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This issue of *Tampa Bay History* is dedicated to Tony Pizzo, who died earlier this year. Tony as he was known to everyone was a friend of history in general and *Tampa Bay History* in particular. Born and raised in Ybor City, this successful businessman became convinced of the importance of documenting the rich heritage of his home town "The Cracker Village with a Latin Accent" as he called Tampa in the title of his book focusing on the nineteenth century. Tony was an amateur historian, in the best sense of the word - a word derived from the French *amour*, love. Beginning in the late 1940s, he devoted increasing amounts of time to collecting everything imaginable—from pamphlets and letters to photographs and artifacts that somehow related to Tampa's past, especially the contributions of Latin immigrants like his grandparents. Tony's infectious enthusiasm and salesmanship enlisted the support of a legion of politicians, businessmen, academics, and citizens, all of whom contributed in a variety of ways to his crusade to preserve Tampa's past. A founder and first president of the Tampa Historical Society, Tony was also a permanent fixture on the Board of Advisors of *Tampa Bay History*, which he generously provided with countless documents and photographs and unflagging morale support.

The passing of Tony Pizzo causes us to pause and reflect on his life and his many contributions to the history of the Tampa Bay area. All but one of the articles in this issue focus on Tony and his accomplishments. The exception is the opening article by Wes Singletary who examines "The Early Baseball Career of Al Lopez" another product of Ybor City. All other articles deal with Tony Pizzo as chronicler and collector of local history. "Tony Pizzo's Ybor City" is an interview of Tony that was conducted in 1979. "Tampa's Cuban Heritage" is a largely autobiographical piece by Tony that looks at his involvement in reviving linkages with Cuba and promoting Tampa's Latin heritage. Finally, Thomas Kemp and Paul Camp use a photo essay to reveal the scope of the "Tony Pizzo Collection," which is now housed in the Special Collections Department of the University of South Florida Library. This collection constitutes Tony's permanent legacy to students of local history.

In addition to articles and book reviews, this issue includes an index of *Tampa Bay History* for the past five years. The completion of fifteen years of publication also brings with it a necessary increase in the cost of subscriptions, which are rising to $18 annually. Only the second increase since publication began, the new price would be higher if not for the generosity of numerous subscribers listed in the Acknowledgments on the pages 2 and 3 who contribute significant additional funds to support *Tampa Bay History*.

We hope you enjoy this special issue, and we look forward to your continued support.
THE EARLY BASEBALL CAREER OF AL LOPEZ
by Wes Singletary

In the fall of 1924, a barnstorming team of big league baseball players came through Tampa, Florida, on an exhibition tour, planning to play either intra-squad games or local amateur teams. When they arrived in Tampa, they felt that it might be a good idea to get one of the local Latin youths to play with them in the hope that it would aid the expected turnout of Latin fans from nearby Ybor City. The young man selected to play with this team of major-league veterans was a modestly built, sixteen-year-old catcher named Alfonso Ramon Lopez.1

Upon being asked to catch, the equally thrilled and scared Lopez inquired who would be pitching. "Walter Johnson," they replied. "Do you think you can catch him?" In response the young Lopez answered that he did not know but that he would try. Walter Johnson, considered by many to be the fastest and possibly the greatest pitcher ever to play the game, could be a challenge to the most veteran receiver much less to a high school catcher. The game was advertised as Walter Johnson pitching and Al Lopez catching. The fact that a sixteen year old received equal billing with the great Walter Johnson gives some indication of the players’ desire to attract a good crowd.2

Before the game began, Johnson took the understandably nervous Lopez aside and instructed him not to call for too many curve balls. Lopez responded, "Mr. Johnson, you throw whatever you want to; I'll put down the sign and if you don't want it then shake it off." Johnson advised Lopez that he would only let it all out against a couple of hitters that had traditionally given him a hard time, Ike Boone and Jack Fornier. That settled, the game commenced, and Lopez, not surprising those who knew him, "caught Johnson good."3 After the contest Johnson, the "Big Train," told a listener, "That boy did real well back there; handled himself fine."4

Al Lopez was just beginning to handle himself in a manner others perceived as fine. By the time this Tampa native and son of Spanish immigrants finished with baseball, he had enjoyed a lengthy and distinguished career as a player and manager and won election to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

During his major league playing career of eighteen years in the National League and one in the American, he was on a first division club nine times, yet most of those teams finished no better than fourth. The 1944 Pittsburgh Pirates gave him his highest finish, placing second that year. His teams were always struggling because they rarely had good pitching depth and never seemed to have the means to get any. Chances were, if a deal had to be made to obtain a pitcher, Lopez would be the player traded. Durability typified his playing days, and he established a then record for most games caught in a career at 1,918, a mark that held up for many years.5

As a manager, he led teams that finished first or second in eleven of his sixteen seasons. Beloved and appreciated by most players, Al Lopez always managed by the rule that if the players respected him he would respect them.6 His 1954 Cleveland Indians team won the American League pennant with a record 111 victories, which continues to stand today. In 1959 Lopez led an unheralded and seemingly under-talented Chicago White Sox club to his second American League crown. These were the only two teams in sixteen years to overtake the powerful New
York Yankees for the American League championship. Clearly, Al Lopez compiled an impressive big league record and like most major leaguers, he had honed his skills in the minor leagues.

Lopez began his career with the Tampa Smokers, the local professional team. While still a teenager and through his play in Tampa’s municipal leagues, Lopez had attracted the attention of a sportswriter named “Montoto,” who worked for La Traducción, an Ybor City, Spanish-language newspaper, and who encouraged the sixteen-year-old catcher to try out with the Tampa Smokers. Lopez, who at the time was working as a delivery boy for an Italian bakery owned by Angelo Ferlita, was eager for the chance. The Smokers were just beginning to organize their Class D, Florida State League team for the 1925 season and were in the market for promising young talent. The 1924 season had ended with the financially strapped Florida State League disbanding, and people in the community hoped to rebuild the franchise and the league. The games were to be played at Plant Field near the University of Tampa.

An independent, partially subsidized minor league club, the Smokers were taken over by Dr. H. E. Opre who it was thought had made some money in real estate. Opre took control of the Smokers from an ownership group known as the Tampa Athletic Association, which had initially organized the team for 1925. When told by these investors that the Smokers would certainly go under without financial support, Dr. Opre’s civic pride was aroused, and he decided to step in, seeing the team through the season, and if possible, to bring a pennant to Tampa.
Initially, Dr. Opre had to pay a large number of obligations before the club could be placed in good standing, and this he did from his own pocket. Even though Dr. Opre anticipated heavy operating expenses for the season, he hoped that the Tampa fans would turn out in larger numbers than ever before, thereby easing the costs involved.11

If the financial backbone of the Smokers was Dr. Opre, then its driving force was "Doc" Nance, who "was the guy that formed the team and ran the whole club," according to Lopez.12 Ably assisted by Ray Parmely, Montoto and other local newspaper men, Nance got busy and eventually rounded up more than seventy-five men to try-out for the available roster positions. Of those first players selected, only Nance and Allen remained at the end of the season.13

Montoto gave Lopez a note and told him to go see Doc Nance. Nance frequented a pool room called the "Horseshoe" which was located on Franklin Street close to the corner of Twiggs. The Horseshoe was often used as a center for bookmaking on horse races and ballgames. When Lopez arrived at the pool hall, he had to wait outside because he was still a minor. Nance, who was in the back and expecting Lopez, came out to meet the young prospect, and Lopez handed him the note from Montoto. Upon reading the note, Nance asked, "How much money do you want to play?" Lopez replied, "I don't know anything about money or contracts or anything like this." Nance responded, "How does $150 a month sound to you?" Exasperated, the young catcher quickly accepted. Lopez then quit both Sacred Heart High School (now Jesuit High School) and his job at Ferlita's bakery to sign a minor league baseball contract.14 Today Lopez recalls that he
felt like he was stealing by being paid to play ball. (Years later, an ironic twist to this story developed when Doc Nance became the grounds keeper at Al Lopez Field in Tampa.)

As Al’s parents, Modesto and Faustina Lopez, were only moderately well off and had little hope of Al attending college or even progressing further in high school, they did not object to his playing baseball for a living. However, they did tell him that if he did not make it in baseball, he would have to get a job. With the threat of a possible cigar factory career looming over his horizon, Al Lopez set out to perform the only job that he ever wanted - to be a professional baseball player.

John Bowman and Joel Zoss, authors of *Diamonds in the Rough: the Untold History of Baseball*, quote baseball historian Steven Reiss's belief that the game was more successful in helping to socialize and integrate Americans during the 1920s than ever before. While today Hispanic-Americans seem "omnipresent and indispensable" on baseball teams throughout the United States, it was not always so. Who, then, were the first Latin ballplayers? Upon the establishment of the first professional baseball league in 1871, the National Association of Professional Baseball Players, Cuban-born Esteban Bellan was listed as a player for the Troy (New York) Haymakers. Bellan proved to be well ahead of his times.

The first legitimate Latin-American baseball star was the pitcher Adolfo "Dolf " Luque. Known as the "Pride of Havana," Luque, a smart and crafty hurler, joined the Boston Braves in 1914 and began to earn a respectable 193179 record over a twenty-year career in the majors that saw him pitch for several teams. Between Luque and the 1947 arrival of Jackie Robinson, another forty or so Latins played in the major leagues. However, "the issue of who was Latin and who was black and who was both or neither is extremely complicated." There were also scores of Latin ballplayers floundering for years in the minors during this period, and no one can ever know how many of them might well have deserved to have been brought up to the majors.

In 1925, sixteen-year-old Al Lopez of the Tampa Smokers participated in this early entry of Latin ballplayers into professional baseball. Although his parents were Spanish, Lopez grew up in a Cuban-dominated community which has a passion for *beisbal*. The roots of this fascination with a North American sport lay in Cuba, where baseball was introduced in the 1860s. Cubans organized teams and leagues in the late nineteenth century, as "baseball fever" swept the county," according to one historian. Thus, Cuban immigrants were already fanatical baseball fans when they arrived in Tampa, and Latins turned out in big numbers to watch the Tampa Smokers play. The cigarmakers of Ybor City, arguably Tampa's strongest baseball fans, were paid on "piece time." Whatever amount of cigars they had produced by the time they left work is what they were paid for. The Smokers’ games usually started at 3:15 p.m., so having made sure that their wages for the day were earned by 2:30, cigarmakers could leave their factories and journey to nearby Plant Field for the games.

Tampa’s Latins were also prone to wager on the ball games although the Smokers were hardly the only bet in town. Lopez remembers Tampa as "wide open" with regard to gambling. "Oh yeah, they bet like hell! They loved to bet. At that time gambling in Tampa was wide open. There were gambling houses with roulette wheels, dice, any kind of gambling you could ask for."
Aside from Tampa, the Florida State League consisted of Class D teams from St. Petersburg, Lakeland, Sarasota, Orlando, and Sanford. Travel to and from the different towns for the games was made difficult by poor roads connecting the towns and the use of private cars. St. Petersburg was the easiest route due to the recent construction of Gandy Bridge which spanned Tampa Bay for the first time. As Lopez recalls, "before the bridge was built, we used to take Memorial Highway and go up around Clearwater, Largo, in there, just to get to St. Pete. It was about sixty miles and a terrible drive. Memorial Highway was just one-lane pavement. If another car was coming from the other direction, you would have to slow down and give him half of the road. When we went to Sanford it was another terrible trip. Tampa to Lakeland was a tough drive in those days. You had to pass through Mango, Seffner, Kissimmee, and then into Orlando, the other side of Lakeland, just to get there."

Once the ordeal of travel was behind them, the teams usually played in front of surprisingly large crowds. "We'd have 1,000 to 1,500 people at the games, but the prices were cheap," Lopez later emphasized. "They [the teams] were collecting $1,000 a game, probably a little more than that. By the end of the year a team might get lucky and break even. If they broke even during the season then they would profit if they sold one player."

