

KEY WEST IN THE 1800's & 1900's

by

Mrs. Nellie Falk

1976

Mrs. Falk started her interview with her remembrance of the the steamship that sailed from Port Tampa to Key West. It would stop over here for two or three days. The businessmen would get the opera group from the ship enroute to Havana to stop over and do their Shakespearean plays for us. It was usually quite an event and everyone would turn out in their regalia. These were performed on Duval Street in the San Carlos Opera House. After the operas, a large crowd of us would go down on Duval Street to Madame Beaulieu's and have dinner.

Social life was rather limited during that period. We had a ^{cotillon} ~~Cotillon~~ Club that used to meet out at the LaBrisa Hall. (In 1977, this is the Sands Restaurant, on the east side of Simonton st.

These recollections include stories told by my grandmother who came over from the Bahamas in 1946. They spent six weeks making the trip. They landed where Ft. Taylor now stands; there were very few houses there at the time. Key West only had two streets then, from Sandy Beach up as far as where Thomas Street is now. There were no more than 20 to 30 early settlers here at that time.

Later on, a ship was wrecked outside of Key West with about 20 German girls on it. They were all rescued, and there are many descendants of these German girls here in Key West now. My grandmother was Elizabeth Laughlin; Wilhelmina Ernestine Munson was another.

Key West was very dependent on cattle shipped in from north Florida. It came in three vessels; they landed at the foot of Simonton Street down where the Fabric Center is now. Early in the morning, the cattle were driven up Simonton Street and what is now Truman Avenue across to White Street and to the slaughter house — what is now Martello Towers. William Lumley and Mr. Tolls owned the cattle industry. They'd slaughter twice a week.

Our factories were the highest between the 1880's and 1890's; the P. Folk and Sons was one; Seidenburg Factory; Lincoln Pahasky's factory; William Otto's factory; Gannon's factory; there were more.

One of the nicest parties I can remember was in 1894 held at the home of Mrs. George Curry. This residence is now occupied by Mrs. Newhouse on Eaton Street. Everyone was in Chinese costume and we were served Chinese Food. There were about 50 couples at the party.

Many social events were held at the end of Simonton Street called the La Brisa. Monthly they held the ~~social~~ ^{Cotillon} the social events of Key West. The men came in full dress (some in a tux).

I used to belong to the Key West Women's Club, but after my husband got sick, I had to drop out because I couldn't drive a car.

Mrs. Malone and Mrs. Wilhelmina Harvey interviewed Mrs. Falk who just had a birthday and is now 81 yrs. old. in 1976, born July 4.

Mrs. Harvey asked Mrs. Falk to tell her about her grandparents and when the Women's Club began.

When they ^{Moreno} first started to raise money to start the Women's Club--where Rosina ~~Casero~~ lives there now--it was Benjamin Curry's property--they put on what they called a Gypsy Encampment. They took the fence down between the property on that whole block; they put on dramas, sold food, and did a lot of things to raise money. Everyone working towards this effort dressed like a gypsy and it lasted for one week. They made what was considered a large amount of money for that time.

Mary ^{Cappick} ~~Casero~~ wrote a History of Key West; it was published away from here. She was Irish and was one of the founders of the Women's Club. She worked in the Post Office in Key West for a long time--a very bright woman--and she had an aunt who lived in Havana for many years.

Whenever there was a shipwreck, everyone would try to get the first boat out there. It was always quite an exciting event.
