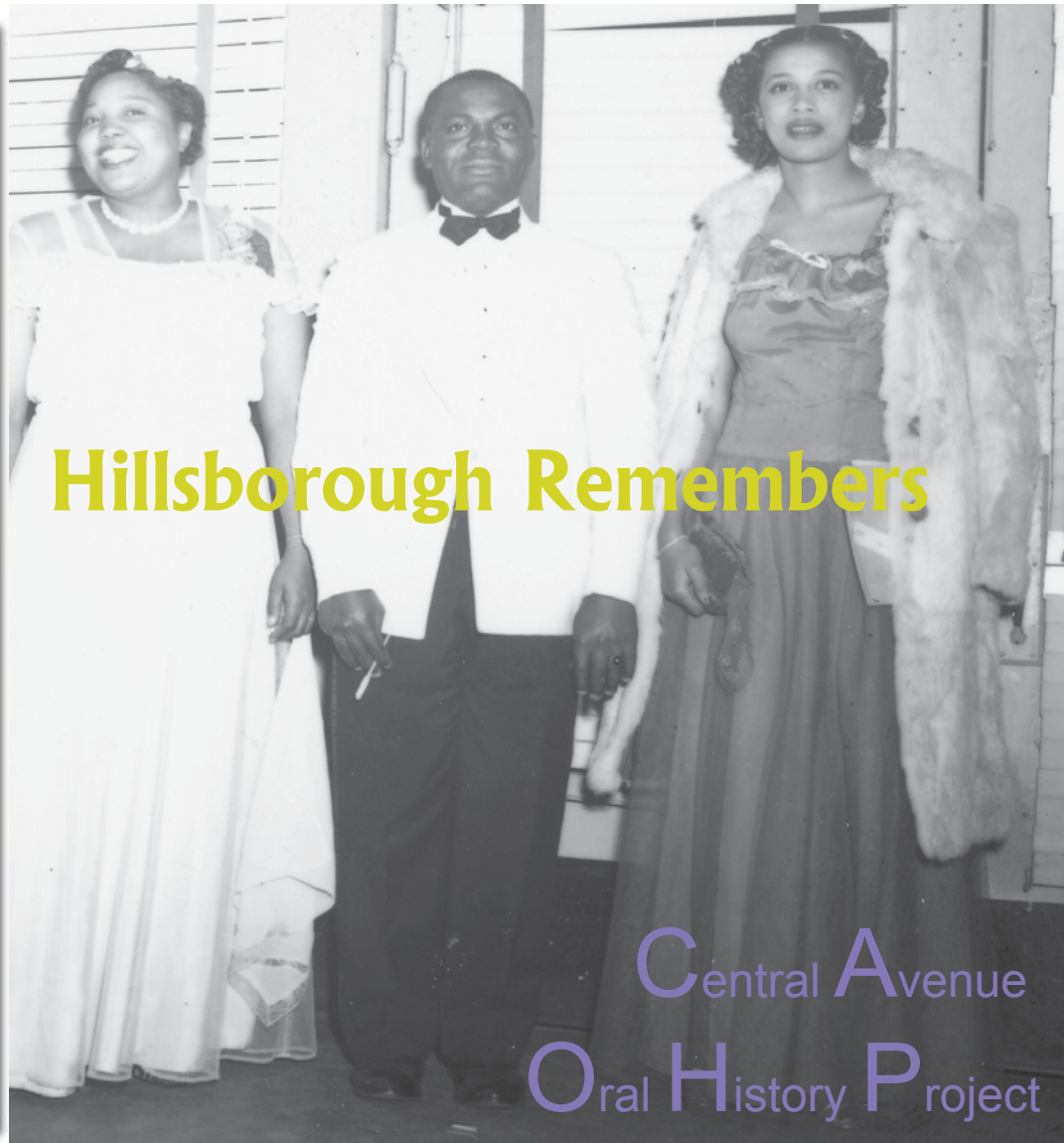


John Argerious



Hillsborough Remembers

Central Avenue
Oral History Project

This is an interview with John Argerious (JA) of Wesley Chapel, Florida. This interview is being conducted on July 10, 2003 at the Ybor City Branch Library. Mr. Arguiles is the son of the Central Avenue business owner, Peter Argerious owner of Central Quick Lunch otherwise known as the Greek Stand along with his brother George Stanley. The interviewer is Carrie Hurst, (CH) representing the Central Avenue Business District Oral History Collections Project.