Lopez was almost sold before he ever played an inning for the Smokers. During spring training for the start of the 1925 season and shortly after signing to play for the Smokers, Lopez was asked by the Washington Senators if he wanted a job as their batting practice catcher for spring
training. Lopez was known to the Senators because of his having caught their star pitcher Walter Johnson that off season in an exhibition game. Lopez explained that "in those days they [major league teams] didn't bring ten or eleven catchers to spring training like they do now. They would only bring two or three. But, because they took hours of batting practice and also had a number of pitchers to warm up, they would need some help. The manager that year was Bucky Harris and they offered me expenses plus $45 a week if I would just catch batting practice. I thought that was great because I would have done it for nothing. Just to put the Washington uniform on was a great experience. The Senators would also carry me to the exhibition games with them so that I could catch [pre-game] batting practice for them. I got to see great players then, guys like Zach Wheat of Brooklyn. Wheat was a picture at the plate, hitting."27

During that spring, the catching and all-round hustle of Lopez caught the eye of a trainer for the Senators named Mike Martin. He suggested to team owner Calvin Griffith that it might be a good idea to purchase the contract of the young catcher, because "he loves to play ball and has good potential." However, upon inquiring with the Smokers about buying the rights to Lopez, the Washington trainer was shocked at the asking price of $10,000. The Senators responded that he was an unproven kid and that they would pay $1,000. The Smokers refused the counter-offer, and Al Lopez remained the property of the Tampa club.28

During that 1925 season with the Smokers, Al kept company with two other Spanish-speaking players on the team. "One Cuban boy, Oscar Estrada, they brought him from Cuba, played the outfield, pitched and played first-base. Good player. He was sold to the Boston Braves after the season. The other fellow I luckily roomed with, named Caesar Alvarez. He was an old man,
about thirty-two. He had been pitching quite a while. He spoke English, but, you know, English like I did I guess (broken). Caesar had married a Spanish girl from Tampa and she had her family here. While on the road, we would go out at night to eat or to a movie, because we played all day games. Get up in the morning, have breakfast, then go over to the ballpark and play your game."

The Smokers played most of their away games in "Cracker towns" where fans would use colorful expletives to bait and hopefully rile the opposing players, but it seems not to have bothered Al Lopez. He simply states that whether the abuse was from the fans or the rival players, it was all part of the game. "They do that all over in baseball. They want to get under your skin. People would call me a ‘Cuban Nigger’ or something like that, and I'm not even Cuban." In retrospect, on the topic of racial or ethnic prejudice in baseball, Lopez thinks that maybe he was just too young to realize when it may have been directed at him. "I treated everybody like I wanted to be treated. If a guy treated me badly then I just didn't bother with him. I never had this minority thing handicap me in anyway. I'm Spanish and proud of it." Al points out that he would eventually play all of his minor league baseball in the South and remembers that he was "treated royally" at every stop.

On the topic of how he perceived the treatment afforded those first black players in organized baseball, Lopez is frank and yet almost painfully blunt: "I think that the news media made more of that than there actually was. Yes, there was some riding of the players. They rode me, not just the black players; and the Anglo players as well and if you can't stand the heat then get out. Jackie Robinson weighed about 220 lbs, hell of an athlete. He was so strong, run, could do everything, great athlete. You mean to say that somebody was going to pick on him? If it was me, named Lopez, weighing 160 pounds, I could see it." When questioned regarding the off-field abuse that Jackie Robinson and the others endured, including death threats and sub-standard living accommodations, Lopez was quick to state that he knew little of that. His concern was on the field, and as such, he may have been blinded to many of the indignities that black players suffered during those historic times. Evidencing just such blindness, and in a statement somewhat devoid of compassion, Lopez opined that Larry Doby (the first black player in the American League and one of Lopez’s players while managing Cleveland) could have been a "Hall of Famer" if he had not played his entire career with the pressure of being the first black in the American League and not always felt like he was fighting everybody. This statement, in characteristic Lopez fashion, sought to emphasize the slant on baseball, thereby keeping the issue of race between the chalked lines.

Perhaps it was because Lopez more easily fit into the overtly "Caucasian" world of organized baseball that he failed to recognize the disparities in treatment afforded minorities of differing skin tone. One has only to look at Al Lopez or at pictures of him during his playing days to note that he did not display the stereotypical dark-completed physical traits associated with most Latin people, particularly Cubans. It may be that the racial slurs never bothered Lopez precisely because he never really considered himself a minority. "I never had this minority thing handicap me in anyway," Lopez recently emphasized. "I'm Spanish and proud of it." Thus, Cubans and blacks might be lumped as one in the same but not Spaniards and blacks nor even Spaniards and Cubans, for in the Ybor City of Lopez's youth, the differences between the groups
were obvious and respected. Al Lopez never felt like a minority because to his way of thinking he had never been one.

In his first year of professional baseball, Lopez did not see much playing. Because the Smokers were in a "good Class D" league, the sixteen year old found veteran minor league catcher Gene "Old Folks" Hudgins playing in front of him. "Whenever 'Old Folks' was behind the plate," chimed the *Tampa Tribune*, "the pitcher in the box felt his confidence grow as he knew that he had a backstop with years of experience behind him and who knew the finer points of the game and just how to work a pitcher." Lopez clearly recalls, "That year I didn't hardly catch until the latter part of the season.... We played in the playoffs with St. Petersburg, and I had a good series that year." Yet, *Who's Who in Baseball*, a statistical abstract of the game, does not indicate that he played at all but merely lists him as one of the players on the roster. Whoever, however, was clearly mistaken.

The Smokers, as with most minor league organizations, found their ballplayers throughout the country and were by no means limited to players from the Tampa area. Lopez well remembers the makeup of the squad.

They brought them from all over. In fact, my first year with the Smokers the team was supposed to have two rookies that had never played pro ball, and they were allowed to have two "classmen" -ballplayers who had played higher classification than "D" ball. So what happened was that we came up with some ballplayers who had played within the junior leagues which was class "B," and they changed some of their names to get them on our roster. One guy, Jimmy Snead, changed his name from Schneider to Snead, and things like that, because they wanted to get away with playing. They wanted to have a good team, which we did. We finally ended up with a good team but the league found out that we had too many classmen. We had four on our roster instead of the [mandated] two. Two of the four were pitchers and so was the manager (Jimmy Snead had taken over the managerial duties) and the catcher, Gene Hudgins. We finally ended up keeping the two pitchers. The manager then changed his name to maintain eligibility and the catcher was let go as a classman and that is when I got my break to start catching.

Hudgins, however, with the approval of the St. Petersburg club, was brought back at the end of the season for the playoffs. Had Lopez not played at all in 1925, as *Who's Who* indicates, then his "break" to begin catching could not have occurred.

Fortunately, the *Tampa Tribune* sets the record straight with its coverage of the 1925 Florida State League pennant race. "Young Alfonso Lopez" was described as having ably filled the place of catcher when Hudgins was released. "He came through not only in the regular season but performed brilliantly in the series." Over the final two weeks of the season and league playoffs, Lopez performed like a grizzled veteran and not the seventeen year old he had recently become. He tore up the opposition by batting .388. (He hit .294 in the league championship.) During this two-week period the Smokers were locked in a pitched battle with the Lakeland Highlanders over first place for the second half of the season and the right to face the St. Petersburg Saints, the first half champions, in the league playoffs. With the heat of a stretch run, the Smokers, strapped by having to play with the inexperienced Lopez behind the plate, began a nine game home and home series with St. Petersburg, to be followed by a six game home and home series against Lakeland.

In St. Petersburg, the Smokers took the first two games and advanced their league lead to two and a half games over Lakeland. They then stretched the lead to three and a half by taming the
Saints 10-2 in their final game of the season across the bay. Caesar Alvarez allowed just six hits while going the distance for Tampa.42

When the two teams returned to Tampa, the Smokers opened it by edging St. Petersburg 1-0 behind the four-hit pitching of the Cuban, Oscar Estrada. Estrada, who during the season had played as much in the outfield as on the mound, continued to show the form that would make him a 1925 signee of the Boston Braves. (Estrada made it to the major leagues in 1929 with the St. Louis Browns. His stint was, however, short lived as he pitched one inning of one game and gave up a hit and a walk.) The following day, Tampa and St. Petersburg split their final double-header, thereby giving Tampa a .710 to .662 lead over second-place Lakeland, going into their final regular season match-up.43

The next week in Lakeland, the Highlanders got six-hit pitching from their ace, Watt Luther, and came away with an unnerving 3-0 shutout. Twice the Smokers filled the bases only to have their hot bats knotted by Luther's "viciously breaking" curveball. But Tampa battled back the following day as Al Lopez went three-for-three, leading a thirteen hit attack to beat Lakeland 6-4 and clinch the second half league title. This gave the Smokers the right to play arch-rival St. Petersburg in the postseason.44

The next day, the Smokers won the coin toss, and it was announced that the playoffs would commence in Tampa the following week. However, due to Centro Asturiano's having already reserved Plant Field to stage a bull fight, the championship opener shifted to St. Peters burg.45

The playoffs began with Tampa edging the Saints 7-6 in a contest marked by "terrific slugging." The two teams combined for twenty-three hits, eleven of which were for extra bases. In game two, St. Petersburg, aided by two costly errors, tied the series at one each. The Saints' ace, Hewitt, was masterful in allowing just four hits over nine innings. Game three was much the same, with St. Petersburg moving ahead for a two to one series advantage.46

Game four witnessed the Smokers' bats rekindle for thirteen hits, and Tampa won the contest 9-6, tying the series at two even. Pitching marked the following day's game as Caesar Alvarez strode to the mound for Tampa while St. Petersburg countered with their ace, Hewitt. The stingy Alvarez proved the better as he allowed only three "widely scattered" base hits during the nine innings, and Tampa came away a 5-1 winner. During the contest the normally amicable Lopez and the veteran Charlie Allen were thrown out of the game for arguing balls and strikes with the umpire. After being called out on strikes to end an inning, Lopez, who was plainly disgusted, confronted the umpire upon returning to take his place behind the plate. The entire Tampa team then crowded around the umpire shouting in defense of Lopez, with Charlie Allen the most vocal of the group. After a few minutes the umpire called for a policeman, and three answered his call. These "minions" of the law then escorted the ejected Lopez and Allen from the field. In game six Oscar Estrada had one bad inning, but it was enough to give St. Petersburg a 4-1 win and tie the series once again.47

Locked at three games apiece, the two best teams in the Florida State League squared off in the final and what turned out to be most exciting game of the season. The contest moved along briskly until the seventh inning when, with the score tied at one run, Hewitt of St. Petersburg grooved a fat one to Horace Hicks and the big Smoker ripped it down the first base line for a
triple. Emerson Welk then followed with a triple of his own to leftfield, knocking in Hicks and picking up the RBl. Bob Lee next bloopped a single bringing Welk home. Those two runs proved the difference as the Tampa Smokers secured a 3-1 victory, thereby clinching the 1925 Florida State League championship and giving Tampa the trophy for the first time in five years.48

The next season saw Lopez work himself into the starting line-up. In 1926 he had an outstanding average, batting .315 over a 116-game schedule. He also belted twelve triples and swiped a career-high of eighteen stolen bases.49 During that season A1 also began to experience the persona of celebrity status among his fellow Ybor City residents.

Lopez emerged as a folk hero for Tampa Latins. "Clearly he fostered a sense of pride among Latins who vicariously shared his success," according to two historians of Ybor City. Lopez himself did not notice any special attention at first. He recalls, "I was just one of the local guys and I lived in the area. I played around the clubs, played dominoes with them. I never figured I was a hero, but I guess that maybe I was." Tony Pizzo, a long-time resident of Ybor City and a chronicler of Tampa's ethnic history, recalled how groups would greet Lopez at the end of each season and parade him down Seventh Avenue in Ybor City. "Al Lopez was a real hero to everyone from Ybor City. It didn't matter that you were Spanish, Italian or what, we all stuck together."50 When asked if the people of Ybor City looked to Lopez with any special pride, Marcelo Maseda, a former professional baseball player and "Alcalde" or unofficial mayor of Ybor City responded, "Oh yeah! Everybody was proud of him."51 The celebrity status reflects the fact that Al Lopez was the first professional baseball player born and raised in Ybor City.

Following the 1926 season in Tampa, Lopez was drafted by the Jacksonville organization which had the higher "B" classification. He explains, "If you're not sold you can only play two years in one league, then you're subject to draft. So the Jacksonville team which had just started the year before drafted me to come up to Jacksonville."52 At Jacksonville the catching durability that Al Lopez would evidence throughout his career began to surface as he caught 128 games for the team - an outstanding number for a minor league catcher. While his batting average dipped to .276 from .315 at Tampa the year before, he improved his home-run production and continued to hit "three baggers" with ten for the season.53

Once again in Jacksonville, as he had while working briefly with the Washington Senators, Al Lopez began to attract the attention of major league scouts. Although the scouts did not initially come to see him play, they did observe enough of his talents to be impressed, as Lopez later recalled.

