6-1-1998

From the Editors

Tampa Bay History

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Recommended Citation
Tampa Bay History (1998) "From the Editors," Tampa Bay History: Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 2. Available at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol20/iss1/2

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FROM THE EDITORS

One hundred years ago the Spanish-American War put Tampa on the map. The "splendid little war," as Secretary of State John Hay called it, held special meaning for Tampa and its 15,000 residents, especially Cuban immigrants who had pioneered the cigar industry in the 1880s. For years the cause of Cuba Libre had rallied Cuban patriots, but in 1898 they watched as their war against Spanish rule was transformed by the United States into the Spanish-America War. Following President William McKinley's call on April 11, 1898, for a U. S. declaration of war against Spain, the War Department selected Tampa as the port of embarkation for the invasion of Cuba.

In observance of the centennial of the Spanish-American War, this issue of Tampa Bay History is devoted to looking at the local impact of the war. As seen by outsiders, especially northern troops and journalists, Tampa seemed a southern wasteland, except for the Tampa Bay Hotel, today's University of Tampa, which one reporter described as "so enormous that the walk from the rotunda to the dining room helps one to an appetite." Someone else said it was "like a Turkish harem with the occupants left out." Notwithstanding the opulence of its biggest attraction, Tampa was dismissed by one reporter as "a city chiefly composed of derelict wooden houses drifting on an ocean of sand." This issue documents life in the Tampa Bay area during "the rocking-chair period of the war."

In the first article, James W. Covington describes the experiences of what became the most celebrated military unit to pass through the city. "The Rough Riders in Tampa" sketches the larger military context that brought a variety of units to Florida's West Coast, including Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders who remained only four days before departing for Cuba. Other units that set up camp in and around Tampa included African-American troops, some of whom were veterans of the Indian wars. In Tampa black soldiers encountered forms of discrimination that led to serious racial conflicts, described in the article "Black Troops in Florida" by Willard B. Gatewood. Some black units were also sent to Lakeland, and their experiences figure in the article by Hal Hubener, entitled "Army Life in Lakeland, Florida, during the Spanish-American War."

"The rocking-chair period of the war" was remarkably well documented by journalists, photographers, illustrators, and soldiers themselves. Two articles draw on these documents. In the first, "'Tampa Is a BUM Place,'" author Alicia Addeo uses the recently discovered letters of First Sergeant Henry A. Dobson to show the reactions of a young volunteer to conditions in Tampa during 1898. In another article, William A. Lorenzen IV brings together reports from the New York Times to examine "'The Rocking-Chair War: Views of Tampa in the New York Press during 1898." So many photographs remain from this period of the Spanish-American War that the editors have chosen to use more illustrations in each article and omit the usual photographic essay, but we hope you enjoy our effort to commemorate the centennial of the Spanish-American War.