

residency there. In describing Webb's property, the deed contains this description: "...being bounded on the Northwest side by Caroline Street, on the Northeast side by Duval Street, on the Southeast side by the lot occupied in 1836 by Francis Watlington and on the Southwest side by lands now or lately occupied by William Marvin."³⁹ Although W.A. Whitehead's 1838 pencil sketch of structures on the island (Figure 2) denotes a "House begun by Judge Webb, unfinished," Cussans' framework behind it is not visible. The deed book entries, nonetheless, substantiate its existence by 1836.

FRANCIS WATLINGTON: PORTRAIT OF A SEA CAPTAIN

Captain Francis Watlington, a sea-faring pilot born in St. Croix on April 1, 1804,⁴³ became familiar with the island of Key West on his journeys along the triangular trade route between New York, Nassau and Key West. Newspaper records indicate young Watlington's first acquaintance with Cayo Hueso occurred in 1829, concurrent with Cussans' arrival. The Key West Register reported a list of persons, among them a Francis Watlington, for whom letters were being kept in August, 1829.⁴⁴

Watlington's family which traced its early ancestry to Devon, England and Bermuda had migrated to New York at the turn of the eighteenth century. Francis' father Thomas Watlington, a shipmaster, took up residence with his wife Sarah at 20 Franklin Street in New York City.⁴⁵ In time their son Francis bought several schooners with which he engaged in shipping and wrecking along the eastern coast and Caribbean islands.

Watlington returned in 1830 bringing his young bride Emeline Johnson Watlington to settle in Key West. The youthful Mrs. Watlington was born in New York in 1812,⁴⁶ the daughter of Charles and Hannah Johnson, 7 Thames Street on Staten Island.⁴⁷ A shipmaster, Charles Johnson owned considerable New York property; upon his death in 1828 Johnson's assets were bequeathed to his wife and thence to be distributed among their five children: John W., Charles, Amelia, Emeline (Watlington) and Louisa (Herder.) (A copy of the 1828 will is included in the Appendix).

Francis Watlington, a master seaman, was appointed Pilot for Monroe County by the State Legislative Council in 1834,⁴⁸ served as Inspector of Customs at the Carysfort Lighthouse in 1838,⁴⁹ and was named Port Warden for Key West in 1840.⁵⁰ He operated the schooners Black Hawk⁵¹ and Caroline,⁵² collecting salvage and transporting passengers and goods to Nassau.

A regular parishoner at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Watlington's seven daughters were baptized there.⁵³ The eldest, Hannah, married Edward Howe, Sarah married Judge Joseph B. Wall of Tampa, and Emeline married William H. Ward in 1858. Maria wed Joseph C. King in 1867, while Mary resided in Key West as the wife of Dr. Charles S. Johnson. Judge Ramon Alvarez, special deputy collector of customs at Key West, claimed Florence Watlington as his wife. Miss Lillie never married and resided at the family home until her death in 1936.⁵⁴

While Watlington's growing family remained in Key West, their home became something of a social center in town. The structure itself was owned by Cussans who leased it to his fellow mariner Francis Watlington until 1839 when it was sold to William H. Wall.⁵⁵ Jefferson B. Browne in Key West: The Old and the New records that "Duval Street was only cleared about half way between Eaton and Fleming Streets as late as 1836, and the only house on it at that time, after crossing Caroline Street, was on belonging to Francis B. Watlington...."⁵⁶ In fact, on December 10, 1839, Cussans sold to Wall for \$750 "All my House and lot situated in the rear of a house and lot owned by James Webb...."⁵⁷ The Wall family held title to the frame dwelling for a little over two years before it was sold to Emeline Watlington's brother-in-law Nicholas D. Herder from New York City.⁵⁸ Herder and his wife, the former Maria

Louisa Johnson, maintained title to the property until August 30, 1869, when it was deeded to Emeline Watlington.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, city tax rolls dating from 1845 assess Francis Watlington for property taxes. The assessed valuation fluctuated from \$600 in 1845 to \$1,000 in 1847; it declined in the 1850s to \$800. The Reconstruction period following the Civil War marked a further decline in the valuation of the Duval Steet site to \$400.⁶⁰ By 1886, however, the property value had risen to \$600. The 1895 tax roll for Key West shows the Watlington House site valued at \$1500. Improvements and personal property together with the lot totalled an aggregate worth of \$2,000 in 1895.⁶¹

Francis B. Watlington's career as Key West mariner and wrecker was supplanted by his brief tenure as state senator in the years prior to the firing on Fort Sumter. Subsequently, Watlington's secessionist beliefs compelled his participation in the South's Confederate Navy. In 1859, the voters of Monroe County supported Watlington's bid to become state senator from the 21st District.⁶² The January 14, 1860 edition of Key to the Gulf noted: "Our Senator, Honorable Francis Watlington, arrived at his house in this city on Sunday last" to report to the townspeople on the legislative session.⁶³ Only a single letter dated April 17, 1861, from Watlington to Florida's Governor Perry remains extant. In that dispatch Watlington described somewhat chaotic conditions in the city when Union steamers docked at Fort Taylor. Watlington wrote: "We are living under great mortification, but we are satisfied that...it is for the best that you did not take the forts or send arms here."⁶⁴