At Jacksonville, we had a pitcher by the name of Ben Cantwell. Cantwell was having a great year. A record of 25-5 or close to it by the early part of July. He would have won 40 games had he pitched all year. All the big league scouts at that time would come out to see him. In those days each team had only a few scouts and they would send those scouts into wherever a ballplayer was hot. Every time we played we must have had 6-8 scouts in the stands watching. Especially when Cantwell was pitching. For some reason or another, the Brooklyn scout, fellow by the name of Net Brook, took a liking to me. He notified the front office about me and said that he liked the catcher better than the pitcher. They told him if he liked the catcher to go ahead and buy him. So they made a deal for me for $10,000 and I was sold to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Lopez also remembers the deal with Brooklyn as one of his first exposures to the realities of baseball finance. "At the time they only gave the Jacksonville guy $1,000 down and the rest
would follow if they kept me. The Jacksonville guy told me that he would let me have a tenth of it if I made good. I said that's fine. I never did get anything.”

Lopez certainly intended to make good and started to prove it the following year at Macon, Georgia, in the South-Atlantic or "Sally" league. Only eighteen years old and just two years away from home, Lopez proved that he was in baseball to stay with an outstanding season which included a .326 batting average over 114 games caught. His most impressive statistic, however, was his sudden power display of fourteen home runs. Never again in his minor or major league career would Lopez hit that many home runs in a single season.

Whether it was the improvement in home-run production or simply his continued outstanding catching, Lopez was called up to the majors by the Brooklyn Dodgers for the last two and a half weeks of the 1928 season. Coming from Tampa and having played only in the small southern towns of Tampa, Jacksonville, and Macon, Lopez was "amazed" when he arrived in Brooklyn.

I got off at the station and luckily I ran into two guys that belonged to Brooklyn and had just been called up from Atlanta at the same time as I was [from Macon]. It was lucky for me because I was only eighteen years old and we took the subway. One of them had been there before; we took the subway and rode underneath the river, and up at the Brooklyn side of the island we got off. It was the first station we came to and by God there was a hotel right on top of the station, quite an experience. I thought that was amazing.

Less than amazing was his performance at Brooklyn in the closing weeks of the 1928 season. Lopez played in three games and came to the plate twelve times, but his hot Georgia bat seems to
have stayed in the South as he "wore the collar," going hitless in all twelve plate appearances. Lopez remembers that he didn't play much initially.

I sat around on the bench the final few weeks, not doing anything until the last weekend of the season. We were playing the Pirates and all of a sudden Wilbert Robinson put me in to catch. I found out later that the reason I caught was because Burleigh Grimes, the last of the great spitball pitchers, was facing us that day and none of the other catchers liked to hit against him; Burleigh was kind of mean. I caught that day and went 0 for 4. The next day we had a double header and 'Robbie' [Wilbert Robinson] let me catch both ends. This is when the Pirates had Pie Traynor and Glenn Wright on the left side of their infield. Well, I was strictly a pull hitter and I hit some good hard shots to the left side. I'd take off for first figuring I had myself a hit, but each time, to my astonishment, I saw that peg zinging into the first baseman's glove. I knew, I just knew, that at Macon those would have been hits. It was practically impossible to hit a ball past Traynor and Wright. I was 0 for 8 in that doubleheader and went home that fall wondering what a fellow had to do to get a base hit in the big leagues.57

Considering his age and relative inexperience, Lopez had accomplished something simply being at the plate in a big league uniform. To that point in major league history, only twelve men from the state of Florida could make the same claim. The distinction of having been the first major league baseball player from the State of Florida goes to Ralph McLaurin of Kissimmee, who debuted with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1908. McLaurin was in the majors just long enough for the proverbial "glass of water," as he went 5 for 22 at the plate over eight games and was never heard from again. The 1908 season was not a stellar year for the Cardinals either as they finished in the cellar with a 49 and 105 record. The poor season may have been the only reason that McLaurin made it to the majors at all. Between McLaurin and Al Lopez there were eleven other "Florida boys" who made it to the "show." Of these only Lance Richbourg of DeFuniak Springs and Johnny Burnett of Bartow saw any significant playing time. Richbourg debuted with the Boston Braves in 1921 and played until 1932. His best season was in 1928 when as an outfielder for the Braves he batted an outstanding .337 in 612 at bats. Richbourg was a lifetime .308 hitter. Johnny Burnett batted .284 over his nine seasons in the major leagues.58

Based upon his improvement during the 1928 season in the minors, Al Lopez was promoted to the AA Southern League Atlanta "Crackers" for the 1929 year. If the Brooklyn organization had any doubt that Al Lopez was a top prospect, it was dispelled at Atlanta. He ripped Southern League pitching- hitting .327 over 490 at bats. Lopez also banged ten home runs, nine triples, and twenty-one doubles while knocking in eighty-five runs.59 For this powerful minor league season, Lopez was paid the hefty sum of $575 a month.60

Al Lopez fondly remembers his years in the minor leagues. While there are many horror stories in baseball folklore about beating the bush and life on the bus, Lopez frankly believes that players during his period had it easier.

When you're young and all, you think that it's fun but actually you look back and... [maybe it wasn't.] The minor leagues, after I left them, got pretty tough traveling because they travel in buses. I was very fortunate because in Tampa we traveled by private car but when I went to Jacksonville we traveled by train most of the time. It was great, then I went to the South-Atlantic League with Macon and that was train. Atlanta traveled by train also. That was great compared to like they do now. They go now and play night games all the time. We used to play all day games because there was no lights. Played all day games at three o'clock. Now they play a night game, they're on the bus and down the road again. Or maybe a doubleheader finishing with a nightcap and then jump and maybe go 400 miles on a bus. Oh yeah, I was very lucky.61
Al Lopez playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers (c. 1931).

Photograph courtesy of the National Baseball Library, Cooperstown, New York.
In addition to luck, Lopez possessed the necessary skills to advance into the major leagues. After catching roughly 500 games in the minor leagues and only four years away from his debut with the Tampa Smokers, Al Lopez looked forward in 1930 to joining Wilbert Robinson and his "Daffiness Boys" in Brooklyn as a member of the major leagues on a full-time basis.

NOTES


2 Ibid., 180-81.


8 Steven F. Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball: An Interview with Al Lopez," *Tampa Bay History*, 7 (Fall/Winter 1985): 64.

9 Ibid., 68.

10 Tampa Tribune, September 15, 1925.

11 Ibid.

12 Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 64.

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14 Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 64.

15 Singletary, Interview of A1 Lopez.

16 Ibid.


18 Ibid., 130.

19 Ibid., 131.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

23 Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 69.

24 Ibid., 70.

25 Ibid., 71.
26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 73.

29 Ibid., 75.

30 Mormino, Interview with A1 Lopez, p. 7.

31 Singletary, Interview of A1 Lopez.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 68.

36 Tampa Tribune, September 15, 1925.
37 Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 65.


39 Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 68.

40 Tampa Tribune, September 15, 1925.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., August 26-27, 1925.

43 Ibid., August 29-30, 1925

44 Ibid., September 1-2, 1925

45 Ibid., September 3, 5, 1925.

46 Ibid., September 8-9, 1925.

47 Ibid., September 11-13, 1925.

48 Ibid., September 15, 1925.

49 Singletary, Interview of Al Lopez; Bloodgood, Who's Who in Baseball.

Wes Singletary, Interview of Marcelo Maseda, June 12, 1992 (in possession of author).

Lawson, "Ybor City and Baseball," 650.


Mormino, Interview with A1 Lopez, 8.


Singletary, Interview of A1 Lopez.

Ibid.

Thorn, Total Baseball. The following list contains the names of the first thirteen "Floridians" to make it to the major leagues, in the order of their major league debut. Note that the designation (P) beside a player's name signifies that player as a pitcher:

1. Ralph McLaurin, Kissimmee, FL deb. 1908.
2. Stuffy Stewart, Jasper, FL deb. 9-13-16.
4. Red Causey (P), Georgetown, FL deb. 4-26-18.
7. Lance Richbourg, Defuniak Springs, FL deb. 7-4-21.
10. Hank Johnson (P), Bradenton, FL deb. 4-17-25.
11. Ned Porter (P), Apalachicola, FL deb. 8-7-26.
12. Johnny Burnett, Bartow, FL deb. 5-7-27.


Singetary, Interview of A1 Lopez.

Ibid.
TONY PIZZO’S YBOR CITY: 
AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY PIZZO

The name Tony Pizzo is so synonymous with the history of Tampa that when producers at WUSF searched for a title of their ten-part documentary of the city, they eventually arrived at the obvious: "Tony Pizzo’s Tampa." The author of *Tampa Town: Cracker Village with a Latin Accent* (1968), Pizzo was also honored with an Award of Merit by the American Association of State and Local History (1980) for his yeoman efforts to preserve the heritage of the Tampa Bay area. In 1983, with Gary Mormino, he wrote *Tampa: The Treasure City*, a book which features many of his hand-selected photographs.

The grandson of Sicilian immigrants, Tony was born September 22, 1912, on the corner of 8th Avenue and 18th Street in Ybor City. His parents, Paul Pizzo and Rosalia Pizzolato ran a thriving grocery store, an institution that managed to endure the urban "renewal" of Ybor City. The long survival of the family bodega was a credit to the indefatigable Pizzo, who at times worked single-handedly to preserve the embattled enclave, which was once the greatest Latin colony in the South.

In his efforts to revitalize Ybor City, Pizzo became increasingly fascinated with the rich heritage of the Tampa Bay area. To promote and popularize the past, he became founder and first president of the Tampa Historical Society, the Ybor City Rotary Club, and the Pan American Commission. A grateful city named him Outstanding Citizen in 1956; he was also decorated by both the Italian and Cuban governments.

Until his death on January 2, 1994, Tony maintained a furious pace of research and writing. In 1989, he "retired" from his long-held executive position with Tampa Wholesale Liquor, the House of Midulla, but retirement was punctuated by energetic bursts of collecting more Tampania and helping friends. Tony is survived by his gracious wife, the former Josephine Acosta, and two sons: Tony, Jr., a physician, and Paul, an attorney. The following interview was conducted in 1979 and originally published in *Tampa Bay History*, volume 2 (Spring/Summer 1980).

**Interview with Tony Pizzo**

Q. Tony, why don't you tell our readers the moment, or period, that you first acquired an historical interest in Tampa.

Pizzo: It happened around 1949. We had organized the Ybor City Rotary Club, and we became very closely affiliated with the Havana Rotary Club—we made trips back and forth—and finally some of the Cubans were wondering why so many Cubans were going to Miami for their vacations instead of Tampa as they did for years. After World War II the S. S. *Cuba* that plied between Tampa and Havana twice a week was taken off the run. We had real close ties with Cuba. After World War II the airlines began promoting Miami as a summer vacation paradise, and the Cubans began to discover the glitter of Miami Beach. A *Time* magazine story reported at that time that Cuban tourism was worth $34 million to the Miami area, and we became very
Tony Pizzo in front of the Italian Club in Ybor City (c. 1980).
aware and disappointed in the shift of Cuban visitors from Tampa to Miami. On one of our trips we met a newspaper man who said to me, "You know, Tampa really means a lot to us because it's the cradle of Cuban Liberty." And; of course, we were amazed. Here we were born and raised in Tampa, and how little we knew about our history. He started telling us about José Martí organizing the revolutionary party here, that the message to start the revolution went out concealed in a Tampa cigar, and how the cigarmakers gave a day's pay each week to help the cause. And we thought, boy, if Tampa and Ybor City are that important, maybe we could put up historical markers as an attraction for Cuban tourism. I broached the subject with a Rotarian of Havana whose name is "Fifi" Bock - he's still living; he's in Miami now. His father was one of the big Cuban cigar tycoons of the 1890s; they were well-to-do and an outstanding family. Mr. Bock at the time was the director of the Military Institutes of Cuba. He volunteered to make the historical markers at the military foundry and put them all over Ybor City. He said, "All you need to do is the research and write them up." We were beside ourselves - what a fantastic deal! So I took it upon myself to find out as much as I could, and I started to interview old-timers, Cubans who were in their 80's and 90's. What I learned from them was unbelievable - that we had such a rich history. Then I started meeting historians in Havana, and one of the friends whom I really admired very much was José Rivero Muñiz. He had written many books - he wrote Conquistadors En La Florida, and Los Cubanos En Tampa, which I cherish!

