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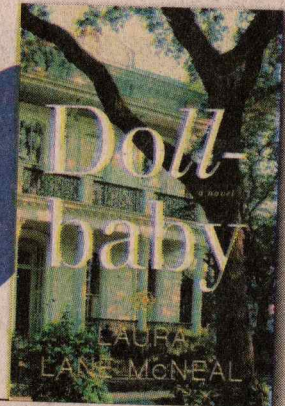
Press

• Living • Learning  
• Playing • Exploring

# pursuits

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A steel  
magnolia  
grows up  
2B

1B



## Fair folk

Celtic festival seeks  
a wee bit of help. 3B

## Fins win

Marathon boys blank  
Palm Glades. 9B



# 50 years

## A home for native beauty





# 50 years

## A home for native beauty



### Garden center reaches milestone

BY LONELL RICE

Garden Club of the Upper Keys

In November 2014, Garden Club of the Upper Keys members and invited guests will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Francis Tracy Garden Center. The center is the hub of club activities and a proclamation by Monroe County Mayor Sylvia Murphy recognizing its place in Upper Keys history will be presented to the club.

The history of the Francis Tracy Garden Center started well before its construction. It all began in June 1952 when 10 ladies met at the home of Mrs. Everett Perkins and formed a club "of civic and cultural advantage to native plant growth in the Keys" named the Key Largo Garden Club. Original

you'll see, have been long lasting.

By 1962, the Upper Keys Garden Club had grown to 60 members and needed a larger meeting space. The decision was made to build a club house. In 1963, Dr. Fred Bond and wife Margaret offered an acre parcel of property on State Road No. 5 (Overseas Highway), a portion of Tract C in Sunset Gardens, to be used for the new building. The Bonds stipulated that it be named the Francis Tracy Garden Center to honor the charter member for her many contributions to the club, her conservation leadership and her dedication as the county's nurse. She was officially proclaimed "Angel of the Keys" by the Florida Keys Clinic in 1957 and by settlers whose ailments, injuries and heartaches she had ministered to for 30 years, frequently using native



The Francis Tracy Garden Center, above, has been the hub of Garden Club of the Upper Keys activities for 50 years. Above, the center as it appears today. Left and below, groundbreaking and the center of yesteryear.

THOMAS C. YAROCH/Free Press and contributed





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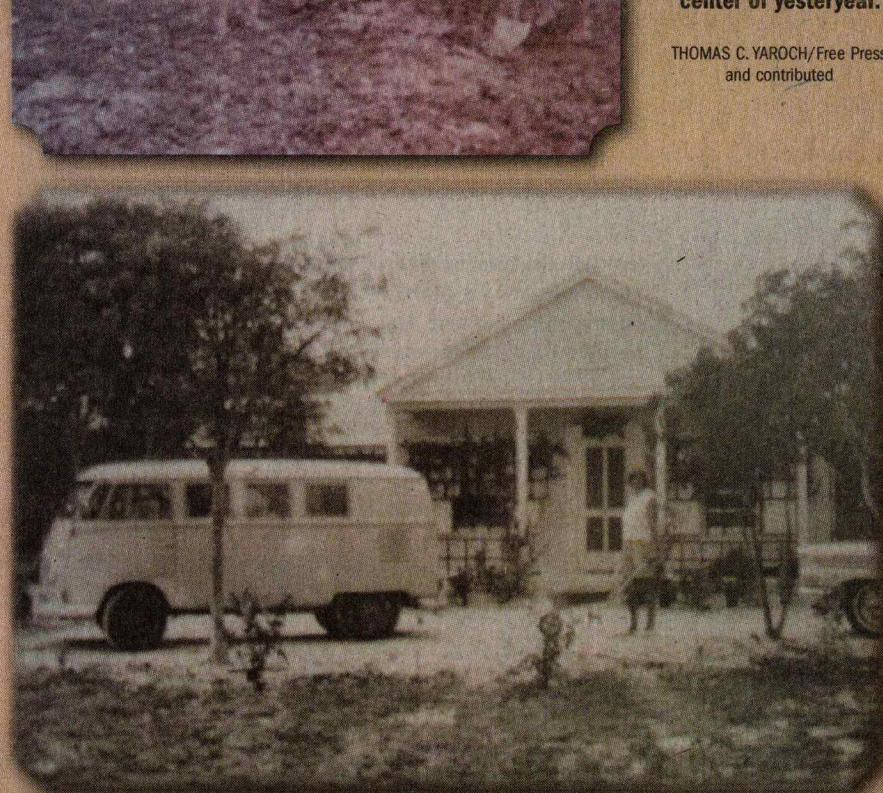
The history of the Francis Tracy Garden Center started well before its construction. It all began in June 1952 when 10 ladies met at the home of Mrs. Everett Perkins and formed a club "of civic and cultural advantage to native plant growth in the Keys" named the Key Largo Garden Club. Original membership was limited to 20 because meetings were held in private homes. By 1954, the club had grown so large that it split into two — the original one to serve the Key Largo area and the new Upper Keys Garden Club to serve the Islamorada area. There were 15 charter members of this new club, including Francis Tracy and Margaret Bond, whose contributions to the club, as

