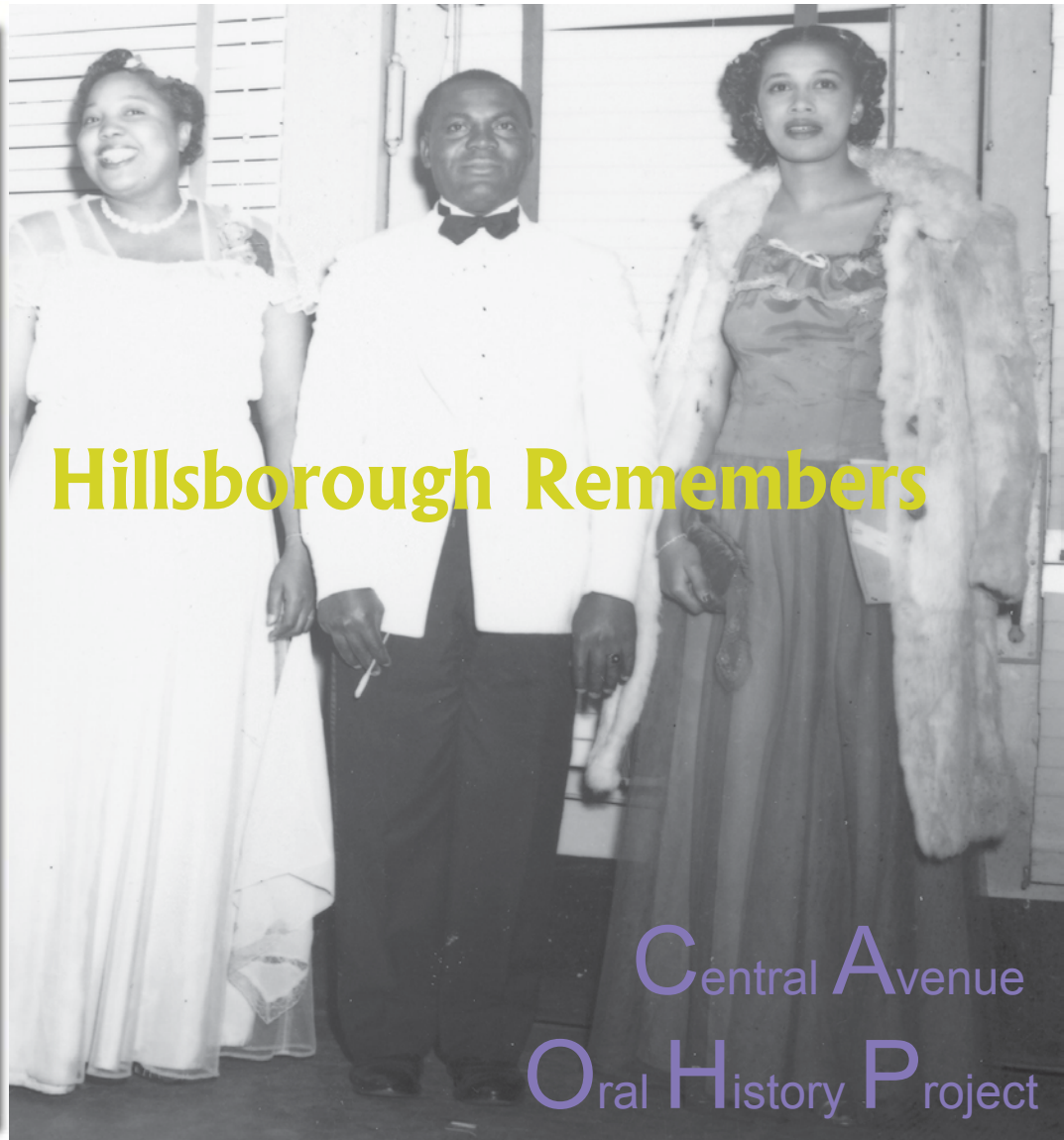


Wayne Pappy



Hillsborough Remembers

Central Avenue
Oral History Project

Wayne Pappy
January 9, 2004
by Myron Jackson

This is an interview with Wayne Pappy (WP), Deputy Director, City of Tampa Parks and Recreation Department of Tampa Florida. This interview is taking place on January 9, 2004. The interviewer is Myron Jackson (MJ), representing the Central Avenue Business and Entertainment District Oral History Collections Project.

