the local fans’ interest in the event he had organized. Anticipating Dempsey’s vision of the development that would surround the ring he would fight within, a Hamner advertisement glowingly described the terrain now christened “Point O’Glory.” Dempsey would see “two thousand acres of rolling hills, covered with beautiful woods and dotted with lovely lakes, being prepared as an incomparable setting for suburban homes. He will see construction forces at work on wide boulevards, concrete sidewalks and other improvements. He will see two partially completed club-houses. He will see homes – eight in Golfland, opened less than two weeks ago, being built.” A drive through the region today reveals that Hamner’s lyrical description, considering it was advertising copy, did not greatly distort the region’s attractiveness. Although most of Tampa is flat as the stretched canvas of a boxing ring, in the Forest Hills section where Hamner’s land was located, some small hills tumble if not roll, and the land is dotted with lovely, though often over-developed and occasionally polluted lakes. Streets still wind among wooded areas and do not follow the rigid grid of many Tampa suburbs, partly because the roads that often curve pleasantly through the neighborhood seem to flow about an irregularly shaped old golf course built, by Hamner and running north-south through what was once his subdivision.

Other local entrepreneurs were also ready to exploit Dempsey’s potent name to enhance the legitimacy or value of their projects. During the 1920s the fortunes of film enterprises locally and in the state had waned, unlike the real estate industry. Prior to World War I, Florida rivaled and sometimes surpassed California in its filming activities. Dempsey’s name and that of his actress wife’s were employed by a Tampa company making one of the periodic attempts in the region to reestablish film making as a fiscally strong local business.
Dempsey’s celebrity status as heavyweight champion was his main attraction to local movie producers, who also undoubtedly knew that he had made a number of films and was interested in developing film properties. Of course Estelle Taylor was an authentic stage and film actress, sometimes a leading lady if never a brightly shining star whose lustre was enhanced by her connection to Dempsey. Her most popular films included “A Fool There Was” (1922) and “Don Juan” (1926), with dashing, unreliable John Barrymore. Dempsey was a bigger attraction than his wife by far – in the Broadway play “The Big Fight,” directed by David Belasco, he had commanded (briefly) $1,250 a week and Taylor only $350. But she was still a valuable added attraction. An advertisement and a news article printed in the Tampa Morning Tribune trumpeted the grand plans of film promoters – “12 Tampa men and a group of New York capitalists” – for the city: “Don’t Crowd, Girls, You’ll All Get Screen Test For Film Job At Movie Ball.” Who could resist the lure? “Movie aspirants, your chance is here! At the Coliseum tomorrow night, R.H. Allison, personal representative of the Chester Beecroft Company, Inc., will select 250 girls and 250 men to take screen tests for the filming of the Gasparilla motion picture” to be shot locally. “Jack Dempsey and Estelle Taylor have been invited to help in the selections and in entertaining the large crowds expected.”

The Beecroft Company’s proposed filming scheme, as lofty in its design as Hamner’s real estate development, was destined for failure. Certainly the cast sought for the movie about Tampa’s legendary, ersatz pirate Jose Gaspar, whose name designated the city’s annual Mardi Gras-type Gasparilla Day festival, was a solid one, including “Harrison Ford for leading male role, Niles Welch for second, Betty Bronson for supporting role,” and either John Robertson or Alberta Parke as director. All were at the time recognizable Hollywood actors. Tampa’s city commission, eager for the fame and fortune a big-time film could bring to its community, “granted the right to film scenes anywhere in the city, and has assigned 10 policemen to help with the mob scenes.” The dreamed of mobs never materialized, just as the envisioned film was never shot, although the fabulous movie ball preparing for it took place, costing gentlemen just $1.10 and ladies only .50¢ (children .25¢). Jack Dempsey along with his wife was a shining symbol of the fantasy of great wealth and success the film represented, as a glamorous photograph of him in the advertisement suggested, with his hair slicked back like Rudolf Valentino’s or Ramon Novarro’s.

The Tampa advertisement said only that Dempsey and Taylor “have been invited” to the movie ball. The St. Petersburg Times the same day was more explicit. “Ball At Davis Island Planned. Jack Dempsey And Wife To Be There For Selecting Movie Players.” The Tribune’s previous day’s report had said “girls” and “men” would be selected for screen tests for the proposed Gasparilla film, but the Times account claimed that Dempsey and Taylor would aid Beecroft’s representative “in completing arrangements for enrolling extras and ‘bit part’ players from the region.” The Times article also contained verisimilitude convincing enough to stimulate the most prosaic of imaginations concerning the reality of the proposed film’s future. John L.R. Pell, the author of Down to the Sea in Ships was scheduled to write continuity for the proposed extravaganza, spinning a yarn “about the thrilling attempt to purloin the jewels of the famed pirate chief Gasparilla.” So not only would Jack Dempsey fight in Tampa, drawing tens of thousands to wander among Hamner’s “Points O’Glory,” but he and his Hollywood actress wife would supposedly reign at a movie ball that according to the Times would ultimately blossom into “a stupendous spectacle with multitudes of fair attendants and processions with gorgeously
Jack Dempsey and his wife Estelle Taylor.

Photograph from *Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler*, by Randy Roberts.
gowned retinues. . . .one of the greatest advertisements for Tampa, the west coast, and even the state of Florida.”

No record exists that either Dempsey or his wife attended the ball, or that the Gasparilla film was ever shot. Not all Tampa dreams materialized. Beecroft's did not, though Hamner’s would.

In the real world distinct from newspaper speculation and promoters’ wishes, a nauseous Dempsey arrived at Key West on Tuesday, February 2, aboard the steamship Cuba en route to Tampa. Confined to his stateroom because of seasickness incurred during the crossing from Havana, Dempsey nonetheless on that day gave an interview to the Key West Morning Call, that was published nationwide by numbers of newspapers including the St. Petersburg Times and the New York Times. Using what must have seemed a surefire technique for drumming up interest in his imminent exhibition scrap in Tampa and for his greater future fortunes, Dempsey told the Key West reporters, “Fellows, I am going to give you a ‘scoop.’ . . . I'm going to fight Harry Wills on Labor Day.” Dempsey further revealed that “the place where this much talked about title match will be held has not been decided upon,” but he speculated it might even take place in Tex Rickard’s own Madison Square Garden. Dempsey proclaimed he was in great shape, certainly good enough to “enter the ring with either Wills or Tunney,” and further “expressed the belief he would meet Tunney during the year,” presumably after he beat Wills. Demonstrating superb confidence despite his queasy stomach, Dempsey finally announced he considered Jack League, one of his sparring partners with whom he would box in Tampa, “the most logical successor for a world heavyweight title. ‘That boy sure packs an awful wallop,’ Dempsey said. ‘I believe he could beat either Wills or Tunney.’”

In this self-assured fashion, Dempsey advertised his Tampa exhibition and neatly manipulated the press, securing newspaper space across the country for what was essentially a non-news item that evoked still further commentary. The next day, for example, the New York Times reprinted Dempsey’s claims about fighting Wills and added the additional non-news that Tex Rickard “characterized as ‘ridiculous’ Dempsey’s statements. Dempsey is ‘kidding somebody’ the promoter commented.” Possibly Rickard felt Dempsey was being manipulated by his actress wife. Estelle had clearly helped create a rift between Jack and some of his old friends, notably his ex-manager “Doc” Kearns, who said she told the champion to choose “either him [Kearns] or me.” In fact, Dempsey would later claim that Estelle Taylor definitely did not want him to fight Wills, whom she called “that glass-jawed nigger.” Naturally, this information did not appear in the newspapers.

Wednesday, February 3, 1926, was the big day of Dempsey’s arrival in Tampa. The Tampa Morning Tribune used the Key West story circulated by the Associated Press as an excuse to stretch the headline “DEMPSEY SAYS HE’LL FIGHT WILLS LABOR DAY” completely across the top of its first sports page. The Tribune also stated that Dempsey “expected a telegram when he arrived in Tampa giving him information as to the city in which the [unnamed] promoter proposes to stage the [Wills] fight.” On the same page the Tribune printed another AP release reporting “RICKARD GRILLED ON TUNNEY BOUT; BUT WON'T TALK.” In New York, the state athletic commission was investigating whether or not Tex Rickard had signed anybody to fight Dempsey “in violation of the commission’s edict against the champion. Rickard refused to answer on the ground that any statement on his part would be embarrassing to his
business affairs.” Asked what kind of discipline the commission would impose on Rickard if it found evidence of his wrongdoing, chairman Jim Farley equivocated “we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” The foolishly tumultuous matter seemed highly speculative, but controversy only added more spice to the news about Dempsey’s plans.

It is doubtful that Dempsey needed much more publicity in Tampa. On February 3, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that an additional 10,000 pasteboards had been ordered to supplement the “practically exhausted . . . initial supply of 25,000 free tickets.” Another even lengthier article about the day’s exhibition flanked a file photograph of Dempsey sparring with the British heavyweight “Bombardier” Billy Wells taken when Jack was training for the Gibbons match in 1923. Thus, a quick left-to-right scan of the *Tribune’s* lead sports page revealed stories or pictures of Dempsey’s present, past, and future, respectively. The article claimed that “Dempsey’s Drawing Power To Be Put To Unique Test When Fans Are Passed Free” in Tampa. While “90,000 paid a tremendous price to see Jack the Giant Killer pound Georges Carpentier . . . into submission” in 1921, this time Dempsey would be watched free of cost, “probably . . . the first time a heavyweight champion has ever appeared in a public exhibition without some admission cost.” Careful directions were also supplied in the story, for the space in which the fight would take place was formerly an open field “several miles north of Tampa out Nebraska or Armenia avenues. . . . The scene of the bout will be easily recognized, as Hamner men have thoroughly placarded the routes” for the expected 25,000 fans.

Surviving photographs show the fight was staged at an isolated make-shift site. The temporary ring stood above a banner declaring “JACK DEMPSEY Complimentary Boxing Exhibition.” Ten or twenty rows of seated spectators surrounded the ring, but thousands more stood around. A platform with photographers was raised above the crowd, and a few kids perched in the trees that formed a constraining perimeter for the spectators. The land in the photographs looks absolutely flat, devoid of rolling hills. No houses appear in the distant landscape, only forest, with a few spindly, tall pines, and some cypresses suggesting low, damp soil.

The competing newspapers from rivalrous sister cities Tampa and St. Petersburg reported the day’s events somewhat differently. The *St. Petersburg Times* commentary was relatively brief, understated and almost cynical. Accompanying the article was a small photograph of Dempsey grinning genially, sitting in an open convertible with his “Florida manager Eddie Conner” and Estelle Taylor, whose smile seems forced if not slightly bilious. Six brief paragraphs related that Dempsey had “entertained a crowd of several thousand fistic fans in an exhibition with one of his sparring partners in a ring set up on an allotment some distance from the city, the free attraction being a means of advertising the subdivision.” The item then revealed that Estelle spent most of the day in her hotel suite because she had not “recovered from her seasickness yet” (probably the reason for her pasty expression). “Dempsey pleasantly posed for the *Times’* photographers,” the paper suggested, because “it has been these many months since he missed an opportunity to crack open some additional publicity.” The *Times* mentioned Dempsey’s statements about fighting Wills on Labor Day, together with Rickard’s charges ridiculing his remarks, but implied that this hoopla “may be merely the means of additional publicity.” “A fellow,” the article sarcastically concluded, “must keep his name before the public some way or another.”
On February 4 the *Tampa Morning Tribune* featured two articles on page one about Dempsey’s visit. Underneath a loving picture of Estelle Taylor nestled close to her husband, the lengthy items that were continued in the paper’s interior pages extolled Dempsey as a personality, man, and champion. The *Tribune* photograph was twice the size of the *Times*’ picture. One article, written by a woman reporter, Rose Lack, presented a more domestic view of Dempsey, though it concluded with a fair-minded declaration by the champion of his willingness to fight Harry Wills. The story opened prosaically enough: “Yesterday I went to the Tampa Bay hotel to meet Jack Dempsey, the Fighter.” Immediately, however, Lack gushed, “But I left, after the interview, an admirer of Jack Dempsey, the Man, and Jack Dempsey, the Husband.” The husband was, according to his wife, slightly impractical, having badly designed a box-like house the couple was planning in California, and for which the Dempseys had reportedly bought marble in Cuba during their recent visit there. But he was also loving, frequently using “affectionate terms” to address Mrs. Dempsey, according to Lack, and understanding enough to support his wife’s decision not to give up her career. Dempsey was willing for her to combine work with marriage, Lack stated. To demand otherwise, Dempsey observed, would have been “as unfair . . . as . . . for her to want me to stop boxing.”

