

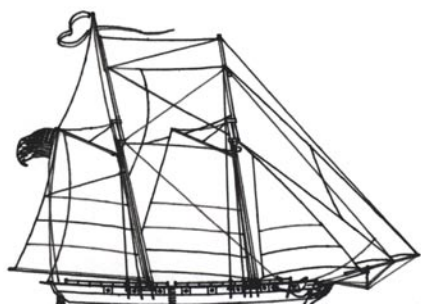
Florida Keys

Sea Heritage Journal

VOL. 17 NO. 4

Summer 2007

USS SHARK



 OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

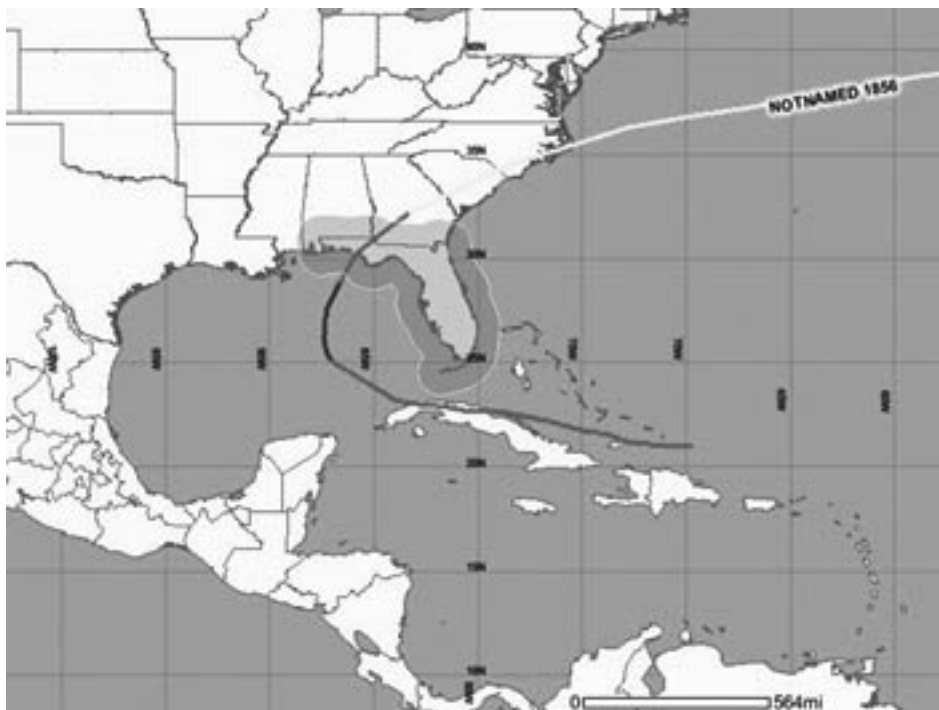
Disaster and Survival in the 1856 Hurricane

By John Viele

In the 1850s, Key West was the second largest city in Florida and the busiest seaport. Every day, scores of ships passed by in the Straits of Florida on their way to and from the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. Many stopped at Key West for supplies, provision, water, repairs to hull and rigging, or to obtain medical aid for sick or injured seamen. Along the reef, a dozen or more sloops and schooners maintained a vigilant watch for any ships so unfortunate as to go aground on the coral heads.

In those days, there was no weather station in Key West, and even if there had been, there was no way to broadcast warnings to ships at sea. Ships' masters were their own forecasters. They watched changes in barometric pressure and temperature, studied cloud formations, and wave patterns. They put all this information together with the experience of years at sea to predict weather they might encounter.

In August of 1856, a hurricane born in the Atlantic, traveled over the island of Inagua in the Bahamas



Track of the 1856 Hurricane. Photo credit: National Weather Service.

doing considerable damage. It continued on a west-northwest track which took it along the north coast of Cuba. By 27 August, gale force winds were felt in Key West and by ships in the Straits of Florida. As the storm continued on its track, winds in the Straits increased to hurricane force. Water covered Sand Key to a depth of six feet. Wind and waves destroyed the wooden buildings, boats, and a wharf on the island. However, the iron-screw-pile lighthouse, completed just three

years earlier, survived.

The storm caused considerable damage to the construction sites at Fort Zachary Taylor and Sombrero Key Lighthouse off Marathon, but only minor damage in Key West. Shipping in the Straits of Florida, however, suffered heavily. Three vessels sank and eight crewmen lost their lives.

The storm drove the ship **Isaac Allerton**, with a very valuable

(Continued on page 12)

SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES
By Ed Little, President, KWMHS



The historical marker at the end of Margaret Street. Photo credit: Tom Hambright.

As you read this, we will be into the autumn of 2007. As you may know, because so many of our Society's members and Directors leave town for summer until autumn, we tend to go "dormant" until cooler weather returns. So, here's what we've been up during the summer hiatus.

This September we delivered to the City of Key West four historical markers that were installed at the major entrances to the "Harborwalk" at the Historic Seaport. These wayside markers provide visitors with a historical overview of why the environs of the waterfront are such a "special place". The "old-time" photos, drawings, and other interpretive content on the markers help portray the maritime industries, such as fishing, sponging, and shrimping, that once thrived at the Seaport. Although the four markers provide useful orientation to the Seaport, we will also likely develop a series of smaller markers that give additional

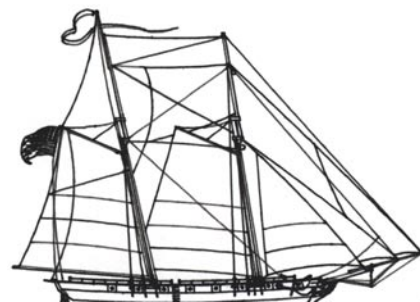
Lastly, there has been the continued success of the Society's

quarterly, the *Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal* to remark on. Through the dedicated efforts of the Journal's editors, Lynda and Tom Hambright, we've been able to bring to our readers articles that cover the gamut of historical subjects that pertain to Key West and the Florida Keys. These articles give us a window into "days gone by" that would not be available otherwise.

That brings me to the future of the Society. In coming months we've lined up additional guest speakers, field trips, and Journal articles. But, we are also a Society that needs the support of the members that belong to it. There is still plenty of room for suggestions to be offered on prospective lectures, articles, and activities that the Society might offer. Actually, although such suggestions would be most appreciated, what we really need is additional helping hands to make those suggestions "happen". So, for those of you that have time, ideas, or expertise to volunteer, we await your call. Just dial us at 292-7903. Don't be shy, get "onboard" mate!!

New Members

Robert Bloink, Key West; Michael Driscoll & Suzanne
Runnels, Key West; William Willis, Miami.



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Editor: Lynda Hambright
Production: Tom Hambright

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

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The Everglades' Bandit Killer

By Thomas Neil Knowles
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There were some rough people on the Key West waterfront during the 1890s and early 1900s. No one was more dangerous than ...

The Florida Everglades had become the Nation's last frontier by the 1890s. Rife with alligators and panthers, infested with snakes and mosquitoes, and isolated from civilization, the marshy landscape was sparsely populated. Along the mangrove-cloaked shoreline south of Fort Myers and the adjacent small keys known as the Thousand Islands, Nature had formed a maze of channels and creeks that defied navigation. All of these undesirable attributes of this untamed land made it attractive to people trying to outrun their past.

In 1892, a man brought his family to this remote region believing he had at last found a place where he could live in peace. But, as the loosely-knit Everglades community would learn, death and violence were constant companions of Ed Watson, and they followed him no matter where he went.

