
HER FAMILY IN KEY WEST, FLORIDA

by
Mrs. William H. (Agnes Sawyer) Reardon

1975

Mrs. Malone introduces Mrs. Reardon during an interview at Mrs. Reardon's apartment. Mrs. Reardon lived formerly in her large lovely family home on Francis Street but because of lack of servants, she decided to move into an apartment. Here is her story.

My mother was born in Key West as well as her mother; I'm not sure, but think my great grandmother was born here too. However, my mother's father was born in Harbor Island. My father came over from Nassau when he was a young man. The Bahamas had at one time an economy that flourished but then came a time when work was hard to get so my father came to Key West for employment; he was by trade a shipbuilder, so he began the same occupation here--believe it was in 1886; he was here during the "big fire" so he acquired six crews and began building homes for people in Key West who had lost their homes. Some people had smaller homes built--these were done on a job site and then hauled to the various sites after the debris from the fire had been cleaned away. He built the Armory Building in 1900 which has been recently restored. It was interesting to learn that three unique buildings are listed in the archives in Washington D. C. (from Key West). One is the Fort Taylor; one is the Grace Kemp home on ~~Baval~~ Street, and the Armory was also chosen for unusual architecture; my father built the Grace Kemp home and the Armory. The interior of the Armory and the two little cupolas on the top hold a great many wonders which set it apart from the ordinary.

→ Caroline at Simonon Sts.

In telling you about my old home, I'll tell you first about the water pumps. We had two--one was a wooden windmill that held two tanks; one for well water and one for cistern water. The wind would just blow and when the tanks would run over, we'd run out and cut it off. Then later on my father put up another one; later when we got electric motors, the windmills were taken down. A great many people wanted running water upstairs and this was about the only way they could get it. There were a great many windmills in Key West. I remember that in Miami, they used a system of pumping water from the roof tops into second stories but don't believe they did much of that in Key West.

(Mrs. Reardon - cont'd)

Pumping from the rooftops just preceded air conditioning.

Getting materials and foodstuffs in here--the Mallory Boats or Shéps came in here. They'd stop at Galveston, New Orleans, Key West, and New York and returned the same way so they'd bring everything that was sold in Key West. I remember that my father had a ship.....boat (that was before we thought of shrimp) and some man from St. Augustine or Jacksonville found the shrimp and through the Thompson Company, he knew where to go to find the shrimp. It then became quite an industry here. This was around World War II.

The people from the Bahamas and the Florida Keys went out in big boats and little..... They had buckets with glass bottoms (they were essential); they took everything from the bottom; they never stepped on the bed. Years later, the Greek came and it was said that they destroyed the bed. Later on they started working the waters in the Gulf area and it became good for the sponge industry; this, and of course, cigars. After they started making the synthetic sponge, it killed the sale of the real sponge.

Everything had to come into Key West by Sail Boat, or from up the Keys. There was no Miami in the early days; there was Cutler, Lemon Grove, and Indian City. All the canned goods and other supplies were shipped from New York. In the early, early, days when they built the towers here, the brick came in from Charleston.

As I remember the trees and foliage in my youth, when people had ^{ties} larger lots, they grew mostly fruit trees; one of the popular fruits was a ~~tiase~~ which I never see anymore. It was a yellow fruit with a few black seeds and very mealy but most people didn't like it. I believe there is one at the Audubon House. It tastes like the yolk of a boiled egg. We had Spanish limes which are much smaller than the citrus lime; we used very little of it--it was like ^{sapodilla} a sweet meat which the kids liked. ~~Sapodillas~~ were popular too. They have a brown skin, black seed, and very, very sweet. Almost everyone grew these. Sugar apples were another fruit--very hard and difficult to eat but very good.

I remember we had an Ice Cream Parlor on Duval Street run by the name of ^{Carmona} ~~Marion~~ and he made ice cream from every fruit on the island except the Spanish lime. Another type of fruit - a big thing about 8 or 10 inches long or larger called "saur sop" made a delicious flavored ice cream. The peeling on this fruit is a dark green and bumpy like elephant skin but the pulp is very white and sweet.

The Coconut milk is and always was excellent food and was used freely especially when people were sick.
