

TAMPA BLENDS OLD AND NEW



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Walk through Hyde Park and look closely at the homes. Close your eyes. Imagine women gently swaying in rocking chairs on their front porches, their high lace collars and bustle dresses preventing them from cooling off in the humid Florida heat.

Gaze at the majestic brick cigar factories. Picture life inside those buildings, as Cuban, Spanish and Italian immigrants toil in sweat-soaked clothes wrapping tobacco leaves, fans whirling overhead, providing an occasional breeze.

Historic structures provide a window into the past. They are a great teaching tool for young people, provide vivid memories for older folks, and give those in the middle a sense of respect and explanation for what life used to be like. History is mirrored in these structures.

Years ago, many of these structures were bulldozed to make way for newer building that offered more amenities. It was called progress. Through the establishment of historic districts and the increased education about the importance of preserving historic structures, many homes, offices, factories and restaurants are now offered protection against demolition and alterations.

The City of Tampa has made great strides in protecting its historic resources. According to Dennis Fernandez, the City's Historic Preservation Manager, Tampa has a structured program that provides protection for its buildings. The administrations have been very supportive of preservation efforts, resulting in the creation of some of the most pristine historic districts known nationally.

"Federal designations such as the National Register of Historic Places bring recognition to sites but offer no protection. Protective measures are delegated to the cities and counties," explains Fernandez. "Tampa's Historic Preservation Commission works closely with the community to protect these assets. When a property owner or community group brings a site forward for designation, the Historic Preservation Commission holds public hearings to decide if the site meets the necessary criteria. It must be associated with a significant individual, event, architectural style or building method, or it must likely yield archeological findings. Once the Historic Preservation Commission deems the site historically significant, the City Council passes an ordinance which mandates review before any type of modification can occur."

The Architecture Review Commission must approve any modifications (beyond basic maintenance) to the exterior of the structure. Permits for demolition for a structure within a historic district are issued if strict criteria are met. Demolition permits for structures outside a historic district that

are 50 years or older must undergo a review by the Historic Preservation Commission staff.

Historic preservation is criticized by some property owners and developers who believe their rights are unfairly restricted. Preservation requires that architectural guidelines be followed and local government approval be obtained to alter a site, often adding time and expense to renovations. Proponents argue that historic preservation works because it balances competing interests for the larger good. Communities get to preserve their history, while property owners see the value of their investments rise.

Two of Tampa's most well-known historic areas are Hyde Park and Ybor City.

Hyde Park

In 1886 O.H. Platt purchased the Robert Jackson farm in anticipation of a bridge joining the west bank of the Hillsborough River to downtown Tampa. He named this new 20-acre area Hyde Park, after his hometown in Illinois. The completion of the Lafayette Street Bridge in 1889, along with the opening of railroad baron Henry B. Plant's luxurious Tampa Bay Hotel in 1891, brought new importance to Platt's vacant land. Soon prominent citizens built homes in Hyde Park and the area flourished.

The fortunes of Hyde Park have fluctuated. Once known as an upper middle class neighborhood, Hyde Park lost status after WWII as outlying suburbs became more desirable. Eventually, however, the area became one of Tampa's most affluent districts. Historic preservation had a prominent role in this change, since it ensured the continuity of style in existing and new structures. Those efforts also raised property values and added a certain cache to a Hyde Park address.

A large part of Hyde Park remains residential. Streets are lined with houses, schools and churches more typical of the late 19th and early 20th centuries than most of today's Florida architecture. Majestic trees provide shade for the long sidewalks, and well-tended gardens are inviting. The neighborhood today encompasses more than 500 acres, so a driving tour is the most practical way to tour all of Hyde Park. Yet, if you have the time, walking through the Hyde Park district is a wonderful way to get the flavor of Tampa's past. Tampa Preservation, Inc. has created an informative and easy to follow walking tour brochure (for a copy of the brochure, contact TPI at 813-248-5437). While most of the buildings on the self-guided route are not open to the public, they are delightful to enjoy from the outside. These are just some highlights of a walking tour.

Hyde Park Village is a newer but architecturally consistent commercial

enclave that offers shopping and dining in an open-air environment. In 2007 a \$100 million renovation and improvement plan will be implemented, giving new life to the Village that opened in 1985. More restaurants, shops and parking will be added. Public art will be added on Swann and Snow Avenues.

"Our overriding goal is to unite the intent of the Hyde Park historic district design guidelines with our development vision," states David Wasserman, principal of Wasserman Vornado Strategic Real Estate Fund, LLC, the managing partner of Hyde Park Village.

The Tampa Historical Society, at 245 Hyde Park Avenue, is located in the Peter O. Knight House, built in 1890. Knight and his new bride, Lillie Frierson, came to Tampa from Fort Myers as a middle-class couple. Knight, an attorney and businessman, was a principal in the Exchange National Bank, the Tampa Gas Company, and the Tampa Suburban Railway (Tampa's streetcar line, operating until 1946). As prominent citizens, the Knights later built a grand mansion at Hyde Park Avenue and Azelee, but their honeymoon cottage remains as a charming artifact from 19th century Hyde Park. To learn about the house and early Tampa, log on to www.tamphistorical-society.com or call 813-831-5214.

