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GAVINO GUTIERREZ AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO TAMPA

by JESSE L. KEENE

SEVENTY THREE years ago the inhabitants around Hillsborough Bay never dreamed of the vast possibilities hidden in the scrub and native forest about them. They never dreamed that a large city was to be built at their own doors and by their own hands.¹

In 1844 there were between seven hundred and eight hundred people in the town of Tampa, a majority of whom were engaged in fishing, farming, and citrus cultivation. The few unpaved streets were named after presidents of the United States. The streets were made of sand. In fact the expanse of sand which was Franklin Street, now the main business street, appeared more like a seashore. There were a few sidewalks of wood in Tampa, and the buildings were chiefly rough and the houses small, while in the rural areas the homes were constructed of logs. Cows still roamed at will over the town, flocks of geese waddled down the streets, and grunting hogs could be seen here and there. Large numbers of alligators were often seen resting their noses on the banks of the Hillsborough River.

A stagecoach line had appeared by 1878, connecting Tampa and Dade City, then known as Tuckertown. Additional stage lines were in existence by 1883 - one connecting Tampa to Sanford, where the railroad terminated. Prior to 1884 northbound travelers were faced with the choice of a stagecoach to Sanford and the train, or a boat to Cedar Keys where they could board a narrow-gauge train to Fernandina. Mail also followed these routes, and freight was shipped by boat into Tampa by way of Key West. Many odd characters were to be found, some in a cluster of shanties on Spanish Town Creek.²

1. *Tampa Tribune*, May 25, 1894. Hereafter cited as *Tribune*.

2. Jessamine in *Pioneer Florida*, *Tribune*, July 24, 1955, reprint of article in *Tribune*, 1915; E. C. Robinson; *History of Hillsborough County, Florida*, 56-59.

The first railroad to reach Tampa was completed on January 23, 1884, and the first train-run with Tampa as the terminus was made January 24, 1884. This railroad is now the Atlantic Coast Line. The first bridge across the Hillsborough River was a railroad bridge. The other method of crossing was a flatboat ferry, no more than a good rowboat, at the approximate location of Lafayette Street Bridge. A rope pulled by hand furnished the motive power. Some of the travelers using the ferry came from the Pinellas section, including the towns of Largo and Clearwater.³

Tampa, up to 1884, looked like and was a "sleepy hamlet," somewhat isolated because of the lack of a railroad and because the United States military forces still occupied Fort Brooke, making navigation difficult for commercial craft which had to by pass the more desirable docks at the mouth of the river, and go up the river to inadequate wharves. Tampa's desirable water front was occupied by Uncle Sam, and the use of the extensive shore line was denied to Tampans.⁴

Despite the arrival of a railroad in Tampa in 1884, no industry of importance had located there, and industry was vital to the development and expansion of a modern city. Thus the first real impetus toward metropolitan growth was the coming of the cigar industry in 1885,⁵ a vitalizing influence, one that was to change Ybor City from an area of scrub oaks, palmettos, alligator holes and underbrush into a cosmopolitan area with all the assets necessary to promote commercial and social progress. The impetus came by accident rather than by a well-laid plan wisely carried out.⁶ It was due to the vision, intelligence, ability and indomitable will of Don Gavino Gutierrez, who made a deep impression on the community through his valuable contributions to the development and progress of Tampa.

Like so many noted people, who were born in small towns and villages, Gavino Gutierrez was born October 26, 1849, in San Vicente de la Barquera, a picturesque village in northern Spain near the foothills of the Cantabrian Mountains in the northern part of the province of Santander. San Vicente de la Barquera,

3. Robinson, *op. cit.* In 1884, St. Petersburg did not exist.

4. *Ibid.*, 56.

5. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

6. *Tribune*, May 25, 1894.

named after Saint Vicente, was and still is a fishing village near the Bay of Biscay. In modern times it is a tourist attraction with its notable bridges, the older one dating from the 15th century and the newer one nearly 200 years old. Elements of Napoleon's army of invasion came by San Vicente de la Barquera to seize the church jewels which were stored for safety in the Gutierrez home, and the army endeavored to burn the home but did not succeed. The ancestral home was a massive building located on a promontory 200 yards from the shore. Here young Gutierrez had an opportunity to learn about the rest of the world. From his home, ships could be seen on their voyages from the ports of other nations to the ports of Spain and Portugal. Here also he frequently saw ships dashed to pieces against the cliffs. Here, as a youth, he acquired a love for the sea which he retained for life.

