

FOR RAILROAD ENGINEERS - This old hotel still standing on Big Pine Key was built about 1905 by Copeland Johnson to give lodging and meals to construction bosses working on the Bahia Honda bridge for the Overseas Railroad. All lumber for it was sawed from Big Pine trees. The property is owned by the Hilario Ramos family of Key West and Willy Adams is the caretaker. - Photo by Pat Parks.

Old Key West hotel

Although the Baker house, which was burned down recently on Big Pine Key, was the oldest house on that island, there is a building which is still standing that is probably older. It is on the property at the end of Old County Road fronting Bogie Channel owned by the Hilario Ramos family of Key West.

Charlie Ramos called me about this and I talked to both him and his father. Mr. Ramos purchased the property in the 1920's from Copeland Johnson who built it as a hotel. Those were the days Key Westers rode the train to Big Pine for outings and the Ramos family fell in love with the Key.

Quite a few other prominent Key Westers did also. Along that same strip of waterfront is the Carbonell property, the Strunk property, and a little house once owned by the late Judge Eva Warner Gibson.

I talked to Dr. Carbonell Saturday on Big Pine and he had a gleam of nostalgia in his eye as he talked of the "old days."

"We could go over to Bahia Honda bridge and get a sackfull of lobster from one spot," he said. "There were plenty of conchs in

more than we could use. We native Conchs practiced conservation even then when everything was plentiful."

This is usually true. The American Indians were great conservationists because they knew their livelihood depended on food from land and sea. And so did the first Keys settlers.

But growth in natural resources can never keep up with growth in population. As more and more people come to the Keys there will inevitably be fewer and fewer conch...until perhaps that final day when this beautiful shell will only be a symbol on the Key West flag.

Dr. Carbonell warned me that Willy Adams and his wife, caretakers for the Ramos property, had two big black dogs. I drove in cautiously and got a menacing welcome from one called "Blackie." But Willy soon came out to keep the dog under control.

I was also glad he had his meanest rooster confined in, of all places, the empty space under the hood of a defunct car. Willy explained the rooster jumps on his back and spurs him every chance it gets. But when I suggested it might be better off in

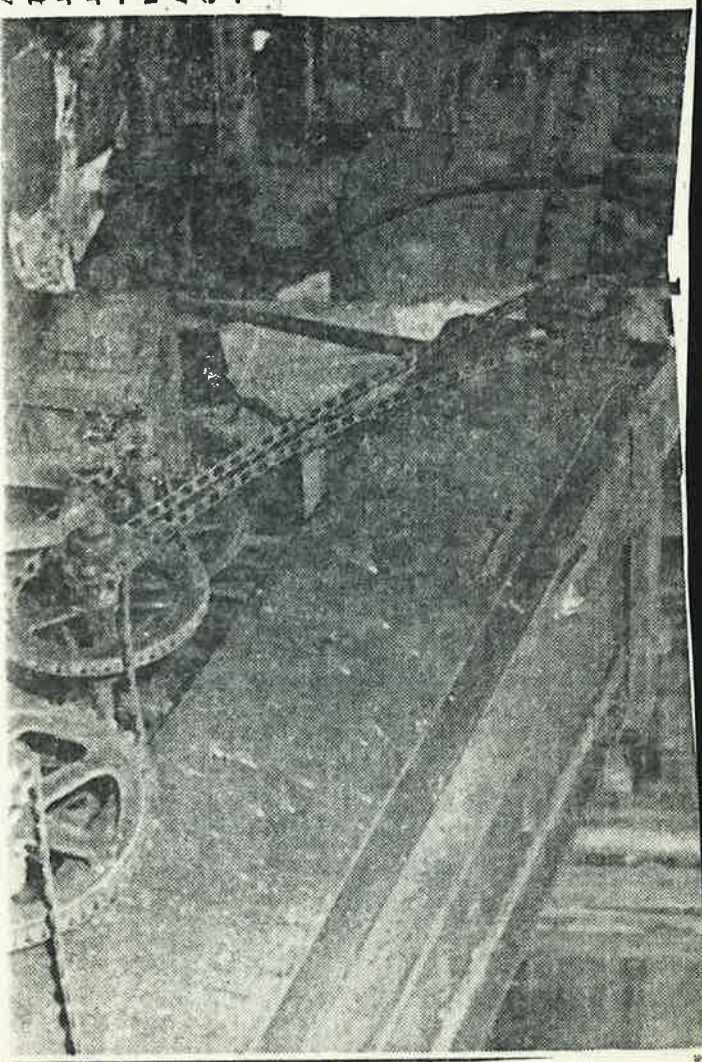
a pot instead of under a hood, soft-hearted Willy explained he had raised it from a chick and couldn't bear to kill it. Then he tried to give that rascally rooster to me!

