

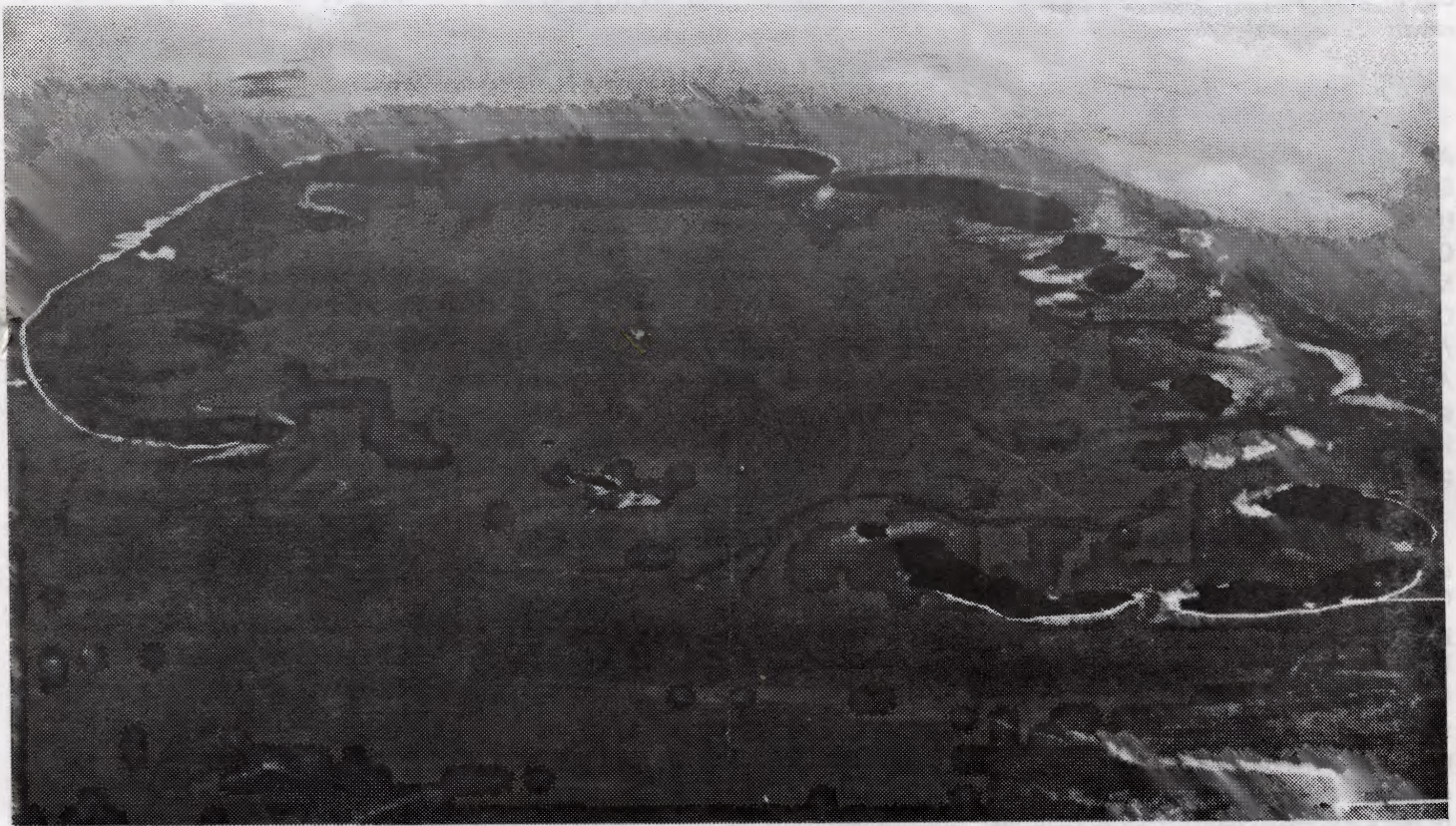
Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal

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SPRING 2000

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The 1622 Tierra Firme Flota Salvage and the Florida Keys Natives



The Marquesas in the 1960's from the southwest. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

**By Dr. Eugene Lyon
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This paper was presented at the Florida Keys Maritime History Conference held on May 6, 2000 at Key West and is reprinted with permission of the Author.

I first saw the Marquesas in 1970. We left Key West and passed through the Lakes—the inside route—I believe Don Kincaid was running the boat. On both sides we passed the green blobs of man-

grove islands, called chiquimulas—the brothers—by the Indians, because they looked so much alike. At last we came up on our left to the island of Boca Grande. Ahead to the west lay a broad channel, across which we could see a low rim of green—the Marquesas Keys. Boca Grande channel was quite rough that day and our boat pounded into the swells. As we approached, the green line separated into the islets of the Marquesas atoll. Passing at low tide through a narrow channel, we

came into a wide shallow lagoon which smelled strongly of mudflats and sun-on-mangrove. I had never seen such a lonely, isolated place.

Imagine how isolated it was before the fleet disaster of September and October of 1622. In the lower keys, named Cuchiaga, Uchiaga, or Aceaga, there lived a sparse Indian population. They traveled by canoe, and likely lived in some degree upon fish and shellfish. They had trade

(Continued on page 12)

Society News

By John Viele



Capt. Douglas P. Rudolph. Photo credit: Tom Hambricht.

Field Trip - February 27

Through the courtesy of the Key West Art and Historical Society, approximately forty-five Maritime Society members were treated to a tour of the recently restored Custom House, now home of the Key West Museum of Art and History. Kevin O'Brien, executive director of the Key West Art and Historical Society led the tour. Among other subjects of interest, he described the painstaking efforts and expense incurred in making the restoration as authentic as possible.

Lecture - March 14

Robert S. Carr, Dade County's director of archaeology and director of the Miami Circle project gave a most interesting slide presentation on the discovery, archaeological investigation, and preservation of the ancient Tequesta native site at the mouth of the Miami River. Among other topics of interest, Carr told how samples of pottery found at archaeological sites in the Keys have convinced him that the

Keys natives were a branch of the Tequesta, not the Calusa, tribe.

Lecture - April 10

Capt. Douglas P. Rudolph USCG, Commander Coast Guard Group Key West, gave a slide presentation on the history of the U.S. Coast Guard from its inception as the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service in 1790 to the present day. He also described significant events in local Coast Guard history and discussed the mission and current operations of the Coast Guard Group Key West.

Maritime History Conference, May 6

A number of Society members attended the all-day Florida Keys Maritime History Conference at the A&B Lobster House. The conference was jointly sponsored by the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society and the Key West Maritime Historical Society. Distinguished speakers included Dr. Eugene Lyon, former director of the Center for Historic Research at Flagler College and author of "The Search for the *Atocha*" who discussed the Spanish salvage of the 1622 *flota* and the involvement of the Keys natives; Dr. Roger Smith, head of underwater archaeology for the state of Florida who described the investigation of the Boca Chica Channel wreck; and Dr. Duncan Mathewson, former member of the Mel Fisher Treasure Salvors team, who told the story of searching for the *Atocha* by following the artifact scatter trail. Other speakers included Society members Tom Hambricht on the Florida Keys in World War II, Ed Little on the history of the Key West Light, Corey Malcom on the excavation of the Key West turtle kraals, and John Viele on the *North America* and the Florida Keys wrecking industry.

In Memory of Leonard Lucas

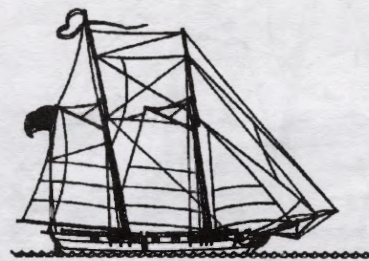
KWMHS lost a good friend and former member of the Board of Directors with the death of Leonard Lucas on February 26, 2000. He was born February 10, 1924,

in California. He had a master's degree in engineering and was self-employed marine engineer that specialized in submarines.

New Members

Lynn Coleman, North Miami Beach; Jeff Dickinson and Deborah Cruze, Key West; Edward Gillis, Key West; Evelyn Gleason, Key West; Phil Hay, Big Pine Key; Keith S. Lowe, Johnston IO; Old Town Trol-

ley, Key West; Bruce McGarey, Key West; Francis Noel, Key West; Nellie Pantaleo, Key West; Mary Jane Proctor, Key West; Maureen Shaw, Key West; David Whall, Marathon;



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Production: Tom Hambricht

Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041 (305) 292-7903.

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An Overview of the Evolution of the Historic Seaport at Key West Bight

By Edward J. Little, Jr.
President, Key West Maritime
Historical Society
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In The Beginning

The Historic Seaport District of Key West has a long and interesting history. It even pre-dates establishment of the first permanent settlement of the island in 1822. When Key West was only an isolated, and undeveloped tropical islet, (which was also known by the name given to it by the Spaniards of Cuba as "Cayo Hueso") it was likely frequented by Native American tribes, buccaneers, and fishermen from Cuba (and the Bahamas). Indeed, a nautical chart based on British surveys made during the 1780's carries the annotation "old turtle crawls" to denote the area that is now encompassed by Key West Bight. This is particularly significant in that the "crawls" (pens where giant sea turtles were held alive in the water prior to shipment or butchering) were obviously distant (and poorly known) forerunners to the Seaport's present day Turtle Kraals. Also, as a journal written in 1784 makes clear, Key West Harbor (of which the Bight is part) was a favorite anchorage for Spanish fishing schooners based in Cuba. Thus, from colonial times on, history of Key West and the Seaport at the Bight has been bound up with the critical importance of the fishery (and other natural) resources of the Keys region, and that this trend has continued almost through the entire 20th century. In this account, we've used the terms "the Bight", and "Historic Seaport" interchangeably, to denote both the uplands, and the harbor, that occupy that portion of Key West that is bounded by Caroline Street on the south and Simonton Street on the east.

