

# One Hundred Years Ago

## Tampa in 1925





A project of the



Compiled by Jennifer Dietz, City of Tampa Archives and Records Division.  
Archives and Records is a division of the City Clerk's Office.

Cover photo: Downtown Tampa from the Bay View Hotel, 208 Jackson Street, with view of Tampa Terrace Hotel, northeast corner Florida Avenue and East Lafayette (which is now Kennedy Boulevard) on July 24, 1925.



*Al Burgert and the first car on Davis Islands, April 22, 1925.*

## **Burgert Brothers Photographic Collection**

The black and white Burgert Brothers photographs in this booklet were taken in 1925, and they are courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library's Burgert Brothers photographic collection. This collection features nearly 19,000 historical photographs captured by local photographers in the Burgert family from the late 1800s until 1960. Images from the collection are available online: [hcplc.org/research/burgert](http://hcplc.org/research/burgert)



# The City of Tampa in 1925

In October of 1920, the citizens of Tampa voted in favor of the Commission-Manager form of government. In this form of government, a Mayor-Commissioner was elected with four Commissioners, who each had equal power.

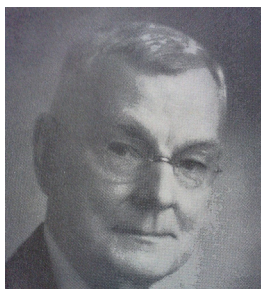
Perry G. Wall began his term as the the 41st Mayor of the City of Tampa on January 8, 1924. He was named after his grandfather, Perry Green Wall, and was therefore sometimes referred to as Perry G. Wall II. With his brother-in-law, Peter O. Knight, he owned a successful hardware and sporting good store called Knight & Wall. Prior to his election, he had served previously on Tampa's City Council from 1890-1891, and 1895-1896.



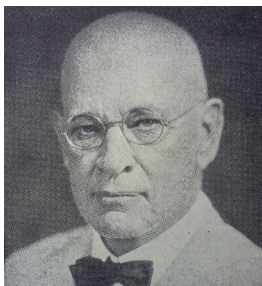
***Perry G. Wall  
City of Tampa Mayor-  
Commissioner,  
1924-1928***



***William James Barritt,  
Mayor-Commissioner Pro Tempore***



***William A. Adams,  
Commissioner***



***Dr. Sumter Lowry,  
Commissioner***



***James McCants,  
Commissioner***

# Tampa's Neighborhoods in 1925

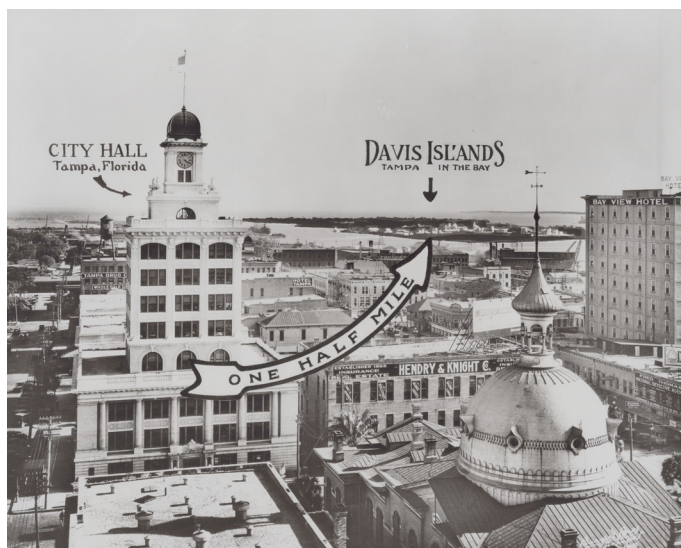
1925 was a big year for neighborhood development in Tampa. According to this excerpt from the 1925 Annual Report of the City Manager, there had been a large increase in building permits.

For the information of the reader, the population estimates which have come to our attention are quoted below:

Tampa Post Office.....	213,000
National Board of Fire Underwriters.....	156,000
Tampa Board of Trade Bulletin.....	154,000
By the method shown above.....	147,000
City Directory.....	132,000
State Census, estimate, 1925.....	95,000

In 1923 the value of buildings constructed as indicated by permits issued by the building inspector was \$3,500,000, in 1924 was \$6,500,000, in 1925 was \$23,000,000 and for the first three months of 1926, after the speculative feature of real estate had completely subsided and buildings were being erected from an investment motive only, the value of the permits issued amounted to \$6,000,000 or at a rate of \$24,000,000 a year. This does not of course represent the normal growth of Tampa but rather the very rapid rate of recent expansion which the extraordinary demands by the rapidly increasing population.

Many of those building permits likely involved D.P. Davis, who spent much of 1925 developing Davis Islands. He also wed the 1925 Gasparilla Queen, Elizabeth Nelson, in October of that same year, though it was a short marriage. For more on that, see *The Rocky Romance of D.P. Davis and Elizabeth Nelson* by Rodney Kite-Powell on page 27.



*This copy of a retouched print shows the proximity of Davis Islands to City Hall.*



**D. P. Davis Properties office on the corner of 502 S. Franklin Street.**



**View of Davis Islands under construction, looking northwest with City Hall in the background.**



***D.P. Davis Properties bus, as seen on January 21, 1925.***



***View of intersection fork of Davis Boulevard and Aegean Avenue, with ongoing construction at Davis Islands on June 19, 1925.***



South Tampa neighborhoods like Palma Ceia, New Suburb Beautiful and Parkland Estates also had a lot of development in 1925.



