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## Calling Descendants of Tampa Bay Pioneer Families:

Families of Tampa Bay's Sunny South Guard will be recognized on Saturday, September 17, 2011 at the Poe Plaza in downtown Tampa during a free historical re-enactment.

Tampa, FL – If you have deep roots in Tampa Bay, the Sesquicentennial Commission is looking for you. Perhaps you have family members with the last name Weeden, McKay, Lesley, Fletcher, Hendry, or Platt. On Saturday, September 17, there will be a historical re-enactment of the Flag Presentation Ceremony to the Sunny South Guard that originally took place 150 years ago in 1861 when Florida seceded from the Union and joined the Confederate States of America. This free re-enactment will happen just steps from it's original Old Fort Brooke location, at 201 N. Franklin Street in downtown Tampa. During the event, dignitaries will recognize descendants from the original pioneer families who settled here, fought to preserve hearth and home, and are now listed on the Sunny South Guard's Roll of Honor.

The re-enactment is being hosted by the Tampa Bay Sesquicentennial Commission, a group of historical re-enactors, genealogist, descendants of Tampa's pioneer families, as well as other civic-minded individuals and organizations interested in preserving Tampa's rich history.

"Florida's secession and its ensuing struggle was a remarkable period in our history," said Lunelle Siegel, genealogist and co-chair of the Sesquicentennial Commission. "Here in Tampa Bay, a majority of its most prominent citizens made the ultimate sacrifice when duty called. That's why these soldiers are recognized today as U.S. veterans, just as any other soldier in any other conflict."

Back in 1861, Hillsborough County also included present-day Polk, Manatee and Pinellas Counties. In June of that year, about 100 of the "darling" sons of Tampa, Hillsborough County and surrounding counties organized themselves into an infantry company known as the Sunny South Guards and

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offered their service to the State of Florida. Upon receiving orders to report and prior to their departure to Jacksonville in September, the ladies of Tampa Town presented them with a company flag in a spectacular, moving presentation ceremony. It was held at the officer's barracks at Fort Brooke, Tampa's militia headquarters which was captured from Federal hands when Florida seceded.

They were soldiers like Captain John T. Lesley, who returned after being wounded in action and eventually served Tampa's Mayor, a State Representative, State Senator, Hillsborough County Tax Collector and Hillsborough County Sheriff. Another was Private Robert J. Carney, a young man who enlisted at the tender age of 17, and was appointed to be a musician for the company on June 10, 1862. When his young age was discovered, he was discharged for being underage and dropped in December of 1862. Instead of heading home, Carney returned after the last roll and was mortally wounded at Resaca on May 14, 1864. He died in the Atlanta Medical College Hospital and was buried in the Oakland Cemetery under a gravestone that incorrectly listed him as R.J. Carvoy. Yet another was James W. Hendry, who enlisted at the age of 36, was reported missing in action and then as a Prisoner of War after being captured on November 25, 1863 at Missionary Ridge, Tennessee. He lived in deplorable conditions on Johnson's Island POW Camp in Sandusky, Ohio for two years before returning to Florida and to cattle ranching in what is now Hendry County, Florida. Then there was Thomas K. Spencer, who went to war with his older brother, who did not survive. When he returned to Tampa, he picked up where his brother left off and started the "Sunnyland Tribune", which ultimately became the Tampa Tribune. Spencer later became Sheriff of Hillsborough County and hired Florida's first black deputy sheriff.

There are many stories like the ones above. It is these brave men and boys who took on such great responsibility that the Sesquicentennial Commission will be honoring, along with recognizing the descendents of these veterans.

"Some may feel this is controversial" said David McCallister, Esq., co-chair of the Commission, "but these veterans deserve to be honored. They were soldiers defending their homes and families. Today's veterans understand the call of patriotic duty and fighting in an unpopular wars. If they hope to be honored for their service into future generations, we're setting the example by remembering past sacrifices."

The re-enactment begins at 3pm with an 1860's brass band concert, followed by the ceremony and flag presentation re-enactment at 4. From 5 to 6, guests will experience history coming alive as re-enactors mix, mingle and discuss their lives and times 150 years ago.

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To learn more, visit <http://www.tampabay150.org>. To read the names of the Sunny South Guardsmen being honored, visit <http://www.tampabay150.org/roll%20of%20honor.html>