The 1860 Census finds no mention of Francis Watlington as a Key West resident. It can be surmised that by late 1861 Watlington had resigned as senator and begun service for the Confederate cause in Alabama. Confederate forces of the Mobile Squadron operated as a bulwark to impede Unionist penetration at Mobile Bay throughout the war years. Flotillas of ironclad gunboats fought to curtail Federal control there; the southerners proved successful until 1864. At the Battle of Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864, the Confederate gunboats Gaines and Selma were beached, the Tennessee was captured, though the Morgan escaped.⁶⁵ Such events signalled the fall of the city of Mobile. The remainder of the squadron fled via the Alabama River toward Selma but Union blockades forced a surrender. On May 10, 1865, Commodore Farrand, C.S.N., surrendered at Nanna Hubba Bluff on the Tombigbee River. Union forces claimed the following ships, Nashville, Morgan, Baltic, Black Diamond and Southern Republic, together with 112 officers, 285 enlisted men and 24 marines.⁶⁶ Among the officers was an "F. Watlington, Lieutenant." Watlington was also listed on the Register of Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the Provisional Navy of the Confederate States.

The letterbook of Admiral Franklin Buchanan and the ledger and cashbooks of the Mobile paymaster reveal Watlington's service; they do not pinpoint, however, the ship on which he served. According to these sources, the Key Wester is first noted on July 27, 1863, as a lieutenant. By August 31, 1864, Watlington was promoted to first lieutenant. His monthly pay averaged \$315.00⁶⁷

Thus, existing information substantiates Francis Watlington's Civil War service--not as a confidant of Jefferson Davis or Stephen

Mallory, nor as Engineer of the Mobile ship yard--such claims are mere conjecture. Yet Watlington, a versatile and significant Key West citizen, maintained his public service record and acted upon his beliefs during the wartime era.

Watlington, now in his sixties, returned to his Duval Street home at the close of the Civil War to re-join his family in Key West. His death in 1883 was mourned by the community. Descendants of this sea pilot continued to inhabit the lovely Bahamian frame house at 322 Duval Street for a century thereafter.

SUMMARY

The foregoing historical account of events and personages linked to Key West's Oldest House Museum represents an attempt to introduce and evaluate existing evidence. Definite conclusions as to the original construction date and the actual architect/builder are difficult to draw. One can offer a judicious assessment based upon recorded documents. In the future perhaps additional data will be generated to complete or finalize the history of this Conch dwelling.

Certain observations based upon the archival material herein discussed, however, may be noted. A thorough search of U.S. military records pertinent to Key West in the 1820s has revealed no connection between Porter's Squadron and Richard Cussans. The notion that the Oldest House was originally erected on Whitehead Street by naval forces and subsequently relocated to the present site has no factual basis. The building complex erected by Commodore Porter was of a temporary type and no documents record any transfer of military property to civilian islanders.

Secondly, historical research supports the claims that Richard Cussans was the earliest Key Wester associated with the Duval Street property. That he acquired the land between 1834 and 1836 is no mere supposition. Given Cussans' carpentry skills it seems likely that he constructed at least a portion of the extant structure upon procurement of the property. Cussans rented the house to his friend and fellow

mariner, Francis Watlington, by 1836. Inspection of the dwelling supports the idea that as the Watlington family expanded, a second structure was enjoined which created the cohesive unit which exists today. Thus, the Watlington family chain's link to the 322 Duval Street site remained unsevered from 1836 to 1974. As such, it is perhaps the longest tie of a Key West family to a homesite.

NOTES

- ¹Royal Gazette and Bahama Advertiser. May 1, 1819. Microfilm, Monroe County Public Library (hereinafter cited as MCPL).
- ²U.S. Congress, House Document, 29th Congress, 1st Session, H.R. 792, pp. 5-6.
- ³Brown, Jefferson B. Key West: The Old and the New. Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 1973. A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1912 Edition.
- ⁴Browne, p. 7.
- ⁵Monroe County Deed Book A, pp. 21-29. Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.
- ⁶Ibid., pp. 13, 15.
- ⁷American State Papers VI: Naval Affairs, 4:963-964. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Niles' Weekly Register, Volume XXIV, p. 130. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- ¹¹Paullin, pp. 314-325.
- ¹²U.S. Congress. H.R. No. 189. February, 9, 1848, p.2.
- ¹³Letters to Commandants, Volume IX, p. 10. Record Group 45, National Archives.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 51.
- ¹⁵Ibid., Volume II, p. 623.
- ¹⁶Letters to Officers, Volume I, p. 292. Record Group 45, National Archives.
- ¹⁷Browne, pp. 99-100.
- ¹⁸Carter, Clarence, ed. Territorial Papers of the United States. Territory of Florida, Volume XXV, Washington: The National Archives, 1959, p. 196.