Key West in the 1820's, A Community Supporter by the Sea Takes Root

Key West owes its origin to the deepwater harbor, which in turn provided a safe base from which to conduct "wrecking" (the salvaging of vessels grounded on the coral reef), the mainstay of the island's economy for much of the 19th century. Until the 1950's however, (when it was deepened) much of the Seaport at the Bight was too shallow to permit docking of large ves-



Key West Bight circa 1880. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

sels (other than sloops, small schooners, and in later years, power boats). So, "wrecking wharves" and other direct involvement with the wrecking industry were probably absent from most portions of the Bight that are now owned by the City. Even so, in addition to merchants, sailors, or others involved with wrecking, many of Key West's earliest residents were fishermen. A large number of them originally hailed from New England ports. They sailed their sloops and schooners to the Keys to fish (primarily during the winter). In 1828, John Simonton (one of Key West's original proprietors) wrote: "...the valuable fisheries of that coast [the Keys] should not be forgotten. There are at present upwards of 30 fishing smacks [small schooners], owned entirely by Americans, engaged in carrying live fish to the Havana market, which brings at least \$75,000 annually into our County" [Key West & the Keys]. Of the 421 persons residing at Key West in 1828, 100 were fishermen. These vessels, their crews, and the shoreside commerce they supported were very likely important additions to the local economy of that small settlement. The Seaport at the Bight was probably the main anchorage for many of these craft. This important early use of the Bight is almost forgotten now.

Key West 1830-1860, the Maritime Community Matures

As the 19th century progressed, the population of Key West grew, and the economy broadened to include industries and activities other than fishing and wrecking. For example, the island devel-

oped the infrastructure to repair and build a variety of watercraft, up to the size of small clipper ships. One can infer that small craft, such as sloops, may have been "careened" (beached for repairs) at the Seaport. This seems likely because some of the intertidal shoreline was suitable for this-wide, with a gentle slope. Also, photographs from the later part of the 19th century depict vessels beached there. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that such activity carried over from custom established in earlier times. More to the point, the Seaport borders on the locale of the principal focus of much 19th century maritime activity-the marine railway of Bowne and Curry (latter, Curry and Sons) located across the Seaport at the site of the present day Galleon Resort

A Seaport Awash in "Sponger Money"

In 1849 Key Westers became involved in harvesting commercial species of sponges for sale in the nation's urban centers and the world over. They harvested the sponges by "hooking". To do this, they leaned over the sides of dinghies, and with the aid of a glass bottomed bucket, used a long pole fitted with a miniature "rake" to hook and bring up sponges from the seafloor. "Sponging" was often profitable, and grew to employ hundreds at Key West, both in the fleet and at jobs ashore. This industry also led many Bahamian "Conchs" (Whites and Blacks), to immigrate to the Keys to work as spongers. Sponging continued as a major Key West based industry until the onset of
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the 20th century.

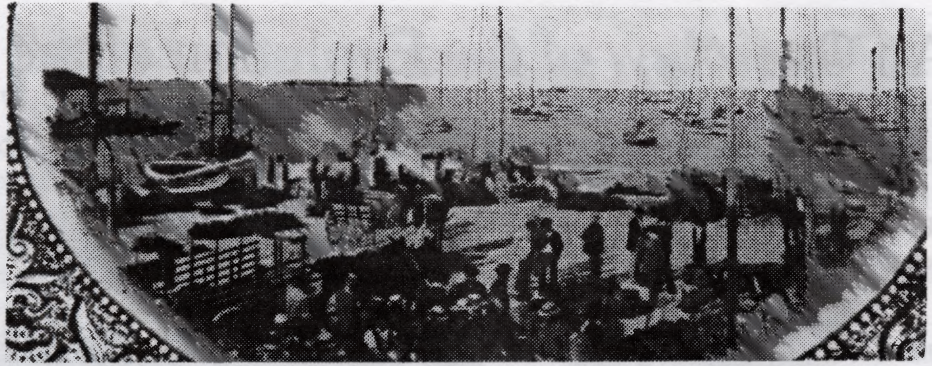
By the 1860's Key West had a sizable fleet of sloops and schooners engaged in sponging. Prints and photos made later in the 19th century indicate that many (if not all) of these craft docked at the Historic Seaport District (especially along its western margins). Probably, they had tied up there in earlier decades as well. Key West was the nation's sponge capital until 1905 when Greek divers established a new center at Tarpon Springs. Afterwards, the harvest brought into Key West was of secondary importance to that landed at the newer port. In 1939 the sponge fishery of the Keys suffered another crippling blow. A fungal parasite "sponge blight" almost wiped out the sponge beds. It took years for new sponges to grow back to replace these losses. So, the fishery had to operate on a reduced scale for most of the 1940's. Nowadays, viewers can only gaze across the Bight in the direction of the A&B Marina, to imagine the scores of sponge schooners once docked near the western margin of the Seaport.

The Grinnell Street entrance to the Seaport also had a connection to the sponge fishery. There, in the winter of 1933-34, a municipal dock was built as a Civil Works Administration (CWA) relief project. It was specifically designed as a place where cargoes of sponges could be displayed by the fishermen. This allowed the quality of the sponges to be inspected by wholesale buyers prior to sale at auction. Thus, this large wooden dock became the new focal point for sponging related activity.

The importance and utility of this municipal sponge dock was relatively short lived. The 1939 blight had reduced the sponging industry to a mere shadow of its previous importance. And, although sponge sales were conducted at the Grinnell Street dock at least until 1946, the site seemingly fell into disuse afterwards. Reportedly, the dock was eventually buried under dredged spoil when Key West Bight was bulkheaded in the early 1950's.

The 1860's to 1900; A City Expands

By the end of the Civil War, Key West was well on its way to being a cosmopolitan city (among the largest and richest in Florida). Steamers, schooners, and other craft linked the island to more northerly



Sponge auction at Key West Bight circa 1880. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

ports. Beginning in 1867, even more convenient communication to the outside world was achieved. Submarine telegraph cables were laid from the island to Cuba and to the Florida mainland. Soon additional immigrants swelled the population here. Among the most numerous of these were Bahamians fleeing hard economic times in their home islands. These "Conchs" included both Whites and Blacks, and many sought employment in Key West's maritime trades.

They were not the only new arrivals. In Cuba, as dissension between Cuban nationalists, and an oppressive Spanish colonial administration increased, a wave of exiles and expatriates sought refuge in Key West. They provided the nucleus of expertise and labor that was needed to produce the City's most notable export product of the 19th century - fine, hand rolled, cigars. During these same decades of economic expansion however, the wrecking industry at Key West slowly diminished in importance. This was because improvements in vessel design and in aids to navigation were helping vessels to transit the Florida Straits in greater safety.

The Historic Seaport serves as a "Pantry for the Island"

The increased population of Key West, and the ethnic groups that immigrated there had a lasting influence on island life. These people were the ancestors to many of the oldest families still residing here. Moreover, they constituted a broadened market for the bounty of the sea that was gathered by the fishermen of the Seaport. The Bahamians, as their generic nickname implies, often dined on that succulent gastropod mollusk, the Queen Conch. Thus, landings of that species were undoubtedly increased to accommodate this heightened demand. In view of the expanding population of Key West, landings of various other species of shellfish and of

finfish also must have been stimulated. In time, the diet of many islanders became popularly characterized as "grits and grunts", the latter comestible being a popular "panfish" harvested by many of the fishermen based at the Bight.

So many boats and crews were involved in catching seafood for sale to the households of the island that this activity came to be known as the "Key West Market Fishery". Unlike the Key West "smacks" (schooners) once used to supply fish to the markets of Havana, the vessels that fished to supply the populace of Key West were mostly small sloops. These were commonly known as "smackees". By the 1880's, at least 50 of them (with a total of almost 100 crew) were in the trade, and sailing from the Bight. A unique design aspect of the smackees (and the smacks) was that the catch was kept alive in a special water filled hold amidships - the "live well". Often, when a boat returned from a fishing trip, the fish were removed from the live well, and allowed to swim freely in floating wooden lathe cages ("live cars") alongside the boat (or the adjacent dock) until sale. A buyer could select the individual fish desired simply by pointing to it as it swam in the live car. The fisherman then would dip it out of the "car" (or from the live well of his boat) with a net. The sale was completed when the fish was dressed out to the customer's satisfaction, and then paid for. Transactions such as this became a traditional facet of island life along the Bight waterfront. This local custom persisted into the 1950s. It probably ended because changes in fishing technology rendered the old, slow, live well boats obsolete.

In time, and before the end of the century, various businesses and infrastructure grew up around the Seaport to support fishing, sponging, and other maritime trades. At the southwest margin of the Bight, Capt. John Lowe built a ma-

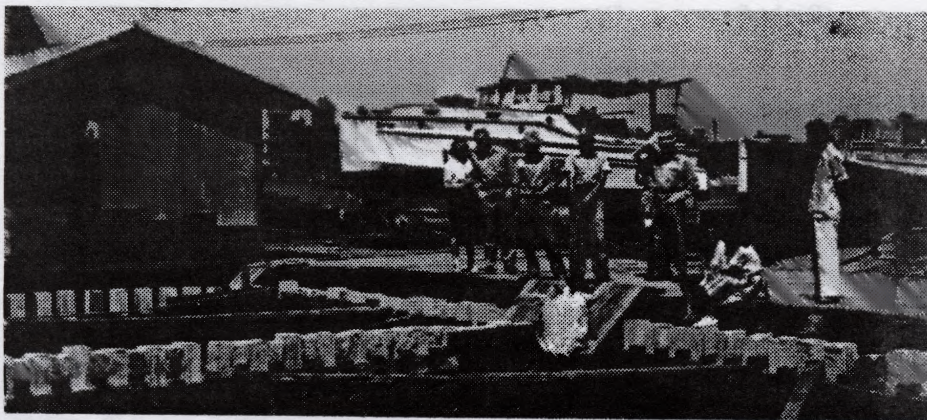
rine ways and at least two large docks. Further east, were the Porter-Allen marine ways, which were located adjacent to what is now the Turtle Kraals restaurant. Also, for more than a century the western shore of the Seaport was the base for much of the fishery to supply local markets.

The Seaport becomes "Sea Turtle Central"

For much of the 19th century, and well into the 20th century, the waters of the Keys, coastal Florida, and much of the Caribbean, were notable for a rather unusual fishery- giant sea turtles. The most important species was the green turtle. It grew to weights of 300 pounds or more, and it was valuable for its meat, eggs, and hide. This creature was so savory that, at least from the 1700's on, stews and soups made from it had been eagerly enjoyed by the gourmards of Europe and America.

