



### Mission

Preserving, promoting, and celebrating the unique cultural heritage of Ybor City and supporting the Ybor City Museum State Park

## ***NEWS BRIEF***

The month of May marks many landmark anniversaries for the City of Tampa. This week, we share stories about Tampa's first professional fire department and the opening of Tampa Union Station. May is also Jewish American Heritage Month. It is estimated that three-fourths of the shops on 7th Ave. in Ybor City were at one time owned by Jewish merchants. We hope you will enjoy our spotlight on one of the shops, Steinberg's Dry Goods.

Chantal Ruilova Hevia, President and CEO

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### **Tampa's First Paid Fire Department**



This week marks the 126th anniversary of the founding of Tampa's first professional, paid fire department on May 10, 1895, when the City of Tampa passed ordinance #307. The first chief was A.J. Harris, who was in charge of over 22 firefighters at 5 stations. Firefighters worked 10-12 consecutive days and many lived near the stations, allowing them to go home for meals.

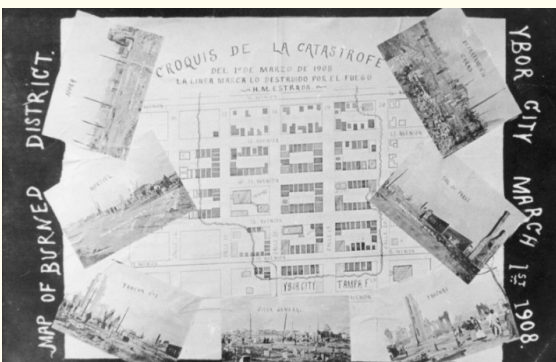
Prior to this date, a volunteer fire department made up of seven "bucket brigades" responded to fires throughout Tampa with water supplied by the Hillsborough River, two public wells, and the Jackson Street Ditch. In 1886, Robert Mugge donated a hand pump and 350 feet of hose after a fire destroyed an entire city block in Tampa. This volunteer group also responded to the Ybor City fire of 1891, which began at the Aurelio Restaurant on 7th Ave. They were overwhelmed by this fire, most notably because of the insufficient supply of water by the privately-owned Tampa Waterworks. This fire ended up destroying several blocks of Ybor City.

Fires like these solidified the need for a professional fire department that had the needed resources to fight fires. Tampa's new fire department was able to purchase

equipment ---like fire engines pulled by horses --- with a budget of \$18,000 a year. A professional fire department was also necessary because in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of the buildings in Ybor City and West Tampa were constructed of wood and very prone to fires. Also, the large number of buildings that contained tobacco leaves, which are highly flammable, added to the concern.

The most devastating fire in Ybor City was the fire of 1908, which began at 9:33 a.m. on March 1st at the Antonio Diaz boarding house on 12th Ave. The fire ultimately destroyed more than 18 blocks, exceeding \$1 million in losses. Consumed in the blaze were 171 homes, 42 businesses, and 5 cigar factories. Though the Tampa fire department responded to this with a new fire engine, they arrived 45 minutes after the fire started due to confusion and again, an insufficient water supply.

Though the loss was immense, most of the buildings were rebuilt with assistance from a relief group established the next day. One of the buildings that was rebuilt was the Perfecto Garcia Brothers cigar factory, which included a small water tower on top. Photos compliments of Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative and UF Pizzo Collection



Map of buildings affected by the 1908 fire



Fire department responding to the 1908 fire

## Steinberg's Dry Goods

Walking down 7th Ave., you are likely to notice the names that are engraved into the building facades. Who were the people behind these names? Local historian Tony Pizzo estimated that three-fourths of the shops on this street were once owned by Jewish merchants. Today, we highlight Edward H. Steinberg, one of Ybor City's most prominent merchants.



Steinberg was the owner of Steinberg's Dry Goods, located in a two-story building at 1611 E. 7th Ave. He sold items like non-perishable food, clothing, needles, and buttons in his shop. Not only did he supply the people of Ybor City with necessary

goods, but he also helped supply Jose Martí with money. Steinberg became active in the Cuban War of Independence and provided support to Martí. Like many other Jewish people in the area, he sympathized with the plight of the Cubans. Primarily immigrating from Romania, Jewish immigrants in Ybor City understood what it was like to live in a country run by a repressive government. For his actions, Martí later honored Steinberg with a reception. Photo compliments of USF Special Collections

## Tampa Union Station



This week also marks the 109th anniversary of the opening of Tampa Union Station, located at the edge of Downtown Tampa and at the gateway to Ybor City. Tampa Union Station, which opened on May 15, 1912, was designed in the Italian Renaissance

Revival style by architect J.F. Leitner of

Wilmington, North Carolina, who later became a Tampa resident. Its original purpose was to unite the operations of the Atlantic Coast Line, the Seaboard Air Line, and the Tampa Northern Railroad in one spot. These lines connected a majority of the Southeast US to Florida. During the early 1900s, they were integral in bringing both tourists and settlers to Florida, contributing to that period's economic boom. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. Tampa Union Station has served many purposes throughout the decades. The building eventually began to deteriorate following the decline in train ridership during the 1950s. Its restoration during a multi-year effort was completed in May 1998.