- ¹⁹Browne, p. 50.
- ²⁰Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser, September 3, 1829.
Microfilm, MCPL.
- ²¹Fifth Census of the United States, 1830. Monroe County, Florida.
Washington, D.C.: National Archives microfilm.
- ²²Scott, Kenneth. "City of Wreckers," Florida Historical Quarterly,
Volume XVII, p. 193.
- ²³Records, St. Matthews Church, Nassau, Bahamas. Microfilm, MCPL.
- ²⁴Territorial Papers, Volume XXIII, p. 989.
- ²⁵Ibid., XXIV, p. 135.
- ²⁶Ibid., pp 112-113.
- ²⁷Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser, February 26, 1829.
Microfilm, MCPL.
- ²⁸Monroe County Deed Book A, p. 143-144, April 14, 1829. Deed books
located at MCPL.
- ²⁹Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser, September 3, 1829.
Microfilm, MCPL.
- ³⁰Monroe County Deed Book A, p. 313.
- ³¹Monroe County Deed Book B, p. 105.
- ³²Monroe County Deed Book A, p. 166, 192.
- ³³Monroe County Deed Book B, pp. 326, 297, 496.
- ³⁴Monroe County Deed Book C, p. 111. Located at MCPL.
- ³⁵Territorial Papers, Volume XXIV, p. 680-2.
- ³⁶Monroe County Deed Book A, p. 513; B, p. 69, 131, 149.
- ³⁷Monroe County Deed Book B, p. 96.
- ³⁸Monroe County Deed Book B, p. 515.
- ³⁹Monroe County Deed Book D, p. 465.

- ⁴³Tenth Census of the U.S., 1880. Florida. Schedule 1, Monroe County.
- ⁴⁴Key West Register and Commercial Advertiser. August 13, 1829. Microfilm, MCPL.
- ⁴⁵Correspondence from The New York Public Library, June 27, 1928. Data from 1828 New York City (Manhattan) Directory.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷Will of Charles Johnson. Surrugate's Court, Richmond County, St. George, Staten Island, New York. Volume C, p. 1120-1123.
- ⁴⁸Monroe County Deed Book B., p. 93.
- ⁴⁹Letters, Secretary of Treasury from Customs Collector, Key West. Microfilm, MCPL.
- ⁵⁰Territorial Papers..., vol. XXVI, p. 65.
- ⁵¹Key West Enquire, Dec. 20, 1834. Microfilm, MCPL.
- ⁵²Royal Gazette, July 22, 1835. Microfilm, MCPL.
- ⁵³St. Paul's Episcopal Church Records, vol. 1 Microfilm, MCPL.
- ⁵⁴Browne, p. 192, Deed Book E-466, F-229, G-57,68: Individual Record of Burial, Key West Cemetery. Filed at MCPL.
- ⁵⁵Deed Book C., pp. 27, 62-63.
- ⁵⁶Browne, p. 11.
- ⁵⁷Deed Book C, p. 62.
- ⁵⁸Deed Book C, p. 213.
- ⁵⁹Deed Book C p. 441.
- ⁶⁰Monroe County Assesment Rolls, 1845-1880. Microfilm, MCPL.
- ⁶¹Ibid., 1886, 1895. Located at MCPL.
- ⁶²The People of Lawmaking in Florida, 1822-1975. Compiled by office of the Clerk, Florida House of Representatives, Tallahassee 1976, p. 14.

⁶³Key to the Gulf, January 14, 1860, p. 1. Microfilm, MCPL.

⁶⁴The War of the Rebellion..., Series I, Vol. LII, Part 2, p. 51.

⁶⁵Scharf, J.T. History of the Confederate States Navy. Albany:
Joseph Mc Donough, 1894, pp. 592-6.

⁶⁶Ibid., and War of the Rebellion, vol. XX, Series 1, p. 705.

⁶⁷Ledger and Cashbook of Paymaster at Mobile, 1862-1865. Record
Group 45, National Archives; pp. 102-210.

APPENDIX

- Figure 1.
Drawing. Location of Cussans' grocery on Whitehead Street.
- Figure 2.
1838 Pencil Sketch of Island of Key West by William Whitehead.
- Figure 3.
Portion of 1912 Sanborn Insurance Map that details layout of 322 Duval Street property.
- Figure 4,5
Cemetery plats of Watlington Family in Key West Cemetery.
- Figure 6.
Map showing effects of fires to portions of Key West.
- Figure 7.
Extract from will of Charles Johnson, 1828.
- Figure 8.
Copy of baptismal record of Richard W. Cussans (Baptismal Register, St. Matthew's Church, 1807-1884, p. 48).
- Figure 9.
Marriage Record of Richard Cussans to Amelia Evans--27 February 1800 (Book of Marriages, Christ Church Cathedral 1792-1805, p. 136).
- Figure 10.
Death record of Richard Walter Cussans (Christ Church Cathedral, Register of Burials 1829-1843, p. 9).
- Figure 11.
The Oldest House. Photograph by Wright Langley, Director, Historic Key West Preservation Board.
- Figure 12.
Genealogy Table of Francis Watlington Family

Fig. 1.