Giant green turtles were surprisingly docile. If captured alive, they could be kept in that condition for weeks, if not months, by binding their flippers and turning them on their backs. In this manner they were brought to market aboard the fishing and trading vessels of the period. Green turtles could also be confined to pens ("crawls" or "kraals") erected in nearshore shallows. There, they could be easily held (and if need be, fed and fattened) prior to slaughter.

The fishery for sea turtles also has a historical dimension of almost national significance. To the early settlers of the Keys and South Florida (and to the generations of explorers and mariners who proceeded them) sea turtles were not just a delicacy, they were almost a necessity. In fact, as one scholar has written, the successful colonization of the Caribbean (and in turn, the remainder of the Western Hemisphere) owes a large debt to the green turtle. This theory maintains that when the first waves of Spanish explorers and colonists arrived in the New World, they were sorely pressed for meat (or other protein sources). The food supplies they had started with generally had been consumed during the long voyage or rendered inedible by spoilage aboard ship. Thus, it was necessary to find in dependable abundance a food animal that could be easily obtained in the Caribbean, was big enough to feed many, and did not require laborious means of preservation. In brief, the green turtle probably fit this need better than any land animal or any fish. As testament to this interpretation of the



Turtle Kraals in the 1950's. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

importance of the green turtle, there are the many historical references to the turtle kraals that had once been commonplace along the shorelines of Key West, the Keys, and elsewhere in the New World.

From 1820's into the 1970's Key West was (arguably) the center of the U.S. trade in sea turtles. The fishery had likely been first pursued by the Indians of the Keys. As evidenced by the 1780's chart mentioned above (and other sources) fishermen from Cuba and the Bahamas had long been coming to the Keys to hunt turtles. During the early 1820's there was also apparently brisk trade in bringing green turtles taken in the Keys to Nassau to supply the needs of a cannery that operated there. Later, after Key West was settled, this export trade was banned. But, green turtles continued to be eagerly sought by local sailors and fishermen (witness the article penned in 1832 by the noted naturalist, John James Audubon regarding his travels in the Keys).

In 1858 (according to a newspaper advertisement) at least one turtle cannery was operating at Key West. The cannery however did not seem to have been successful. There is no further mention of it in historical references for this period. In addition, there were probably several dealers in live turtles. They provided fresh turtle meat to locals. By the 1880's one of Capt. Lowe's wharves at what is now the western margin of the Historic Seaport was used as a turtle dock. He and others also shipped many turtles alive to distant urban markets. About 1890 another turtle cannery opened. This one was located near the Seaport at Elizabeth St. It was started by Armond Granday, "a celebrated French chef" who used a "secret recipe" to produce turtle soup of high quality. This venture was relatively profitable, and was purchased in 1910 by

Norberg Thompson of Key West (his various enterprises will be summarized below). In the 1920's Thompson transferred cannery operations to his property at the foot of Margaret St. Adjacent to the cannery he built several large turtle "crawls" (which, for reasons now unknown, by the 1940's came to be known as "kraals"). But, the abundance of sea turtles in the Keys was declining.

To provide a reliable supply of green turtles sufficient for the cannery, Thompson looked to the Caribbean. He arranged for Cayman Islanders, who had long experience at turtling, to net turtles off the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua, and to bring them to Key West aboard schooners. Eventually, Thompson used his own turtle schooners to transport the turtles from crawls on Grand Cayman to his "kraals" at Key West.

Of Thompson's schooners, the *A. M. Adams* (also known as the *A. Maitland Adams*) was the best known. It was built on Grand Cayman in the late 1930's, and until 1971, was primarily engaged in carrying turtles to Key West. This vessel was approximately 90 ft long, and could carry several hundred turtles within its hold and on its deck. The arrival of the *Adams*, (usually every other month) and the unloading of its cargo of giant turtles at the Kraals was invariably given wide notice by the local press. As a result, locals and tourists often thronged the Kraals to witness the spectacle. But, in the spring of 1971, this trade in turtles came to an end. Florida enacted measures to conserve sea turtles in State waters. The minimum legal size was set at 41 inches carapace length. The law did not distinguish between turtles of local origin versus those imported from the Caribbean. Because green turtles larger than the legal size

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were almost unobtainable via the Cayman fishermen, Thompson Enterprises was forced to cease importing and canning sea turtles.

1900 To Present, Transition and Diversification

With the onset of the 20th century, the isolation of Key West lessened. Coastal steamers had long linked the island with the major ports of the Atlantic seaboard and of the Gulf Coast. Eventually, the quality and quantity of these sailings improved such that they were almost taken for granted (unlike the questionable reliability of such connections during the first half of the 19th century). Then, in January of 1912, Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad began regular service from the Florida mainland to Key West. On what is now Trumbo Point Annex (across from the Seaport's southern margin) Flagler constructed extensive piers and other installations. These accommodated large ferries that transported rolling stock and cargo to and from Cuba. With the coming of the railroad, and other technological advances of the 1900's and beyond, Key West was opened to new economic and social factors that made it less insular than formerly.

Mr. Norberg Thompson's influence on the evolution of the Historic Seaport

The coming of the rail link between Key West and the mainland soon had a very direct influence on the activities at the Seaport. This was because it stimulated the business endeavors of a man who would have a long and lasting impact on that waterfront, Mr. Norberg Thompson. From the 1920's through the 1960's, much of the southern shoreline of the Bight bustled with a variety of marine related businesses started by Norberg Thompson and his associates. For many years he was probably the wealthiest and most influential man on the island. Thompson was born at Key West in 1883 to a relatively well to do family. Although he earned a law degree at NYU in 1906, he soon returned to Key West to manage his father's wholesale sponge business. Within a few years he had branched out into other pursuits. In 1910 he bought the "A. Granday" canning company (see above). In 1911 (at the site of what is now B.O.'s Fishwagon) Thompson erected a large factory to manufacture cigar boxes (a commodity much in demand by Key West's many cigar



Fishing boats at the pier by the Thompson Fish House in 1937. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

factories).

Rail service to the mainland was essential to Thompson's next major venture; (begun in 1913) sending carloads of Keys caught fish to distant urban markets. This business, the Thompson Fish Company, required a plentiful and dependable supply of ice. To assure this, in 1918 Thompson constructed a modern, high capacity, ice manufacturing plant. The Thompson Ice Company was located at what is now the Margaret Street entrance to the Seaport parking lot. By the late 1920's Thompson owned all the Bight waterfront from William Street east to Margaret Street. He had the Thompson Fish House built, had Turtle Cannery and Kraals built at their present location, and made other improvements to the Seaport property that survive to this day. His many businesses were known collectively as "Thompson Enterprises." Almost all were based at the Bight. Almost all generally prospered. Over the years, they included a marine ways, a boat building/repair facility, a hardware store/chandlery/machine shop, ownership of several trading and turtling schooners, and a venture to pack guava preserves.

At their peak, Thompson's businesses employed hundreds. The fish company alone once directed the operations of up to 125 powerboats and their crews. Most of this activity was centered on the winter time fisheries for spanish mackerel and for king mackerel. Millions of pounds of these species were shipped by Thompson

yearly to distant markets. To help crew his fleet, Thompson seasonally hired experienced fishermen from ports along the eastern seaboard (especially from the fishing towns of New Jersey shore). The firm also developed distant markets for snappers, groupers, and spiny lobsters. By the early 1950's the company had also become a major producer of shrimp from the prolific grounds off Dry Tortugas (see below).

Although Norberg Thompson died in 1951, his various enterprises continued on much as they had (primarily under the able direction of Thompson's close associate, A. Maitland Adams) until 1968. That September, a shrimp mariculture firm, Sea Farms, bought the Thompson holdings. These were modernized and expanded to allow more efficient unloading and processing of the shrimp catch. A portion of the Seaport property (just west of what is now the Turtle Kraals restaurant) was even used as a laboratory and hatchery to further Sea Farm's work on shrimp mariculture. In 1976 Sea Farms sold all its Bight properties to a firm owned by the colorful (and rich) fisherman, Henry "Booty" Singleton. Singleton already owned a fleet of shrimp trawlers, and operated shrimp packing plants in Stock Island and elsewhere on the Gulf. Shrimp packing remained the focus of his company's activities at the Bight. In 1977 Singleton embarked on a major re-development program for the his Bight properties. The old Thompson ice plant,

Civil War Days in Key West

By Lewis G. Schmidt

PART 7 (January thru June 1864)

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The Key West Post Cemetery Records indicated 93 burials for the year of 1864, as a rotation of troops would take place and the new men would suffer as they became acclimated to their new station. The four year record of the cemetery records (1862-65) seemed to predict an increase in deaths as new troops arrived in the keys, probably resulting from a weeding out process, as those individuals most susceptible to the local diseases would succumb during the first season on station. It also took time for the new troops to learn how to protect themselves from the ravages of the various fevers present in the area. Most of the deaths in 1864 would occur in the 2nd US Colored Infantry Regiment and the 110th New York Volunteer Regiment, who would relieve the 47th Pennsylvania at Key West and the Tortugas. The highest incidence of military deaths at Key West during 1864 would occur in May, June, and July, when there would be 18, 17, and 23 burials respectively. A year later, in 1865, "only" 38 burials would be recorded for the entire year.

There would be two burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in January, and two members of the 47th Pennsylvania would die during the month, but neither of the regiment's deaths were at Key West. Three men died at the Marine Hospital.

On January 1st it was "Raining all morning & very dull day. Places of business closed. Street parade of Colored Population, the anniversary of their freedom, according to the Emancipation Proclamation."

The local Freedman at Key West celebrated New Year's day on Friday as the first anniversary of their deliverance from bondage. A large meeting was held in the Baptist Church where they normally worshipped. "Judge Boynton, US District Judge, got up from a sick bed, in opposition to the advice of physician, and made a most excellent address to them. He was followed by Mr. Plantz, US District Attorney, Post Master Albury, Mr. Curtis and Mr. Furgeson."