Only four years earlier, his search for refuge had taken him from North Florida to Franklin County, Arkansas, and then west across the state line to the south fork of the Canadian River eighty miles into Indian Territory. The Territory was divided among the Indian nations including the Osage, Cheyenne, Arrapahoe, Wichita, Iowa, Kickapoo, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Creek, Chickasaw, and

Choctaw. Measuring approximately 240 miles north/south and 330 miles east/west, it was all they were allowed under the treaties with Washington, and even this token would be lost in 1907 with the founding of the state of Oklahoma. But, at this time the land was Indian-owned and Indian-governed, and was outside the jurisdiction of U.S. law enforcement. The latter was the primary attraction for some non-Indian people who sought sanctuary there.

While only Indians could own land, there were farms available for sharecropping; the Indian owners were glad to find hard working tenants. And so in January 1888 when a covered wagon carrying a white man and his wife rumbled through the cold and entered San Bois County, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, it did not raise any alarm among the Indian population. The good-looking man who helped his wife down from the battered wagon was thirty-one years of age, physically fit, six feet tall with red hair and a fair complexion that bespoke his Scottish ancestry. His appearance and behavior did not reveal that Edgar A. Watson was desperate for a place to settle down, one beyond the reach of the "Law".

The Territory seemed to Watson a perfect place to lease a plot of land and become another of the people without a past in the wild country. The blue-eyed Scotsman and his wife worked one plot, then as the year came to a close, they crossed the river into Creek Country and began sharecropping on property allotted to a white woman and her Indian husband. The woman's name was Belle Starr.

Belle Starr has been portrayed in many books, articles and even a major motion picture as a "bandit queen", an infamous outlaw. Newspaper and dime novels in the East had seized upon the image of an independent woman running her own gang. The fact that Belle was indeed strong-willed, wore a .44 pistol around her waist, and could out-ride and out-shoot most men in the region strengthened that image. According to her biographer, Glenn Shirley, most of the lawless escapades attributed to her were pure fiction.

Myra Maybelle Shirley was born in southwest Missouri on February 5, 1848. Her parents insisted that she have a good education, which she received from various schools and even a private tutor. She played the piano well and could speak french. She was just entering her teens when the Civil War occurred, and her older brother became a member of a group of raiders allied with the Confederacy. Belle, as she had come to be called, began scouting for the raiders; a role she performed very well. She was trim of figure and attractive, but not too attractive. An accomplished rider, Belle was also an expert marksman with both pistol and rifle.

Her association with the Confederate raiders brought Belle into contact with men who would become notorious during and after the Civil War: Quantrill, Cole Younger, Jessie James, and others. Following the War, she married one of the raiders, Jim Reed. Eight years later, after fathering a son and daughter, Reed was shot to death trying to avoid arrest for robbery.

(Continued on page 4)



Ed Watson's trail of death wound from the Lake City/Columbia County area in North Florida to Franklin County, Arkansas just east of Fort Smith. He then moved into Indian Territory as a tenant farmer at Younger's Bend on the Canadian River where Belle Starr's ranch was located. After her death, he went back into Arkansas then to Columbia County in Florida. From there he went to the Chatham River in the Everglades where he lived for several years before returning to Columbia County. His final journey took him to Arcadia northwest of Lake Okeechobee and then back to Chatham River. While living in the Everglades, Watson frequently traded in Key West. Linked to him were three murders in Columbia County, the ambush of Belle Starr in Indian Territory, another killing in Arcadia, an attempted murder in Key West, and several murders in the Chatham River area. Photo credit: The Author.

(Killer from page 3)

Belle remained a widow for six years then, in 1880, married Sam Starr, who being three-quarters Cherokee was entitled to an allotment of land in the Indian Territory.

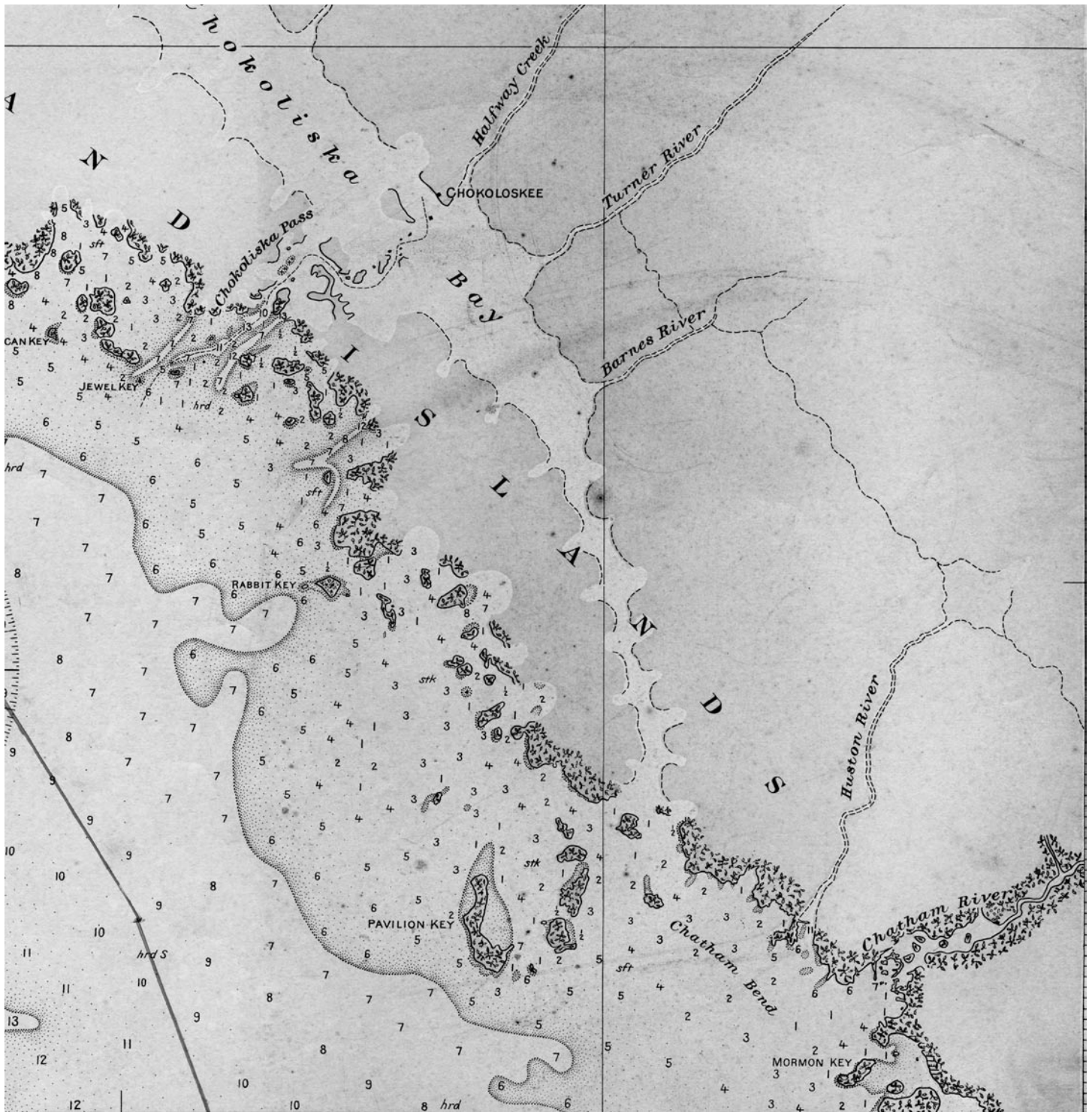
The Starr ranch was located a few miles west of the confluence of the North Fork and South Fork of the Canadian River, in a box canyon that could only be approached from one direction. Some of Belle's acquaintances from Civil War days including Cole Younger and Jessie James used the canyon as a hideout when they were being pursued. Younger had frequented the area to

such an extent that the bend in the river beside the Starr's home was known as Younger's Bend.