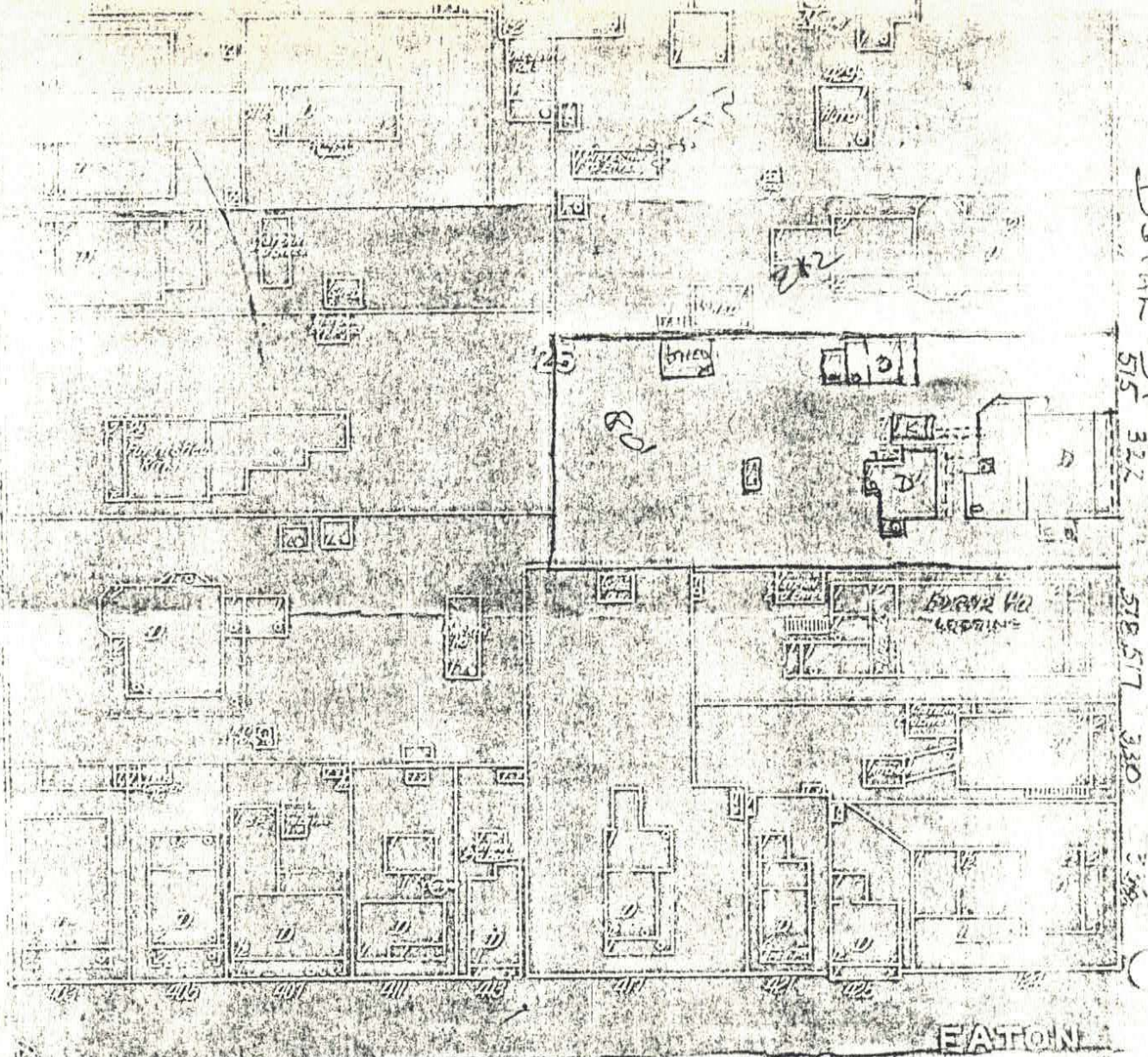
Drawn by Betty Bruce

1. Whiteheads' Point. 2. Light-house. 3. Old Grave Yard. 4. Residence of F. A. Browne. 5. Custom House and Collector's Residence. 6. Jail. 7. Court House.
8. Whitehead Street. 9. Caroline Street. 10. Residence of A. Gordon. 11. Clinton Place. 12. Front Street. 13. Foot-bridge across Pond on the line of Duval Street.
14. House begun by Judge Webb, unfinished. 15. Residence of Judge Marvin. 16. Residences of P. J. Fontane and Patterson, (one behind the other.) 17. Residence of Mr. Weaver.

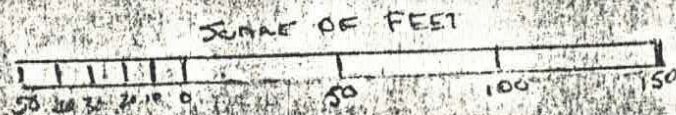
KEY - WEST.

Looking South-East. Reduced from a pencil sketch by W. A. Whitehead taken from the Oppola of the Warehouse of Messrs. A. C. Tift & Co., June 1838.

Fig. 2.



