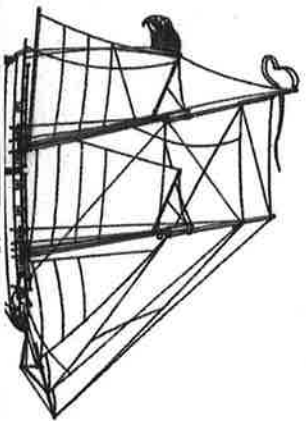


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Travel in The Keys in 1870s

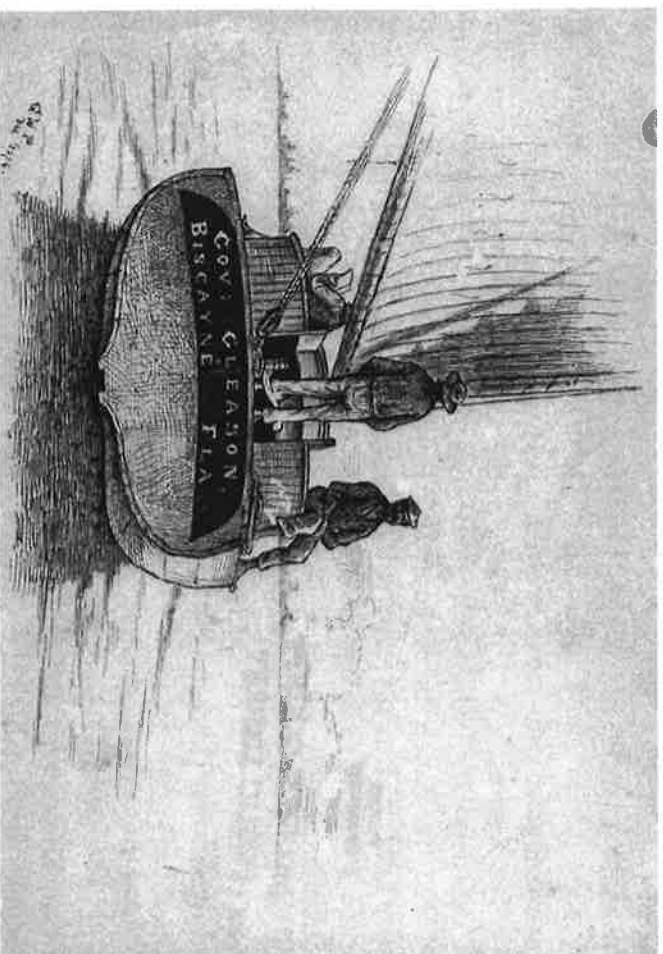
By John Viele.

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Island Navigator in 1993

Two young men, George Parsons and a friend he called "Ros," arrived in Key West by Mallory Line steamer in November 1873 just after news of the **Virginius** affair had been received. They were on their way to Biscayne Bay to stay with a friend. Ros was ill with rheumatism and it was hoped that the warm sunshine and outdoor living there would restore his health.

The transportation situation in the Keys in the 1870s had not improved much in the 50 years since Key West was first settled. If a traveler wanted to get to another Key or the mainland, he either had to have his own boat, charter one, or take his chances on the mail boat which ran between Key West and Biscayne Bay on a regularly-irregular schedule. Through a diary that George Parsons kept, we are fortunate to have a first-hand view of what it was like to be a passenger on an 1870s inter-Keys-Biscayne Bay mail boat.



Drawing by Geo Potter in January 1874. Gift Dr. William M. Stainght.

Soon after arriving, George found the captain of the mail boat, a black man named Andrew Price, and negotiated passage to Biscayne Bay for himself and Ros for \$5 each. Indicative of how sacred the mail schedule was, George had no difficulty in persuading the captain to defer his departure until the following morning.

The two young men, having found that the principal place of entertainment in town was a roller

skating rink, had no regrets over leaving after only one night's stay. The mail boat was a broad-beamed schooner, about 30 feet in length, named the **Governor Gleason** (William H. Gleason had been Lieutenant Governor of Florida from 1868 to 1872 and held, or had an interest in, the mail contract between Key West and Biscayne Bay). There were three other passengers in addition to George and Ros. One

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