***The entrance to Parkland Estates on Parkland Boulevard.***



***This photograph of a fountain and small pond in Parkland Estates was taken on April 30, 1925.***





**Sunset Drive in New Suburb Beautiful on December 6, 1925.**



**To accommodate the growing neighborhoods in South Tampa, construction on what is now Roosevelt Elementary School was completed in 1925. The school opened in 1926.**

Developers from the Tampa Beach corporation, which sought to develop land in East Tampa, hosted a banquet for the Chicago Bears at the Hillsboro Hotel.



***Red Grange and the Chicago Bears at Plant Field promoting Tampa Beach on December 30, 1925.***

In 1925, the Central Avenue area was growing as new businesses were developing. Established in 1924, Helping Hand Day Nursery and Kindergarten has since moved but is still in business in Tampa in 2025.



***Staff and children in front of Helping Hand Day Nursery and Kindergarten on May 9, 1925.***



***Children on swings in the playground at Helping Hand Day Nursery and Kindergarten on May 9, 1925.***

The Tampa Urban League was active in the community. At the time, it was located at 1310 Marion Street. This photo shows a group of its members at the home of Inez Alston on 1611 Lamar Avenue.



***Blanche Armwood is kneeling on the top left, and Clara Alston is seated in the middle in a white dress.***



Downtown Tampa was thriving in 1925. These two photos were taken on February 23, 1925, and both provide different views of Franklin Street.

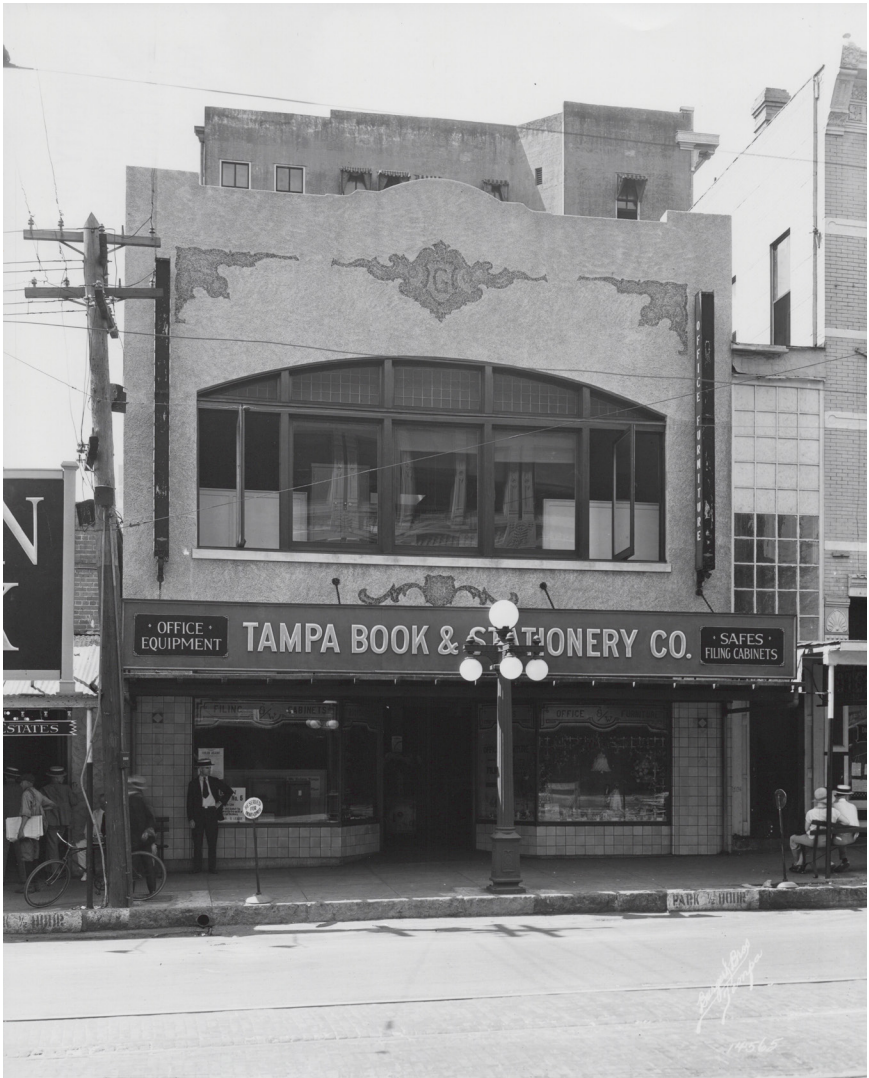


***Looking southeast on Franklin Street (100-200 blocks).***



***Looking northeast on Franklin Street (200 block) toward Tampa City Hall.***

There were many shops downtown such as this one.



***Tampa Book and Stationery Company at 112 Lafayette Street  
on June 20, 1925.***



# The Spanish Presence in the U.S.A.

**E.J. Salcines**

***Retired Appellate Judge, District Court of Appeal***

Spaniards have been in Tampa forever. We all know about the cigar factories, mutual aid societies, and how their children and grandchildren and great grandchildren have been leaders in this community. Even the former Governor of Florida, Bob Martinez, is the grandson of Spanish immigrants. The first Hispanic American to serve in the U.S. Congress was Joseph M. Hernandez in 1822, representing the Florida Territory. State Senator Louis de la Parte, Jr. from Tampa was the first Hispanic American to serve as President and President Pro Tempore of the Florida Senate (1972-1974).

The exhibit, *Invisible Immigrants: Spaniards in the U.S. (1868-1945)* at the Tampa Bay History Center, has awakened many questions of the past, things that are in the recesses of people's minds, but have not been refreshed. As the doors opened to this exhibit, more answers were sought about the Spanish presence in the United States. This will be a quick review of these last 500 years, with many of these years being in a dormant stage. With this presentation, we are going to be able to tell the untold stories of the Spaniards of North America and Canada, not just limited to the United States.