Q. What was Ybor City like in 1948 when you set out on your projects?

Pizzo: Well, let's say it was still intact. The people had not moved out of Ybor City. The people were still there ...but things were beginning to change. After the war the economy began to prosper, and the younger Latins, better educated and prepared for life, began to look towards new horizons. Then something happened in the early 1950s that started the downfall of Ybor City as we knew it, the colorful colony of Spaniards, Cubans and Italians. Near the downtown area there existed a small area known as "the Scrub." That area is the site of today's Central Park Village, a housing project occupied by blacks.

"The Scrub" was a world of its own. No one ventured into that quarter. Only those who lived there frequented the place. There were no paved streets. The houses were placed at random - thrown together in an incomprehensible maze. The frame houses dated to the 1880s; they were weather beaten, shabby, and literally uninhabitable. It was probably the worst slum area in the state. I remember a news story referring to "the Scrub" as a cesspool in the heart of town. It was a frightful place forgotten by time.

"The Scrub" started as a small Negro settlement which surrounded a lumber mill near Oaklawn Cemetery. Tampa was a village then, its northern fringe extended to LaFayette Street (Kennedy Boulevard). The Negro settlement got its name from the scrub palmettoes which covered the area. Some of the first blacks to inhabit "the Scrub" came from the Bahamas. When many of the lumber mills in the interior began to close down in the 1890s, many of the black lumberjacks drifted into the quarters. This is how Tampa's first black community emerged.

When Ybor City was established in 1886, two miles to the east of Tampa, the black community found itself in the middle of a wilderness sandwiched between the cracker village of Tampa on
the one side and the Latin village on the other. In time Tampa and Ybor City began to grow in all directions and "the Scrub" remained in the center, a lost and forgotten world.

When a movement was starting for the clearing of "the Scrub," I remember Curtis Hixon, then mayor, telling me while flying to Havana, "we must do something to better the living conditions of our black people."

So when these people were displaced, where were they to go? Ybor City was the logical area. Many of the Latins were beginning to build new homes in other areas. Real estate agents grasped a golden opportunity and began selling Ybor City houses to the blacks who had nowhere to go. These agents gouged the black man, selling houses for more than double their worth. Many of the Ybor City houses were very old and in dire need of repair. The Latin section was classified as a blighted area. Many of the younger Latins had become Americanized had been to war and were educated. They began to leave - it wasn't that they didn't like Ybor City - it was a question of economy. How could you build a new home in an area that was decaying? And we saw what had happened to several people who built beautiful homes there. To give you a good example, Dr. Santiago Paniello built a magnificent yellow brick home on 14th Avenue and 16th Street. He was a good friend of mine. I asked Dr. Paniello, "Dr., why did you build this beautiful home right here in the middle of Ybor City?" He said, "I made my money here; these are my people. I want to live amongst them." Later, his children finished college, and they wanted to live in a better area. And so this is what was happening. The real estate people went to the blacks who were selling their houses to the federal government, and induced them to buy old houses in Ybor City. The old Ybor City dwellings were selling for $7,000 to $10,000 houses that weren't worth $1,500.

Q. Up to that time were many blacks living in Ybor City?

Pizzo: There were very few blacks living in Ybor City. The majority were blacks from Cuba, who were different from American blacks. To begin with, they were highly educated, not only in formal schooling, but also they were highly trained cigarmakers. They worked next to the white cigarmakers and lived in the white neighborhoods; they were mixed. And there was a lot of respect, one for the other. And the Cubans had their own clubs, their own baseball teams . . . and there was no discrimination between the Latin whites and the Cuban blacks. They lived together, they worked together ...there were many fast friendships between blacks and whites. My father had an elderly Cuban tenant. When they became too old to work, we fed them. When they died my father paid for their funeral. Remember, those were the days before welfare.

Q. How did the Cuban blacks and the American blacks get along once this transition took place?

Pizzo: Well to begin with, there was a barrier there. Most of the Cuban blacks didn't speak English. So that kept them separate, and also the Cuban blacks were a lot better educated than the American blacks. They just didn't mix that well. The Cuban blacks associated more with the Latins in Ybor City, and there was a good bond of friendship among them. So it was a real different situation.
Q. Could anything have been done to prevent what you called the demise of Ybor City, even once the black migration took place to Ybor City

Pizzo: Well, actually to go in sequence, after the blacks moved to Ybor City the Federal Urban Renewal Act was passed. Florida could not take advantage of this legislation because a state court decision declared the act unconstitutional. Daytona Beach had instituted a test case, but the lower court ruled against her. The City of Tampa decided to test the constitutionality of the act before the State Supreme Court. The case was prepared by Cody Fowler, one of Tampa’s most eminent attorneys, with the assistance of Milo Smith, a young up-and-coming city planner.

The petition was for the approval of the Maryland Avenue redevelopment in Ybor City. The main thrust of the petition was to show the importance in preserving and redeveloping the historic aspect of the area. Milo Smith asked me if I could prepare an historical map showing the historic sites, events, and buildings in Ybor City. I still have this "historic" map. Because of the dynamic history of Ybor City the Supreme Court decided in favor of Cody Fowler and Milo Smith. Ybor City made it possible for cities in Florida to participate in the use of urban renewal funds.
The first urban renewal project cleared the area from the Union Station to 7th Avenue. Today, this area is the site of a large complex of attractive apartments housing blacks. The second urban renewal project was the downtown riverfront. That area on Ashley between LaFayette and Cass Streets where the city library is located was a series of warehouses with railroad tracks on Ashley as well as a railroad yard along the river bank.

The third and final urban clearance was part of the Ybor City section bordering from 7th Avenue to Interstate 4 on the north and from Nebraska Avenue to 22nd Street on the east. From Ybor City the exodus was to Tampa Heights. Urban renewal was meant to enhance living conditions of the cities, but the plan covered only the material things; human feelings and the people’s well-being were totally ignored. So because of cold blooded governmental programs the Latins and blacks of Tampa have been forced to scatter to the four winds. Shifting people without regard to their feelings has been criminal. What they should have done was to take a block at a time, rebuild and have the people keep their properties and let them stay. We could have had beautiful small homes in Ybor City and many happy people. Today there still is a lot of nostalgia for Ybor City; people are still dreaming of the old days. They wish that somehow they could have stayed there. And so urban renewal just went in there and in one shot cleaned everything out. A lot of the great buildings that should have been preserved were destroyed. There were very beautiful brick buildings that are irreplaceable.

Q. Do you remember any specific incidents?

Pizzo: Yes, the No. 4 Fire Station. We were going to turn the fire station into a museum, and before we knew it the bureaucrats worked up a fast deal and in twenty-four hours it was bulldozed into dust. The junior college wanted the land, and a fast shuffle was pulled. Other very valuable brick buildings were also destroyed. Today Hillsborough Community College owns about fifty empty acres in Ybor City—off the tax rolls. Another good example is the time we tried to preserve four flat-top concrete houses which had served from the very early days of the founding of Ybor City as homes for Cuban cigarmakers. These buildings were the only examples found in Tampa that were typical of Spanish colonial period architecture found in Cuba. They were located on 14th Street and 12th Avenue.

We had a very forceful campaign going to save the four houses. We had the full cooperation of the press, and organizations and citizens had voluntarily pledged more than a thousand dollars to save them. These unique buildings were destroyed without regret by an agency which claimed that the buildings were in the way of the redesigned street pattern through Ybor City. That Fire Station No. 4 was a real sad thing. So we made a second choice, and the museum is now housed in the Ferlita bakery building. Then on 15th Street and 9th Avenue we had two beautiful brick buildings, with a lot of wrought iron. They just tore those down it was pitiful and disgusting.

Q. Now, whom should we blame? Should we blame faceless bureaucrats in Washington, or Tampa people?

Pizzo: Of course it goes to every level. It started in Congress because the law was formulated--formulated, let’s put it that way. They had no regard for humanity. If a blighted area needed to be razed, that’s all it spelled out. It had to go. It didn't take into account historic buildings, it didn't
take into account the welfare of the poor, or anything. They just paid everybody off and you’d
find yourself another house. They displaced people indiscriminately, which was wrong. Congress
passed the law, and all the way down to the local level there were axes to grind. They tore down
buildings because it was to their advantage. The more buildings they tore down, I imagine, the
more money they were able to get. They wanted to prolong the project. On the local level a lot of
people had no feeling for our city. They were actually, in my book, unconcerned about the
community’s welfare. They conducted the business of the bureaucracy, without feeling for the
history or the future of our community. I fought like a one-man fire department trying to
preserve things. The El Pasaje building, for example. It had a beautiful balcony the entire length
of the second floor, and one day I saw it was gone. I went to see the owners. Mrs. Avellanal, the
owner, said “We didn’t want it to fall, and we’ve got it in the back of the yard.” Well, anyway,
she said they were going to replace it. It was never replaced. To me, that’s one of the most
historic buildings next to the Tampa Bay Hotel. El Pasaje is the second most historic building in
Tampa. The destruction of the old courthouse was a blunder, but that’s another story.

In 1950 we had a $50 million bond issue to clear the riverfront of unsightly warehouses and
build a convention center. The Ybor City Rotary Club called a meeting of leading citizens of the
community. We had an evening meeting, and a nice dinner at the Columbia Restaurant. We
broached the subject that out of the $50 million, we wanted $1 million earmarked for Ybor City.
And we got the $1 million. The city fathers and all of the community leaders agreed that
something should be done to preserve Tampa’s Latin quarter. So we had a million dollars
earmarked for Ybor City. We came up with a plan to build a Latin plaza and redo all of 7th
Avenue, and really try to revive it. Well, what happened was we had an election year coming up,
and the city representatives who were running for reelection didn’t want to increase taxes or the
budget. Things became so involved with public meetings that Ybor City became a pawn. So they
dipped into the $1 million fund, the measly $1 million out of the $50 million, and took $600,000.
They took the easy way out and Ybor City was sacrificed because they were afraid that the
people would vote against them. This is true history. In the following election Nick Nuccio, a
proponent of the Latin plaza project lost to Julian Lane, and we went to see the new mayor, and
we said, "Let’s put the $400,000 into Ybor City." Julian Lane agreed with us and he beautified
7th Avenue and built a mall. So out of the $400,000 not only was 7th Avenue beautified as it is
today, but also the old original lampposts that were there were torn down during the Curtis
Hixon administration, and they were given to schools, to the TB hospital - they were scattered all
over. We fought to keep the lampposts, but would you believe that the Ybor City Chamber of
Commerce wanted the new type of lamps and actually asked the city to take them out. So when
Mayor Lane decided to beautify 7th Avenue he hired Milo Smith to work on the plans. One day I
got a call from Milo. He said, "Tony, we want to put up fountains, and we want to put the old
lampposts back. Where can we find one to make a mold?" I said, "Well, I think you can get one
at the Orange Grove Grammar School. They’ll lend you one, I am sure." Well, to make a long
story short, in redoing all of 7th Avenue the city had to pay $1,000 for each lamppost, which,
you know, were no longer the originals. So that was another lost cause that was victorious in the
end.

Q. What period saw the greatest amount of property removal and housing removal in Ybor City?
Pizzo: It was the 1960s. I think it was the middle 60's when everything went to pot. But I want to go back to the historical markers. So I went to Cuba. I had finished my research and found that José Martí came here in 1891; he made about seventeen trips to Tampa. The basis of the Cuban Revolutionary Party was drafted right here in Ybor City. The Cuban Revolutionary Party was ratified at the Liceo Cubano on 13th Street and 7th Avenue. That's where José Martí made two of his most famous speeches. The speeches were called "Para Cuba Que Sufre" and "Los Pinos Nuevos." The Cuban volunteers were trained here. At any rate, I found that we had taken a tremendous part in the liberation of Cuba in the 1890s. There was a hotel on 9th Avenue at 16th Street which today is the site of the labor temple. The hotel called Victoria--it was a stopping place for rebels who came in to be trained in Ybor City and then clandestinely were sent to Cuba to fight.