offered an acre parcel of property on State Road No. 5 (Overseas Highway), a portion of Tract C in Sunset Gardens, to be used for the new building. The Bonds stipulated that it be named the Francis Tracy Garden Center to honor the charter member for her many contributions to the club, her conservation leadership and her dedication as the county's nurse. She was officially proclaimed "Angel of the Keys" by the Florida Keys Clinic in 1957 and by settlers whose ailments, injuries and heartaches she had ministered to for 30 years, frequently using native plants. Mildred "Millie" Gasser was the president at that time and the first of 30 presidents who have presided over the club and the clubhouse since its inception, maintaining and keeping it for future generations of members, residents and visitors.

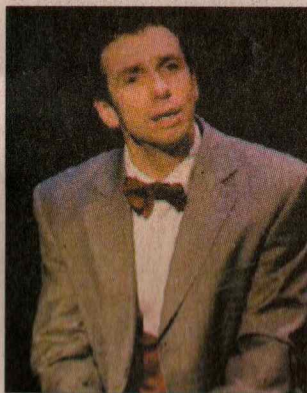
Building a clubhouse was a major

See **GARDEN**, page 4B

Center of yesterday.  
THOMAS C. YAROSH/Free Press  
and contributed



## A tribute to Broadway's most important founder



**BY JOSH GORE**  
Free Press Staff

**KEY LARGO** — Two years after his last performing visit to the Florida Keys, showman Jon Peterson returns this week to give his regards to legendary American entertainer and songwriter George M. Cohan.

Peterson will star in a one-man musical honoring the life and music of

the late song-and-dance man. "George M. Cohan Tonight!" was written by Chip Deffaa and premiered Off-Broadway with Peterson as the star in 2006.

The two-weekend performance will be presented by The Key Players community theater group.

"I'm ready for the sunshine in Key Largo," Peterson told the Free Press last week.

The performer plans to enjoy some beach time and visit Key West between shows. Peterson said he looks forward to reconnecting with the Upper Keys audience.

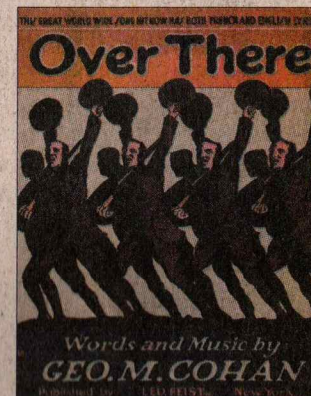
"They are really sweet and enjoy music from the good golden era," he said.

Peterson has performed the Cohan tribute show sporadically during the last two years from Coral Springs to New Orleans to

Rochester, N.Y.

"Someone saw it and said I should pick it back up," Peterson said. "[Cohan] kind of invented the American musical as we know it."

In addition to writing, producing or performing in more than three dozen Broadway musicals during the early 20th century, Cohan is credited with



