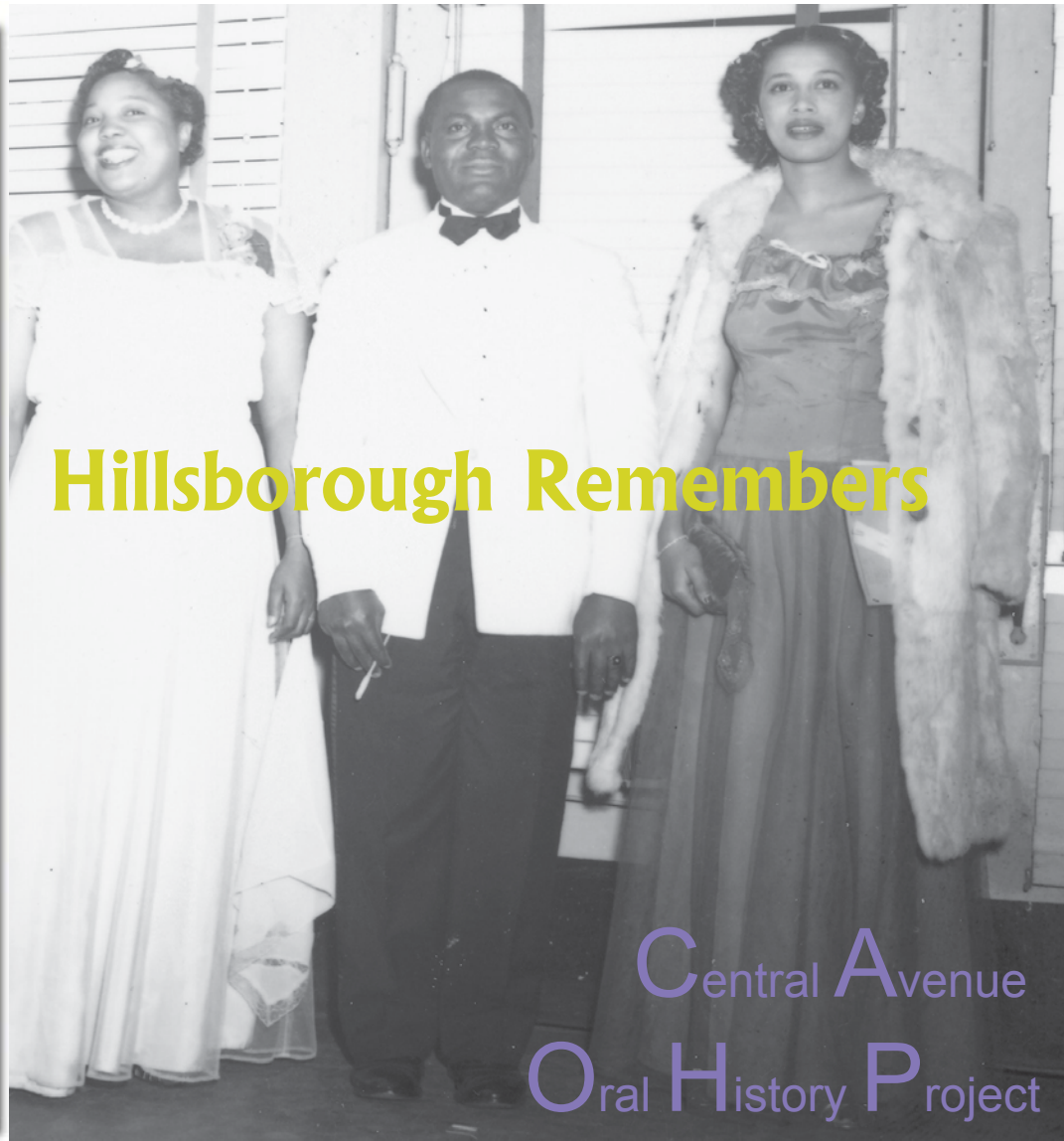


John Gibbons



Hillsborough Remembers

Central Avenue
Oral History Project

This is an interview with Mr. John Gibbons (JG) of Tampa, Florida. This interview is being conducted on November 20, 2003 at the Library Ybor City Branch Library. Mr. Gibbons will talk about his memories of Central Avenue and working for Kid Mason and Charlie Moon. The interviewer is Carrie Hurst (CH) representing the Central Avenue Business and Entertainment District Oral History Collections Project.