Willy took me through the old hotel, a treacherous trip since the floor is pitfall rotten in many places. The building is not long for this life. I'm afraid. Willy told me that Johnson had the hotel built back around 1905 to house the "big shots" in construction of the Overseas Railroad who were then grappling with problems of erecting Bahia Honda bridge.

The building used to be about a third longer, he said, but the hurricane of 1909 tore part of it away. It is now about 75 feet long and contains the remnants of four or five sleeping rooms, kitchen, bath, and a long narrow room where the mess tables were set for the railroad workers. The smallest sleeping rooms once contained tiers of bunk beds, Willy said.

Interesting historically is the fact that all wood used in its construction came from Big Pine. According to Willy, Williams Henry Sanda and his son, Harold, operated a sawmill nearby where local trees were ripped and finished into lumber

**MECHANICAL CON-
VEYORS** like this one
were used to load key
limes grown at plantation
settlements such as Plant-
er onto railroad cars for
export. The conveyor
sheds were built adjacent
to the railroad for easy



Copyright 1912 by Harris

Florida East Coast Railway,
Key West Extension,
looking through
Bahia Honda Bridge, Florida.



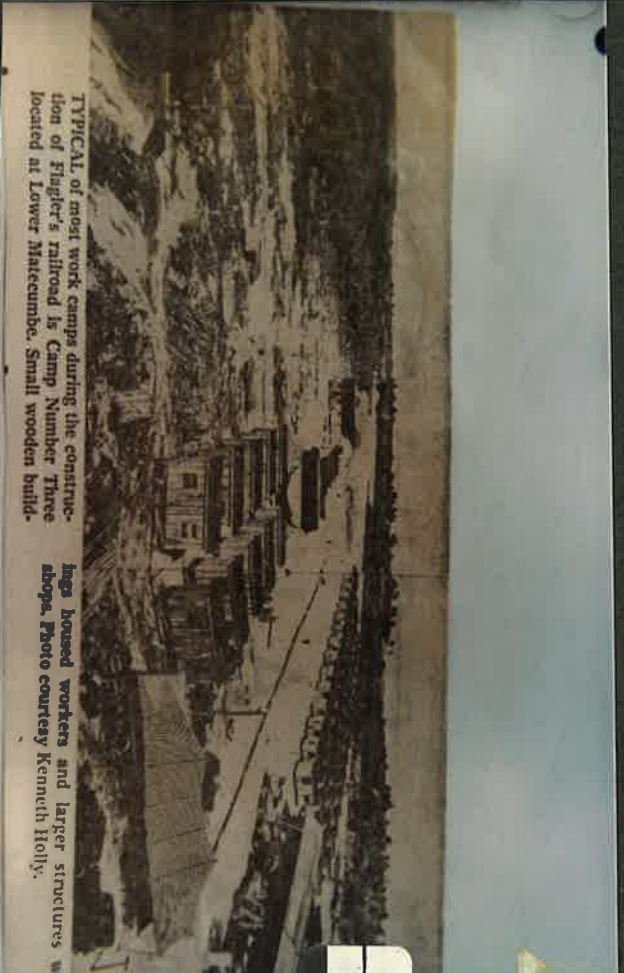
Connecting Miami - Key West - Havana



TWO WAYS OF TRAVEL IN THE
KEYS 1912---1935

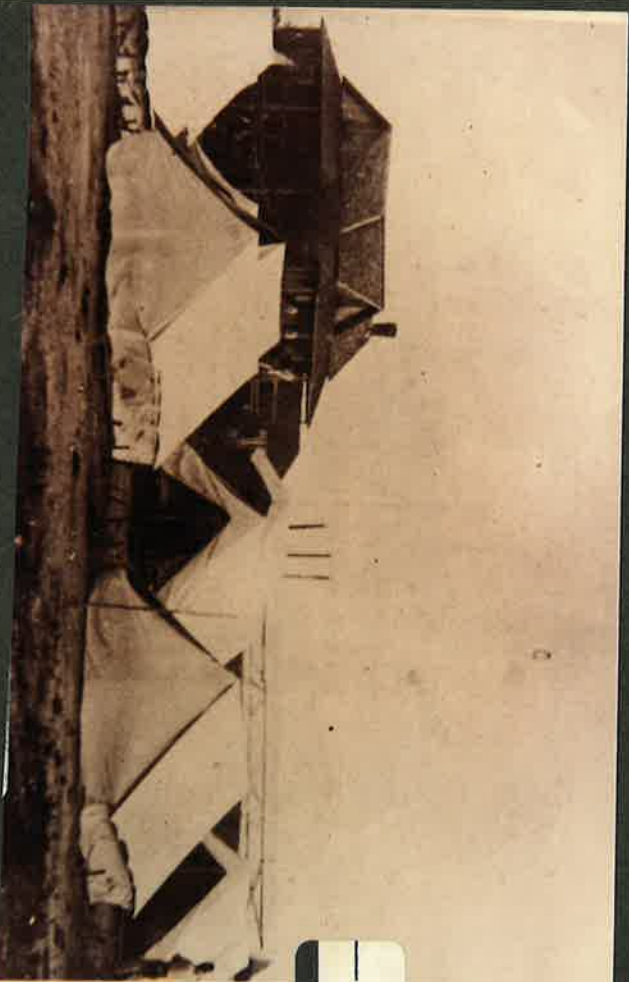


— TAKING THE TRAIN FROM KEY
WEST TO MIAMI —



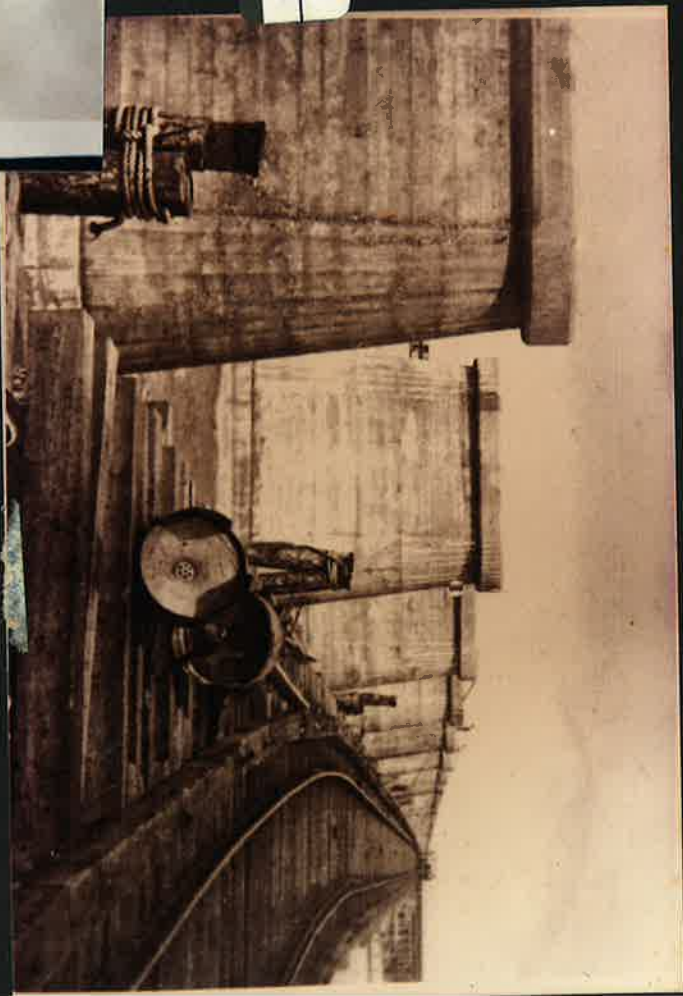
TYPICAL of most work camps during the construction of Flagler's railroad is Camp Number Three located at Lower Matecumbe. Small wooden buildings housed workers and larger structures were shops. Photo courtesy Kenneth Holly.