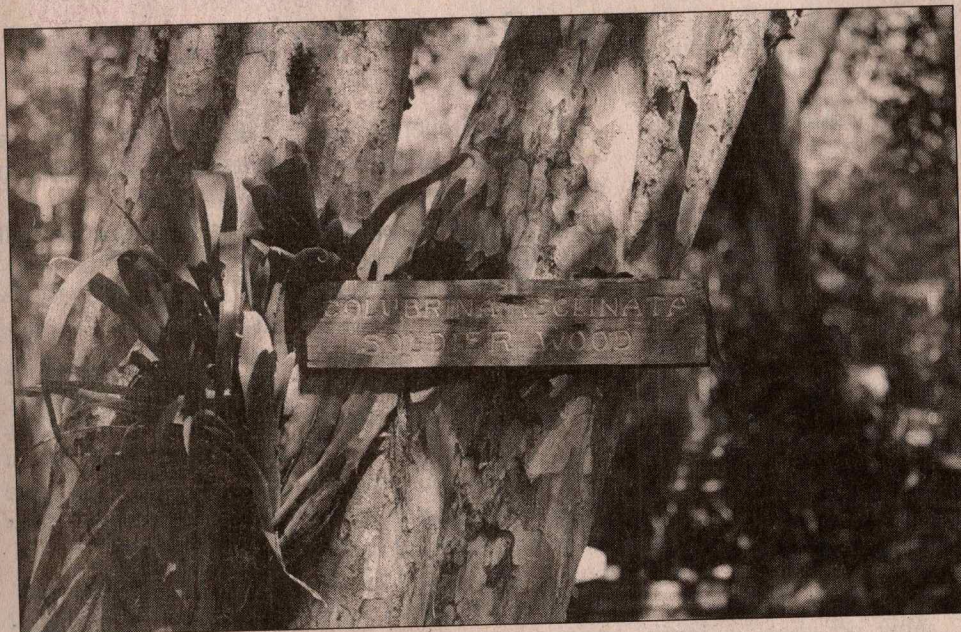
Contributed photo  
Cohan penned about 300 songs, including 'Over There.'

See **COHAN**, page 6B





## UPPER KEYS



THOMAS C. YAROCK/Free Press

Left, more than 50 species of plants and trees, including this soldier wood, are identified at the Francis Tracy Garden Center by their botanical and common name. Above, in 2010, the center was declared a Community Peace Park by Keys for Peace.

## Garden

Continued from page 1B

undertaking for the small, nonprofit organization. Only those involved know how many hours and how much work went into all the money-raising bake sales, rummage sales and flower shows needed to start the building. Dr. Bond arranged for financing of the building and the insurance. An \$8,000 mortgage was secured from the Bank of Florida in

Company. Many of them donated supplies and labor. The club's board of directors dug the first shovels of dirt during a ground-breaking ceremony in early 1964. Typical of older Keys' architecture, the clubhouse design was Bahamian cottage, built among the now towering wild yamarind, mahogany and gumbo limbo trees on the property.

The first meeting in the new clubhouse was held September 1964, but the official dedication and

After three years of extensive and creative money-raising efforts, the club had raised \$8,000 to pay off the debt and receive an official "satisfaction of mortgage." In December 1967, for her 90th birthday, Francis Tracy lit the flame to burn the mortgage papers for the building named in her honor. Fund raising projects continued for several years thereafter for furnishings and developing the grounds.

In her 1966 "History of the Upper Keys Garden

flower shows, art shows, quilt shows and design classes were held, often including other clubs in the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. In 1968, the property was designated a Wild Bird Sanctuary. To this day the club continues to support the Florida Keys Wild Bird Center with routine donations. In 2010, the gardens were declared a Community Peace Park by Keys for Peace, providing space for people to meditate and reflect on nature. A peace bell — a

Rodney Albury from the 1874 wreck of the Mohawk on a reef off Tavernier, was placed in the southeast side wall during construction. It contained, among other documents, the names of all the members who had helped build the clubhouse. This time capsule would later be opened, reviewed, added to and resealed in 2007 with the assistance of local historian Jerry Wilkinson.

The gardens at the center have evolved over the years into a place of beauty under the supervision of

the palm circle, with spindle, bottle and buccaneer palms. There's a succulent garden where full sun is available and another garden that butterflies can enjoy. Among the trees are benches to sit and enjoy the view. And there are native trees and bromeliads everywhere, providing shade and a truly tropical feel to the property.

Maintenance costs have risen as the building has aged. There have been new roofs, paneling, painting inside and out, carpeting, updated electrical system,



# Garden

Continued from page 1B

undertaking for the small, nonprofit organization. Only those involved know how many hours and how much work went into all the money-raising bake sales, rummage sales and flower shows needed to start the building. Dr. Bond arranged for financing of the building and the insurance. An \$8,000 mortgage was secured from the Bank of Florida in Homestead for the balance to complete the financing.