Six years after their marriage, Sam met an untimely death in a revenge shootout with a man who had killed Belle's favorite horse during an attempt to arrest Sam on a robbery charge. As Starr's wife, Belle had become a citizen of the Cherokee Nation; although as his widow the improvements made to the property passed to her, she was no longer entitled to use the land. She solved this problem by promptly marrying a mixed-blood Cherokee.

Although all of her husbands were involved in robberies and horse thieving, Belle was never proved to be involved except in one case of horse theft. For this crime, which Belle claimed to be the result of a misunderstanding, she spent nine months in a correction house in Detroit in 1883. Around Younger's Bend, she was known to be a good mother and a considerate person. Her home, although made of rough siding and located in a remote canyon, included a piano and a reasonably well-stocked library.

On February 3, 1889, two days before her forty-first birthday, Belle



Southwest Florida from a 1920's chart. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

Starr was riding back to her home after visiting the home of a neighbor, Jackson Rowe, when a shotgun blast tore into her back. She fell off her horse, struggled to turn over and was shot again at close range in the face and left side. She died several hours later. Tracks left at the scene suggested that the attacker had come

from the direction of Ed Watson's house, which was nearby. Watson owned a shotgun that left a distinctive mark on the percussion cap of the shell casing. The same pattern was found imprinted on spent shells alleged to have been found near Belle's body.

Watson had been at the Rowe

house on the day of the ambush, and had left the gathering after Belle arrived. When confronted about the killing, Watson denied shooting her claiming that he had no reason. Belle's daughter Pearl, who was twenty years old at the time, knew otherwise. Three months earlier,

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(Killer from page 5)

she had overheard an ominous conversation between Watson and Belle, but fearing for her life, she said nothing prior to and during the trial.

The conversation occurred when Watson had come to see Belle about a letter she had sent him refunding his rent and telling him to move off her property. Watson's wife had unwittingly caused the eviction by sharing a confidence with Belle, who had befriended her. Mrs. Watson had told Belle that her husband was charged with murder in Columbia County, Florida, which was why they had moved to Arkansas, and finally to Indian Territory. Belle had earlier been warned by the Indian authorities after her incarceration that if she was ever caught harboring fugitives, she would be expelled from the Territory. Although she was sympathetic to the Watsons' plight, she could not risk losing her home.

After returning Watson's rent money, she made arrangements for another tenant to move in, but Watson discouraged the new tenant. When Watson came to see her, Belle in desperation threatened to reveal his past. Furious and frustrated with his situation, he promptly moved off Belle's property and became a tenant of Jackson Rowe. Watson's new place was on the trail that led from the Rowe property to the Starr ranch.

Three days after the murder, Watson attended the funeral with his wife, and appeared to be very nervous. He was arrested at the grave site and a hearing was held two weeks later in Fort Smith. Watson's attorney pleaded that the accusation was based on circumstantial evidence, and that Watson, a "quiet, hardworking man whose local reputation was good", was being



Ed Watson's house on Chatham River. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

framed. The district attorney was given time to discover and produce more evidence, but was unable to do so. Belle's daughter kept her secret, and on March 4, the hearing officer ordered the defendant discharged.

The identity of Belle's killer has never been conclusively established. In addition to Watson, allegations were made that she was murdered by her husband so that he could live unhampered with his lover. Another theory is that Belle was shot by her son, Eddie, because she had whipped him with her riding quirt for mistreating her horse. Both the husband and the son theories had serious faults, but could not be ruled out. Nonetheless, Ed Watson was forever marked as the man who killed Belle Starr.

With many of Belle's Indian relatives living in the area and fully aware of the threat of revenge, Watson decided it was time to move on. As soon as he was released, he returned to his tenant farm, collected his wife and belongings and left the Territory, presumably for Arkansas. About three years later, Watson was seen on Half Way Creek in the Florida Everglades. He is said to have come there from Arcadia, Florida after fatally shooting a man named Quin Bass.

Ed Watson was industrious and had a good mind for business. He

acquired a seventy-foot schooner and began cutting buttonwood and selling it in Key West. Then he bought a claim on the Chatham River from Will Raymond's widow. Raymond was killed at the mouth of the river in a shootout with law officers from Key West, who had come to arrest him. Watson bought the claim for \$250, built a two-story house, and began farming, raising sugar cane/making syrup, harvesting potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables. He was reputed to be a good farmer. Subsequently, he bought a claim on Lostman's Key from Winky Atwell.

Fate seemed to be smiling on Watson, and he began reaping the fruit of hard work. Charles "Ted" Smallwood, a longtime resident of southwest Florida, who operated a store on Chokoloskee Island and traded with Watson, said that the Scotsman was married three times. All of his wives were from Columbia County in North Florida. Watson had a son by the first, two sons and a daughter by the next, and two daughters and a son by the third. Smallwood described Watson as "a friendly man with a broom handle mustache".

The "friendly" man cast a dark shadow. On one trip to Key West at George Bartlum's auction room, Watson had an encounter



Smallwood Store at Chokoloskee. Photo credit: Tom Hambright.

with Adolphus Santini, a major landowner of Chokoloskee Island. Santini's throat was slashed, but he survived and the affair only cost Watson \$900. Then a man named Tucker moved onto Watson's property on Lostman's Key and would not leave when Watson wrote and told him to do so. Tucker supposedly sent Watson a sarcastic response. A few days later, Tucker and his nephew were found murdered. Although Watson was believed to have been the killer, he was not tried for the crime due to lack of evidence.

It was time to move again, so Watson returned to Columbia County and bought another farm. But while there, a prominent man named Toland was shot and killed. Watson was believed to have been the killer. Toland's brother set out for revenge, and was soon found

murdered in approximately the same location. Watson reportedly evaded prosecution by making a payoff, after which he returned to the Everglades and his place on the Chatham River.

For several years he did well making syrup and growing vegetables. But rumors began to circulate that he would hire transients, give them food, tobacco, and lodging, but no money. When they began to demand to be paid, Watson was said to have had them killed.

In the fall of 1910, Watson's luck ran out. He had previously hired Ellen "Hannah" Smith, an unusually tall woman with a muscular, manlike body, who was called "Big Squaw" by the Indians. He had also employed a man named Waller to work in the fields, and an overseer, Leslie Cox. For some

unknown purpose, Watson brought a ruffian known as Duchy Melvin (or Dutchie Melborne) to Chatham Bend from Key West. Melvin was reputed to have killed a policeman and to be an accomplished arsonist.

One night while Melvin and Watson were at Chokoloskee Island, Smith and Waller were killed by Cox, who forced a Negro, also employed by Watson, to assist him. The reason for the murders is not known, but Smith and Waller may have demanded to be paid. In any event, Cox and the Negro disposed of the bodies by slitting their stomachs open and weighing the corpses down with chain, and submerging them in the bay. Watson and Dutchy Melvin returned to Chatham River the next day. Melvin must have known too

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(Killer from page 7)

much and demanded blackmail for he soon disappeared; allegedly killed by Cox and Watson who dumped his body in a creek where the evidence would be removed by the alligators.

