

Memorandum

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of STATE

TO: Wright Langley, Director, Historic Key West Preservation Board

FROM: Lee H. Warner, Historic Preservation Boards Coordinator

DATE: February 11, 1981

SUBJECT: Oldest House Report by Donald Crusoe

This arrived yesterday. Please review it and let me have your response so we know what to do. I have asked Ross to have one of the archaeologists review it at the same time.

LHW:vw

Feb. 4, 1981
2366 Red Barn Rd
Marietta, Ga 30064

The Honorable Secretary Firestone
Secretary of State
The Capitol
Tallahassee, Fl. 32301

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Dear Secretary Firestone:

Enclosed is a revised copy of my report On the Oldest House in Key West. The report has been revised in accordance with recommendations from Mr Tesar of the Historic Preservation section of your Department. I am in receipt of Mr Langley's comments and have attempted to comply with them as best as I am able to at this distance and given the amount of time which has passed. Some of Mr. Langley's comments cannot be complied with since they are based upon studies which were conducted since my work. I am enclosing an invoice for the amount suggested by your office. You will note that Appendix I includes pages data from pages 10-14 of the original report and that Appendix A includes pages 19-26 from the original report--none of these pages were recommended to have changes made on them.

I thank you for your cooperation on this matter and hope to receive final payment soon.

Sincerely,


Donald L. Crusoe, PhD

FINAL INVOICE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: OLDEST HOUSE, KEY WEST, FLORIDA

REPORT PREPARATION COSTS

PERSONAL SERVICES

\$749.00

TOTAL INVOICE

\$749.00


Submitted by: DONALD L. CRUSOE, Ph.D

322 Duval Street: Excavations at the Oldest House

ABSTRACT

Excavations were undertaken at the site of the Oldest House in Key West, Florida (8 Mo 1143). These excavations revealed the presence of a carriage house. They also documented the fact that most of the centrally located area in the back yard of the structure contains no historically significant remains.

INTRODUCTION

In 1822, less than a decade before the construction of the Oldest House, John Simonton and his partners came to the island of Key West to establish a colony. In that same year, the United States laid illegitimate claim to the islands of the Florida Keys by having Lt. Perry raise the flag of the United States over the island of Key West.

Less than a decade after the construction of the Oldest House in Key West the island boasted a population of about 300 people. In 1828 Richard Cussons, a gentleman from Nassau, became the owner of the Oldest House. It is still unclear whether Cussons actually built the house himself or, whether he purchased it from still an earlier owner. Mr. Cussons was however, quite capable of constructing the Oldest House, since he was a carpenter and a joiner by

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trade.

To stand in front and view the house today, one notices a porch which runs the entire front of the structure and also three gables protruding from the roof. None of these three gables are the same size. The one on the south side of the house is visibly larger than the more western one--the tiniest of the three. The sides of the house are straight, except on the west; and, the walls are only interrupted by an occasional window. The rear of the house has a small centrally located porch with two rooms which accompany the porch to its width. The roof of the house is high pitched and is quite typical of Bahamian structures of the time period--the only unusual items are the gables.

The house is situated upon what appears to be limestone pillars. It stands at least three feet above the ground in most places. The land in the area is not level and it is lowest in front along Duval Street. Beneath the house is the rain water cistern. The wood used in constructing the house appears to be cypress, but no tests were made to verify this observation.

After the Cussons ownership, the house passed through four hands prior to its acquisition by the State of Florida. Currently, the management of the house and of the general property is the direct responsibility of the Key West

Historical Preservation Board.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

The archaeological problems associated with standing structures becomes more difficult than those relating to ruins. With the Oldest House these problems were compounded by the general size of the area in the back yard which had no structures upon it.

Older maps, in possession of the Key West Historical Preservation Board indicate that there were a number of structures located near the edges of the property. However, it has not been determined whether these maps indicate actual structures, or whether they indicate plans for proposed construction. Therefore, what was known of the Oldest House, and that which was accepted at the outset of the excavation was the following: (1) the house was built in a Bahamian traditional fashion, except for the gables; (2) There may have been many structures; (3) It is an authentic house that survived the great fire of 1886 (NOTE: While some have questioned this, it is now considered to be a fact); and (4) The variety of artifacts which would be recovered from any excavations of this house and environs would reflect the marine salvage economy existing in Key West at the time that the house was occupied.

Archaeological field investigations were begun at the Oldest House in February of 1973. The objectives of the

excavations were as follows. First, to determine the validity to the early plots depicting the Oldest House. Second, to note of the relative significance of the various land sectors in the back yard of the Oldest House. Finally, to encounter through archaeological test excavations the remains of any structure or structures located in the yard so that the archaeological value of these remains could be identified and examined in detail during any necessary salvage excavations at a later date. It perhaps need not be stressed that these excavations are only preliminary in nature and that the interpretation of data recovered during six days of fieldwork are limited at best. Much more lengthy and detailed work would be necessary to provide a more complete interpretation of the features associated with the area being studied.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The excavation methodology was as follows. First, the entire area was divided into five foot squares by using a Brunton compass and a chain. A permanent datum point was established in the northern quadrant of the resulting grid. This datum point is a zinc metal rod driven into the ground.