Islamorada's George Coffin donated plans for the building, a one story CBS club house with a screened porch. General contractor D.L. Skidmore, also of Islamorada, was the builder and subcontractors included, among others, Dixie Aluminum Products, Renuart-Bailey-Cheely Labor Company and Naranja Rock

Company. Many of them donated supplies and labor. The club's board of directors dug the first shovels of dirt during a ground-breaking ceremony in early 1964. Typical of older Keys' architecture, the clubhouse design was Bahamian cottage, built among the now towering wild yamarind, mahogany and gumbo limbo trees on the property.

The first meeting in the new clubhouse was held September 1964, but the official dedication and public opening wasn't until November 1964. More than 200 members and friends were present to celebrate the event. Several donations of furnishings and equipment were received, including tables from Arthur Miller in memory of wife Alma, one of the original members. Each club member had been asked to purchase one chair for \$3.75, and 100 were purchased.

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In her 1966 "History of the Upper Keys Garden Club," Tracy had said, "A garden club is not a money making organization primarily, but building a club house seemed a worthwhile cause for the Keys as well as the club."

Keeping with that thought, the Upper Keys Garden Club (now Garden Club of the Upper Keys) continued to improve and expand the uses of the property. The club's archives show numerous

flower shows, art shows, quilt shows and design classes were held, often including other clubs in the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs. In 1968, the property was designated a Wild Bird Sanctuary. To this day the club continues to support the Florida Keys Wild Bird Center with routine donations. In 2010, the gardens were declared a Community Peace Park by Keys for Peace, providing space for people to meditate and reflect on nature. A peace bell — a painted, modified scuba tank — hangs in the gardens.

The Francis Tracy Garden Center today looks much as it did in 1964 as there have been no additions or major renovations. It started as a yellow building with white shutters and a white front door; it's now yellow with green shutters and fuchsia front door. A granite cornerstone, salvaged by

Rodney Albury from the 1874 wreck of the Mohawk on a reef off Tavernier, was placed in the southeast side wall during construction. It contained, among other documents, the names of all the members who had help build the clubhouse. This time capsule would later be opened, reviewed, added to and resealed in 2007 with the assistance of local historian Jerry Wilkinson.

The gardens at the center have evolved over the years into a place of beauty under the supervision of numerous dedicated club members. Some of the native trees planted by the charter members now tower over the property. The most recent planting renovations were started in 2013 with the implementation of an updated property master plan. There are more than 50 species of plants and trees planted on the grounds, each identified with both a botanical and common name as well as country of origin.

Pathways lead visitors into the different areas and to the front door, which originally was flanked by hibiscus-filled trellises. There's

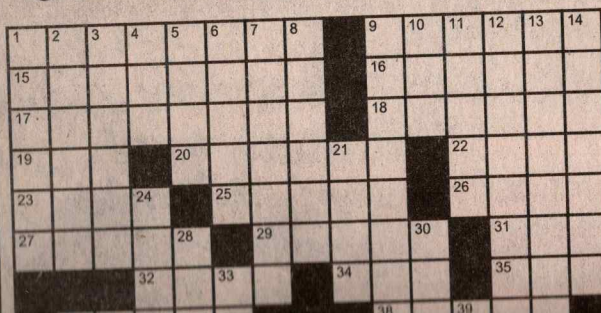
the palm circle, with spindle, bottle and buccaneer palms. There's a succulent garden where full sun is available and another garden that butterflies can enjoy. Among the trees are benches to sit and enjoy the view. And there are native trees and bromeliads everywhere, providing shade and a truly tropical feel to the property.

Maintenance costs have risen as the building has aged. There have been new roofs, paneling, painting inside and out, carpeting, updated electrical system, flooring and appliances to name a few. The Francis Tracy Garden Center has been and is currently used by several other organizations who appreciate the beauty of the property and whose donations help offset maintenance costs. The Garden Club of the Upper Keys also hosts a popular Garden Walk every year, with part of the proceeds used to maintain the center as a part of Upper Keys' history.

The Garden Club of the Upper Keys is proud to maintain its historical clubhouse and gardens, and it should be.

## KEY

# crossword



## KEY

# horoscopes

### SCORPIO - Oct 24/Nov 22

You're no scrooge, Scorpio, but you know how to save. A friend could use some help in that area. Show them the ropes. A text clues you in to a situation.

### SAGITTARIUS - Nov 23/Dec 21

Silliness is encouraged this

### CANCER - Jun 22/Jul 22

Cool, calm Cancer. You're good in a crisis, and that will come in handy this week. A friend pushes the envelope one too many times. Be there for them.

### LEO - Jul 23/Aug 23



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