The province of Santander, of which his village was a part, was rich in agricultural and citrus products and mineral resources. Furthermore the cattle and fishing industries were well developed.

Gutierrez observed the early development of the wealth of his province, but the promise was not enough to allay his curiosity about other parts of the world.⁷ So strong was his love of the sea and his desire to better himself economically that he went to Cuba, the usual destination of Spanish emigrants. Here he worked in a store, but according to Mrs. L. B. Mitchell, a daughter of Gutierrez, he was not satisfied, and in 1868 at the age of nineteen he arrived in New York.⁸

The United States was in the reconstruction period, following the War Between the States, when Don Gutierrez arrived. We were a comparatively weak nation of a little more than 30,000,000 people with a disjointed and disturbed economic situation. Yet the young Spaniard from San Vicente de la Barquera had faith in the future of this country.⁹ He worked as a bellhop for the first month in New York City. In a short time he had established an import-export business, selling in this country merchandise from Spain, Cuba and Mexico, and making numerous trips to Mexico, thus acquiring a good knowledge of the land. Being

7. Interview with D. B. McKay, January 16, 1957; E. C. Nance, "Gavino Gutierrez," *La Gaceta*, July 26, 1956.

8. Interview with D. B. McKay and Mrs. L. B. Mitchell, February 14, 1957.

9. Interview with D. B. McKay and Mrs. L. B. Mitchell, January 14, 1957, and February 14, 1957. E. C. Nance, *loc. cit.*

of an inquisitive and searching nature and having a great hunger for knowledge, young Gutierrez devoted much of his spare time to the study of architecture, engineering, surveying, the English language, and the customs of his adopted country. He became proficient in all of these intellectual pursuits.

Gutierrez was a handsome young man. His complexion was light and he had friendly but penetrating blue-gray eyes. Of medium stature, he had a robust appearance. He was a good conversationalist and enjoyed the exchange of ideas. His lively mind and imagination were obvious to all. He had reddish hair and in our day he would be nicknamed "Sandy." We are, therefore, not surprised to learn that such an attractive young man might also attract a beautiful young lady. When he was twenty eight years of age he fell in love with a beautiful Irish girl by the name of Nelly Daly, and they were married October 31, 1877.

An interesting humanitarian incident, which occurred while Gutierrez was still in New York City, is related by his son-in-law, D. B. McKay. One of the many revolutions in Mexico forced the members of a convent into exile. They walked from the United States-Mexican boundary to New York, carrying with them a piano in a push cart. Gutierrez clothed and fed the individuals and made arrangements for passage to Spain. He was offered compensation but refused it. When the members of the convent were on board, a mutual friend told Gutierrez that they had left the piano as part compensation. The piano could not be used: so Gutierrez demolished it and made some furniture from it. Three of the pieces, a console table, a small chest, and a mirror frame are in D. B. McKay's home today.¹⁰

In 1884 approximately seven years after Gutierrez's marriage, vast and important changes took place in his life, changes that were to influence not only his own life but the Tampa Bay area also. Gutierrez had a friend by the name of Bernardino Gargol, also a young Spaniard, who owned marmalade and guava paste factories in Cuba. Gargol told Gutierrez that he possessed reliable information that large plantations of wild guavas existed all along the west coast of Florida in the vicinity of Tampa Bay. Gargol believed that this would be an ideal place to establish fac-

10. Interview with D. B. McKay and Mrs. L. B. Mitchell, February 14, 1957.

tories for the manufacture of guava paste, and he had little difficulty in persuading Gutierrez to accompany him on an inspection trip to the region along Tampa Bay. Gargol did not speak English and he especially wanted Gutierrez as his interpreter as well as a partner in the exploration of the wild regions near Tampa.