Rose Lack portrayed Dempsey as an idealistic and competitive fighter, emphasizing his aesthetic interest in the sport rather than the brutality for which he was famous. Though he had

Jack Dempsey (in black tank top) sparring at the “Complimentary Boxing Exhibition” in “Tampa’s North Side Country Club Area,” today’s Forest Hills.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
“the flattened nose of the pugilist . . . his voice [was] soft and musical, unusually so for a big man. He dresses immaculately in the latest style, and his hair is slicked back in the most approved ‘jelly’ fashion.” Dempsey “the Man” and Dempsey “the Fighter” were both articulate, and hard to distinguish between, as reported by the Tribune’s writer. “To do one’s best, there has to be an intense love of the work, and a desire to accomplish a goal,” the “Man” said, and the “Fighter” claimed in a similar fashion, with “an eager light” shining in his eyes, that money was not his goal. “It isn’t that I’m in the game for what I can make; I’m in it because I love it, because it makes my life’s ambition come true to me,” though “naturally,” he admitted “as long as it is my work I cash in on it.” However, “boxing is an art to me just as acting is to Mrs. Dempsey.”

Although Dempsey diplomatically declared that Cuba was “one of the most beautiful places” he and his wife had ever visited, he also prudently admitted that he had “refused to fight” there “because they couldn’t pay him enough.” Though “impractical” as a husband (an acceptable stereotype for a wealthy consumer able to spend conspicuously), he was otherwise portrayed as a substantial citizen, planning for example “to go into the producing end” of films that appealed to him more than acting. He was shown as a man of varied possessions, holding interest in “coal mines, hotels and restaurants.” Since the article also related that when he began boxing he was “barely getting paid for what I did,” his accomplishments underscored for the public his rags-to-riches climb, in the best tradition of the American dream of success.

Rose Lack presented Dempsey as a model American – affable, genial trying to be funny (“I might weigh a little less since that boat trip”), thoughtful, supportive, successful, many-sided, and, finally, fair-minded. As a “slave of the public,” just like “actresses, physicians, newspapermen,” he added graciously, he was destined to carry out the public’s wishes. He diplomatically explained his feelings about fighting Wills, in such a way that would offer some salve to both those who wanted him to fight the “Black Panther” who many still thought would be his most formidable opponent, and those racists who desired him to maintain the color line. He got himself off an ideological hook and appeared a forthright, just American, no mean trick for an ex-hobo from Colorado. “The public wants me to fight Wills, so I suppose I'll have to.” His use of “suppose” implied reluctance, but then Dempsey added, “It’s not a question of race or color, likes or dislikes, but of ability against ability. If he’s the best, then I want to meet him because I want to compete with the best.” The American spirit of fair play would triumph if he fought Wills.

The other page-one story in the Tribune was no less complimentary though it generally remained strictly on the topic of Dempsey the fighter. In presenting details of Dempsey’s proposed fight with Wills, called “the darkest shadow on Jack’s championship career during the last two or three years,” reporter Marvin McCarthy still emphasized the idea that Dempsey was also a serious, big businessman. “It will be a percentage proposition,” he says of the Wills fight, “although Floyd [Fitzsimmons] will put up $500,000 as a guarantee of his ability to go through with the bout.” Dempsey was also genial, joking about his voyage to Tampa that proved “that I am not a sailor . . . . I felt like a bird in a cage all the way over from Havana, and I felt giddy enough to fly.” But mainly McCarthy extolled Dempsey’s great physical shape and animalistic fighting ability. He reported that ten thousand men, women, and children – a few kids at ringside but many holding tightly to “precarious perches in swaying tree-tops” – watched Dempsey belie
reports that he was “not in condition” as he “emerged from his bathrobe a slender-hipped, broad-shouldered leopard of a man.”

McCarthy’s description recaptured the primal, feral qualities that probably accounted for Dempsey’s fantastic appeal among millions of Americans, many of whom did not root for him as a fighter for any number of reasons – his war record for instance. Even those who considered him essentially an unskilled ex-bum who had clobbered his way to the top of boxing’s heap, might be mesmerized by the fierce power he could exhibit in the ring in a flash, a power that could apparently be glimpsed though in a veiled form in his Tampa exhibitions. “There is something magnetic about Dempsey’s expression as he goes into action,” McCarthy declared. “One almost forgets to watch the lithe movements of the man, or the dismay of his opponent as Jack wades in with his famed left hook snaking in and out like a rapier.”

Dempsey fought two rounds with Joe Lavigne, announced as “the heavyweight champion of Oregon . . . . when Dempsey is not in the state” by referee and Hamner company salesman Harvey Hester. Dropping his opponent to the canvas several times, Dempsey permitted Lavigne to last until the final bell because he did not “care to add” the Oregon championship “to his collection.” He was also “most courteous” to Lavigne, picking him up once, shaking him until his glassy eyes cleared, and telling him “that’s all right, fellow. Now you can finish your bout.”

Jack League, Dempsey’s next sparring partner, “was the only one of the quartet of opponents who did not feel the force of a typical Jack Dempsey blow,” according to the 

**Tribune**

reporter, although in the second round Dempsey “clipped [him] on the chin” and dropped him “to his knees for a second or two.” Dempsey praised League as “a youngster who may be heard from in boxing before long. . . . He is one of the best men I have met – in either an exhibition or a real bout – in a long time.” League was Dempsey’s protege, so his praise of the otherwise undistinguished club fighter was based on a sympathetic if not completely trustworthy or accurate appraisal of his potential. While in Tampa, Dempsey began arrangements for League to fight a real bout there which, as much as League’s skill, might explain why none of Dempsey’s most forceful swipes at his jaw ever connected.

Ed Warner, the smallest of the afternoon’s opponents, then sped two rounds with Dempsey, followed by Marty Cutler, “a big, rotund sort of battler,” who for a round served as a foil for Dempsey’s demonstration “of various punches” and “the Dempsey shift. . . a queer sort of a motion, brought about when the champion winds himself up like a top, unwinds, re-coils and then strikes like a flivver crank running wild.” Cutler acted the supporting role of punching bag with competence until “Dempsey demonstrated on [his] ample abdomen” with a right hook. “Marty lost his temper and started swinging rights and lefts at the champion. Jack went into his shift and pumped Cutler through the ropes with a smashing blow to the body. Marty was sending out frantic SOS calls for help as attendants rushed to extricate him from the crowd of ringsiders.” No one suggested that the outburst – in some ways a recreation of Dempsey’s famous trip through the ropes in his fight against Firpo – was staged. Rather, the crowd seemed greatly pleased at the afternoon’s dramatic conclusion.

If Dempsey was the star of the day, B.L. Hamner was the star producer. He had successfully promoted an interesting afternoon of scrapping that featured one, of the country’s most famous
sports stars and arguably the world’s best known athlete. A photograph depicting Jack Dempsey with Hamner accompanied the fight’s report in the *Tribune*. Yet another article the same day announced that a fight card scheduled for Friday night would be moved up to Thursday to accommodate Dempsey – who agreed to attend – and several of his sparring partners, who were to participate. Dempsey would appear with his wife, “B.L. Hamner, of the North Side Country Club area, and other members of the firm. It was Mr. Hamner who arranged for the champion’s appearance here yesterday [Wednesday, February 3, 1926]. The party will have a special ringside box. Jack Dempsey will be introduced to the fans during the evening by Harvey Hester, referee, and for several years a traveling companion of the champion.” Clearly Hester’s past relationship with Dempsey was blossoming in retrospect as Dempsey lingered in Tampa. “Hester went on a tour with Jack several years ago. He is to referee the bouts tonight.”

Dempsey’s visit surely brought private joys to Hamner, along with the public recognition he received. We can only guess at the pleasure he experienced at the “fete” he hosted for Dempsey and his wife the evening of Wednesday, February 3, at Temple Terrace’s Club Morocco, by its own proclamation “The South’s Most Distinctive Dining and Dancing Rendezvous.” Doubtless Hamner’s party watched “The Club Morocco Revue” with its “New York and Paris artists.” Probably Hamner picked up the tab for the Club’s announced “couvert charge,” and everyone must have gabbled about the car loads and buses of tourists and native Tampans who had flocked
to his project to see Dempsey and also view “Points O’Glory’s” wooded groves and rolling hills.\(^4\)

Though Dempsey was not greatly richer or better known because of his visit to Tampa, he had gained by it. He publicized himself by stirring up once more the chance that he might fight Harry Wills. He whetted the fans’ appetite for a real fight with Wills or Tunney. He conducted himself diplomatically with the Hamner organization, the Tampa fans, and the region’s newspapers; he appeared as a respectable, business-like, friendly man who was also a prize fighter in tip-top shape and in control of his own destiny. The local newspaper accounts suggest that Dempsey demonstrated what a fine, solid, amiable, respectable fellow and businessman he really was. And Tampa, as the *Tribune* editorial shows, felt itself basking in Dempsey’s light.

So small a matter as the agreement Dempsey reached with local promoter Jim Downing for Jack League to meet the Canadian Champion Jack Renault “within the next two months” appeared newsworthy at least within the state.\(^4\) His confidence and good spirits seemed always on display. Wherever he appeared crowds gathered.

At the fight he attended at Benjamin Field on Thursday, February 4, he “expressed his delight in being in Tampa and voiced a desire to appear in a real bout here at some later time.” The
crowd of 4,500 roared its approval. The fans loved him. He played them as beautifully as he had the press. He insisted to a ringside reporter “that he will fight Wills in September,” and when asked about Tex Rickard he replied, “There is no wonder he denies that I will fight Wills... for he knows nothing whatsoever of my plans.” Earlier, photographed playing golf at one of the area’s fine courses displaying in the middle of winter the pleasures of Florida to untold potential tourists, Dempsey had joked that he would not mind “taking Tunney on in golf,” but at the same time intimated “that he didn’t think a whole lot of Gene’s fistic capabilities,” even though he thought Gene “plays a pretty fair golf game.”

Estelle Taylor stood by her husband the champion as he spoke in the ring at the Benjamin Field fights, though she did not speak herself: a paradigm of supportive and decorative wifely responsibility, she “was given a bouquet of roses by admirers.” After the eighth round of the night's main event between Marine Tolliver and Buck Aston, the loving husband and wife left Tampa for Memphis, where on February 8 Dempsey knocked out four fighters including Jack League, in one round each.

Even after he left Florida to continue his triumphal tour of the southern hustings prior to reemerging in the great world of major league prizefighting and promotion, an afterglow of his visit to the region flared occasionally to light. In Miami his screen image appeared in the service
Once more he was selling land in the state and maintaining interest in himself, though he was no longer present in person.

