

HISTORY OF THE OLDEST HOUSE

IN 1823, A CAPTAIN COUSSENS HAD SIX HOUSES, ALL ALIKE, CONSTRUCTED IN NEW ENGLAND AND BROUGHT TO KEY WEST ON NAVAL SHIPS. ASSEMBLED AT THE FOOT OF WHITEHEAD STREET, APPROXIMATELY FIVE BLOCKS AWAY, THESE SIX HOUSES SERVED TO HOUSE THE FIRST NAVY PERSONNEL BROUGHT TO KEY WEST AT THAT TIME TO DRIVE THE PIRATES OUT OF THE CARIBBEAN.

CAPTAIN AND MRS. FRANCIS BENJAMIN WATLINGTON CAME TO KEY WEST IN 1829, AND RETURNED SEVERAL YEARS AFTER THE PIRATES HAD DEPARTED THE AREA. CAPTAIN WATLINGTON PURCHASED ONE OF THE SIX, AND MOVED IT TO ITS PRESENT LOCATION USING MULE POWER AND WINDLASS. DURING THE MOVE, A LITTLE MORE THAN A COW PATH AT THAT TIME, A STONE WAS PLACED ON THE HIGH STONE PILLAR SO THAT IT WOULD NOT BE WASHED AWAY BY STORMS.

THE OTHER FIVE DUPLICATE HOUSES WERE DESTROYED EITHER BY STORM OR BY FIRE, AND THIS HOUSE IS NOW THE OLDEST HOUSE IN KEY WEST. IT REMAINS IN THE WATLINGTON FAMILY, AND WAS PASSED TO ITS DESCENDANTS, UNTIL 1973, WHEN IT WAS PURCHASED THROUGH AN ESTATE AND RESTORED TO AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO ITS ORIGINAL CONDITION.