1912 Sanborn Map showing structures at 322 Duval Street



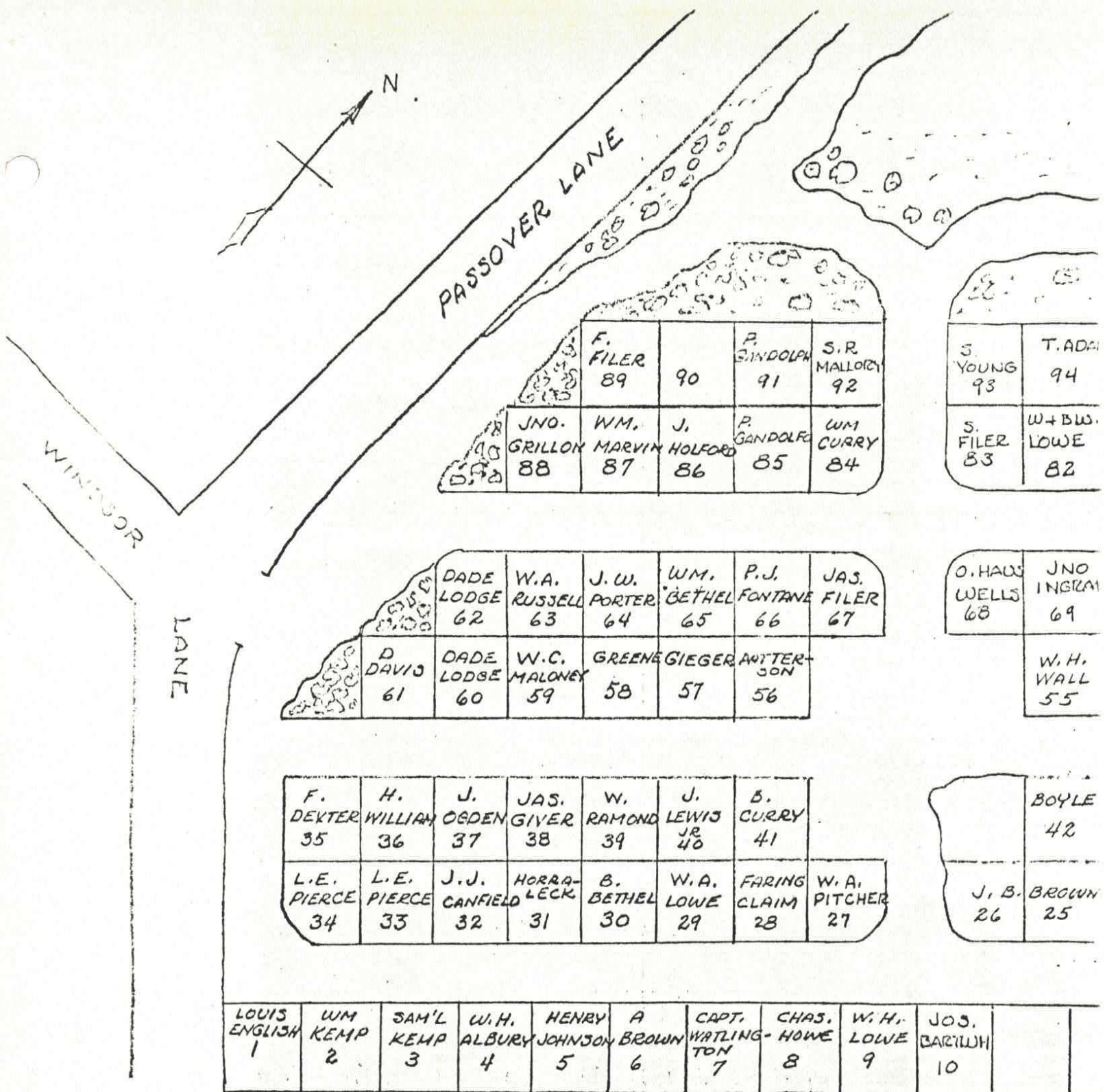


Fig. 4.

