

# Henry Mansfield Dillard: Pillar of Spring Hill

## Early Life and Arrival in Tampa

One of four children, Dillard attended Lee Street Academy and resided in Valdosta until at least 1906, when he married Adella Winn in Tampa. The Dillards made their home on Estelle Street and Henry worked as a laborer in a saw mill. Later, he attended the Florida Seminary in Lakeland. In 1908, Dillard established St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church at 905 Governor St., Tampa. By 1910, the Dillards also lived on Governor St., a few blocks away, where they welcomed a daughter, Carrie, and a son, Mansfield.



U.S. Census, 1910, City of Tampa, recording the Dillards’ arrival in Tampa.



Present day Governor Street, looking north from the former site of St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church.

Born in Valdosta, Georgia, Dec. 17, 1878 to Mansfield Dillard, a preacher, and Georgia Dillard, Henry Mansfield Dillard went on to become an influential spiritual and community leader in Spring Hill. An early settler in the new Spring Hill development, Dillard became an instrumental figure in the establishment of one of the earliest churches in the community and started the first school in Spring Hill.

## The Dillards Arrive in Spring Hill

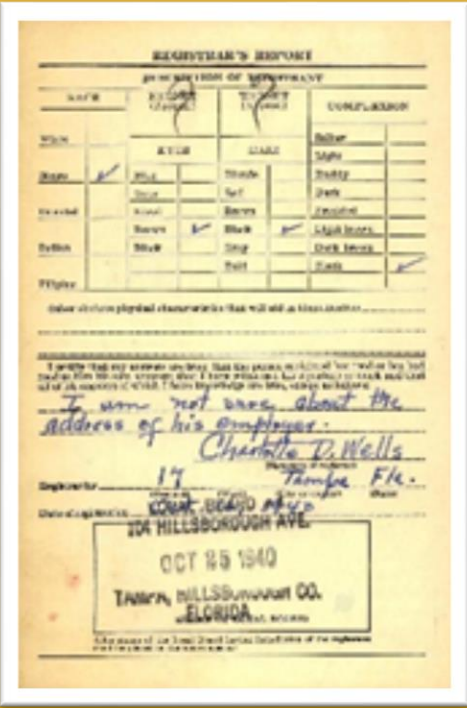
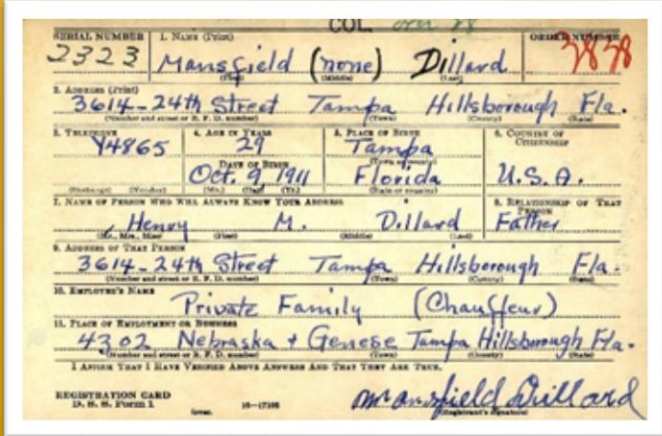
Oral histories have long reported the Dillards’ arrival in the newly-developed Spring Hill subdivision around 1911; the first written documentation is in the 1918 Tampa city directory. Though some believe Dillard was the first pastor or founder of the Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church, WPA records of around 1940 dispute that. The current Church history reflects that under Dillard’s leadership in 1915, the church moved into a new facility on W. 3<sup>rd</sup> St. (now Humphrey Ave.) solidifying it as a fixture in Spring Hill.

## The Beginnings of Education in Spring Hill

In 1913, the Dillards welcomed another daughter, Sallie, and two years later, a third, Madeline. They had two more sons – Henry D. W. and Willie. Like the Dillards, Spring Hill families in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were growing, and feeling the absence of an acceptable school. Schools in neighboring Sulphur Springs would not accept Black children. Around 1925, Rev. Dillard decided to start a school for African American children in Spring Hill. By most accounts, the school was housed in the Spring Hill Missionary Baptist church in its first year, moving to W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street (now Okaloosa Avenue) between Taliaferro Street and Central Avenue in 1926.

