The Song of the Hillsborough Public Art in Hillsborough County
...in paint and poetry
The Song of the Hillsborough...in paint and poetry
James E. Tokley, Sr.

James E. Tokley, Sr., the City of Tampa’s distinguished Poet Laureate, is an accomplished author of poetry. He has earned national recognition for his fervent writing and enthusiastic recitations. *The Song of Hillsborough* is the official poem of the Hillsborough Community 2000 Millennium Initiative, and was written by Mr. Tokley for Hillsborough County. The unique narrative describes a vision, which sings to the reader a sense of past and current history and reflects the community’s diverse people. The poet first recited this piece in May 1999 to elected officials and gatherers at the Millennium Kick-Off event on the veranda of the historic University of Tampa. Since then, Mr. Tokley personally has read the poem to students and residents throughout the area, and on a television program produced by HTV22. Tokley was the featured literary artist at the prestigious 2000 Tampa Bay Business Committee for the Arts Business in the Arts Annual Gala, and it was at this event that the poet inspired the painter.

Jack Beverland (*Mr. B.*)

Jack Beverland is a folk artist. He is self-taught. Every day, he creates art.

After being diagnosed with two serious medical problems, Mr. Beverland was forced into early retirement. Known as *Mr. B.*, the artist turned his disappointment into a unique art form that helped him heal physically and emotionally.

Early paintings reflected frustration and anonymity, but finally, *Mr. B.* depicted a new joy, in a hospitable world, including small town scenes and hometown life with lovely landscapes, animals, family and humanity. Using brightly colored, dimensional acrylic and glow-in-the-dark puffy paint, *Mr. B.* established his signature style. He is pleased that his art tells of a life at a simpler time that most of us have forgotten, but should not forget. Through his art, he turned darkness into light, and rejection became success and recognition.
Generous Gifts of Art

The Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners through its Public Art Program, acquires works of art, by direct purchase, commission or as gifts, which enhance the contemporary cultural character and aesthetic vitality of the community. Residents and art professionals appointed by the County Commissioners comprise the volunteer Public Art Committee who help to select artwork, which may be: artistically significant, reflective of the County's cultural diversity, site specific and complementary to the environment and structural design of a particular place. In 2002, artist Jack Beverland (Mr. B.) donated 17 of his original paintings to the County. The paintings represent Mr. B's unique folk art, colorful and uplifting style. Not coincidentally, Mr. B's inspiration for this collection was the Millennium poem entitled The Song of the Hillsborough, penned in 1999, and donated to the Hillsborough community by James E. Tokley, Sr. Mr. B.'s interpretative paintings hanging throughout the library portray the people, the emotions and the places mentioned in the popular Tokley poem. The 35 stanzas of the poem are printed on plaques, which are placed next to the pictures. The poetry plaques and paintings are an integral part of the JBK Regional Library experience. While the gift of public art visually responds to the heart of the Tokley poem, it's amazing how both the visual and literary art at JBK Regional Library connect to each other, and to the public.

In addition to The Song of the Hillsborough paintings, Mr. B. also donated another image entitled A Ride of Adventure, which reflects the library's carousel theme. With an old-fashion feeling of fun, A Ride of Adventure will make "kids of all ages" smile.

COMMUNITY CARING

The Carrollwood Area Business Association (CABA) also donated two sculptural works of art by the accomplished artist Wyland. The manatee and dolphin hanging on the wall enhance the children's area at the JBK Regional Library. CABA's demonstration of generosity, and its addition to the library make the art collection diverse and interesting.
I

In the darkness of an oaktree swamp
With its thousand-million unseen eyes
& its myriad sharp-seductive cries
beats a heart as old as it is wise
II

For, a river slumbers in this place
Who once was part of a rambling sea
Whose raiments rose to hide the face
Of this dry land with its birds and trees
III
But whales invade the river’s dream
& sharks as long as a house is wide
who scoured the sea & picked it clean
but left few clues as to how they died

IV
This placid river thinks of these
As it cradles sleeping manatees
While alligators grieve and moan
For what was their ancestral home.
V
An orphaned bush sits by the bank of the river that was once the sea...
a frizzy-headed juvenile—white blossom-headed Myrtle tree
It listens as the river snores
& bends its boughs of blooms and leaves in self-seduction, all the more.
& The moonlight mirrors what it sees

VI
A playful zephyr sees it all
‘Clips a blossom, then lets fall a snowy lock upon the cheek of a river rousing from her sleep
VII

“O brooding river, please forgive
your brash, intrusive relative
who stood too close & looked too deep
& now whose locks have bruised your cheek.”
The river rolled her drowsy eyes
Full dark and brown, like the Seminoles
With a gator’s voice, she answered wise,
“If your child would swim, then let him go.”

So the river says to the Myrtle tree,
“If you let your young set sail with me
then I shall show them what has been
& what may never be, again
& all in the sweep of a thousand years,
‘fore daylight wanes & the night reappears.

& The Natchez Myrtle bid its children
follow as the river leads
& The river flowed through plain and hammock,
eagle-cresting, picking up speed
XI
A mourning dove, with its song-the-same
uncoohs an old ancestral name
Of the spirit we have come to know
As the river, christened “HILLSBOROUGH.”