Several days later, a man and his son returning from a fishing trip came across a foot sticking up out of the water. It was Smith's body. The man and boy went to the clam bar and told the clam diggers what they had found. By the time they returned to where the body was, her companion in death, Waller, had floated to the surface. In the meantime, the Negro who had been forced to help Cox became frightened for his own life and escaped to the clam bar. He told the men what had happened and they confronted Watson.

Watson denied having anything to do with the murders and insisted on going to Fort Myers to get the sheriff and have him arrest Cox, who Watson declared was solely responsible for the crimes. On October 17, 1910, Sheriff Frank Tippens was accompanying Watson to investigate the situation in Chatham Bend when a powerful hurricane began to move into the area. At Marco, Sheriff Tippens decided the severity of the storm dictated that he must return to Fort Myers, so Watson continued on alone. He stopped at the trading store on Chokoloskee and bought some shotgun shells from Smallwood saying that he was going to kill Cox. Cox was never seen again, but is believed to have fled before Watson arrived at Chatham Bend.

A few days later Watson returned with his wife to Smallwood's Landing at Chokoloskee. While his wife visited with the Smallwoods at their home, he strolled along the

waterfront, encountering a group of men from the area, armed with shotguns, rifles, and pistols. They approached Watson and announced it was their intention to arrest him for the murders of Smith and Waller. As Watson eased his hand toward his waistband and the pistol he always carried there, the men demanded that he hand it over slow and easy.

Watson had previously stated he would give up his gun to no man, so the self-appointed posse was ready when he made an attempt to pull the weapon and fire. The deafening gunfire roared through the clearing causing flocks of birds to erupt from the trees and mangroves. Mrs. Watson, visiting at a nearby house, dashed to the windows as her husband, his pistol falling aside, was knocked backward by the barrage of lead. He was dead before his body crumpled into the shallow water.

Without celebration, some of the men boarded a small boat then cast a line around the ankles of the corpse and towed it to Rabbit Key, the outermost island from Chokoloskee. Buried in a crude grave, as far away from civilization as possible, no epitaph was considered necessary. Sometime later, Watson's body was reinterred at Fort Myers, where his family eventually settled.

Before his death at age 54, Edgar Watson is believed to have killed, or to have caused to be killed, at least eight men and two women. By word of mouth, he was firmly established as the Everglades' most infamous killer, but was he really a killer? He is not known to have served any prison time for a crime. He was never tried and found guilty of any of the murders attributed to him. As was the case with the "Bandit Queen", he may have been maligned by rumor and hyperbole.

Yet, as Belle Starr's fate attests, associating with Edgar Watson all too often proved to be a fatal experience.

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Tom Knowles is a fourth generation Conch whose ancestors (Knowles and Archers) migrated from the Bahamas in the 1800s. He holds a bachelors degree in mechanical engineering from Georgia Tech and a masters in business administration from Florida State University, where he recently retired after 32 years managing the operation and construction of FSU's facilities.

Although he resides in Tallahassee, his roots remain firmly attached to the Island City, and he is currently working on a historical book about the Labor Day hurricane of 1935 which will published by in 2009 by the University Press of Florida.

Hackley's Diary

William Hackley practiced law in Key West from 1829 to 1857. He kept a diary for part of the time he was in Key West. Here is the diary for part of January and February 1856.

Monday, January 28. Rose at 6 and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.48, thermometer 70, wind north northeast 3, clouds 9. The wind went from southeast to northwest yesterday and about 7 p.m. quite a shower fell. Tried the case of Thomas Adams vs. the ship **Ashburton** and cargo which kept us in court until after 2. p.m. Walked about being fatigued with the trial.

Tuesday, January 29. Rose at 5:30 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 9:15 a.m. barometer 29.57, thermometer 68, wind north by east 2, clouds 9. Some little rain fell about 8 a.m. and the weather is raw and disagreeable. Drew up petitions for John Lowe of the **Libby Sheppard** for 172 bales of cotton and one anchor and chain, Simon Frow of the schooner **Florida** for 201 bales of cotton, James Riggs of **Ramona** for 112 bales of cotton and Oliver Braman of the schooner **Dart** for 61 bales of cotton from the wreck of the ship **Mary Hale**, Rollins Master. Samuel Douglas filed libels for William Lowe, schooner **Chestnut** and John Curry of the schooner **Relampago**. My petitions are in fact libels as there was no consortium between the parties. R.W. Welch refused to endorse the bills of Captain John S brigantine **Sarah Stern** incurred for replacing sails, spars and riggings lost at sea and Tift to whom she was consigned asked my advice in the matter. Recommended a protest against Welch and the only reason he gave for not signing the drafts was that the Captain had not consulted with him and advertisements having made for proposals to advance the

amount on bottomry and there being no offers. The only recourse is to sell cargo which will about double the costs incurred by Welch's obstinacy. Raining lightly all day.

Wednesday, January 30. Rose at 5:30 but found it was drizzling when I got into the yard to go to walk so I made a fire in the stove and sat till breakfast. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.65, thermometer 64, wind north by west 4, clouds 10. Read papers. Disagreeably cold in the office.

Thursday, January 31. Rose at 5:30 and walked as far as the Fort when some drops of rains began to fall and I returned home and bathed. Made a fire in the stove. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.55, wind north northeast 3, clouds 10. Read papers. Tried the case of John H. Geiger et als vs. cargo and materials of the ship **Mary Hale**, Rollins respondent. p.m. Read Putnam's magazine. Rained and blew heavily in squalls all night from south to southwest.

Friday, February 1. Rose at 6 and it being too wet to walk, bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.33, thermometer 72, wind southwest 4, clouds 5. The air is pleasant and soft. The case of William Pearce vs. cargo of the ship **Siddons** was tried. The lawyers were Winer Bethel and Samuel Douglas. Read papers. A heavy fog bank rolled over the Island but only lasted a short time. The afternoon is clear and pleasant. Wind from north to northeast.

Saturday, February 2. Rose at 5:45 and went out to walk but found a thick fog or rather a mist which would have wet me so I returned and bathed. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.33, thermometer 69, fog 8, wind east by north 1. Read papers

and Putnam's magazine. p.m. Read papers. The bark **George Thomas** came in, with loss of main mast, loaded with sugar box hooks. At 4 p.m. barometer 29.22, thermometer 74, wind east by north 2, clouds 6. The fog cleared off about 11 a.m. The USS **Fulton** towed in the ship **Columbia** of New York which has been ashore near the lighthouse on Carysford Reef and no wreckers in sight.

Sunday, February 3. Rose at 5:15 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.31, thermometer 70, wind south by west 1, clouds 3. A heavy dew fell last night. The brig **General Worth** from Matanazs came in leaking. At 3:30 p.m. barometer 29.18, thermometer 74, wind west 1, clouds 9. Read Household Words. The USS **Fulton** left for Pensacola.

Monday, February 4. Rose at 6 and found it too wet to walk, a great deal of rain having fallen during the night and too much wind to bathe. Tried to make a fire but the eddy wind blew down the pipe and the fire would not burn. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.46, thermometer 65, wind northwest 7, clouds 10. The steamer **Florida** got in about 9. The USS **Fulton** at anchor inside the Northwest Bar. About 12 the pilot boat **Florida** got in from the bark **Balaclava** loaded with cotton and about 4 the bark got in accompanied by the schooner **Libby Sheppard** with part of a load of cotton. Afternoon cold and raw. Wind northwest fresh.