The Spanish found what they have called "Bahía del Espíritu Santo," or the Bay of the Holy Spirit. A better name for it may have been "Bahia de Ponce de León" because Juan Ponce de León in his 1521 visit to the Gulf side had already come to Florida in 1513, on the Atlantic side. It was he and his pilot that could see the ship being driven by a current. They discovered the Gulf Stream, which became indispensable for ships navigating back to Europe. As they came close to the shore, they thought it looked like a place where the sugar cane grows. The word "cañaveral" in Spanish means "sugar grove." The oldest landmark on the map of North America, Canada included, is our own Cape Canaveral, thanks to Juan Ponce de León. Leon County, where the State Capitol is located, is named after him. Florida got its name from the season in which Ponce de León arrived in the Cape Canaveral area. He arrived around Easter, which in Spanish is called, "Pascua Florida," meaning "the Pascal season of the flowers." So consequently, Florida has a Spanish name.

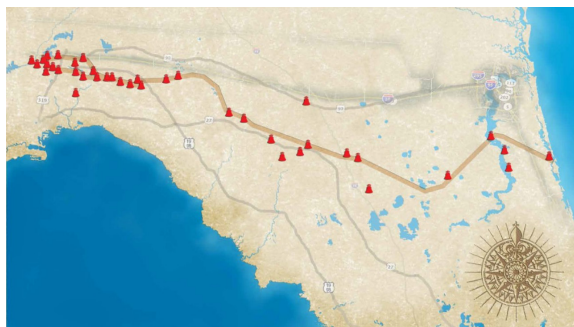
Las Floridas went all the way to the Mississippi River and all the way past Chesapeake Bay. It was a very large territory. Comparatively, Spain is roughly the size of Texas. Spain is a peninsula in Europe bordered by Portugal and France. It is smaller than the State of Texas, but when you look at the square mileage, Spain is about the same size. Spain is almost nineteen times smaller than the United States.

Like the Roman empire of centuries before, Spain introduced European civilization to the new world, Las Americas: North, Central and South America. Among the many things that the explorers brought was Christianity, which entered the United States of America through Tampa Bay, right here in Florida. The Roman Catholic faith is a branch of Christianity and it is followed by the many European countries.

Protestantism came to the United States starting with the English arrival which started in Jamestown in 1608, followed by Plymouth Rock in 1621. But this is later than the 1521 arrival of Juan Ponce de León, as well as the Spanish exploration that took place in 1528. 2028 will be the 500th anniversary of European Civilization's arrival in North America.

The English followed the Spaniards when they explored North America in 1607, followed by the French in 1608, then the Dutch in 1621, and the Germans in 1683.

In 1528, about four hundred Spaniards came through Tampa with the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition to explore this area of the South. They brought domesticated animals like horses, cows, and pigs, which all came from Europe. They also brought farming equipment, literature, music and instruments, as well as European engineering, architecture, clothing, medicine and the wheel, axle, the cart, and wagon.



***Florida's Spanish missions, image courtesy of Billy Somerville at the Tampa Bay History Center.***

In 1539, the Hernando de Soto expedition arrived with about six hundred more people, who explored all of the South. They crossed the Mississippi, and de Soto was buried in the Mississippi River.

In 1565, way before our English forefathers arrived

in Jamestown or Plymouth Rock, Spaniards had already arrived in St. Augustine, Florida, which is the oldest permanent European settlement in the United States. They also brought religious people with them. Twelve Franciscans and four Jesuit priests came with Pedro Menéndez de Avilés who founded St. Augustine. Between the end of the 15th century until 1822, when Spain left what is now known as Florida, Spain had sent 16,000 missionaries to America. The Spanish missions of Florida were more successful than the Spanish missions of California. However, the missions of Florida disappeared while the ones in California remain as beautiful historic churches. The Florida missions were all burned to the ground by invaders, ruffians, as they were called. They came down from South Carolina and Georgia and burned down those Catholic missions.

To summarize, St. Augustine is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the continental United States and Canada. Las Floridas appeared on the maps of Spain and international maps. Florida has a great history. Christianity arrived and was started here. The first European animals such as horses and cows arrived here, the first farming tools were used here, and there was also a great food exchange.

There were foods in America that were not known in Europe. The indigenous people did not know that Europe existed. Little by little, the potato, corn and tomato from America went to Europe, as did chocolate and other products. Europe was introduced to American foods, and America was introduced to European foods.

The first books and dictionaries were introduced in our nation as early as 1569. The first book about our country was published in 1542, 66 years before Jamestown. The first Christian Christmas ever celebrated in this North American area, including Canada, was celebrated by Hernando de Soto in 1539, in the Tallahassee area of Florida. In 1565, the first Thanksgiving that was documented with the Spaniards and the Native Americans took place in St. Augustine, headed by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. As Florida historian Michael Gannon noted, by the time that our English forefathers arrived at Plymouth Rock to celebrate their Thanksgiving, those in St. Augustine were already in urban renewal.

The following notable events also happened prior to the settlement in Plymouth Rock.

The first martyr for Christianity in North America was Juan de Padilla, who was killed in what is now known as Kansas in 1542. The second martyr was Father Luis Cancer, who was killed in Tampa in 1549.

The first European male born in St. Augustine in 1566 was Martin de Argüelles. That was twenty-one years before Virginia Dare was born in the English colony of Roanoke.

The first marriage took place in the St. Augustine Catholic Mission on July 4, 1594.

The first parish mass was celebrated in St. Augustine on September 8, 1565.

The oldest church in the United States is the Church of San Francisco in St. Augustine.

The oldest public square in the United States is the Constitution Plaza right in the middle of St. Augustine.

The first legal process, judicial order, in St. Augustine was from August 31 – September 23, 1602. For lawyers and judges, that was a significant event.

There are many more firsts. Keep in mind that while the Spaniards were exploring through Florida and the Southern United States, other explorations were going on in other parts of the world.

