

# DID YOU KNOW

BY PLANT CITY PHOTO ARCHIVES

Send Questions & Comments to: ktharrington@floydpublications.com

## THE MACKS OF PLANT CITY

"The Bard of Collins Street". That's what they called him. L. B. Mack, that is. Everyone knew him as "L.B.". He ran the feed and seed store on South Collins, across from the fledgling McGinnes Lumber.

During the Great Depression, men who were down on their luck would come to L.B. for a special favor. They could not afford a gift, or even a card, for their wife's birthday, or their anniversary, and L.B. would write a poem for them. They were proud to present such a unique and thoughtful gift. He sometimes wrote as many as 200-300 of these in a year. L.B.'s son, T.B. Mack, has collected twelve scrapbooks of his father's poems.

When times were tough on the farms, some store owners extended credit and supplied the necessities for getting the next crop in, and would collect when it was harvested if it was a good harvest. L. B. was one of those.

Lonnie Birdell Mack was born in South Carolina and moved to Florida when he was a young man, first to Wauchula, then to Vero Beach, back to Wauchula, and settled in Plant City about 1930-31. The Macks purchased a home on West Baker in 1931, where Ruby Irene Mack, L.B.'s daughter, still resides.

Mack worked for Kilgore Seed for several years. After a dispute with the company, L.B. opened up his own feed and seed store on South Collins. The store was first sponsored by Florida's Favorite Fertilizer, but Mack later bought it outright.

Mack's store became quite a gathering place. Many townfolk would stop in to shop, but also to swap stories. Politics was big in America during those years, and frequently the talk turned to politics. That was the seed that germinated into the infamous "Mack's Political Graveyard".

Using his poetic gift, L.B. would set up his cemetery alongside his Collins Street store. In it would be just about every politician who lost an election. Although the tombstones would be erected shortly after the election took place, it seems L.B. had prepared well in advance. In addition to burlap and straw, old shoes, pumpkin heads, and hats, and sometimes photographs L.B. would erect a tombstone painted with a wonderful homespun story. Here are some of those verses from long ago.

Close beside Mack's Service Store,  
Beneath all these guava bushes;  
Are several of our personal friends,  
Who failed in their political wishes.

In every other game of life,  
There was to be a winner;  
The sands of time move ever on,  
For saint as well as sinner.

So as you pass and read this verse,  
And praise the man who won;  
Remember these are all our friends,  
And this all is done in fun.

### CHAS. BOOTH

Now Charlie Booth to tell the truth,  
We thought you were a natural;  
But you can still sell life insurance,  
And get more policies in your satchel.

That fellow Brannen was long a-planning,  
For you he was laying low;  
So that is why your friends all cry,  
When we put you here below.

You thought it would be so easy,  
And not needing to make a showing,  
You ran around taking it lightly,  
Your horn you should have been blowing.



Mack's Seed Store-Collins St.



Allentown Brawl-Mack's Political Graveyard

That's the reason  
Charlie is here,  
Next time again you  
can try;  
But in meantime get  
more friends,  
On whose promises  
you can rely.

### J. ARDEN MAYS

Arden Mays has quit  
his city job,  
Now some several  
months ago;  
He wanted a job on  
the Budget Board,  
And up the political ladder go.

He failed to climb that ladder,  
Now look where he is today;  
Lost, rejected, could not win,  
The voters have had their say.

It peeves us to do this Arden,  
But you know it must be done;  
Another day you can try again,  
When Carey don't care to run.

The Tampa Tribune paid tribute to L.B. Mack in an article in the September 10, 2003, edition, with a 19x photo of Mack's Political Graveyard. Politics was a tough, serious, yet fun-filled activity in those days.

Young Thomas B. Mack played football for the Plant City High School Planters. He worked at his father's store, moving 200lb bags of feed and seed. He made All-State when he played on the 1932 team that destroyed virtually every opponent of the so-called "Big Ten" conference. Most of all, they wanted to beat Plant High, and they did. It was more of a free-for-all than a football game, almost a brawl, but the Planters emerged victorious. And T.B. blocked three punts, all of which resulted in touchdowns.

T.B., now 89 and a Professor Emeritus at Florida Southern, visited the Photo Archives recently and shared some memories.

Plant City was the place on Saturday nights in those years. People would come to town from everywhere. If they drove, they would park far from the center of town there was no municipal parking lot then and walk back into town. Or they'd walk from home. But they all went to town on Saturday nights. The sidewalks bulged with people, as did the restaurants, soda shops, and theaters. Retail establishments would stay open until 11 p.m., or midnight, if people were still shopping.

During those years, kids would pick strawberries for pocket money, and on Saturdays they would go to town. They would feast on five-cent ice-cream cones, cram into a small photograph booth and get their pictures taken ten cents for a strip of four then head to the Capitol or State Theater for a 10-cent double-header.

Young T.B. left Plant City to attend the University of Florida, and later served in the U.S. Army. He got into the citrus industry and gravitated to Florida Southern College, where he has been for 52 years. "Mr. Citrifacts" they call him. T.B. Mack. He developed Florida Southern's horticulture and citrus program, and taught in the program for many years. He also established the magnificent Citrus Archives Center on the campus of Florida Southern College, and he still oversees it. L.B. and T.B. the Macks of Plant City have made their marks.

Sources: Plant City Photo Archives, Inc., Professor Thomas B. Mack, Plant City Photo Archives Oral History Project 2003.