— RAILROAD CAMP NO. 3 —



— WORKCAMP AT SUGARLOAF 1916 —

WORK ON THE SEVEN MILE BRIDGE



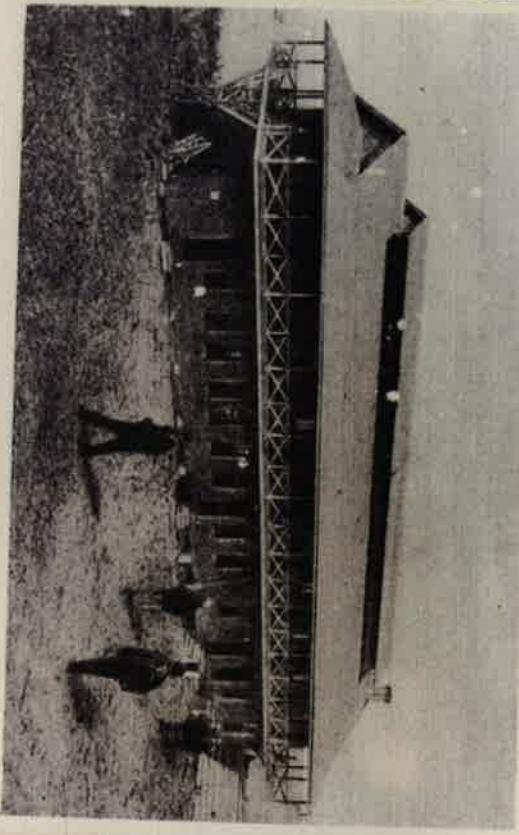
MARATHON RAILROAD DEPOT



— TRAIN ARRIVING IN MARATHON —



— HOTEL IN MARATHON —



— TRAIN IN MARATHON —





Do You Remember?

IF YOU HAVE EVER crossed Knight's Key Bridge (Seven Mile Bridge), you passed over this tiny island. Only now it's covered with tropical growth and set aside as a park

for tourists — it's Pigeon Key. This wooden bridge, the first railroad cars to tiny Pigeon since 1910, of the original buildings are believed still standing in first in a series of Florida Keys photos of long (Picture courtesy of George Stevens colln

Keys longest bridges over nine miles

MARATHON — The longest, and in some respects the most imposing of all structures of the famed Overseas Railroad from an engineering standpoint, was the Knight's Key-Moser Channel Bridge, now commonly known as the Seven Mile Bridge.

Three years were required to complete this huge structure.

It was commenced in the spring of 1909 and completed in January 1912.