A Spaniard who was originally part of the Magellan Expedition circumnavigated the globe and finally returned to Spain in 1522. Juan Sebastián Elcano proved that the world is round 59 years before Francis Drake did such a thing in 1580.

A Spaniard by the name of García López de Cárdenas was the first European to see the Grand Canyon. That was in September of 1540, sixty-eight years before Jamestown and eighty years before Plymouth Rock.

In 1542, even before St. Augustine was founded, another explorer was already exploring what we now call the Philippines. In 1549, Jesuit priests made history by going into Japan.

Shortly after St. Augustine was established, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés sent other explorers into what we now call South Carolina. In 1567, they established Santa Elena where the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island is now located.

The flag of Florida has flown over the United States for 289 years, compared to the flag of England that has flown over the United States for 175 years. The Spanish flag was in the United States 114 years

before the arrival of the English. The flag of the United States has flown over our nation for 238 years. That's 51 years less than the flag of Spain has flown over the United States. It will be 2076 before the flag of the United States has flown over this country as long as the flag of Spain.

Additionally, the Spanish flag was incorporated into Florida's state flag. Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas and New Mexico also have included elements of the Spanish flag in their own state flags.



The Cross of Burgundy flew over Florida from 1565 to 1763.

The current Alabama state flag was officially adopted in 1895.



The current Florida state flag was officially adopted in 1900.

***Alabama and Florida both have state flags that were influenced by the Cross of Burgundy flag that was used by the Spanish military.***

There were 55 Spanish governors in Florida from 1565-1763 and 1783-1821. In Louisiana there were 10 Spanish governors from 1766 to 1803. Texas had 34 Spanish governors from 1691 to 1822. New Mexico had 60 Spanish governors from 1608 to 1822. California had 10 Spanish governors from 1768 to 1822.

Spanish missions in Florida totaled 48. There were 51 Spanish missions in New Mexico. There were 16 Spanish missions in Georgia, and 45 Spanish missions in Texas. Roads connected these missions and settlements.

There are lasting Spanish imprints in Florida, with Florida recognizing different anniversaries such as the founding of St. Augustine and the turning over of Florida to Andrew Jackson in 1822, when Florida became part of the United States as a territory.

There is much history connecting Spain to the United States, not only language, but also engineering, architecture and landmarks. In 2015, the Spanish culture and institutions were recognized in St. Augustine when it was celebrating the 450th anniversary of its founding. In 2018, in San Antonio, Texas, they celebrated the 300th year anniversary of the founding of that area by Spaniards.

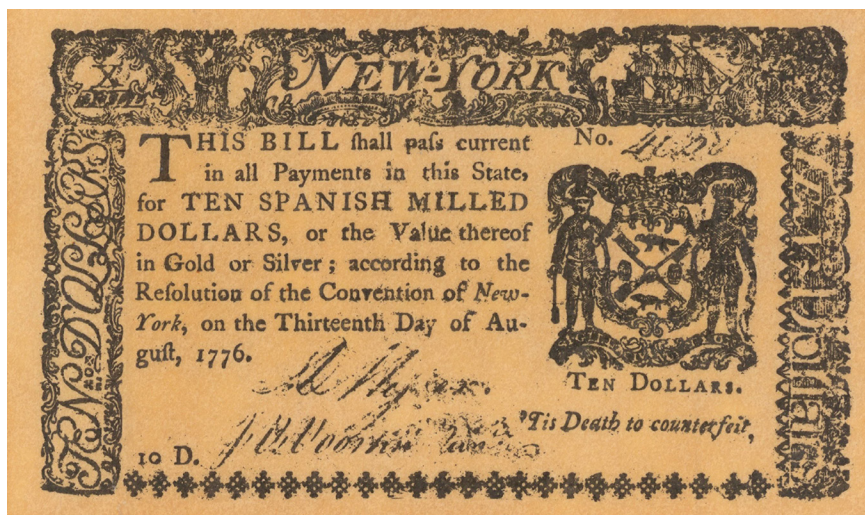
The territory of Puerto Rico, and many U.S. states have Spanish names. Within those states, there are also many cities with Spanish names. California alone has more than 400 cities, towns and landmarks with Spanish names. In Florida, many counties have Spanish names such



as Leon, Hernando, DeSoto, Santa Rosa, Alachua, and Escambia. Even Pinellas, the last of the counties to be created, has a name that was taken from the Spanish "Punta Piñal," which means point of pines. Some examples of places with Spanish names in Florida are Pensacola, Oviedo, Cortez, Punta Gorda, Boca Raton, Largo, Hernando, Alachua, Captiva, Sanibel, Islamorada, Ponte Vedra, Cape Canaveral and many others.

Spain was the forgotten ally in the American War of Independence. They are the ones who kept the Gulf of Mexico open, which was the entrance to the Mississippi River. All of the supplies that George Washington's troops needed could come up through Mexico and Cuba and go up through New Orleans. Bernardo de Gálvez, for whom Galveston, Texas is named, helped the United States on the side of Spain. He was such a hero in the effort to attain independence that the Congress of the United States granted him American citizenship. If you go to the Capitol Building in the National Statuary Hall, next to Winston Churchill is Bernardo de Gálvez. He was the one that defeated the English during the War of Independence in Pensacola, Mobile and Natchez.

When the thirteen colonies had declared their independence, they started issuing paper money. But there was no Fort Knox, so the paper they were issuing is what prosecutors would call, "worthless checks." It was stopping commerce, trade and bartering. Then the Spanish dollar, the doblón (doubloon in English) / pieces of eight came up. Spain guaranteed the paper money that the thirteen colonies were issuing. They called it the "dolar." The name came from the German



**Ten Spanish milled dollars, New York. Image Courtesy of E.J. Salcines.**



***Doblón/pieces of eight.***

name “bit” was derived from biting into the doblón/pieces of eight to see if it was real silver. The Spanish currency was so popular that it was used in the United States until 1857. The term “a buck” came from trading deer buckskin for one doblón.