You cannot write about the Cuban revolution without mentioning Ybor City. The workers in the factories, and that included Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians, gave one day's pay to the cause of Cuban liberty. They called that "el dia de la Patria." Many of these events were mentioned on markers. The first marker was erected in front of the Ybor factory. It is a beautiful stone put up by the Ybor City Rotary Club. I think it was in 1949. That was the first one. And of course when Castro took over our project became paralyzed. We never were able to get any markers out of Cuba. All of our friends left Cuba for the States. By this time it had become a very personal project to me because I had done all of the research. At that time there was a foundry on the Hillsborough River near the site of Interstate 75. I talked to the owner, and he said "Tony, I'll make those markers for $75 apiece." I went out and raised the money. I went to about twenty-five major corporations and nobody turned me down. So I was able to raise the money and had the plaques put up. We made it an official project of the Ybor City Rotary Club. I didn't want to do it as an individual. The city cooperated in putting up the markers. The markers were made at $75 apiece, but after the first ten markers were made the price went up to $100. So we paid $100. Later they went to $150. Today they're being made in Ohio at a cost of $450 a plaque. And we're still putting up markers. I guess I personally have been involved in putting up more than forty historical markers not only in Ybor City but all over Tampa.

Q. Who's the most interesting character you've ever interviewed?

Pizzo: I talked to a man whose name was Tinner, a native of Tampa. When I talked to him in the 1940s, he was in his 80's. I'll never forget it. One evening, we were sitting on a curbstone, and he was telling me the story of the Spanish-American War. All about the saloons, and how wild they were, and the soldiers.

And, of course, I used to visit D. B. McKay a lot. He died in the early 60's when he was ninety-four years old. He was probably, in my book, the greatest native citizen in Tampa history. He was a courageous man, a very talented man. He served as mayor of Tampa for several terms and made many contributions in the growth of Tampa. In his later years he published the "Pioneer Florida" column in the Sunday Tampa Tribune. Because of him much valuable information has been preserved. I came across a story in the Tribune dated 1887. During the yellow fever epidemic McKay was running a rival newspaper. He was a very young man then. The Tribune reported that you could shoot a shotgun down the street, and not hit anybody. The village was deserted. Everybody had taken off into the woods. People thought they were safer in
the woods, and everybody left town, except young McKay. The *Tribune* complimented McKay for staying in town through the epidemic to get the paper out.

Q. From your conversations with those pioneers, would Tampa have been a good place to live in the 1870s or 80s?
Pizzo: Well, in the 1870s Tampa was really in the doldrums. Things were bad, Tampa had shrunk in population. The 1870s were probably the worst years. There was nothing going on here; it was an isolated community. Progress was at a standstill. But the people who lived here seemed to have enjoyed it. There was a lot of game, and fishing was excellent. It was quiet. The weather was beautiful. There were those who really loved it. And there were those who didn't see much prosperity for the future. We had an influx in the 1870s of people from the state of Nebraska. I never could figure out what brought them from Nebraska to Tampa.

Q. Is that how Nebraska Avenue was named?

Pizzo: That probably had something to do with it because they started developing orange groves along Nebraska Avenue. From 7th Avenue to Columbus Drive, Nebraska Avenue was a dirt road with orange groves on both sides. It was an interesting time in Tampa; for instance most of downtown Tampa was covered with orange groves. The foundation of the Tampa Bay Hotel was packed with shells from a mound which was located at Bullfrog Creek. So a large part of the Indian mound is right under the Tampa Bay Hotel today. They used to bring the shells in barrels loaded on barges. One of the barges capsized right by the Tampa Bay Hotel and all the shells went into the river. They had an awful time getting the shells all out of there. Also, when they started developing the downtown area after 1891, some of the orange trees were transplanted on the grounds of the Tampa Bay Hotel. The same thing happened in Ybor City. The area near 13th Avenue and Columbus Drive in the 1890s was known as "Morey Heights." Mr. Morey was a real estate developer. From Columbus Drive on out, everything was a wilderness in those days. When Mr. Morey surveyed his grove for home sites, he had some of the orange trees transplanted on Bayshore Boulevard at the site of the Centro Español Hospital. And until recently, when the hospital was torn down--another tragic loss, if you remember that hospital, its architecture--a lot of orange trees were still there.

Q. What do you say when someone says "progress"? How do you answer?

Pizzo: I believe in progress and I believe that some changes have to be made. But I think there's a limitation. You take, for example, the Latin clubs today. The new generation is no longer interested in their functions. You know, the Latin clubs started a mutual aid society, and they served a tremendous purpose. Latin people are very proud - they never got on the welfare rolls, no one from Ybor City would go on the welfare rolls. The clubs took care of them. In other words, the Italians took care of the Italians, and the Spaniards and Cubans did the same thing. The clubs rendered other services. The buildings served as a meeting place, schools were conducted there, a fine library was found in every clubhouse. The young found recreation in the reading room, the card room and in the cantina. Entertainment was available for all ages in theaters and ballrooms. Yes, the Latin clubs were gems; they served the early immigrants fantastically well.

Q. What do you see as your finest historical accomplishment?

Pizzo: Well, I'm very proud that I had a vital role in organizing the Tampa Historical Society. The results are gratifying. We have members, especially descendants of many old pioneer families who built the city, and to them it was a question of "why haven't we done this before?"
Among the more than 500 members are some of the most prominent families, as well as members from all walks of life. This naturally gives me a great deal of pleasure. Just recently we obtained the Peter O. Knight house as our headquarters. The Tampa Junior League was very instrumental in obtaining the Knight house. Those young ladies do fabulous things for Tampa. We also have received financial assistance from individuals who have shown their affection for our community throughout the years. The Tampa Historical Society has been a blessing to Tampa, and I’m proud of the part I played in organizing it.

I am also very pleased to have served as president of the Jose Martí Park Committee. I never will forget an elderly Negro man, a Cuban Negro, coming to me and pointing to the old shack and saying, "That's where Jose Martí lived. That's where the Negro woman, Paulina Pedroso, had her boarding house. And when they tried to poison Martí, she said, 'you'd better live here ...this is going to be your headquarters and my husband is going to be your bodyguard.'" When I heard all of this, I did some investigation to make sure that the old gentleman was right. And so I went before the Rotary Club, and we formed a committee to preserve the building - but the building was too far gone. If we could not save the house, we wanted to do something with the historic area. We made many trips to Cuba seeking help with this project. We were offered lumber by Cuban companies, and money by Cuban patriots who believed that something should be done. Cuban newspaper writers started coming to Tampa, and stories were being written about the
house. The Martí house became the most publicized preservation project through the fifties with stories in Cuba and Tampa. Finally, on one of our trips we saw President Batista. The committee was composed of Mayor Curtis Hixon, Doyle Carlton, the former governor of Florida, Earl Mullen, director of the Pan-American Commission, Tony Grimaldi, and Johnny Diaz. We have a photograph taken with Batista, the president of Cuba, at the meeting. He pledged to give us money. And he said, "I will give you $25,000." Batista sent architects from Cuba to inspect the old frame house. The building was filled with termites. It was so far gone that you really would have had to rebuild it. It couldn't be preserved.

So they said, "Why don't we make a little park?" And they came up with plans - I have them - the original plans of what the park was supposed to look like. Anyway, on our second trip Batista definitely pledged the money, and he said, "We'll send you the money." So we waited about two or three months and nothing happened. And in the meantime the building caught fire, and the fire department saved it.

So we took a picture of the building, partially burned, and sent it to Cuba. Every newspaper in Cuba ran stories and the picture of the house: "José Martí’s house to be razed .... The partially burnt historic house will not be preserved." And things got so hot in Cuba over that picture that, believe it or not, President Batista called a special session of Congress, and the money was appropriated for the house. When the money arrived here it was sent to the Cuban Consul. He formed his own committee, changed the plans, and the park was established. Of course I raised hell, and we were included in the committee. At any rate we can proudly claim all the credit for the creation of the José Martí Park.

Q. The Irish character, Mr. Dooley, said he didn't like historians because they only study what nations died of. He'd like to know what they lived of. Let's talk about what you remember as the vibrant signs of Ybor City.

Pizzo: Well, as I was growing up as a child, I was born in 1912, most of the generations before mine were immigrants. So I was in an environment that was so different from, say, twenty years later after my generation started coming into it's own. It was a different world. Everyone spoke Italian or Spanish, and they were all oriented to their clubs. The club was the "mecca." The whole soul of Italian life was the Italian Club and the activities of the Italian Club. It was the same with the Spanish clubs and the Cuban Club. But those clubs had other things going: they had beautiful libraries, foreign newspapers, and classical books. I remember one particular newspaper, *IL Corriere d'America* published in New York. The Italian Club had regular weekly dances in its beautiful ballroom. The theater showed movies and vaudeville shows. There was so much going on - the whole social focus was on the clubs. Some of the activities in the summertime were picnics out in the countryside. All the clubs had picnics, and they were very enjoyable. Rocky Point, Ballast Point, and DeSoto Park in Palmetto Beach were very popular sites. Picnics were held on the Alafia River and at Bullfrog Creek. They were very happy times. When one of the clubs gave a picnic, people of different nationalities attended. 7th Avenue was a vibrant main drag; it probably surpassed Franklin Street at one time. The best shops in Tampa were on 7th Avenue. Payday in the factories was on Saturday, so you can imagine thousands of cigarmakers getting their pay, going home and taking a bath, putting on their best finery, and walking up and down 7th Avenue. The shops stayed open on Saturday until 11:00. That's the
reason Saturday night dances in the Latin clubs started after the shops closed at 11 P.M. That custom has come down to this day.

Q. Would you find an Anglo on 7th Avenue in 1930?

Pizzo: Well, you used to find them on Saturday morning. Hillsborough County was very rural until the 1940s. Ybor City was a very fine shopping center. And the "crackers," what we called the "country people," came to shop. They used to have caravans of wagons loaded with families. They came only Saturday morning and went shopping all up and down 7th Avenue. In the afternoon they would go back home; they had quite a way to travel. And in the evenings the Latins flooded 7th Avenue. Saturdays were busy and fun days on 7th Avenue.

Q. Were there any ethnic distinctions that you might see on the avenue? For instance, were Italians dressed the same way as the Cubans, and the Cubans like the Spaniards?
Pizzo: No, they all dressed more or less the same. They did all their shopping in the same stores, and the same styles were being followed - American styles. On Saturday nights the restaurants would be crowded. It wasn't like today where you have two or three restaurants. In those days you had two or three restaurants or cafes on every block. They had pastries and served coffee in the old Cuban style, and hot chocolate. You know, they used to boil the milk, and they used one pot for hot milk and a coffee pot for coffee. The waiter would come along and say "obscuro (dark), medium, or black" and he would pour the coffee according to your desire.

Q. Was the Columbia Restaurant always a jewel of Ybor City?

Pizzo: The Columbia Restaurant was opened in 1903. It opened up as a saloon, a little cafe, and in time it became the gem of Spanish restaurants. They had a bar, which is still there; they served pastries, coffee, and short orders. It was a regular coffee shop, a bistro or a cantina, if you want to call it that. What made 22nd Street in the early days really very popular was its location, an important crossroads. 22nd Street was called Livingston Avenue in those days. And the 22nd Street corner became the gathering place for farmers in the morning. That’s where they traded,
along 7th Avenue and 22nd Street. They’d come in with their wagons and trade produce. You see, we had a lot of peddlers in the early days, Italian peddlers who peddled vegetables and fruit. They started arriving at about four o’clock in the morning, and before long there were hundreds of wagons. The cracker farmers brought their product and sold them to the peddlers. 22nd Street was a very active corner for many, many years.

Q. Tell us about your courtship patterns on 7th Avenue. What would young people do on Saturday night?

Pizzo: When my generation came along - this is hard to believe, but in my generation in high school, if we dated a Latin girl, we had to have a chaperon. The mother would usually go along. Dating started at high school age so we had to take the mothers to the movies with us, or to dances, we'd take the old ladies. I remember going to dances at the Centro Español, which were really the plush dances of the period. And you'd see sitting along the walls the Spanish ladies, and some Italians, with their daughters. And that's the way it was until I went to college.