KEY WEST CEMETARY

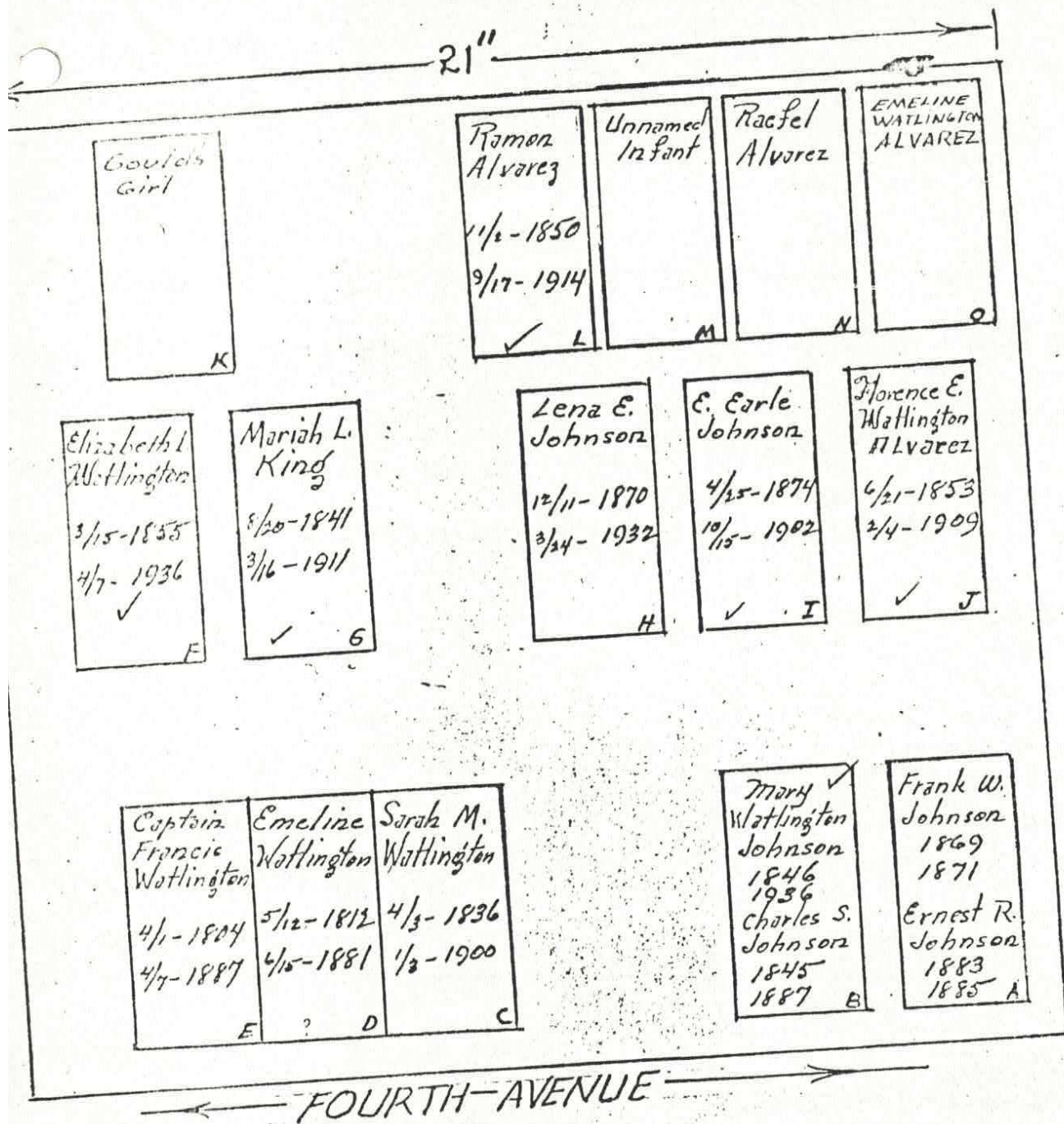
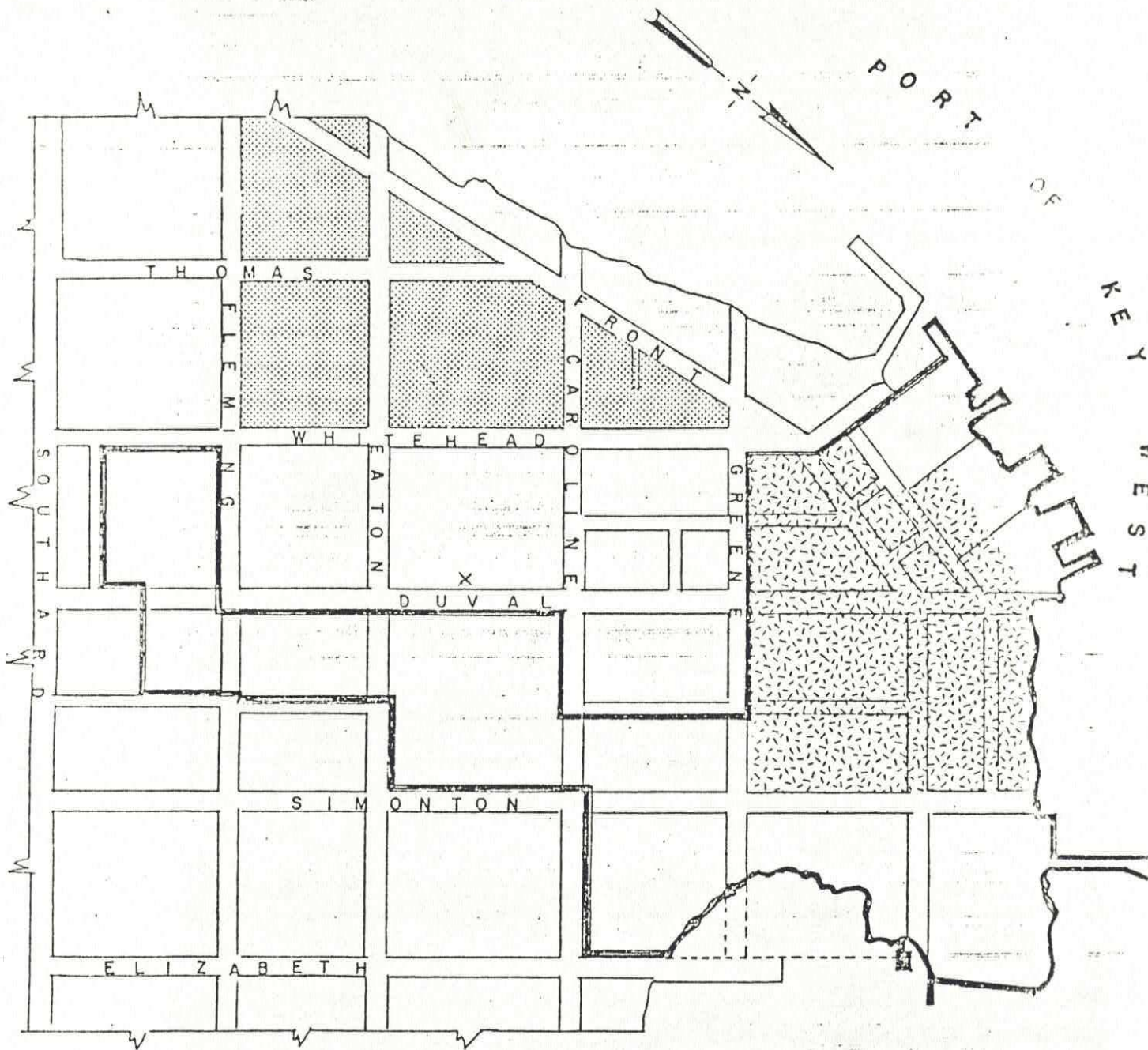


Fig. 5.