Many different European nations influenced the United States. New York was once called New Amsterdam. When the Continental Congress took a vote to determine the national language, English won by only one vote over German, which was heavily used in Pennsylvania. You may have heard of “Pennsylvania Dutch,” which is a mispronunciation of Pennsylvania Deutsch.

When Harvard University was established in 1636, the Spanish had already created ten colleges and universities, all in Central and South America.

word “thaler” which meant weight, as Germans measured currency by its weight. El dolar was guaranteed by the Spanish government with Spanish milled dollars. “Milled” refers to the ridges on the edges of the coins, which is a way to avoid counterfeiting.

Suddenly, business and commerce started because it was guaranteed by Spanish milled dollars. That is where we got the dollar sign from, Spanish gold bars. That is the origin of the Spanish gold bars and our currency. We count our money in the decimal system because Thomas Jefferson advocated counting our currency in the same way as Spain, and the Continental Congress adopted the decimal system. If the colonists needed to make change, they would cut the Spanish milled dollar in half, that is how we got fifty cents, which cut in half would be a quarter, etc. That is how we came up with terms like, “two bits, four bits, six bits, a dollar.” Eight bits equals a dollar. The

Language has continued to be an important aspect of Spanish presence. More than 16 million people in the United States speak Spanish. The United States has the second highest number of Spanish speakers in the world, second to Mexico. Last year more than 30,000 American students studied abroad in Spain. At least of 25% of Florida's population speaks Spanish. Many words in the English language have Spanish origins such as: aficionado, fiesta, flotilla, cafeteria, tornado, rodeo, siesta, patio, plaza, vigilante, gorilla, etc. This is part of the Spanish legacy in North America, particularly in Florida.

The Capitol of Florida was established in 1822. At the time, Florida's two population centers were St. Augustine and Pensacola. The midway point between these two cities was a Spanish mission called San Luis, which then became Tallahassee. It was first the Capitol of the Florida territory, and later the Capitol of Florida when it became a state in 1845.

Immigrants from all over the world have made this country. I hope that with this supersonic, quick overview, you will have a better appreciation of the Spanish culture and its importance in these 500 years.

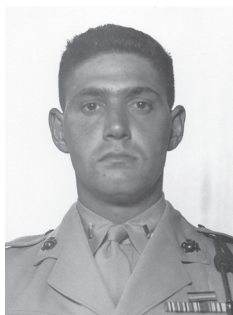


## About the Author

E.J. Salcines is a native of Tampa, and a career state and federal prosecuting attorney with a legal career spanning more than 60 years, including 16 years as the elected State (prosecuting) Attorney and serving more than 14 years on Florida's Second District Court of Appeal. He has 2 academic degrees including his law degree, as well as 2 honorary doctorate degrees. He is a

recognized local historian and has produced documentary programs on Tampa history seen on City of Tampa Television and YouTube entitled *Tampa: Untold Stories*. He is the 2021 recipient of the Medal of Honor from the Florida Bar Foundation. In 2023, he received another Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from the University of South Florida. In 2024, he was the recipient of Tiger Bay Club's Lifetime Achievement Award, and he was also selected as Las Damas' 2024 Man of the Year by the Centro Asturiano. In 2025, he received the Florida Historical Society's Michael Gannon Lifetime Achievement Award.

**75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**Recognizing First Lieutenant**  
**Baldomero Lopez, Marine Corps**



***Born in Tampa, Florida August 23, 1925***  
***Died in Inchon, Korea September 15, 1950***

A Congressional Medal of Honor was given posthumously to First Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez (MCSN-HQ-4934) United States Marine Corps for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 15 September 1950, as a Marine platoon commander of Company A, First Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division (Reinforced), in action against enemy aggressor forces during the landing at Inchon, Korea. With his platoon, First Lieutenant Lopez was engaged in the reduction of immediate enemy beach defenses after landing with the assault waves. Exposing himself to hostile fire, he moved forward alongside a bunker and prepared to throw a hand grenade into the next pillbox whose fire was pinning down that sector of the beach. Taken under fire by an enemy automatic weapon and hit in the right shoulder and chest as he lifted his arm to throw, he fell backward and dropped the deadly missile. After a moment, he turned and dragged his body forward in an effort to retrieve the grenade and throw it. In critical condition from pain and loss of blood, and unable to grasp the hand grenade firmly enough to hurl it, he chose to sacrifice himself rather than endanger the lives of his men and with a sweeping motion of his wounded right arm, cradled the grenade under him and absorbed the full impact of the explosion. His exceptional courage, fortitude, and devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon First Lt. Lopez and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

***Text courtesy of the Baldomero Lopez Hillsborough County Veterans Memorial Park marker.***

# Tampa's Booker T. Washington School Turns 100 Years Old

*By Fred Hearns*

*Tampa Bay History Center Curator of Black History*

The date was Friday, May 1, 1925. The Hillsborough County School Board had just approved construction of a "twelve-room negro school building at Blanche Street and Fourth Avenue." The school would be located in the southwestern corner of Ybor City, in the eastern part of the largest Black community in Tampa, known as the Scrub. It would first be called the Blanche Street School before the name changed to Booker Taliaferro Washington (BTW) School. It soon became the "Booker T. Washington Junior-Senior High School."

BTW's construction cost \$100,000 and was part of Hillsborough County's taxpayers supporting much-needed additional classrooms for the community's growing Black population. BTW received part of the school board's 1924 \$1,000,000 bond referendum – not the whole amount. Tampa Urban League's Education Committee, led in the early 1900s by chairman Rev. Andrew J. Ferrell, deserves much of the credit for the construction of Tampa's first school facility built for Black secondary students. Ferrell also was president of Tampa's Afro-American Civic League.