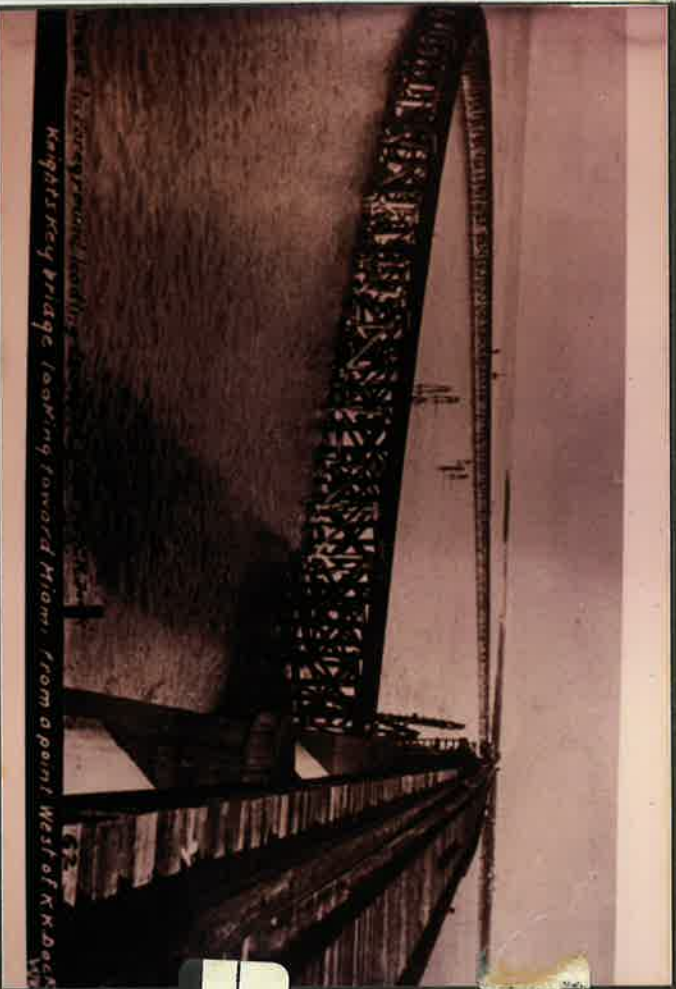
The bridge is 35,815 feet in length, and consists of 335 eighty foot and sixty foot deck plate girder steel spans, resting on concrete piers, and a concrete viaduct one and three quarter miles long, consisting of 210 53-foot arches and a draw bridge of 253 feet in length.

Altogether, the bridge rests upon 546 concrete foundation piers, which far exceeds the number in any other railway bridge in the world. Each of the piers in the main structure rests on bedrock in some cases as much as 28 feet below the waterline.

The Long Key Viaduct, was the first great bridge to be built, though much shorter than the Seven-Mile span.

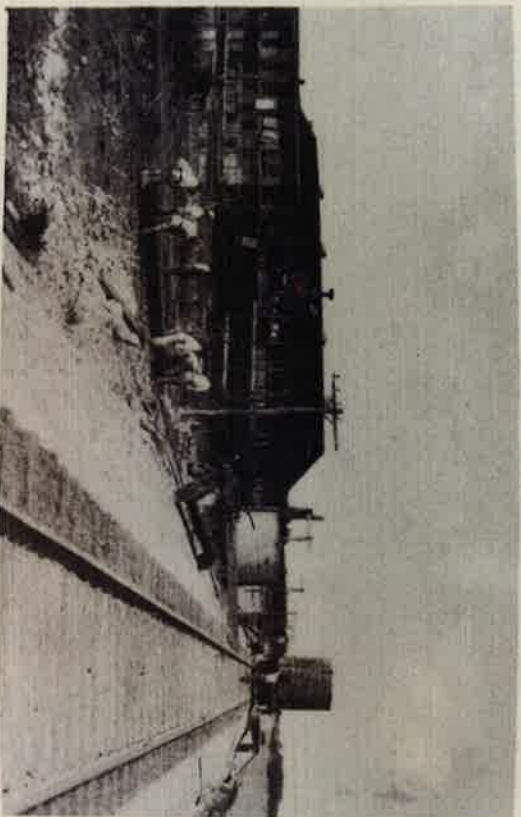
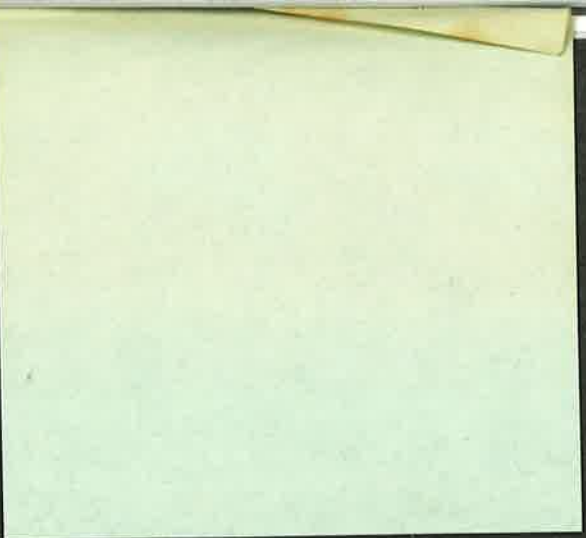
The reinforced concrete structure consists of 222 concrete arches, some 50 feet and some 35 feet in length.