MJ: *We're here to get Mr. Pappy's recollection on the 1967 riots in the Central Avenue business district.*

WP: Back in 1967, I had just started with the city, and I was working at Broward playground. I was a member of the Florida Armory National Guard at that time. And I remember my supervisor came by-- it was Monday afternoon about 4:00 PM-- and she said, "The National Guard just called for you, and you got to report for duty." And I said, "OK."

And I knew that the night before, they'd had some problems down on Central Avenue there. Of course, it was in the newspapers. That was about 4:00. At 6:00, I reported to the armory. And by about 7:30 - 8:00, we were loaded on the trucks and dispersed down to Central Avenue to help control the crowds and relieve the Tampa Police and the Hillsborough County sheriffs that had been on duty there for most of the night and most of the day.

MJ: *Do you recall, during that time, how many nights of unrest they had?*

WP: There was about--. I think the incident began on a Sunday night. We went in on Monday night and were there, I believe, Tuesday, Wednesday, and possibly Thursday night. Things quieted down as the nights progressed there. But we were not always on Central Avenue- we were bivouacked at Cascaden Park, just in case they needed us, a couple of times. And another occasion, we went down to the corner of Lake and 22nd Street, just to make sure that things didn't happen down in that area, also.

MJ: *My recollection is that they also enlisted the services of some individuals referred to as "White Hats." Did they work in conjunction with law enforcement and the National Guard?*

WP: I remember the White Hats, and I remember them coming out. They came out, actually, the second day after we were on duty down at Central Avenue. They was just first in--, you know, just folks who knew the people that lived in there and trying to calm the crowds down, and serving as an intermediary

between the police department and the Nation Guard. We were basically in just to protect the buildings that were left standing there after some of them were burned, and that was our main duty at that time. We were disbursed in front of all the storefronts to keep people from looting them and burning them down.

***MJ:** During that time, when you speak of the damage, was that significant in terms of the amount of buildings that had gotten damaged?*

***WP:** My recollection--. It seems like there was some severe damage- some buildings were burned out from the previous night before we went in. And that's the main reason we went there- was to protect the structures and the damage from occurring again, you know, on the following nights. We really weren't in for crowd control; we were more of a protective unit that went in.*

***MJ:** I guess the new construction aspects did never really occur, right? The buildings that were burnt out, they just razed those.*

***WP:** From my knowledge, you know, the next thing that happened: there was urban development came in, and much of the old Central Avenue shopping district was razed. And that's where Perry Harvey Park was built. Of course, that was several years later. I'm not real sure what happened in between the time of the riot and when Model Cities came in, because I think that Perry Harvey Park was dedicated back in 1976. There were several years that had gone by in there.*

***MJ:** Were there any more incidents after that? Were there any more riots after that episode in which they had to enlist the services of the National Guard?*

***WP:** If I remember correctly, there was about four nights that we were called up to duty and stayed on duty. As that quieted down, being a National Guard then, of course, were--, became the focus of our training for future years. And that was in '67. And then in 1968, I was--, my tour of duty with the National Guard was up, so I don't really remember if there were incidents where they were called out again after that. Seems like to me like there was, but my tour of duty was up in '68, so I was out of there.*

***MJ:** Did that particular episode facilitate improve relations with the city and the residents in that area, in terms of their concerns? What precipitated that was when the gentleman got shot and had stolen something.*

***WP:** Right in between the two houses- Robin Hill, was it? I think that definitely that incident and those riots there and that- the administration of the City of Tampa up to--, start dealing with a lot of the rights issues and things. It's ironic, because I remember I had taken a softball--, a girl's softball team from my Broward playground over to Ponce de Leon to play a game just two days before*

that incident happened over there, you know. And these were all white kids going into a black neighborhood to play.