Q. Do you care to talk about bolita?

Pizzo: Bolita came very early with the cigar industry. You know, one of the stipulations Mr. Ybor made the Board of Trade when he came here to establish his company town was the fact that his workers had to have gambling. He knew the cigarmakers. He knew their likes and dislikes. The Cubans weren't good churchgoers. They all wore religious medallions, and they believed in God. But when it came to going to church, they weren't that good. That was pretty true of most of the Latins in Ybor City. But there's a reason for all that. Anyway, when Mr. Ybor came he said to the city fathers: "Remember, this community is going to be hiding in the woods by itself. And I want you to know that I know the Anglo Saxon spirit of church on Sunday and no gambling." The Board of Trade was so anxious to get the cigar industry that it said: "Well, they're going to be all by themselves out in the country in their little community out there, let them do what they want. If they want to gamble, let them have gambling." But a little later on the Tampa villagers were raising an eyebrow with what was happening in its little sister village of Ybor City. Saloons were opened on Sunday and gambling dens with games of faro, dice, and roulette were in full sway. There also was cock fighting. So the churches of the little town of Tampa started opening up little branches out there, and they called them "missions." Their mission was to Christianize the Latins.

Q. Didn't you once as a youngster see bolita thrown? Weren't you a newsboy and you happened to wander into a plush gambling house?

Pizzo: Yes, the Tribune wrote a story about bolita, and I was interviewed. You see, when I was going to grammar school I would sell the Tampa Times until the evening up and down 7th Avenue. In those days we had all those big green streetcars, and I'd ride between 22nd Street to 14th Street up and down, until I got rid of my last newspaper. In those days there were several casinos in Ybor City. The best known were the Lido and the Imperial. The most plush of these casinos or gambling houses was the Lido on 14th Street and it was run by Rafael Reina. I described to the Tribune what I saw when I walked in there selling my newspapers. It was a regular Las Vegas type of casino. It was very plush, full of people, well-dressed, and the women
were wearing minks, and there was bolita throwing going on. Bolita started back in the early part of the century here. It was introduced by a man they called "El Gallego"--he was a Spaniard.

Q. You had mentioned earlier that there was a reason why Ybor City was anti-clerical, not very religious. Would you elaborate?

Pizzo: The Spaniards, as well as the Italians, came from little villages of their respective countries. The clergy in those villages were the rulers. From what I have read and heard, the clergy would cater to the well-to-do, and the poor, the peasant, the tiller of the soil was treated as a third-rate human being. The Church should have treated every individual equally. It isn't like our church here in America. It was very provincial, and the priests played their politics. Those who had nothing (and later became immigrants in Ybor City) resented the treatment. I'll give you a good example. If you read Mr. Angelo Massari's book, he related how as a young boy he went to church for confession. The priest sat at the head of the altar like he was the king of the town of Santo Stefano in Sicily. Everybody had to stand in line for confession, but when a Don of the community or any of the well-to-do, the *prominenti*, would come in they would go straight to the priest without standing in line for their turns. Mr. Massari said that this preferential treatment of the well-to-do turned him away from the church. These are the types of resentments people brought with them. That's true of the Spaniards, because they had the same situation. The clergy just ruled the roost. When the Catholic Church was organized in Ybor City, the Spaniards were probably the best churchgoers, and the Italians were second, the Cubans third. In most cases only the women and children went to church, the men just didn't. The Italians were the hardest group to get together. When the church was organized in Ybor City in 1890 a priest was brought in from out West because he spoke Italian. They felt with all these Italians here they should have an Italian priest. His main task was to get the Italians to become churchgoers. He fared poorly at his assignment. In the early twenties, however, an Italian church was organized and located in the Italian community on 8th Avenue and 23rd Street. I became an altar boy at that church. That church was still in existence until a few years ago.

Q. In conclusion, please sum up your thoughts about Tampa.

Pizzo: Well, I think that Tampa is a unique community because it has always been cosmopolitan from its very beginning. It started as a fort, and people came and settled near the fort. Before the arrival of the Americans, Cuban and Spanish fishermen were living along the shores of Tampa Bay. In 1848, a severe hurricane nearly wiped out Fort Brooke and the small Tampa settlement. The boom created by the rebuilding of the fort attracted quite a number of people from St. Augustine. In those days peninsular Florida was bare of any settlements with the exception of St. Augustine and New Smyrna. Attracted to Tampa were a number of descendants of the Italian settlers who came to establish New Smyrna in 1767. They spoke Spanish and English, and began to grow roots in the Tampa community. So from the very beginning Tampa was a polyglot of nationalities.

Tampa was destined to become an important city because its geographical location at the mouth of the Hillsborough River at the head of Tampa Bay made it a logical harbor. From the beginning it was the hub of commerce for the region of the central west coast of the peninsula. Its proximity to Latin America was the main reason the community became a railhead in 1883. In
Bolita balls from the 1930s. Tampa’s favorite form of gambling for generations, bolita was a "numbers game" with 100 small wooden or ivory balls being shaken and the winning ball picked by one of several methods. The ball cut open in this photograph reveals a core of lead, one of many devices used to fleece hopeful gamblers.

Photograph from Tony Pizzo Collection, USF Special Collections.
turn, the coming of the railroad attracted Messrs. Ybor and Haya with their important cigar factories to create their company town, Ybor City. The cigar industry launched Tampa into existence as a viable, progressive, and successful community. The railroad also spurred Tampa’s economy by encouraging the establishment of several fishing companies, lumber mills, and truck farming.

Tampa’s destiny was to succeed. At times progress was at a standstill, or moved along slowly, but it always forged ahead. Tampa has been blessed through the years with dynamic community leaders, and a bit of luck also played a part from time to time. We have attained an enviable position as a city, but we have paid a dear price because of the rapid growth, the clumsy planning for the future. Our bay is no longer the fisherman’s paradise. Our mangroves have disappeared, and the pollution infesting our once clean air has dimmed the rays of the famous Florida sun.

Every morning Davis Islanders are reminded of the poison they breathe by merely looking at the industrial dust covering their cars. Some of our palm trees have died from this foul air. It’s sad.

I am not a pessimist and have never been. I think Tampa has a fantastic future. Look at what has happened in the last few years. The downtown area and Seddon Island are on the verge of a fabulous redevelopment. We will not be able to recognize downtown Tampa a few years from now.
I would like to share with you some of the exciting information I learned as a result of research into the activities of José Martí in Tampa in the cause of Cuban liberty, and my community's involvement in that cause. My adventure into Tampa history started October 20, 1948, when the Ybor City Rotary Club received its charter. The club was royally inaugurated by 300 Rotarians from Florida and Cuba in a tropical setting in the patio of the Cuban Club. I had the honor of being the club's charter president. At our first official meeting at the Columbia Restaurant, Rabbi David Zeilonka, a member of the Tampa Rotary Club and program speaker said, "Your Rotary Club has the opportunity to be an ambassador for the Rotary Clubs of the United States to Latin America because of the language similarity of the members." The Ybor City Rotary Club accepted his counsel and adopted a long-range program of international relations with particular emphasis on Cuba, where Rotary was a great community force.

On November 3, 1948, I and several other Ybor City Rotarians made the first goodwill trip to Havana. We were entertained royally, as only the Cubans can. The trip renewed old bonds and set into motion a social, cultural, and commercial exchange between Tampa and Cuba which lasted until 1959 when Fidel Castro came to power.

During this decade Tampa became the mecca for Cuban visitors. They literally worshiped the ground José Martí had walked on. This was their chunk of land in America because it had helped deliver their dream for a Cuba Libre. Tampa's mayor at the time, Curtis Hixon, was so impressed with the great flow of Cuban visitors that he appointed an official "Greeters' Committee," whose members spoke Spanish to welcome arrivals at the airport. Welcome signs in Spanish were displayed in the terminal. The Tampa Chamber of Commerce advertised in Cuban newspapers. These ads attracted many organizations which held meetings and conventions in Tampa through the years. Some of the organizations meeting in Tampa included the Cuban Dental Association, the Cuban Medical Society, the Havana Society of Engineers, La Sociedad Colombista Pan Americana, the Historical Society of Havana, the Cattlemen's Association of Cuba, the Ladies of the Cuban Lawn and Tennis Club, and many Rotary Clubs, as well as a yearly visit of the queen and her court of the Havana Carnival to participate in Tampa's Gasparilla festivities.

Two political mavericks who made an indelible mark on Cuban history also made the pilgrimage to Ybor City to baptize themselves in the waters of Tampa-Cuban history.

On October 2, 1950, Senator Eduardo R. Chibas, candidate for the presidency of Cuba under the Partido Ortodoxas appeared at a meeting of Ybor City cigar workers held at Cuscaden Baseball Park. The podium was decorated with Cuban and American flags. Chibas opened his speech in memory of José Martí, extolling his efforts in Tampa on behalf of Cuba Libre.

The Ortodoxas party he started was the "party of the common people, who were being robbed by
the corrupt political pirates." His friends called him "Escobita" (Little Broom), which was also the emblem of his party and reflected his obsession to sweep corruption from public life. In his Ybor City speech he declared that he stood for a "better nation, without thieves and without traitors to the ideals of José Martí." Chibas related that Mrs. Sorano, a member of the O'Halloran family of Tampa, had loaned him José Martí's gold ring to wear that memorable evening. She also owned the *chaveta*, a knife used to make the cigar that carried the order to start the revolution of 1895, and the pistol that General Maximo Gomez had given to Martí for his own protection.

Chibas informed the public, "I have gold in my hand but it's not the gold of the people of Cuba, it's the gold ring that belonged to José Martí, the apostle who found hearts and minds in Tampa which blended with his." Mrs. Sorano promised that if Chibas lived up to his promise to implement into practice the ideals of José Martí when he became president she would give him the precious ring to keep. Chibas responded, "If I falter in my duties as president, if I fail to reconstruct the political morals of Cuba, then I expect the noble lady who owns the precious memento of Martí to send me the pistol to punish myself for not keeping a sacred promise to the people of Cuba."

On Sunday, August 5, 1951, Chibas addressed the Cuban nation over CMQ radio network. This would be his last verbal broadside aimed at the corrupt administration of President Carlos Prio Socarras. His last words to the people of Cuba were for them to "forge ahead for independent, economic freedom, political liberty and social justice! Sweep the robbers out of government! People of Cuba, awaken and arise! This is the last time I will knock at your door!" He punctuated his last statement with a pistol bullet to his body. He died a few days later.

Thousands upon thousands followed the funeral cortege to Colon Cemetery in Havana. The August 26 issue of *Bohemia* magazine was dedicated to the life of Eduardo Chibas. A full-page photograph standing before the statue of José Martí in Ybor City was placed in his coffin. The cutlines under the photograph stated that Chibas had made sensational declarations before the Martí statue and that he was disposed to end his life if he failed to rid the government of corruption.

In November 1955 a young unknown Cuban rebel appeared on the Ybor City scene. He did not come so much to be inspired by the spirit of José Martí, but to garner support and funds to launch an uprising against the dictatorial regime of Cuba's President Fulgencio Batista. His name was Fidel Castro.

During his sojourn in Tampa, Castro had difficulty finding a place to hold a meeting with his supporters. The Cuban Club and the Italian Club denied him the use of their quarters. At the last minute he was able to meet at the CI0 Hall on Tampa Street. The following day he was interviewed by Channel 8-WFLA and the Spanish Radio station, WALT. Castro stated that he would go to Cuba to fight for the cause of Cuban liberty, regardless of the obstacles thrown in his path by President Batista.

While in Tampa, Castro had dinner with a few supporters at E1 Boulevard Restaurant, then located on Nebraska and Palm avenues. He was photographed at the dinner table showing the
$250 he had raised. The next morning he left for Key West, "the historic route of José Martí." Castro later wrote, "The Key West odyssey was worse than the Tampa one. We could not find a place for a meeting."

Castro and his band made it to Cuba and launched a guerrilla-type warfare. In 1959 Castro's rebels came down from the mountains of the Sierra Maestra and entered Havana. In Ybor City the news sparked a wild celebration. Cuba, they thought, was free again. Fidel launched a program of agrarian reform. In Ybor City jubilant Cubans raised funds to buy a farm tractor.

The numerous Cuban students in exile in Tampa made a mad-dash for their homes in Cuba. Many of them were attending the University of Tampa and were sons of my friends in Cuba. I was somewhat their guardian. They came to visit me frequently. In time they started returning, this time with their families. Cuba had become a red regime under Castro, their former idol.

This renewed interest of Cubans in Tampa during the 1950s was sparked by members of the Ybor City Rotary Club. Their first act in launching an international program was to send letters to 800 Rotary Clubs in Latin America stating that the Ybor City of Hispanic heritage planned frequent interchanges of visitors to promote the good neighbor policy of the United States.