It should be noted that this grid ran diagonally across the back yard, rather than parallel to the property lines.

Seven test units were excavated. Six of these units were 5' by 5', while the seventh was a 3' by 9' test trench. Five of the seven units were placed in the 20 west grid line (see map 1). The location of the seven units was determined on the basis of exposed ground area and the project's focus on determining the presence or absence of significant archaeological features within the central area of the yard where development of a scenic garden walkway complex is planned.

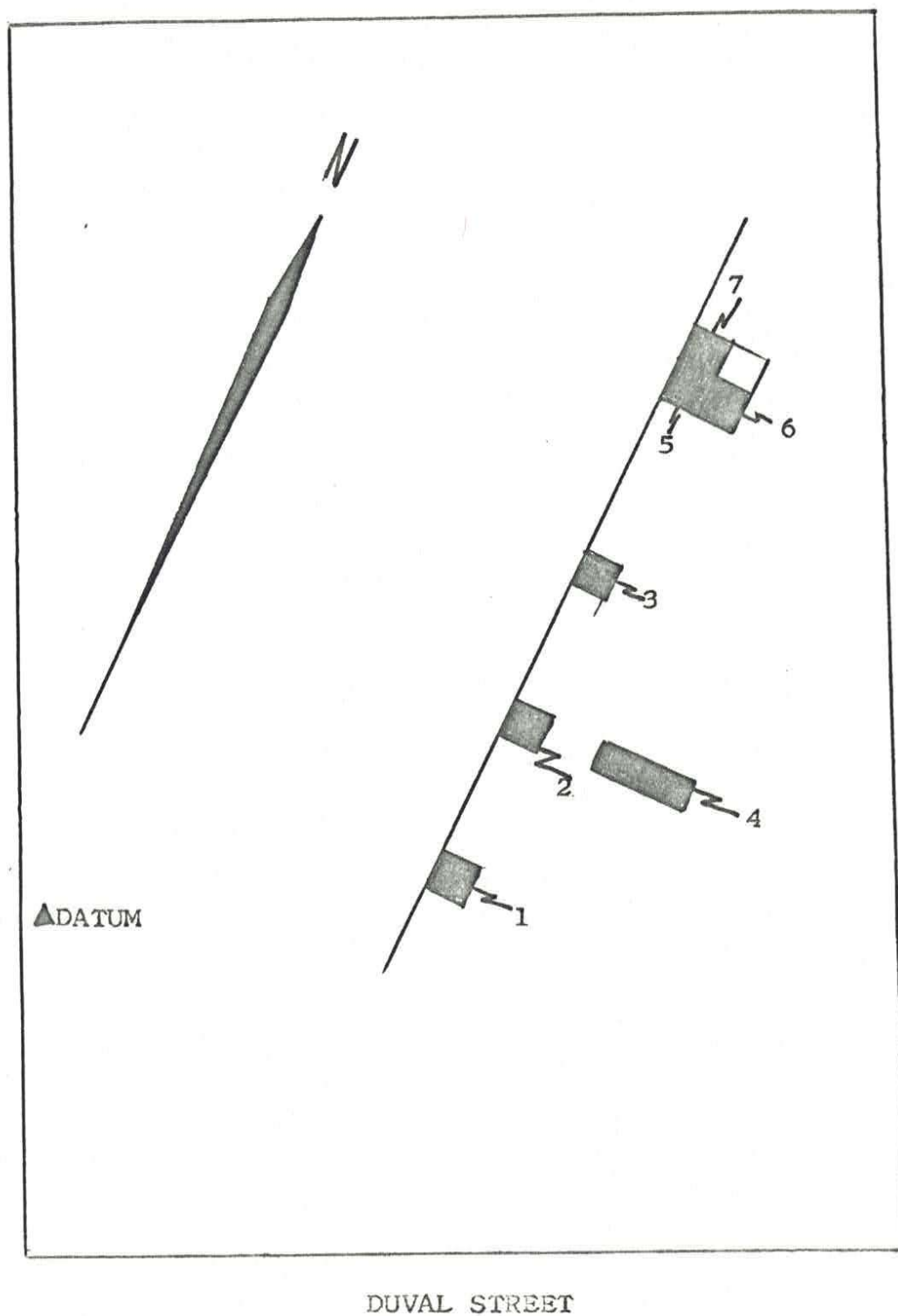
Upon completion of the field excavation phase of the project, recovered artifacts were prepared for analysis. While ceramic artifacts were completely cataloged, time constraints prohibited a similar treatment of the remaining artifact categories. These were simply inventoried and bagged as study collections without detailed formal treatment.

A description of the excavation of each test unit is contained in Appendix I. Their location on map 1. The contents of these units is contained in Appendix II.

SUMMARY

The heavy concentration of artifacts was found in test units 5 through 7. Artifacts reflected a carriage house. It is recommended that this area be protected. However the area external to these units appears to be clear of significant cultural deposits.

MAP 1.
OLDEST HOUSE, KEY WEST, FLORIDA
MAP OF FEBUARY, 1978 E CAVATIONS



APPENDIX I

APPENDIX II