Gargol was poor sailor, therefore it was decided to make an overland trip to their destination, and they took the railroad to Sanford, then a rough stage ride to Tampa. They were not able to find any guava plantations in this locality, although they found some trees in the Tampa area. Gutierrez and Gargol then explored other nearby regions, particularly Peru, an area near the Alafia River, but again were disappointed, and acknowledging failure, they returned to Tampa.

During the search for the non-existent guava trees Gutierrez had ample opportunity to study the area around Tampa and was thoroughly convinced that Tampa and the surrounding country offered a bright and profitable future. He studied Tampa's natural harbor, visualizing this area converted to a center for export and import business, and, reasoned that, because of its strategic geographical position, its ideal climate, and the hospitality of its citizens, this would be a fine business area. Furthermore, Gutierrez was fond of hunting and fishing, two sports in which he could not indulge in New York as he would like. Thus, to Gutierrez there were opportunities for business success and gracious living.¹¹

Disappointed in their search for guava plantations, Gutierrez and Gargol decided to return to New York by boat. Their decision, no doubt, was influenced by the uncomfortable land journey to Tampa and Gutierrez's love of the sea.

The trip required a change of boats at Key West, and while waiting for the New York boat the two gentlemen decided to visit an old friend, Vincente Martinez Ybor, who owned one of the many cigar factories at Key West. Here they found another mutual friend at Ybor's home, Ignacio Haya, who owned and operated a cigar factory in New York City. These two men were to be vitally identified with the future history of Tampa.¹²

11. E. C. Nance, *loc. cit.*

12. *Tribune*, October 30, 1956.

Gutierrez was informed by Ybor that he was planning to move his factory from Key West because of constant labor trouble. The manufacturer was considering offers from Galveston, Texas, and Mobile, Alabama. At this point Gutierrez made a suggestion that has helped Tampa in the past seventy-odd years. He described the wonderful climate and other desirable conditions, similar to those of Havana and Key West; the ease with which the Havana tobacco could be imported; the necessary transportation facilities which would unite Tampa with the northern markets; and above all the friendliness of the people. So convincing was Gutierrez that Ybor and Haya decided to go to Tampa to investigate. They invited young Gutierrez to accompany them.¹³

Ybor and Haya found the conditions favorable for the manufacturing of cigars, but they could not reach an agreement with the Board of Trade regarding financial help they would receive as an inducement to bring the factory to Tampa. Just as they were about to leave for Galveston, they visited the store of Miller and Henderson. At this time Colonel W. B. Henderson offered them valuable property equal in value to the desired amount. W. C. Brown, then clerk of the circuit court of Hillsborough County, expressed his desire to collaborate with Colonel Henderson if the visitors established factories in Tampa. The offer was not accepted, but it probably influenced them to reconsider their decision and investigate further the advantages of manufacturing cigars in Tampa.¹⁴

Gutierrez thus became the first advocate of a major industry in the area. His zeal and courage, foresight, and wisdom, enthusiasm and brave vision were contagious, and Ybor decided to build his factories in this location. Gutierrez continued, through correspondence with Haya, to advance reasons why Haya should move his factory to Tampa. Haya, troubled by the climate and other conditions in New York City, decided to do so, and a friendly contest ensued between Haya and Ybor to see which one would activate the first factory.¹⁵

13. *Tribune*, October 30, 1955; Anthony Pizzo, "Gutierrez Discovers Tampa," *Tropico*, March, 1955.

14. E. C. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 61; interview with D. B. McKay, February 14, 1957.

15. Interview with D. B. McKay, January 16, 1957; E. C. Nance, *loc. cit.*

V. Martinez Ybor purchased from John T. Lesley, for \$9,000, 30 to 40 acres of land northeast of Tampa on which the factory and a number of houses for the employees were to be erected. Afterwards, an additional 30 acres were purchased from S. P. Hadson. Meanwhile, Haya purchased 20 acres and started building a two and one-half story factory at Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street.

Gutierrez, a capable civil engineer, was selected by Ybor to lay out the streets, and to design and construct the factory and the homes of the workers. The first tree was cut down on October 8, 1885, the beginning of a process which was to result in urbanization of this area.

