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Celebrating Florida's 150th Birthday: St. Petersburg Campus Hosts the State's Sesquicentennial Anniversary with Help from the Library's Special Collections

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Looking Back

Watching the Bathers, Pablo Beach, Fla.

The sandy shores of Pablo Beach in Duval County attracted many visitors to the warm Atlantic waters.

Celebrating Florida's 150th Birthday

St. Petersburg campus hosts the state's sesquicentennial anniversary with help from the Library's Special Collections

Florida is our nation's oldest and newest frontier. Generations of Native Americans thrived on its verdant landscape and nourishing estuaries. Spaniards established settlements in La Florida long before English boats landed at Plymouth Rock. Spanish, French and English flags flew above remote outposts until the 1821 cession of the territory to the United States under Territorial Governor Andrew Jackson.

On March 3, 1995, Florida celebrated its 150th anniversary of statehood. To commemorate this special birthday, the Campus Lecture Series at USP St. Petersburg sponsored a major two-week symposium from February 27 to March 12. Entitled Florida: A Sunshine State of Mind, this program included lectures, exhibits, panel discussions, folk music and dramatic performances.

The symposium's historical perspective begins in 1845 when Florida attains...
statehood. Through the Civil War, Reconstruction and Gilded Age, Florida remained the least developed and most remote region of the southeastern United States. The 20th century refined both Florida and its image through land booms, demographic explosions, and rocket blasts into outer space. Scholarly lectures examined Florida's demography, environment and agriculture, while performers and raconteurs brought music, historical personages and folk culture to life. Panelists discussed pivotal events, such as World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, as well as local archival and historical resources.

Designed and funded by students at the St. Petersburg campus, the symposium paid tribute to our state during USF's Homecoming Week and was sanctioned as an event of state-wide significance by the Florida Sesquicentennial Commission.

Special Collections Traces Florida History

Much of the event's primary source materials — photographs, maps and historical documents — were supplied by the USF's libraries, providing an authentic mosaic of Florida history. (Unless otherwise noted, all of the materials mentioned below may be examined at the Special Collections Department on the fourth floor of the Tampa Campus Library.) Some items are part of the Florida Historical Society's archives, a rich treasure trove presently housed in Special Collections.

A large number of Florida maps, some dated as early as the sixteenth century, can be found in the library's special collections, indicating changing awareness of the geography of the state's landscape during the Spanish, English and French colonial periods.

During the territorial period, Florida remained a remote, sparsely populated area. Its frontier served as a battleground between Seminole Indians and migrating white settlers. The papers of Territorial Governor Richard Keith Call document the Second Seminole War and attempts to remove Seminole Indians to other parts of the country, while the Ellis...
Hughes papers recount life in Florida during the 1830s. Also of interest are the business records of Odet Philippe, an early white settler along the shores of Old Tampa Bay.

Plantation records offer a portrait of antebellum Florida. The papers of Farquhar Bethune and the El Destino Plantation record work assignments and activities at Jacksonville area and Jackson County plantations prior to the Civil War. Governor John Milton's official letterbook, a part of the Florida Historical Society's collection, records his correspondence during the hostilities. As Union troops captured coastal ports, many battles took place within the state's interior.

After the Civil War, the center of population moved south from the Panhandle to the peninsula. Former military outposts — Fort Brooke (Tampa), Fort Harrison (Clearwater), and Fort Myers, to name a few — were transformed into villages and towns. The records of the pioneers, such as the papers of James McKay and Captain John Lesley, illustrate the growth of social, commercial and economic institutions in the Tampa area.

The population of many Florida cities, especially Tampa, exploded during the Spanish-American War. The Camp Cuba Libre papers cover military life and activities at the Jacksonville area headquarters for the Seventh Army Corps. A variety of personal papers, such as those of the Jackson family, trace the transformation of Tampa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from a town into a city.

This demographic explosion continued into the twentieth century. The Tampa/St. Petersburg, Palm Beach, and Miami/Ft. Lauderdale areas experienced major booms during the 1910s and 1920s. The business, real estate, and personal records of Walter Fuller and George Gandy provide a primary perspective of local developers.

USF houses the papers of numerous post-World War II politicians and civic leaders who shaped our state's future. Of special interest is the substantial collection of papers, films, scrapbooks and memorabilia that document the political career of Governor LeRoy Collins. As legislator, governor and private citizen, Collins vigorously championed ethical leadership during an uneasy transition between Old and New Florida. The papers of community leaders such as Cody Fowler and Robert Saunders, among others, provide primary accounts of the complex nature of the struggle for civil rights in Florida.

Prominent African-Americans, such as Saunders and Blanche Armwood persevered under the oppressive Jim Crow system. A segregated society required African-Americans to create institutions to provide for community needs and mutual aid. Cubans and Afro-Cubans also devised mutual aid organizations. The Centro Espanol de Tampa, Circulo Cubano and Centro Asturiano mutual aid society collections include more than 750 bound volumes and operational records, as well as photographs, playbills and other cultural artifacts. The voluminous papers, records, and ephemera collected by Anthony "Tony" Pizzo allow us to witness the evolution of Tampa in general, and the Spanish and Italian flavor of Ybor City in particular.
Special Collections Additional Resources

USF Tampa's Special Collections also preserves a wealth of aerial photographs from counties in west central Florida, as well as a vertical file with special emphasis on the development of Hillsborough County and our University. In addition to photographs found in the University Archives, the Special Collections department at USF Tampa also serves as a repository for many images used in the Oracle, USF's student newspaper.

Among the Tampa library's outstanding photo collections is The Burgert Brothers photographs which record the development of Tampa between the 1840s and 1950s, with an emphasis on the early 20th century. At USF St. Petersburg, the Earl Jacobs Collection provide a unique perspective of boom-era St. Petersburg. USF also maintains a substantial number of historic postcards, largely covering the early 20th century.

The voices of Florida comprise another part of the library's historical documents and recordings. The Florida Sheet Music collection includes songs—many promotional in nature—about late nineteenth and early twentieth century Florida. Interviews in the Oral History of Modern America collection at USF St. Petersburg offer a rich and impressive primary source for local, state and Southern history.

In addition to archival resources, the circulating collections of the Tampa Campus and regional libraries include a variety of original and reprint volumes that describe Florida, from its prehistoric archaeology to present-day issues. A majority of these works have call numbers between F306 and F320.

For more information, call Special Collections Department, Tampa Campus Library — 974-2731, Florida Historical Society, Tampa Campus Library — 974-3815, Special Collections & Archives, Poynter Library — 893-9125 or 553-3590.

By James Schnur, coordinator of Florida Sesquicentennial Symposium at USF, a graduate student in history and Special Collections Assistant at the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.