In 1934, George Schroeder Middleton High School was named for the former mail carrier and secretary-vice president of Tampa's Central Industrial Insurance Company under President Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. For the next three decades, BTW was the primary feeder school for Middleton. Many



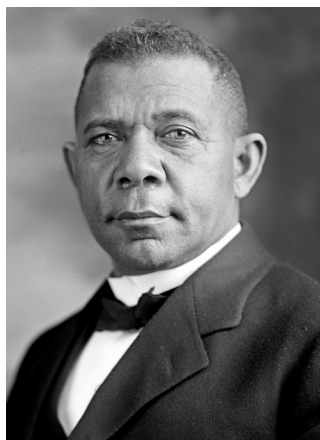
***Booker T. Washington School in 1926. This photo is reprinted from Excelsior: The Senior Class Annual of Booker T, Washington High School. Floridiana Collection, USF Libraries – Tampa Special Collections, University of South Florida.***



BTW students also went on to Don Thompson (1945-1956) or Howard Wesley Blake (1956-1971) High Schools.

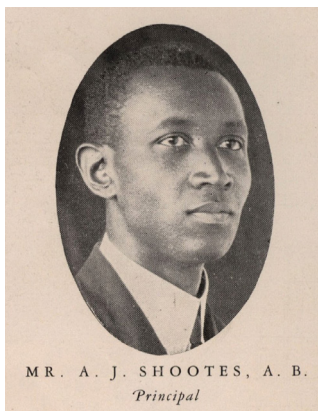
In the early 1900s, Middleton chaired the local committee that brought Mr. Washington to Tampa. At the Casino building in Tampa's Plant Park on March 4, 1912, Washington gave an inspirational speech to a rare Tampa mixture of Black and White audience members – separated by white sheets strung down the middle of the Casino ballroom. The historical marker in front of BTW tells this story. In addition to advocating for Negro education, especially in the industrial arts, Washington successfully persuaded Blacks in Tampa to support the Tampa Negro Board of Trade, fashioned after his National Negro Board of Trade. This encouraged dozens of Blacks to open businesses on Central Avenue – the "Harlem of the South."

In 1922, the Hillsborough County Board of Education appointed thirty-two year old Blanche Mae Armwood Beatty as the county's first Supervisor of Negro Education. Under Armwood Beatty's supervision, BTW School opened. Prior to that time, the few Black students in Tampa who went beyond 8th grade, attended classes at the Gilchrist Institute, located on the East side of town in Historic Belmont Heights. The international African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church supported Gilchrist.



**Booker T. Washington**

A. J. Shootes was BTW's first principal. The more spacious BTW campus allowed growing Black youngsters to spread their wings: the school had a basketball court, an isolated band and choral building. There was an acre or two of land for a recreational area and football games on the south side of the campus. Nearby were



***Principal A.J. Shootes. This photo is reprinted from Excelsior: The Senior Class Annual of Booker T, Washington High School. Floridiana Collection, USF Libraries – Tampa Special Collections, University of South Florida.***

dozens of wood-frame shotgun houses and apartment buildings, an icehouse and the popular Marti-Maceo Clubhouse for Afro-Cubans and other Blacks.

Ybor's heartbeat – Seventh Avenue – was a mere three blocks away. And the bustling Central Avenue was only a ten-minute walk from BTW (students who occasionally cut classes, when detected by Principal Howard Wesley Blake, could sprint back to the school in less than five minutes).

Today – 100 years later – one of the original 1925 red brick BTW buildings still has active classrooms. The basketball court, the separate band and choral building are gone but the playground still is there. The one original building used now is surrounded by additions built after 1955. This makes BTW one of the county's oldest school classroom sites that has been continuously used since 1925.

Men including Ferrell, Middleton and Wade Perrin joined women like educators Christina Meacham, Georgette Gardner and Armwood Beatty as advocates for this first junior-senior high school facility built for Tampa's growing Black population. Mr. Middleton died in 1933, and the new high school was named for him a year later. Ferrell's son, Andrew Jr., was principal at Middleton from 1959, until the school was converted into an eighth and ninth-grade center in 1971. Meacham Elementary School existed from 1926 to 2009, in the midst of the Scrub and, beginning in the 1950s, Central Park Village Apartments. The Meacham Urban Farm, three blocks away, replaced the Meacham school and its campus near BTW. Armwood High School opened in Seffner, Florida in 1984, near land Blanche's family owned in the early 1900s.

Before the Great Depression, business was booming and Tampa was known as the Cigar Capitol of the World. Most of the city's nearly 200 cigar factories were in West Tampa or in Ybor City just a few blocks away from BTW. Many Black students walked past the Ybor City factories every morning and afternoon going to and from school. Former BTW student Rev. Abraham R. Brown recalled how his brother, Robert, learned to speak Spanish and was one of the few African Americans who worked at a Tampa cigar factory.

While Cubans, Italians, Spaniards and Sicilians flocked to Ybor City and to West Tampa to work in the cigar factories, in corner stores and on construction jobs, thousands of Black men and women raised their children in segregated neighborhoods near BTW – the Garrison, the Scrub, Western Ybor City (Afro-Cubans) and sections of Tampa Heights. They worked on the docks of the Garrison Channel and in Port

Tampa, on road and construction crews, as porters and doormen in downtown buildings and as maids, cooks, chauffeurs, grounds keepers and waiters in South Tampa. Black parents sent their children to join others as BTW Hornets and to prepare them for opportunities that most of them never had due to their color.

Because of segregation that lasted legally until the Civil Rights era of the late 1960s and early 1970s, White families had their separate schools in Tampa and across the South. So too did local fair-skinned Hispanic students. The color line separated every child. Black Hispanics, regardless of their national origin, went to school only with other Hispanic and/or with Black American students until 1971.