Tuesday, February 5. Rose at 6 and it was too cold to walk or bathe. Thermometer exposed in the front of the piazza 48 degrees, in the house 56 degrees. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.71, thermometer 57,

(Continued on page 10)

(Hackley from page 9)

wind northeast 4, clouds 3. Judge William Marvin read the decree in the case of the ship **Ashburton** a very small salvage and everyone dissatisfied. James Riggs, master of the **Ramona**, one of Bowne and Curry's vessels came to me and gave the items for a libel against the bark **George Thomas**. Prepared the libel and filed it after dinner.

Wednesday, February 6. Rose at 6 and made a fire in the stove. At 9:40 a.m. barometer 29.74, thermometer 64, wind northeast 4, clouds 9. Read Law Register. Curry came up to see me, the wreckers wish me to move for a rehearing of the case of the ship **Ashburton**. Called on Governor Thomas Brown and saw his daughter, they both look well. Called to see Judge William Marvin about the rehearing as the practice is new and he has the power to regulate the practice by rule. He suggests that a petition be filed and a copy given to opposite counsel giving notice that on a day certain I will move for a rehearing. The steamer **Isabel** got in about 4 bringing the schooner **Entire** from Attakoaas laden with sugar. She has but the stump of her foremast and bowsprit standing and was within 200 yards of breakers in the middle sandbar with a heavy gale from the southeast forcing her on the rocks. I drew up and filed a libel for Captain Rollins. Got a letter from Mother and from the Secretary of the Interior and from Elsie.

Thursday, February 7. Rose at 6 and with rain all night and the grounds was too wet to walk. A heavy wind from the southeast all night and is still fresh though rather moderated. Bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.44, thermometer 71, wind southeast 8, clouds 7. Drew up a petition for a rehearing in the case of the ship **Ashbuton** and got

Captain J. Lowe to sign it and made a copy which I served on Samuel Douglas and filed the original. George Bowne introduced me to Captain Barss of the bark **Balaklavs** which was the bark **Magnolia** and sold at Mobile by order of the District Court and is now under the English flag. She is normally consigned to William H. Wall and Company but George Bowne has the control. Winer Bethel has filed the libel. Read papers. p.m. Saw Captain Barss and drew up the answer. Took a copy of Andrew's report and one of the patent office report and gave them to George Bowne for Mr. Anduze.

Friday, February 8. Rose at 6 having been awake a half an hour but it was so dark and cloudy and the ground so wet from light rain during the night that I did not go to walk. Bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.37, thermometer 75, wind south 6, clouds 9. There was sheet lightning and distant thunder in the northwest about 5:30. Tried the case of William Rollins vs. schooner **Entire** and cargo which took until half past one. p.m. Wrote to Editor of the Knickerbocker magazine that duplicate number for January and February had been received. Also wrote to Fowler and Wills enclosing a stamp to know of a Knitting Machine for family use could be procured and the cost thereof. Samuel Douglas gave notice of a motion for a reappraisal of the ship **Lavinia Adams**. p.m. Weather warm and close, clouds 10.

Saturday, February 9. Rose about 6 and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.47.5, thermometer 73, wind northwest 3, clouds 10. Misty and drizzle all night. The steamer **Northern Light** got in about 4 a.m. Judge William Marvin would not hold court today. Read papers and the Knickerbocker magazine.

Sunday, February 10. Rose at 5:40

and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 8:40 a.m. barometer 29.52, thermometer 70, wind north northeast 3, clouds 8. Wrote to Mother. Sent Bryd the January number of the Water Cure Journal. Mailed a letter from Matilda to Miss M.C. Bright, Pensacola and to Mrs. Ann Adams, Baltimore care of Reverend C.C. Adams. The steamer **Isabel** got in about 4:30. The Steamer **Florida** left about 9 p.m.

Monday, February 11. Rose at 5:30 and walked above the Barracks when finding the road muddy returned and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.46.5, thermometer 72, wind east by south 1, clouds 7. Argued the motion for a rehearing in the case of the ship **Ashburton**. Judge William Marvin refused the motion on the grounds that he had not misunderstood the evidence and that the wreckers either did not know of the existence of the reef or that they acted in bad faith in not telling of it and were entitled to no salvage but rather should be punished for their bad faith and that either Welch and Captain Walton told an untruth or the wreckers were not worthy of salvage. This I grant but I cannot believe that either Welch or Walton. Tried the motion for reappraisal in the case of the ship **Lavinia Adams** on the ground that the appraisal was too high. Judge Marvin said that the affidavit of the appraisers that their appraisal was based upon a mistake and they wished to change it where necessary. Gave time for Samuel Douglas to procure the affidavit. Tried the case of James Riggs vs. the bark **George Thomas**. Examined Riggs and Captain Cutler and submitted case without argument.

Tuesday, February 12. Rose at 6. It was stormy all night raining

and blowing heavy squalls from the southwest to the northwest. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.49, thermometer 71.5, wind northwest 5, clouds 10. The drizzling squalls last night was the stormiest night I have seen for many years. All morning examining the complaint of Captain Lane of the brig **Uranus** of New York against Frederick Raffle, one of the crew, for striking the Captain. Find that there is no statue against a seaman striking the officer.

Wednesday, February 13. Rose at 6 and made a fire in the stove, thermometer 58. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.60, thermometer 62, wind north 3, clouds 1. Had Frederick Raffle up and discharged him. Read paper and Putnam's magazine. p.m. Walked on the beach with all the family.

Thursday, February 14. Rose at 5:30 and made a fire, thermometer 61 in the room. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.60, thermometer 64, calm with some fog about sunrise and clear. Judge William Marvin read his decreed in the case of William Rollins vs. schooner **Entire** and in the case of Riggs vs. bark **George Thomas** \$400.00. Received of the clerk \$334.23 being my fee in case of the ship **Lavinia Adams** paid William Pinkney \$100.00 which I borrowed from him at Christmas. Paid Oliver O'Hara house rent July to January \$120.00. Paid William C. Dennis for two months hire of a Negro woman and 3 cords of wood \$34.00. On my way home called on Major William Fraser, U.S. Engineers, who arrived in the steamer **Isabel** to relieve Major William Chase. He is well acquainted with Captain Talcott and family and Mother. He is a small man and very pleasant in his manners and full of talk. Read papers. p.m. Read Putnam's magazine.

Friday, February 15. Rose at 5 and walked a short distance

above the Barracks when finding the road muddy turned back and walked down to the Fort Wharf, returned home and bathed water cold. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.50, thermometer 65, wind north 2, clouds 2. Read paper. p.m. Read Harpers magazine.

Saturday, February 16. Rose at 5 and walked as yesterday, returned home and bathed. At 8:20 a.m. barometer 29.43, thermometer 69, calm, clouds 9. Read papers. Gave Matilda \$2.80 to pay Mrs. James C. Clapp for plaid silk purchased some time since which I believe has been paid. Paid Morris \$4.00 for cutting wood and hooping tubs. Yesterday paid Williams for vegetable \$1.25. p.m. Read Law Register. Paid White for grist and meal \$2.50. Paid Negro man for work cleaning yard \$2.00.

Sunday, February 17. Rose at 6:10 having overslept myself, bathed. At 8:15 a.m. barometer 29.45, thermometer 73, wind southwest 1, clouds 1. Read Law Register and Harper's magazine.

Monday, February 18. Rose at 5:15 and walked on the beach. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.55, thermometer 69.5, wind north northeast 3, clouds 2. Read Law Register and Harper's magazine. p.m. Read Household Words and walked to South Beach by Porter's Spring. Had a fire in the stove after night.