Sometimes the shine of his local fame was slightly tarnished. His protege Jack League was knocked out by Jack Renault in Tampa on February 26. Remembering Dempsey’s appraisal of League’s possible future, one reporter cynically commented “if he’s the next champion, then I’m the last.” But the fight drew approximately 10,000 spectators, far more than it would have had Dempsey not been League’s sponsor. Disappointment in Dempsey’s protege did not in any way diminish the interest local fans and newspapers lavished on the champion. His next opponent remained a matter of constant interest. But whomever he fought, it was Dempsey who commanded the fans’ attention. Tunney and Wills seemed incidental to him. He was the champ, he was the best.

Dempsey did not of course change Florida by his visit there nor did Florida change him. The regions he toured would grow into major urban areas but not because of his intervention. The cheers Dempsey heard in Miami and more loudly in Tampa probably did not last long in his
memories. The exhibitions he fought in Tampa never became part of his official record, as about forty of his other exhibition matches would.

Several photographs taken by the region’s premier commercial photographic firm, Burgert Brothers, exist of the famous day Jack Dempsey came to Tampa. One shows the smiling, vital, confident champion shaking hands – his are encased in boxing gloves – with slightly balding, handsome, happy, assured, confident B.L. Hamner. Dempsey wears a tank top and fighting togs, Hamner a business suit. A ringpost in the background is covered, as were all the ringposts that afternoon, with an American flag banner. The picture graphically portrays the cozy, friendly relationship between American sport and business, both acting in league to sell each other. Sport enhances – or exploits – business, which in turn enhances – or exploits – sports. Hamner and Dempsey gave a kind of credibility, a visibility, to each other. Dempsey’s visit to Florida in 1926 demonstrates how sports and business could operate literally and metaphorically hand in glove. Dempsey used, perhaps manipulated, the press in the state to provide him with an even greater audience, to intensify the reputation of his prowess, and to establish himself in the public mind not merely as a brutal, animalistic fighter, but as an American citizen who might be liked or respected for carrying out the duties of a citizen – he was presented as a happily married man, as a businessman, as a friend to the community.

B.L. Hamner presented Dempsey as a gift to the public, but in doing so also associated him with community-building enterprises. Hamner was specifically praised for employing Dempsey to spread the fame of Tampa. Jack Dempsey in Florida offers a classic example of sport, business, and community operating together to form a booster network whose interconnected strands seemed to enhance all partners engaged in a mutual enterprise, while attracting and delighting the masses of people – citizens and consumers – these partners gathered in their net.

1 Tampa Morning Tribune and St. Petersburg Times, February 4, 1926.
2 I am very clearly indebted in my discussion of sports heroes in general and Dempsey in particular, to concepts and terms from Benjamin Rader’s American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Spectators (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), and his article “Contemporary Sport Heroes: Ruth Grange, and Dempsey,” in Journal of Popular Culture (Spring 1983): 11-24. My reliance upon Randy Roberts's excellent Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), for general facts, authentic opinions, and informed analyses will be apparent to anyone who has read that text.
3 Roberts, Jack Dempsey, 64.
4 Ibid., 134.
5 Ibid., 113.
6 Ibid., 202.
7 Tampa Morning Tribune, January 23, 1926.
8 Ibid, October 28, 1925.
9 Ibid., January 3, 1926.
10 Ibid., January 28, 1926.

Tampa Morning Tribune, January 20, 1926.

Ibid.

Ibid., January 31, 1926.

Ibid., February 1, 1926.

Ibid., February 18, 1926.

Ibid., February 18, 1926.

I am greatly indebted for many facts and details about Hamner to his nephew, Joseph Burks Hamner Miller, a Tampa realtor who shares his uncle’s vision of a growing city. I interviewed Mr. Miller for the first time June 8, 1988, and subsequently was able to check a number of details with him. Mr. Miller was born in Reno, Nevada, May 11, 1909, but moved to the Tampa region in 1911. His mother was a Hamner.

Tampa Morning Tribune, February 18, 1926.

Ibid., January 2, 1926.

Ibid., January 7, 1926.

Ibid., January 3, 1926.

Ibid., January 7, 1926.

Ibid., January 31, 1926.

Roberts, Jack Dempsey, 213; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 3, 12, 16, 25, 1926.

Tampa Morning Tribune, February 2, 1926.

Standard records, for example The Ring Record Book, also indicate Dempsey fought an exhibition in Pensacola, and possibly in Jacksonville, in 1924. Roberts, Jack Dempsey, 194-95.

St. Petersburg Times, February 2, 1926.

Tampa Morning Tribune, February 2, 1926.


Tampa Morning Tribune, February 2, 1926.

Ibid.

St. Petersburg Times, February 2, 1926.


36 Demsey and Stearns, Round by Round, 171, 179.

37 Tampa Morning Tribune, February 3, 1926.

38 Ibid.

39 St. Petersburg Times, February 4, 1926.

40 Tampa Morning Tribune, February 4, 1926.

41 Ibid. See also ibid., January 12, 1926, for A Club Morocco advertisement.

42 Miami Herald, February 4, 1926.

43 Tampa Morning Tribune, February 5, 1926.

44 Miami Herald, February 10, 1926.

45 Tampa Morning Tribune, February 27, 1926.
WORK WANTED – FEMALE: WOMEN AND WORK IN PINELLAS COUNTY IN THE 1950s
by Ellen Babb

During World War II millions of American women worked in wartime industries and in other non-traditional fields when mobilization of the armed forces called the nation’s men into service. At first the entry of women into previously male-dominated sectors of the economy was viewed with alarm and some resistance by unions and the public at large. But by 1943, the federal government began hiring women in great numbers to meet emergency needs, and government propaganda and advertising in women’s periodicals depicted female employment as a patriotic duty. For the first time in America’s history, older, married women – many with children – dominated the country’s female work force. Seventy-five percent of the new workers were wives and mothers. During the war, women gained well-paying jobs in new fields, and they won praise for their part in keeping the nation’s businesses going and providing soldiers with necessary munitions and supplies.¹

The employment of women in “men’s work” was viewed as temporary, only “for the duration” of the war. They were then expected to return to their homes or to lower-paying jobs in female-dominated fields such as the service industry, relinquishing their wartime positions to returning veterans and younger men. Although four million women lost their jobs in the immediate aftermath of World War II, two million more women remained in the labor force than at the onset of the war.²

Just as the decade of the 1940s saw an expansion of economic opportunities for women, the decade that followed saw a parallel contraction in response to evolving social values which placed a premium on traditional gender roles and family life at the expense of individual needs and ambitions. The men and women who grew up during the uncertainty of the Great Depression and came of age during World War II were part of a generation obsessed with security and stability. In this setting, the family became the center of refuge, much as it had been during the Victorian era, and women were seen as the caretakers of home and hearth, confined to a life of domesticity and motherhood. Even as the number of women in the work force continued to rise, the social ideology and postwar government policies in housing and education conspired to restrict women from the work force by relegating them to the isolated sphere of home and family and by narrowing the types of opportunities available to women who chose to work for pay.³

A study of women in Pinellas County, Florida, during the 1950s illustrates the limited employment opportunities for women and exposes the psychological and social costs of being a working mother and/or housewife during this time. Because of postwar social ideology and because of Pinellas County’s almost total reliance on tourism and related services during the 1950s, women found themselves severely restricted in the types of employment available to them.

Pinellas County’s development was influenced by World War II in a number of important ways. At the onset of the war, the county’s population growth came to almost a complete halt. With the city of St. Petersburg as its hub, the area relied heavily on tourism as its main economic
During World War II government recruitment campaigns glorifying women’s employment were steeped in patriotic sentiment.


base, and this foundation was undermined in the transition from peace to mobilization.
Nevertheless certain areas of the county, particularly St. Petersburg, were saved from total economic devastation by an infusion of financial aid from the federal government in the early and mid-1940s. Local hotels, denied their normal tourist occupancy, were filled with soldier trainees, and local airports were used for flight practice. Thousands of service men and women and their families visited Pinellas County in the 1940s, and after the war many of them returned to the accommodating, residential environment and to the warm, sunny climate they remembered so fondly.4

Postwar affluence and the return of military veterans to Pinellas County led to the biggest population and building boom in the county’s history. The newcomers’ migration south was aided by the opening of the Sunshine Skyway, connecting Pinellas to Manatee county in 1954, and by the completion of the Gulf Coast Highway (U.S. 19) from Tallahassee to St. Petersburg the following year. These improvements in transportation helped end the geographic isolation of Pinellas County from important economic and political centers to the north and south. Between 1950 and 1960, the county’s population increased from 159,249 to 374,665 – an increase of over 135 percent. Retirees and returning veterans made up the bulk of the new residents, and the local economy revolved around servicing their needs.

Nationwide as well, growth in the service and sales industries exploded during the 1950s. The American labor force, which had seen a great expansion of opportunities for women in all sectors of the economy during the 1940s reverted to employment defined by gender and race.5 Women, particularly black women, provided the bulk of unskilled labor in service industries. Given the already narrow economic base of Pinellas County in the early 1950s, as well as the lack of unionization, meaningful career opportunities for men as well as for women were almost nonexistent. But a glimpse at the sexually and racially segregated help-wanted columns in the St. Petersburg Times indicates that while women were normally recruited for positions in housekeeping, restaurant work, general office work, and retail stores, positions available to men included higher paying jobs in management, construction, insurance sales, and administration. Not even the arrival of light industries by the end of the decade altered the pattern of work for women in any significant way. Throughout the 1950s, the majority of women in Pinellas County remained sequestered in the same low-paying, low-status occupations (see Table 1).

| TABLE 1 |
|---|---|---|
| Jobs Held by Women over the Age of 14 in Pinellas County | 1950 | 1960 |
| Clerical or kindred | 22% | 26% |
| Service workers | 16 | 17 |
| Private household workers | 16 | 9 |
| Professional, technical | 12 | 13 |
| Sales workers | 11 | 11 |

After World War II new “labor-saving” devices such as the automatic washing machine actually increased the amount of time many housewives spent accomplishing routine household chores.