CH: Mr. Argerious could you tell us about the business and remembrance of it?

JA: The Central Quick Lunch otherwise known as the Greek Stand was located on the corner of Central Avenue and Scott Street, 1339 Central Avenue was the address. I'm going to read some information here that I've compiled concerning the restaurant. *This was a full service restaurant located on the Southeast corner of Central Avenue and Scott Street. It was open sometime in the year 1911 by two young white Greek men from Greece. Their names were Peter Argerious and George Stanley and the restaurant became known as the Greek Stand. The restaurant was open seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year. During the great depression many people of the area were helped by Pete and George and they became beloved by the citizens of the community. Many of them grew up at the Greek Stand and it became known as far away as Harlem, New York. Some of the main menu foods other than the regular ala carte items included a full breakfast line, and for lunch and dinner there was stew beef, spare ribs, pig ears and pig feet served with rice, assorted greens, corn, macaroni and cheese, spaghetti and various other vegetables. The desserts for dessert there was sweet potato, peach, apple and coconut custard pies all made fresh daily. Doughnuts were made fresh daily also. Two items that became well known were the great northern bean soup and the Cuban sandwich. Orders for the Cuban sandwiches were called in daily from business houses and offices in the downtown area for lunch pickup. The restaurant hired many women of all ages for cooks, waiters and waitress, and clean up personnel. Several young men learned the cooking trade there and went on to eventually own their own businesses.*

Pete and George managed their restaurant working twelve hour shifts, and over the years built a great amount of respect and a vast number of friends in the Central Avenue community. The restaurant was never closed for more than a few hours until the death of Pete Argerious in 1950. At this time it was closed for three days. There were no locks on the doors so the employees were kept on duty throughout that time. When operations resumed Pete's position was filled by his son John. He was in his last senior semester at the University of Tampa. John graduated in January of 1951 and assumed the day time management of the restaurant. John with his Uncle George ran the business until mid 1957 when he left to pursue other interests.

George continued the operations with the able assistance of Johnnie Jordan who practically grew up in the restaurant. May and under the guidance of Pete and George, Johnnie Jordan became well versed in the restaurant business and George Stanley sold the Greek Stand to him in the early 1960's and retired to his home town in Greece. The Greek Stand remained under John Johnnie Jordan's ownership until. That concludes my written statement.

CH: O.K. do you have any recollections about how the Greek Stand looked, can you tell us something the looks?

JA: The Greek Stand was on the corner and it was a counter type restaurant. Ah there was no tables, there was counters running down both sides of the restaurant with stools and the business part of the restaurant and the food service and and processing was done in the center. There was approximately forty stools. Forty plus stools.

CH: And ah who took the orders? You and your uncle actually took the orders and you had people that wait counters?

JA: We had waitresses working the counters and we had a short order cook and ah we had a dishwasher and clean-up personnel.

CH: Um, so the kitchen area was closed off so you couldn't see in from the public it was behind the scenes?

JA: No, all of the cooking was done in the front of the restaurant right in front of and out in the open so everybody to see. There was a the stove and the steam table and the grills and everything was right up in the very front part of the restaurant.

CH: O.K. so um was it crowded? I mean, during during the day I'm sure there were peak times when lunch time. Perhaps when people you know, just kinda assembled or was it a lot of calling in, pick up type of business?