Rev. Dillard lost his wife, Adella, in 1933. By 1934, he had moved with his sons to the College Hills area, making their home just two blocks south of the cemetery where Adella was buried. Sometime between 1937 and 1938 Dillard remarried, and his new wife Luella (Nellie) joined him in the ministry as the Church Secretary at St John’s.

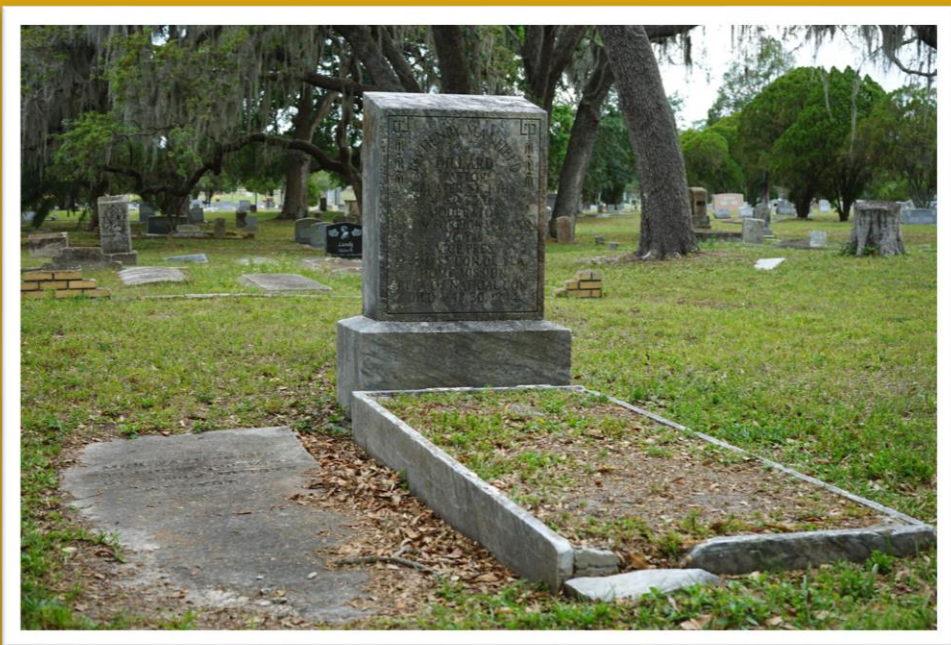
## The Dillards and World War II



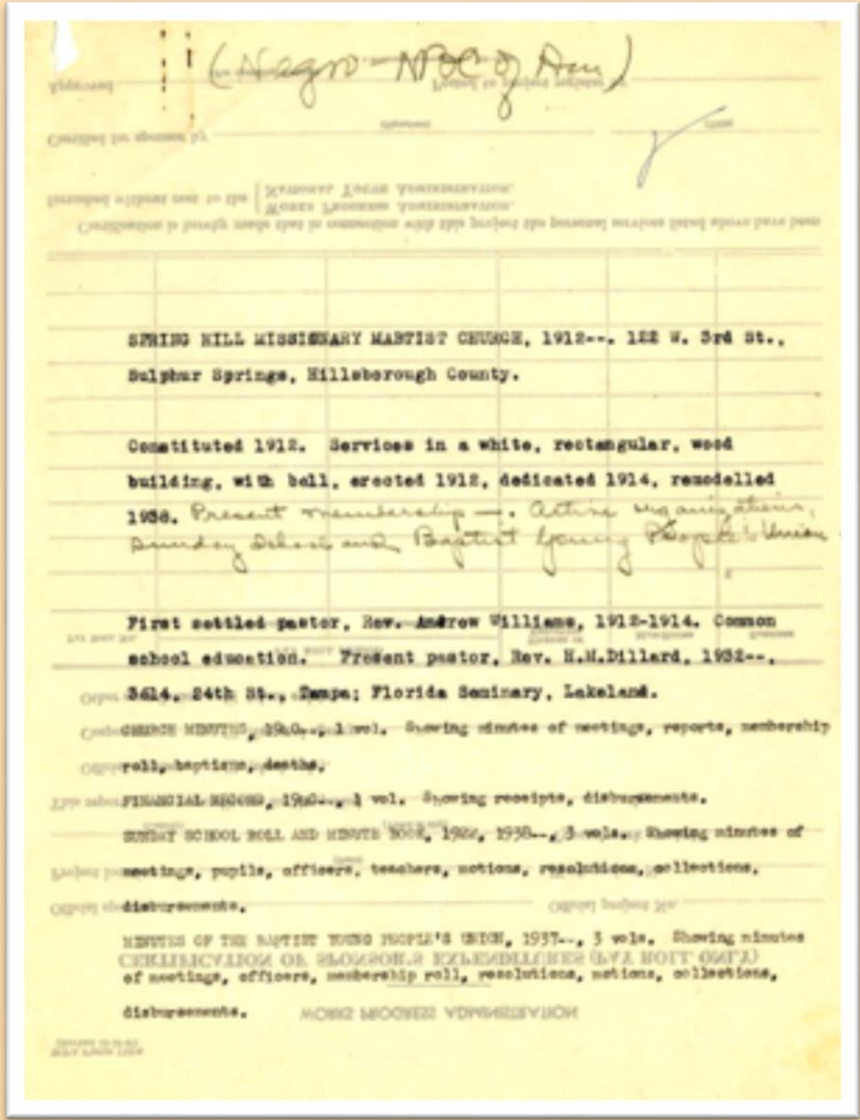
This draft card registered Henry’s eldest son, Mansfield, for the draft in 1940, There is no record