Photograph from Never Done: A History of Housework in America, by Susan Strasser.
By race, the statistics were even more exclusionary. Almost 100 percent of the female clerical and sales workers in Pinellas County were white in both 1950 and 1960, while 83 percent of cooks and maids in private homes in 1950 and 70 percent in 1960 were non-white women.6

The 1950s ideal of wives and mothers remaining at home was an illusion. In reality, the number of married women entering the workforce steadily increased after World War II, so that married women represented 60 percent of all women in the nation’s workforce by 1960. Although this trend clashed with the prevailing social philosophies consigning women to domestic boundaries, some types of paid work received social approval. Wives were “permitted” to work if they did not destroy their husband’s image as the primary breadwinner in the family and if their wages allowed their family to partake of the new material comforts. But even if a woman chose to work in order to help secure a comfortable home for her family, her employment was seen as temporary and could expect to be interrupted for child-rearing. A 1954 article, entitled “It Takes Only One Paycheck For a Happy Marriage” and published in the women’s section of the St. Petersburg Times, explained the guidelines. The author, Dr. John Crane, advised readers that if a woman absolutely had to work in order to get her home established, her salary should never be put toward regular expenses, but should instead be set aside for such extras as furniture, new appliances and vacations. Crane warned that if the family
adjusted to living off two paychecks, this would contribute to an inflated standard of living, and the family would suffer horribly when – not if – the wife stopped working to have children.\textsuperscript{7}

Once the children were older and in school, it was again respectable for a woman to go to work in order to augment the family budget and help maintain a certain standard of living for the family. A sample of thirty-eight middle-class, white women, who worked and raised young children in Pinellas County during the 1950s, showed that three stopped working with the birth of their children and never went back; four continued working but on a part-time basis; fourteen returned when their children were older and in school; eight began their very first jobs after their children were older; and nine began working full-time again within two years of their child’s birth. In this last group, almost half of the women who returned to work within a short period of time were employed in businesses owned by their families.\textsuperscript{8}

Clearly, working in family businesses offered some working mothers benefits they could not find elsewhere. Marguerite Wilder worked as co-owner and manager of Wilder’s Mobile Home Park after her only child was born in 1950, and she provided a place for him in the office while she worked, thus avoiding the high cost of day care most working mothers faced. During the 1950s, Winona and Charley Jones worked together in a cooperative family enterprise, managing a roadside express fruit shipment and delivery business while raising three young children. Charley worked another full-time job in addition to the fruit delivery venture, and he and Winona shared the housework. Looking back, Winona admits that they could never have devoted the time necessary to making their business a success if they had not received additional support from her mother and her in-laws, who assisted with child care, housework, home repairs, and meals. Winona also feels that as a white, Protestant woman working in a family business, she was spared the overt discrimination other ambitious women faced.\textsuperscript{9}

In a society that placed motherhood and the cult of domesticity at a high premium, women with true career ambitions were thought to be neurotic. When these women repressed their desires for external recognition and internal fulfillment in non-domestic areas and retreated into the socially-sanctioned isolation of home and family, they often found themselves on the analyst’s couch, listless, bored, and unable to explain the source of their discontent. In her well-known commentary on dysfunctional American sex roles in the 1950s, Betty Friedan in \textit{The Feminine Mystique} described this schizophrenic half-life common to so many women as “the problem that has no name.”\textsuperscript{10} “It is the mystique of feminine fulfillment and the immaturity it breeds,” Friedan wrote, “that prevents women from doing the work of which they are capable. It is not strange that
women who have lived...within the mystique...should be afraid to face the test of work in the real world and cling instead to their identity as housewives.”

Janet Vuille grew up in the shadow of the feminine mystique. As a young woman, Janet wanted to make a niche for herself in the field of anthropology or in law but was discouraged from doing so by contemporary attitudes and the disapproval of her husband. She applied to the University of Arizona and to the University of Chicago and was accepted at both, but instead of pursuing a career, Janet married immediately after graduation from St. Petersburg Junior College “because that’s what everyone did.”

Janet met her husband at the local tennis club where she had played regularly since first becoming interested in tennis as a teenager. He was ten years older than she, came from a wealthy family, and had just returned from three years of military duty overseas. For many years her husband managed the local tennis club, and their social life largely revolved around club activities and tennis tournaments. In 1957, Janet and her husband each won city championships; he won the men’s singles and she the women’s singles. Janet had plenty of time to devote to sharpening her tennis skills. She played while her five children were in school, as did many of her women friends, and the family hired a maid to take care of the housework. Janet recalls that because tennis was not considered a professional sport at the time, the intense competition associated with the game today was non-existent. Nevertheless, the required discipline and internal focus of the game drove Janet to excel. Throughout the 1950s, her name and picture appeared frequently in the *St. Petersburg Times*, as Janet accumulated titles and trophies.

The rhythm of life on the courts and at the club dominated Janet’s life for many years, and she filled in her free hours with volunteer work with the PTA, the symphony, the League of Women Voters, and the Audubon Society. But when her youngest child was ten years old, Janet began to feel the need to do something more meaningful and productive. She still wanted to attend law school, but education courses fit in better around her children’s school schedule and allowed her to be home for her husband in the evening. She went back to St. Petersburg Junior College and then attended the University of South Florida where she graduated with a degree in education in 1970. She was forty-three years old.

Janet was offered a job at Lakeview Elementary, but she took a year off and did more volunteer work before taking a teaching position at the Belleair Montessori School. She loved her work and decided that she wanted to operate her own Montessori school. During the summer of 1974, she left her children with her husband in St. Petersburg while she flew to Chicago to
enroll for coursework certifying her as a Montessori teacher. She spent two more years teaching, this time as directress at Countryside Montessori School in Clearwater, but eventually she stopped because of the distance she was required to commute each day.

Janet spent the next year formulating plans to open her own school. She put together her portfolio and organized her instructional materials, but she had difficulty finding space to rent. Her husband could have afforded to set her up in her own school, but he disapproved of his wife being in business and told her she would have to finance her dream alone. Janet had hip surgery later that year, and during her convalescence gave up any thought of ever running her own school. In 1985, Janet was hired by another woman to start a Montessori School at Pass-a-Grille Community Church. However, the pain of running another woman’s business, one that she herself had built, was too much for Janet, and she left the work force permanently. She still plays tennis, secure in the knowledge that she was a good wife and mother, but like many women of her generation, she often reflects on a life of diminished dreams.12

Betty Fuller is a native of Pinellas County who graduated from Largo High School in 1940. Like many young women, she married right out of high school and had her first child at the age of nineteen. Another child was born in 1943, followed by a third daughter born in 1948. Betty claims not to have started working until 1961, but in reality she performed non-paid clerical work for her husband, a self-employed mechanic, all during the 1950s, bringing her youngest daughter to work with her each day. She also made dresses for customers at home, and the additional income paid for extras like her daughters’ dance and piano lessons. Betty remembers that jobs for women were not plentiful in the 1950s and that even if they had been, she would have stayed home to raise her children, believing that it is important for a child’s healthy development to have a mother at home, particularly in the early years. “My one claim to fame,” she says, “is that I was a good mother.”

Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with her life and the desire to provide greater opportunities for her daughters prompted Betty to return to school. In the late 1950s she enrolled in adult education courses at Clearwater High School, and then she took night classes in accounting at St. Petersburg Junior College. In 1961, her oldest daughter married, and Betty began experiencing “empty nest syndrome.” At the same time, her middle child began to take classes at the junior college, and the family needed extra money to pay for her tuition. Since Betty’s husband, whom she later divorced, did not believe that it was worthwhile to educate women, Betty started working for the city of Largo and applied all of her earnings toward her daughter’s education. Her first job was only part-time as a substitute, bringing street maps and graveyard maps up to date, but her supervisors saw her potential and soon hired her full time. Her husband had to hire someone else to do his books. By the time Betty retired in 1990, she had been promoted several times, reaching the position of Risks and Benefits Coordinator for the city of Largo.

Feeling that she sacrificed many of her own dreams to raise a family, Betty still harbors great hostility toward her ex-husband for his lack of physical and emotional support. She would have preferred to have gone to St. Petersburg Junior College and gotten a better education for herself instead of getting married, but she felt her options were limited. Unable to pursue the career in journalism she had wanted, she bought into the dream of motherhood, claiming that “if you can’t have what you want, want what you have.” Betty has seen some of her own dreams realized
through the success of her daughters, all three of whom graduated from college. One daughter is a music teacher who sings with the Atlanta Symphony (the piano lessons paid off); another manages a fabric store; and her youngest daughter, married with two adopted children, has her own business as a computer consultant. Betty thinks about the journalism career she might have had and spends her free time writing poetry, hoping to publish a book someday.

Although the 1950s brought new technology and appliances designed to make housework easier, the average amount of time spent doing housework actually increased. With all the new cooking gadgets, the preparation of dinner and other meals became an art in itself. With the new, lightweight electric vacuum cleaners, a dutiful housewife might vacuum her rugs every day, whereas her mother and grandmother might have gotten by with beating the rugs once a month. In addition to the burdens of housework, women were expected to participate in volunteer work at their children’s school and family churches, join auxiliary groups for their husband’s professional organizations, and act as family chauffeurs, driving children to and from various school functions.

While working in her husband’s office and doing part-time seamstress work in her home, Betty Fuller also did all the housework, belonged to the PTA at her children’s school, served as a Brownie leader and a 4-H leader, and organized a local chapter of the Rainbow Girls, an auxiliary group of the Order of the Eastern Star. This schedule explains why many middle-class white women, whose families could be supported on their husband’s income, chose not to work outside their home. As Betty put it, “Who wanted to work for very little pay all day in a job like cooking or housekeeping, and then come home and work another fulltime job taking care of your own family and home?”

Professional positions were also gender-cast during the 1950s. For example, women made up 85 percent of all elementary school teachers nationwide. Women who engaged in professional work were usually restricted to jobs in traditional care-taking work like teaching, social work, and nursing. Women employed in these areas were not considered threatening because they performed nurturing, non-aggressive “female-type roles.”

Sarah Knutson worked her entire adult life, taking only brief periods off for maternity leave when her two children were born in 1946 and 1950. For thirty-two years, she worked full-time for the Florida Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS). Beginning her employment in social work in 1942 and working steadily in that field until her retirement in 1979, she took only a three-year hiatus in the mid-1940s to experiment with teaching and secretarial work. Sarah’s consistent employment record and the management skills she subsequently developed led to a promotion to a supervisory position in 1955, and for the next twenty-four years she supervised HRS divisions in Clearwater, St. Petersburg, and Pinellas Park. Today, Sarah and her husband Rich both look forward to the arrival of two pension checks each month, but originally Sarah had a difficult time convincing Rich of her desire to work. He was, she recalls, “a hard sell.” She succeeded in part because she reminded Rich that both of their mothers had worked and these women had managed to integrate their professional and personal lives without any ill effects on the family.
As a young woman in the early 1900s Sarah’s mother, Catherine Huckaday McIntosh, had gone to business school, but she was unable to finish due to family commitments. White-collar jobs for single women in business and sales rose by 64 percent in the 1910s, and women like Catherine McIntosh entered business and trade schools in large numbers. In 1914, Catherine married a young elementary school teacher but found herself widowed the following year. She went back to school and finished her business degree in Tampa. She then moved home to Dade City, where she worked in a bank before marrying her second husband, Charles Anderson McIntosh (Sarah’s father), in 1917. Catherine divorced Charles ten years later, when Sarah was six years old, and she took a job in the office of the clerk of circuit courts in Pasco County, where she remained until her retirement in 1962. From 1938 until 1970, Catherine held a second job as the social reporter for the Dade City Banner. After working all day, Catherine came home and worked in the garden until dark, and then made dinner for the family. During the Depression, Sarah’s brother worked in their grandfather’s grocery store, and Sarah sold flowers from her mother’s garden to local hotels.

Rich’s mother, Hannah Madson Knutson, was also widowed at a young age. Left with three young boys to raise, Hannah survived as many women did during the 1920s and 1930s; she put her domestic skills to work and opened a baking and sewing business out of her home. The new, ready-to-wear clothing put a dent in her business at first, but Hannah soon specialized in alterations and remodeling work. Although Hannah was a widow when she opened her home business, many married women were similarly employed during the Great Depression, doing home sewing and canning and taking in boarders to help make ends meet.

Because of her own personal familiarity with the experience of working mothers, Sarah never felt any guilt or remorse about working full-time, and she enjoyed a successful career that gave her status and some financial independence. Like most women who achieved some degree of success, Sarah had the physical and emotional support of her family. Her mother-in-law lived with her family during the winter months and helped with child care and everyday housework. Later, Rich began working the night shift at Florida Power so he could be at home and watch the children while Sarah worked.

Reflecting other newspapers and women’s periodicals, the St. Petersburg Times reinforced sexual stereotypes through advertising and special “women’s sections” of the paper. This section usually lacked news of any substance, and instead reported on social happenings, gave restaurant reviews and advice on manners and cooking, listed club and church meetings, and announced
engage

ments. A regular column, the “Women’s Exchange,” gave information about household cleaning, interior design, pets, and etiquette. On January 16, 1954, the women’s page announced that Janet Vuille and her partner, Janet Turville, had defeated the top-ranked doubles team in the South. Ironically, a quip in the same section the following day read, “A smart girl is one who knows how to play tennis, golf, and piano and act dumb."