Musician Wharton reported: "Among the lookers on I noticed the Rev. Dr. Herrick, of the Episcopal Church, Mr. Allen, Clerk of the Court, and several prominent citizens, whose former opin-

ions were in opposition to interference with slavery, but now see the justice of it, and are heart and hand with the administration. After the speeches, toasts were given and responded to with loud cheers. Old Sandy, the headman of the crowd, of whom I have before spoken, could not let the occasion slip, so he gave "the speedy down fall of Charleston". This was received with such tremendous applause that there was great fear of an extra expense for window lights. When the speeches, toasts, etc. were over, Sandy, acting as chief marshal, formed them in a line, and headed by music, such as two violins, a flute, guitar, and bass drum, played by men of their own color, they marched through the principal streets, and that in a quiet and orderly manner that was a credit to them."

Wharton continued: "If those at home who are continually crying that a negro, when freed, cannot take care of himself and would come to want, had seen these freedmen and women in their gay clothes and the comfortable condition in which they appeared, they would have altered their opinion, and come to the conclusion that slavery is a curse and should not be tolerated."

On January 11, Henry Hornbeck was "Issuing rations all day to the troops. Steamer *Mississippi* arrived this afternoon having a small Mail... To night witnessed a Nigger Ball which was first rate. Serenaded at Lieut Heebners. Retired at 2 A.M."

At Key West on January 18, "Another prize has just been brought in, taken by the schooner *Two Sisters*, at the mouth of the Suwanee." The District Court, which had convened on the 12th, had already issued decrees in the cases of the steamers *James Battelle*, *Alice Vivian* and *Anita*; schooners *Frolic*, *Mary Jane*, *Harriet*, *Rebecca*, *Julia*, *Sea Drift*, *Anna Maria*, *Miriam*, *Lady Maria*, *Ann*, *Georgia*, *Charmer*, *Clara Louisa*, and *Shot*; sloops *John Wesley*, *Emma*, *Florida*, *Retampago*, name unknown, and *Southern Star*; boats *Alice* and *Buckshot*. "This makes a total of twenty-five cases."

The *Roebuck* captured the sloop *Caroline* at Jupiter Inlet, with "50 sacks salt, 4 cases gin, one-half barrel soda, and one box dry goods", and sent her to Key West for adjudication.

On January 27, the officers of the 47th Pennsylvania gave a party at Fort Taylor on Wednesday evening. "It was the

party of the season. Northern beauty was there in loveliness, and great was the rivalry among the brass buttons to gain one of the ladies from "among the hills" as a partner. Quite a number of ladies are spending the winter here with their husbands and fathers... This party was a large one-at one time there were ten sets on the floor. The guests enjoyed themselves in the mazy dance 'till three in the morning, when they left Fort Taylor somewhat fatigued."

And on the 28th, a meeting of "unconditional Unionists favorable to the early restoration of Florida to the Union" was held at the Baptist Church at Key West. Judge Philip Fraser, US District Attorney Homer G. Planting, Admiral Bailey, Postmaster Albury, Mr. Pent, and other citizens addressed the meeting, explaining the President's Proclamation to a group so large that not all were able to gain admittance to the building. The Judge made the point that "the emancipation of the slave would benefit the poor white man of the south, taking labor into view."

The speeches were heckled by a "fellow" professing to be a "good southern boy" and shouting "lie", until "a large sized Allentown boy by his side used moral suasion by catching him by the throttle, thereby causing suspension of the breathing apparatus, and in the end ousted him from the building." District Judge, Hon. Thomas J. Boynton was confined to his room by sickness and could not attend.

At Key West, the cistern of the East Martello Tower was accidentally allowed to flood while drying, requiring it to be rebuilt in February.

There was only one burial in the Key West Post Cemetery in February, and no deaths in the 47th Pennsylvania. Three men died at the Marine Hospital, two of them crew members of the USS *Honduras*.

On February 5, Willard Smith of the 8th Vermont Regiment, en route from New York to New Orleans with his regiment and some members of New York units, reported that "We landed at Key West Friday night and anchored in the harbor until morning. While the ship was taking in salt and water a very few of us (perhaps twenty) were favored with the permission of going ashore... the grass stands high and green—the trees and flowers in full bloom. The orange trees and bananas are growing beneath their load

the cigar box factory, and other structures were razed. Eventually, Singleton tired of managing his far-flung shrimping empire. So, in 1981, he leased out his shoreside Key West interests to the agribusiness conglomerate, ConAgra, which had become active in the seafood business.

As the decade progressed, ConAgra continued to pack shrimp. But, each year, the catches dwindled (and profit margins decreased). Inevitably, the firm's shrimping and commercial fishing operations were cut back. When ConAgra's lease on the "Singleton properties" ran out in 1991 they did not renew their option. The City then began negotiations to buy the parcel. These were successful, and in January, 1993, the City took ownership of what was to become the "Historic Seaport". This eventually changed the character of a property that for decades had once been a vibrant "working waterfront" and, until recently, dimmed the acknowledgment that much of that activity derived from Thompson's various enterprises.

The Seaport in Uniform

The military has always been important to Key West (and vice-versa). With the outbreak of WWI, Naval and other units moved into Key West on scale that dwarfed the build-ups seen there during the 1820's, the Civil War, and the Spanish American War. A massive harbor (including the Truman Annex "Mole Pier") and other installations were built on the western end of the island to serve as an operating base. After the end of WWI the base was reduced to a minimal "caretaker" basis. That status was relatively short-lived. Within 20 years WWII loomed, and the Navy returned to Key West with a massive and all-pervasive presence. As the U.S. role in the fighting intensified, thousands of servicemen and civilian workers were based on the island. This payroll, and the millions spent on military construction here, transformed the city forever. It now was part of the mainstream American war-time and postwar "experience." The island's economy centered on the military until defense cutbacks in the early 1970's sent it into a tailspin. This was reversed in the early 1980's, when tourism became a predominate factor in the economy of the Keys.

Although the Naval and Coast Guard installations now at Trumbo Annex are



Shrimp boats in Key West Bight in the 1960's. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

not part of the Seaport property, they are linked with it in terms of history and custom. They occupy the site of Flagler's railroad link to the island. For many years, smaller classes of Naval craft were a common fixture along the northern margins of the Bight. Also, in the immediate postwar era, the personnel of the Navy's piers at Trumbo Annex, especially on paydays, were frequent habitués of the Seaport, and of the "watering holes" (most notably the "Big Fleet" at the site of what is now "P.T.'s Late Night") along the Seaport's Caroline Street "corridor."

A Seaport in white rubber boots

WWII served to bring the economy of Key West out of the severe slump that had prevailed during the Depression (and partly as a result of the obliteration of much of the Overseas Railroad from the deadly "Labor Day" hurricane of 1935). But, in the early post-war years the island's military infrastructure (and the attendant payroll) began to be scaled back. To sustain the growth in employment and income that had prevailed during the war, new industries were needed. Tourism was growing, but still had not become a pervasive presence in the Keys. And, many of the region's traditional sources of jobs had not fully recovered from the Depression or other limiting factors. All that changed late in 1949. That is when "pink gold" was discovered in the waters off Key West. On a lucky hunch, some fishermen from St. Augustine, the Salvadore brothers, had made some test tows at night with trawl nets in the Gulf northwest of the island. When the nets were hauled aboard, they were filled with pink, "jumbo" shrimp. Previously, the waters of the Keys were thought to be devoid of commercial concentrations of these crustaceans. Now, vast

quantities of the savory creatures had been found. Word of this bonanza soon spread to all the shrimping ports of the Atlantic and the Gulf. By the spring of 1950, almost 300 vessels had relocated to the waters off the Keys to trawl what became known as the "Tortugas Grounds". This valuable fishery has, with some ups and downs, continued to the present day. In time, many shrimping crews (as did other fishers, and the workers shoreside processing plants) began forsaking their hot, black, rubber work boots for newer, cooler versions made of white rubber. In doing so, they were making (perhaps unwittingly) a fashion statement that they were among those hearty souls that pursued a living from the fertile fishing grounds of the Florida Keys.

After the Salvadore brothers made their initial discovery of the shrimp "beds", they brought Norberg Thompson and his fish company into the project. The Thompson Fish House, and other of that company's properties at the Seaport were used to unload the shrimp trawlers, to hold the shrimp in cold storage until they could be trucked north, to replenish the vessels with ice and diesel fuel, and to make all the preparations needed so that the vessels could go out to fish again. Within months, other seafood dealers from Key West and elsewhere set up shrimping fleets and unloading docks to compete with Thompson. Some of these dealers worked out of the Bight (especially along the western side). Other dealers used the Mallory Dock, and other sites in downtown Key West for their base of operations.

Shrimping brought more to Key West

(Continued on page 15)

of fruit.”

“Our ship did not go within a half mile of the Dock to prevent the soldiers from going ashore. Small boats swing from the dock to the ship, loaded with fruit and eatables of all kinds, were as thick as bees in July. Though I did not eat anything except one orange and that was nearly as large as my head...The Turtle pens covers cares [sic] along the shore, being built mostly in the water. The turtles weighing from twenty pounds up to ten hundred.” Their ship left the next day.

On February 22, “To day is Washingtons birthday, the flags displayed all over town. “The Steamer *Chas Thomas*’ arrived from New Orleans” bringing the 2nd US Colored Troops to Key West.

“Rising this morning we soon saw Key West light; then Key West itself was in sight, and soon a pilot came on board, and we steamed into the harbor....This is Washington’s birthday, you know, and all the vessels in the harbor are gaily decorated with flags. There are a large number of all manner of craft lying here; several gunboats,—the *San Jacinto*, and the famous slaver, *Wanderer*, among the number. Tugs and row-boats are plying in all directions.”

Capt. John A. Wilder was with Company A of the 2nd USCT and reported being sea sick the three days it took to reach Key West, even though it was a “smooth” voyage. “The people of Key West are of course southern in feeling and most of them rank rebs in sentiment so that of course they did not fancy our arrival at all. Some of them wished, including it is said the Union Mayor, that the ship was sunk and all persons on board lost. However, as usual, ‘Man proposes and God disposes’.”

“Of the houses we see little, as they are mostly hidden by the banana and cocoa trees...The day is most beautiful...It is pleasant to hear once more the whistle of the railroad engine. There is a railroad running from the fort to two market towns near the eastern end of the island.”