Still, by 1925, opportunities to get an education had never been better for Tampa's Black youngsters. Before then, Black children who got as far as high school (and did not have to drop out of school to go to work to help their families survive) attended the former Gilchrist Institute in East Tampa's Historic Belmont Heights community. Gilchrist was built in 1907 to educate Black children in that fast-growing section of the city. By 1925, this school was known as Thomas Lomax School and in the first part of the Twentieth Century, it served first through twelfth grade.

The brilliant young woman Blanche Armwood Beatty had graduated with honors from St. Peter Claver Catholic School in Tampa's Scrub community at the age of twelve. She then qualified for a Florida State teachers' certificate. And by sixteen, she had earned a college degree from Spelman Seminary in Atlanta, Ga. Armwood Beatty then returned to Tampa to teach. It was one of the few relatively well-paying professions available then for an educated, well-bred woman of color.

Armwood Beatty was one of the most accomplished Black citizens in the state in the early 1900s. In the late 1920s, Blanche served as the assistant principal at BTW before moving to Washington, D. C. to help care for her parents. While living there, she graduated from Howard University School of Law.



***Blanche Armwood Beatty***

Blanche lived an extraordinary life as a pioneer in the home economics field, an author, expert in the field of food preservation and a public speaker. Before she could begin her law practice, Blanche died of natural causes at the age of 49. Blanche Armwood Beatty Washington (she married for a third time later in life) is buried in the L'Unione Italiana Cemetery near the historic Belmont Heights neighborhood.

When G. S. Middleton High School opened in Historic Belmont Heights in 1934, many BTW teachers and staff members transferred to the new secondary school. From 1933 until his death in 1954, Blake was principal at BTW Junior High School. He was a stern disciplinarian who required the best out of his students, faculty and staff. His 21-year tenure at Washington is the longest of any principal in the school's history.



***Booker T. Washington High School graduating class posed outside of building in caps and gowns on May 23, 1945.***

My father, Samuel Hearn, attended BTW from 1943-1945 and played basketball there, in high school and in college. The experience led to a career as a coach and high school principal. BTW gave him lifelong friendships and thousands of other BTW students had similar success stories. In 1960, I entered BTW under Principal Ben D. Griffin, played

in the marching band and left there in 1963, well prepared for high school.

Months before I entered BTW as a seventh-grade student in the fall of 1960, a 20-year-old barber from Alachua County, Florida became president of the Tampa Branch of the NAACP Youth Council. Clarence Fort was very familiar with Southern racism and discrimination. He had heard about the sit-in movement that got major press coverage on February 1, 1960, at a Greensboro, North Carolina F. W. Woolworth Department Store. Four Black students at North Carolina A&T State University bravely sat at a lunch counter there asking to be served. They knew they would be ignored but they boldly stood for justice and equality while sitting down. Fort thought, "Why can't we do the same thing in Tampa?"

He visited Booker T. Washington Junior High School, Middleton and Blake High Schools recruiting students to begin a sit-in movement at Tampa's Woolworth Department Store, located at 801 Franklin Street. With the protection of Tampa Mayor Julian B. Lane and his police department from would-be mob violence, the Tampa sit-ins began. The peaceful Black student demonstrators returned again and again to Woolworth for months until they finally were served. Other adult leaders got involved in a city-wide sit-in movement, spearheaded by James Hammond and his Young Adults for Progressive Action (YAPA). And with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Tampa's walls of segregation in public accommodations began slowly to crumble.

In the fall of 1971, under federal court order, the Hillsborough County School Board desegregated all its public schools. BTW then became a desegregated seventh-grade center. For the first time in its history, White students attended classes at BTW. In 1981, BTW was converted back to a junior high school. And from 1996 through 2003, the school served the community as a Magnet Middle School for International Studies.



***Author Fred Hearns standing at the podium for the 1963 induction ceremony of the Booker T. Washington Junior High School National Junior Honor Society. This photograph was taken when Mr. Hearns was in the ninth grade on March 1, 1963.***



Today the community surrounding BTW looks vastly different from the way it did in the 1960s. The school still is surrounded by a few familiar historic churches, the Tampa Park Apartments and by the Tampa Park Playground. Today BTW is a PreK-5 School, attached to the Robert W. Saunders Public Library by a covered, now secured, gated walkway. The public library opened in 2015, with the concept of a BTW-Public Library Partnership. But the children's library was relocated during the 2020 pandemic crisis. Nearby, there are dozens of new apartment buildings adjacent to several sixty-year-old vacant two-story units. The adjacent Historic Tampa Park Plaza has newer business tenants. The Barrio Latino Commission's architectural review board reviews all exterior updates to BTW and to all Ybor buildings. Thus, upkeep of BTW over the years has continued to feature the signature red brick walls and the square, white wood-framed windows that say to the world "Welcome to Ybor City!"

And on its centennial birthday, Booker T. Washington still is located where a BTW School has stood for a century -- 1407 E. Estelle (formerly Blanche) Street. Now seventy-eight percent (78%) of BTW's students are rated economically disadvantaged. Sixty percent (60%) of the children there are Black, 30% are Hispanic/Latino and 6% are White. But the school teaches students to rise above negative statistical labels and to reach for the stars. BTW School's importance in Hillsborough County is a testament to the vision of a school district that values the virtues of education, historic preservation and culture.

Happy Birthday, Booker T. Washington PreK-5 School!



## About the Author

Fred Hearn is the Curator of Black History at the Tampa Bay History Center. Previously, he served the City of Tampa for more than thirty years, retiring in 2007 as the Director of Community Affairs. He has a Master of Arts Degree in Human Services from Springfield College, and a Master of Science degree in Africana Studies from the University of South Florida.