Sex was an acceptable outlet for women within the feminine mystique, and, of course, within the boundaries of their own marriages. Advertising and articles in women’s magazines stressed the importance of a youthful, attractive appearance for women. Help-wanted advertisements in newspapers often made age and appearance a condition for employment. In the January 1960 classified section, samples of such openly sexist advertising in the St. Petersburg Times included the following: “Receptionist-trainee: excellent advancement for attractive typist”; “Receptionist, automotive. Attractive, experience helpful”; and “Receptionist-office manager. Highly polished woman 25-35. Very high standard of appearance and skill needed for high salary offered.”

In Pinellas County, where so much of the population was sixty-five and older, many ads were age-specific in favor of experienced, “mature” women. Eileen Bennett, who moved with her husband and two small children from Ohio to Pinellas County in the late 1950s, remembers that the county’s changing demographics often worked against younger women in the field of employment. Between 1950 and 1960, the county experienced an increase of more than 200 percent in residents age sixty-five and over. By 1960 almost one-quarter of Pinellas County’s
total population was aged sixty-five and older. Eileen says that companies often preferred to hire retired women who brought their benefits and social security with them to Florida and who were willing to work part-time for a low salary. Older women also often had experience and required little in the way of additional training. Working against men and women, Eileen says, were employers who came from outside Pinellas County and brought in their own employees.22

For black women, the field of opportunity was particularly narrow, and the majority had no choice about working - the prevailing social and economic caste system dictated that they would. Classified advertisements in the *St. Petersburg Times* sought “colored salad girls” and “colored maids,” as well as black couples for work in private homes. One ad in 1960 read: “Colored maid for Key West. Husband may go as houseman.” The same ad noted that there were openings for the summer with northern hotels, indicating that some blacks followed employment on a seasonal basis, working in Pinellas County during the peak winter season and traveling north during the heaviest tourist months in those areas.23 The 1950 federal census indicates that 81 percent of all working non-white women were employed as cooks or maids in private households, or in some other aspect of the service industry catering to tourists and winter residents (see Table 2).

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobs Held by Non-White Women over the Age of 14 in Pinellas County.</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private household workers</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service workers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operatives</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, technical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Some opportunity for self-employment existed within the African-American community. A cursory review of the 1950 *Clearwater City Directory* indicates that a number of black women owned their own dress shops and beauty parlors. “Beauty culture” was an important part of black life, and black operatives serviced black customers. According to one woman interviewed, it was not uncommon for white women to travel to beauty parlors within African-American communities for less-expensive, high-quality grooming, but black women were not permitted entry to white-operated salons.24

Only four percent of working non-white women were employed in technical or professional jobs in 1950. The majority of these were employed as nurses in all-black institutions like St. Petersburg’s Mercy Hospital or as teachers in one of the county’s numerous segregated schools. Although the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954 declared
segregated schools to be inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional, Pinellas County nevertheless built nine brand new all-black schools between 1954 and 1963.25

Except for the one year she worked for the State Department of Education in Tallahassee, Dorothy Thompson spent her entire teaching career of thirty-eight years in the Pinellas County school system.26 Both of Dorothy’s parents were school teachers; her father, Gilbert Maxwell, served as principal of the Clearwater Colored Junior High School. When Dorothy graduated from eighth grade in 1931, plans were just getting underway to build a high school for blacks as an addition to the “colored junior high,” and the secondary school became known as Pinellas High. With that high school not yet available, Dorothy’s parents enrolled her in a private academy outside of Ocala. From there, Dorothy went on to earn her Bachelor of Science in health and physical education from Florida A. & M. University in 1938, minoring in English and biology. She spent three summers at the University of Michigan completing requirements for her master’s degree.27

In her professional career and personal life in Pinellas County, Dorothy Thompson suffered the double burden of discrimination based on race and sex. Her career began innocuously enough. From 1939 to 1946, Dorothy taught health and physical education at Pinellas High, in the neighborhood where she had grown up. She remembers teaching in sub-standard buildings, poorly lit and badly ventilated. At that time, black students commonly received their textbooks in the way of discards from well-funded white schools in the county. One year, Dorothy’s parents went all the way to Jacksonville to buy new books for her students, because those allocated to her class were so worn and dirty. Dorothy provided much of the equipment and materials her students used in the classroom, paying for them out of her own pocket. The school PTA also raised funds to augment the school budget, but the money did not go for extras. It went for basic materials that the school board provided as a matter of course to white schools. Dorothy took great pride in her work, and Superintendent Greene Fuguitt publicly commended her for excellence in the classroom on many occasions.28

In 1943, Dorothy Thompson became the plaintiff in a salary equalization suit against the Pinellas County School Board, and she found herself in an adversarial position with black and white administrators alike. She was elected by a majority of the Black Teacher’s Union to represent them in the second chapter of a battle that had started six years earlier in 1937, when Gibbs High School principal Noah Griffin and five of his colleagues were fired by Fuguitt for filing a similar suit. When Dorothy’s case went to court, black teachers were receiving $75 a month while white teachers with equal education and less experience received $105 per month. Unlike Griffin, Dorothy was not fired, and on October 17, 1945, the Pinellas County School Board approved an equal pay plan.29 But Dorothy remembers that discrimination against black teachers continued in the form of unequal evaluation policies.

Dorothy Thompson’s determination and outspokenness brought retribution from school administrators. She was transferred to Jordan Elementary in St. Petersburg, twenty-two miles from her home in Clearwater, and she remained there for fourteen years. “Everyone knew it was my punishment,” she recalls. “At that time, it was not fashionable for a teacher to live one place and work another. Everyday when I left here to go there, I thought about why I was going. Because I was considered uppity for demanding my rights as a human being.”
The transfer of her teaching assignment to St. Petersburg posed great hardships for Dorothy’s family. Since she did not drive, the family was forced to buy a car so that her husband could drive her and their young son to and from Jordan Elementary every day. When her husband lost his eyesight as a result of glaucoma, she took trains and buses cross-county. Immediately prior to her transfer, Dorothy had held a supervisory position, but with her re-location she was demoted to a teacher’s salary. Her family had only recently purchased a new home, and because her husband’s poor health prevented him from working, Dorothy worked two and three jobs to make ends meet. In addition to offering dance classes at the YWCA, she also taught teacher re-certification courses off-hours in Tampa. Finally, in 1964 Dorothy was allowed to return to Pinellas High (which became Clearwater Comprehensive Middle School in 1968), and she remained there until her retirement in 1976.

In her personal life, Dorothy Thompson suffered additional indignities as a black woman in Pinellas County. When she first met her husband, whom she married in 1944, he worked as an auditor for the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company. One weekend she took the train up to see him, calling ahead to reserve a seat in the coach section. When she arrived at the Seaboard Coastline Station, the ticket agent balked at seating her, claiming he thought she was white when she ordered the ticket. Dorothy insisted on boarding the train, and remained standing in the aisle until they allowed her to sit, just outside of Plant City. When her only child was born in 1948, Dorothy gave birth to him in the basement of the local hospital, because blacks were not permitted upstairs.30

In 1939, the St. Petersburg Times began publishing a “Negro News” page. Written by black staff members, the insert of news about the local African-American community was distributed only in black neighborhoods. White subscribers to the Times learned nothing about the daily life of their black neighbors, but were only exposed to negative stories about black crime. The “Negro News” reported on achievements and events such as births, deaths, graduations, sports, and club meetings. When Mamie Brown (then Mamie Doyle) was hired in 1952 to work as an assistant to Calvin Adams on the “Negro News” page, she became its first full-time black society reporter. Mamie remembers calling a local department store to get a description of the gown a young woman had chosen for her wedding and was aghast when the clerk told her “Oh, you don’t want to know about her dress.”31 She’s a Negro. Mamie remembers being treated fairly by her colleagues in the newsroom, but adds that the camaraderie ended outside the office walls. When she left the Times, she called a former white colleague of hers from the newspaper who
had just started her own telephone answering service. The woman told Mamie that her voice was “too Negroid” for her to be a phone operator, but that “she did need someone to wash windows.”

In spite of the obstacles they faced and the hardships they endured, Mamie Brown and Dorothy Thompson managed to escape the menial job opportunities that awaited most black women in Pinellas County in the 1950s. Ninety-five percent of non-white working women were relegated to nonprofessional jobs.

The work experiences of women in Pinellas County during the 1950s generally parallels that of the majority of American women at that time. After World War II had briefly opened up a wide range of opportunity in traditionally “male fields” because of the shortage of manpower, women were asked to return to “female type” jobs in service, sales, and office work where wages were low and upward mobility was an unfamiliar term. In Pinellas County, which featured an economy based on the tourist industry and related services, this translated into entry-level jobs in restaurants, hotels, private homes, and clerical.secretarial positions in business offices. Not surprisingly, black women comprised the bottom rung of the economic ladder in an era of racial segregation.

Married women faced another set of problems. Cold War preoccupation with social stability, conformity, and traditional sex roles placed a heavy burden on women who wished to establish
an identity separate from that of wife and mother. Even when they worked to augment the family income, many working wives experienced guilt and remained ambivalent about their decision to work. Yet the penalty imposed on those women who took the socially accepted path and remained at home was often equally painful. Later in life, many of these women looked back on the choices they made with sadness and regret. Despite the great strides made in the area of equal employment opportunities and civil rights for women over the last forty years, the legacy of the 1950s remains as women still struggle to break free from the confines of a sexually segregated marketplace.

2 Ibid., 257.
5 Pinellas Planning Council, Pinellas County, 5, 48-49; Ryan, *Womanhood*, 278, 282.
8 Results compiled from written survey conducted by Ellen Babb in Pinellas County and randomly distributed to women who lived in Pinellas County at any time between 1950 and 1960 and who were of working age during that period of time. Distributed and collected between September 1990 and March 1991.
9 Written survey responses from Marguerite Wilder and Winona Jones.
11 Ibid., 253.
13 Interview of Betty Fuller by Ellen Babb, October 15, 1990.
15 Fuller interview.
18 Knutson interview.
19 *St. Petersburg Times*, January 16 and 17, 10-C and 4-E.


21 *St. Petersburg Times*, January 3, 1960, classified advertising section.


23 *St. Petersburg Times*, January 3, 1960, classified advertising section.

24 *Polk’s 1950 City Director: Clearwater* (Richmond: R. L. Polk and Co., 1950); Interview of Dorothy Thompson by Ellen Babb, April 2, 1991.


26 Videotaped interview of Dorothy Thompson by Ellen Babb, June 4, 1990.


28 Ibid.


FORT DE SOTO:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY
by Alicia Addeo*

Today a visitor to Fort De Soto County Park, located on Mullet Key in Pinellas County, encounters few remnants of the post buildings which were once part of the U.S. Army installation. A brick road, concrete sidewalks, and a few fire hydrants are almost the only visible remains, except for Battery Laidley which houses four 12-inch seacoast mortars and two 6-inch rifled guns that were originally part of Fort Dade on nearby Egmont Key. Battery Bigelow is half submerged in the Gulf of Mexico. Fort De Soto’s post buildings have disappeared.

Battery Laidley dates from the establishment of the fort in 1898. Two years later construction commenced on the post buildings and other structures which proved less permanent. Whereas the battery was made of concrete and steel-reinforced I-beams, post buildings were constructed of wood with slate roofs and brick footers. Interior light was provided by mineral oil lamps. Most of the buildings had sewer and water connections which served tubs, sinks, and toilets.