Tuesday, February 19. Rose at 6 and made a fire, thermometer 60 at home. At 8:15 a.m. barometer 29.55, thermometer 65, wind northeast 3, clouds 1. The steamer **Vanderbilt** came in about 8. Got a letter from Byrd. Surveyed a lot for Benjamin Curry, Jr.

Wednesday, February 20. Rose at 5 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.44, thermometer 69, wind southeast 3, clouds 2. Read Law Register. p.m. Read Household Words. Broke my steel spectacles

and took the glasses to Walberg to put them in a silver frame which I have had for some years.

Thursday, February 21. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Ponds. Took a shower bath the well being so foul that I cannot use the water. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.22.5, thermometer 76, wind south southwest 5, clouds 9. A very heavy bank of clouds to the northwest having the appearance of a heavy northern. About 8:25 the wind came round the northwest with rain which continued till noon when it ceased and became calm and by 2 p.m. the wind was blowing again and by half past 4 was blowing a good breeze. The barometer 29.45, thermometer 76, wind southwest 5, clouds 2.

Friday, February 22. Rose at 5 and walked on the beach. At 8 a.m. barometer 29.36, thermometer 71.5, wind northwest 2, clouds 2. The steamer **Isabel** got in last night about 1. Got papers. Senator Stephen Mallory sent me the two volumes of U.S. Astronomical Expedition. P. Williams sent me back Francis Watlington's claim for a Land Warrant because it did not have a certificate from the Clerk of Circuit Court that the magistrate was duly commissioned. Got the certificate and enclosed it back. Got costs in case of State of Florida vs. J.P. Smith, \$11.05 from Smith. Captain Palmer and W. Turner Patterson, son of Colonel William T. Patterson of New York came in the **Isabel**. After tea Matilda, Hatty and I went to Alexander Patterson's and heard Turner play a number of old airs on the flute which he plays well.

Saturday, February 23. Rose at 5 and walked on the beach, returned home and took a shower bath. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.46, thermometer 70, wind north. Read papers. The steamer Star of the West came in at 6 p.m.

(Hurricane from page 1)

cargo of merchandise, across the reef and onto Washerwoman Shoal (off Sugarloaf Key) where she sank. Over seventy craft, from large schooners to small rowing boats, with over four hundred men, labored for two months, diving up cargo from the submerged hull. It was the largest salvage operation in Keys history.

The French bark, **Marie**, was driven on the coral heads at Looe Key, which tore open her hull and she sank. The captain and seven crewmen drowned; five survived. The bodies of some of the men washed up on Sugarloaf Beach.

The British bark, **Emigrant**, ran aground on a bank inside Alligator Reef three days before the hurricane struck. Four wrecking vessels heaved her off and took her to Key West. No sooner was she anchored there than the wind rose to gale force, blew her off her anchorage, and drove her aground Crawfish Bar. She was a total loss.

A number of other vessels in the Straits were severely damaged, leaking, or lost masts, sails, and rigging in the storm. They limped in to Key West for repairs and replacement of lost gear. Among them was a brig whose master gave the following account of his frightening experiences in the hurricane of 1856.

(The following article was extracted from the "*Sailor's Magazine*," Vol. 33-34 of October 1861)

Hurricane At Sea

Vicissitudes of a Sailors Life
By a Nautical Correspondent of
the Independent

"Nat, I believe we are going to have a hurricane."

"Why, what makes you think so, Captain?"

"Why, look at my journal for the last three days; do you note how steadily the barometer has gone down? With the fine weather we have had, it means that mischief is near us; whether we get caught or not remains to be seen."

I was master. Nat was a youngster of nineteen, and a passenger – the mate lay in his berth dying of yellow fever – two men out of six (my whole crew) were also down with it. The brig was deeply and badly laden. Weak from a recent attack of fever myself, I little relished a hurricane being added to my trouble. Sea-room was scarce – Double-Headed Shot Keys on one side, Florida Reef on the other, with but a sixty-miles channel between them. The wind for the last three days had been southwest, baffling and very warm. In the afternoon and evening of Aug. 26th, it struck in suddenly and strongly from the northwest, with sharp squalls. Reduced sail accordingly. At midnight, made Elbow Key Light [on Cay Sal Bank], and wore ship to the north-northwest – barometer 29:50 at 8 A.M. The morning of the 27th, sighted the Florida shore, and immediately wore ship to the south-southeast. Brig under close reefed topsail and mainsail, and reefed foresail. During the forenoon, the squalls increased in strength and duration, while the constantly falling barometer told me there was more coming. At 1 P.M., I knew the brig was in mid-channel, and that, the wind being northeast, if she was then hove to, she would make a "dead drift" to the southwest, and not approach the land on either side unless through the agency of currents. Every sail was taken in and bound tightly to the yards.

Short-handed as we were, I was obliged to join the men in their labors, and with a little coil of spun-yarn on my arm, I bound every sail

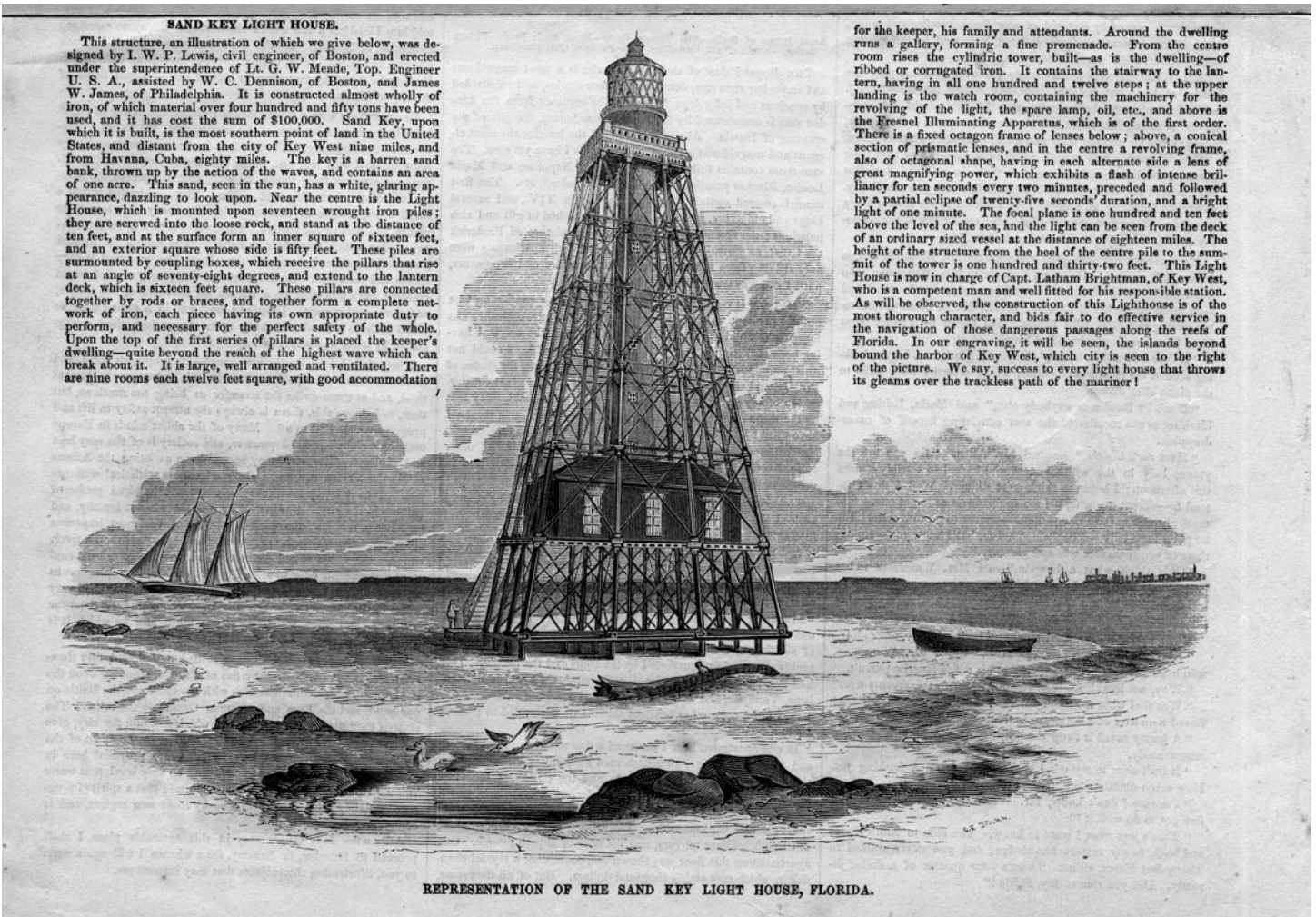
to the yard which showed the least sign of "puffing." Having made everything snug, and nothing more to do, I took the liberty of looking about me. The sea was rising as if by magic, not the long, lazy grand ocean swell of the Atlantic, but the short, sharp tumult of the Gulf Stream. It seemed, and I believe really was, impossible for any vessel to ride such a sea as that; ours did not at all events, for the sea soon began to load her, and her decks being full, even with the rail, made it impossible for the men to work at the pumps. This state of affairs made it necessary to cut away the bulwarks. Calling the second mate and one man to the break of the poop-deck, I made an earing fast around my waist, and giving them the end of it, I descended to the main deck, and watching my chance dashed out board after board with an ax. Three times was I washed clear over the side into the water to leeward, and hauled in again before I had accomplished my task. Tired, startled, exhausted nearly to death, I threw myself flat upon the deck and rested. Few, I fancy, know the meaning of the word *rest*: only twice in my life have I known it myself – times of fright, emergency and danger, when the strong will forced the human machine beyond endurance. Then, oh how sweet rest is! then even death is not too great a price to pay for it!

