JOSE MARTI, CUBA’S ‘GEORGE WASHINGTON,’ SLEPT HERE

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA --- Ybor City, Tampa’s colorful Latin quarter, was a place of intrigue during the buildup to and during the Spanish-American War. An exciting rendezvous for the revolutionaries was the Cherokee Club, an attractive red brick building at the northwest corner of 9th Ave. and 14th St. where it still stands.

This was the second brick building in Ybor City and was erected in 1888. It soon became the meeting place for the elite, and later became known as El Pasaje Restaurant.

Jose Marti, the leader of the Cuban insurrection in 1895, slept at this hotel on his first trip to Tampa, Nov. 25, 1891. Before retiring he said, "I feel happy amongst warriors."

During the Spanish American War other big names often were seen at the El Pasaje. There were Col. "Teddy?" Roosevelt, Sir Winston Churchill, President Grover Cleveland, Gen. Leonard Wood and others. From 1890 to 1935 all Governors of Florida were feted here.

There are other memorable spots in Ybor City marking Marti’s stay. Across the street from the El Pasaje is still standing the pioneer cigar factory on the front steps of which Marti made a speech of liberation in 1893. Next door to the old restaurant is the Cuban club and a bust of Marti is erected on the corner. A Jose Marti Park is at 8th Ave. and 13th St., at the spot where Marti stayed at La Casa de Pedroso; the house of Paulina Pedroso, great woman patriot of Cuba. The official newspaper of the Cuban revolutionary party was published nearby.