Fort De Soto had one company of the Coast Artillery Corps assigned to the post, but the fort was only active until 1910. After that only a caretaker remained to watch over the buildings. In 1917 a small detachment was temporarily assigned, but four of the eight 12-inch mortars were disassembled and shipped to a newly constructed fort in San Diego, California. In June 1940 the fort buildings were disposed of by a salvage sale.

The following photographic essay, including the photographs themselves, draws largely on the records of the U.S. Army Chief of Engineers, which are located in the National Archives. These historic photographs, dating mostly from 1905-1907, give a sense of what Fort De Soto looked like at when it was in use just after the turn of the century.

*The author wishes to thank the Pinellas County Historical Society for the Special Grant Award which made it possible to travel to the National Archives and undertake research on Fort De Soto. She also expresses appreciation to Bill Lind and Victoria Washington of the National Archives, who provided assistance with the research.
Fort De Soto Structures (circa 1905):

1. Administration Building
2. Commanding Officer’s Quarters
3. Officer’s Quarters
4. Barracks
5. Mess Hall & Kitchen
6. Post Exchange
7. Fire Station
8. Lavatory
9. Guard House
10. Civilian Employees Quarters
11. Bakery
12. Q. M. Storehouse
13. Engineer Storehouse
14. Searchlight
15. Pumphouse
16. Water tank
17. Ordnance Storehouse
18. Wagon Shed
19. Stable
20. Shed
21. Blacksmith & Carpenter Shop
22. Sawmill
23. Storehouse
24. N.C.O. Quarters
25. Hospital Steward
26. Hospital
27. Ice House
28. Mine Storehouse
29. Post Flagpole
30. Wharf
31. Oil Storehouse
32. Target Range Shelter
33. Battery Bigelow
34. Battery Laidley
Fort De Soto’s administration building, which was constructed in 1900-01 at a cost of $4,106, had 2,248 square feet of floor space.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The fort hospital was constructed in 1900-01 at a cost of $9,726. Covering 2,628 square feet, it had ten beds, four wash sinks, three wash basins, one tub, two toilets, and a urinal.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The hospital steward’s quarters covered 1,004 square feet and cost $2,653.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The single officer’s quarters were constructed in 1900-01 at a cost of $5,529, and each of the three buildings of this design had 2,938 square feet of living space.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The quarters for two noncommissioned officers were constructed in 1900-01 at a cost of $4,583 and had a floor area of 2,022 square feet.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The barracks, built in 1900-01 at a cost of $14,599, had 8,207 square feet with space for one company of 106 men. The building, shown in 1905 with soldiers lounging near the entrance, had 118 wall lockers but no toilet or washing facilities.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The lavatory, constructed in 1900-01 at a cost of $5,547, covered 1,006 square feet and had facilities designed to serve one company—sixteen wash basins, five showers, two tubs, eight toilets, and eight urinals.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The quartermaster storehouse was built at a cost of $4,063 and had 4,065 square feet of floor space.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The mess hall and kitchen, built in 1900-01 for $3,634, had 2,131 square feet of space, which was designed to serve a full company.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The pump house, built at a cost of $16,064 in 1900-01, pumped fresh water from three shallow surface wells.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The stable wagon shed was constructed in 1900-01 at a cost of $3,223. The floor area of 3,340 square feet had room for eight horses, who entered up the ramp and through the door, where a soldier stands at attention in this 1905 photograph.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

This wagon shed was built in 1905 at a cost of $2,874, and its 1,904 square feet of space could hold ten vehicles.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The guard house, built in 1900-01 at a cost of $3,476, covered 957 square feet and could hold up to six prisoners.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The bake house was constructed for $1,557 and had 619 square feet of floor space.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
Additional officers’ quarters were built 1905; the two-story structure, covering 4,770 square feet, cost $9,492.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The post exchange, built in 1905 at a cost of $7,555, had 3,106 square feet and was designed to serve an entire company.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The post’s fire house was constructed in 1905 at a cost of $1,180 for the 720-square-foot structure which held one engine, one hook and ladder, and one hose cart.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The ordnance store house had 2,086 square feet and was built in 1906 at a cost of $3,460.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
The flagpole, built in 1902, was seventy-five feet high and constructed of iron on a concrete foundation. In this photograph the wharf can be seen in the background.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
Abandoned in 1910, Fort De Soto’s wooden buildings had fallen into disrepair by the time this photograph was taken in 1938.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.

This 1938 photograph shows wooden structures still standing along a brick street.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.
One of the two buildings for noncommissioned officers as it looked in 1938.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.

One of the buildings for officers’ quarters as it appeared in 1938.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.
Another abandoned building, with an attached water tower, showing its serious state of disrepair in 1938.

Photograph courtesy of Heritage Park/Pinellas County Historical Museum.

Battery Laidley, shown here at an unknown date, still stands due to its massive walls of reinforced concrete.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.
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WOMEN AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN TAMPA: AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN. H. GREEN
by Stacy Braukman

The civil rights movement in Tampa was a decidedly moderate one. Beginning with the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960, the movement was led by middle-class African-American men representing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), local churches, and fraternal organizations.¹ As part of this moderate strand of activism, black women played significant, if not always publicly recognized, roles within their churches and within the NAACP. In Tampa, middle-class, church-going African-American women chaired membership and fund-raising drives. As volunteers from clubs and churches, they went door to door recruiting new members. Some became leaders of the NAACP Youth Council, and two women, Ellen H. Green and Helen Saunders, served as president of the Tampa Branch of the NAACP.²

Ellen Green, like countless other black women, gave her time, energy, and support to the civil rights struggle, more often than not balancing political activism with a full-time job and a family. Her contributions to the movement, and those of other black women who worked largely behind the scenes and performed the less glamorous work, deserve recognition as well as inclusion into the larger story of the civil rights movement in Tampa.

The following interview, conducted on May 20, 1992, provides insight into the activities of Ellen Green and other black women who campaigned for civil rights in Tampa.

* * * * *

Interview with Ellen H. Green:

Q: Let’s start with your background – how long you have lived in Tampa, where did you attend school and what kind of work did you do?

Green: My entire life has been spent in Tampa. I was born here in Port Tampa in this house in 1915. After attending the Port Tampa Elementary School, I was transported to east Tampa to Booker T. Washington Junior and Senior High School, the only school for blacks. I am the oldest member, in years, at my church in Port Tampa – Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church,³ where I have served as a steward, trustee, and superintendent of the Sunday school for twenty-five years. I taught the intermediate class for approximately thirty years, and I've been a usher for fifty-six years.

My employment was varied. I began my professional career as an agent and clerk for the Afro-American Life Insurance branch office in Tampa. Then for three years and nine months, I was special secretary for the Pallbearers Grand Union.⁴ In 1951 I was hired in the Industrial Department of the Central Life Insurance Company.⁵ With a variety of duties I worked there for twenty-nine years and retired in 1980. After about two weeks I was asked to come help a friend with her duties at the now Progressive Pallbearers Grand Union. Then after five years I was elected the state financial secretary. It is something I have been trying to give up because I am
Ellen H. Green (left) presenting a National Council of Negro Women award to Clemmie James in the 1970s.
now seventy-seven. But new officers were just elected, and they asked me not to leave for now. Eleven years have passed since I retired, and I am still in the work force.

Q: When did you get involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People?

Green: In 1955 I became involved with the NAACP. I was asked to serve as recording secretary temporarily. Then I was elected the financial secretary and subsequently vice president. After that I successfully defeated the president and served as head of the Tampa Branch from 1959 to 1961. That created quite a bit of excitement because I had the honor of being the first woman president of the Tampa NAACP. Also it was just at the peak of time when blacks were realizing that there was a little more freedom in the world for them, and the fight for integration became very heated up. Through our demonstrations with the Youth Council of our chapter we went to the theaters and the lunch counters. And I ate my first sandwich at the lunch counter in the basement of McCrory’s downtown on Franklin Street, with various individuals standing around looking at us. I did not know for sure if I was going to be able to really eat it, but they did not bother us. They accepted us and so the world changed colors. I worked real hard and ended up with a heart attack.

Q: When was that?

Green: December 1960. I was working at my job and running night and day. And I had an ill mother who was bedridden at home, and I had to have somebody sit with her while I was gone. But I would fix her food and leave everything prepared, and I kept all her clothes clean, so it was a bit much for me. The pressure took me down, but I still carried on. In 1961 I went to the NAACP national convention in Philadelphia. The doctor advised me that it was best that I slow down. But I was just thrilled to see so many changes coming fast. Public services, entertainment, and schools were being made available to blacks. This is what we had been living and hoping for, and to see it happening just motivated me to do everything that I could to help bring it to pass. So my career as president of the Tampa NAACP ended there, but I became treasurer after that time. I also served on several state committees and as state assistant recording secretary.

In 1966, after serving as vice president to the late Mrs. Lithia Davis, I was elected president of the Tampa Metro Chapter of the National Council of Negro Women. I served them for sixteen years. We had quite a unit there – one hundred and twenty ladies with fifty or sixty at a meeting.
My civic career actually began in 1949 as a volunteer at the YWCA branch. In my twenty-nine years with the YWCA, I served as Young Adult Chairman for the branch and a board member. I was one of the first three black women that they integrated on the Board of Directors.

**Q: Did you participate in demonstrations and protests during the 1960s?**

Green: Yes, we went in pairs to the various lunch counters and eating places. Juanita Hall and I went to McCrory’s and ordered a sandwich in 1960. We were quite fearful because the white onlookers didn't say anything. We didn't know what their attitude was, but they were passive.

**Q: And they served you?**

Green: Yes. There were different groups of us at different places all over downtown.

**Q: Did you march or do any protesting?**

Green: I didn’t do any marching because I was working. The Youth Council was under the supervision of Mr. Charles Stanford, Mr. Clarence Fort and Reverend A. Leon Lowry. I was out there on the sidelines, running around raising the money and planning the programs. But I did go into the city.

**Q: What about the theater protests? Did you participate in those?**
Green: Yes, we were all out there together at one time or the other.

Q: Were many other women doing that?

Green: Yes, there were young girls and women. Many of the people out there with me were employees of Central Life, and officers of the Tampa Branch.

Q: I wanted to talk about the role of the church in the civil rights movement in particular, the behind-the-scenes work of women.

Green: Well, St. Paul A.M.E. and Beulah Missionary Baptist were the headquarters where we had all the mass meetings. Women were always there supporting the leaders, but we were never pushed to the front. Many of the black greats came to Tampa and held rallies at these churches to raise money to finance the legal and travel expenses. I remember we would have parties and fish fries at Progress Village. It would be three o’clock in the morning when I would get home after cleaning up the Vice-President’s house. Levy Turner and I would get real upset with the others but then I would go and do it all over again. That’s the way we raised our money to help send the Field Secretary and lawyers out there on the road, because they did not only work here, they worked throughout the state. People like Bob Saunders, the State Field Secretary, and Francisco A. Rodriguez and William Fordham were the attorneys.

Q: Were a lot of the women at Central Life also in the NAACP?

Green: Yes, we were a unit. We were just a big family there. And when I would have to leave to go to a NAACP meeting or a National Council of Negro Women meeting or the YWCA, the president would always say, “Mrs. Green is privileged to go because she is serving the community.” They stood behind us there because they were members. Most of us were involved, running around quite a bit.

Q: It seems like there was a connection between black-owned businesses and churches and the civil rights movement.

Green: Yes, they all played an important role. The ministers supported us. I succeeded a minister as president of the Tampa Branch of the NAACP.
Q: I would like to hear about the National Council of Negro Women, especially how and when it began in Tampa and what kinds of things the group has done.