“We camped for a few days just on the edge of the town on the Northerly side of it, and then 4 companies...were ordered into Fort Taylor to learn artillery drill, and one company...ordered to the barracks in town, the remainder of the regiment under the major, 6 companies, is encamped in tents and probably will remain so until other barracks partly completed are fully finished.”

“On my sketch you will see a promi-

nent place given to Sandy’s Garden. Old Sandy is an institution. He is a genuine darky, large headed, large souled, big of stature, full of vigor & brawn, and the most perfect gentleman in Key West. He was formerly a slave—paid \$2300.00 for his own freedom with the help of his wife who sold herself into slavery for his sake—has now the finest garden on the island, has some thousands of dollars in bank and is generally a noble fellow & prosperous as he should be.”

“There seems to be no vigor nor enterprise among the people here. They wont plant, they wont work, yet manage somehow to live. They wont even raise their own fruit, but send 60 miles to Havana for it. What nature does they accept, yet do not add to it. Old Sandy’s, so far as I know, is the only garden of any size on the island, yet fruit grows wild...there are large cactus trees, 15 to 20 feet high, with large branches spreading out towards Heaven...there is a kind of hemp here which puts out a stalk 15 feet long, and more—a regular tree.”

“Comfortably quartered were we at Fort Taylor and at various barracks on the island...From the piazza of the Light-House Barracks, the highest position on the island, there is a noble view of the ocean...vigorously did we drill during the spring of our arrival in 1864. At that time we hardly knew what we could do ourselves; and the islanders, to whom the appearance in line of battle of nine hundred black men with shining muskets, brass buttons, and white gloves, was a novel, if not an unconstitutional sight, had not the dimmest idea.”

“The people of Key West, one of the largest communities in Florida, and having a fair share of fashionable slaveholding society, unlike the inhabitants of the rest of the State, were loyal...as a people they are not pre-eminently distinguished for intellectual activity. Were the place to be destroyed by a tornado, as has been once or twice threatened, the arts would not be lost...It would still be as eligible a place to be wrecked upon as any in the Gulf, and its inhabitants would generously restore to the shipwrecked as large a proportion of their own property as any engaged in similar occupations.”

Residing here are the “Conchs”, originally from the Bahamas, and said by some to be descendants of North Carolina or other Tories, who fled to British protection during the Revolutionary War. They

are very ignorant, have manners and customs peculiar to themselves, and reside in a distinct part of the island. They were formerly much looked down upon by the more wealthy; but as they have not a few good traits, the prejudice against them is sensibly dying out. The arrival of a colored regiment at Key West, by giving the good people a more important object of disgust, helped the Conchs immeasurably in this regard; though I am sorry to say they did not appear to appreciate it. During the war they were a rebel almost to a man.”

“While active hostilities lasted, they were forbidden to frequent the coast of the mainland, but at the close of the war they reaped large profits from the accumulations of previous years.”

On February 25, Companies B, C, D, I, and K of the 47th Pennsylvania boarded the US Transport Steamer *Charles Thomas* and left at 2 PM en route to New Orleans. The 2nd US Colored Regiment had arrived as replacements for the 47th at Key West.

“No portion of the obnoxious hue of the colored soldier’s skin was found by experience to adhere to his greenbacks. We never became the rage, however, officers or men. There, as elsewhere, the courteous received us civilly. We lived under the cold shadow of the displeasure of others, which in a hot climate was not very uncomfortable, after all.”

The 47th “Left the wharf at 2 P.M. the band playing ‘When this Cruel War is Over’ & ‘Bully for Us’, the wharves crowded with citizens, and the sailors on the many Gunboats cheering as we passed out of the harbor, which was returned by us...The citizens of Key West were very desirous of retaining us there & had made a petition to that effect, and all felt sorry on account of our leaving, the remaining 5 Companies at Tortugas will be relieved & join us in a few weeks.”

Whenever the troops changed stations, the bands usually played “Sweet Girl I left Behind Me”:

Then to the south we bore away,
To win a name in story,
And there where dawns the sun of day,
There dawned our sun of glory;
Both blazed in noon on freedom’s height,
Where in the post assigned me,
I shared the glory of that fight,
Sweet girl I left behind me.

In March, the workers on the fortification
(Continued on page 10)

(Civil War from page 9)

cations at Key West struck for higher wages as Yellow Fever returned to the key. It was reported that the Confederate sympathizers in Key West were not happy to see the 2nd US Colored Infantry Regiment arrive.

There were 11 burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in March, eight of the men were members of the 2nd USCT. Four men died at the Marine Hospital, two of them from the US machine shop.

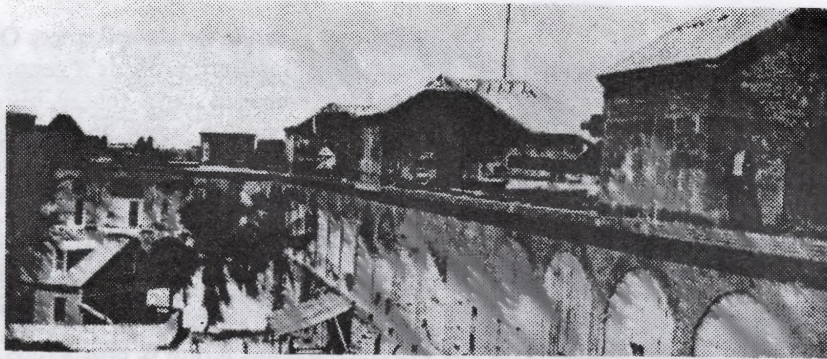
After the 47th Pennsylvania left the District of Key West in 1864, Yellow Fever returned to strike the new troops heavily during May, June, and July. The Black members of the 2nd US Colored Regiment would be paid 40 cents per day to replace the fleeing workers at the forts during that period. The fevers tapered off in August and September, but during most of the summer after the regiment left, ships were required to lie off shore, and work on the fortifications came to a near halt.

It was reported on March 12 that "The First Regiment of Florida Cavalry is recruiting here [Key West] from among the refugees of Florida, and forty of them are commanded by Captain Crane, of Creek war notoriety, at an old Indian fort upon the Caloosahatchie River, ten miles up. It is established there as a rendezvous for the disinfected [sic] men of the Rebel army, who are obliged to take the oath and enlist upon giving themselves up. They come in slow as yet."

"The Conches of this place are growling at the presence of the negro regiments, who swarm every street and patrol at every corner. The Secesh element is only dormant, and is greatly in the majority, and they feel the disgrace of a hated race in a position of authority. There was rumor of a draft lately, and there was great excitement, many moving bag and baggage to Nassau or Havana."

And on the 15th at Key West were the *Dale*, *Eugenie*, *Fort Henry*, *Marigold*, *Stars and Stripes*, and *Wanderer*. Cruising in the Gulf were the *Clyde*, *Hendrick Hudson*, *Honeysuckle*, *Huntsville*, and *San Jacinto*. The *De Soto* and *Tioga* were cruising in the Atlantic, and the *Honduras* supplying the squadron.

General Order #6 set forth quarantine regulations at Key West. The quarantine ground shall be beyond the *Wanderer* at a place designated by a white buoy and flag. All vessels arriving were to hoist a flag and anchor off the Marine Hospital



Fort Jefferson inside wall and court yard. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

for inspection by the health officer, who would check sanitary conditions and determine the port of departure. Any ship with cases of yellow fever, small pox, cholera or other infectious disease, or coming from an area where yellow fever exists, was to proceed to the quarantine ground. Vessels bringing refugees were required to have them wash their clothing and bedding, soaking it in fresh water for 24 hours, before thoroughly drying it. What couldn't be washed was to be thrown overboard. All sponge boats, wood boats and small fishing boats used to supply Key West were exempt, unless they had visited a wreck, another vessel, or a foreign port. Surgeon A.E. Stocker was designated Health Officer, and Asst. Surgeon J.M. Wertz was his assistant. A fee of \$2 to \$5 was charged by the health officer for each visit to a vessel, and all surgeons or physicians at Key West were ordered to report all cases of disease.

There were four burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in April, three of the men were members of the 2nd USCT. Six men died at the Marine Hospital.

"Some of the citizens have petitioned to have us [2nd USCT] removed, but I think there is little danger of that as we were ordered here on the ground of our being a black regiment & to replace a Dutch [47th] Pennsylvania Copperhead Regt. that was here before us. Naturally the Copperheads and Rebs do not fancy the change."

"Altho Key West is the largest town in Florida yet there is no bank here...The climate is so mild in winter that the most of the houses have no chimneys which gives them an odd look...old Mallory (of the US Senate...) was born here and is said to be the illegitimate son of a hotel keeper's wife or widow...the village dandies have mustacios as fierce as any ones & have quite the air of southern elegance."

In order to relieve the pressure of the yellow fever season, John Wilder and a few other officers of the 2nd USCT de-

cidied to take a fishing trip to the reefs. "We assembled at the Cove at early day-break, and found our pretty little schooner with everything apparently in readiness...Our crew consisting of but one man...but William, a private of Company A, was a thorough sailor...and off we went, heading for a little key a few miles distant, where we hoped to obtain crawfish for bait...The boat was well-found, except that we had no anchor; a heavy round shot thrust into a pillow-case was all that ingenuity suggested when the lack at the last moment was discovered." The party shot some birds on which they feasted while camped on one of the keys where they spent the night. After spending a few days catching many fish, shooting a deer, visiting a remote key and lone resident, and the Tortugas, they returned to Key West.

"I have been on two different excursions among the islands, fishing & shooting...In one of my excursions the chaplain accompanied us [as did the postmaster]...We passed one night in the house of an old 'Portugee' called Antone on an island some 15 or 20 miles from here. He had cleared a small space of about an acre in the underbrush & there he lived 20 miles from anybody in particular with his wife (a very pretty Spanish girl) his dogs & his babies. We had a drunken methodist along with us, whom we persuaded to dance & sing & in this latter we joined him, & such a curious scene could hardly be imagined. A half naked methodist dancing & shouting methodist & other 'spertual song' with half a dozen of us shouting the 'chorous'. Old Antone guitar in hand, not understanding a word." There were six dogs, and the house had a bed and table, "floored at one end".

"We expect this coming week to leave our tents & go into our new barracks which are now finishing. There every captain is to have two rooms & each Lieut one."