In a few moments I was myself again – frightened, certainly, for I never expected to see another sun rise; but no one knew it but myself. I gave my orders coolly, to keep the men pumping whenever there was a chance, and walked aft to look at the watch; it was a quarter to 3 P.M. Creeping up to the weather-side, and holding my nose over the rail, I tried to peep to windward. "Can it blow any harder than this? was

SAND KEY LIGHT HOUSE.

This structure, an illustration of which we give below, was designed by I. W. P. Lewis, civil engineer, of Boston, and erected under the superintendence of Lt. G. W. Meade, Top. Engineer U. S. A., assisted by W. C. Dennison, of Boston, and James W. James, of Philadelphia. It is constructed almost wholly of iron, of which material over four hundred and fifty tons have been used, and it has cost the sum of \$100,000. Sand Key, upon which it is built, is the most southern point of land in the United States, and distant from the city of Key West nine miles, and from Havana, Cuba, eighty miles. The key is a barren sand bank, thrown up by the action of the waves, and contains an area of one acre. This sand, seen in the sun, has a white, glaring appearance, dazzling to look upon. Near the centre is the Light House, which is mounted upon seventeen wrought iron piles; they are screwed into the loose rock, and stand at the distance of ten feet, and at the surface form an inner square of sixteen feet, and an exterior square whose side is fifty feet. These piles are surmounted by coupling boxes, which receive the pillars that rise at an angle of seventy-eight degrees, and extend to the lantern deck, which is sixteen feet square. These pillars are connected together by rods or braces, and together form a complete network of iron, each piece having its own appropriate duty to perform, and necessary for the perfect safety of the whole. Upon the top of the first series of pillars is placed the keeper's dwelling—quite beyond the reach of the highest wave which can break about it. It is large, well arranged and ventilated. There are nine rooms each twelve feet square, with good accommodation

for the keeper, his family and attendants. Around the dwelling runs a gallery, forming a fine promenade. From the centre room rises the cylindrical tower, built—as is the dwelling—of ribbed or corrugated iron. It contains the stairway to the lantern, having in all one hundred and twelve steps; at the upper landing is the watch room, containing the machinery for the revolving of the light, the spare lamp, oil, etc., and above is the Fresnel Illuminating Apparatus, which is of the first order. There is a fixed octagon frame of lenses below; above, a conical section of prismatic lenses, and in the centre a revolving frame, also of octagonal shape, having in each alternate side a lens of great magnifying power, which exhibits a flash of intense brilliancy for ten seconds every two minutes, preceded and followed by a partial eclipse of twenty-five seconds' duration, and a bright light of one minute. The focal plane is one hundred and ten feet above the level of the sea, and the light can be seen from the deck of an ordinary sized vessel at the distance of eighteen miles. The height of the structure from the heel of the centre pile to the summit of the tower is one hundred and thirty-two feet. This Light House is now in charge of Capt. Latham Brightman, of Key West, who is a competent man and well fitted for his responsible station. As will be observed, the construction of this Lighthouse is of the most thorough character, and bids fair to do effective service in the navigation of those dangerous passages along the reefs of Florida. In our engraving, it will be seen, the islands beyond bound the harbor of Key West, which city is seen to the right of the picture. We say, success to every light house that throws its gleams over the trackless path of the mariner!



REPRESENTATION OF THE SAND KEY LIGHT HOUSE, FLORIDA.

Sand Key Lighthouse. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

the question I involuntarily asked aloud.

I thought I would look at the barometer. Creeping to the stairs, I slid down, almost fearing to do so. I looked – 28:90! I screwed the slide to mark it. The second mate was bending over the mate, trying to catch his last words. The poor man was sending a message to his wife, and died in a few moments afterwards. Upon deck again; must watch everything. Pumping was now out of the question. The sea was no longer *high*, but ran like high breakers on a beach, which the terrible wind caught with giant strength, and dashed down on the brig's main-deck by turns at a time. Masses of clouds were rising to windward, which, spreading to the zenith, would burst on us with a roar and a deluge of water, in rain and

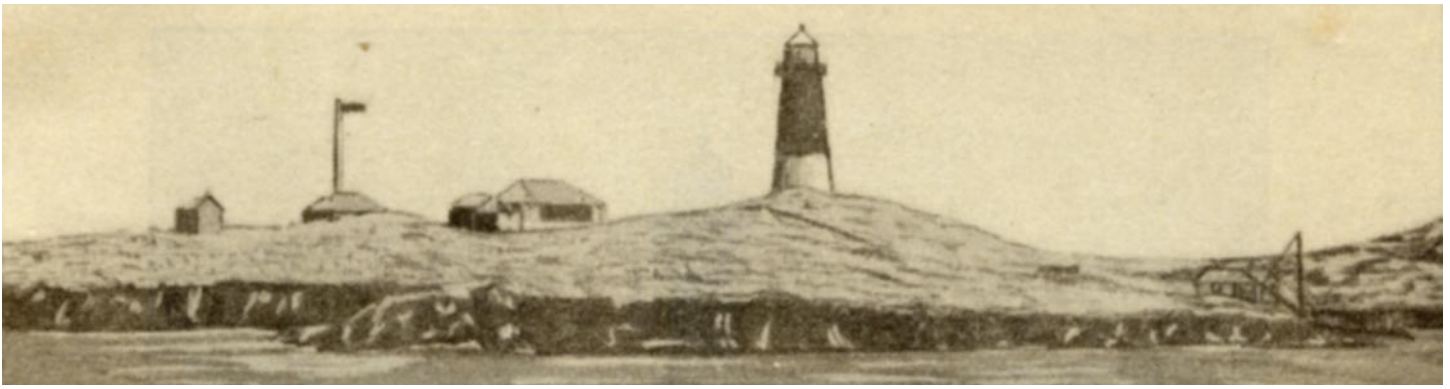
spray, enough to appall the stoutest heart. After they were passed the sun would shine out gayly and clearly for a few moments, and I would think, perhaps this is the worst.