LOT #7
 TRACT #5



LEGEND



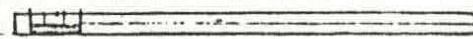
DESTROYED BY FIRE 1859



DESTROYED BY FIRE 1886



RAZED BY NAVY 1902



scale 1/4 in - 100 ft

Fig. 6.

Courtesy of Department of
Archives, History and Records
Management

Fig. 7.

& First, I order and give power to Benjamin Fymer to sell my house, or property in Church Street &c two hundred and twenty one for the purpose of paying all my just and Lawfull debts, the Deeds to be given by my Executors, and the Remainder to be put out for the use of my widow, hereafter mentioned, Secondly, I Will and bequeath to my beloved Wife Hannah Johnson the use and benefit of all my property during her natural Life, And after her decease, to be sold and divided in the following manner -
First. I Will or give to my Daughter Louisa Johnson A new hogua bed sted, bed and bedding, A Sofa, Cloaths, press, Barre, also silver ware table spoons and tea spoons, Soup spoon shooagar tongues, milk and sugar cup, over and above the equal part of the residue to be divided, which is to be given, ^{her} when she arrives to the age of eighteen years. I Also order my Executors to sell the farm on which I live, at such time when they can get as much in sal as I gave for said farm, lying in Westfield, southside, County of Richmond. But if they cannot obtain as much in sal, to remain during the natural life of my Widow Hannah Johnson; And after the death of my Widow, Hannah Johnson I order my Executors to ^{sell} the farm, and also, my house in New York, situate, Thames Street &c seven, And also all my moveable property, and distribution to be among my five children: equally, as Share and Share, About the names of my Children to whom I bequeath my property is as follows, John W Johnson, Charles Johnson, Emelie Johnson that were now Amelie Sawyer, ^{Emeline Hallington} and Louisa
A. S. D. B. H. A. S. L. L. H. V. Minnato Comstitute and ab

21st Thomas James - born 15th June 1804 -

Richard Muller born 11th Decr 1800

*

Ann Sarah Elizabeth Ollary

3rd March 1800

2 sons & 1 Daughter of Richard and

Ann Sarah Ollary baptised 21st July 1810

March

4th Henry Thomas son of William and

Mary Jane Jones - born 22nd January 1816 - baptised 4th March 1810

4th Joseph son of John & Sarah Bethel

John & Amelia
 of Boston

James Peck
 Senr. of New

Richard Gouws Bachelor & Amelia Evans, in
 the parish of Christ Church, the 22^d
 of the Providence were lawfully married
 according to the highest ceremonies
 of the Church of England the 22^d day of February
 1800 by me John Richards Pastor of the Church

his marriage
 was solemnized
 between us


Richard Capron

Amelia Evans

In the presence

of
 Wm. P. H. H. H. H.

BURIALS in the Parish of *St. George*
 in the *City of New Providence*

Name.	Abode.	When Buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
1832 <i>Hugh George</i> <i>Chalmers</i> <i>Slave</i> <i>Mate of Brig the Nassau</i> <i>Prince, Capt. Joseph</i> <i>No. 65 in Pottersfield</i>		<i>Decr 10th</i>		<i>Wm. H. H. H. H.</i>
<i>John Horace St</i> <i>Pay, son of Robt</i> <i>Halclague</i> <i>Slave</i> <i>from Bogota, on</i> <i>his way home, sent</i> <i>No. 66 in do</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>" 13th</i>		<i>Do</i>
<i>Migault, wife</i> <i>of Mr Longley</i> <i>Exp. native</i> <i>do</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>" 21th</i>		<i>Do</i>
<i>No. 67 in do</i> 1838 <i>Richard Cus-</i> <i>sim, Cooper</i>		<i>1838</i>		
 <i>No. 68 in do</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>Jul 27th</i>		<i>Do</i>