[Click here](#) for a history of Tampa Union Station. Photo compliments of Tampapix

## COOKING CORNER

### Challah

In honor of Jewish American Heritage Month, we are featuring the recipe for one of the most well-known Jewish foods. Challah is bread that is enjoyed during the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. The name was first given to bread used by the Jews in South Germany in the Middle Ages for the Sabbath. The name is derived from the Hebrew word for giving the Lord the first portion of dough. Those of the Jewish faith were instructed to give 1/24th of their dough to the priests each Sabbath.



Challah has a centuries-long history of symbolism and folklore. Loaves are made in different shapes and sizes that give them different meanings. Although it can be baked without braids, Challah is commonly braided, which represents intertwined arms symbolizing love. Twelve divisions of the braided bread are used to show the miracle of the 12 loaves for the 12 tribes of Israel. With no beginning or end, these loaves represent continuity and are served for Rosh Hashanah. Hand and ladder shapes are served for Yom Kippur and small triangular loaves resembling hamantaschen (traditional pastries) are served for Purim. Aside from the way they are baked, challah can differ in their flavor. Savory challah is often baked with onions and sweet versions are usually baked with honey or raisins.

No matter the kind of challah, they are often sprinkled with poppy or sesame seeds which represent the manna that fell from heaven. When served, the bread is covered by a challah cover or white napkin to symbolize the morning dew on the manna.

[Get the Recipe](#)

## Meet Ranger Louis Ferris



When you visit the Ybor City Museum State Park, you are likely to meet an enthusiastic and friendly ranger. One of them is Louis Ferris who has told us, "I love sharing the cultural resources that this State Park has to offer and I look forward to learning more about it." Louis started working at [Hillsborough River State Park](#) on October 3, 2019

and began working at the Ybor Park two months ago. Like most of the rangers, he alternates his time between Ybor City and Hillsborough River.

Louis has three children. His 20-year-old daughter, a Navy Corpsman, is stationed at Great Lakes Naval Base in Chicago. His 18-year-old son Taj just earned Eagle Scout rank and three-year-old Christian is his "cutest lil brat". Louis has Tampa connections. He grew up in Town N' Country and graduated from Tampa Catholic High School.

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## COMING SOON

The Ybor City Museum Society is working on several events for summer and fall 2021.

\*Buildings Alive! The Video (TBD)

\*Legacy Awards Brunch, Columbia Restaurant, October 3

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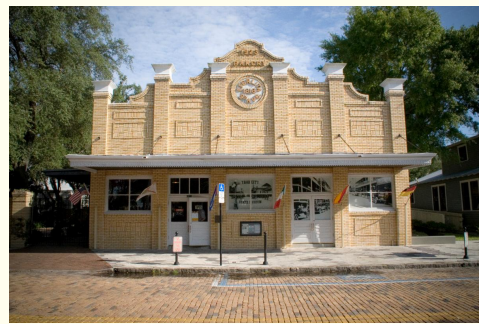
**The Ybor City Museum State Park is Open**



The Ybor City Museum State Park is again open to the public. To ensure your safety, masks are required to be worn during your visit.

Admissions can be paid by cash or credit card, however you are requested to bring exact change if you are paying by cash. The "casita" portion of the museum tour is closed due to

Covid-19 restrictions but you can enjoy the Museum Garden during your visit. **You can also inquire about renting the Garden, a beautiful 10,000 sq. ft. outdoor space, by [clicking here](#).** This unique venue creates its own ambience for your special event.



**New Hours of Operation:** 9 am - 4 pm Wednesday - Sunday  
Admission: \$4 per person, free for children 5 years and younger  
1818 E. 9th Avenue, Tampa, FL 33605, 813.247.6323

### Please Join Us

Member benefits make it easy for you to strengthen your connection to Tampa's roots and experience the unique cultural heritage of Historic Ybor City. Now that the Ybor City Museum State Park is reopening, you can use the free admissions included in your membership. Thank you to our current members, whether you have been part of our family for years or have just joined us. For your convenience, new or current members can [join or renew your membership online](#).

### With Gratitude

History teaches many lessons and gives us a lens to the future. While 2020 was a year to pause and reflect, we have benefitted in many ways as our friends and followers came together to celebrate the landmark events that make Ybor City such a unique community. Thank you to those who supported our programs and educational activities last year. For those who enjoy this newsletter and learning more about Ybor City's cultural heritage, please consider a donation to support our 2021 programming.

DONATE

The Ybor City Museum Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Federal Tax ID No. 59-2274494. While we do not give tax advice, donations are tax deductible to the extent the law allows.

[YborMuseum.org](http://YborMuseum.org) ■ [Info@Ybormuseum.org](mailto:Info@Ybormuseum.org) ■ 813.247.1434