Both firms completed their factories by January, 1886, and decided to open together, but labor trouble occurred in Ybor's factory because of a Spaniard employed in the bookkeeping department. The Cuban cigar workers, who were anti-Spanish, refused to work. This difficulty was the first of many such incidents to appear in the Tampa cigar factories. The Spaniard was discharged, but the delay caused Ybor's factory to secure a license as factory number two.

In the meantime, in the early part of 1885, Gutierrez made arrangements to move his family to Tampa and went to New York to liquidate his business affairs. He returned to Tampa in September, 1885, bringing with him his family, which consisted of his wife, two daughters, Aurora and Adelaida, and a seven-months-old boy, Gavino, Jr. In 1888, a third daughter, Maria Harriot, was born.

Gutierrez was thirty-six years old when he came to Tampa, and he worked hard and with enthusiasm in the creation of the small town. Originally it consisted of a few blocks from Twelfth Street eastward to Fourteenth Street, and from Sixth Avenue northward to Ninth Ave. The numerical designations of the streets were due to Gutierrez, and it is significant that Ybor City is the only part of present Tampa so numbered.

Gutierrez was a busy man in the following three years, and the program sponsored by Ybor and directed by Gutierrez grew rapidly. The nature of the area changed from a frontier character to a town of 10,000 people, with numerous factories, restaurants, social clubs, hotels, stores, and homes.

As years passed, Gutierrez continued in various fields of endeavor. His family was growing. His oldest daughter, Aurora, married D. B. McKay, later Mayor of Tampa. From this marriage seven girls and three boys were born. Aurora died October, 1956. His second daughter, Adelaida, married Francisco Colado. When she died, she left three sons and two daughters. His only son, Don Gavino, Jr., married Lolita Del Corro, a native of Santander, and they had two sons and two daughters. His youngest daughter, Maria Harriot, who was born in Tampa, married L. B. Mitchell, a prominent Tampan physician.¹⁶

Don Gavino established the family fortune and properties by buying 149 acres of land in an area that extended from Thirty-sixth Street up to Fiftieth, and from Seventh Avenue to McKay Bay, and showed an extraordinary ability and knowledge in this field of real estate development. He subdivided this land and sold it in parcels for the construction of homes. He also acquired a swampy piece of property which was drained and filled situated on Sixteenth Street and Seventh Avenue. A three-story building was erected on this lot in front of another two-story building, which served for a long time as the post office. Both properties still belong to the family.

Gutierrez built his own home, which he named "Spanish Park," in an area covered with palm trees and other tropical plants. It was the stage for many fiestas celebrated with his friends, some of whom still remember the picnics and outings where the delicious Spanish wine calmed thirsty throats. "Spanish Park" is still maintained in its original state, and there Gavino Gutierrez, Jr., his family, and his sister, Maria Mitchell live.¹⁷

Because of his position in the community Gutierrez was appointed the first Spanish consul in Tampa by the Spanish government. He held the office for many years, rendering faithful and honest service without compensation.

His love for the water often motivated trips to the adjacent islands of the west coast of Florida. On one of his voyages he met an old Spanish fisherman name Casanas, who had homesteaded the island of Anna Maria and lived there for thirty-five years. In

16. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 60; interview with D. B. McKay and Mrs. L. B. Mitchell, February 14, 1957; Anthony Pizzo, *loc. cit.*

17. Interview with D. B. McKay, January 14, 1957; Anthony Pizzo, *loc. cit.*

his old age, Casanas requested Gutierrez to survey the land for purpose of sale. Casanas also sold some of the land to him and for compensation gave lots to Gutierrez's children, who still own the property.

Gutierrez, in his late years, made a trip around the world on the ship of an old Scottish friend. He kept a diary recording the interesting episodes, but unfortunately, according to members of the family, this diary has been lost.

His voyage coincided with outbreak of the World War I, and the news reached the ship when it was off the coast of Africa. The vessel immediately went to a neutral port in Spain.

The life of a great humanitarian, builder, engineer, and architect came to an end in Madrid on March 8, 1919. His body remained in Spain until 1924, when it was brought to Tampa, where it now remains in its last resting place.¹⁸

18. Interview with D. B. McKay and Mrs. L. B. Mitchell, February 14, 1957.