

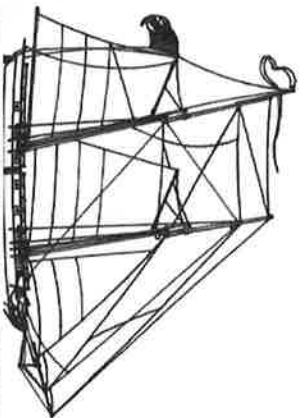
# Florida Keys

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### FORT FORGOTTEN:

## Vanishing Key West History !

By Tom Perera

Valentine's day of 2008 was a sad day in the history of Fort Zachary Taylor in Key West. On that day, thousands of Civil War artifacts, guns and models were removed from the fort and trucked to Tallahassee because the fort had disintegrated so badly that it was not deemed safe to leave them in the fort.

Fort Taylor was excavated in the 1960s by Howard England who found that it contained the greatest collection of Civil War artifacts in America. Mr. England began conserving and protecting these artifacts using his own money but he died early and all of the artifacts were allowed to rust in damp and hidden rooms in the fort where they were never seen by the public.

Major allocations of money were repeatedly requested to preserve and repair the fort but they were all turned down and recent hurricane damage made continued storage of the artifacts unwise. The fort has been widely known as "Fort Forgotten" because it has received so little funding over the years. In fact, the Fort Taylor State Historic Park has received so little funding that volunteers do most of the



*A truck leaves Fort Taylor carrying artifacts past a sign that forbids the removal of artifacts from the fort. Photo credit: the Author.*

maintenance work.

I was lucky enough to notice the removal of the artifacts on my daily jogs through the fort and I was able to photograph all of the thousands of items before and during their loading onto the big flatbed trucks. These photographs are the first that have ever been seen by the public. I think it is important to carefully track these artifacts so that their return to the fort can be ensured

after the fort is improved enough to hold them.

Unfortunately although the funds to conserve the artifacts have been allocated, the funds to return them to Key West have not! Current Florida Department of Parks and Recreation plans are to require that a formal request be submitted in order for each item to be returned and it is hoped that this will be done

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