Green: It was organized in 1935 in Washington, D.C. Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune\textsuperscript{9} were very good friends, and they involved a group of women who were black and white. The founders were women of financial means who could do things to help black youth. Mrs. Bethune’s world revolved around young people. So with Mrs. Roosevelt’s help this group was organized, and then it branched out throughout the United States. Its commitment was to black youth. The purpose was and is to educate, inspire, aid black women, motivate youth by providing scholarship awards, visit nursing homes, organize entertainment, devise programs for unwed mothers, and raise funds, with shared contributions for the other civic groups. Mrs. Bethune was also president of Central Life for a while after Mr. G. D. Rogers died.

Q: So she lived in Tampa?

Green: She had an apartment in the original building of Central Life. She was a very astute lady – very distinguished and proud and an asset to the community.

Q: How long was she here?

Green: Well, she was here not quite a year.

Q: Is that when they organized a chapter of the NCNW here in Tampa?

Green: Our chapter was organized here in Tampa in 1937 by a group of prim ladies unaware of the meaning of Dr. Bethune’s dream. They were finally dissolved. Later on another group was organized, and I was asked to become a member which I did, but didn’t stay too long. In the middle sixties I went back. The president had become ill, so I would help her with the meetings. At election time I was elected Second Vice President to Mrs. Lithia Davis, but served in her place after her death. First Vice President, Mrs Cancerina Martin made this statement to me: “I don’t want to be the president. If you take it, I’ll stand behind you.” She was a woman of her word. She stood right with me until I got it all together, and we expanded in numbers. These were a great bunch of women. I was president from 1966 until 1982 when I retired.

Q: What kind of problems or issues did you deal with?

Green: Well, we did all kinds of things. We adopted girls at the foster homes out in Seffner. We would go out there and do parties for them and take them essentials. I was “Momi” and Mrs. Cancerina Martin (the vice president) was “Grandmom.” We also did Easter egg hunts for poor children, and we did scholarships. Whatever was worthwhile, we were in the midst of it. Our major fundraising project was a banquet and a fashion show each year, which was very successful. Then we in turn made contributions to the Urban League and the NAACP. Whatever events that they had, we would attend in a group. And we would help poor women with money for their children. We would go to the nursing homes to visit the sick and leave toilet articles. Right now the group is supposed to be working with the AIDS program, and we’re supposed to be working with the Spring.\textsuperscript{10} But it’s all dragging. Whenever there was a need, we were there.
And we’re constantly teaching education for our children. In our youth council we have girls who have all gone on to be outstanding citizens – college-bound and all doing well. Anyway, I am really proud of what happened while I was there.

The National Council was designed for women of all walks of life. You were not supposed to overlook the maid or the housekeeper. She was supposed to be as important in that organization as anybody else. But we had more schoolteachers as members than just ordinary housewives. Mrs. Bethune’s purpose was to bring together women from all walks of life, to let them reason together to help make the world a better place. And we tried to put it in action as much as we possibly could.

Q: Were a lot of these women also active in churches?

Green: Oh yes. Going to church is what strengthened us, gave us the stamina to reach up a little bit higher. And black women were an inspiration to the men also. Because even when the mother was without a husband, she was there constantly inspiring her children to raise up from where they were and reach up a little bit higher. The black woman has really been the chief moral support of the family. In the days when she was there washing and ironing for a living or doing
domestic work, she was working for her children to have a better life. She toiled and she sweated as she worked. So the day has come when we are just a little bit higher.

Q: Did white women ever join any of these groups?

Green: No, we didn’t have any white women in the Council. There were white persons who would contribute to the NAACP – not necessarily women, but white persons. My involvement with white women was in the YWCA. We were all good friends. Really we got to be best friends.

Q: Did you know Augusta Marshall, former president of the Tampa Urban League?

Green: Oh sure, we were very close. She was also a member of the Council. She was very good at the Urban League, but Joanna Tolkey has stepped in her shoes and is doing a dynamic job. Augusta was there for quite a few years and then Joanna moved in and has done a beautiful job.

Q: What are you involved in now?

Green: I am not really involved in anything, except the NCNW and the Mayor’s Community Awareness Advisory Committee for about ten years.

Q: What is that?

Green: We hold public forums to enlighten the people about what’s going on, and we have various city officials come in and speak to the public. One segment of us goes out to work with the youth in schools – black and white children. We have committees that work with the police force to see what they are doing or to at least give some input into what they are doing. I am in a special group that looks after the neighborhood. Dope is really running rampant out here, and we monitor that sort of thing, looking at whatever concerns the neighborhoods in the city of Tampa. We have representatives from each neighborhood, and we meet every three months and discuss whatever we have done or what we want to do.

Q: And this is made up of women and men, black and white?

Green: Well, no, we are all black in this particular group. There is a Hispanic group, and then there is a regular white group. But they are all members of the Community Awareness Advisory Committee. That is really what I am involved in now because at my age I do not have the speed and the energy to run around and do all the things that I used to do. But I have spent my life in my church and in the community doing whatever I could to help make the world a better place for all of us.

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2 Press release from the Tampa Branch, NAACP, October 29, 1963, Robert and Helen Saunders Collection, Special Collections, University of South Florida Library, Tampa, Florida; Helen Saunders, interview by author, Tampa, Florida, November 19, 1991.

3 Port Tampa’s Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1889.

4 The Pallbearers Grand Union is a Florida burial society, whose Tampa lodge dates from the 1930s.

5 Central Life Insurance Company was founded in Tampa in April 1922 by a group of black businessmen interested in community development efforts to overcome adverse conditions created by segregation.

6 Clarence Fort, a twenty-one-year-old barber, was president of the NAACP Youth Council in 1960 and led sit-in demonstrations that sparked integration of lunch counters at stores in downtown Tampa. The dispute was mediated by Tamp’s Biracial Committee, a recently formed group, that had several black members, including Reverand A. Leon Lowry, who went on to become the first black to attain public office in Tampa in 1977 when he was elected to the school board.

7 St. Paul A.M.E. Church, the second oldest black church in Tampa, was founded in 1870. The current structure, located at the corner of Harrison and Marion Streets, was completed in 1915.

8 Bob Saunders, a Tampa native, and Francisco Rodriguez, an Afro-Cuban attorney, were both active in the civil rights struggle in Tampa, where both served as head of the NAACP.

9 Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Dayton Normal and Industrial School for Girls in 1904, and in 1923 it was joined with the Cookman Institute of Jacksonville to become Bethune Cookman College, located in Daytona Beach, Florida. In the 1930s she worked as administrator in Roosevelt’s New Deal.

10 The Spring is a private center in Tampa that offers a variety of social services for women.
BOOK REVIEWS


Paul E. Hoffman is a meticulous scholar and a recognized expert on sixteenth-century southeast America, which at that time was totally claimed by Spain. He has combed Spanish archives for documentation not yet available in this country. Although not a comprehensive account of the Spanish Southeast of the sixteenth century, this book already has won some historical prizes, and it further enhances Hoffman’s reputation. For the amateur it is a difficult work and not recommended for pleasure reading. For the expert it still is heavy reading but revealing for its originality, based heavily on sound primary sources.

The thrust of the book is the expectation of the Spanish presence in the early 1520s on the South Carolina coast – what became known as Chicora. A Chicora legend was created, portraying the Chicora region as a New Andalucia. While all attempts by three nations (Spain, France and, lastly, England) to settle the region failed in the sixteenth century, it constituted a powerful geographical magnet that radiated to all the North American Atlantic coast. This also meant that the search for a passage to the Pacific (leading to Asia) was an important corollary to the settlement of this coast.

Basically, Hoffman tells us that there was a direct relationship between the “earliest Spanish voyages to the American Southeast in 1521-1526 and the later French and Spanish activities during the 1560s.” This is covered in the first two parts of the book. The sequence is continued in part three, covering 1562 to 1590 which is the beginning of the tri-national struggle in the Southeast with the entrance of the English at the end of the century.

In my estimation, Hoffman has not totally succeeded in making the reader aware of the consequences and continuity. This is what makes the monograph a bit tedious and the central theme not too easy to follow. Close attention and backtracking are necessary to really appreciate Hoffman’s valuable contribution.

The author avoids events which have been extensively covered, such as the Ponce de Leon voyages, the Narvaez and De Soto expeditions, the establishment of St. Augustine and its first years of struggle. Hoffman brings to attention more neglected events, such as the Nicolos Strozzi voyage of 1576-1577. Here he gives much new information, but this obfuscates clarity and chronology.

To develop his central themes, cartographic information is a must. Maps were the linchpins for the Chicora legend and the search for the passage. Much of this information is included and has been adequately integrated in the text.
Hoffman has excellent knowledge of Spanish archival material and a solid understanding of sixteenth-century Spanish paleography. The part of his book dealing with Spain is firmly based on original documentation with very little attention to secondary material. (He does not even cite the 1944 pioneer work of Verne E. Chatelain.) The French and English episodes are drawn on pivotal sources, but basically primary printed material. The same goes for the cartographic data, aided by excellent secondary sources, such Lawrence Wroth’s 1970 book on Verrazzano.

There is no use of French archives. My own contention has always been that we have thoroughly neglected them. I believe that important unused French documents regarding the early North American Southeast rest in the French archives. This is basically because few historians of the so-called colonial Spanish Southeast are competent in French paleography, to which must be added (I draw on my own experience) the greater difficulty, including bureaucratic obstacles, of working in French archives, compared to those of Spain and England.

The book has twelve good maps; more would be welcomed. Notes (at the bottom of the page) and the bibliography are in traditional presentation for a research monograph. The index appears well done.

Finally, for the Florida history student Hoffman defines the term “La Florida” as all of the Spanish Southeast (including the important Chesapeake Bay). The term “Florida” is used to designate the area of what is today the state of Florida.

Charles W. Arnade


By now the Columbus quincentennary has inspired so many new works, scholarly and popular, concerning the interaction of Europeans and Native Americans that one might think there is little left to say. In reality, of course, we are just beginning to learn the right questions to ask and
realizing the scarcity of sources in which to search for answers. An advantage of archaeology is that excavation always brings out something new. The task then is to see if the information confirms previous answers or not.

Brent Weisman has produced a fascinating account of his 1988-89 excavations at the Fig Springs Mission site at Ichetucknee Springs State Park located in the Suwannee River valley northwest of Gainesville. Believed to be the early seventeenth-century Franciscan mission of San Martin de Timucua, the site produced thousands of Spanish and aboriginal artifacts, architectural details of the church, cemetery, convento (priest’s residence) and aboriginal dwellings, and even plant and animal remains. All demonstrate the blending of native and Spanish cultures. Compared with better known missions at centers such as St. Augustine and Tallahassee, Fig Springs was a frontier station in Timucua province, inhabited by perhaps 100 Indians and a priest. Weisman skillfully tells the story of its discovery from 1949, when archaeologist John Goggin found Spanish pottery underwater, to the late 1980s, when the actual settlement was located up the hill from the spring in a beautiful forest setting. He carefully describes the history of Florida mission investigations and the painstaking archaeological methods of testing, excavation, dating, and artifact processing and analysis. He then explores the meaning of all the findings in relation to areas of different activities at the site, such as food preparation and building construction, as well as to the wider cultural systems of politics, society, and religion.