The court martial of Henry Hamilton of the 2nd USCT's Company I was held

on Friday, April 15, the charge was "Joining in a mutiny". The proceedings opened at 8:30 A.M. before eight officers of the 2nd USCT and 110th New York Regiment. It was alleged that Henry interfered with the officer of the day who was attempting to arrest a disorderly member of Company I, by seizing a gun and fixing the bayonet to prevent the arrest of members of his company. The incident occurred at Ship Island, Mississippi the previous December 27th.

Pvt. Hamilton stated "I was out in my company street cleaning my gun when the guard came after Cornish and the way I happened to have my bayonet fixed—there were four or five together in the tent and all the way I could tell mine was by fixing it, I did not intend to hurt anyone. I went to my quarters when the officer of the day ordered me to. I can't read or write and I beg the mercies of the court on account of my ignorance." Henry pled not guilty to the charges, but was found guilty on all counts the following day. Two members of the court recommended mercy, but he was executed at Key West the following November 4.

He was to "be shot to death by musketry, in the presence of the 2d Regiment U.S. Colored Troops, between the hours of sun rise and sun set."

"The people are very depraved and vicious on this island. Drinking-saloons are numerous. Sabbath-breaking is almost the general practice."

On April 26, the 2nd US Colored's Chaplain James H. Schneider died at Key West on Tuesday, and was buried in grave #190 of the Key West Post Cemetery. Maj. Wilder "did not believe the chaplain died of yellow fever, tho many others thought so."

A Northern paper later reported that 12 officers of the 2nd USCT had died from yellow fever, "including the colonel, the chaplain, and several captains". Mr. Waldo Abbott, a lawyer from New York adjudicating prize cases at Key West, was also a victim of the fever during the outbreak.

In "The summer of 1864... Very few of the unacclimated escaped the disease; and from the commanding general down, the loss of life was lamentable. In our own regiment, among the men, (though they were originally from Virginia and Maryland,) the disease was comparatively harmless; but of all the officers of the regiment who were stationed there, we lost over one half. Beginning with our noble

colonel."

"It was during this terrible season, when ships refused to stop,—when day after day we could see them passing, yet almost unwilling to receive the mails from the little pilot-boat that plied in and out of the harbor,—when even the ships of war, whose usual station was close to the island, lay off at Sand Key Light grim and silent, but clustered together as if for sympathy."

There were 19 burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in May, 17 of the men were members of the 2nd USCT, and the remaining two with the 110th New York. There were no recorded deaths at the Marine Hospital.

There were "132 cases [of yellow fever] with 12 deaths...reported as having occurred among the 2d U.S. Colored Troops in May and June, and 78 cases with 21 deaths among white troops in July and August."

On May 16, "In view of the large number of sick daily...the men must be cleanly in clothing, quarters and habits. They must also be careful of what they eat, and not eat too much. They ought to eat only at the regular hours for meals." Instructions were also given regarding when to wash clothes, and how garbage was to be disposed of.

On May 28, Maj. Wilder was "in command of Light House Barracks with 4 companies under my charge...Quite a number of our officers have been sick with a disease resembling yellow fever. So far, no one has had it, who lives in our Barracks, which are on higher & different ground from the Fort. There is a bad moat around the Fort, smells badly & is very unhealthy."

There were 17 burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in June; seven members of the 110th New York, six of the 2nd USCT, two USA, one from the Navy yard and one "contraband". Seven other men died at the Marine Hospital.

On June 7, Maj. Wilder reported that the 2nd USCT "had much sickness in the regiment but it is now abating. Nearly every officer here had some kind of fever. I have had one which only laid me up for 12 hours—thanks to immediate 'punishment' which I gave it—a heavy sweat & thorough cleaning out of the bowels saved me from the yellow fever. Several of our officers have died including the Colonel. We now have no new cases. I think my case was the acclimating fever which nearly

every one has sooner or later... Yellow fever is now raging among the shipping."

At Key West on June 14, Emily Holder was "comfortably settled at Captain McFarland's, as his family had gone North a few weeks before, and he had room for all the party...Mrs. Hook called in the morning, asking us all to the barracks to tea, and Captain Hook told us that she was going North with my sister and Mrs. Holgate...I remember the evening as being exceptionally beautiful, and General Woodbury, who had joined us, proposed a walk on the piazza, during which he talked of his family." He would shortly die of the fever, as would Capt. Hook.

It was reported on June 19 that during the past week, Capt. Martin and Lt. Kuhl, both members of the 2nd USCT, died of yellow fever. "We have thus far lost about half of our officers who were on duty at the fort...There are sometimes 30 or 40 new cases a day among the sailors and others...As soon as one is taken [with yellow fever], every effort is made to throw off the poison...a profuse perspiration, open bowels and kidneys are the only safety. The most prompt treatment only, will save life, from 20 to 40 grains of calomel, half a tumbler of castor oil, & hot mustard baths taken at once are the only things which are found successful. This disease doesn't tolerate fooling, 3 or 4 days generally settles it, & frequently less time...A man feels all right at one time, & in 5 hours is dead. Sometimes a man is stricken down without one moment's warning—getting out of a carriage, or going up stairs."

Charges were later preferred against Pvt. John W. Easton of the 2nd USCT's Company K for going "into the garden of Odin Auge a citizen and steal therefrom one water melon...on or about the 23d of June 1864." He was also charged with being absent without leave at the same time.

Charges were later preferred against Pvt. George W. Carr of the 2nd USCT's Company K for going "into the garden of Odin Auge a citizen and steal therefrom one water melon...on or about the 24th of June 1864."

There were 22 burials in the Key West Post Cemetery in July; eight from the 2nd USCT, twelve from the 110th New York, one US Navy and one from the 30th Massachusetts. Nineteen other men died at the Marine Hospital, among them at least four from the USS *Nita*, four from the USS *Julia*, two from the US machine shop, and two from the USS *Dale*.

(Natives from page 1)

relations, with larger Native American populations on the middle and northern Keys, on the southwest coast, and up to Biscayne Bay. Hernando Escalante Fontaneda, a captive of the Calusa for 17 years mentions the Cuchiaga in his "Memoir" written in 1576.

Fresh water supplies in the extreme lower keys must have been a challenge for those people. Their contacts with Europeans were quite limited, and usually resulted from the nearby Spanish trade routes, including the homebound Gulf Stream passage. In 1566, the Florida Adelantado, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés discovered a shortcut through the lower Keys for the New Spain ships sailing from Vera Cruz to Havana. This route was called the "Cuchiaga passage," and its location is in dispute. It may have been located between the Tortugas and the Quicksands, or through Key West harbor (DeBrahm's "Egmont Channel") or at Bahia Honda; I personally favor the first or second alternatives because of the use of the word "Cuchiaga" for the area from Key West to the Marquesas.

As John Viele shows in his fine second work on the history of the Florida Keys, there were Spanish shipwrecks in various places in the middle and northern Keys before 1622. But from September 1622 regularly for more than nine years and sporadically for fifty years, the presence of Spanish salvors and Dutch invaders in the isolated world of the Marquesas Keys was a powerful factor in the lives of its Native Americans.

In the immediate aftermath of the September storm, the surviving Tierra Firme and Guard fleet vessels sought winter refuge in Havana. Captain Gaspar de Vargas was appointed to attempt salvage on the three silver galleons lost in the Florida Keys, the costs being charged against the merchants' manifests. Several expeditions were mounted to the place of the loss of the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, *Santa Margarita* and *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*. One of those expeditions was caught by the second, October storm at the place of loss of the *Rosario* on Garden Key in the Tortugas.

As a part of the 1622 fleet disaster, a small Cuban coast-guard vessel, the *Candelaria*, was stranded near Man Key or on the offshore reef. While the surviving seamen watched helplessly, the Indians

of the area burned it to the water's edge. This doubtless led to Havana Governor Venegas' instructions to Captain Pedro de la Torre Cifontes "Anchor your ship with guards, go with a small boat to where the ship is lost, for this is the coast of Indians... be always with arms and matchcord lit... these people display bad faith and treachery. . . ."

Vargas and Don Pedro de Ursúa continued the salvage into 1623. They brought in Captain Nicholas de Cardona from New Spain, with his dive team. Cardona's famous map turned up in the manuscript section of Spain's Biblioteca Nacional, its National Library. This map eventually came into the hands of a pilot, Captain Antonio de Govea, one of the prime movers in the subsequent Spanish salvage story.

Small amounts of *Atocha's* treasure was found by the first Spanish expeditions, and some was found by Indians, who traded it up the coast to Native Americans at Biscayne Bay. Early in 1623 Vargas returned to the keys, rowing out to the place where buoys marked the shipwrecks. The commander of the Guard fleet, Don Lope Díaz de Armendáriz, the Marquis of Cadereita, came to the keys. His temporary residence, the large island on the southwest corner of the atoll, was named for him: el cayo del Marqués. In the Cuban accounts now located in Seville, I found the pages which led Mel Fisher to the Marquesas. One of those pages began "Account of that taken from the galleon *Santa Margarita*, which was lost in the Cayos del Marqués the year of 1622. "All that is another story, but shows why the Spaniards had given that name to the atoll. But by August 6, 1623, Gaspar de Vargas had given up on the salvage of the *Atocha* and *Santa Margarita*; the deep sand which had gathered over the sites had defeated him.

After Vargas's salvage ended, the continuity in the search, was maintained by the placement of various sets of buoys the area of the lost ships in the Marquesas.

Now an important Havana political figure, Francisco Núñez Melián, who had ties to the important Canary Island trade, had served as Alcalde of Havana, and had been appointed the Royal collector for indulgence sales in Cuba, entered the picture. In 1624, he sought and obtained a Royal license to seek and salvage the two main missing 1622 ships. In his contract he was to receive one-third of the recovered materials, the Crown was to

receive one-third, and he could take his expenses from the remaining third. That was the rationale for the crucial documents which led modern salvors to the shipwrecks. In April, 1625 he began to prepare for his expedition, buying a launch for "dragging in the said keys."

Then the pilot Francisco de la Luz went from Havana to the wrecksite area in the fragata *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, Melián's expense account says he was outfitted on August 20, 1625, a bad time to sail across the Florida Straits. At any rate, as Melián put it, "there is no charge against any person, for their having been lost and drowned on the said voyage."