And that was right on the leading edge of what--, when parks and recreation departments were combining things. And we were already trying, at that time to, you know, to facilitate the kids and get them involved in things and sports with each other. And I remember distinctly going to Ponce and playing, and then going four nights later, going down to Central Avenue when they were burning the place up. And it was really hard to understand those kinds of things in those days.

***MJ:** That's a good point that you made. I'm sure that with that episode and maybe many others, you and Parks and Recreation is probably the lead emissaries and diplomats in improving dialogue and communications, because when I think about interviewing a few other people, you did have a leadership that emerged from that area, Central Park. Essie Mae Reed comes to mind; she was one of the persons that I talked with.*

Actually, with the improvements that came about later, I think as you talk about, again, Perry Harvey Park, those types of things were some of the initial things that the people had access to is parks, and in other words, outlets, for the purpose of exercising or just the opportunity for kids to have more expanded area to run around in and not stay boxed in all the time.

WP: Certainly, I can remember from the city's standpoint in Parks and Recreation that that began a true involvement by the city's administration to provide those types of facilities in East Tampa and into those neighborhoods where they didn't have it before. And the development of Perry Harvey Park, you know, within eight years after that was through the Model Cities program. And Perry Harvey Park, then Riverfront, came on line about the same time, and those were truly examples of first class parks in those days.

***MJ:** And you also treated residual impact on that end of it. You have people becoming professional athletes. When you think about the Belmont Heights area or the places where, for now, I guess the last thirty years, people of professional caliber have emerged as a result of that. So the role of Parks and Recreation is significant in this community, in terms of facilitating communications, dialogue, and bettering communities. And certainly, the work you do to this day is ongoing and very visible.*

I don't want to belabor the point of the riots, because clearly that was an isolated episode. Tampa, I think, has probably been fortunate compared to other communities elsewhere throughout America. But I think that it's good that positive came out of that- more positive than actual destruction, in the sense that even now, we know that in the event that people are frustrated, that there are conduits to communicate their concerns.

WP: You know, it's ironic that the White Hats in the '67 riot played that pivotal role, because I think from there is what developed into all of the human resource folks that we have now that deal in those problems in the blighted areas.

MJ: *Is there anything else about that point in time that stands out- not necessarily the civil riots, but just anything in general you think is significant for this historical interview/documentation?*

WP: I guess the most important thing to me--. And of course, I was a young--. You know, I was only about twenty-three years old when that episode happened. I just couldn't understand why people were willing to burn down their own stores and loot their own stores in their own neighborhood. That's what they really--. That was just hard to comprehend- and why they were doing that.

MJ: *Yeah, that's true. That's self-defeating. There were many businesses that never had a chance to recover from that.*

WP: And that was a thriving business area in those days. I mean, I never went there, but we were on the fringe of that area, having grown up around there.

MJ: *You said Broward was your park detail. ().*

WP: Broward was at North Boulevard and Austin Avenue.

MJ: *So you were in fairly close proximity, but at least you were able to make some preliminary steps in creating that interaction that we spoke about. And I think you still experienced the ripple effect of those actions, which I think that in terms of the interviews that we've been conducting, that's a very important point for people to know about and understand. I appreciate your time.*

WP: No problem. It's just one of those things that, you know, you happen to come along in life, and that's where I was at that time. It's one of those things you get put in a situation, and you never ever forget it.

You read about what happened up North and a lot of the things in Los Angeles, and yet here in Tampa it happened on a much smaller scale. But yet our citizens on both sides--. You know, the black community and the white community reacted in a positive sense to keep those growing and festering.

MJ: *I recall in later years reading how Tampa became a model for the nation as a result of legislation that was passed at the national level of the Senate and the House, to employ those types of methods: utilizing White Hats and people in the communities to assist with quelling, or communicating, more than anything, which is probably why to this day we still have some semblance of that. I appreciate your time.*

[END OF INTERVIEW]