that he ever served in WWII, although Dillard’s son, Henry D.W., served four years in the U.S. Army, and was honorably discharged at the rank of TEC 5 in 1945, one year after his father died.

## Rev. Dillard’s Legacy

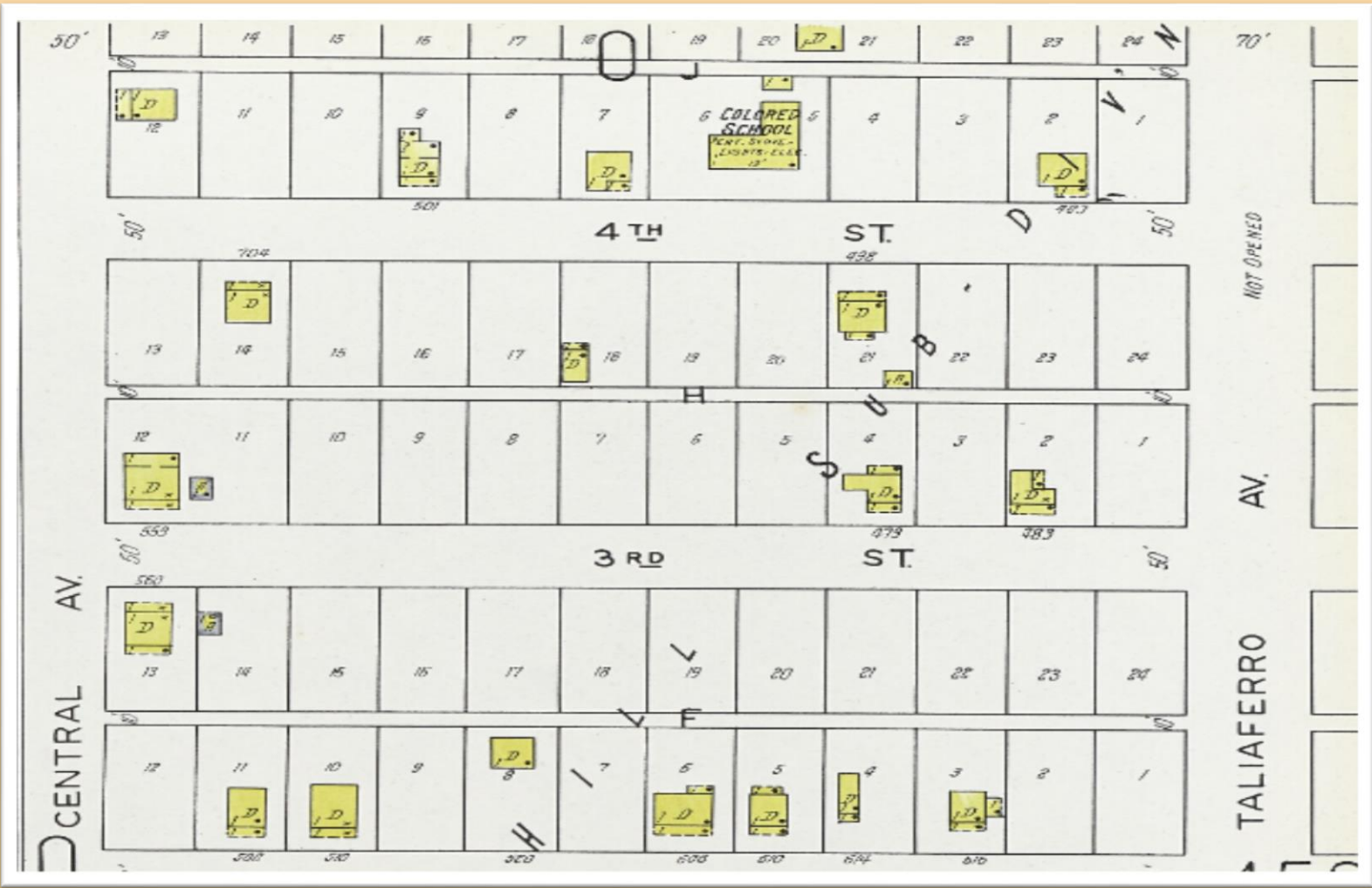
Henry Mansfield Dillard died in 1944 at age 66. He is buried next to Adella in the Memorial Park Cemetery in Tampa. In Dec. 1949, the Hillsborough County School Board renamed the Spring Hill school the Dillard School, a name that remained when a new facility was built a few years later.