At 349 Plant Avenue, the **James B. Anderson House** is a granite-trimmed mansion with six fireplaces and a third floor ballroom.

The Sumter Lowry House at 333 Plant Avenue is a three-story clapboard house that was once home to Sumter Lowry, a Tampa councilman who helped start the Lowry Park Zoo and St. Andrews Episcopal Church.

The **Albert Johnson House** at 332 Plant Avenue started as a hunting lodge for Marshall Field.

Continue to **611 Swann Avenue** where the 1923 bungalow house is a fine example of the type of houses located in the Lower Hyde Park area.

"Mansion Row" on **Bayshore Boulevard** is also part of Hyde Park. Each house has a unique style and history and deserves your attention. While in recent decades some structures deviated in style from those that produced the surrounding neighborhood, many buildings on Bayshore Boulevard still evoke Tampa's original "Boulevard of Dreams." A walk along the wide sidewalks along the Bay lets you soak in the architecture and style unique to this part of Tampa.



Ybor City

One of only three National Historic Landmark Districts in Florida, Ybor City is a living, working historic district home to a variety of nightclubs, restaurants and trendy shops. Strolling down the narrow streets surrounded by brick buildings and antique-style lampposts, it's easy to get a sense of the area's rich history. From downtown Ybor, you see glimpses of former cigar factories, renovated and in use. But few know how integral cigar making was to Tampa's prosperity. During the height of Ybor's cigar production, over 400 million cigars were made annually. The cigar industry spawned unprecedented industrial growth and immigration.

Ybor City was founded in 1886 by cigar manufacturers Vicente Martinez Ybor and Ignacio Haya. The duo originally produced cigars in Key West but wanted to move farther from the Cuban government, with whom they were experiencing resistance. They were offered cash incentives to relocate to Tampa, where they eventually built the world's largest cigar factory.

The community-minded pair provided funding for others to build cigar factories. At its most prosperous time, Ybor City had 70 cigar factories and

30,000 employees, called Tobaqueros. The Tobaqueros were mostly immigrants from Cuba, Spain and Italy. Shotgun houses, hotels, restaurants and shops sprung up to accommodate the growing population. Ybor was sometimes referred to as a "mini-Havana" during the 50 years it led the cigar industry.

"The City of Tampa holds Ybor City in the highest regard due to the significant impact the area has had on the city's history," says Fernandez. "Ybor City has its own architectural review commission, the Barrio Latino Commission, who are the stewards of Ybor's historic district." Today 22 of the original cigar factories still remain, 15 of which are in Ybor's historic district.

Ybor City Chamber of Commerce CEO, Tom Keating is trying to steer the Ybor business community into pro-active mode.

"Preservation is not a passive thing," explains Keating. "You have to redevelop the structure and put it back into use. That way it provides economic benefits for the community and the owner while preserving history. We've had great success with the Lion's Eye Institute renovating the old Lozano Cigar Factory and Wilson/Miller Engineering coming into the Siedenburg Factory. We are embracing history and modern economic development in the best way possible."

A shining example of the community pulling together to save a historic structure and preserve the integrity of Ybor's downtown area occurred recently when a raging fire devastated a century-old building in the historic district. Instead of rushing to demolish the condemned building community leaders, preservation experts, politicians, the property owner and others engineered a compromise.

"A creative compromise was worked out, minimizing both public and private risk and maximizing the remaining value of the building," says Keating. "The plan is to preserve the façade of the building's original first floor. This historic element can be incorporated into a new facility that will contribute to the vitality of the historic district."

The Ybor City Museum State Park is a state historic park consisting of the Ybor City Museum, housed in the Ferlita Bakery building, the Casita, and the Garden.

The State Park contains exhibits on Vicente Martinez Ybor, the founding and early history of Ybor, the cigar industry, city social clubs and the Ferlita Bakery.

The Casita, one of the earliest structures in Ybor, is one of seven small cottages, built for cigar workers' families around 1895. Casitas rented for \$1.50 to \$2.50 a week or could be purchased from \$400 to \$900. By allowing workers to deduct house payments from their wages, Vicente Martinez Ybor and other cigar manufacturers contributed to the stability and security of Ybor's work force.

The Ybor City Museum offers tours of the Casita, walking tours of Ybor City on Saturdays, and a cigar roller who works on weekends. For more information visit www.ybormuseum.org. The Museum is located at 1818 E. 9th Avenue in Tampa and is open Monday through Sunday 9 am to 5 pm.

The Columbia Restaurant was established in 1905 by Casimiro Hernandez, Sr. who opened a corner café for local immigrants and cigar workers. In 1920 Hernandez added a dining room and a tradition of delicious cuisine and lavish décor was born. The Columbia, now in its fourth and fifth generation of ownership, is the oldest restaurant in Florida.