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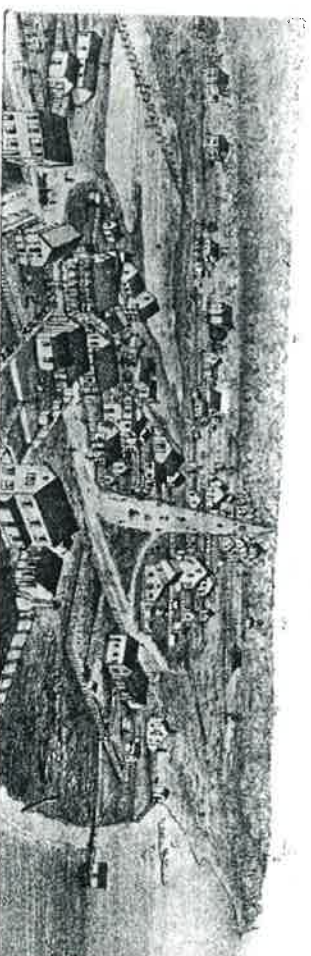
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## William Whitehead's Key West

*William Whitehead was one of the earliest settlers of Key West when he came to the island in 1828 as an assistant to his half-brother, John, one of the original owners. He served as collector of customs, completed the first survey of the island and served as mayor during the ten years he spent in Key West. He returned to New Jersey where he spent the rest of his life. He wrote about his life for his grandchildren. Following is the parts of his memoirs about his time in Key West.*

My half-brother John, commenced his business career as a clerk in the Bank in Newark of which my father was the Cashier, and thence went to New York - in whose employ I do not-recollect. In 1819 he was induced to join some other young men and go out to Mobile, Ala., then just beginning to attract merchants and others from New York, his immediate partner being some one named Smith. On their way out they were wrecked on the Bahama Islands and taken first to Nassau, and thence to Mobile, stopping on the way in the harbor of the island of Key West, then uninhabited. Thus it was that subsequent relations with the Bahamas and Key West arose. The firm of Smith and Whitehead was unfortunate. Smith died, and for many years my brother was harassed with the debts of the concern. In 1822, in conjunction with a Mr. Fleming of Massachusetts, a sea captain by the name of Greene, and a Mr. Simonton through whom it all came about, he became a purchaser of a fourth part of the island of Key West. Its location, immediately on the Gulf Stream, directly opposite to Havana in the island of Cuba, and on the direct track of all the traffic from and to the harbors of the Gulf of Mexico, as well as of many of the West Indies islands, its natural salt-ponds and excellent harbor, all promised to make the island a most



*William Whitehead's sketch of Key West from Tift's tower. The view of Whitehead Street looking south from the corner of Front Street. The bridge over the pond on the left is Duval Street. The other half of the sketch of Key West is on page 11.*  
*Photo credit: Monroe County Library.*

important mercantile center. All four of the proprietors proceeded at once to take possession of their purchase, carrying with them such stores and supplies as would at once render the island a place of resort for passing vessels and for those engaged in "wrecking" on the coast. It had already been made the rendezvous for the United States vessels under Commodore Porter engaged in suppressing piracy in the Gulf of Mexico, and the lapse of sixty years, with all its changes, finds the anticipations of the original settlers verified, so that the small island, 4 miles long by 1 wide, is now probably the most densely populated spot on the globe, with its fort and garrison, light-houses, wharves, etc. At first my brother was a member of the firm of P. C. Greene & Company, but after three or four years, confined his mercantile operations to the purchasing of wrecked goods during the winter on the island, spending his summers at the North. During his residence at the South he had become acquainted with several influential gentlemen and, in conjunction with Mr. Simonton, who was personally known to the President (Jackson) and the Secretary of War (Eaton) obtained for me a warrant for West Point; but my sister Caroline

having died in 1824, my brother Thomas being established in business in Newark, and my brother John only within reach for a few months in the year, my father was unwilling to part with me, notwithstanding the tempting opportunity for my advancement, and the warrant was declined. It was in 1826 I think that I was baptized at my brother's house in Newark by the Rev. Mr. Towers, along with my brother and his eldest child. I should account for this delay of my parents in having me admitted to membership in Christ's flock. - My father's children, by his first wife, were all baptized under the supervision and sponsorship of old Mrs. Simpson, whom I have mentioned as filling so well the place of a mother to him, and it was his desire that she should perform the same kind service for my brother and myself, but she residing in Westchester, N. Y. and we in Newark, the convenient time had never arrived, and hence the postponement of the baptism to the time mentioned.

This was in 1825 or 1826 but in 1828, my brother urged upon my father so strongly the injury he was doing me in

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