The club's activities received good coverage in the press. On March 13, 1949 an editorial appeared in the *Tampa Tribune* entitled "Tampa Must Get Busy." The editorial written by Edwin D. Lambright, editorial editor and past president of the Tampa Rotary Club, declared: "Tampa's promotion in Cuba to be effective must be concentrated and organized. It is too large a project for any one organization to handle alone. The effort must be unified - we can do something progressive and productive in regaining some of the lost prestige and profit lost to inattention and apathy. We can establish a permanent organization for the development of relations with Cuba and other Latin American countries." About the same time a story in *Time* magazine reported that Miami Beach had become a favorite summer gathering for Cuban tourists, resulting in a windfall to the city of $33 million from the Cuban visitors. Up to that time Miami Beach had been strictly a winter resort. The Ybor Rotarians quickly recognized that Tampa had to recapture its former position in trade and cultural relations with Latin America and particularly with Cuba.

The idea expounded in the *Tribune* was accepted by the Ybor City Rotary Club. It invited thirty-two local organizations, city officials, county representatives, the officers of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce, and the Tampa Consular Corps to participate in organizing an association which would become "the State Department" of Tampa and Hillsborough County. The name was the Pan American Commission. Today it is an arm of the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce and is known as the Tampa Bay International Trade Council.

The Pan American Commission was endorsed by the Tampa delegation in Congress and Florida's two U.S. Senators. Through the years the organization has served the Bay Area in promoting trade, commerce, tourism, and cultural relations with the world.

A dramatic event happened during the Gasparilla festivities in 1948. This event led to the establishment of a memorial to José Martí's memory. Theresa Maria de Cárdenas, queen of the Havana Carnival was presented flowers by Tampa's Mayor Hixon. The queen asked to be taken
to the monument of José Martí. When told there was no such statute here, tears welled in her eyes. She and her maids were taken to the steps of the Ybor City cigar factory where Martí had addressed Cuban cigar makers in 1891 and 1893. She placed the flowers at the door entrance. The next day the *Tribune* ran the historic photograph of Martí standing on the steps of the factory in 1893. Queen Maria Theresa's tears touched the hearts of the Ybor Rotarians.

The Ybor Club promptly announced that it would start a program to erect a monument to Jose Martí. After the news was published, seventeen organizations in Ybor City, including three Spanish newspapers, asked to join in the effort. Again the Ybor City. Rotary Club was the pacesetter. A new organization was created and called the José Martí Memorial Foundation. U.S. Senators Spessard Holland and Claude Pepper introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate to provide funds for the project.

The news was all over Cuban newspapers. In Havana the Cuban lodge, Los Caballeros de la Luz, raised funds for a bronze bust of José Martí. The gift arrived in Tampa and was placed on a marble pedestal in front of the Cuban Club. A large delegation of Cuban officials, a Cuban warship, and lodge members attended the unveiling of the first Martí statute in Tampa. In time
there were others erected. The noble efforts of the Martí Foundation faded away after the colorful dedication.

The Ybor City Club erected a stone marker in front of the Ybor factory's iron steps, where Martí was photographed in 1893. The marker appeared in newspapers across the island of Cuba. Ybor City had truly become a hallowed place to all Cubans. Being photographed by the stone marker in front of the Ybor City iron steps was a must for Cuban visitors.

Another Martí statute proposal that came to naught due to political intrigue was a lifesized statue that was to be placed on the steps of the Ybor factory. The idea was initiated by Dr. Jorge Trelles and Dr. A. A. Gonzalez, two physicians who owned clinics in Ybor City. I was named chairman of the project with several Rotarians on the committee. We raised about $3,000 and obtained the services of José Fidalgo, a well known Cuban sculpturer. He sent us two models made in his studio in Havana. One was to be presented to President Truman and one to Mayor Hixon. Fidalgo had finished the lifesize statue in bronze. At the base of the statue he placed the inscription, "Para Cuba que sufre" ("To Cuba in bondage"). These were the first words in José Martí’s first speech in Tampa in 1891.

The photograph of the statue and the story appeared in Cuba's Bohemia magazine. President Batista, who was having serious opposition, interpreted the inscription on the statue as a personal insult. Batista sent his troops to the studio and demolished the statue and all of the miniature statues. Fidalgo was put on a tramp steamer to Mexico and was never seen again. The money, the effort, and the statue went to waste. It was a great idea. I hope someday in the future someone will revive the project.

Another project which culminated after more than five years of effort was the establishment of José Martí Park, which has become a patriotic shrine to Cubans in exile. One morning in 1952 as I was walking along 8th Avenue near 13th Street, Leno Menendez, a black Cuban known as "Bigote" because of his long handlebar moustache, approached me and said, "Tony, this is the house where Martí lived." I was born on 8th Avenue about five blocks away from the building, and I had never heard that. It really piqued my interest. My first thought was to turn it into a Cuban museum memorializing the great Martí--another magnet to attract Cuban and Latin American visitors.
A few days after this incident, I was told by a friend that Colonel Manuel Queredo, the owner of the airline Aerovias Q, I was at the Tampa Terrace Hotel in bed with the flu. I had become close to Colonel Queredo when I helped him obtain a permit in Washington for his airline to come to Tampa. I went to see him at the hotel to see if I could do something for him. In the course of my visit I brought up the Martí house. The colonel looked at me, raised his arm, and pointing a finger said, "Go buy it! Don't worry about the money. I will send it to you, pronto."

I left him and went directly to the First Federal Bank. General Homer W. Hesterly was president and a member of the Ybor City Rotary Club. I explained what had transpired between Colonel Queredo and me only a few minutes before. General Hesterly called Lesley Blank, a realtor, that same afternoon. The three of us went to see the proprietor of the house, a Mrs. Crenshaw, and the deal was made. I sent the documents to Colonel Queredo in Havana. By return mail, he sent a check for $3,500 to me. Colonel Queredo donated the house and the land to the Cuban government.

It took about five years to create the park. A delegation of Tampans made three trips to confer with President Batista. Among the committee members were former Governor of Florida Doyle E. Carlton, Mayor Hixon, John Diaz, Tony Grimaldi, and Earl Mullen. The house was too far gone to preserve. The Cuban government suggested a park be established. The plans were drawn by No de Menecis and the contractor was Rañon y Jiménez. The Cuban government had pledged $23,000, but only $18,000 was finally sent to the Cuban consulate in Tampa. The statue of José Martí located in the center of the park was made from funds left from the failed project to erect a statute of Martí on the steps of the Ybor factory. Alberto Sabas, the sculptor, who created the Christopher Columbus statue on Bayshore Boulevard, donated his services.

Through the years of effort to establish the park, the Tampa committee was supported by Cuban civic leaders, journalists, and historians. Today Cuban exiles take great pride in keeping the Martí Park in beautiful condition. This is their little piece of Cuba where they gather to celebrate patriotic dates.

The 1950 Gasparilla festivities were the greatest in the city's history. The Tribune's headlines read, "Gasparilla Goes Latin." The Cuban government sent the frigate José Martí, fifty conga dancers, seventy newsmen, the Havana Carnival Queen and her court, and hundreds of Cuban visitors. This was one of the most colorful and festive events in Gasparilla's history. A few months later the king of Gasparilla, Howard Frankland, and Queen Mary Dupre and her court received an invitation to participate in Havana Carnival. The interchange between Tampa and Cuba was now at its peak.

On one of our goodwill trips to Havana we visited with President Batista and members of his cabinet. As we were leaving, I was approached by the president's press secretary whose name was Cabus. He said to me, "You know, Tampa is the cradle of Cuban liberty. If you research the history of Martí in Tampa we will make historical markers with the information you send us." I was taken to the military school outside of Havana, and they showed me the foundry where the work on the markers would be done. In charge of the military was a Havana Rotarian, Fifi Bock, the son of a Cuban tobacco tycoon. I was beside myself with the proposition. This was truly a great opportunity to cement historical ties with Cuba.
When I returned to Tampa, I went to the local library for information. I found little to nothing on Ybor City and Martí’s activities here. At the time there were quite a few veterans of the Cuban revolution living in Ybor City. In fact they had a veteran's association called Delegacion en Tampa de las Emigrados Revolucionarios Cubanos de la Guerra de Independencia. I started interviewing veterans and old-timers of Ybor City. The first man I interviewed was Blas O'Halloran. He was ninety years old and the son of Blas, Sr., the man who had made the cigar that concealed the message from the Cuban junta to start the revolution in 1895. I found this story so intriguing that it prompted me to write my first historical article. It was published in Tampa magazines and in Cuba.

I had gathered a lot of historical data, but the political climate in Cuba was becoming so volatile that it affected the historical markers project. In 1959, with Castro's revolution a success, the project died. Nevertheless, in Tampa, funds were raised from various corporations, and we were able to erect all twenty-four historical markers in Ybor City. This made quite an impact on the community. Leland Hawes, in a full page story in the Sunday Tribune, lauded the project. The project has been an ongoing one. Today Hillsborough County has more historical markers than any other county in the state.

In 1955 Tampa celebrated its 100th anniversary as an incorporated town. This was a year-long celebration. Cuba honored our city by issuing commemorative stamps of El Liceo Cuban, the
original Ybor wooden factory where José Martí formalized the Cuban revolutionary party and a stamp of the historic photograph of Martí on the steps of the Ybor factory. The Havana Rotary Club and the Cuban Tourist Commission were on hand for several events. Tampa and Havana celebrated their century-old ties, including the tobacco industry, blood ties, and the fabulous history echoing to the clang of Spanish armor a full century before Plymouth and Jamestown were settled.

The programs started by the Ybor City Rotary Club have made a lasting impact on the Tampa community. It brought together civic, social, and cultural business organizations in an effort to unify the community, promote its port and industries, and exhibit its rich history by erecting monuments, parks, and historical markers. Today the former Pan American Commission carries on with worldwide efforts as the Tampa Bay Trade Council. It is the hope that in the future Tampa will again embrace the people of Cuba and renew old bonds.

As for me personally, delving into the history of Tampa in relation to Cuba has enriched my life. We have proven that history is not the dead past but a rich bond in building bridges of friendships and goodwill.
For Tampa’s historical community, 1994 will be remembered above all as the year the city lost Tony Pizzo. Termed by the Tampa Tribune "the man who has done more than anyone else to keep the city’s past alive," Tony Pizzo WAS Tampa history to many people.

Born in Tampa on September 22, 1912, Tony Pizzo was the grandson of Italian immigrants Paul and Rosalia Pizzolato Pizzo. He grew up in Ybor City, Tampa’s vibrant cigar making community of Cuban, Spanish, Afro-Cuban, and Italian immigrants. As a young businessman in the 1950s, he noticed that the unique multicultural Tampa he had known as a boy was rapidly fading under the impact of time and change. Beginning in 1952, he devoted himself to promoting public awareness of Tampa’s colorful history and to gathering materials documenting the city’s rich cultural heritage. An eloquent speaker and writer, he enthusiastically pursued Tampa history, making him one of the best known (and best loved) citizens of his native town.

His prominence as a Tampa historian also made him an archival magnet of formidable power, drawing irreplaceable old photographs and other historical source materials out of Tampa’s trunks and attics. To ensure preservation of his vast trove of Tampiana and make it available for research, he chose the Special Collections Department of the University of South Florida as the ultimate home for his collection. The tens of thousands of books, maps, manuscripts, cigar labels, artifacts, and photographs constituting the Tony Pizzo Collection uniquely embody the heritage of Tampa and its environs. In saving this rich array of Tampa source material, Tony Pizzo not only earned a measure of immortality for himself, but also made immortal the city’s lost yesterdays, providing windows through which can be seen the streets, buildings, and people of vanished years. The following photograph essay is designed to give a sense of the nature and scope of the Pizzo Collection.
Anthony P. Pizzo
1912 - 1994
The Pizzo Collection contains a great quantity of material dealing with Tampa’s ethnic mutual aid societies. Seen here are rule booklets for the Circulo Cubano (1928), Centro Español (1940), and L’Unione Italiana (1952).

In many ways, the stereoscope was the late 19th-century equivalent of the TV set. The well-equipped American parlor in the 1890s and early 1900s often featured a stereoscope like the one seen above, with boxes of slides showing strange and exotic scenes from around the world. When viewed through the twin lenses of the stereoscope, the two pictures on the slide gave a realistic 3-D effect. The Pizzo collection contains numerous stereo views of early Florida like the one seen here.
Map of Fort Brooke, Tampa Bay. Copied from the original in the National Archives, Washington, D.C. The Pizzo Collection contains scores of rare cartographic images of the Tampa area, both originals and reproductions.