CH: What are some of your earliest memories of the Central Avenue Business and Entertainment District?

JG: Well, it was a lot of dancing. I used to dance () and ah during those days different people would come in and we would dance against different people. And there was (), a boxer.

CH: What was Central Avenue?

JG: Central Avenue just was the hang out place then. You could go there for entertainment. You go there for a good time.

CH: Is it for certain people?

JG: Anybody can hang out at that time. There was no ah, mostly African-Americans would be ah hang out there. Course there was the Greek Stand. Lot a people came there to eat. Matter of fact after dances, you'd always stop by the Greek Stand to get a Cuban sandwich. It was a place to hang out. There was a drug store on the corner of Central and Scott. And even on Sundays the people go to church they come by the drug store just to have a soda or something.

CH: Do you remember what years you spent time on Central?

JG: No, not that I can pinpoint a years, because being raised around here I know lots about Central and then there was a bunch of well, we used to call it Indian Street School, but it was Christian () now. And ah, then we used to hang out mostly there and then when I got a little older I started hanging out on Central. Then as time went by I started working. I worked with Chet "Kid" Mason. And a little later on I worked for Charlie Moon. Those where days that I did a lot of dancing and I went to a lot of big names—bands used to come down. You'd dance at those times and there was other dances. But then things gone so long you know, all the ah. But I had a lot of good times.

CH: You said you worked for Kid Mason, where did you work for Kid Mason?

JG: I worked as a clerk and ah.

CH: What type of business?

JG: He had a little stand you could dance in there. You could buy sodas and ice cream, and stuff like that. And then they had, I hate to say but he had a back room that you could get a little wine.

CH: So you couldn't legally sell alcohol then?

JG: No. No he had that little back room there you'd have a little party of four or five and you go in there and get you a quart of wine or something and go in the back there. You couldn't do it out there where people was, it was like a bar. A private room.

CH: You worked for Charlie Moon, where?

JG: Right across the street from Kid Mason. On Central. No, Charlie Moon is on Central and Scott.

CH: What kind of place was it?

JG: It was a night stand, it was a big long bar. And people in the back room that entertained. Was no entertainment like a band or something you just go back there to drink and then in the back another room you could was the gambling.

CH: What did you do at that place?

JG: I was the bartender at Charlie Moon's.

CH: What other kind of businesses where on Central and who owned them?

JG: Well. There was a cab stand right next to the a Charlie Moon's. I think Charlie—I don't think he had nothing to do with the cab stand, but that's where you would come out and get a cab and go wherever you wanted to go. And a there was another drug store down the street. Close to Harrison Street and there was a pool hall down on Harrison Street. And there was just a --. And there was other places there, I can't recall their names but a cause entertainment and a –

CH: Who were some of the people you remember from Central and do you remember seeing any celebrities?

JG: No. No, no celebrities that I could call out. There were, I know one a couple of musicians but they was local, they wasn't celebrities. And a because any time a celebrity come in to play a night – Earl Irons was but he played at the Catholic School dance. But there was so much, there was so much, so much activities down there. And a at the other end of Scott Street there was another pool room. And a Marlina. There was two, two different kind of guys that used to hang out. Like I mentioned, Elton Futch he became a school teacher. Least he wasn't a school teacher when I left here but after so many years when I'm coming back I find out he was a school teacher and I went over by the school. And a I don't think that he hung around the places that I hung around with because I () around gambling joint places and he hung around the drug store. These guys that hand around the drug store and drank sodas. Course I wasn't a drinking person but a I hung around the gambling joints.

CH: What were some of the best times you can remember on Central?

JG: Well, the parades was – when Joe Louis knocked Max Mellon in one of those fights.

CH: Who was that?