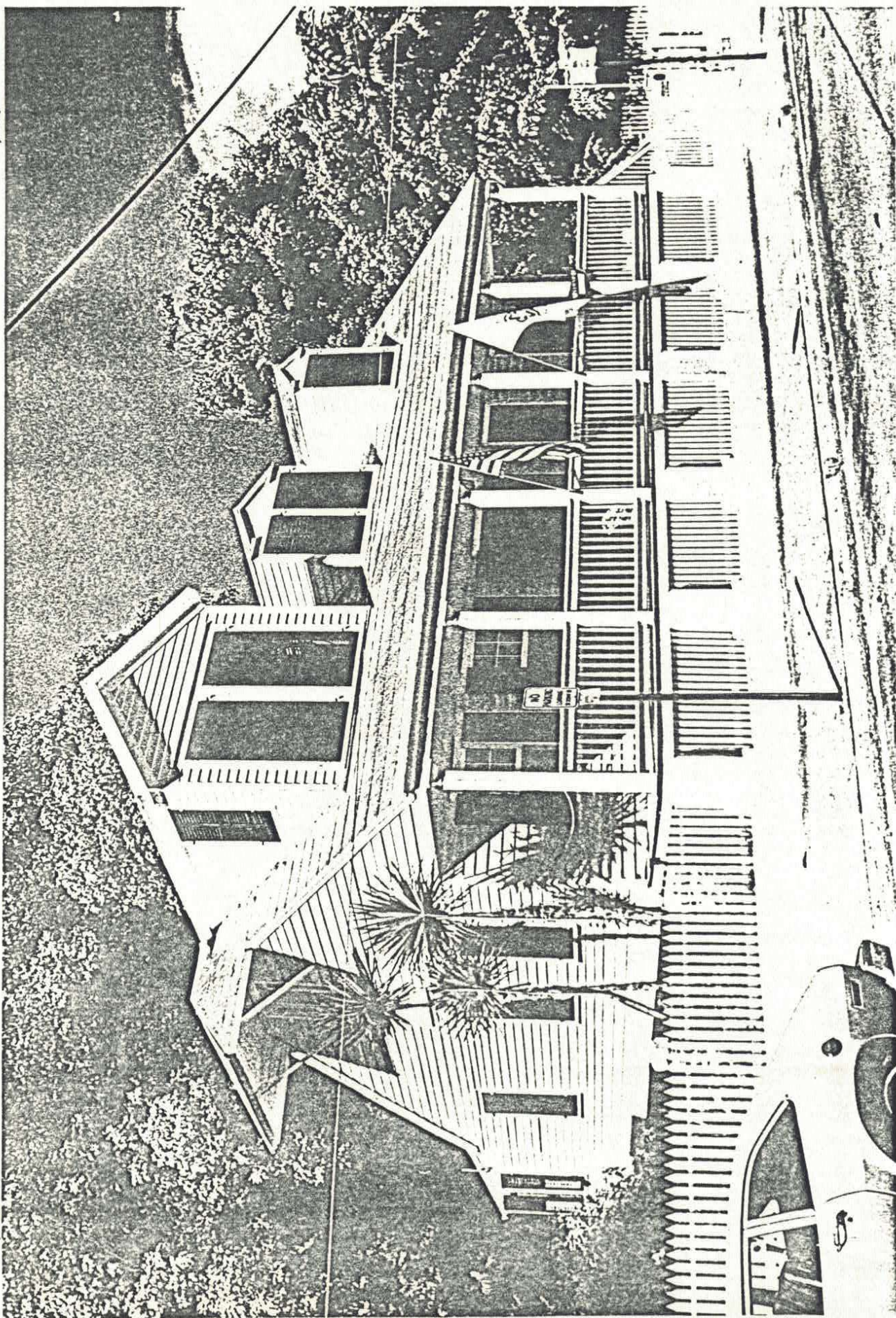


Fig. 11.

CAPTAIN FRANCIS BENJAMIN WATLINGTON

Born St. Croix, April 1, 1804

Died Key West, April 7, 1887

M.

Emeline Matilda Johnson

Born N.Y. City, May 12, 1812

Died Key West, June 15, 1881

CHILDREN

1.

Hannah Amelia

Born N.Y. City

Mar. 20, 1834

Died Newton, Mass.

Oct. 30, 1912

M.

Edward Cole Howe

Born Indian Key, Fl.

June 3, 1831

Died Key West

Mar. 10, 1880

2.

Sarah Maria

Born Key West

Apr. 30, 1836

Died Key West

Jan. 3, 1900

M.

Percy G. Wall

Tampa, Fla.

Died Gainsville

Feb. 19, 1895

3.

Emeline Frances

Born N.Y. City

Oct. 26, 1837

Died Key West

May 1, 1903

M.

Lt. Wm. Henry Ward

Born Syracuse

also M.

Joseph P. Roberts

Born Bahamas

Sept. 29, 1826

Died Key West

Apr. 30, 1874

4.

Maria Louisa Herder

(Lolla)

Born Key West

Aug. 20, 1841

Died Key West

Apr. 16, 1911

M.

Joseph C. King

Born Canada

Died Detroit

May 24, 1881

5.

Susan Quereau

Born Key West

Oct. 8, 1844

Died Key West

Aug. 17, 1850

(Yellow fever epidemic)

M.

Dr. Chas. Johnson

Born Nassau

Jan. 13, 1844

Died Key West

Dec. 13, 1887

(Yellow fever epidemic)

7.

Ellen Mallory

Born Key West

Feb. 4, 1850

Died Key West

Oct. 18, 1851

8.

Florence Earle

Born Key West

June 1, 1852

Died Key West

Feb. 4, 1909

m.

Ramon Alvarez

Born Cuba

Died Key West

Feb. 4, 1919

daughter

Sarah Watlington

Born Key West, Dec. 22, 1882

Died Key West, Aug. 22, 1953

m.

Ross C. Sawyer

Born Key West, Aug. 26, 1888

Died Key West, Dec. 13, 1957

daughter

*Florence E. Sawyer

Ronald A. Sawyer

daughter

*Elizabeth W. Matthews

Earl W. Matthews

Camille A. Matthews

son

Edwin Earle Johnson

Born Key West

Apr. 25, 1874

Died Key West

Oct. 15, 1902

M.

Nellie Blanch Saunder

Born Key West

Jan. 1, 1876

Died Newton, Mass.

Dec. 8, 1928

son

Earle Saunders

Johnson

Born Key West

Aug. 21, 1902

Died Key West

May 2, 1972

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