Key West's Tall Ship

L. Glenn Westfall

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During the early spring months of 1983, plans unfolded for a most spectacular event, the arrival to Tampa of the Key West schooner "Western Union". In May, Dr. L. Glenn Westfall was visiting Executive Director of the Key West Preservation Board, Mr. Wright Langley. Mr. Langley introduced Dr. Westfall to the crew of the "Western Union", and after learning that the ship and crew made an annual trip to Tarpon Springs for repairs, the group suggested the schooner stop by Tampa for a gala welcome. Dr. Westfall was appointed Hyde Park Ambassador of the Conch Republic by Key West Mayor Mr. Dennis Wardlow, and in this official capacity, he initiated plans for an official goodwill tour. Dr. Westfall returned to Tampa and found an enthusiastic supporter in Mr. Tom Curtis, president of the Tampa Bay Maritime Commission. Mr. Curtis vigorously involved himself in the project and made all the arrangements for the event. He and his organization contacted the Tampa Port Authority, the media, and a joint Tampa Historical Society-Tampa Bay Maritime Commission event was underway.

DR. WESTFALL, a past president of Tampa Historical Society, is a professor of history and anthropology at Hillsborough Community College-Brandon Campus and currently serves as executive director of Tampa Historical Society.

On Saturday, September 17, guests from both organizations came aboard for the festivities. They were amazed at the sleekness of the schooner, which had been constructed in 1939. Originally, the ship had been owned by Key Westers but was leased by the Western Union Telegraph Company to lay cables in the Caribbean. The delighted guests browsed through the cabins and were entertained with nautical songs. It is hoped that in succeeding years the "Western Union" will make an annual visit to Tampa so that our community can appreciate the preservation of a beautiful 131-foot schooner.
Official participants to the Western Union gala included, left to right, Mr. Randy Stevens, president, Tampa Historical Society, Mr. Scott Bottoms, Captain, The Western Union, Mr. Tom Curtis, President, Tampa Bay Maritime Commission, Tampa’s Mayor, Mr. Bob Martinez, and Key West’s Mayor, Mr. Dennis Wardlow (whose grandfather was president of the Ruy Lopez Cigar Factory which originated in Key West and later moved to Tampa).

Tall mast of the Western Union

Guests to the gala who feasted on shrimp and cocktails included Sarah Charles Stevens and Nancy Skemp, chatting here with Mayor Martinez and Randy Stevens.