In early 1626, another expedition went to the keys, and that group was obviously in touch with the Native Americans. Led by Captain Antonio Govea as Chief Pilot, the team included a quartermaster, six sailors, four grommets, two pages and two Spanish divers and was sent to "search for the buoys which the Marquis had ordered placed." They were there from January 28, 1626, until the following 27 February, without finding that which they searched.

The supplies they were issued were used to sustain the people and "in giving food and drink to the Indians of the coast of Florida who ordinarily came and went to the said fregata, since it was important to keep them pleased (gratos) in order that they not disturb the doing of the said tasks." They had begun the process of gifting the Indians.

The next expedition left as soon as the last had returned to Havana, and Sgt. Fernández de la Peña requisitioned six stream cables (calabrotes); to hold six buoys "put out in the place where the galleons *Almiranta* and *Margarita* were lost."

On May 15, 1626, Melián departed Cuba for the keys for his most momentous voyage. He had had the idea of a diving bell which would not only shelter a diver but which could be dragged as a search vehicle with the diver inside to survey the bottom. He went to the old cannon foundry in Havana and had a large bronze bell cast, complete with seat and window. It cost him, he said "an immense sum to carry out this philosophy." Actually it only cost him 625 pesos.

While being dragged in the bell along the edge of the great sandbank some five or six miles west of the Marquesas, the black slave diver Juan Bañon spotted a ballast pile and came up with the first silver

bar from the *Santa Margarita*. Thirty-seven more ingots were shortly found and a few coins. They put down buoys to mark the place of their find, and returned to Havana.

In the interim, before they could return in force to exploit their find, Melián sent the pilot Juan de Vigas with 13 sailors and six soldiers in a longboat to guard the buoys and the site. They were there from June, 18 until July 15, when the next, large expedition arrived. It was also their duty to placate the Indians, who it states came to the longboat, by giving them food and drink, in order that they not disturb the work nor take away the buoys over the *Margarita* wrecksite. It appears that up to now, the Indians were still in a barter economy (called rescate by the Spaniards) and did not yet deal in cash.

Meantime, back in Havana, the salvor had bought substantial materials to make a house on the keys to house the large workforce, including fifty crossbeams and 500 loads of palm thatch. The house was doubtless to be located on the large key at the southwest corner of the atoll, called "Cayo del Marqués" on an 18th century map. In a later storm or storms, that key evidently broke in half. Donny Jonas found a complete half-arroba olive jar in the cut just north of that key, and Dot and I found a piece of olive jar in the new cut just east of that key, evidences of the Spanish encampment on the island.

This next was the most productive trip of all the Marquesas salvage, until Mel Fisher's Mother Lode find. Besides Melián, it included Royal Overseer Juan de Chaves Sotomayor, Pilot Govea, a chaplain, notary, 59 sailors, three blacks for service, and 13 divers, aboard a ship and fregata, with a longboat and tender. They also brought four canoes for use in the salvage.

During this trip, which lasted until August 17, 1626, they found some 312 more silver ingots and 64,000 pesos in silver coins. Their expenses involve, again, the gifting of things to the Indians "who came and went to the boats, in order that they not disturb the work."

Hernando Blanco, quartermaster, was executor for Juan Martín, deceased sailor, who served from the 15th of April until the 17th of August when he died. Most of the men served from May 15 until September. The divers for the 1626 diving are paid from 15 August until 31 October of 26 when they go out again, to keep them sustained. The salvors would have

pleased an Admiralty judge. They worked at the sites, or tried to reach the sites, regularly in the next five years, going out in the windy fall, winter and spring months.

There is another voyage to the Keys from October 31 to January, 1627. Stormy weather kept them in port until the end of October. On this trip they used four Royal divers and seven paid. Four blacks for cooking and fishing. The gifts to the Native Americans on this trip are described as "giving food and drink to the Indians of the said keys and coast of Florida to keep them placated. . . " etc., etc. They bought outfits of coarse burlap for His Majesty's divers.

The salvors' diet in the keys was typically Spanish. They prepared cocidos with rice, beans and/or garbanzos and a little meat, cooked in olive oil and seasoned with vinegar. Bread was regular hardtack dressed with lard. Officers got white hardtack. Meat was salt beef or pork. The live pigs were for very special occasions. Their drinks were water and wine. They bought 12 empty pipe (barrels) to take water to the keys. Fish was abundant around the Marquesas, but at least once they sailed to the Tortugas to fish. Only the sick got special diets. Cooking and fishing was done by black slaves. They gathered firewood on the "key of Aceaga."

In early 1627 they discovered that Indians had burned their building on the Marquesas. On February first they put out again from Havana, but stormy winter weather battered the small salvage fleet, and it finally had to return to Cuba. From this point on, the *Margarita* salvage brought diminishing returns, and the salvors never left off searching for the *Atocha*.

The Dutch enemy: After the expiration of the 12 years truce in 1621, the Dutch forces began a powerful offensive against Spanish ships and territories in the Indies. They were especially active in 1627-29.

Antonio Cavallero, a Guayquiri Indian from the Caribbean pearl island of Margarita, worked on the wrecksite from late 1626 through 1627. He was accustomed to deep free-diving, and was well paid for his work, at the rate of 100 pesos a month. Ordinary paid divers received 60 pesos a month. The main 1627 expedition also employed 11 Spanish and black divers. Four of those came from New Spain. But for the 1627 operations, nine of the area Indians were also employed as divers. This task utilized their natural swimming

and diving skills, but trained them specifically to work as wreck divers. Henceforth, they would be known for that skill. Since the gifting was still going on, one assumes that those Indians employed as divers were additionally paid in the same goods---- melado, knives and hatchets-- and not in cash, as no cash payments are shown for them.

Summer, 1627. Squad leader Bernave de Salvatieffa, with Andrés Rodríguez, pilot, another skilled (pilot?) and Juan Gallardo, master of the small boat, and eight grommets, went in a longboat to reconnoitre the buoys on the hull of the *Margarita* and to see if there were enemies in that place. Complying with this, they ran into three enemy ships and were made prisoners of the Dutch, who turned them over to the Indians.

The Governor then sent out Juan de Vegas, pilot, six seamen, four grommets and two pages in the fregata *Santa Cruz*. They left Havana July 28, 1627, "for the keys of Uchiaga to search for Squadron leader Bernave de Salvatierra and the other men in his company, whom the enemy had seized and put in that place."

Listed is the expenditure of 96 reales for six jugs of melado which they carried to ransom the said people who were in the power of the Indians. Also, twelve hatchets and six bundles of knives for the same purpose. So when they left, they knew what the Indians would require for the ransom.

Another expedition in the summer of 1627, not a large one, also gifted the Indians.

The 1628 work at the Marquesas wrecksites was troubled by the active and belligerent Dutch presence. In late summer, a canoe was sent to Jaruco, Cuba to await the fregata coming from the keys and warn the salvors of the presence of an armada of Dutch enemies on the Cuban coast port of Jaruco, on this coast to look out for the fragata which we awaited from the keys, to give them work of an armada of enemies off this port, August 17, 1628. A week later, they sent a fragata to the keys to give warning. This could well have been Piet Heyn's flotilla of urcas, which went on to bottle up and capture the whole New Spain fleet up in the harbor of Matanzas on September 3 of 1628. The Dutch West India Company declared a dividend of 100% of the value of its assets.

The 1628 operations in the Marquesas

(Continued on page 14)

(Natives from page 13)

evidently concentrated on dragging for the *Atocha*. Its accounts, which also included the usual gifting of the Native Americans, included the purchase of many cables and hawsers of hemp, and heniquen for the work. D. García Maldonado describes what must have been the 1628 expedition, for which all those cables and hawsers were requisitioned and purchased:

"The witness said that he went in the month of May in the fregatas that went to salvage silver at the keys of Marqués and search for the nao *Almiranta* and he saw done in his presence that with the two longboats they would go dragging with hemp lines with cannon-balls and stones at lengths, and rowing from ten to six brazas (from 33 to 55 feet depth), diminishing bit by bit and leaving buoys. Leaving off the said dragging, they would work, putting divers below... (they salvaged a few items from the Margarita site and) seen a ship come toward where they were, this witness retired between the keys where he had word that there were enemies in the coast and he left. . . "

Because of the Dutch threat the expeditions now regularly included a sizeable contingent of soldiers and artillerymen to protect the sites and any salvaged treasure. In 1629, they arrived onsite and sought the sunken hull of *Atocha* until a force of Dutch ships appeared. They fought with them but soon realized their superior force, and returned to Havana.

In 1629, Jan Janszoon van Hoorn and Pieter Adriaensz both commanded fleets — 6 sails in all — who sailed for the "crunch," point off the Tortugas, where they could command the sallyport of the New Spain ships and where they could lay in wait for the Tierra Firme fleets. That put them in near proximity to the salvage sites in the Marquesas, and those ships may have been the ones which fought with our salvors.

The Spanish salvors were detained until October by the Dutch on the Cuban coast. This time, they sailed with thirty soldier musketers. Onsite, they were dragging for the missing lower hull of the missing *Almiranta* when "there arose such a wind and sea that, without being able to make the Cayo del Marqués, we came to this port."

Now Francisco Núñez Melián had been awarded by King Philip IV by being named Governor at Caracas. He left for his new

assignment, leaving Captain Juan de Añuez in charge of the Marquesas salvage operations. Those continued until 1631 without much result.

In February, 1635, Francisco Alonso de Jesús, a Franciscan friar, wrote to King Philip IV, proposing missions in "Carlos, Pohoy, and Metecumbe." He went on to add that the Marquis of Cadereita, and Melián would advise how the Indians would welcome preaching in "Matecumbe."

In 1638, Pilot Sebastián Rodríguez was seized in Vera Cruz by the Viceroy of New Spain to pilot a courier vessel through the Tortuga Passage, because he "knew the navigation of the keys of Cuchiaga."

Order of Governor D. Francisco de Riaño to Accountant Lázaro Fañez de Minaya to go in search of the *Almiranta* in the keys of Matecumbe (1639)

"Inasmuch as notice has been given to me that the Indians of the cayos del Marqués know where is the sunken hull of the galleon *Almiranta* of Tierra Firme, lost in the year of 1622, I dispatched Captain Juan de Añuez... to make the efforts necessary to learn from the Indians where the said sunken hull is. Having learned this, he shall buoy it and with the divers he carries under his command, to salvage whatever the weather and enemies will permit.