JG: Max Mellon, I think it was. Magelen fighter. We paraded that day. But there used to be parades for football games and stuff and a – the cops came we would parade all the way from Central and Scott to ah Cass and Central and then back. And then it, it almost like it caused a riot. One time when we got to Cass St. we turned instead of coming back we went on down making all that noise, beating the drums and stuff, by Florida – Hotel Florida. That eighteen story building and never had a building that tall at those times and all these people looking out there, they didn't know what it was. And then all of a sudden the police came up from everywhere, thinking it was a riot or something. And they had run off, well being a young man you know, you just run and that broke up that parade. But then I guess there was

some parades during the during football and stuff but ah. Matter of fact a friend of mine fell off a car and broke his legs or something. But there were a few parades.

CH: Did you live in that area during this time? Did you live in the area of Central Avenue?

JG: No, I lived on Scott Street. When I worked for Kid Mason I lived on Scott Street across from that other gambling --.

CH: It's ok if you can't remember you just know that you lived on Scott Street. So you where, you left Tampa you said.

JG: I left Tampa, let's see I was nine I think in '39 well anyway, I went to school from um a welding school and that's when I went to New York. When I caught the train and went on to New York lived with my wife's uncle. He took me to Brooklyn Navy Yard and that's and from there I went to the Army.

CH: You stayed away for how long?

JG: Stayed away from here?

CH: Yes.

JG: It must be for fifty years, I have – let's say from ah till twelve years ago I moved back here.

CH: After having been gone for fifty years you came back and you wanted to let us know what your memories of Central Avenue were. We really appreciate that. To close our interview is there anything else you'd like to say?

JG: No, nothing particular I would like to say.

CH: If you could sum up the Central Avenue () what would you say?

JG: Well, to me it was a place of entertainment, a place you could have fun. Matter of fact, the first time I seen my intended wife was on Central Avenue. She was going home and I saw her and I said, "Who's that young lady?" She said, "Oh, that's one of the West girls." And she said, "I know her, I'll entertain you", but she couldn't stop her then because she had an emergency she was going home. It was during school hours and she was going home for other reasons. But it was a good place, and where I hung I used to have a shoe shine stand and I used to work in there. And a –

CH: So you don't remember any of the bad times about Central when things started to decline? You where gone then?

JG: Yes, I was gone. I was gone. The onlyest thing, my grandmother wrote me a letter when Charlie Moon was killed. I think they said Paul Mechanic shot Charlie Moon that's the way the letter, I mean I think I still have the letter. And she wrote me a letter that Charlie Moon was dead and ah because she only think that because I used to work with Charlie Moon. That was the reason she a but a ().

CH: Who was it that shot Charlie Moon?

JG: Pearl McAdams.

CH: Pearl McAdams?

JG: Yeah. He was a local policeman, a detective. Honestly, the way I understood it he shot him and then wouldn't let 'em, wouldn't let 'em, wouldn't let 'em, work on him. Wouldn't rightly, you know, let him die. That's the way, I think that.

CH: You say his name was Pearl?

JG: Pearl McAdams, I think it was the name.

CH: Was he black or white?

JG: No, he was black. I think he was light complexion. But he carried two guns. One up here and one in the back because he showed it to us one day. Because I used to play dominoes at at Jack Pension had a pool room right back of a Charlie Moon's establish. And he came in there and a he showed the guns and everything. They used to sit, sit in my pickup bad guys he was supposed to be a bigot. Matter of fact, I had trouble with him myself. See in the old days, Booker T. Washington, wasn't no Middleton and no (). We had, when I graduated from elementary school to high school seventh grade, I couldn't go to Booker T. Washington cause I had, I had to wait till twelve o'clock I'd go to Booker T. Washington at twelve o'clock. Instead of I could go in the early morning and then again in the evening. I had to go, split shift. And a Pearl McAdam came by the drive one day and I'm sitting on my porch, and he says to me he waved his, used to have a water hose they beat you with and, he said, "Why you not in school?" I said, "I don't go till twelve o'clock." Must be ten o'clock () and he said, "Well, I gonna let you know", shook his water hose at me and () "mess around and don't go to school this is what your gonna get." Well, I was sittin on my own porch and a course the road was right by the house but it was Pearl McAdams that that supposed, that's what come in the letter. And a well.

CH: Thank you so much for coming in and sharing your memories with us.