Total length of the bridge is 11,958 feet, or 2.15 miles.



Knight's Key bridge looking toward Miami from a point West of Knight's Key

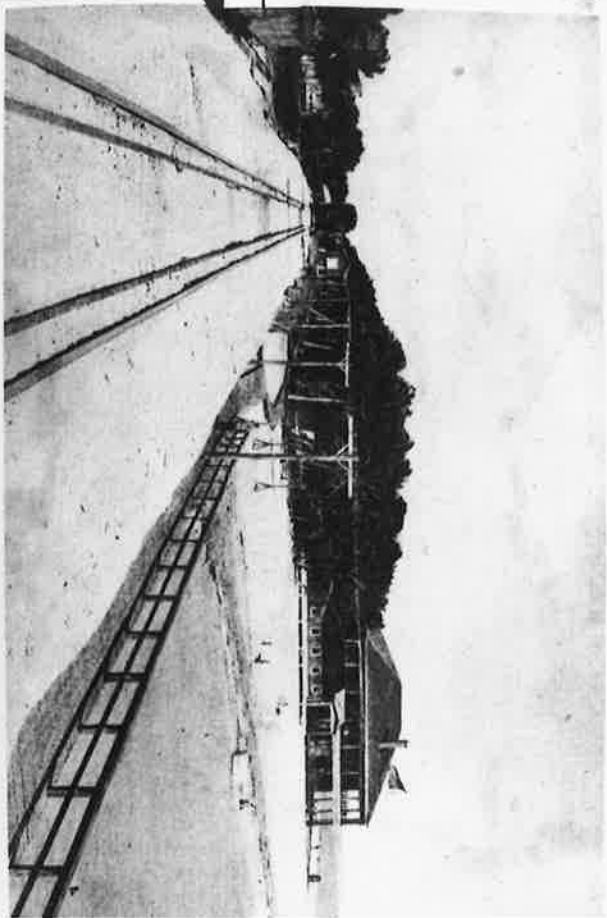
KNIGHT'S KEY TURNAROUND



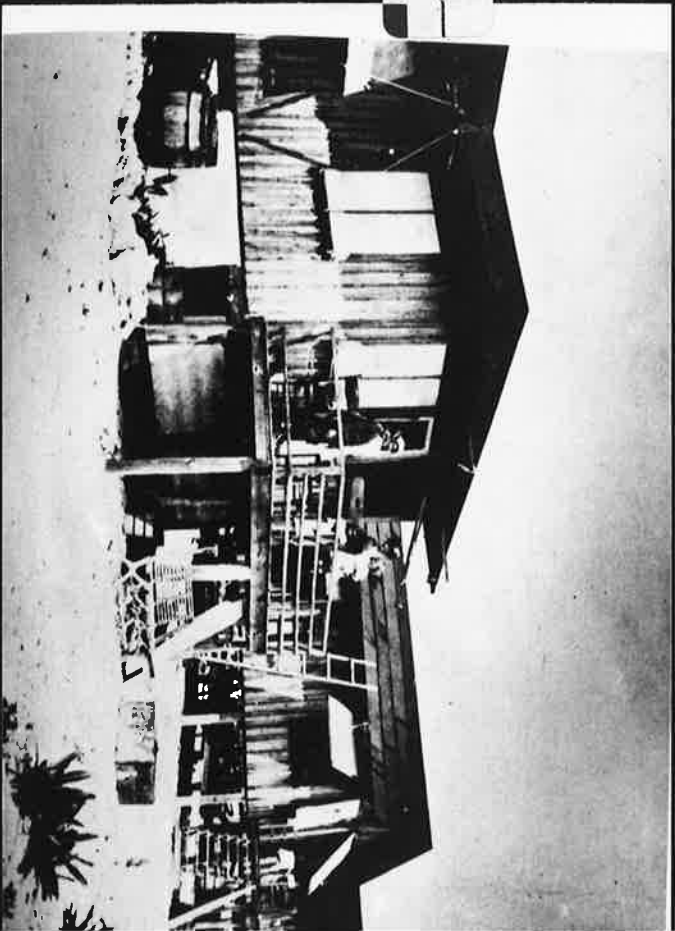