1642-43 Melián's last attempt on the *Atocha* with new information from the Keys Indians. Some of the wreckage (hatch covers?) Was found in shallow water.

1676. Bishop Calderón's description of the Keys Indians included the Vizcaínos, the Maticumbeses, the Bayajondes, and the Cuchiagaros. That same year Martín de Melgar, salvor of the *Marvillas* in the Bahamas, not, far from the likely *Santa Clara* worked by Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society for six years, came to the Marquesas seeking Indian divers. He made no deal there.

1678 salvage attempt. The Florencia family were powerful in Spanish Florida, and they gained the right to search for the still-missing *Atocha* in 1678. Captain Ysidro de Mayorga was the chosen project manager, and he went to the Marquesas. The Indians employed as divers chased a sounding turtle and found a ballast pile, but it was not that of the *Atocha*.

There were still Indians in the vicinity of the Marquesas. at the very end of the seventeenth century, for divers from the "Cayos del Marqués. were sought for shipwreck salvage in Cuba. But things

changed in the next century, as fierce struggles among Native Americans marked the peninsular progress of Creek and Yuchi invaders. In 1743 the Jesuit mission at Biscayne Bay noted the gathering of a pitiful remnant of the Coast Indians, still resistant to Christianity. In 1763 the remaining South Florida Hispanicized Indians were picked up at Key Biscayne, to be taken to Cuba. The last of them died, probably at Guanabacoa, where their burials are recorded.

It is now almost 300 years since the Spanish salvage concluded in the Marquesas, since the long-time Spanish presence there ended. But treasure still draws the salvors; the descendants of Mel Fisher still work both shipwrecks. But, except for a coconut palm or two, the islands probably look much as they did in 1622. And at dusk, as they always have, frigate birds circle down to the atoll. The timeless Marquesas, but something is missing. The Indians are forever gone.

Eugene Lyon is a native of Miami. He worked as a government administrator before he returned to the University of Florida, at the age of 38, to complete a Ph.D. in Latin American studies. While studying in Spain he became the researcher for Mel Fisher's search for the Atocha. His work put Fisher on the track that led to the Atocha. Dr. Lyon is the premier scholar on Spanish Florida.

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ED SWIFT

(Bight from page 7)

than vessels, crews, and wholesale dealers. It stimulated the island's shoreside infrastructure, economy, and society. The demand for dockage, and other facilities to support the shrimping fleet, escalated. Eventually, so many shrimp trawlers were operating on the Tortugas Grounds, that additional unloading docks were constructed on Stock Island (just east of Key West) and "up the Keys" at Marathon. The shrimping crews and the seafood dealers generally made very good money in the early days of the fishery. And, in the best traditions of the sea, the crews spread their earnings around to the benefit of many local businesses (often, as was the case for the downtown bars, this was not infrequently done with a roistering vengeance, or so it is said!).

The shrimp dealer's payroll included more than just the vessel crews. There were jobs for the men that unloaded the trawlers, plus bookkeepers, truck drivers, and numerous others who worked in the shrimp packing plants. Then, there were the "headers". These were the hundreds of free-lance laborers that worked at large tables in the packing plants to remove the inedible heads from the landed catch. They were paid on a piece-work basis. Technically, they were employed by vessel owner, since the catch was sold to the dealer after the shrimp heads had been removed by the headers. But, in reality, they were paid by the shrimp dealers. Many of the headers were Blacks from Bahama Village, and many were women. Unlike many shrimpers and shrimp dealers, few, if any, headers ever got rich. But they, and hundreds of others who lived on or by the harvest of "pink gold" were given employment which they might not otherwise have had. By the late 1980's changes in the technology of shrimping and in the marketing of the catch ended the dependence of shrimpers and dealers on the local workforce of headers, and this occupation has faded away.

Relatively few native Key West "Conch's" crewed on shrimp trawlers. Instead, the fleet was manned primarily by Southerners. Shrimping had long been a major industry at other ports of the Gulf and South Atlantic. Vessels from there soon flocked to the newly discovered grounds off Tortugas. But this influx was seasonal. Generally, on the Tortugas grounds, shrimp catch rates were highest in the winter and lowest in the sum-

mer. So, the bulk of the fleet moved up the coast during the summer. In the winter however, and especially during bad weather, hundreds of shrimp boats tied up at the Bight. With them came the crews. "Tar-heels" from the Carolinas, Georgians, Texans, and all the rest of the "good ol' boys" of Dixie. They worked hard. No wonder they played hard. The music emanating from the bars of Caroline Street-the "Mascot", the "Red Doors", (aka "the Bucket of Blood") and the "Big Fleet" (to name a few of the last -to-expire establishments) -were as often as not, country and western. Honky-tonks and bars such as those, (which are, perhaps mercifully, defunct) and their raucous, patrons (white rubber boots were "de rigueur"), helped give the Seaport a weathered, gritty, "blue collar," ambiance that lives on in local legend.

Some of those who moved to the Keys to work in the shrimp fishery ultimately "settled down" there. They, and their families, added their own regional beliefs and customs to those of other groups in the community. This further contributed to the giving the Keys and Key West a more cosmopolitan character. There was also the matter of the money that shrimping brought in. During the 1960's (the earliest period for which the dockside value of shrimp landed in the Keys has been published) the average annual value of the catch was approximately \$4.5 million. Typically, 10-12 million pounds of shrimp (whole weight) were shipped out of the Keys each year. Soon, much of island life, particularly that which centered around the Seaport, was tied to the day to day goings on of the shrimping industry. In time, the pervasive presence in the downtown area of the crews of shrimp trawlers rivaled, and in the wake of military cutbacks, supplanted, that once provided during previous decades by the Navy's "whitehats".

As the 1980's unfolded, shrimping began to decline from its former prominence in the Keys. The reasons for this were many. Some were ecological, others were socio-economic. The end result was that faced with declining catch rates, increased operating costs, and the inability to increase the value of the catch by hiking prices (due to competition from imports) those in the industry opted to either relocate from Key West, or get out of the fishery entirely. By the late 1980's commercial fishing and shrimping had ceased to have any meaningful presence at the Seaport.

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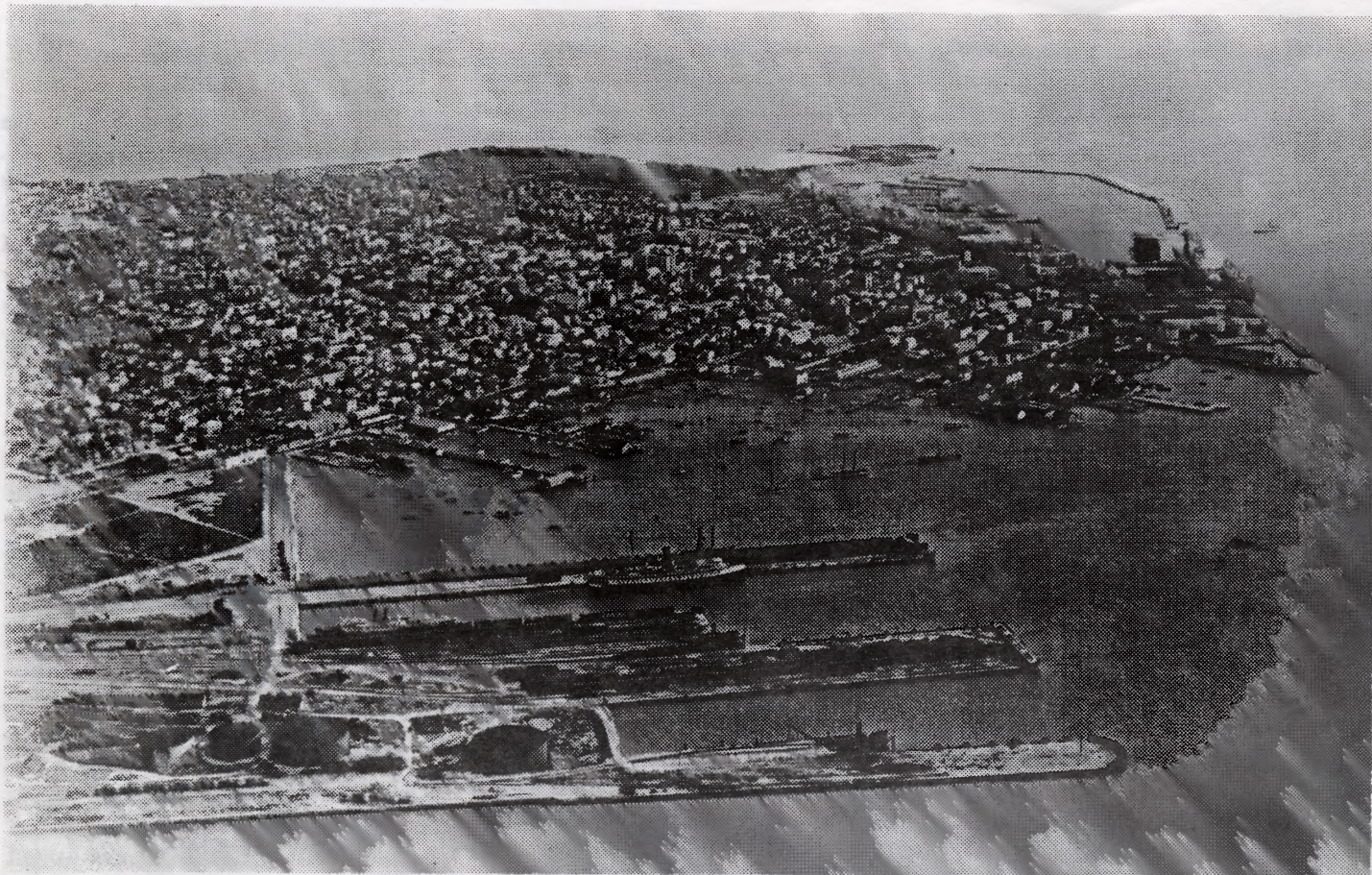
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The Florida East Coast Railroad Yard and Key West Bight taken from the north. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

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