

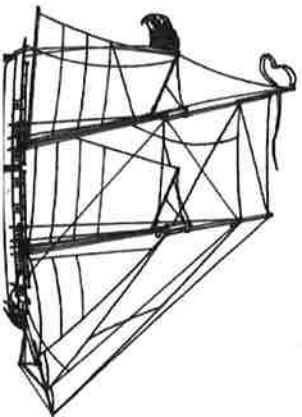
# Florida Keys

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## Labor Day: Night Of Harrow

Mozelle Williams' Handwritten Account of the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane

Commentary and Transcription

By Thomas Neil Knowles

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On the evening of September 2, 1935, the first Category V hurricane to make landfall in the United States cut a swath of death and destruction across the Florida Keys. The center crossed the Florida East Coast Railway track at Craig with maximum winds estimated by the Weather Bureau at over 200 mph. According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the water surged across the low-lying islands from Long Key to the south end of Key Largo reaching a maximum height of 18 feet above mean sea level. On Upper Matecumbe Key where the most powerful part of the storm came ashore, two families had taken shelter inside a heavily braced storm house. When that began to come apart, the four adults and five children tried to jam themselves into an automobile wedged between two coconut trees. For Mozelle Law Williams, her brother, their spouses, and their children, it truly was a night of torment.

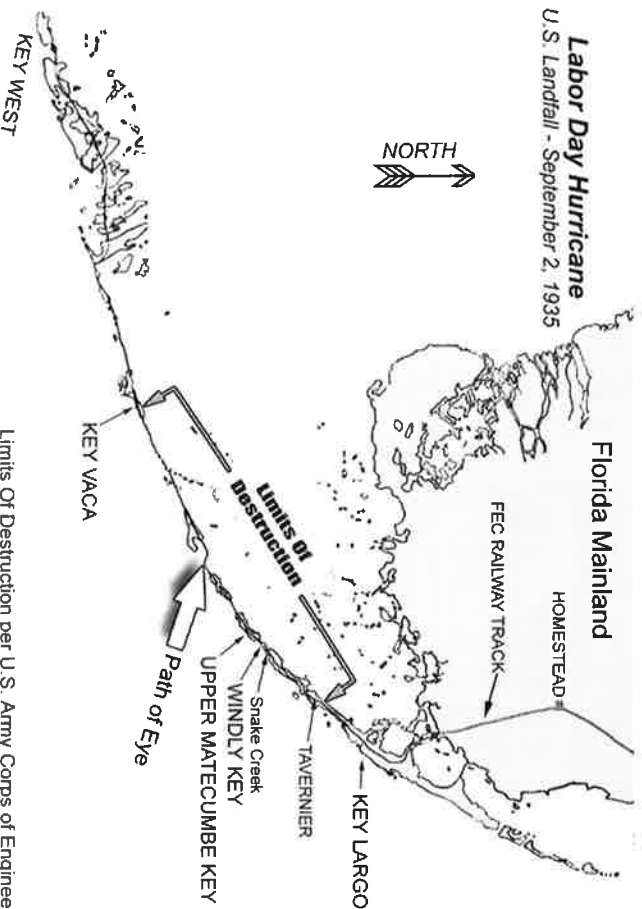
Mozelle and Edwin Morris Williams had been married for 10 years and had three children: two

*The hurricane originated east of the Bahamas and had been tracked for several days by the Weather Bureau's hurricane center in Jacksonville, Florida. A compact weather system that was difficult to precisely locate with the technology available in 1935, the eye of the hurricane had been projected to pass south of Key West, but instead passed over Craig near the middle of the Florida Keys. Photo credit: the Author*

girls (9 & 8 years old) and a boy (18 months). They had recently moved into a house that Eddie had built on the railroad fill at Whale Harbor between Upper Matecumbe Key and Windley Key.

Eddie & Mozelle struggled to make ends meet, as did many people living on the Keys during the Great Depression. Born in Key West and

raised in the Keys, Eddie had a boat that he used for commercial fishing and to take tourists charter fishing. In addition to carpentry skills, he had a good mind for mechanical things and worked on cars and engines. Mozelle was an excellent cook and during the winter season



Limits Of Destruction per U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
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(Continued on page10)