JA: No, mostly it was walk-in customers from you know. Ah, ah the workers a were on their way to work and they would stop in for breakfast and then there'd be a lunch trade or the business people and the people down in the shopping area. And then in the evening, you know, would be the people of the area and later on at night a mostly for the ala carte, steaks, chops, chicken and what not would be the people that were coming from the dances and the night clubs and the other entertainment places on the Avenue.

CH: Do you remember the pricing any of the pricing, like how much could you get a a typical average dinner for?

JA: Pause.

CH: Can't remember?

JA: Aaaaa, now I would be talking about the early 19 late 40's and the early 50's and a you would be, I would say that the a lunch the lunch and the dinners would go for seventy-five cents or the Cuban sandwiches were thirty-five cents or a bowl of beans would be twenty-five cents, and ah the various, you know, various other prices of a a items.

CH: And your family did not live in this area, I take it.

JA: We lived in Tampa Heights which is about seven blocks North of Central and Scott. On Oak Avenue. It was within walking distance from where I was raised and to to the restaurant.

CH: Do you recall during your tenure there um any um celebrities coming through? You heard about a lot of Black celebrities ah you know, frequenting Central Avenue. Do you recall any of 'em coming into the Greek Stand? Like Cab Calloway?

JA: Well, there were several celebrities that came through we mostly at night during my Uncle's shift at night. There was ah at one time there was Erskin Hawkins came in and a a um, Louis Jordan and a that's about all I can remember.

CH: As you know, well um do you have any recollections about um the parades and stuff that used to come through?

JA: Yeah, there were several parades I remember that ah at times the early whites would have a parade and the ah ah there was another organization, I can't remember the name, they would have a parade and they would come right down Central Avenue. And a but a that's about all I can remember.

CH: Um, what about ah, the any of the civil unrest, do you have any recollection about that?

JA: Well during the the later years of the World War II there was some riots that broke out on Central Avenue and ah from time to time the military police from MacDill would be would patrol Central Avenue in armored vehicles and I think the military personnel had to be off the streets by by ten o'clock at night. Ah there was some problems with some of the bars or on the Avenue that some of the service men got into some trouble. That's about all I can remember on that.

CH: Who was the um ah was the primary primarily Black district, I know that was it the Blacks people that Central Avenue ran?

JA: No, it was primarily Black. It was there were two or three white business owners ah down on Central and a but primarily the area was Black. Now like I said before from time to time we received orders from business houses downtown Tampa for a Cuban sandwiches to be picked up for lunch and things like that. And the the ah police on patrol would stop for um you know, ah something to eat from time to time but it ah was primarily a Black area.

CH: And you said the police where there, were they Black police or white police?

JA: Both, both. Both.

CH: Did you know any of the other white businesses that were there?

JA: I don't remember the names of the individuals but in the ah ah right across the street there was a small jewelry shop that was owned by a white man. And ah um further down South toward downtown Tampa there was another little restaurant that was owned by another white man which he eventually sold. But ah other than that I think most of the businesses were owned owned by Black men and women.

CH: O. K. Is there anything further that you would like to tell us about Central Avenue or the business or your family?

JA: Well that's about, that's about all. I ah ah. That's about it.

CH: You mentioned that the business was sold to Johnnie Jordan who had been a employee late ah for many years of the business and that you had some contact with the family members. Could you just tell us about that?

JA: Well, in the () we found out about Johnnie Jordan and how long he actually owned the restaurant after my uncle sold to him. I contacted his brother ah, the Reverend Jacob Jordan

and he told me that Johnnie Jordan had passed away in 1989. But that his younger brother, Solomon had worked with Johnnie in the restaurant for some years and that he could give me some information concerning what went on after I left. Ah, I have his phone number but I have yet to get in touch with him. Which I will try to do shortly and find out what happened on to the Greek Stand after my uncle sold out and retired.

CH: Well, that concludes our formalized interview and thank you so much for your contribution.

JA: Your quite welcome and any way I can help you let me know.

CH: Thank you.

This interview was conducted by Carrie J. Hurst, Librarian and employee of the Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative, Ybor City Branch Library.