Wonderful details emerge to flesh out the meager historical record of this site and time period. Thousands of artifacts were recovered: typical and unusual Indian pottery, stone and cut shell artifacts, as well as a wide range of Spanish items including nails and spikes, olive jar and majolica pottery shards, glass beads, pins, tools, and other metal, and even religious items of gold such as a Catholic cult medallion and a possible rosary ornament. Evidence in the ground indicated the church was specially constructed on a raised, prepared clay floor with square hewn posts, as contrasted with the sand-floored aboriginal dwelling made with round posts. Appendices document details of pottery types and the continued native subsistence pattern based on maize horticulture and wild foods, such as deer, small game, birds, fish, turtles, acorns, nuts, and fruits, supplemented by Old World crops such as peaches, a very small amount of wheat (which was not too successful), and even watermelon.

This book will appeal to both scholars and general readers. Specialists will be delighted by the excellent scientific treatment and data tabulations with lists of measurements, including both counts and weights for ceramic shards, for example. General readers will be pleased with the rich description in clear, accessible language and the excellent presentation of so many aspects of the life of this small community, from mundane details of everyday life to the psychology of the use of space and fusing of Indian and Spanish traditions of sacred versus secular activity. Pressed to comment on the book’s shortcomings, I could only mention petty items such as the lack of clarity of some artifact photos, or failure to identify all the people in photo captions, in this otherwise well edited volume.

Weisman cautions that he has uncovered only a portion of the story. Work continues at Fig Springs, including exploration of the earlier prehistoric aboriginal culture and analysis of cemetery burials. But he has brought forth vividly the wealth of information recovered so far, and he has many suggestions for future research. Intriguing mysteries remain, such as the actual
The late Edward Akin spent fifteen years compiling this fascinating picture of businessman Henry Morrison Flagler. Flagler’s birth in upstate New York, his decision to earn his livelihood at fourteen, his early success as an Ohio merchant, and his ultimate bankruptcy as a salt manufacturer are all shown to be a prelude to his amazing success as a partner in the Standard Oil Company. Although forced to start his business life over, Flagler set a new course, and his life goal of seeking wealth was in motion again.

The author first develops the various roles Flagler played during his active years as a full partner of John D. Rockefeller with their desks back-to-back during those start-up days at Standard in Cleveland. Although Flagler most likely brought some money to the arrangement, his most valuable contribution was his “business genius: a shrewdness in identifying new opportunities and then capitalizing on their potential” (27). Flagler is shown to be the skillful negotiator with the railroads and canal companies for favorable freight rates, with fellow refiners for “associations,” and with federal and state lawmakers for advantageous laws and regulations. His familiarity with contracts as a result of these negotiations made Flagler the company legalist.

The author suggests that working at the giant Standard lost its appeal for Flagler who then turned his energies to developing Florida. Flagler attempted to control all the forces necessary to convert historic St. Augustine to “the Newport of the South” (116). Advertising, transportation, electricity, water, hotels, churches, shopping arcades, baths and cottages were all built, brought or renovated toward that end. Although the new “Newport” never quite materialized, the experience and energy of the attempt prepared Flagler for later, more successful developments at Palm Beach, Miami, and finally the railroad extension to Key West.

This book portrays Henry Flagler as the builder and business man who fulfilled the American Dream of rising from humble beginnings to great wealth. We meet his family, friends, and acquaintances. We see his motives, share his failures, and successes. It is an excellent look at the business world from just before the Civil War until the beginning of World War I and an important supplement to the relatively few available readings about the man.

R. Randolph Stevens

The Historic Places of Pasco County is a listing of 264 buildings, sites and objects designated as historic by the Pasco County Historical Preservation Committee. Authored by three current committee members who draw on unpublished research in addition to a list of published works on Pasco County’s communities, this local register of historic places has been fifteen years in the making. The Preservation Committee was guided in its designation of historic sites by nine criteria, outlined in the introduction. The rich image of Pasco County’s past is enhanced by historic photographs gleaned from the archives of the University of South Florida Special Collections and the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library. Organized alphabetically by community name and by site name within each community, Pasco County’s historic sites are presented from Aripeka in chapter two to Zephyrhills in chapter twenty-four. Non-extant communities are treated as sites under the community headings. Appendices listing the cemeteries and post offices of Pasco County complete this presentation of the county’s designated historic resources.

Chapter one opens this survey of Pasco County’s heritage with a profile of Samuel Pasco, relating the story of the naming of the county at the time it was partitioned from Hernando County in 1887. Local boosters managed to keep legislative action creating the new county on track over the objections of a strong Brooksville lobby. The Harvard-educated Pasco, a politically effective resident of Monticello in Jefferson County since 1859, had no direct connection to the county that now bears his name. In fact, it is not known that he ever visited Pasco County.

The chapter on Aripeka presents the Old Aripeka Post Office, originally built in 1895, an institution that survived the partitioning of Hernando County. Here, the logging operations of the Aripeka Saw Mill Corporation, named for the Seminole chief, are first discussed. Chapter three on Bayonet Point offers the first glimpse into the lives of some of the persons involved in the county’s logging industry. The chapter on Dade City, the county seat, with 107 designated sites, is the second site of Fort Dade, the Old Pasco County Courthouse, combined with representative examples of ecclesiastical, commercial and residential buildings, begin to offer the reader a perspective on the community’s heritage.

The designation of a community’s historic sites should be preceded by a survey process that includes identification, documentation and evaluation of the sites being considered. The physical,
social and historical interrelationships of the sites must be established within the context of the community’s history, in order to evaluate the relative significance of each site. The lack of any overview of the history of the county or its communities makes this task difficult, if not impossible.

The authors admit the most serious shortcomings of this work in their introduction. “We recognize that our efforts at comprehensive compilation and description are incomplete” (ix). The first is to be expected. It is a rare community that can allocate adequate funding to assess and protect its historic resources. However, the inadequacy of the individual descriptions of sites or buildings calls into question the validity of the designation process. The variation in quality of the landmarks’ descriptions is greater than it should be. On one end of the spectrum is the brief description of the Meyers Home of Dade City: “This house was constructed of hollow, glazed terra cotta brick about 1925” (22). The other extreme includes the buildings of Saint Leo College. The descriptions of these monumental masonry buildings and the personalities that brought them into being are cogent and thorough, while succinct.

The leadership and preservation constituency in Pasco County is to be commended for allocating the funds for this educational resource. Let us not forget, however, that this is just a beginning, an opportunity for increased awareness of Pasco’s heritage.

David Rigney


For years, visitors to Chinsegut Hill in Hernando County have listened to the story of “the Lenin Oak” marker, flung into Lake Lindsey by the local American Legion or Boy Scouts at some time in the fifties. We were mildly offended and amused about those ignorant rednecks so paranoid about Communism. Today, after the inglorious death of the Soviet Union and after reading Neil V. Salzman’s biography of Colonel Raymond Robbins, the man who planted that oak, I think those upright citizens had a point.

Raymond Robbins (1873-1954), likely Hernando County’s most prominent resident ever, made a place for himself – modest, yet noteworthy – in early twentieth-century American history. In his extensive, if not exhaustively researched study of Robbins, Professor Salzman offers a highly readable biography. It benefits throughout from the author’s warm interest in every facet of Robbins the man and public figure. Raised in Ohio and Kentucky, the young Robbins first lived in the Brooksville area as a ten-year-old, and he returned regularly for physical and emotional recharging until he settled down permanently in 1924. He bought what was then Snow Hill in 1905 and named it in the Innuit Eskimo language “Chinsegut,” which meant “the spirit of things lost and regained.”

Robbins’ life lay under the shadow of two premises – hereditary mental illness (“unipolar depression,” according to Salzman’s tentative diagnosis) and the passionate attachment to his older sister Elizabeth, an acclaimed actress and author. The former affliction may have
accounted for the hyper-activity Somerset Maugham once called “not human.” It drove the seventeen year-old from Florida’s west coast to working in the coal mines of Tennessee, to studying at Columbian (now George Washington University) Law School, to practicing law and early politicking in San Francisco, to prospecting for gold in the Yukon wilderness, to caring for and preaching to the lost souls of Nome, Alaska, and to engaging himself in the politics of Chicago, Illinois, and the nation on behalf of the social gospel and unionization. A powerful public speaker and tireless organizer, Robbins propelled himself into “the thick of every major social struggle of the Progressive Era.” All presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Herbert Hoover sought his advice, as did Harold Ickes, William Borah, and many others. Raymond Robbins chose well when marrying Margaret Dreier (18681945). The daughter of prosperous German-born parents, she was an influential labor activist and social welfare organizer in her own right, serving as president of the National Women’s Trade Union League from 1907 to 1922. However in Salzman’s book, neither she nor her rival sister-in-law come to life.

Robbins’ greatest challenge and most significant contribution to history, in his biographer’s eyes, came in 1917 when Theodore Roosevelt advanced him as a member of the American Red Cross Committee to Russia. Financed by the copper magnate William B. Thompson, the committee enjoyed no standing with the Wilson administration, although its first chief, Thompson, and Robbins, his successor, received commissions in the U.S. Army. Initially faithful to Thompson’s goal of helping keep the Provisional Government in power and Russia in the war,
Robbins soon embraced not only the bloody revolution of Lenin and Trotsky but also its two leading protagonists as well. Liberation from Tsarist oppression was the noble objective, and in 1917 probably no Western observer was placed as closely to the Bolshevik power center as the squire from Hernando County.

After his return to the United States, Robbins became a highly visible advocate of the fledgling Soviet Union, first speaking against allied intervention, then for American recognition. He also embraced the causes of Prohibition and world peace, and he signed on as an early recruit in the fight against Nazism. After a fall from a tree in 1935, the outdoorsman found himself paralyzed from the pelvis down. Raymond Robbins died nineteen years later at his beloved Chinsegut Hill, where both he and Margaret are buried.

Suddenly thrust into a front seat to watch highest historical drama, but emotionally unfit to stay put and far too naive to realize the dimensions of the events, Robbins cast himself in a role no greater man could have filled. His biographer regrets that success was denied this novice in foreign affairs. But Salzman declares that between 1987 and 1991, the date of his book’s publication, the prophet was finally vindicated. Professor Salzman forgets to mention that Gorbachev was not a Lenin. But even if we accept the parallel, what in 1990-91 appeared as “a dramatic transformation in U.S.-Soviet relations” of the very kind that Robbins advocated, has already slipped away. The perception of historical events is, after all, changing constantly, and the Robbins-Salzman version enjoyed one of the shortest lives in business. By placing his hero into a contemporary world-historical context and promoting him to prophet of the New World Order, Professor Salzman doomed this thrust of his book to almost instant anachronism.

Current plans are to replace the marker at Chinsegut’s “Lenin Oak.” Fine, but don't tell the Russians. Their enthusiasm would only be matched by that of the Germans if told that next to it we might be planting a “Hitler Ash.”

Georg Kleine
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COVER: A Florida alligator hunter in the 1880s. Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
BOOK NOTES

James J. Horgan, Professor of History at Saint Leo College, has added to the growing body of literature relating to Pasco County. The author of *The Catholic Colony of San Antonio, Florida* (1989) and *Pioneer College* (1990), Horgan has now edited *The Letters of the Hand Family: San Antonio Colonists of the 1880’s and 1890’s*. Published by the Pasco County Historical Society (1992), the book consists of hundreds of letters revealing the hardscrabble lines of Pasco County pioneers. "Family patriarch Michael Hand," observes Horgan, "was a man who evidently saved every document and piece of mail he ever got."

John K. Mahon, a long-time Professor of History at the University of Florida, authored *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842*, which was originally published in 1967. A reviewer at the time noted, "Mahon provides colorful detail not only of battles and leaders but also of problems (often comic ones) of military organization and ordnance, Florida population and high society, Seminole culture and history, and the life and character of the leading Indians." A revised edition has been published in paperback by the University Press of Florida ($15.95).