# The Rocky Romance of D. P. Davis and Elizabeth Nelson

*By Rodney Kite-Powell  
Director, Touchton Map Library  
Tampa Bay History Center*

Of the dozens of stories perpetuated about Davis Islands developer David P. Davis, few are as salacious as the ones that surround his marriage, divorce, and remarriage to Elizabeth Nelson. The story began during the heady days of the Florida Land Boom. Blessed with success, cash and an extraordinary ego, Davis cast his determined stare in a more personal direction. One of the enduring legends regarding Davis at this time centers on what seemed his almost absurd New Year's Eve declaration that he would marry the next queen of Gasparilla. Davis once again, the legend goes, showed he could accomplish anything he truly desired, marrying twenty-two-year-old Nelson, Queen Gasparilla XVII, on October, 10, 1925, one month shy of his fortieth birthday.



*David P. Davis, developer of Davis Islands*



*Crowds watching Gasparilla pirate corsair on Hillsborough River, in front of the Atlantic Coast Line Freight Depot.*

Assuming the story of the boast is true, how did Davis manage to fulfill his daring prediction? The naming of the court of Gasparilla is a secret, but it is decided in advance of the February coronation ball. Davis had a number of connections within Ye Mystic Krewe of Gasparilla (some sources list Davis as a

member), and it is quite likely that he knew Nelson would be elected queen. During this era in Gasparilla's history, the queen was usually the previous year's first maid, and Nelson was first maid in 1924. The true mystery centers on their relationship during the time just before his New Year's Eve boast and their wedding day. It is unknown whether or not they had a secret relationship or if he had an unrequited desire for her, using his boast to gain her interest and attention. It is also possible, but much less likely, that he did not care who the next queen would be. We will probably never know.



*Elizabeth Nelson,  
1925 Gasparilla Queen*

Davis and Nelson married eight months after the Gasparilla coronation ball, on the afternoon of October 10, 1925, at the "Presbyterian manse" in Clearwater (possibly Peace Memorial Presbyterian Church on Fort Harrison Avenue and Pierce Street). The only people to attend the hastily planned wedding were Nelson's sister Ruth Rorebeck and Raymond Schindler, one of Davis's business associates. The Nelson-Davis wedding was a surprise to many, not the least of whom included the Nelson and Davis families.

Tampa's two daily newspapers, the Morning Tribune and Daily Times, each ran stories about the wedding in the following day's editions. Both papers related the basic facts, including Nelson's status as the reigning queen of Gasparilla. The Tribune's headline, "D.P. Davis and Elizabeth Nelson, Prominent Tampans, Are Married in Clearwater; Surprise Families," topped that day's feature stories.

The writer mentioned that "members of the immediate families were not informed that the wedding would take place during the afternoon until a short time before Mr. Davis and Miss Nelson left Tampa for Clearwater." The Daily Times article also addressed the secrecy behind the marriage, stating, "There were occasional rumors of the romance, but the marriage...came as a complete surprise." The paper further alluded to her age, stating that she was "one of the most popular members of the younger set here."

The honeymoon apparently was short-lived. Davis and Nelson divorced and remarried in the span of eight weeks. To say that Nelson's family, particularly her parents, did not like Davis would be an understatement. Rumor and innuendo flew as to the real reasons why the couple's relationship was particularly stormy.

By this time, Davis had developed a substantial drinking problem, becoming a prominent symbol of Prohibition colliding with the Jazz Age. Like many men of his time, including Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher, Davis enjoyed the advantage Florida's coastline provided bootleggers who brought illicit alcohol into the state. While no evidence exists showing Davis's drinking affected his work, contemporaries acknowledge that it brought out his melancholy side and greatly affected his personal life. Many of Nelson's relatives — including her brother, grandson (from her second marriage) and great-nieces and nephews, plus Davis's son George — have related stories of Davis's poor treatment of Nelson.

Perhaps the cruelest thing he did was trick her into divorce by slipping their divorce papers among a stack of other paperwork she needed to sign for D.P. Davis Properties. Though Nelson signed the document without realizing it, she followed through with the divorce proceedings, which occurred before Judge J.B. Browne of the Monroe County Circuit Court. Judge Browne granted the divorce on the grounds of "habitual intemperance."

The decree was granted on November 4, just shy of three weeks after the marriage and less than one week after they returned from their honeymoon. The Nelson family was likely happy with the divorce and was decidedly unhappy with the reconciliation. Davis and Nelson remarried on December 11. Newspapers said that "reports that friends and relatives of the bride had rejoiced over the reconciliation were denied by E.K. Nelson, Jr., brother of the bride" — hardly the welcome return that Davis had hoped for from his brother-in-law. Nevertheless, Davis and Nelson had reunited, but it was clear that their situation had not changed.

Davis and Nelson separated again, this time in mid-1926. She went to London, then on to Paris, in September of that year, and he booked passage on a luxury liner to France in October. He never made it.

***This article was reprinted with permission from the author. Originally published by the Tampa Tribune on August 11, 2013, and online: [tampabayhistorycenter.org/blog/the-rocky-romance-of-d-p-davis-and-elizabeth-nelson/](http://tampabayhistorycenter.org/blog/the-rocky-romance-of-d-p-davis-and-elizabeth-nelson/)***



## About the Author

Rodney Kite-Powell is the Director of the Touchton Map Library at the Tampa Bay History Center. He received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Florida and a Master of Arts from the University of South Florida, both in American History. He is the author of three books, including *History of Davis Islands: David P. Davis and the Story of a Landmark Tampa Neighborhood*, and *Tampa*

*Bay's Waterfront: Its History and Development*, co-authored with Arthur Savage. He was appointed by the Hillsborough County Historical Advisory Council as Hillsborough County Historian in 2019.







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