Boot Key Harbor

BOOT KEY HARBOR

RAILROAD GOING INTO LONG KEY
FISHING CAMP

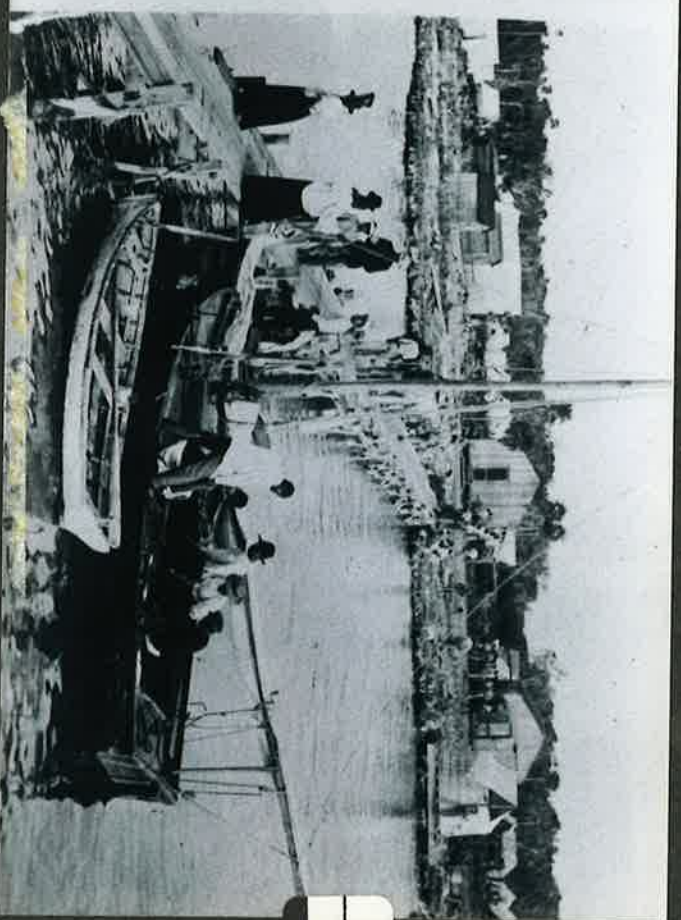


LIVING QUARTERS AT LONG KEY





RAILROAD WATER TOWER IN
MARATHON



WORK CAMP AT GRASSY KEY