So the weary, long hours passed away. I was in truth afraid to look at the barometer again, so I staid upon deck and hoped. At half-past five a cloud arose in the eastern quarter – so dark, so opaque, that my first thought was a whole new continent had arisen from the sea. I jumped down into the cabin and looked at my old friend again; 28:50 was the news it told me. The mate lay dead upon his mattress, his lower jaw dropped, and his eyes frightfully staring. “Cover that man up,” I said, and jumped up on deck again. Slowly, majestically that vast bank rose as if it would sweep the whole

world clear of all that impeded its progress. It *burst* upon us! All that had passed before was but little in comparison; the poor brig seemed as nothing – over, over, over she went, till her yard-arms were buried six feet in the water, and her lee-side up to hatch-coamings were submerged. The second mate grasped my arm and yelled in my ear, as nearly as I could distinguish, (for the clamor was so great I could only guess what he said,) “My God, we are gone!”

It was now half-past six, and dark. Clinging to the rail, hearing the dismal noise of the wind, and seeing nothing but the lurid glare of the water, which was one phosphorescent sheet, we stood listening to the gale and waiting for – *death*. That was a time for thinking!

(Continued on page 14)



Elbow Key Light on Cay Sal Bank, Bahama Islands. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

Never was I so spiritualized as then. Commencing in life at my first whipping, (the first thing I can remember,) every incident passed before me in review; and, strange to say, the most ludicrous were the most vivid and longest dwelt upon. In the meantime the wind was blowing. Who of my readers ever heard the wind *blow*? I have often read of the wind *roaring* in the most violent hurricane. Don't say *roar*, say *tear*. A heavy cannon ball in passing through the air, sounds like tearing new strong cloth. Imagine ten thousand cannon balls flying close by your ears, and you have some idea of the awful clamor of a hurricane.

Nine P.M., a sudden and decided lull, the sea suddenly running up into long grand swells, and the brig righting to a great extent. Set the storm-trysail, and sounded the pumps. Owing to their being full of froth, they gave wet line all their length. Manned them and set to pumping; kept the other at work. Took a long look at the barometer – 29:00. I felt better. At midnight, after taking my turn at the pump, I went to the cabin, and laid down on the settee, completely exhausted, more from extreme nervous tension than from hard labor. I thought of Mazeppa's horse –

“For many a verst
Panting as if his heart

would burst
The weary steed still
staggered on”

Poor Nat came out of his room pale as a ghost. “What *was* that awful noise Captain?” “That! why it was the wind, Nat.” “Well,” replied Nat, “I never knew wind could make such a noise as that.” “Nor I either,” said I, “but I know it now.” I went to sleep. My last thought was, “Where is the brig? Is she near land? She ought to be in mid channel.” If not, no man could tell till morning.

I was in the middle of a happy dream of boat-sailing on the Connecticut River, when the second mate jumped down, shook me violently by the shoulder, exclaiming one word, “Land!” and before I could reply was on deck again. Of course, I was not long after him. As my head emerged from the companionway, I noticed a light on the lee beam, and that the water was white as milk. The light I doubted about, but that we were in white water was sure, and either on the edge of Florida Reef, or inside the Double-Headed Shot Keys, and on Salt Key Bank. In either case I must make sail and get to the southeast as soon as possible.

The crew were all on the weather side of the poopdeck, each one exclaiming to the other, “We are ashore!” and “Where's the captain?”

It was *very* dark, and still blowing a heavy gale, and the sea running very high, and giving indications of breaking, and I had no doubt but the brig's time had come, and probably ours also. Working my way forward, I came in contact with the black stewardess – she had joined in the general stampede, and was making as much noise as the best man of them. I happened to be to leeward of her, and I well remember the comical wish passing through my mind, that if we were going across the dark river together, the distinguished trait of the African race, which she possessed in an eminent degree might be left behind.

Sail was made on the brig immediately. I gave the men directions not to wait to cast off gaskets, but to cut everything. They worked as only men will work to

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save their lives, and I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard the topsail-sheets come rattling home. While they were setting the headsails, I was cutting the stops off the main-sail, and in a short time she was steering off shore under close reefed sails, taking whole cataracts of water over her forecastle. Having put all the sail on her that she would bear, I had the lead passed forward – “Forty fathoms, and no bottom.” “Well done old girl,” said I, “you are well out of this scrape.” Daylight came and found us about three miles from the reef, on and over which the sea was breaking horridly. The gale was moderating fast; more sail was made, and we were soon well off shore. Now we were greatly annoyed by large birds, which, as soon as daylight came, flocked on board of us by dozens, gasping from thirst and exhaustion. I picked up and thrown overboard, they would immediately fly back and dash down anywhere about decks, and fight us if we attempted to move them. They were smart birds, without doubt, but the hurricane had been a little too much for them. At six A.M., buried the mate. The single pump had been constantly going from the time the gale moderated, and it was still kept going. At noon, the weather moderated to a pleasant breeze; a ship passed us steering southwest, with top-gallant sails set. She spoke us, and reported that she had carried the same sail all the night before. So much for our vessel being in the wrong place.

Upon examination, I found the brig was so badly strained, and making water so fast, that I should be obliged to go into Key West and repair. I laid off and on Sand Key Light during to night of the 28th and the next morning, put the wheel up and went in over the reef,

took a pilot, and in an hour we were anchored off the wharves.

An old friend of mine met me as I landed, and asked me to his house, and to make it my home during my stay in Key West. Accordingly, as soon as I had made arrangements for hauling the brig in, and had been through the custom house, I repaired to Mr. H -----, and took dinner with him. After dinner Mr. H----- said, “Don’t you want a nap, captain?” “Yes,” said I, “I would like a short one.” He showed me to a bedroom, and I was soon under the mosquito bar, the sweet trade wind blowing softly through the lattice of the window, and rustling the branches of the cocoa nut tree in front of the house. I thought, “This is pleasant, and quite a contrast to yesterday,” and went to sleep. In a few hours, just as the sun was setting Mr. H ----- called me to supper, and I got up and ate it feeling quite refreshed. This is my version of the story; but Mr. H----- said that he called me to supper, and my answer was, “Let me alone, I don’t wish for any;” that I slept all night; that he got the same answer at breakfast, the same at dinner, and that it was supper-time the next day when he was able to get me up. But I would not believe him, and I have not been able to realize yet that I did not get up the first time he called me. At all events, I had a good sleep

John Viele has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Key West Maritime Historical Society of the Florida Keys for the past 20 years. He is the author of three books on the history of the Keys published by Pineapple Press of Sarasota: “The Florida Keys – A History of the Pioneers,” “The Florida Keys, Vol. 2 – True Stories of the Perilous Straits,” and “The Florida Keys, Vol.3 –The Wreckers.”

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