2018

Remembering Scottish Chief

St. Petersburg Times

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Camp Commander James Hayward stood tall in his Confederate soldier’s uniform. He didn’t seem to mind the gray wool clothing, even in the scorching summer heat. Maybe his mind was on his victory.

Hayward, whose great-grandfather fought in the Civil War, watched proudly as the Tampa Historical Society dedicated a plaque to commemorate Tampa Bay’s only Civil War battle. The bronze sign was placed near the entrance of the Lowry Park Zoo on July 28.

“It’s important that we perpetuate our heritage," said Hayward, a member of the John T. Lesley Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

The sign, 3 feet by 4 feet with gold letters, tells the story of the Scottish Chief, a Confederate ship that was sunk by Union soldiers in the Hillsborough River.

The Scottish Chief was a blockade runner for the Confederate Army. During the Civil War, the Union Navy blocked the entrance to Tampa Bay but the Scottish Chief broke through six times.

The ship, one of Capt. James McKay's two blockade runners, would drop supplies along the Hillsborough River.

On Oct. 17, 1863, several Union soldiers slipped aboard and burned the Scottish Chief while it was docked near what is now Lowry Park.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans presented the idea for a plaque four months before, said Historical Society President Jim Judy. The 15-member board of local volunteers studied the proposal before it was approved, he said.

A single sign costs about $1,500, Judy said. He said he was unsure how many signs the Society had erected.

About 50 descendants of Confederate soldiers turned out for the ceremony.
Several, like Hayward, were dressed in Confederate uniforms while others wore plaid to commemorate McKay's Scottish heritage.

"As far as I'm concerned, the war is over," said James McKay's great-grandson Herbert. "But we need to remember it."