

Celebrating our sixth anniversary!

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ALSO INSIDE:
Mt. Zion Celebrates Anniversary
STATE CHAMPIONS Pg-35

Cover: CF Freshman Rodell Wigginton slams home two in his team's 75-45 win against Daytona State Feb. 20, 2013. Photo/CF

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION ON PAGE 4

Stories From Our Past

Frank P. Gadson, Department Store Pioneer Extraordinaire

By Canter Brown, Jr.
Unite Contributing Writer

Over generations, residents and visitors have come to expect the best of shopping opportunities from the Sunshine State's famed large-scale merchants, department stores, and malls. But, who deserves credit for pioneering the idea in Florida?

Longtime Floridians might mention Tampa's Maas Brothers. They opened for business in the late 1880s. William M. Burdine established his dry goods store at Miami a decade later. James Earl "Doc" Webb waited a generation to start the little drugstore that would become world famous as "Webb City."

Before them all, though, came Frank P. Gadson. You may not have heard of him, but you should have.

Born at Charleston, South Carolina, in 1861, Gadson ventured to Florida in the early 1880s to seek fame and fortune. He settled at Ocala, having discovered there a remarkable African American community.

At the time and in subsequent years, ocala leaders acted together to advance their fellow men. The "Florida Sentinel," one of the state's leading black newspapers, explained the "Ocala Program" this way. "The idea was to create with Negro brain and capital white collar jobs for Negroes," it observed, "and in due time build an independent Negro economy."

Gadson found this situation to his liking. He soon married a local girl. With connections cemented



Some of the Founders of Metropolitan Savings Bank

Left to Right: R. Reche Williams, **Frank P. Gadson**, George Giles, Joseph L. Wiley, Arthur St. George Richardson, David Walter Goodwin. **Gadson** served as the bank's first cashier and was named president after Mr. Giles' death in 1919. (Photo courtesy of Florida State Archives.)

in the process, the young man found backers for his dreams.

During the middle years of the 1880s, Gadson took the first steps toward realizing those dreams by opening an extraordinary dry goods store. Called the Ocala Bazaar, the South Magnolia Street enterprise quickly grew to become one of the region's principal shopping centers. Its clientele poured in regardless of race.

The early 1890s saw the businessman's success resound throughout the state. As a Jacksonville newspaper proclaimed, the "big-hearted and genial" Gadson had become "the merchant prince of Ocala."

Ocalans seconded the compli-

ments. They elected Gadson city treasurer, city councilman, and city tax collector. The state of Florida likewise singled him out for praise. Its promotional literature informed the nation of the merchant's 1891 reelection as tax collector, observing in the process that he had been "a faithful and capable official."

Having tasted success, Gadson furthered the Ocala Program with his own investments. He helped organize a mill complex, the Metropolitan Savings Bank, the Metropolitan Realty and Investment Company, and other initiatives. He also aided the prestigious Howard Academy and the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Please see GADSON, Page 19

LOCAL

Milling Foundation Offers U-F Loan Opportunities

MARION COUNTY – The Milling Foundation provides low-interest and even interest-free loans to graduates of Marion County schools attending the University of Florida.

Loans are available for four years to students pursuing bachelor degrees. Students can borrow up to \$30,000 over four years. Loan amounts are based on resources available and financial need.

This year's application deadline is March 29. Award recipients will be notified after the May 2013 Milling Foundation board meeting.

Gadson

Continued from page 10

Frank P. Gadson died at Ocala on February 6, 1941. Through a long life of hard work, innovative thought, and community service he had built a record of solid accomplishment. Those achievements deserve a place in our memory and in Florida's history. ■

Canter Brown, Jr. is a historian, professor and author. He was born in Fort Meade, Florida and earned his degrees at Florida State University. He taught at Florida A&M University and currently is the Executive Vice President and Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs at Fort Valley State University in Fort Valley, Georgia.

**Deadline for
May 2013 Issue is
April 15th**

The Milling Foundation is a trust fund specifically designated for graduates of Marion County schools attending the University of Florida. Marion County Superintendent of Schools George Tomy and Marion County public high school principals serve as the Foundation's board of directors. This board determines loan amounts on a case-by-case basis.

Students can use their loans for tuition and other educational and college living expenses. As long as students are enrolled at UF, no interest is charged on the loan. Loans may even be interest-free for students moving back to

Marion County after college graduation.

Applications are available in guidance departments at each public high school.

For more information, contact Leona Patterson at 352.671.7720 or Leona.Patterson@marion.k12.fl.us
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