XII
A panther screams, The river snakes
& the land gives way to a painted sun
Come crashing through palmetto breaks
like a razor-back, on a morning’s run/
Hillsborough
Winds like a cotton mouth
To a silver bay that lies due south.
XIII
& Themes of a thousand-thousand stories
sung by swarms of troubadours
laid siege to the guests who rode the river,
like siren-songs from a distant shore

XIV
"& Shall I sing," the river said, "about my
children who were here,
who stood them taller by a head,
than the strip pine
or a white-tail deer?"
The Timucuan and Caloosas, they who were,
But now have passed away

XV
"& Shall I sing," the river said, "a wondrous
song of Spanish dreams...
whose dreamy-eyes & crinkly hair I led
through swamp and evergreen,
beguiling them, beyond all proof,
that I was the source of fountained youth
XVI
I welcome home the runaway slave
& from my banks, I breathed new life
upon them who themselves had saved.
I brought to Osceola his favorite wife

XVII
I nursed young Seminoles at my breast –
Young Mycanopy, Gopher John –
Coa-coo-shee I loved the best:
Wild Cat, my unabated storm

XVIII
Young Dade, I raised and watched him march
Into a never-ending dark
Adoptive, though I was for all
My children, they must rise or fall
On their own merits or the lack
of fortune, buried in a backwoods track.
XIX
They brought me their wiry long-horn steers
Whose leathery muzzles nudged my chin
& suffered their horses to tickle my ear...
my pioneer children and their pioneer kin

XX
With quarrelsome whips and crude machines
& a fear no season could abate,
they kept me busy with their dreams
of a bountiful, beautiful paradise State

XXI
& The Myrtle blossoms eddied past
a fertile wonder, tame and vast.
& The river turned for them to see –
like wings, on either of its flanks –
what seemed like an eternity
of citrus, stretching from its banks
& Strawberry rows, on either side,
stretched out their arms, a quarter-mile wide
Tomatoes, melons and sugar cane
Bore greetings to the river of forgotten names
The river winked & rolled on,
With its life-giving spirit, running deep
And strong.

XXII
"Now shall you see," the river said,
"in quick kaleidoscopic view,
the ghosts of things and times, long dead,
revived here, now, for your review."
XXIII
& Civil War bugles blared again
on the riverboat fleet of James McKay
& Henry Plant, with his fearless men
laid railroad tracks to Tampa Bay

XXIV
"& An iron-clad river challenged me
& did its best to strip me bare.
But the swamp was raised on loyalty
& Seagulls kept me well aware."
XXV
But the land was changing, eagles warned
The wilderness, “Expect great harm!”
& Hammock denizens should beware
for, there was progress in the air!

XXVI
& Hamlets sprang like flowers-a field
& Buzz-saws spun like spinning wheels
XXVII
A hotel rose on my western bank/ &
As buildings go, it most outranked
Those opulent palaces along the Nile,
in creature-comfort, grace and style
So, a town I used to scurry from
Became a place where celebrities come
To Tampa do I give my due,
As a wondering river, passing through
XXVIII

For, I had rather placed my bets
On Ybor City...better yet,
Port Tampa, with its mile-long pier
That beckoned ocean liners near.
Plant City, name-sake of a king
Valrico’s never-ending spring
Proud Bealsville, built by former slaves
Rough Brandon with its phosphate caves
Or a village name for Clair and Mell,
Who settled there and did quite well
or Temple Terrace, calm and neat,
with its orderly oakshaded streets.
XXIX
But Tampa, lucky to survive,
Would be the chosen one to thrive
& lead a land whose given name
is the name I wear: "one-in-the-same."

XXX
The Hillsborough River, with voice as deep
And wise as gypsum piles are steep,
Directed the blossoms from the Myrtle tree
To "hold on tight & run to me!"

XXXI
& Years flew like a stallion's mane
--caught up and coursing with the wind.
World wars, flash floods and hurricanes
Were merely but a ripple on the rivers dark skin

XXXII
& By its banks, a city of glass
concrete and steel went rising up...
A flag full-waving, hard and fast
A golden seal, a brimming cup
That signaled like the polished leaves
Of the evergrowing Myrtle tree
That here was the point where the land would leap
Millennium-wide, on panther's feet.
& The river takes on form and face
of all its young, in time and space
is the Mayor of Tampa, in his first floor flat...
is the old La Tropicana, with its Cuban coffee black...
It is the one who throws the paper.
every morning on the lawn...
It is a group of children trying to catch their bus
before it’s gone...
It is the laborer, set to dreaming
as he picks his basket full...
It is a quarterback, sent weaving,
‘midst the footballs’ push
And pull.
It is
A Firefighter dreaming,
‘fore she hears the clanging bell./
& is
a doctor’s face that beams to tell his patient,
“You are well.”/
It is
A dreamer of the future who has caught up
with his dreams/
& it becomes
a revelation of whatever the future means.
& The river and its riders race,
XXXIV
like dolphins t'ward the Bay
For, they have seen the coming future,
As it beacons for today.
A window light in evening...
Could it be the shining moon
Could it be a Natchez Myrtle,
with its white and crinkly blooms?
But the Hillsborough flows onward,
through a timeless open door
That seems to lead to an oaktree swamp,
on a bright, familiar Shore
Where a Myrtle tree stands waiting,
in silence and concern
When the river speaks with a gator’s voice,
“Your children
Have returned.”

XXXV
A screech owl shrieks its vesper prayers
As the Seminole sun reclines
& the Myrtle’s young have much to share
for much is on their minds.