Rev. Henry M. Dillard and Adella Dillard gravesite



WPA Church Inventory Form 19, Spring Hill Missionary Baptist Church.



1931 Sanborn Insurance map noting Spring Hill “Colored School” on 4<sup>th</sup> Street (now Okaloosa Avenue). This area west of Taliaferro Avenue was lost when Interstate 75/275 was built in the 1960s.

## Pistol and Bible Combination Adds To Parson’s Woes

The Rev. H. M. Dillard, negro preacher of Sulphur Springs, obviously belongs, police say, to the church militant. Ordinary weapons of righteousness do not suffice for the reverend. He carries the Gospels in one hand and a gun in the other. When police arrested the reverend Saturday afternoon for reckless driving -- he had two wrecks in as many minutes -- they found his Bible and his gun side by side in a small satchel in the car. "Pahson" explained the Bible but had less to say about the pistol. For the accidents--and the concealed weapons--he will face trial in police court Wednesday morning. He was to have been tried today but one of the victims of the jehu's ride has not recovered sufficiently to appear in court. The victim is W. C. Crosby, 1908 Thirtieth street, who was run down by Reverend Dillard, pastor of St. John's Baptist church of Sulphur Springs, as Crosby stepped from his parked car on Seventh avenue Dillard failed to stop, and H. C. Hancock, 3111 Twenty-second avenue, gave chase. At Thirteenth street and Michigan avenue, Dillard crashed into a car driven by Joe Pardo, 610 East Michigan avenue ending his ride. But Dillard still had wings on his feet, and fairly flew from the scene until Hancock overhauled him and held him for the police.

## Truth in Media?

This article, published by the *Tampa Times*, April 18, 1932, offers unique insight into the challenges faced by African Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The arrest of Rev. Dillard, a respected church and community leader, for reckless driving, is described in language that is far from respectful. Modern readers will note descriptions like “negro preacher,” “church militant,” and “jesu,” along with a mocking reference to the “Pahson.” Sadly, no report of the incident in an African-American publication has been discovered that might offer any counterpoint.