A page from an original record book showing shipments of cattle from Tampa in the 1880s. Each group of cows is listed by brand and ear-notches. The figure-eight symbols represent the animal’s ownership. The ear-notches supplemented the brand, making it harder for rustlers to disguise stolen cattle.
The Cuesta Rey cigar factory at 2015 Howard Avenue in West Tampa circa 1919.

The Centro Español building in West Tampa, circa 1914.
"El Lector," the Reader. One of the notable features of the cigar industry was the institution of *el lector*, who was hired by the workers to read to them while they worked. The picture above shows a lector in action at the Cuesta Rey cigar factory in Tampa around 1930. The man standing at right is the foreman, Ramón Fernández Rey.

Photograph of a group of "stripers" in the Perfecto Garcia "El Paraiso" factory in 1924. The "stripers" removed the medial rib from the tobacco leaf. The presence of the Afro-Cuban woman at the left shows the cigar industry did not segregate workers by race.
The Pizzo Collection is rich in materials relating to the Tampa cigar industry, including cigar boxes, cigar labels, cigar bands, and related ephemera.

A tobacco exhibit at the Florida State Fair in Tampa, 1941. The aeroplane and the dress of the young woman standing next to it are made of Tampa cigars.
This selection of brochures about Ybor City from the 1940s is typical of the thousands of items of printed ephemera about Tampa in the Pizzo Collection.

Excavated bottles of the Florida Brewing Company, once the state’s leading beer manufacturer. This brewery, a photograph of which appears with the bottles, was located in Ybor City.
Owned by Harry Galetzil, Harry’s Market at 2115 Grand Central Avenue featured the exotic tropical fruits popular with Tampa’s polyglot population - mango, guava, zapote, platanos, mamey, and carambola.

Seventh Avenue (circa 1940) was Ybor City’s "main street," the center for shopping and socializing. At left is the famous Las Novedades Restaurant.
Ybor City residents flocked to the movies. Center: 1920 advertisement for a film at the San Souci Theatre, a popular Ybor City movie house at 1313 7th Avenue. Top: boys outside an Ybor City movie theater around 1910. Lower right: tickets to the Casino Theatre, a motion picture theater located in the Centro Español in Ybor City during the 1930s and '40s.

The Pizzo Collection contains menus and other memorabilia of Ybor City's restaurants, ranging from the world famous Columbia Restaurant to the somewhat humbler dining establishment that issued the above menu in 1912.
Tony Pizzo, Alcalde of Ybor City, with Mayor George B. Coover of Redington Beach, in June 1953. The Ybor City flag that Alcalde Pizzo planted in the beach was to "claim" it for Ybor City. The unofficial "office" of Alcalde, or Mayor, of Ybor City was created by the Ybor business community in the 1950s, with Tony Pizzo as the first to hold the honor.

Mack Traina outside the Las Novedades Restaurant campaigning for Alcalde of Ybor City in 1959, on a platform calling for "clean elections." Traina won the election.
One of the many rare Tampa cigar labels from the Pizzo Collection.

T.J. Shaw’s Oyster House on the Tampa waterfront near the foot of Whiting Street in the 1880s. In the background is the mouth of the Hillsborough River, where some of the best oyster beds in Florida could be found. On the horizon are two low, grassy keys that would later become Davis Islands.

The shore of Tampa Bay where Plant Avenue reaches Bayshore rive, as it was in 1902.
Members of the Tampa Whist Club, circa 1892. Whist was a popular card game in Victorian America.

In 1910, Tampa was certainly not in the forefront of the struggle for women’s rights, as indicated by this anti-suffrage float in the Panama Canal Celebration held that year. Sponsored by the Anti-Suffrage Club of Tampa, the float was emblazoned: “We can serve home and country without the vote.”
Downtown Tampa as it looked in 1890s. The corner at left is the intersection of Franklin and Lafayette (now Kennedy). Visible across the river in the background is the Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa).

Jack’s Place, a roadside restaurant near the Green Gables Touris Camp, Tampa, shown around 1927.
Walter Beecham, founder of Beechcraft Aviation, posing with an early aeroplane flying from the Old Fairgrounds near the Tampa Bay Hotel (University of Tampa). This was one of the first aircraft to fly in the Tampa Bay region.

The U.S.S. *Tampa*, moored in her home port in 1912. On September 26, 1918, she was sunk with all hands while on a war patrol in the Bristol Channel off the coast of England. As the crew included 23 Tampans, this was the greatest single loss the city suffered during World War I.
"Profit Without Risk," an illustrated pamphlet published by the Mutual Realty & Investment Company in 1909 promoted development along Grand Central Avenue (now Kennedy Boulevard).

An advertisement from a pamphlet promoting Tampa’s Davis Islands in the 1930s.
BOOK REVIEWS


Florida spends more on historic preservation than other states, perhaps because there is relatively more left due to its more recent development, and perhaps also because preservation is good for tourism. Though original native inhabitants were here for 10,000 years, their remains are seldom apparent compared with more recent historic attractions. Only a few hundred prehistoric mounds, canals, causeways, and settlements are left of the hundreds of thousands that once existed. Florida Indian temples, graveyards, and residences were not stone pyramids but constructions of earth, wood, wattle, and daub, which easily decayed and eroded away. Other than stone tools, pottery, artifacts, and bones, mostly perishable materials usually disappeared fast in the acidic soils and wet climate. The most visible remains are Indian mounds, many composed of alkaline shell which helps preserve organic remains. Mac Perry’s book is a welcome addition to public archaeology in Florida because it catalogues for the interested resident and tourist alike the many mounds still standing along the west coast from Cedar Key southward.

This book is, however, much more than just a list of places and exhibits. It presents archaeology for the lay reader in fascinating but never tedious detail, describing how scientists record, investigate, analyze, and reconstruct the past. Respectfully mourning the extinct native peoples, Perry brings out well the conservation message, urging visitors to see, imagine, and enjoy, but not to dig or endanger the evidence, nor trespass, nor disturb the natural environment. He notes how often both shell and sand mounds have been mined for construction fill (most Florida roads were built using Indian midden soils).

This is also the colorful story of a personal quest to visit each site. Here Perry’s gentle humor emerges as he guides his boat or his van (named "Buttermilk") past garage sales down some lonesome forested road or climbs up some thickly vegetated slope, or drives into some heavily populated area to find modern buildings where a mound once stood. His interest was first aroused when he moved into a St. Petersburg house that sits atop the remains of a mound; his extensive background in plant and animal species provides additional attractive detail at each site. The book has photos and drawings of sites, artifacts, and reconstructions of what settlements, buildings, and everyday life might have looked like. Several boxes describe minutiae such as archaeological terms, Florida’s law against disturbing aboriginal graves, conquistadors’ explorations, and the famous Native American black drink. For history buffs there are descriptions and photos of nineteenth-century excavations, notes on the last few centuries’ use of several locales, historic buildings, and early non-Indian pioneers.

Another notable aspect of this work is the author’s fanciful (but reasonable) interpretation of different times in the past (from early hunting to the moment of Spanish arrival) by means of short dramatic narratives with "tan, nearly naked, tattooed" characters engaged in getting food, making medicine, and other aspects of Indian life. Unlike a dry scientific report, the popular approach, while not new, is still rare in archaeology. It conveys the excitement of the past by
fleshing out the detail with real people making and using those artifacts and mounds. Since most excavation in Florida is done with public funds, the public should expect more of this kind of enjoyable reporting about research. Perry has set a good example for professionals.

Well written and edited, the book is inexpensive and attractive, with a beautiful cover painting of the temple mounds, plaza and town that once stood on the shore at Tampa Bay. There are few typographical errors, and the only thing missing is a good overall map. Forced to be picky, I could criticize the author’s reconstructions of native life as lived mostly by male actors (the women are usually described as being off to the side gathering shellfish with the kids). I could also ask why he stopped at the Suwannee River and the west coast when Florida has so much more. The book is an intriguing travel guide, educational tool, and captivating story. I hope it can be updated as needed and followed by similar treatments of the rest of the state. It is a valuable contribution to the quest for knowledge of vanished human cultures and the movement to preserve what is left of their evidence as it is rapidly being bulldozed away.

Nancy Marie White

It is easy to exhaust a vocabulary of superlatives on Ringling: The Florida Years. But the reader needs to be patient because the initial but erroneous impression is that the author intends to canter over old terrain. He first dwells on the paucity of documentation about the Circus King and then provides an extended treatment of the early years in Sarasota.

The fear that antiquarian zeal, enlivened by occasional speculation about an enigmatic figure, will prevail is unjustified. It soon becomes clear that the preliminary material is relevant to establishing John Nicholas Ringling in his socio-economic milieu and providing a persuasive evaluation of his career. David Weeks has ransacked all of the available letter collections, court records, and recollections of surviving contemporaries to produce an arresting biography. The rewards are all the greater because he resists the temptation to rehash the already familiar history of the circus, and instead he concentrates on Ringling’s role as a leader in areas hitherto largely overlooked.

In the process, the author verifies his major contention that the destinies of Ringling and Sarasota were entwined to the ultimate benefit of the city. There is a detailed and authoritative treatment of the aspirations that gained expression in the creating of the Ringling Museum of Art. Weeks demolishes the notion that Ringling imitated William Randolph Hearst by purchasing quantities of art objects on impulse. Like most beginners, the Circus King acquired statuary and paintings of dubious quality, but his taste improved because he relied increasingly on the advice of discriminating professionals. The chapter on the assembling of the collection is done so meticulously that it should be required reading for docents, to say nothing of visitors to the museum.

Later in his study Weeks produces a lucid account of the ten-year assault on the Ringling estate by creditors trying to break the will which conferred the museum on the state of Florida and prohibited its removal from Sarasota. The legal complexities are clarified as never before. Ample attention is given to the mini-war of the Roses conducted by the Ringling heirs, with the combatants prone to change sides in endless plotting to control the circus. John Ringling North, the nephew of the Circus King, finally emerged as the winner, and he also receives the credit for keeping the museum intact. Weeks must have trained as a lawyer but recoiled from the jargon of the profession because he has improved on earlier accounts, the bulk of which read like refrigerator warranties.

Not surprisingly, John Ringling is depicted as an elusive figure: one secretive about his financial dealings and his personal life. Although he did a lot of entertaining, such relationships were casual, sustained by prodigal hospitality rather than intimacy. Drawn mostly from the business world, they thrived on favors done and received as Ringling pursued his far-flung enterprises. Such friendships also unraveled when his financial empire slowly crumbled after the abrupt end of the Florida land boom. Weeks makes a brave effort to represent Ringling as basically honest, but provides considerable data for the opposite conclusion. The probability is that the resort to questionable financial practices increased during the great depression. Business partners learned
the hard way that if they crossed the desert with Ringling they needed to carry the water bottle. His cunning turned into paranoid suspicion of relatives and friends who tried to save him from bankruptcy after 1932; the personality change was due to a series of thromboses.

Weeks puts a positive spin on a gloomy ending by hailing Ringling’s fitful philanthropies which ultimately turned Sarasota into a cultural center. So sketchy a review conceals the encyclopedic knowledge that Weeks has brought to bear on a small but noteworthy episode in American history.

George H. Mayer
BOOK NOTES


The Colcord sisters’ book is a collection of entertaining historical vignettes portraying life in Fort Myers from the 1890s to the 1930s. Although some of the stories have previously appeared in modified form in such publications as the *Caloosa Quarterly and Miami Herald*, much of the material appears here for the first time. In writing the book, the third-generation Fort Myers natives drew not only on their personal memories of the 1920s and 1930s, but also on the tales of pioneer life told by their mother and grandmother. Additionally, during her years of service as a registered nurse, Alberta Colcord Weidenbach was able to record firsthand the memories and reminiscences of many elderly Fort Myers pioneers.

The book is divided into three sections, entitled "Personages From the Past," "Events of Yesteryear," and "Reminiscences." From the 1890s equestrian ring tournaments that gave the name of the city’s Tournament Street to the eight "commandments" for coping with the omnipresent Florida cockroaches of pre-Orkin-Man days, the individual chapters give a diverse series of snapshots illuminating the tribulations and rewards of living in early Fort Myers. The book also contains a sixteen-page photographic section that illustrates the various stories.
The book is available from the Southwest Florida Historical Society, and should be enjoyed by anyone interested in what daily life was like in Fort Myers in the "Old Days."
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